

Speeches by

Obama

# Introduction

This is a collection of speeches and interviews made by Barrack Obama from his time in office as well as a couple speeches from before he became president.

All transcriptions obtained from [www.americanrhetoric.com](http://www.americanrhetoric.com).

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# Speech Opposing the War in Iraq at Federal Plaza

Good afternoon. Let begin by saying that although this has been billed as an anti-war rally, I stand before you as someone who is not opposed to war in all circumstances.

The Civil War was one of the bloodiest in history, and yet it was only through the crucible of the sword, the sacrifice of multitudes, that we could begin to perfect this union, and drive the scourge of slavery from our soil.

I don’t oppose all wars.

My grandfather signed up for a war the day after Pearl Harbor was bombed, fought in Patton’s army. He saw the dead and dying across the fields of Europe; he heard the stories of fellow troops who first entered Auschwitz and Treblinka. He fought in the name of a larger freedom, part of that arsenal of democracy that triumphed over evil, and he did not fight in vain.

I don’t oppose all wars.

After September 11th, after witnessing the carnage and destruction, the dust and the tears, I supported this Administration’s pledge to hunt down and root out those who would slaughter innocents in the name of intolerance, and I would willingly take up arms myself to prevent such tragedy from happening again.

I don’t oppose war in all circumstances, and when I look out over this crowd today, I know there is no shortage of patriots or patriotism. What I do oppose is a dumb war. What I am opposed to is a rash war. What I am opposed to is the cynical attempt by Richard Perles and Paul Wolfowitz and other arm-chair, weekend warriors in this Administration to shove their own ideological agendas down our throats, irrespective of the costs in lives lost and in hardships borne.

What I am opposed to is the attempt by political hacks like Karl Roves to distract us from a rise in the uninsured, a rise in the poverty rate, a drop in the median income -- to distract us from corporate scandals and a stock market that has just gone thru the worst month since the Great Depression.

That’s what I’m opposed to. A dumb war. A rash war. A war based not on reason but on passion, not on principle but on politics.

Now let me be clear -- I suffer no illusions about Saddam Hussein. He is a brutal man. A ruthless man. A man who butchers his own people to secure his own power. He has repeatedly defied UN resolutions, thwarted UN inspection teams, developed chemical and biological weapons, and coveted nuclear capacity.

He’s a bad guy. The world, and the Iraqi people, would be better off without him.

But I also know that Saddam poses no imminent and direct threat to the United States, or to his neighbors, that the Iraqi economy is in shambles, that the Iraqi military a fraction of its former strength, and that in concert with the international community he can be contained until, in the way of all petty dictators, he falls away into the dustbin of history.

I know that even a successful war against Iraq will require a US occupation of undetermined length, at undetermined cost, with undetermined consequences.

I know that an invasion of Iraq without a clear rationale and without strong international support will only fan the flames of the middle east, and encourage the worst, rather than best, impulses of the Arab world, and strengthen the recruitment arm of Al Qaeda.

I am not opposed to all wars. I’m opposed to dumb wars.

So for those of us who seek a more just and secure world for our children, let us send a clear message to the president today.

You want a fight, President Bush? Let’s finish the fight with Bin Laden and Al Qaeda, thru effective, coordinated intelligence, and a shutting down of the financial networks that support terrorism, and a homeland security program that involves more than color-coded warnings.

You want a fight, President Bush? Let’s fight to make sure that the UN inspectors can do their work, and that we vigorously enforce a non-proliferation treaty, and that former enemies and current allies like Russia safeguard and ultimately eliminate their stores of nuclear material, and that nations like Pakistan and India never use the terrible weapons in already in their possession, and that the arms merchants in our own country stop feeding the countless wars that rage across the globe.

You want a fight, President Bush? Let’s fight to make sure our so-called allies in the Middle East, the Saudis and the Egyptians, stop oppressing their own people, and suppressing dissent, and tolerating corruption and inequality, and mismanaging their economies so that their youth grow up without education, without prospects, without hope, the ready recruits of terrorist cells.

You want a fight, President Bush? Let’s fight to wean ourselves off Middle East oil, through an energy policy that doesn’t simply serve the interests of Exxon and Mobil.

Those are the battles that we need to fight. Those are the battles that we willingly join. The battles against ignorance and intolerance. Corruption and greed. Poverty and despair.

The consequences of war are dire, the sacrifices immeasurable. We may have occasion in our lifetime to once again rise up in defense of our freedom, and pay the wages of war. But we ought not -- we will not -- travel down that hellish path blindly. Nor should we allow those who would march off and pay the ultimate sacrifice, who would prove the full measure of devotion with their blood, to make such an awful sacrifice in vain.

# 2004 Democratic National Convention Keynote Address

On behalf of the great state of Illinois, crossroads of a nation, Land of Lincoln, let me express my deepest gratitude for the privilege of addressing this convention.

Tonight is a particular honor for me because, let’s face it, my presence on this stage is pretty unlikely. My father was a foreign student, born and raised in a small village in Kenya. He grew up herding goats, went to school in a tin-roof shack. His father -- my grandfather -- was a cook, a domestic servant to the British.

But my grandfather had larger dreams for his son. Through hard work and perseverance my father got a scholarship to study in a magical place, America, that shone as a beacon of freedom and opportunity to so many who had come before.

While studying here, my father met my mother. She was born in a town on the other side of the world, in Kansas. Her father worked on oil rigs and farms through most of the Depression. The day after Pearl Harbor my grandfather signed up for duty; joined Patton’s army, marched across Europe. Back home, my grandmother raised a baby and went to work on a bomber assembly line. After the war, they studied on the G.I. Bill, bought a house through F.H.A., and later moved west all the way to Hawaii in search of opportunity.

And they, too, had big dreams for their daughter. A common dream, born of two continents.

My parents shared not only an improbable love, they shared an abiding faith in the possibilities of this nation. They would give me an African name, Barack, or ”blessed,” believing that in a tolerant America your name is no barrier to success. They imagined -- They imagined me going to the best schools in the land, even though they weren’t rich, because in a generous America you don’t have to be rich to achieve your potential.

They're both passed away now. And yet, I know that on this night they look down on me with great pride.

They stand here, and I stand here today, grateful for the diversity of my heritage, aware that my parents’ dreams live on in my two precious daughters. I stand here knowing that my story is part of the larger American story, that I owe a debt to all of those who came before me, and that, in no other country on earth, is my story even possible.

Tonight, we gather to affirm the greatness of our Nation -- not because of the height of our skyscrapers, or the power of our military, or the size of our economy. Our pride is based on a very simple premise, summed up in a declaration made over two hundred years ago:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

That is the true genius of America, a faith -- a faith in simple dreams, an insistence on small miracles; that we can tuck in our children at night and know that they are fed and clothed and safe from harm; that we can say what we think, write what we think, without hearing a sudden knock on the door; that we can have an idea and start our own business without paying a bribe; that we can participate in the political process without fear of retribution, and that our votes will be counted -- at least most of the time.

This year, in this election we are called to reaffirm our values and our commitments, to hold them against a hard reality and see how we're measuring up to the legacy of our forbearers and the promise of future generations.

And fellow Americans, Democrats, Republicans, Independents, I say to you tonight: We have more work to do -- more work to do for the workers I met in Galesburg, Illinois, who are losing their union jobs at the Maytag plant that’s moving to Mexico, and now are having to compete with their own children for jobs that pay seven bucks an hour; more to do for the father that I met who was losing his job and choking back the tears, wondering how he would pay 4500 dollars a month for the drugs his son needs without the health benefits that he counted on; more to do for the young woman in East St. Louis, and thousands more like her, who has the grades, has the drive, has the will, but doesn’t have the money to go to college.

Now, don’t get me wrong. The people I meet -- in small towns and big cities, in diners and office parks -- they don’t expect government to solve all their problems. They know they have to work hard to get ahead, and they want to. Go into the collar counties around Chicago, and people will tell you they don’t want their tax money wasted, by a welfare agency or by the Pentagon. Go in -- Go into any inner city neighborhood, and folks will tell you that government alone can’t teach our kids to learn; they know that parents have to teach, that children can’t achieve unless we raise their expectations and turn off the television sets and eradicate the slander that says a black youth with a book is acting white. They know those things.

People don’t expect -- People don't expect government to solve all their problems. But they sense, deep in their bones, that with just a slight change in priorities, we can make sure that every child in America has a decent shot at life, and that the doors of opportunity remain open to all.

They know we can do better. And they want that choice.

In this election, we offer that choice. Our Party has chosen a man to lead us who embodies the best this country has to offer. And that man is John Kerry.

John Kerry understands the ideals of community, faith, and service because they’ve defined his life. From his heroic service to Vietnam, to his years as a prosecutor and lieutenant governor, through two decades in the United States Senate, he's devoted himself to this country. Again and again, we’ve seen him make tough choices when easier ones were available.

His values and his record affirm what is best in us. John Kerry believes in an America where hard work is rewarded; so instead of offering tax breaks to companies shipping jobs overseas, he offers them to companies creating jobs here at home.

John Kerry believes in an America where all Americans can afford the same health coverage our politicians in Washington have for themselves.

John Kerry believes in energy independence, so we aren’t held hostage to the profits of oil companies, or the sabotage of foreign oil fields.

John Kerry believes in the Constitutional freedoms that have made our country the envy of the world, and he will never sacrifice our basic liberties, nor use faith as a wedge to divide us.

And John Kerry believes that in a dangerous world war must be an option sometimes, but it should never be the first option.

You know, a while back -- awhile back I met a young man named Shamus in a V.F.W. Hall in East Moline, Illinois. He was a good-looking kid -- six two, six three, clear eyed, with an easy smile. He told me he’d joined the Marines and was heading to Iraq the following week. And as I listened to him explain why he’d enlisted, the absolute faith he had in our country and its leaders, his devotion to duty and service, I thought this young man was all that any of us might ever hope for in a child.

But then I asked myself, "Are we serving Shamus as well as he is serving us?"

I thought of the 900 men and women -- sons and daughters, husbands and wives, friends and neighbors, who won’t be returning to their own hometowns. I thought of the families I’ve met who were struggling to get by without a loved one’s full income, or whose loved ones had returned with a limb missing or nerves shattered, but still lacked long-term health benefits because they were Reservists.

When we send our young men and women into harm’s way, we have a solemn obligation not to fudge the numbers or shade the truth about why they’re going, to care for their families while they’re gone, to tend to the soldiers upon their return, and to never ever go to war without enough troops to win the war, secure the peace, and earn the respect of the world.

Now -- Now let me be clear. Let me be clear. We have real enemies in the world. These enemies must be found. They must be pursued. And they must be defeated. John Kerry knows this. And just as Lieutenant Kerry did not hesitate to risk his life to protect the men who served with him in Vietnam, President Kerry will not hesitate one moment to use our military might to keep America safe and secure.

John Kerry believes in America. And he knows that it’s not enough for just some of us to prosper -- for alongside our famous individualism, there’s another ingredient in the American saga, a belief that we’re all connected as one people. If there is a child on the south side of Chicago who can’t read, that matters to me, even if it’s not my child. If there is a senior citizen somewhere who can’t pay for their prescription drugs, and having to choose between medicine and the rent, that makes my life poorer, even if it’s not my grandparent. If there’s an Arab American family being rounded up without benefit of an attorney or due process, that threatens my civil liberties.

It is that fundamental belief -- It is that fundamental belief: I am my brother’s keeper. I am my sister’s keeper -- that makes this country work. It’s what allows us to pursue our individual dreams and yet still come together as one American family.

E pluribus unum: "Out of many, one."

Now even as we speak, there are those who are preparing to divide us -- the spin masters, the negative ad peddlers who embrace the politics of "anything goes." Well, I say to them tonight, there is not a liberal America and a conservative America -- there is the United States of America. There is not a Black America and a White America and Latino America and Asian America -- there’s the United States of America.

The pundits, the pundits like to slice-and-dice our country into red states and blue states; red states for Republicans, blue states for Democrats. But I’ve got news for them, too. We worship an awesome God in the blue states, and we don’t like federal agents poking around in our libraries in the red states. We coach Little League in the blue states and yes, we’ve got some gay friends in the red states. There are patriots who opposed the war in Iraq and there are patriots who supported the war in Iraq. We are one people, all of us pledging allegiance to the stars and stripes, all of us defending the United States of America.

In the end -- In the end -- In the end, that’s what this election is about. Do we participate in a politics of cynicism or do we participate in a politics of hope?

John Kerry calls on us to hope. John Edwards calls on us to hope.

I’m not talking about blind optimism here -- the almost willful ignorance that thinks unemployment will go away if we just don’t think about it, or the health care crisis will solve itself if we just ignore it. That’s not what I’m talking about. I’m talking about something more substantial. It’s the hope of slaves sitting around a fire singing freedom songs; the hope of immigrants setting out for distant shores; the hope of a young naval lieutenant bravely patrolling the Mekong Delta; the hope of a millworker’s son who dares to defy the odds; the hope of a skinny kid with a funny name who believes that America has a place for him, too.

Hope -- Hope in the face of difficulty. Hope in the face of uncertainty. The audacity of hope!

In the end, that is God’s greatest gift to us, the bedrock of this nation. A belief in things not seen. A belief that there are better days ahead.

I believe that we can give our middle class relief and provide working families with a road to opportunity.

I believe we can provide jobs to the jobless, homes to the homeless, and reclaim young people in cities across America from violence and despair.

I believe that we have a righteous wind at our backs and that as we stand on the crossroads of history, we can make the right choices, and meet the challenges that face us.

America! Tonight, if you feel the same energy that I do, if you feel the same urgency that I do, if you feel the same passion that I do, if you feel the same hopefulness that I do -- if we do what we must do, then I have no doubt that all across the country, from Florida to Oregon, from Washington to Maine, the people will rise up in November, and John Kerry will be sworn in as President, and John Edwards will be sworn in as Vice President, and this country will reclaim its promise, and out of this long political darkness a brighter day will come.

Thank you very much everybody.

God bless you.

Thank you.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Senate Floor Speech on Ohio Electoral Vote Counting Procedures

Thank you very much, Mr. President; Ladies and Gentlemen of the Senate:

I have to say that I didn't anticipate speaking today, but the importance, I think, of this issue is one in which I feel it's important for me to address this body. You know, during the election I had the occasion of meeting a woman who had supported me in my campaign. And she decided to come to shake my hand and take a photograph. A wonderful woman, she wasn't asking for anything, and I was very grateful that she took time to come by. It was a[n] unexceptional moment except for the fact that she was born in 1894. And her name was Marguerite Lewis, an African-American woman who had been born in Louisiana, born in the shadow of slavery, born at a time when lynchings were commonplace, born at a time when African-Americans and women could not vote.

And yet, over the course of decades she had participated in broadening our democracy and ensuring that, in fact, at some point, if not herself, then her children and her grandchildren and her great-grandchildren would be in a position in which they could, too, call themselves citizens of the United States and make certain that this Government works not just on behalf of the mighty and the powerful but also on behalf of people like her.

And so the fact that she voted and that her vote was counted in this election was of supreme importance to her and it is the memory of talking to her and shaking her hand that causes me to rise on this occasion.

I am absolutely convinced that the President of the United States, George Bush, won this election. I also believe that he got more votes in Ohio. I think, as has already been said by some of the speakers in this body, he is not some -- this is not an issue in which we are challenging the outcome of the election. And I think it's important for us to separate out the issue of the election outcome with the election process.

I was not in this body four years ago, but what I observed as a voter, as a citizen of Illinois four years ago, were troubling evidence of the fact that not every vote was being counted. And I think that it is unfortunate four years later that we continue to see circumstances in which people who believe that they have the right to vote -- who show up at the polls -- still continue to confront the sort of problems that have been documented as taking place, not just in Ohio, but [in] places all across the country.

I would strongly urge that this Chamber, as well as the House of Representatives, take it upon itself once and for all to reform this system. There is no reason, at a time when we have enormous battles taking place ideologically all across the globe, at a time when we're try to make certain that we encourage democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan and other places throughout the world, that we have the legitimacy of our elections challenged, rightly or wrongly, by people who are not certain as to whether our processes are fair and just. This is something that we can fix. We have experts on both sides of the aisle who know how to fix it. What we've lacked is the political will.

I would strongly urge that, in a circumstance in which too many voters have stood in long lines for hours, in which too many voters have cast votes on machines that jam or malfunction or suck the votes without a trace, in which too many voters try to register to vote only to discover that their names don't appear on the roles, or that partisan political interests and those that serve them have worked hard to throw up every barrier to recognize them as lawful, in which too many voters will know that there are different elections for different parts of the country and that these differences turn shamefully on differences of wealth or of race, in which too many voters have to contend with state officials, servants of the public, who put partisan or personal political interests ahead of the public in administering our elections -- in such circumstances, we have an obligation to fix the problem.

And I have to add that this is not a problem unique to this election, and it is not a partisan problem. Keep in mind, I come from Cook County, from Chicago, in which there is a long record of these kinds of problems taking place and disadvantaging Republicans as well as Democrats. So I would ask that all of us rise up and use this occasion --

Senate President: Senator's time has expired.

Senator Obama: -- to amend this problem. Thank you.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Commencement Address at Knox College

Good morning President Taylor, Board of Trustees, faculty, parents, family, friends, the community of Galesburg, the class of 1955 -- which I understand was out partying last night, and yet still showed up here on time -- and most of all, the Class of 2005. Congratulations on your graduation, and thank you -- thank you for the honor of allowing me to be a part of it. Thank you also, Mr. President, for this honorary degree. It was only a couple of years ago that I stopped paying my student loans in law school. Had I known it was this easy, I would have ran [sic] for the United States Senate earlier.

You know, it has been about six months now since you sent me to Washington as your United States Senator. I recognize that not all of you voted for me, so for those of you muttering under your breath "I didn’t send you anywhere," that's ok too. Maybe we’ll hold -- What do you call it? -- a little Pumphandle after the ceremony. Change your mind for the next time.

It has been a fascinating journey thus far. Each time I walk onto the Senate floor, I'm reminded of the history, for good and for ill, that has been made there. But there have been a few surreal moments. For example, I remember the day before I was sworn in, myself and my staff, we decided to hold a press conference in our office. Now, keep in mind that I am ranked 99th in seniority. I was proud that I wasn’t ranked dead last until I found out that it’s just because Illinois is bigger than Colorado. So I’m 99th in seniority, and all the reporters are crammed into the tiny transition office that I have, which is right next to the janitor’s closet in the basement of the Dirksen Office Building. It’s my first day in the building, I have not taken a single vote, I have not introduced one bill, had not even sat down in my desk, and this very earnest reporter raises his hand and says:

“Senator Obama, what is your place in history?”

I did what you just did, which is laugh out loud. I said, "place in history?" I thought he was kidding. At that point, I wasn’t even sure the other Senators would save a place for me at the cool kids’ table.

But as I was thinking about the words to share with this class, about what’s next, about what’s possible, and what opportunities lay ahead, I actually think it’s not a bad question for you, the class of 2005, to ask yourselves: What will be your place in history?

In other eras, across distant lands, this question could be answered with relative ease and certainty. As a servant in Rome, you knew you’d spend your life forced to build somebody else’s Empire. As a peasant in 11th Century China, you knew that no matter how hard you worked, the local warlord might come and take everything you had -- and you also knew that famine might come knocking at the door. As a subject of King George, you knew that your freedom of worship and your freedom to speak and to build your own life would be ultimately limited by the throne.

And then America happened.

A place where destiny was not a destination, but a journey to be shared and shaped and remade by people who had the gall, the temerity to believe that, against all odds, they could form “a more perfect union” on this new frontier.

And as people around the world began to hear the tale of the lowly colonists who overthrew an empire for the sake of an idea, they started to come. Across oceans and the ages, they settled in Boston and Charleston, Chicago and St. Louis, Kalamazoo and Galesburg, to try and build their own American Dream. This collective dream moved forward imperfectly -- it was scarred by our treatment of native peoples, betrayed by slavery, clouded by the subjugation of women, shaken by war and depression. And yet, brick by brick, rail by rail, calloused hand by calloused hand, people kept dreaming, and building, and working, and marching, and petitioning their government, until they made America a land where the question of our place in history is not answered for us. It’s answered by us.

Have we failed at times? Absolutely. Will you occasionally fail when you embark on your own American journey? You surely will. But the test is not perfection. The true test of the American ideal is whether we’re able to recognize our failings and then rise together to meet the challenges of our time. Whether we allow ourselves to be shaped by events and history, or whether we act to shape them. Whether chance of birth or circumstance decides life’s big winners and losers, or whether we build a community where, at the very least, everyone has a chance to work hard, get ahead, and reach their dreams.

We have faced this choice before.

At the end of the Civil War, when farmers and their families began moving into the cities to work in the big factories that were sprouting up all across America, we had to decide: Do we do nothing and allow captains of industry and robber barons to run roughshod over the economy and workers by competing to see who can pay the lowest wages at the worst working conditions? Or do we try to make the system work by setting up basic rules for the market, instituting the first public schools, busting up monopolies, letting workers organize into unions?

We chose to act, and we rose together.

When the irrational exuberance of the Roaring Twenties came crashing down with the stock market, we had to decide: do we follow the call of leaders who would do nothing, or the call of a leader who, perhaps because of his physical paralysis, refused to accept political paralysis?

We chose to act -- regulating the market, putting people back to work, expanding bargaining rights to include health care and a secure retirement -- and together we rose.

When World War II required the most massive home front mobilization in history and we needed every single American to lend a hand, we had to decide: Do we listen to skeptics who told us it wasn’t possible to produce that many tanks and planes? Or, did we build Roosevelt’s Arsenal for Democracy and grow our economy even further by providing our returning heroes with a chance to go to college and own their own home?

Again, we chose to act, and again, we rose together.

Today, at the beginning of this young century, we have to decide again. But this time, it is your turn to choose.

Here in Galesburg, you know what this new challenge is. You’ve seen it. All of you, your first year in college saw what happened at 9/11. It’s already been noted, the degree to which your lives will be intertwined with the war on terrorism that currently is taking place. But what you’ve also seen, perhaps not as spectacularly, is the fact that when you drive by the old Maytag plant around lunchtime, no one walks out anymore. I saw it during the campaign when I met union guys who worked at the plant for 20, 30 years and now wonder what they’re gonna do at the age of 55 without a pension or health care; when I met the man who’s son needed a new liver but because he’d been laid off, didn’t know if he could afford to provide his child the care that he needed.

It’s as if someone changed the rules in the middle of the game and no wonder -- no one bothered to tell these folks. And, in reality, the rules have changed.

It started with technology and automation that rendered entire occupations obsolete. When was the last time anybody here stood in line for the bank teller instead of going to the ATM, or talked to a switchboard operator? Then it continued when companies like Maytag were able to pick up and move their factories to some under developed country where workers were a lot cheaper than they are in the United States.

As Tom Friedman points out in his new book, The World Is Flat, over the last decade or so, these forces -- technology and globalization -- have combined like never before. So that while most of us have been paying attention to how much easier technology has made our own lives -- sending e-mails back and forth on our blackberries, surfing the Web on our cell phones, instant messaging with friends across the world -- a quiet revolution has been breaking down barriers and connecting the world’s economies. Now business not only has the ability to move jobs wherever there’s a factory, but wherever there’s an internet connection.

Countries like India and China realized this. They understand that they no longer need to be just a source of cheap labor or cheap exports. They can compete with us on a global scale. The one resource they needed were skilled, educated workers. So they started schooling their kids earlier, longer, with a greater emphasis on math and science and technology, until their most talented students realized they don’t have to come to America to have a decent life -- they can stay right where they are.

The result? China is graduating four times the number of engineers that the United States is graduating. Not only are those Maytag employees competing with Chinese and Indian and Indonesian and Mexican workers, you are too. Today, accounting firms are e-mailing your tax returns to workers in India who will figure them out and send them back to you as fast as any worker in Illinois or Indiana could.

When you lose your luggage in Boston at an airport, tracking it down may involve a call to an agent in Bangalore, who will find it by making a phone call to Baltimore. Even the Associated Press has outsourced some of their jobs to writers all over the world who can send in a story at a click of a mouse.

As Prime Minister Tony Blair has said, in this new economy, "Talent is the 21st century wealth." If you've got the skills, you've got the education, and you have the opportunity to upgrade and improve both, you’ll be able to compete and win anywhere. If not, the fall will be further and harder than it ever was before.

So what do we do about this? How does America find its way in this new, global economy? What will our place in history be?

Like so much of the American story, once again, we face a choice. Once again, there are those who believe that there isn’t much we can do about this as a nation. That the best idea is to give everyone one big refund on their government -- divvy it up by individual portions, in the form of tax breaks, hand it out, and encourage everyone to use their share to go buy their own health care, their own retirement plan, their own child care, their own education, and so on.

In Washington, they call this the Ownership Society. But in our past there has been another term for it -- Social Darwinism -- every man or woman for him or herself. It’s a tempting idea, because it doesn’t require much thought or ingenuity. It allows us to say that those whose health care or tuition may rise faster than they can afford -- tough luck. It allows us to say to the Maytag workers who have lost their job -- life isn’t fair. It let’s us say to the child who was born into poverty -- pull yourself up by your bootstraps. And it is especially tempting because each of us believes we will always be the winner in life’s lottery, that we’re the one who will be the next Donald Trump, or at least we won’t be the chump who Donald Trump says: “You’re fired!”

But there is a problem. It won’t work. It ignores our history. It ignores the fact that it’s been government research and investment that made the railways possible and the internet possible. It’s been the creation of a massive middle class, through decent wages and benefits and public schools that allowed us all to prosper. Our economic dependence depended on individual initiative. It depended on a belief in the free market; but it has also depended on our sense of mutual regard for each other, the idea that everybody has a stake in the country, that we’re all in it together and everybody’s got a shot at opportunity. That’s what’s produced our unrivaled political stability.

And so if we do nothing in the face of globalization, more people will continue to lose their health care. Fewer kids will be able to afford the diploma you’re about to receive.

More companies like United Airlines won’t be able to provide pensions for their employees. And those Maytag workers will be joined in the unemployment line by any worker whose skills can be bought and sold on the global market.

So today I’m here to tell you what most of you already know. This is not us -- the option that I just mentioned. Doing nothing. It’s not how our story ends -- not in this country. America is a land of big dreamers and big hopes.

It is this hope that has sustained us through revolution and civil war, depression and world war, a struggle for civil and social rights and the brink of nuclear crisis. And it is because our dreamers dreamed that we have emerged from each challenge more united, more prosperous, and more admired than before.

So let’s dream. Instead of doing nothing or simply defending 20th century solutions, let’s imagine together what we could do to give every American a fighting chance in the 21st century.

What if we prepared every child in America with the education and skills they need to compete in the new economy? If we made sure that college was affordable for everyone who wanted to go? If we walked up to those Maytag workers and we said “Your old job is not coming back, but a new job will be there because we’re going to seriously retrain you and there’s life-long education that’s waiting for you -- the sorts of opportunities that Knox has created with the Strong Futures scholarship program.

What if no matter where you worked or how many times you switched jobs, you had health care and a pension that stayed with you always, so you all had the flexibility to move to a better job or start a new business? What if instead of cutting budgets for research and development and science, we fueled the genius and the innovation that will lead to the new jobs and new industries of the future?

Right now, all across America, there are amazing discoveries being made. If we supported these discoveries on a national level, if we committed ourselves to investing in these possibilities, just imagine what it could do for a town like Galesburg. Ten or twenty years down the road, that old Maytag plant could re-open its doors as an Ethanol refinery that turned corn into fuel. Down the street, a biotechnology research lab could open up on the cusp of discovering a cure for cancer. And across the way, a new auto company could be busy churning out electric cars. The new jobs created would be filled by American workers trained with new skills and a world-class education.

All of that is possible but none of it will come easy. Every one of us is going to have to work more, read more, train more, think more. We will have to slough off some bad habits -- like driving gas guzzlers that weaken our economy and feed our enemies abroad. Our children will have to turn off the TV set once in a while and put away the video games and start hitting the books. We’ll have to reform institutions, like our public schools, that were designed for an earlier time. Republicans will have to recognize our collective responsibilities, even as Democrats recognize that we have to do more than just defend old programs.

It won’t be easy, but it can be done. It can be our future. We have the talent and the resources and brainpower. But now we need the political will. We need a national commitment.

And we need each of you.

Now, no one can force you to meet these challenges. If you want, it will be pretty easy for you to leave here today and not give another thought to towns like Galesburg and the challenges they face. There is no community service requirement in the real world; no one is forcing you to care. You can take your diploma, walk off this stage, and go chasing after the big house, and the nice suits, and all the other things that our money culture says that you should want, that you should aspire to, that you can buy.

But I hope you don’t walk away from the challenge. Focusing your life solely on making a buck shows a certain poverty of ambition. It asks too little of yourself. You need to take up the challenges that we face as a nation and make them your own. Not because you have a debt to those who helped you get here, although you do have that debt. Not because you have an obligation to those who are less fortunate than you, although I do think you do have that obligation. It’s primarily because you have an obligation to yourself. Because individual salvation has always depended on collective salvation. Because it’s only when you hitch your wagon to something larger than yourself that you realize your true potential.

And I know that all of you are wondering how you’ll do this, the challenges seem so big. They seem so difficult for one person to make a difference.

But we know it can be done. Because where you’re sitting, in this very place, in this town, it’s happened before.

Nearly two centuries ago, before civil rights, before voting rights, before Abraham Lincoln, before the Civil War, before all of that, America was stained by the sin of slavery. In the sweltering heat of southern plantations, men and women who looked like me could not escape the life of pain and servitude in which they were sold. And yet, year after year, as this moral cancer ate away at the American ideals of liberty and equality, the nation was silent.

But its people didn’t stay silent for long.

One by one, abolitionists emerged to tell their fellow Americans that this would not be our place in history -- that this was not the America that had captured the imagination of the world.

This resistance that they met was fierce, and some paid with their lives. But they would not be deterred, and they soon spread out across the country to fight for their cause. One man from New York went west, all the way to the prairies of Illinois to start a colony.

And here in Galesburg, freedom found a home.

Here in Galesburg, the main depot for the Underground Railroad in Illinois, escaped slaves could roam freely on the streets and take shelter in people’s homes. And when their masters or the police would come for them, the people of this town would help them escape north, some literally carrying them in their arms to freedom.

Think about the risks that involved. If they were caught abetting a fugitive, you could’ve been jailed or lynched. It would have been simple for these townspeople to turn the other way; to go live their lives in a private peace.

And yet, they didn’t do that. Why?

Because they knew that we were all Americans; that we were all brothers and sisters; the same reason that a century later, young men and women your age would take Freedom Rides down south, to work for the Civil Rights movement. The same reason that black women would walk instead of ride a bus after a long day of doing somebody else’s laundry and cleaning somebody else’s kitchen. Because they were marching for freedom.

Today, on this day of possibility, we stand in the shadow of a lanky, raw-boned man with little formal education who once took the stage at Old Main and told the nation that if anyone did not believe the American principles of freedom and equality, that those principles were timeless and all-inclusive, they should go rip that page out of the Declaration of Independence.

My hope for all of you is that as you leave here today, you decide to keep these principles alive in your own life and in the life of this country. You will be tested. You won’t always succeed. But know that you have it within your power to try. That generations who have come before you faced these same fears and uncertainties in their own time. And that through our collective labor, and through God’s providence, and our willingness to shoulder each other’s burdens, America will continue on its precious journey towards that distant horizon, and a better day.

Thank you so much class of 2005, and congratulations on your graduation. Thank you.

# Senate Floor Speech Honoring the Life of Rosa Parks

Mr. President, today the nation mourns a genuine American hero. As most of you know, Rosa Parks died yesterday in her home in Detroit. Through her courage, and by her example, Rosa Parks helped lay the foundation for a country that could begin to live up to its creed.

Her life and her brave actions reminded each and every one of us of our personal responsibilities to stand up for what's right and the central truth of the American experience that our greatness as a nation derives from seemingly ordinary people doing extraordinary things.

Rosa Parks' life was a lesson in perseverance. As a child, she grew up listening to the Ku Klux Klan ride by her house, fearing that her house would be burned down. In her small hometown in Alabama, she attended a one-room school for African-American children that only went through the sixth grade. When she moved to Montgomery, Alabama, to continue her schooling, she was forced to clean classrooms after school to pay her tuition. Although she attended Alabama State Teachers College, Rosa Parks would late -- later make her living as a seamstress and housekeeper.

But she didn't accept that her opportunities were limited to sewing clothes or cleaning houses. In her 40s, Rosa Parks was appointed secretary of the Montgomery branch of the NAACP and was active in voter registration drives with the Montgomery Voter[s'] League. In the summer of 1955, she attended the Highlander Folk School, where she took classes in workers' rights and racial equality. Well before she made the headlines across the country, she was a highly respected member of the Montgomery community and a committed member of the civil rights effort.

Of course, her name became permanently etched in American history on December 1st, 1955, when she was arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white passenger on a Montgomery bus. But what's not as well known is that it wasn't the first time Rosa Parks refused to acquiesce to the Jim Crow system. The same bus driver

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who had her arrested, and had her thrown off the bus that day, had done the same the year before when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat.

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Some schoolchildren are taught that Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat because her feet were tired. But our nation's schoolbooks are only getting it half right. Ms. Parks once said: "The only tired I was, was tired of giving in."

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This solitary act of civil disobedience became a call to action. Her arrest led to a then relatively unknown pastor, Martin Luther King, Jr., to organize a bus boycott for the entire Montgomery [bus] system. That boycott lasted 381 days and culminated in a landmark Supreme Court decision finding that the city's segregation policies were unconstitutional.

This solitary act of civil disobedience was also the spark that ignited the beginning of the end for segregation and inspired millions around the country and ultimately around the world to get involved in the fight for racial equality.

Rosa Parks' persistence and determination did not end that day in Montgomery, nor did it end with the passage of the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act years later. She stayed active in the NAACP and other civil rights groups for years. From 1965 to 1988, Ms. Parks continued her public service by working for my good friend Congressman John Conyers. And in an example of her low-key demeanor, her job in Congressman Conyers' office did not involve appearances as a figurehead or celebrity; she helped homeless folks find housing.

At the age of six -- At the age of 74, she opened the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development, which offers education and job training programs for disadvantaged youth. And even into her 80s, Rosa Parks gave lectures and attended meetings with civil rights groups.

At the age of 86, Rosa Parks' courage and fortitude was recognized by President Bill Clinton, who awarded her the nation's highest honor for a civilian -- the Congressional Gold Medal.

As we honor the life of Rosa Parks, we should not limit our commemoration to lofty eulogies. Instead, let us commit to carrying on her fight, one solitary act at a time, and ensure that her passion continues to inspire as it did a half-century ago. That, in my view, is how we can best thank her for her immense contributions to our country.

In closing, Mr. President, Rosa Parks once said:

As long as there is unemployment, war, crime and all the things that go to the infliction of man's inhumanity to man, regardless -- there is much to be done, and people need to work together.

Now that she's passed, it's up to us to make sure that her message is shared. For while we will miss her cherished spirit, let's make sure to ensure that her legacy lives on in the heart of the nation.

And Mr. President, as a personal note, I think it is fair to say that were it not for that quiet moment of courage by Ms. Parks, I would not stand here before you today. I owe her great thanks, as does the nation. She will be sorely missed.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Senate Floor Speech on the PATRIOT Act

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

You know, four years ago, following the most devastating attack in our history, this Body passed the USA PATRIOT Act in order to give our Nation's law enforcement the tools they needed to track down terrorists who plot and lurk within our own borders and all over the world; terrorists who, right now, are looking to exploit weaknesses in our laws and our security to carry out attacks that may be even deadlier than those that took place on September 11th.

We all agree that we need legislation to make it harder for suspected terrorists to go undetected in this country. And we all agree that we needed to make it harder for them to organize and strategize and get flight licenses and sneak across our borders. Americans everywhere wanted to do that.

But soon after the PATRIOT Act passed, a few years before I even arrived here in the Senate, I began hearing concerns from people of every background and political leaning that this law, the very purpose of which was to protect us, was also threatening to violate some of the rights and freedoms that we hold most dear; that it didn't just provide law enforcement the powers it needed to keep us safe but powers that it didn't need to invade our privacy without cause or suspicion.

Now, in Washington, this issue has tended to degenerate into the typical either/or debate: Either we protect our people from terror or we protect our most cherished principles. I would suggest, Mr. President, that this is a false choice. It asks too little of us and it assumes too little about America.

That's why, as it's come to time to reauthorize the USA PATRIOT Act, we've been working in a bipartisan way to do both -- to show American people that we can track down terrorists without trampling on our civil liberties, to show the American people that the Federal Government will only issue warrants and execute searches because it needs to do so, not because it can do so.

What we have been trying to achieve under the leadership of a bipartisan group of Senators is some accountability in this process to get answers and see evidence where there is suspicion.

Several weeks ago, these efforts bore fruit. The Judiciary Committee and the U.S. -- U.S. Senate managed to pass a piece of bipartisan legislation that, while I can't say is perfect, was able to address some of the most serious problems in the existing law.

Unfortunately, that strong bipartisan legislation has been tossed aside in conference. Instead, we've been forced to consider a piece of rushed legislation that fails to address the concerns of Members of both parties as well as the American people.

This is legislation that puts our own Justice Department above the law. When national security letters are issued, they allow Federal agents to conduct any search on any American, no matter how extensive, how wide ranging, without ever going before a judge to prove that the search is necessary. All that is needed is a signoff from a local FBI agent. That's it.

Once a business or a person receives notification that they will be searched, they are prohibited from telling anyone about it and they're even prohibited from challenging this automatic gag order in court. Even though judges have already found that similar restrictions violate the first amendment, this conference report disregards the case law and the right to challenge the gag order.

If you do decide to consult an attorney for legal advice, hold on. You will have to tell the FBI that you've done so. Think about that: You want to talk to a lawyer about whether or not your actions are going to be causing you to get into trouble, you've got to tell the FBI that you're consulting a lawyer. This is unheard of. There is no such requirement in any other area of the law. I see no reason why it's justified here.

And if someone wants to know why their own Government has decided to go on a fishing expedition through every personal record or private document, through the library books that you read, the phone calls that you've made, the e-mails that you've sent, this legislation gives people no rights to appeal the need for such a search in a court of law. No judge will hear your plea; no jury will hear your case. This is just plain wrong. And there are Republican Senators as well as Democratic Senators that recognize that it's plain wrong.

Giving law enforcement the tools they need to investigate suspicious activities is one thing and it's the right thing; but doing it without any real oversight seriously jeopardizes the rights of all Americans and the ideals America stands for.

Now, supporters of this conference report have argued we should just hold our noses and support this legislation because it's not going to get any better. That is not a good argument. We can do better. We've got time to do better. It doesn't convince me that I should support this report. I believe we owe it to the Nation, we owe it to those who fought for our civil liberties, we owe it to the future and our children to make sure that we craft the kind of legislation that would make us proud, not just legislation that we would settle for because we're in a rush. We don't have to settle for a PATRIOT Act that sacrifices our liberties or our safety. We can have one that secures both.

Now, there have been proposals on both sides of the aisle and in both Houses of Congress to extend the PATRIOT Act for three months so that we can reach an agreement on this bill that is well thought through. I support these efforts and will oppose cloture on what I consider to be this unacceptable conference report.

Mr. President, I thank you. I yield the floor.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Senate Floor Speech Honoring the Life of Coretta Scott King

Thank you very much, Mr. President. Today, we mourn the passing of Coretta Scott King. And when I think about Coretta Scott King, I think about the little girl who walked five miles to school on those rural Alabama roads and felt the heat of racism each day she passed the door of the Whites-only school, so much closer to home. It didn't matter, because she studied and succeeded and excelled beyond most of her classmates, Black and White. She earned a college degree, and an acceptance to a prestigious graduate school up North.

And one day she met a young preacher from Atlanta, and she fell in love with him. And he told her his dreams -- and she believed in those dreams. And she decided that she would help to make them real -- not just as a wife or as a friend, but as a partner in freedom's cause.

Over the next years, Coretta Scott King did that in so many ways we can't even imagine. She raised a family, she marched through the streets, she inspired through song, she led through speech -- even dodged the countless attempts on her family's life.

And one of -- when one of those attempts finally took her love from this world, she made the selfless decision to carry on. With no time to even cry or mourn, to wallow in anger or vengeance, Coretta Scott King took to the streets just four days after the assassination and led 50,000 through the streets of Memphis in a march for the kind of justice that her husband had given his life for. She spent the rest of here marching for that same justice -- leading the King Center for Nonviolent Social Change in Atlanta, and spreading her family's message of hope to every corner of this world.

You know, I had the great honor of -- of knowing Mrs. King, and the occasion to visit with her in Atlanta last year. She was an extraordinarily gracious woman. We sat and chatted in her living room. We -- She showed me an album of photographs of her and Dr. King and the children. And then she told me what her husband had said to her once, at a time when she was feeling burdened, understandably, by all the stress and strain that had been placed on the family as a consequence of his role in the Civil Rights Movement. She said her husband suggested that:

When you are willing to make sacrifices for a great cause, you will never be alone because you will have divine companionship and the support of good people.

That was her husband's advice to her -- that when you are willing to make sacrifices for a great cause, you will never be alone.

Coretta Scott King died in her sleep last night. She certainly was not alone. She was joined by the companionship and support of a loving family and a grateful Nation -- inspired by her cause, dedicated to her work, and mournful of her passing.

My thoughts, condolences today are with her children.

And I ask that she and her husband now rest together in eternal peace.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Senate Floor Speech on Voting Rights Act Reauthorization

Mr. President, I rise today both humbled and honored by the opportunity to express my support for renewal of the expiring provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

I want to thank the many people inside and outside Congress who have worked so hard over the past year to get us here. We owe a great debt of gratitude to the leadership on both sides of the aisle. And we owe special thanks to Chairmen Sensenbrenner and Specter, Ranking Members Conyers and Leahy, and Representative Mel Watt. Without their work and dedication, and the support of voting rights advocates across the country, I doubt that this bill would have come before us so soon.

I want to thank both Chambers and both sides of the aisle, as well, for getting this done with the same broad support that drove the original act 40 years ago. At a time when Americans are frustrated with the partisan bickering that too often stalls our work, the refreshing display of bipartisanship we're seeing today reflects our collective belief in the success of the act and reminds us of how effective we can be when we work together.

Nobody can deny that we've come a long way since 1965. Look at the registration numbers. Only two years after the passage of the original Act, registration numbers for minority voters in some States doubled. Soon after, not a single State covered by the Voting Rights Act had registered less than half of its minority voting age population.

Look at the influence of African-American elected officials at every single level of government. There are African-American Members of Congress. Since 2001, our Nation's top diplomat

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has been African American. In fact, most of America's elected African-American officials come from States covered by section 5 of the Voting Rights Act -- States like Mississippi, and Alabama, Louisiana, and Georgia.

But to me, the most striking evidence of our progress can be found right across this building in my dear friend Congressman John Lewis, who was on the front lines of the Civil Rights Movement, risking life and limb for freedom. And on March 7th, 1965, he led 600 peaceful protesters, demanding the right to vote, across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama. Now, I've often thought about the people on the Edmund Pettus Bridge that day, not only John Lewis and Hosea Williams, who led the march, but the hundreds of everyday Americans who left their homes and their churches to join it -- Blacks and Whites, teenagers, children, teachers, bankers, shopkeepers -- what Dr. King called a beloved community of God's children ready to stand for freedom.

And I wonder sometimes -- Where did they find that kind of courage? You know, when you're facing row after row of State troopers on horseback, armed with billy clubs and tear gas -- when they're coming toward you spewing hatred and violence, how do you simply stop, kneel down, and pray to the Lord for salvation?

But the most amazing thing of all is that after that day, after John Lewis was beaten within an inch of his life, after people's heads were gashed open and their eyes were burned, and they watched their children's innocence literally beaten out of them -- after all that, they went back and marched again. They marched again. They crossed the bridge. They awakened a nation's conscience. And not five months later the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was signed into law. It was reauthorized in 1970, in 1975, and 1982.

Now, in 2006 John Lewis, the physical scars of those marches still visible, is an original cosponsor of the fourth reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act. And he was joined last week by 389 of his House colleagues in voting for its passage.

There were some in the House, and there may be some in the Senate, who argue that the Act is no longer needed, that the protections of section 5's "preclearance'' requirement" -- a requirement that ensures certain States are upholding the right to vote -- are targeting the wrong States. Unfortunately, the evidence refutes that notion. Of the 1100 objections issued by the Department of Justice since 1965, 56 [percent] occurred since the last reauthorization in 1982. Over half have occurred since 1982. So despite the progress these States have made in upholding the right to vote, it's clear that problems still exist.

Now, there are others who would argue that we shouldn't renew section 203's protection of language minorities. These arguments have been tied to debates over immigration and they tend to muddle a noncontroversial issue -- protecting the right to vote -- with one of today's most contentious debates. But let's remember, you can't request language assistance if you're not a voter. And you can't be a voter if you are not a citizen. And while voters, as citizens, must be proficient in English, many are simply more confident that they can cast ballots printed in their native languages without making errors. It's not an unreasonable assumption.

A representative of the Southwestern Voter Registration Project is quoted as saying, (quote):

Citizens who prefer Spanish registration cards do so because they feel more connected to the process. They also feel they trust the process more when they [fully] understand it.

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These sentiments, connection to and trust in our democratic process, are exactly what we want from our voting rights legislation.

Our challenges, of course, don't end at reauthorizing the Voting Rights Act. We have to prevent the problems we've seen in recent elections from happening again. We've seen political operatives purge voters from registration rolls for no legitimate reason, prevent eligible ex-felons from casting ballots, distribute polling equipment unevenly, and deceive voters about the time, location, and rules of elections. And unfortunately, these efforts have been directed primarily at minority voters -- the disabled, low-income individuals, and other historically disenfranchised groups.

The Help America Vote Act, or HAVA, was a big step in the right direction. But we've got to do more. We need to fully fund HAVA if we're going to move forward in the next stage of securing the right to vote for every citizen. We need to enforce critical requirements like statewide registration databases. We need to make sure polling equipment is distributed equitably and equipment actually works. And we need to work on getting more people to the polls on election day.

We need to make sure that minority voters are not the subject of some deplorable intimidation tactics when they do go to the polls.

You know, in 2004 Native American voters in South Dakota were confronted by men posing as law enforcement. These hired intimidators joked about jail time for ballot missteps and followed voters to their cars to record their license plates.

["]In Lake County, Ohio, some voters received a memo on bogus Board of Election[s] letterhead, informing voters who registered through Democratic and NAACP drives that they could not vote.["]

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In Wisconsin, a flier purporting to be from the "Milwaukee Black Voters League" was circulated in predominantly African-American neighborhoods with the following message: "If you've already voted in any election this year, you can't vote in the presidential election. "If you violate any of these laws, you can get ten years in prison and your children will get taken away from you."

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Now, think about that. We've got a lot more work to do. This occasion is a cause for celebration. But it's also an opportunity to renew our commitment to voting rights. As Congressman Lewis said last week: It's clear that we've come a great distance, but we still have a great distance to go.

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Now, the memory of Selma still lives on in the spirit of the Voting Rights Act. Since that day, the Voting Rights Act has been a critical tool in ensuring that all Americans not only have the right to vote but have the right to have their vote counted.

And those of us concerned about protecting those rights can't afford to sit on our laurels upon reauthorization of this bill. We need to take advantage of this rare, united front and continue to fight to ensure unimpeded access to the polls of all Americans. In other words, we need to take the spirit that existed on that bridge, and we have to spread it across this country.

You know, two weeks after the first march was turned back, Dr. King spoke, and he told a gathering of organizers and activists and community members -- he said that they should not despair because "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice. That's because of the work that each of us do that it bends toward justice. It's because of people like John Lewis and Fannie Lou Hamer and Coretta Scott King and Rosa Parks -- all the giants upon whose shoulders we stand -- that we are beneficiaries of that arc bending toward justice.

That's why I stand here today. I would not be in the United States Senate had it not been for the efforts and courage of so many parents and grandparents and ordinary people who were willing to reach up and bend that arc in the direction of justice.

I hope we continue to see that spirit live on not just during this debate but throughout all our work here in the Senate.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor.

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# Announces Presidential Exploratory Committee

As many of you know, over the last few months I've been thinking hard about my plans for 2008. Running for the presidency is a profound decision -- a decision no one should make on the basis of media hype or personal ambition alone -- and so before I committed myself and my family to this race, I wanted to be sure that this was right for us and, more importantly, right for the country.

I certainly didn't expect to find myself in this position a year ago. But as I've spoken to many of you in my travels across the states these past months, as I've read your emails and read your letters, I've been struck by how hungry we all are for a different kind of politics. So I've spent some time thinking about how I could best advance the cause of change and progress that we so desperately need.

The decisions that have been made in Washington these past six years, and the problems that have been ignored, have put our country in a precarious place. Our economy is changing rapidly, and that means profound changes for working people. Many of you have shared with me your stories about skyrocketing health care bills, the pensions you've lost and your struggles to pay for college for your kids. Our continued dependence on oil has put our security and our very planet at risk. And we're still mired in a tragic and costly war that should have never been waged.

But challenging as they are, it's not the magnitude of our problems that concerns me the most. It's the smallness of our politics. America's faced big problems before. But today, our leaders in Washington seem incapable of working together in a practical, common sense way. Politics has become so bitter and partisan, so gummed up by money and influence, that we can't tackle the big problems that demand solutions. And that's what we have to change first. We have to change our politics, and come together around our common interests and concerns as Americans.

This won't happen by itself. A change in our politics can only come from you -- from people across our country who believe there's a better way and are willing to work for it. Years ago, as a community organizer in Chicago, I learned that meaningful change always begins at the grassroots, and that engaged citizens working together can accomplish extraordinary things. So even in the midst of the enormous challenges we face today, I have great faith and hope about the future -- because I believe in you.

And that's why I wanted to tell you first that I'll be filing papers today to create a presidential exploratory committee. For the next several weeks, I'm going to talk with people from around the country, listening and learning more about the challenges we face as a nation, the opportunities that lie before us, and the role that a presidential campaign might play in bringing our country together. And on February 10th, at the end of these discussions and in my home state of Illinois, I'll share my plans with my friends, neighbors, and fellow Americans.

In the meantime, I want to thank all of you for your time, your suggestions, your encouragement, and your prayers. And I look forward to continuing our conversation in the weeks and months to come.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Official Announcement of Candidacy for US President

Hello Springfield! ...Look at all of you. Look at all of you. Goodness. Thank you so much. Thank you so much. Giving all praise and honor to God for bringing us here today. Thank you so much. I am -- I am so grateful to see all of you. You guys are still cheering back there? [to audience on left.]

Let me -- Let me begin by saying thanks to all you who've traveled, from far and wide, to brave the cold today. I know it's a little chilly -- but I'm fired up. You know, we all made this journey for a reason. It's humbling to see a crowd like this, but in my heart I know you didn't just come here for me. You...came here because you believe in what this country can be. In the face of war, you believe there can be peace. In the face of despair, you believe there can be hope. In the face of a politics that shut you out, that's told you to settle, that's divided us for too long, you believe that we can be one people, reaching for what's possible, building that more perfect union.

That's the journey we're on today. But let me tell you how I came to be here. As most of you know, I'm not a native of this great state. I -- I moved to Illinois over two decades ago. I was a young man then, just a year out of college. I knew no one in Chicago when I arrived, was without money or family connections. But a group of churches had offered me a job as a community organizer for the grand sum of 13,000 dollars a year. And I accepted the job, sight unseen, motivated then by a single, simple, powerful idea: that I might play a small part in building a better America.

My work took me to some of Chicago's poorest neighborhoods. I joined with pastors and lay-people to deal with communities that had been ravaged by plant closings. I saw that the problems people faced weren't simply local in nature, that the decisions to close a steel mill was made by distant executives, that the lack of textbooks and computers in a school could be traced to skewed priorities of politicians a thousand miles away, and that when a child turns to violence -- I came to realize that -- there's a hole in that boy's heart that no government alone can fill.

It was in these neighborhoods that I received the best education that I ever had, and where I learned the meaning of my Christian faith. After three years of this work, I went to law school, because I wanted to understand how the law should work for those in need. I became a civil rights lawyer, and taught constitutional law, and after a time, I came to understand that our cherished rights of liberty and equality depend on the active participation of an awakened electorate. It was with these ideas in mind that I arrived in this capital city as a state Senator. It -- It was here, in Springfield, where I saw all that is America converge -- farmers and teachers, businessmen and laborers, all of them with a story to tell, all of them seeking a seat at the table, all of them clamoring to be heard. I made lasting friendships here, friends that I see here in the audience today. It was here -- It was here where we learned to disagree without being disagreeable; that it's possible to compromise so long as you know those principles that can never be compromised; and that so long as we're willing to listen to each other, we can assume the best in people instead of the worst. That's why we were able to reform a death penalty system that was broken; that's why we were able to give health insurance to children in need; that's why we made the tax system right here in Springfield more fair and just for working families; and that's why we passed ethics reform that the cynics said could never, ever be passed. It was here, in Springfield, where North, South, East, and West come together that I was reminded of the essential decency of the American people -- where I came to believe that through this decency, we can build a more hopeful America. And that is why, in the shadow of the Old State Capitol, where Lincoln once called on a house divided to stand together, where common hopes and common dreams still live, I stand before you today to announce my candidacy for President of the United States of America.

Now -- Now, listen, I -- I... -- thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you. [to audience chanting "Obama"]

Look, I -- I...recognize that there is a certain presumptuousness in this, a certain audacity, to this announcement. I know that I haven't spent a lot of time learning the ways of Washington. But I've been there long enough to know that the ways of Washington must change. The genius of our Founders is that they designed a system of government that can be changed. And we should take heart, because we've changed this country before. In the face of tyranny, a band of patriots brought an empire to its knees. In the face of secession, we unified a nation and set the captives free. In the face of Depression, we put people back to work and lifted millions out of poverty. We welcomed immigrants to our shores. We opened railroads to the west. We landed a man on the moon. And we heard a King's call to let "justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream."

We've done this before: Each and every time, a new generation has risen up and done what's needed to be done. Today we are called once more, and it is time for our generation to answer that call. For that is our unyielding faith -- that in -- in the face of impossible odds, people who love their country can change it.

That's what Abraham Lincoln understood. He had his doubts. He had his defeats. He had his skeptics. He had his setbacks. But through his will and his words, he moved a nation and helped free a people. It's because of the millions who rallied to his cause that we're no longer divided, North and South, slave and free. It's because men and women of every race, from every walk of life, continued to march for freedom long after Lincoln was laid to rest, that today we have the chance to face the challenges of this millennium together, as one people -- as Americans. All of us know what those challenges are today: a war with no end, a dependence on oil that threatens our future, schools where too many children aren't learning, and families struggling paycheck to paycheck despite working as hard as they can. We know the challenges. We've heard them. We've talked about them for years. What's stopped us from meeting these challenges is not the absence of sound policies and sensible plans. What's stopped us is the failure of leadership, the smallness -- the smallness of our politics -- the ease with which we're distracted by the petty and trivial, our chronic avoidance of tough decisions, our preference for scoring cheap political points instead of rolling up our sleeves and building a working consensus to tackle the big problems of America.

For the past six years we've been told that our mounting debts don't matter. We've been told that the anxiety Americans feel about rising health care costs and stagnant wages are an illusion. We've been told that climate change is a hoax. We've been told that tough talk and an ill-conceived war can replace diplomacy, and strategy, and foresight. And when all else fails, when Katrina happens, or the death toll in Iraq mounts, we've been told that our crises are somebody else's fault. We're distracted from our real failures, and told to blame the other Party, or gay people, or immigrants. And as people have looked away in disillusionment and frustration, we know what's filled the void: the cynics, the lobbyists, the special interests -- who've turned our government into a game only they can afford to play. They write the checks and you get stuck with the bill. They get the access while you get to write a letter. They think they own this government, but we're here today to take it back. The time for that kind of politics is over. It is through. It's time to turn the page -- right here and right now.

Now look --

[Audience chants "Obama...Obama...Obama"]

Okay. Alright. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Look, look, we have made some progress already. I was proud to help lead the fight in Congress that led to the most sweeping ethics reforms since Watergate. But Washington has a long way to go, and it won't be easy. That's why we'll have to set priorities. We'll have to make hard choices. And although government will play a crucial role in bringing about the changes that we need, more money and programs alone will not get us to where we need to go. Each of us, in our own lives, will have to accept responsibility -- for instilling an ethic of achievement in our children, for adapting to a more competitive economy, for strengthening our communities, and sharing some measure of sacrifice.

So let us begin. Let us begin this hard work together. Let us transform this nation. Let us be the generation that reshapes our economy to compete in the digital age. Let's set high standards for our schools and give them the resources they need to succeed. Let's recruit a new army of teachers, and give them better pay and more support in exchange for more accountability. Let's make college more affordable, and let's invest in scientific research, and let's lay down broadband lines through the heart of inner cities and rural towns all across America. We can do that.

And as our economy changes, let's be the generation that ensures our nation's workers are sharing in our prosperity. Let's protect the hard-earned benefits their companies have promised. Let's make it possible for hardworking Americans to save for retirement. Let's allow our unions and their organizers to lift up this country's middle-class again. We can do that. Let's be the generation that ends poverty in America. Every single person willing to work should be able to get job training that leads to a job, and earn a living wage that can pay the bills, and afford child care so their kids can have a safe place to go when they work. We can do this. And let's be the generation that finally, after all these years, tackles our health care crisis. We can control costs by focusing on prevention, by providing better treatment to the chronically ill, and using technology to cut the bureaucracy. Let's be the generation that says right here, right now: We will have universal health care in America by the end of the next President's first term. We can do that.

Let's be the generation that finally frees America from the tyranny of oil. We can harness homegrown, alternative fuels like ethanol and spur the production of more fuel-efficient cars. We can set up a system for capping greenhouse gases. We can turn this crisis of global warming into a moment of opportunity for innovation, and job creation, and an incentive for businesses that will serve as a model for the world. Let's be the generation that makes future generations proud of what we did here.

Most of all, let's be the generation that never forgets what happened on that September day and confront the terrorists with everything we've got. Politics doesn't have to divide us on this anymore; we can work together to keep our country safe. I've worked with the Republican Senator Dick Lugar to pass a law that will secure and destroy some of the world's deadliest weapons. We can work together to track down terrorists with a stronger military. We can tighten the net around their finances. We can improve our intelligence capabilities and finally get homeland security right. But let's also understand that ultimate victory against our enemies will only come by rebuilding our alliances and exporting those ideals that bring hope and opportunity to millions of people around the globe.

We can do those things.

But all of this cannot come to pass until we bring an end to this war in Iraq. Most of you know -- Most of you know that I opposed this war from the start. I thought it was a tragic mistake. Today we grieve for the families who have lost loved ones, the hearts that have been broken, and the young lives that could have been. America, it is time to start bringing our troops home. It's time -- It's time to admit that no amount of American lives can resolve the political disagreement that lies at the heart of someone else's civil war. That's why I have a plan that will bring our combat troops home by March of 2008. Let the Iraqis know -- Letting the Iraqis know that we will not be there forever is our last, best hope to pressure the Sunni and Shia to come to the table and find peace. And there's one other thing that it's not too late to get right about this war, and that is the homecoming of the men and women, our veterans, who have sacrificed the most. Let us honor their courage by providing the care they need and rebuilding the military they love. Let us be the generation that begins that work.

I know there are those who don't believe we can do all these things. I understand the skepticism. After all, every four years, candidates from both Parties make similar promises, and I expect this year will be no different. All of us running for President will travel around the country offering ten-point plans and making grand speeches; all of us will trumpet those qualities we believe make us uniquely qualified to lead this country. But too many times, after the election is over, and the confetti is swept away, all those promises fade from memory, and the lobbyists and special interests move in, and people turn away, disappointed as before, left to struggle on their own. That's why this campaign can't only be about me. It must be about us. It must be about what we can do together. This campaign must be the occasion, the vehicle, of your hopes, and your dreams. It will take your time, your energy, and your advice to push us forward when we're doing right, and let us know when we're not. This campaign has to be about reclaiming the meaning of citizenship, restoring our sense of common purpose, and realizing that few obstacles can withstand the power of millions of voices calling for change. By ourselves, this change will not happen. Divided, we are bound to fail. But the life of a tall, gangly, self-made Springfield lawyer tells us that a different future is possible.

He tells us that there is power in words.

He tells us that there's power in conviction. That beneath all the differences of race and region, faith and station, we are one people. He tells us that there's power in hope. As Lincoln organized the forces arrayed against slavery, he was heard to say this: "Of strange, discordant, and even hostile elements, we gathered from the four winds, and formed and fought to battle through."

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That is our purpose here today. That is why I am in this race -- not just to hold an office, but to gather with you to transform a nation. I want -- I want to win that next battle -- for justice and opportunity. I want to win that next battle -- for better schools, and better jobs, and better health care for all. I want us to take up the unfinished business of perfecting our union, and building a better America. And if you will join with me in this improbable quest, if you feel destiny calling, and see as I see, the future of endless possibility stretching out before us; if you sense, as I sense, that the time is now to shake off our slumber, and slough off our fears, and make good on the debt we owe past and future generations, then I am ready to take up the cause, and march with you, and work with you -- today.

Together we can finish the work that needs to be done, and usher in a new birth of freedom on this Earth.

Thank you very much everybody -- let's get to work! I love you. Thank you.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

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# Selma Voting Rights March Commemoration Speech

Thank you. Thank you. Giving all praise and honor to God for bringing us here today.

I must begin because at the Unity breakfast this morning I was saving for last and the list was so long I left him out after that introduction. So I'm going to start by saying how much I appreciate the friendship and the support and the outstanding work that he does each and every day, not just in Capitol Hill but also back here in the district. Please give a warm round of applause for your Congressman Artur Davis. It is a great honor to be here. Reverend Jackson, thank you so much. To the family of Brown A.M.E, to the good Bishop Kirkland, thank you for your wonderful message and your leadership. I want to acknowledge one of the great heroes of American history and American life, somebody who captures the essence of decency and courage, somebody who I have admired all my life and were it not for him, I'm not sure I'd be here today, Congressman John Lewis. I'm thankful to him. To all the distinguished guests and clergy, I'm not sure I'm going to thank Reverend Lowery because he stole the show. I was mentioning earlier, I know we've got C.T. Vivian in the audience, and when you have to speak in front of somebody who Martin Luther King said was the greatest preacher he ever heard, then you've got some problems. And I'm a little nervous about following so many great preachers. But I'm hoping that the spirit moves me and to all my colleagues who have given me such a warm welcome, thank you very much for allowing me to speak to you here today. You know, several weeks ago, after I had announced that I was running for the Presidency of the United States, I stood in front of the Old State Capitol in Springfield, Illinois; where Abraham Lincoln delivered his speech declaring, drawing in scripture, that a house divided against itself could not stand. And I stood and I announced that I was running for the presidency. And there were a lot of commentators, as they are prone to do, who questioned the audacity of a young man like myself, haven't been in Washington too long. And I acknowledge that there is a certain presumptuousness about this. But I got a letter from a friend of some of yours named Reverend Otis Moss Jr. in Cleveland, and his son, Otis Moss III is the Pastor at my church and I must send greetings from Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright Jr. but I got a letter giving me encouragement and saying how proud he was that I had announced and encouraging me to stay true to my ideals and my values and not to be fearful. And he said, if there's some folks out there who are questioning whether or not you should run, just tell them to look at the story of Joshua because you're part of the Joshua generation. So I just want to talk a little about Moses and Aaron and Joshua, because we are in the presence today of a lot of Moseses. We're in the presence today of giants whose shoulders we stand on, people who battled, not just on behalf of African Americans but on behalf of all of America; that battled for America's soul, that shed blood , that endured taunts and formant and in some cases gave -- torment and in some cases gave the full measure of their devotion. Like Moses, they challenged Pharaoh, the princes, powers who said that some are atop and others are at the bottom, and that's how it's always going to be. There were people like Anna Cooper and Marie Foster and Jimmy Lee Jackson and Maurice Olette, C.T. Vivian, Reverend Lowery, John Lewis, who said we can imagine something different and we know there is something out there for us, too. Thank God, He's made us in His image and we reject the notion that we will for the rest of our lives be confined to a station of inferiority, that we can't aspire to the highest of heights, that our talents can't be expressed to their fullest. And so because of what they endured, because of what they marched; they led a people out of bondage. They took them across the sea that folks thought could not be parted. They wandered through a desert but always knowing that God was with them and that, if they maintained that trust in God, that they would be all right. And it's because they marched that the next generation hasn't been bloodied so much. It's because they marched that we elected councilmen, congressmen. It is because they marched that we have Artur Davis and Keith Ellison. It is because they marched that I got the kind of education I got, a law degree, a seat in the Illinois senate and ultimately in the United States senate. It is because they marched that I stand before you here today. I was mentioning at the Unity Breakfast this morning, my -- at the Unity Breakfast this morning that my debt is even greater than that because not only is my career the result of the work of the men and women who we honor here today. My very existence might not have been possible had it not been for some of the folks here today. I mentioned at the Unity Breakfast that a lot of people been asking, well, you know, your father was from Africa, your mother, she's a white woman from Kansas. I'm not sure that you have the same experience. And I tried to explain, you don't understand. You see, my Grandfather was a cook to the British in Kenya. Grew up in a small village and all his life, that's all he was -- a cook and a house boy. And that's what they called him, even when he was 60 years old. They called him a house boy. They wouldn't call him by his last name. Sound familiar? He had to carry a passbook around because Africans in their own land, in their own country, at that time, because it was a British colony, could not move about freely. They could only go where they were told to go. They could only work where they were told to work. Yet something happened back here in Selma, Alabama. Something happened in Birmingham that sent out what Bobby Kennedy called, "Ripples of hope all around the world." Something happened when a bunch of women decided they were going to walk instead of ride the bus after a long day of doing somebody else's laundry, looking after somebody else's children. When men who had PhD's decided that's enough and we're going to stand up for our dignity. That sent a shout across oceans so that my grandfather began to imagine something different for his son. His son, who grew up herding goats in a small village in Africa could suddenly set his sights a little higher and believe that maybe a black man in this world had a chance. What happened in Selma, Alabama and Birmingham also stirred the conscience of the nation. It worried folks in the White House who said, "You know, we're battling Communism. How are we going to win hearts and minds all across the world? If right here in our own country, John, we're not observing the ideals set fort in our Constitution, we might be accused of being hypocrites." So the Kennedy's decided we're going to do an air lift. We're going to go to Africa and start bringing young Africans over to this country and give them scholarships to study so they can learn what a wonderful country America is. This young man named Barack Obama got one of those tickets and came over to this country. He met this woman whose great great-great-great-grandfather had owned slaves; but she had a good idea there was some craziness going on because they looked at each other and they decided that we know that the world as it has been it might not be possible for us to get together and have a child. There was something stirring across the country because of what happened in Selma, Alabama, because some folks are willing to march across a bridge. So they got together and Barack Obama Jr. was born. So don't tell me I don't have a claim on Selma, Alabama. Don't tell me I'm not coming home to Selma, Alabama. I'm here because somebody marched. I'm here because you all sacrificed for me. I stand on the shoulders of giants. I thank the Moses generation; but we've got to remember, now, that Joshua still had a job to do. As great as Moses was, despite all that he did, leading a people out of bondage, he didn't cross over the river to see the Promised Land. God told him your job is done. You'll see it. You'll be at the mountain top and you can see what I've promised. What I've promised to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. You will see that I've fulfilled that promise but you won't go there. We're going to leave it to the Joshua generation to make sure it happens. There are still battles that need to be fought; some rivers that need to be crossed. Like Moses, the task was passed on to those who might not have been as deserving, might not have been as courageous, find themselves in front of the risks that their parents and grandparents and great grandparents had taken. That doesn't mean that they don't still have a burden to shoulder, that they don't have some responsibilities. The previous generation, the Moses generation, pointed the way. They took us 90% of the way there. We still got that 10% in order to cross over to the other side. So the question, I guess, that I have today is what's called of us in this Joshua generation? What do we do in order to fulfill that legacy; to fulfill the obligations and the debt that we owe to those who allowed us to be here today? Now, I don't think we could ever fully repay that debt. I think that we're always going to be looking back, but there are at least a few suggestions that I would have in terms of how we might fulfill that enormous legacy. The first is to recognize our history. John Lewis talked about why we're here today. But I worry sometimes -- we've got black history month, we come down and march every year, once a year. We occasionally celebrate the various events of the Civil Rights Movement, we celebrate Dr. King's birthday, but it strikes me that understanding our history and knowing what it means, is an everyday activity. Moses told the Joshua generation; don't forget where you came from. I worry sometimes, that the Joshua generation in its success forgets where it came from. Thinks it doesn't have to make as many sacrifices. Thinks that the very height of ambition is to make as much money as you can, to drive the biggest car and have the biggest house and wear a Rolex watch and get your own private jet, get some of that Oprah money. And I think that's a good thing. There's nothing wrong with making money, but if you know your history, then you know that there is a certain poverty of ambition involved in simply striving just for money. Materialism alone will not fulfill the possibilities of your existence. You have to fill that with something else. You have to fill it with the golden rule. You've got to fill it with thinking about others. And if we know our history, then we will understand that that is the highest mark of service. Second thing that the Joshua generation needs to understand is that the principles of equality that were set fort and were battled for have to be fought each and every day. It is not a one-time thing. I was remarking at the unity breakfast on the fact that the single most significant concern that this justice department under this administration has had with respect to discrimination has to do with affirmative action. That they have basically spent all their time worrying about colleges and universities around the country that are given a little break to young African Americans and Hispanics to make sure that they can go to college, too. I had a school in southern Illinois that set up a program for PhD's in math and science for African Americans. And the reason they had set it up is because we only had less than 1% of the PhD's in science and math go to African Americans. At a time when we are competing in a global economy, when we're not competing just against folks in North Carolina or Florida or California, we're competing against folks in China and India and we need math and science majors, this university thought this might be a nice thing to do. And the justice department wrote them a letter saying we are going to threaten to sue you for reverse discrimination unless you cease this program. And it reminds us that we still got a lot of work to do, and that the basic enforcement of anti-discrimination laws, the injustice that still exists within our criminal justice system, the disparity in terms of how people are treated in this country continues. It has gotten better. And we should never deny that it's gotten better. But we shouldn't forget that better is not good enough. That until we have absolute equality in this country in terms of people being treated on the basis of their color or their gender, that that is something that we've got to continue to work on and the Joshua generation has a significant task in making that happen. Third thing -- we've got to recognize that we fought for civil rights, but we've still got a lot of economic rights that have to be dealt with. We've got 46 million people uninsured in this country despite spending more money on health care than any nation on earth. It makes no sense. As a consequence, we've got what's known as a health care disparity in this nation because many of the uninsured are African American or Latino. Life expectancy is lower. Almost every disease is higher within minority communities. The health care gap. Blacks are less likely in their schools to have adequate funding. We have less-qualified teachers in those schools. We have fewer textbooks in those schools. We got in some schools rats outnumbering computers. That's called the achievement gap. You've got a health care gap and you've got an achievement gap. You've got Katrina still undone. I went down to New Orleans three weeks ago. It still looks bombed out. Still not rebuilt. When 9/11 happened, the federal government had a special program of grants to help rebuild. They waived any requirement that Manhattan would have to pay 10% of the cost of rebuilding. When Hurricane Andrew happened in Florida, 10% requirement, they waived it because they understood that some disasters are so devastating that we can't expect a community to rebuild. New Orleans -- the largest national catastrophe in our history, the federal government says where's your 10%? There is an empathy gap. There is a gap in terms of sympathizing for the folks in New Orleans. It's not a gap that the American people felt because we saw how they responded. But somehow our government didn't respond with that same sense of compassion, with that same sense of kindness. And here is the worst part, the tragedy in New Orleans happened well before the hurricane struck because many of those communities, there were so many young men in prison, so many kids dropping out, so little hope.

A hope gap. A hope gap that still pervades too many communities all across the country and right here in Alabama. So the question is, then, what are we, the Joshua generation, doing to close those gaps? Are we doing every single thing that we can do in Congress in order to make sure that early education is adequately funded and making sure that we are raising the minimum wage so people can have dignity and respect? Are we ensuring that, if somebody loses a job, that they're getting retrained? And that, if they've lost their health care and pension, somebody is there to help them get back on their feet? Are we making sure we're giving a second chance to those who have strayed and gone to prison but want to start a new life? Government alone can't solve all those problems, but government can help. It's the responsibility of the Joshua generation to make sure that we have a government that is as responsive as the need that exists all across America. That brings me to one other point, about the Joshua generation, and that is this -- that it's not enough just to ask what the government can do for us-- it's important for us to ask what we can do for ourselves. One of the signature aspects of the civil rights movement was the degree of discipline and fortitude that was instilled in all the people who participated. Imagine young people, 16, 17, 20, 21, backs straight, eyes clear, suit and tie, sitting down at a lunch counter knowing somebody is going to spill milk on you but you have the discipline to understand that you are not going to retaliate because in showing the world how disciplined we were as a people, we were able to win over the conscience of the nation. I can't say for certain that we have instilled that same sense of moral clarity and purpose in this generation. Bishop, sometimes I feel like we've lost it a little bit. I'm fighting to make sure that our schools are adequately funded all across the country. With the inequities of relying on property taxes and people who are born in wealthy districts getting better schools than folks born in poor districts and that's now how it's supposed to be. That's not the American way. but I'll tell you what -- even as I fight on behalf of more education funding, more equity, I have to also say that , if parents don't turn off the television set when the child comes home from school and make sure they sit down and do their homework and go talk to the teachers and find out how they're doing, and if we don't start instilling a sense in our young children that there is nothing to be ashamed about in educational achievement, I don't know who taught them that reading and writing and conjugating your verbs was something white. We've got to get over that mentality. That is part of what the Moses generation teaches us, not saying to ourselves we can't do something, but telling ourselves that we can achieve. We can do that. We got power in our hands. Folks are complaining about the quality of our government, I understand there's something to be complaining about. I'm in Washington. I see what's going on. I see those powers and principalities have snuck back in there, that they're writing the energy bills and the drug laws. We understand that, but I'll tell you what. I also know that, if cousin Pookie would vote, get off the couch and register some folks and go to the polls, we might have a different kind of politics. That's what the Moses generation teaches us. Take off your bedroom slippers. Put on your marching shoes. Go do some politics. Change this country! That's what we need. We have too many children in poverty in this country and everybody should be ashamed, but don't tell me it doesn't have a little to do with the fact that we got too many daddies not acting like daddies. Don't think that fatherhood ends at conception. I know something about that because my father wasn't around when I was young and I struggled. Those of you who read my book know. I went through some difficult times. I know what it means when you don't have a strong male figure in the house, which is why the hardest thing about me being in politics sometimes is not being home as much as I'd like and I'm just blessed that I've got such a wonderful wife at home to hold things together. Don't tell me that we can't do better by our children, that we can't take more responsibility for making sure we're instilling in them the values and the ideals that the Moses generation taught us about sacrifice and dignity and honesty and hard work and discipline and self-sacrifice. That comes from us. We've got to transmit that to the next generation and I guess the point that I'm making is that the civil rights movement wasn't just a fight against the oppressor; it was also a fight against the oppressor in each of us. Sometimes it's easy to just point at somebody else and say it's their fault, but oppression has a way of creeping into it. Reverend, it has a way of stunting yourself. You start telling yourself, Bishop, I can't do something. I can't read. I can't go to college. I can't start a business. I can't run for Congress. I can't run for the presidency. People start telling you-- you can't do something, after a while, you start believing it and part of what the civil rights movement was about was recognizing that we have to transform ourselves in order to transform the world. Mahatma Gandhi, great hero of Dr. King and the person who helped create the nonviolent movement around the world; he once said that you can't change the world if you haven't changed. If you want to change the world, the change has to happen with you first and that is something that the greatest and most honorable of generations has taught us, but the final thing that I think the Moses generation teaches us is to remind ourselves that we do what we do because God is with us. You know, when Moses was first called to lead people out of the Promised Land, he said I don't think I can do it, Lord. I don't speak like Reverend Lowery. I don't feel brave and courageous and the Lord said I will be with you. Throw down that rod. Pick it back up. I'll show you what to do. The same thing happened with the Joshua generation. Joshua said, you know, I'm scared. I'm not sure that I am up to the challenge, the Lord said to him, every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon, I have given you. Be strong and have courage, for I am with you wherever you go. Be strong and have courage. It's a prayer for a journey. A prayer that kept a woman in her seat when the bus driver told her to get up, a prayer that led nine children through the doors of the little rock school, a prayer that carried our brothers and sisters over a bridge right here in Selma, Alabama. Be strong and have courage. When you see row and row of state trooper facing you, the horses and the tear gas, how else can you walk? Towards them, unarmed, unafraid. When they come start beating your friends and neighbors, how else can you simply kneel down, bow your head and ask the Lord for salvation? When you see heads gashed open and eyes burning and children lying hurt on the side of the road, when you are John Lewis and you've been beaten within an inch of your life on Sunday, how do you wake up Monday and keep on marching? Be strong and have courage, for I am with you wherever you go. We've come a long way in this journey, but we still have a long way to travel. We traveled because God was with us. It's not how far we've come. That bridge outside was crossed by blacks and whites, northerners and southerners, teenagers and children, the beloved community of God's children, they wanted to take those steps together, but it was left to the Joshua's to finish the journey Moses had begun and today we're called to be the Joshua's of our time, to be the generation that finds our way across this river. There will be days when the water seems wide and the journey too far, but in those moments, we must remember that throughout our history, there has been a running thread of ideals that have guided our travels and pushed us forward, even when they're just beyond our reach, liberty in the face of tyranny, opportunity where there was none and hope over the most crushing despair. Those ideals and values beckon us still and when we have our doubts and our fears, just like Joshua did, when the road looks too long and it seems like we may lose our way, remember what these people did on that bridge. Keep in your heart the prayer of that journey, the prayer that God gave to Joshua. Be strong and have courage in the face of injustice. Be strong and have courage in the face of prejudice and hatred, in the face of joblessness and helplessness and hopelessness. Be strong and have courage, brothers and sisters, those who are gathered here today, in the face of our doubts and fears, in the face of skepticism, in the face of cynicism, in the face of a mighty river. Be strong and have courage and let us cross over that Promised Land together. Thank you so much everybody. God bless you.

# Senate Floor Speech in Favor of Iraq Federalism Amendment

Mr. President, I rise, first, to offer strong words of support for the statement that was just offered by the distinguished Senator from Massachusetts. I, as well, rise today to speak in support of the Iraq resolution that the Senate will consider tomorrow.

Mr. President, the news from Iraq is very bad. Last week, a suicide bomber stood outside a bookstore and killed 20 people. Other attacks killed 118 Shia pilgrims. On Sunday, a car bomb went off in central Baghdad, and more than 30 people died. And the road from the airport into Baghdad is littered with smoldering debris, craters from improvised explosive devices, and the memories of our sons and daughters.

Mr. President, the civil war in Iraq rages on. The insurgents have started to change their tactics. They hide in buildings and along the streets and wait for our helicopters. They've shot down at least eight U.S. helicopters in the last month. More of our soldiers are dying and coming home with their bodies broken and their nerves shattered at a VA system completely unprepared for what they need to rebuild their lives.

Mr. President, it is not enough for the President to tell us that victory in this war is simply a matter of American resolve. The American people have been extraordinarily resolved. They've seen their sons and daughters killed or wounded in the streets of Fallujah. They've spent hundreds of billions of dollars on this effort -- money that they know could have been devoted to strengthening our homeland security and our competitive standing as a Nation. The failure has not been a failure of resolve. That's not what's led us into chaos. It's been a failure of strategy; and it's time that the strategy change. There is no military solution, Mr. President, to the civil war that rages on in Iraq; and it's time for us to redeploy so that a political solution becomes possible.

The news from Iraq is very bad, and it's been that way for at least four years. We all wish the -- that the land the President and the Vice President speak of exists. We wish that there was an Iraq where the insurgency was in the last throes, where the people work with security, where children play outside, where a vibrant new democracy lights up the nighttime sky. We wish for those things, but there's no alternative reality to what we see and read about in the news, to what we've experienced these long four years.

I repeat, Mr. President, there is no military solution to this war. At this point, no amount of soldiers can solve the grievances at the heart of someone else's civil war. The Iraqi people -- Shia, Sunni, and Kurd -- must come to the table and reach a political settlement themselves. If they want peace, they must do the hard work necessary to achieve it.

Our failed strategy in Iraq has strengthened Iran's strategic position, reduced U.S. credibility and influence around the world, placed Israel and other nations friendly to the United States in the region in greater peril. These are not the signs of a well-laid plan. It's time for a profound change.

This is what we're trying to do here today. We're saying it is time to start making plans to redeploy our troops so that they can focus on the wider struggle against terrorism, win the war in Afghanistan, strengthen our position in the Middle East, and pressure the Iraqis to reach a political settlement. Even if this effort falls short, we will continue to try to accomplish what the American people asked for last November.

I'm glad to see, though, that this new effort is gaining consensus. And I want to commend Senator Reid for his efforts. He took the time to listen -- so many of us from both Chambers of Congress could help develop this plan.

The decision in particular to begin a phased redeployment, with the goal of redeploying all our combat forces by March 31st, 2008, is the right step. It's a measure the Iraq Study Group spoke of, an idea I borrowed from them, an idea that, in a bill I introduced, now has more than 60 cosponsors from House and Senate and from both sides of the aisle. They've supported this plan since I announced a similar plan in January.

The decision allows some U.S. forces to remain in Iraq with a clear mission to protect U.S. and coalition personnel, conduct counterterrorism operations, and to train and equip Iraqi forces; and that is a smart decision. President al-Maliki spoke at a conference and warned that the violence in Iraq could spread throughout the region if it goes unchecked. By maintaining a strong presence in Iraq and the Middle East, as both my bill and the leadership bill does, we can ensure that the chaos does not spread.

I should also add that the decision to begin this phased redeployment within 120 days is a practical one. Our military options have been exhausted. It's time to seek a political solution to this war, and with this decision we send a clear signal to the parties involved that they need to arrive at an accommodation.

Mr. President, while I strongly believe that this war never should have been authorized, I believe we must be as careful in ending the war as we were careless getting in. While I prefer my approach, as reflected in my bill, I believe that this new resolution does begin to point U.S. policy in Iraq and the region in the right direction. An end to the war, and achieving a political solution to Iraq's civil war, will not happen unless we demand it.

Peace with stability doesn't just happen because we wish for it. It comes when we never give in and never give up and never tire of working towards a life on Earth worthy of our human dignity. The decisions that have been made have led us to this crossroads -- a moment of great peril, Mr. President.

We have a choice. We can continue down the road that's weakened our credibility and damaged our strategic interests in the region or we can turn toward the future. The road won't be smooth, and I have to say, Mr. President, that there will be risks with any approach. But this approach is our last best hope to end this war so we can begin to bring our troops home and begin the hard work of securing our country and our world from the threats that we face.

The President has said he will continue down the road towards more troops and more of the same failed policies. The President sought and won authorization from Congress to wage this war from the start. But he is now dismissing and ignoring the will of the American people, that is tired of years of watching the human and financial tolls mount.

Mr. President, the news from Iraq is very bad, but it can change if we in this Chamber say "enough."

Let this day be the day that begins the painful and difficult work of moving from this crossroad.

Let this be the day that we begin pulling towards the future with a responsible conclusion to this painful chapter in our Nation's history.

Mr. President, let this be the day when we finally send a message that is so clear and so emphatic that it cannot be ignored.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor.

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# Senate Floor Speech on the Iraq War After 4 Years

[AUTHENTICITY CERTIFIED: Text version below transcribed directly from audio]

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

Mr. President, on Thursdays Senator Durbin and I hold a constituent coffee so we can hear from the folks back home. A young man came a few months ago who was about 25, 26 years old. He had been in Iraq for a year -- The first -- He had been back from Iraq for a year. The first six months of that year had been spent in a coma. An explosion had shattered his face, blinded him in both eyes, has left him without the use of one arm.

He talked to us about how he was going through rehab. He introduced us to his family. He has a wife and two young daughters like I do, and his wife talked for a bit about the adjustments they were making at home since dad got hurt. And I found myself looking at not just him, but his wife, who loves him so much. And I thought about how their lives were forever changed because of the decision that was carried out four years ago.

The sacrifices of war are immeasurable. I first made this point in the fall of 2002, at the end of the speech that I gave opposing the invasion of Iraq. I said then that I certainly do not oppose all wars. Rather, I oppose dumb wars, rash wars, wars that are based on passion as opposed to wars based on a sober assessment of our national security interests, because there's no decision more profound than the one we make to send our brave men and women into harm’s way. I’ve thought about these words from time to time since that speech, but never so much as the day I saw that young man and his wife, and understood the degree to which their lives had been turn upside down.

The sacrifices of war are immeasurable. Too many have returned from Iraq with that soldier’s story -- with broken bodies and shattered nerves and wounds that even the best care may not heal. Too many of our best have come home shrouded in the flag they loved. Too many moms and dads and husbands and wives have answered that knock on the door that’s hardest for any loved one to hear. And the rest of us have seen too many promises of swift victories and dying insurgencies and budding democracy giving way to the reality of a brutal civil war that goes on and on and on to this day.

The sacrifices of war, Mr. President, are immeasurable. It was not impossible to see back then that we might arrive at the place we’re at today. I said then that a war based not on reason but on passion, not on principle but on politics would lead to a U.S. occupation of undetermined length, at undetermined cost, with undetermined consequences. I believed that an invasion of Iraq without a clear rationale or strong international support would only strengthen the recruitment arm of al-Qaeda and erode the good standing and moral authority that took our country generations to build. There were other experts and leaders and everyday Americans who believed this too.

I wish I had been wrong. I wish we weren’t here talking about this at the beginning of the war’s fifth year -- because the consequences of this war have been profound. And the sacrifices have been immeasurable.

Mr. President, those who would have us continue this war in perpetuity like to say that this is a matter of resolve on behalf of the American people. But the American people have been extraordinarily resolved. They've seen their sons and daughters killed and wounded on the streets of Fallujah. They've spent hundreds of billions of dollars on this effort -- money that could have been devoted to strengthening our homeland and our competitive standing as a nation.

It is not a failure of resolve that has led us into this chaos but a failed strategy -- a strategy that has only strengthened Iran’s strategic position, increased threats posed by terrorist organizations, reduced U.S. credibility and influence around the world, and placed Israel and other nations [friendly] to the United States in the region in greater peril. Iraq has not been a failure of resolve; it has been a failure of strategy -- and that strategy must change. It is time to bring a responsible end to U.S. involvement in this conflict is now.

It's become apparent, Mr. President, that there's no military solution to this war. No amount of U.S. soldiers -- not 10,000 more, not 20,000 more, not almost 30,000 more than we know -- that we know we are sending -- can solve the grievances that lay at the heart of someone else’s civil war. Our troops cannot serve as their diplomats, and we can no longer referee their civil war. We must begin a phased withdrawal of our forces starting May 1st, with the goal of removing all combat forces by March 30th, 2008.

We also must make sure that we’re not as careless getting out of this war as we were getting in, and that’s why this withdrawal should be gradual, and maintain some U.S. troops in the region to prevent a wider war in the region, while they can also work on going after Al Qaeda and other terrorists. But this phased withdrawal, Mr. President, must begin soon. Letting the Iraqis know that we will not be there forever is our last, best hope to pressure the Iraqis to take ownership of their country and bring an end to their conflict. It is time for our troops to start coming home.

History will not judge, Mr. President, the architects of this war kindly. But the books have yet to be written on our effort to right the wrongs we see in Iraq. The story has yet to be told about how we turned from this moment, found our way out of the desert, and took to heart the lessons of war that too many refused to heed back then; for it is of little use or comfort to recall past advice and warnings if we do not allow them to guide us in the challenges that lie ahead. Mr. President, threats loom large in an age where terrorist networks thrive, and there will certainly be times when we have to call on our brave servicemen and women to risk their lives again.

But before we make that most profound of all decisions, before we send our best off to battle, we must remember what led us to this day and learn from the principles that follow.

We must remember that ideology is not a foreign policy. We must not embark on a war based on untested theories, political agendas, or wishful thinking that has basis -- that has little basis in fact or reality. We must focus our efforts on the threats we know exist, and we must evaluate those threats with sound intelligence that is never manipulated for political reasons.

Mr. President, we must remember that the cost of going it alone is immense. It is a choice we sometimes have to make, but one [that] must be made rarely and always reluctantly. That's because America’s standing in the world is a precious resource not easily rebuilt. We value the cooperation and goodwill of other nations not because it makes us feel good, but because it makes all the world safer; because the only way to battle 21st century threats that race across the borders -- threats like terror and disease and nuclear proliferation -- is to enlist the resources and support of all nations. To win our wider struggle, we must let people across this planet know that there is another, more hopeful alternative to the hateful ideologies the terrorists espouse -- and renewed -- and a renewed America will reflect and champion that vision.

Mr. President, we must remember that planning for peace is just as critical as planning for war. Iraq was not just a failure of conception but a failure of execution, and so when a conflict does arise that requires our involvement, we must understand that country’s history, its politics, its ethnic and religious divisions before our troops ever set foot on its soil.

We must understand that setting up ballot boxes does not a democracy make -- that real freedom and real stability come from doing the hard work of helping to build a strong police force, and a legitimate government, and ensuring that people have food, and water, and electricity, and basic services. And we must be honest about how much of that we can do ourselves and how much must come from the people themselves.

Finally, Mr. President, we must remember that when we send our servicemen and women to war, we make sure we give them the training they need, and the equipment that will keep them safe, and a mission that they can accomplish. We must respect our commanders’ advice not just when its politically convenient, but even when it’s not what we want to hear. And when our troops come home, it is our most solemn responsibility to make sure they come home to the services, and the benefits, and the care they deserve.

As we stand at the beginning of the fifth year of this war, Mr. President, let us remember -- let us remember that young man from Illinois, and his wife, and his daughters, and the thousands upon thousands of families who are living the very real consequences and immeasurable sacrifices that have come from our decision to invade Iraq. We are so blessed in this country to have so many men and women like this -- Americans willing to put on that uniform, and say the hard goodbyes, and risk their lives in a far off land because they know that such consequences and sacrifices are sometimes necessary to defend our country and achieve a lasting peace.

That is why we have no greater responsibility than to ensure the decision to place them in harm’s way is the right one. And that is why we must learn the lessons of Iraq. It is what we owe our soldiers. It is what we owe their families. And it is what we owe our country -- now, and all the days and months to come.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor.

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# Senate Floor Speech on Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Mr. President,

Last year I spoke

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at one of the marches in Chicago for comprehensive immigration reform. I looked out across the faces of the crowd. I saw mothers and fathers, citizens and noncitizens, people of Polish and Mexican descent, working Americans, and children. And what I know is that these are people we should embrace, not fear. We can and should be able to see ourselves in them.

I do not say that to diminish the complexity of the task. I say it because I believe that attitude must guide our discourse. We can and should be able to fix our broken immigration system and do so in a way that's reflective of American values and ideals and the tradition that we have of accepting immigrants to our shores.

Now, I think that the bill that has come to the floor is a fine first step, but I strongly believe it requires some changes. And I'm working with others to improve it.

In approaching immigration reform, I believe that we must enact tough, practical reforms that ensure and promote the legal and orderly entry of immigrants into our country. Just as important, we must respect the humanity of the carpenters and bricklayers who help build America; the humanity of garment workers and farmworkers who come to America to join their families; the humanity of students like my father who came to America in search of a dream. We are a nation of immigrants, and we must respect that shared history as this debate moves forward.

To fix the system in a way that does not require us to revisit the same problem in twenty years, I continue to believe that we need stronger enforcement on the border and at the workplace. And that means a workable mandatory system that employers must use to verify the legality of their workers.

But for reform to work, we also must respond to what pulls people to America and what pushes them out of their home countries. Where we can reunite families, we should. Where we can bring in more foreign-born workers with the skills our economy needs, we should. And these goals are not mutually exclusive. We should not say that Spanish speaking or working class immigrants are only good enough to be temporary workers and cannot earn the right to be a part of the American family.

With regard to the most pressing part of the immigration challenge -- the 12 million undocumented immigrants living in the U.S. -- we must create an earned path to citizenship. Now, no one condones unauthorized entry into the United States. And by supporting an earned path to citizenship, I am not saying that illegal entry should go unpunished. The path to permanent residence and eventual citizenship must be tough enough to make it clear that an unauthorized entry was wrong and will be punished.

But these immigrants are our neighbors. They go to our churches, and their kids go to our schools. They provide the hard labor that supports many of the industries in our country. We should bring them out of hiding, make them pay the appropriate fines for their mistakes, and then help them become tax paying, law-abiding, productive members of society. And so I'm heartened by the agreement that we have in this bill to put all 12 million or so undocumented immigrants on a path to earned citizenship. And I applaud those who worked on this compromise to achieve that pathway.

But there are other parts of the compromise deal before us that cause me serious concern. I want to just address those now, Mr. President.

In order to stem the demand for illegal workers, we need a mandatory employment verification system that is actually mandatory. It needs to allow employers to check with the Department of Homeland Security to see that their employees are legally eligible to work in the United States. This is something that I worked on last year when we crafted comprehensive reform and passed it out of the Senate.

Unfortunately, this this year's version of the employment eligibility verification system would give the Department of Homeland Security too much power to force the screening of everyone working in America without appropriate safeguards. I will be working with others to offer an amendment to make this provision closer to what we proposed last year.

As for the guestworker program in the bill, it proposes to create a new 400,000 person annual temporary worker program that could grow to 600,000 without Congressional approval. And it expands the existing seasonal guestworker program from 66,000 up to 100,000 in the first year, and 200,000 after that.

At the end of their temporary status, almost all of these workers would have to go home. That means at the end of the first three years, we would have at least 1.2 million of these new guestworkers in the country with only 30,000 of them having any real hope of being able to stay. And it is my strong belief, Mr. President, that we are setting ourselves up for failure and creating a new undocumented immigrant population.

As we've learned with misguided immigration policies in the past, it is naive to think that people who do not have a way to stay legally will just abide by the system and leave. They will not. This new group of second-class workers will replace the current group of undocumented immigrants, placing downward pressure on American wages and working conditions. And where their -- when their time is up, they will go into the shadows where our current system exploits the undocumented today.

I will support amendments aimed at fixing the temporary worker program that Senator Bingaman and others have offered. And if we're going to have a new temporary worker program, those workers should have the opportunity to stay if they prove themselves capable and willing to participate in this country.

I have to say though, Mr. President, that the most disturbing aspect of this bill is the point system for future immigrants. As currently drafted, it does not reflect how much Americans value the family ties that bind people to their brothers and sisters, or to their parents.

As I understand it, a similar point system is used in Australia and Canada and is intended to attract immigrants who can help produce more goods. But we need to consider more than economics; we also need to consider our nation's unique history and values and what family-based preferences are designed to accomplish. As currently structured, the point system gives no preference to an immigrant with a brother or sister or even a parent who is a U.S. citizen unless the immigrant meets some minimum and arbitrary threshold on education and skills.

That's wrong and fails to recognize the fundamental morality of uniting Americans with their family members. It also places a person's job skills over his character and work ethic. How many of our forefathers would have measured up under this point system? How many would have been turned back at Ellis Island?

I've cosponsored an amendment with the president [Presiding Officer Senator Menendez] to remove that arbitrary minimum threshold of points before family starts to count and to bump up the points for family ties.

And at the appropriate time, I will be offering another amendment with the president [Presiding Officer Senator Menendez] to sunset the points system in the bill. The proposed point system constitutes, at minimum, a radical experiment in social engineering and a departure from our tradition of having family and employers invite immigrants to come. If we are going to allow this to go forward, then Congress should at the very least revisit the point system in five years to give us time to examine the concept in depth and determine whether its intended or unintended consequences are worth the cost of continuing the experiment, or, whether we should return to the existing system that allows immigrants to be sponsored through family and employers.

In closing, Mr. President, we must construct a final product that has broad bipartisan support and will work. I agree with Senator Brownback that the time is now to fix our broken immigration system. If we do not fix it this year, I fear that divisions over the issue will only deepen and the challenge will only grow.

But I also believe, Mr. President, that we have to get it right. And I think that it is critical that as we embark on this enormous venture to update our immigration system, that it is fully reflective of the powerful tradition of immigration in this country and fully reflective of our values and our ideals.

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# The War We Need To Win

Thank you. Thank you so much. Let me begin for thanking Lee Hamilton, who has provided just extraordinary leadership, both with the 9/11 Commission and the Iraq Study Group and here at the Wilson Center. Lee has been a steady voice of reason in an unsteady time and we are grateful for the contributions that he's made to our country. Let me also echo your comments, Lee. My thoughts and prayers are with your colleague, Haleh Esfandiari, and her family. I've made my position known to the Iranian government. Their detention of her is unacceptable. It is time for Haleh to be released. It is time for her to come home.

Thanks to all of you for taking the time to come out with your busy schedules.

I want to acknowledge at least one of the Congressmen that you mentioned Lee, because I saw him just walk in, Congressman Steve Rothman of the 9th District of New Jersey. Thank you very much for being here.

Well, thanks to the 9/11 Commission, we know that six years ago this week President Bush received a briefing with the headline: "Bin Ladin determined to strike [the U.S.]." It came during what the Commission called the "summer of threat," when the "system was blinking red" about an independent -- impending attack. But despite the briefing, many felt the danger was overseas, a threat to embassies and military installations. The extremism, the resentment, the terrorist training camps, and the killers were in the dark corners of the world, far away from the American homeland.

And then one bright, beautiful Tuesday morning, they arrived at our shores. I remember that I was driving to a state legislative hearing in downtown Chicago when I heard the news on my car radio -- that a plane had hit the World Trade Center. By the time I got to my meeting, the second plane had hit, and we were told to evacuate. People gathered in the streets in Chicago, looking up at the sky and the Sears Tower, transformed from a workplace to a target. We feared for our families and we feared for our country. We mourned the terrible loss suffered by our fellow citizens. Back at my law office, I watched the images from New York: the plane vanishing into glass and steel; men and women clinging to windowsills, then letting go; tall towers crumbling to dust. It seemed all the misery and all the evil in the world were in that rolling black cloud, blocking out the September sun.

What we saw that morning forced us to recognize that in the new world of threats, we are no longer protected by our own power. And what we saw that morning was a challenge to a new generation.

The history of America is one of tragedy turned into triumph. And so a war over secession became an opportunity to set the captives free. An attack on Pearl Harbor led to a wave of freedom rolling across the Atlantic and Pacific. An Iron Curtain was punctured by democratic values, new institutions at home, and strong international partnerships abroad.

After 9/11, our calling was to write a new chapter in the American story -- to devise a new strategy and build new alliances, to secure our homeland and safeguard our values, and to serve a just cause abroad. We were ready. Americans were united. Friends around the world stood shoulder to shoulder with us. We had the might and moral suasion that was the legacy of generations of Americans. The tide of history seemed poised to turn, once again, toward hope.

But then everything changed. We did not finish the job against al Qaeda in Afghanistan. We did not develop new capabilities to defeat a new enemy, or launch a comprehensive strategy to dry up the terrorists' base of support. We did not reaffirm our basic values, or secure our homeland. Instead, we got a color-coded politics of fear -- patriotism as the possession of one political Party; the diplomacy of refusing to talk to other countries; a rigid 20th-century ideology that insisted that the 21st century's stateless terrorism could be defeated through the invasion and occupation of a state; a deliberate strategy to misrepresent 9/11 to sell a war against a country that had nothing to do with 9/11.

And so, a little more than a year after that bright September day, I was in the streets of Chicago again, this time speaking at a rally in opposition to war in Iraq. I did not oppose all wars, I said. I was a strong supporter of the war in Afghanistan. But I said I could not support "a dumb war, a rash war" in Iraq. I worried about a "U.S. occupation of undetermined length, at undetermined costs, with undetermined consequences" in the heart of the Muslim world. I pleaded that we "finish the fight with bin Ladin and al Qaeda."

The political winds were blowing in a different direction. The President was determined to go to war and there was just one obstacle: the U.S. Congress. Nine days after I spoke, that obstacle was removed. Congress rubber-stamped the rush to war, giving the President the broad and open-ended authority he uses to this day. With that vote, Congress became co-author of a catastrophic war. And we went off to fight on the wrong battlefield, with no appreciation of how many enemies we would create, and no plan for how to get out.

And because of a war in Iraq that should've never been authorized and should've never been waged, we are now less safe than we were before 9/11.

According to the National Intelligence Estimate

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the threat to our homeland from al Qaeda is -- quote -- "persistent and evolving." Iraq is a training ground for terror, torn apart by civil war. Afghanistan is more violent than it has been since 2001. Al Qaeda has a sanctuary in Pakistan. Israel is besieged by emboldened enemies, talking openly of its destruction. Iran is now presenting the broadest strategic challenge to the United States in the Middle East in a generation. Groups affiliated with or inspired by al Qaeda operate worldwide. Six years after 9/11, we are again in the midst of a "summer of threat," with bin Ladin and many more terrorists determined to strike in the United States.

What's more, in the dark halls of Abu Ghraib and the detention cells of Guantanamo, we have compromised our most precious values. What could have been a call to a generation has become an excuse for unchecked presidential power. A tragedy that united us was turned into a political wedge issue used to divide us.

It is time to turn the page. And it is time to write a new chapter in our response to 9/11.

Now be clear: Just because the President misrepresents our enemy does not mean that we do not have enemies. The terrorists are at war with us. The threat is from a violent -- is from violent extremists who are a small minority of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims, but the threat is real. They distort Islam. They kill man, woman, and child; Christian and Hindu, Jew and Muslim. They seek to create a repressive caliphate, and to defeat this enemy we must understand who are we are [sic] fighting against, and what are we fighting for [sic].

The President would have us believe that every bomb in Baghdad is part of al Qaeda's war against us, not an Iraqi civil war. He elevates al Qaeda in Iraq -- which didn't exist before our invasion -- and overlooks the people who hit us on 9/11, who are training new recruits in Pakistan right now. He lumps together groups with very different goals: al Qaeda and Iran, Shiite militias and Sunni insurgents. He confuses our mission. And worse, he is fighting the war that the terrorists want us to fight. Bin Ladin and his allies know they cannot defeat us on the field of battle or in a genuine battle of ideas. But they can provoke the reaction we've seen in Iraq: a misguided invasion of a Muslim country that sparks new insurgencies, ties down our military, busts our budgets, increases the pool of terrorist recruits, alienates America, gives democracy a bad name, and prompts the American people to question our engagement in the world.

By refusing to end the war in Iraq, President Bush is giving the terrorists what they really want, and what the Congress voted to give them in 2002: a U.S. occupation of undetermined length, at undetermined cost, with undetermined consequences.

It is time to turn the page. When I am President, we will wage the war that has to be won, with a comprehensive strategy with five elements:

[1] getting out of Iraq and on the right battlefield in Afghanistan and Pakistan;

[2] developing the capabilities and partnerships we need to take out the terrorists and the world's most deadly weapons;

[3] engaging the world to dry up support for terror and extremism;

[4] restoring our values;

[5] and securing a more resilient homeland.

Let me talk about each of these in turn.

The first step must be to get off the wrong battlefield in Iraq and take the fight to the terrorists in Afghanistan and Pakistan. I introduced a plan in January that would have already started bringing our troops out of Iraq, with the goal of removing all combat brigades by March 31st, 2008. If the President continues to veto this plan, then ending this war will be my first priority when I take office.

There is no military solution in Iraq. Only Iraq's leaders can settle the grievances at the heart of Iraqis' civil war. We must apply pressure on them to act, and our best leverage is reducing our troop presence. And we must also do the hard, sustained diplomatic work in the region on behalf of peace and stability.

In ending the war, we must act with more wisdom than we started it. That's why my plan would maintain sufficient forces in the region to target all al Qaeda within Iraq. But we must recognize that al Qaeda is not the primary source of violence in Iraq, and has little support -- not from Shia and Kurds who are al Qaeda targets, or Sunni tribes hostile to foreigners. On the contrary, al Qaeda's appeal within Iraq is enhanced by our troop presence.

Ending the war will help isolate al Qaeda and give Iraqis the incentive and opportunity to take them out. It will also allow us to direct badly needed resources to Afghanistan. Our troops have fought valiantly there, but Iraq has deprived them of the support that they need and deserve. As a result, parts of Afghanistan are falling into the hands of the Taliban, and a mix of terrorism, drugs, and corruption threatens to overwhelm the country.

As President, I will deploy at least two additional brigades to Afghanistan to re-enforce our counter-terrorism operations and support NATO's efforts against the Taliban. As we step up our commitment, our European friends must do the same, and without the burdensome restrictions that have hampered NATO's efforts. We must also put more of an Afghan face on security by improving the training and equipping of Afghan Army and Police, and including Afghan soldiers in U.S. and NATO operations. We must not, however, repeat the mistakes of Iraq. The solution in Afghanistan is not just military -- it is political and economic. That's why as President, I will increase our non-military aid by one billion dollars to Afghanistan. These resources should fund projects at the local level to impact ordinary Afghans, including the development of alternative livelihoods for poppy farmers. And we must seek better performance from the Afghan government, and support that performance through tough anti-corruption safeguards on aid, and increased international support to develop the rule of law across the country.

Above all, I will send a clear message: We will not repeat the mistakes of the past, when we turned our back on Afghanistan following Soviet withdrawal. As 9/11 showed us, the security of Afghanistan and America is shared. And today, that security is most threatened by the al Qaeda and Taliban sanctuaries in the tribal regions of northwest Pakistan. Al Qaeda terrorists train, travel, and maintain global communications in this safe-haven. The Taliban pursues a "hit and run" strategy, striking in Afghanistan, then skulking across the border to safety.

This is the wild frontier of our globalized world. There are wind-swept deserts and cave-dotted mountains. There are tribes that see borders as nothing more than lines on a map, and governments as forces that come and go. There are blood ties deeper than alliances of convenience, and pockets of extremism that follow religion to violence. It is a tough place. But that is no excuse. There must be no safe-havens for terrorists who threaten America. We cannot fail to act just because action is hard. As President, I would make hundreds of millions of dollars in U.S. military aid to Pakistan conditional, and I would make our conditions clear: Pakistan must make substantial progress in closing down the training camps, evicting foreign fighters, and preventing the Taliban from using Pakistan as a staging area for attacks in Afghanistan. Now I understand that President Musharraf has his own challenges. But let me make this clear: There are terrorists holed up in those mountains who murdered 3,000 Americans. They are plotting to strike again. It was a terrible mistake to fail to act when we had a chance to take out an al Qaeda leadership meeting in 2005. If we have actionable intelligence about high-valued terrorist targets and President Musharraf will not act, we will.

And Pakistan needs more than F-16s to combat extremism. As the Pakistani government increases investment in secular education to counter radical madrasas,

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my Administration will increase America's commitment. We must help Pakistan invest in the provinces along the Afghan border, so that extremist programs of hate are met with programs of hope. And we must not turn a blind eye to elections that are neither free nor fair. Our goal is not simply an ally in Pakistan, it is a democratic ally.

Beyond Pakistan, there's a core of terrorists -- probably in the tens of thousands -- who have made their choice to attack America. So the second step in my strategy will be to build our capacity and our partnership to track down, capture or kill terrorists around the world, and to deny them the world's most dangerous weapons.

I will not hesitate to use military force to take out terrorists who pose a direct threat to America. This requires a broad set of capabilities, as outlined in the Army and Marine Corps's new counter-insurgency manual.

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I'll ensure that our military becomes more stealth, agile, and lethal in its ability to capture or kill terrorists. We need to recruit, train, and equip our armed forces to better target terrorists, and to help foreign militaries to do the same. This has to include a program to bolster our ability to speak different languages, understand different cultures, and coordinate complex missions with our civilian agencies.

To succeed, we must improve our civilian capacity. The finest military in the world is adapting to the challenges of the 21st century. But it cannot counter insurgent and terrorist threats without civilian counterparts who can carry out economic and political reconstruction missions -- sometimes in dangerous places. As President, I will strengthen these civilian capabilities, recruiting our best and brightest to take on this challenge. I'll increase both the number and capabilities of our diplomats, development experts, and other civilians who can work alongside our military. We can't just say there is no military solution to the problems unless we actually have other approaches. We need to integrate all aspects of American military power.

One component of this integrated approach will be a new Mobile Development Team that brings together personnel from State Department, the Pentagon, and USAID. These teams will work with civil society and local governments to make an immediate impact on peoples' lives, and to turn the tide against extremism. Where people are most vulnerable, where the light of hope has grown dark, and where we are in a position to make real differences in advancing security and opportunity -- that is where these teams will go. I'll also strengthen our intelligence. This is about more than an organizational chart. We need leadership that forces our agencies to share information, and leadership that never, ever twists the facts to support bad policies. But we also have to build our capacity to better collect and analyze information, and to carry out operations to disrupt terrorist plots and break up terrorist networks.

This cannot just be an American mission. Al Qaeda and its allies operate in nearly 100 countries. The United States cannot steal every secret, penetrate every cell, act on every tip, or track down every terrorist by itself -- nor should we have to do this by ourselves. This is not just about our security. It's about the common security of all the world.

As President, I will create a Shared Security Partnership Program to forge an international intelligence and law enforcement infrastructure to take down terrorist networks from the remotest islands of Indonesia, to the sprawling cities of Africa. This program will provide five billion dollars over three years for counter-terrorism cooperation with countries around the world, including information sharing, funding for terror -- training, operations, border security, anti-corruption programs, technology, and targeting terrorist financing. And this effort will focus on helping our partners succeed without repressive tactics, because brutality breeds terror -- it does not defeat it.

We must also do more to safeguard the world's most dangerous weapons. This is something that I've spoken about extensively before. We know al Qaeda seeks a nuclear weapon. We know they would not hesitate to use one. Yet there's still about 50 tons of highly enriched uranium, some of it poorly secured, at civilian nuclear facilities in over forty countries. There are still about 15,000 to 16,000 nuclear weapons and stockpiles of uranium and plutonium scattered across 11 time zones in the former Soviet Union.

That's why I worked in the Senate with Republican Senator Dick Lugar to pass a law that would help the United States and our allies detect and stop the smuggling of weapons of mass destruction. That's why I'm introducing a bill with Chuck Hagel that seeks to prevent nuclear terrorism, reduce global nuclear arsenals, and stop the spread of nuclear weapons. And that is why, as President, I will lead a global effort to secure all nuclear weapons and material at vulnerable sites within four years. This is something that we can do. We have to stop short-changing it. While we work to secure existing stockpiles, we should also negotiate a verifiable global ban on the production of new nuclear weapons material.

I also won't hesitate to use the power of American diplomacy to stop countries from obtaining these weapons or sponsoring terrorism. The lesson of the Bush years is that not talking does not work. Go down the list of countries we've ignored and see how successful that strategy has been. We haven't talked to Iran, and they continue to build their nuclear program. We haven't talked to Syria, and they continue to support for terror. We tried not talking to North Korea, and they now have enough material for six to eight more nuclear weapons. It's time to turn the page on the diplomacy of tough talk and no action. It's time to turn the page on Washington's conventional wisdom that agreement must be reached before you meet, that talking to other countries is some kind of reward, and that Presidents can only meet with people who will tell them what they want to hear.

President Kennedy said it best: "Let us never negotiate out of fear, but let us never fear to negotiate." Only by knowing your adversary can you defeat them or drive wedges between them. As President, I will work with our friends and our allies, but I won't outsource our diplomacy to Tehran -- in Tehran to the Europeans, or our diplomacy in Pyongyang to the Chinese. I will do the careful preparation that's needed, and let these countries know where I stand. They will no longer have the excuse of American intransigence, although they will have our terms: no support for terror and no nuclear weapons. But America must be more than taking out terrorists and locking up weapons, or else new terrorists will rise up and take the place of every one we capture or kill. That's why the third step in my strategy will be drying up the rising well of support for extremism. When you travel to the world's trouble spots as a U.S. Senator, much of what you see is from helicopters. So you look out, with the buzz of the rotor in your ear, maybe a door gunner nearby, and you see the refugee camps in Darfur, the blood near Djibouti -- the...flood near Djibouti, the bombed out blocks in Baghdad. You see the thousands of desperate faces. But you only see them from a distance.

Al Qaeda's new recruits come from Africa and Asia, the Middle East and Europe. Many come from disaffected communities and disconnected corners of our interconnected world. And it makes you stop and wonder: When those faces look up at an American helicopter, do they feel hope, or do they feel hate?

We know where extremists thrive: in conflict zones that are incubators of resentment and anarchy; in weak states that cannot control their borders or territories, or meet the basic needs of their people. From Africa to central Asia to the Pacific Rim -- nearly 60 countries stand on the brink of conflict or collapse. The extremists encourage the exploitation of these hopeless places with their hate-filled -- hate-filled websites.

And we know what the extremists say about us: America is just an occupying Army in Muslim lands, the shadow of a shrouded figure standing on a box at Abu Ghraib, the power behind the throne of a repressive leader. They say we are at war with Islam. That's the whispered line of the extremist who has nothing to offer in this battle of ideas but blame -- blame America, blame progress, blame Jews. And often he offers something along with the hate. A sense of empowerment. Maybe an education at a madrasa, some charity for your family, some basic services in the neighborhood. And then -- a mission and a gun.

We know we are not who they say we are. America is at war with the terrorists who killed people on our soil. We're not at war with Islam. America is a compassionate nation that wants a better future for all people. The vast majority of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims have no use for bin Ladin or his bankrupt ideas. But too often since 9/11, the extremists have defined us, not the other way around. When I am President, that will change. We will author our own story. We do need to stand for democracy. And I will. But democracy is more than a ballot box. America must show -- through deeds as well as words -- that we stand with those who seek a better life. That child looking up at the helicopter must see America and feel hope.

As President, I will make it a focus of my foreign policy to roll back the tide of hopelessness that gives rise to hate. Freedom must mean freedom from fear, not freedom of anarchy. I will never shrug my shoulders and say -- as Secretary Rumsfeld did -- "Freedom is untidy." I will focus our support on helping nations build independent judicial systems, honest police forces, and financial systems that are transparent and accountable. Freedom also means freedom from want, not freedom lost to an empty stomach. So I'll make poverty reduction a key part of helping other nations reduce chaos and anarchy.

I will double our investments to meet these challenges to 50 billion dollars by 2012. And I will support a 2 billion dollar Global Education Fund to counter the radical madrasas -- often funded by money from within Saudi Arabia -- that have filled young minds with messages of hate. We must work for a world where every child, everywhere, is taught to build and not to destroy. And as we lead we will ask for more from our friends in Europe and Asia as well -- more support for our diplomacy, more support for multilateral peacekeeping, and more support to rebuild societies ravaged by conflict. I will also launch a program of public diplomacy that is coordinated across my Administration, not a small group of political officials in the State Department explaining a misguided war. We will open "America Houses" in cities across the Islamic world, with the Internet, libraries, English lessons, stories of America's Muslims and the strength they add to our country, and vocational programs. Through a new "America's Voice Corps" we will recruit, train, and send out into the field talented young Americans who can speak with and listen to the people who today hear about us only from our enemies.

As President, I will lead this effort. In the first hundred days of my Administration, I will travel to a major Islamic forum and deliver an address to redefine our struggle. I will make clear that we are not at war with Islam, that we will stand up with -- we will stand with those who are willing to stand up for their future, and that we need their effort to defeat the prophets of hate and violence. I will speak directly to that child who looks up at that helicopter, and my message will be clear: "You matter to us. Your future is our future. And our moment is now." This brings me to the fourth step in my strategy: I will make clear that the days of compromising our values are over. Major General Paul Eaton had a long and distinguished career serving this country. It included training the Iraqi Army. After Abu Ghraib, his senior Iraqi advisor came into his office and said: "You have no idea how will this play -- this will play out in the streets of Baghdad and the rest of the Arab world. How can this be?" This was not the America this Iraqi had looked up to.

As the counter-insurgency manual reminds us, we cannot win a war unless we maintain the high ground and keep the people on our side. But because the Administration decided to take the low road, our troops have more enemies. Because the Administration cast aside international norms that reflect American values, we are less able to promote our values. When I am President, America will reject torture without exception. America is the country that stood against that kind of behavior before, and we will do so again.

I will also reject a legal framework that does not work. There has been only one conviction at Guantanamo. It was for a guilty plea on a -- on material support for terrorism. The sentence was nine months long. There has not been one conviction of a terrorist act. I have faith in America's courts, and I have faith in our JAGs. As President, I will close Guantanamo, reject the Military Commissions Act, and adhere to the Geneva Conventions. Our Constitution and our Uniform Code of Military Justice provide a framework for dealing with the terrorists.

This Administration also puts forward a false choice between the liberties we cherish and the security we provide. I will provide our intelligence and law enforcement agencies with the tools they need to track and take out the terrorists without undermining our Constitution and our freedom.

That means no more illegal wire-tapping of American citizens; no more national security letters to spy on citizens who are not suspected of a crime; no more tracking citizens who do nothing more than protest a misguided war; no more ignoring the law when it is inconvenient. That is not who we are. And it's not what is necessary to defeat the terrorists. The FISA court works. The separation of powers works. Our Constitution works. We will again set an example for the world that the law is not subject to the whims of stubborn rulers, and that justice is not arbitrary.

This Administration acts like violating civil liberties is the way to enhance our security. It is not. There are no shortcuts to protecting America, and that is why the fifth part of my strategy is doing the hard and patient work to secure a more resilient homeland.

Too often this Administration's approach to homeland security has been to scatter money around and avoid hard choices, or to scare Americans without telling them what to be scared of, or what to do. A Department set up to make Americans feel safer didn't even show up when bodies drifted through the streets in New Orleans. That's not acceptable. My Administration will take an approach to homeland security guided by risk. I will establish a Quadrennial Review at the Department of Homeland Security -- just like at the Pentagon -- to undertake a top to bottom review of the threats we face and our ability to confront them. And I'll develop a comprehensive National Infrastructure Protection Plan that draws on both local know-how and national priorities. We have to put the resources where our infrastructure is most vulnerable. That means tough and permanent standards for securing our chemical -- chemical plants; improving our capability to screen cargo and investing in safeguards that will prevent the disruption of our ports; and making sure our energy sector -- our refineries and pipelines and power grids -- is protected so that terrorists cannot cripple our economy. We also have to get past a top-down approach. Folks across America are the ones on the front lines. On 9/11, it was citizens -- empowered by their knowledge of the World Trade Center attacks -- who protected our government by heroically taking action on Flight 93 to keep it from reaching our nation's capital. When I have information that can empower Americans, I will share it with Americans.

Information sharing with state and local governments must be a two-way street, because we never know where the two pieces of the puzzle are that might fit together -- the tip from Afghanistan, and the cop who sees something suspicious on Michigan Avenue. I will increase funding to gather information and connect it to the intelligence they receive from the federal government. I will address the problem of our prisons, where the most disaffected and disconnected Americans are being explicitly targeted for conversion by al Qaeda and its ideological allies. And my Administration will not permit more lives to be lost because emergency responders are not outfitted with the communications capability and protective equipment their jobs require, or because the federal government is too slow to respond when disaster strikes. We've been through that on 9/11. We've been through that during Katrina. I will ensure that we have the resources and competent federal leadership we need to support our communities when American lives are at stake. But this effort can't just be about what we ask of our men and women in uniform. It can't just be about how we spend our time or our money. Ultimately, it's about the kind of country we are.

We are in the early stages of a long struggle. Yet since 9/11, we've heard a lot about what America can't do or shouldn't do or won't even try to do. We can't vote against a misguided war in Iraq because that would make us look weak. We can't talk to other countries because that would be a reward. We can't reach out to the hundreds of millions of Muslims who reject terror because we worry that they hate us. We can't protect the homeland because there are too many targets, or secure our people while staying true to our values. We can't get past the America of Red States and Blue States, the politics of who's up and who's down because that's how politics has come to be done in America.

That is not the America that I know. The America I know is the last, best hope for a child looking up at a helicopter. It's the country that put a man on the moon, a country that defeated fascism and helped rebuild Europe. It's a country whose strength abroad is measured not just by armies, but rather by the power of our ideals, and by our purpose to forge an ever more perfect union at home. That's the America I know. We just have to act like it again to write that next chapter in American [sic] story. If we do, we can keep America safe while extending security and opportunity around the world. We can hold true to our values, and in doing so advance those values abroad. And we can be what that child looking up at a helicopter needs us to be: the relentless opponent of terror and tyranny, and the light of hope to the world. To make this story a reality, it's going to take Americans coming together and changing the fundamental direction of this country. It's going to take the service of a new generation of young people. It's going to take facing tragedy head-on and turning it into the next generation's triumph. That's a challenge that I welcome. Because when we do make that change, we will do more than win a war -- we'll live up to that calling to make America, and the world, safer, freer, and more hopeful than we found it.

Thank you very much everybody. Thank you.

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# Speech at the Jefferson-Jackson Dinner

Thank you so much. To -- To the great Governor of Iowa and Lieutenant Governor of Iowa; to my dear -- dear friend Tom Harkin for the outstanding work that he does; to the congressional delegation of Iowa that is doing outstanding work; and to Nancy Pelosi, Madam Speaker, thank you all for the wonderful welcome and the wonderful hospitality.

I love you back. [to audience]

A little less than one year from today, you will go into the voting booth and you will select the President of the United States of America. Now, here’s the good news -- the name George W. Bush will not be on the ballot. The name of my cousin Dick Cheney will not be on the ballot. We’ve been trying to hide that for a long time. Everybody has a black sheep in the family. The era of Scooter Libby justice, and Brownie incompetence, and Karl Rove politics will finally be over.

But the question you’re going to have to ask yourself when you caucus in January and you vote in November is, “What’s next for America?” We are in a defining moment in our history. Our nation is at war. The planet is in peril. The dream that so many generations fought for feels as if it’s slowly slipping away. We are working harder for less. We’ve never paid more for health care or for college. It’s harder to save and it’s harder to retire. And most of all we’ve lost faith that our leaders can or will do anything about it.

We were promised compassionate conservatism and all we got was Katrina and wiretaps. We were promised a uniter, and we got a President who could not even lead the half of the country that voted for him. We were promised a more ethical and more efficient government, and instead we have a town called Washington that is more corrupt and more wasteful than it was before. And the only mission that was ever accomplished is to use fear and falsehood to take this country to a war that should have never been authorized and should have never been waged.

It is because of these failures that America is listening, intently, to what we say here today -- not just Democrats, but Republicans and Independents who’ve lost trust in their government, but want to believe again. And it is because of these failures that we not only have a moment of great challenge, but also a moment of great opportunity. We have a chance to bring the country together in a new majority -- to finally tackle problems that George Bush made far worse, but that had festered long before George Bush ever took office -- problems that we’ve talked about year after year after year after year.

And that is why the same old Washington textbook campaigns just won’t do in this election. That’s why not answering questions ‘cause we are afraid our answers won’t be popular just won’t do. That’s why telling the American people what we think they want to hear instead of telling the American people what they need to hear just won’t do. Triangulating and poll-driven positions because we’re worried about what Mitt or Rudy might say about us just won’t do. If we are really serious about wining this election Democrats, we can’t live in fear of losing it.

This party -- the party of Jefferson and Jackson, of Roosevelt and Kennedy -- has always made the biggest difference in the lives of the American people when we led, not by polls, but by principle; not by calculation, but by conviction; when we summoned the entire nation to a common purpose -- a higher purpose. And I run for the Presidency of the United States of America because that’s the party America needs us to be right now.

A party that offers not just a difference in policies, but a difference in leadership.

A party that doesn’t just focus on how to win but why we should.

A party that doesn’t just offer change as a slogan, but real, meaningful change -- change that America can believe in.

That’s why I’m in this race. That’s why I am running for the Presidency of the United States of America -- to offer change that we can believe in.

I am in this race to tell the corporate lobbyists that their days of setting the agenda in Washington are over. I have done more than any other candidate in this race to take on lobbyists -- and won. They have not funded my campaign, they will not get a job in my White House, and they will not drown out the voices of the American people when I am President.

I’m in this race to take those tax breaks away from companies that are moving jobs overseas and put them in the pockets of hard working Americans who deserve it. And I won’t raise the minimum wage every ten years -- I will raise it to keep pace so that workers don’t’ fall behind.

That is why I am in it. To protect the American worker. To fight for the American worker.

I’m in this race because I want to stop talking about the outrage of 47 million Americans without health care and start actually doing something about it. I expanded health care in Illinois by bringing Democrats and Republicans together. By taking on the insurance industry. And that is how I will make certain that every single American in this country has health care they can count on and I won’t do it twenty years from now, I won’t do it ten years from now, I will do it by the end of my first term as President of the United States of America.

I run for president to make sure that every American child has the best education that we have to offer -- from the day they are born to the day they graduate from college. And I won’t just talk about how great teachers are -- as President I will reward them for their greatness -- by raising salaries and giving them more support. That’s why I’m in this race.

I am running for President because I am sick and tired of democrats thinking that the only way to look tough on national security is by talking, and acting, and voting like George Bush Republicans.

When I am this party’s nominee, my opponent will not be able to say that I voted for the war in Iraq; or that I gave George Bush the benefit of the doubt on Iran; or that I supported Bush-Cheney policies of not talking to leaders that we don’t like. And he will not be able to say that I wavered on something as fundamental as whether or not it is ok for America to torture -- because it is never ok. That’s why I am in it.

As President, I will end the war in Iraq. We will have our troops home in sixteen months. I will close Guantanamo. I will restore habeas corpus. I will finish the fight against Al Qaeda. And I will lead the world to combat the common threats of the 21st century -- nuclear weapons and terrorism; climate change and poverty; genocide and disease. And I will send once more a message to those yearning faces beyond our shores that says, “You matter to us. Your future is our future. And our moment is now.”

America, our moment is now. Our moment is now. I don’t want to spend the next year or the next four years re-fighting the same fights that we had in the 1990s. I don’t want to pit Red America against Blue America, I want to be the President of the United States of America.

And if those Republicans come at me with the same fear-mongering and swift-boating that they usually do, then I will take them head on. Because I believe the American people are tired of fear and tired of distractions and tired of diversions. We can make this election not about fear, but about the future. And that won’t just be a Democratic victory; that will be an American victory. And that is a victory America needs right now.

I am not in this race to fulfill some long-held ambitions or because I believe it’s somehow owed to me. I never expected to be here, I always knew this journey was improbable. I’ve never been on a journey that wasn’t. I am running in this race because of what Dr. King called “the fierce urgency of now.” Because I believe that there’s such a thing as being too late. And that hour is almost upon us.

I don’t want to wake up four years from now and find out that millions of Americans still lack health care because we couldn’t take on the insurance industry.

I don’t want to see that the oceans have risen a few more inches. The planet has reached a point of no return because we couldn’t find a way to stop buying oil from dictators.

I don’t want to see more American lives put at risk because no one had the judgment or the courage to stand up against a misguided war before we sent our troops into fight.

I don’t want to see homeless veterans on the streets. I don’t want to send another generation of American children to failing schools. I don’t want that future for my daughters. I don’t want that future for your sons. I do not want that future for America.

I’m in this race for the same reason that I fought for jobs for the jobless and hope for the hopeless on the streets of Chicago; for the same reason I fought for justice and equality as a civil rights lawyer; for the same reason that I fought for Illinois families for over a decade.

Because I will never forget that the only reason that I’m standing here today is because somebody, somewhere stood up for me when it was risky. Stood up when it was hard. Stood up when it wasn’t popular. And because that somebody stood up, a few more stood up. And then a few thousand stood up. And then a few million stood up. And standing up, with courage and clear purpose, they somehow managed to change the world.

That’s why I’m running, Iowa -- to give our children and grandchildren the same chances somebody gave me.

That’s why I’m running, Democrats -- to keep the American Dream alive for those who still hunger for opportunity, who still thirst for equality.

That’s why I’m asking you to stand with me, that’s why I’m asking you to caucus for me, that’s why I am asking you to stop settling for what the cynics say we have to accept.

In this election -- in this moment -- let us reach for what we know is possible. A nation healed. A world repaired. An America that believes again.

Thank you very much everybody.

# Iowa Caucus Victory Speech

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Thank you, Iowa. You know, they said -- they said -- they said this day would never come.

They said our sights were set too high.

They said this country was too divided, too disillusioned to ever come together around a common purpose.

But on this January night, at this defining moment in history, you have done what the cynics said we couldn't do.

You have done what the state of New Hampshire can do in five days.

You have done what America can do in this new year, 2008. In lines that stretched around schools and churches, in small towns and in big cities, you came together as Democrats, Republicans, and independents, to stand up and say that we are one nation. We are one people. And our time for change has come. You said the time has come to move beyond the bitterness and pettiness and anger that's consumed Washington; to end the political strategy that's been all about division, and instead make it about addition; to build a coalition for change that stretches through red states and blue states; because that's how we'll win in November, and that's how we'll finally meet the challenges that we face as a nation.

We are choosing hope over fear. We're choosing unity over division, and sending a powerful message that change is coming to America. You said the time has come to tell the lobbyists who think their money and their influence speak louder than our voices that they don't own this government -- we do. And we are here to take it back. The time has come for a President who will be honest about the choices and the challenges we face, who will listen to you and learn from you, even when we disagree, who won't just tell you what you want to hear, but what you need to know. And in New Hampshire, if you give me the same chance that Iowa did tonight, I will be that President for America. I'll be a President who finally makes health care affordable and available to every single American, the same way I expanded health care in Illinois, by -- by bringing Democrats and Republicans together to get the job done.

I'll be a President who ends the tax breaks for companies that ship our jobs overseas and put a middle-class tax cut into the pockets of working Americans who deserve it. I'll be a President who harnesses the ingenuity of farmers and scientists and entrepreneurs to free this nation from the tyranny of oil once and for all. And I'll be a President who ends this war in Iraq and finally brings our troops home, who restores our moral standing, who understands that 9/11 is not a way to scare up votes but a challenge that should unite America and the world against the common threats of the 21st century -- common threats of terrorism and nuclear weapons, climate change and poverty, genocide and disease. Tonight, we are one step closer to that vision of America because of what you did here in Iowa. And so I'd especially like to thank the organizers and the precinct captains, the volunteers and the staff who made this all possible.

And while I'm at it on thank you's, I think it makes sense for me to thank the love of my life, the rock of the Obama family, the closer on the campaign trail: Give it up for Michelle Obama. I know you didn't do this for me. You did this -- You did this because you believed so deeply in the most American of ideas -- that in the face of impossible odds, people who love this country can change it. I know this. I know this because while I may be standing here tonight, I'll never forget that my journey began on the streets of Chicago doing what so many of you have done for this campaign and all the campaigns here in Iowa: organizing and working and fighting to make people's lives just a little bit better. I know how hard it is. It comes with little sleep, little pay, and a lot of sacrifice. There are days of disappointment. But sometimes, just sometimes, there are nights like this: a night -- a night that, years from now, when we've made the changes we believe in, when more families can afford to see a doctor, when our children -- when Malia and Sasha and your children inherit a planet that's a little cleaner and safer, when the world sees America differently, and America sees itself as a nation less divided and more united, you'll be able to look back with pride and say that this was the moment when it all began. This was the moment when the improbable beat what Washington always said was inevitable. This was the moment when we tore down barriers that have divided us for too long; when we rallied people of all parties and ages to a common cause; when we finally gave Americans who had never participated in politics a reason to stand up and to do so. This was the moment when we finally beat back the poli[tics] of fear and doubt and cynicism, the politics where we tear each other down instead of lifting this country up. This was the moment. Years from now, you'll look back and you'll say that this was the moment, this was the place where America remembered what it means to hope. For many months, we've been teased, even derided for talking about hope. But we always knew that hope is not blind optimism. It's not ignoring the enormity of the tasks ahead or the roadblocks that stand in our path. It's not sitting on the sidelines or shirking from a fight. Hope is that thing inside us that insists, despite all the evidence to the contrary, that something better awaits us if we have the courage to reach for it and to work for it and to fight for it. Hope is what I saw in the eyes of the young woman in Cedar Rapids who works the night shift after a full day of college and still can't afford health care for a sister who's ill -- a young woman who still believes that this country will give her the chance to live out her dreams. Hope is what I heard in the voice of the New Hampshire woman who told me that she hasn't been able to breathe since her nephew left for Iraq -- who still goes to bed each night praying for his safe return. Hope is what led a band of colonists to rise up against an empire, what led the greatest of generations to free a continent and heal a nation, what led young women and young men to sit at lunch counters and brave fire hoses and march through Selma and Montgomery for freedom's cause. Hope -- Hope is what led me here today. With a father from Kenya, a mother from Kansas, and a story that could only happen in the United States of America. Hope is the bedrock of this nation -- the belief that our destiny will not be written for us, but by us, by all those men and women who are not content to settle for the world as it is, who have the courage to remake the world as it should be. That is what we started here in Iowa and that is the message we can now carry to New Hampshire and beyond; the same message we had when we were up and when we were down; the one that can save this country, brick by brick, block by block, calloused hand by calloused hand; that together, ordinary people can do extraordinary things. Because we are not a collection of red states and blue states. We are the United States of America. And in this moment, in this election, we are ready to believe again. Thank you, Iowa.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# New Hampshire Primary Concession Speech

Thank you. Thank you, New Hampshire. I love you back. Thank you. Thank you.

Well, thank you so much. I am still fired up and ready to go. Thank you. Thank you.

Well, first of all, I want to congratulate Senator Clinton on a hard-fought victory here in New Hampshire. She did an outstanding job. Give her a big round of applause.

You know, a few weeks ago, no one imagined that we'd have accomplished what we did here tonight in New Hampshire. No one could have imagined it.

For most of this campaign, we were far behind. We always knew our climb would be steep. But in record numbers, you came out, and you spoke up for change.

And with your voices and your votes, you made it clear that at this moment, in this election, there is something happening in America.

There is something happening when men and women in Des Moines and Davenport, in Lebanon and Concord, come out in the snows of January to wait in lines that stretch block after block because they believe in what this country can be.

There is something happening. There's something happening when Americans who are young in age and in spirit, who've never participated in politics before, turn out in numbers we have never seen because they know in their hearts that this time must be different.

There's something happening when people vote not just for party that they belong to, but the hopes that they hold in common.

And whether we are rich or poor, black or white, Latino or Asian, whether we hail from Iowa or New Hampshire, Nevada or South Carolina, we are ready to take this country in a fundamentally new direction.

That's what's happening in America right now; change is what's happening in America.

You, all of you who are here tonight, all who put so much heart and soul and work into this campaign, you can be the new majority who can lead this nation out of a long political darkness.

Democrats, independents and Republicans who are tired of the division and distraction that has clouded Washington, who know that we can disagree without being disagreeable, who understand that, if we mobilize our voices to challenge the money and influence that stood in our way and challenge ourselves to reach for something better, there is no problem we cannot solve, there is no destiny that we cannot fulfill. Our new American majority can end the outrage of unaffordable, unavailable health care in our time. We can bring doctors and patients, workers and businesses, Democrats and Republicans together, and we can tell the drug and insurance industry that, while they get a seat at the table, they don't get to buy every chair, not this time, not now.

Our new majority can end the tax breaks for corporations that ship our jobs overseas and put a middle-class tax cut in the pockets of working Americans who deserve it.

We can stop sending our children to schools with corridors of shame and start putting them on a pathway to success.

We can stop talking about how great teachers are and start rewarding them for their greatness by giving them more pay and more support. We can do this with our new majority.

We can harness the ingenuity of farmers and scientists, citizens and entrepreneurs to free this nation from the tyranny of oil and save our planet from a point of no return.

And when I am President of the United States, we will end this war in Iraq and bring our troops home.

We will end this war in Iraq. We will bring our troops home. We will finish the job -- We will finish the job against Al Qaida in Afghanistan. We will care for our veterans. We will restore our moral standing in the world.

And we will never use 9/11 as a way to scare up votes, because it is not a tactic to win an election. It is a challenge that should unite America and the world against the common threats of the 21st century: terrorism and nuclear weapons, climate change and poverty, genocide and disease.

All of the candidates in this race share these goals. All of the candidates in this race have good ideas and all are patriots who serve this country honorably.

But the reason our campaign has always been different, the reason we began this improbable journey almost a year ago is because it's not just about what I will do as president. It is also about what you, the people who love this country, the citizens of the United States of America, can do to change it.

That's what this election is all about.

That's why tonight belongs to you. It belongs to the organizers, and the volunteers, and the staff who believed in this journey and rallied so many others to join the cause.

We know the battle ahead will be long. But always remember that, no matter what obstacles stand in our way, nothing can stand in the way of the power of millions of voices calling for change.

We have been told we cannot do this by a chorus of cynics. And they will only grow louder and more dissonant in the weeks and months to come.

We've been asked to pause for a reality check. We've been warned against offering the people of this nation false hope. But in the unlikely story that is America, there has never been anything false about hope.

For when we have faced down impossible odds, when we've been told we're not ready or that we shouldn't try or that we can't, generations of Americans have responded with a simple creed that sums up the spirit of a people:

Yes we can.

Yes we can.

Yes we can.

It was a creed written into the founding documents that declared the destiny of a nation: Yes, we can.

It was whispered by slaves and abolitionists as they blazed a trail towards freedom through the darkest of nights: Yes, we can.

It was sung by immigrants as they struck out from distant shores and pioneers who pushed westward against an unforgiving wilderness: Yes, we can.

It was the call of workers who organized, women who reached for the ballot, a President who chose the moon as our new frontier, and a king who took us to the mountaintop and pointed the way to the promised land: Yes, we can, to justice and equality.

Yes we can -- to opportunity and prosperity.

Yes we can heal this nation.

Yes we can repair this world.

Yes we can.

And so, tomorrow, as we take the campaign south and west, as we learn that the struggles of the textile workers in Spartanburg are not so different than the plight of the dishwasher in Las Vegas, that the hopes of the little girl who goes to the crumbling school in Dillon are the same as the dreams of the boy who learns on the streets of L.A., we will remember that there is something happening in America, that we are not as divided as our politics suggest, that we are one people, we are one nation.

And, together, we will begin the next great chapter in the American story, with three words that will ring from coast to coast, from sea to shining sea: Yes, we can.

Thank you, New Hampshire.

Thank you. Thank you.

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# Ebenezer Baptist Church Address

Scripture tells us that when Joshua and the Israelites arrived at the gates of Jericho, they could not enter. The walls of the city were too steep for any one person to climb. They were too strong to be taken down by brute force. And so, the people sat for days, unable to pass on through; but God had a plan for His People. He told them to stand together and march together around the city, and on the seventh day he told them that when they heard the sound of the ram’s horn, they should speak with one voice. And, at the chosen hour when the horn sounded and a chorus of voices cried out together, the mighty walls of Jericho came tumbling down. That’s what scripture tells us.

And there are many lessons to take from this passage, just as there are many lessons to take from this day, just as there are many memories that fill the space of this church. As I was thinking about which ones we needed to remember at this hour, my mind went back to the very beginning of the modern Civil Rights era. Because before Memphis and the mountaintop, before the bridge in Selma and the march on Washington, before Birmingham and the beatings, the fire hoses, and the loss of those four little girls, before there was King the icon and his magnificent dream, there was King the young preacher and a people who found themselves suffering under the yolk of oppression. And on the eve of the bus boycotts in Montgomery, at a time when many were still doubtful about the possibilities of change, a time when there were those in the black community who not only mistrusted each other, but mistrusted themselves -- King inspired with words not of anger, but of an urgency, a fierce urgency that still speaks to us today. “Unity,” he said, “is the great need of the hour.” “Unity is the great need of the hour.” Unity is how we shall overcome.

What Dr. King understood is that if just one person chose to walk instead of ri[de] the bus, those walls of oppression would not be moved. But maybe if a few more decided to walk, those foundations might start to shake. If just a few women were willing to do what Rosa Parks had been willing to do, maybe the cracks in those walls would start to show. If teenagers took rides from North to South, maybe a few bricks would come loose. Maybe if white folks marched because they’d come to understand that their freedom was wrapped up in the freedom of others, that they too had a stake in the impending battle, the walls would begin to sway, and if enough Americans were awakened to injustice, if they joined together North and South, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, then perhaps that wall would come tumbling down, and justice would flow like waters of righteousness, like a mighty stream. “Unity is the great need of the hour.” That’s what Dr. King said. It is the great need of this hour as well, not because it sounds pleasant, not because it makes us feel good, but because it's the only way we can overcome the essential deficit that exits in this country.

I’m not talking about the budget deficit. I’m not talking about the trade deficit. Talking about the moral deficit in this country. I’m talking about an empathy deficit, the inability to recognize ourselves in one another, to understand that we are our brother’s keeper and our sister’s keeper, that in the words of Dr. King, “We are all tied together in a single garment of destiny.” We have an empathy deficit when we’re still sending our children down corridors of shame, schools in the forgotten corners of America where the color of your skin still affects the content of your education. We have a deficit when CEOs are making more in ten minutes than ordinary workers are making in an entire year, when families lose their homes so unscrupulous lenders can make a profit, when mothers can’t afford a doctor when their children are stricken with illness. We have a deficit in this country when we have Scooter Libby justice for some and Jena justice for others, when our children see hanging nooses from a school yard tree today, in the present, in the 21st century. We have a deficit when homeless veterans sleep on the streets of our cities, when innocents are slaughtered in the deserts of Darfur, when young Americans serve tour after tour after tour after tour of duty in a war that should have never been authorized and should have never been waged. We have an empathy deficit in this country that has to be closed. We have a deficit when it takes a breach in the levees to reveal the breach in our compassion, when it takes a terrible storm to reveal the hungry that God calls on us to feed, the sick that He calls on us to care for, the least of these that He commands that we treat as our own. So, we have a deficit to close. We have walls, barriers to justice and equality that must come down, and to do this, we know that “unity is the great need of the hour.”

However, all too often, when we talk about unity in this country, we’ve come to believe that it can be purchased on the cheap. We’ve come to believe that racial reconciliation can come easily; that it’s just a matter of a few ignorant people trapped in the prejudices of the past, and that if the demagogues and those who would exploit our racial divisions will simply go away then all our problems will be solved. All too often, we seek to ignore the profound structural and institutional barriers that stand in the way of insuring opportunity for all of our children, or decent jobs for all of our people, or health care for those who are sick. We offer unity, but we are not willing to pay the price that's required

Of course, true unity cannot be so easily purchased. It starts with a change in attitudes. It starts with changing our hearts, and changing our minds, broadening our spirit. It’s not easy to stand in somebody else’s shoes. It’s not easy to see past our own differences. We’ve all encountered this in our own lives. What makes it even more difficult is that we have a politics in this country that seeks to drive us apart, that puts up walls between us. We are told that those who differ from us on a few things, differ from us on all things, that our problems are the fault of those who don’t think like us or look like us or come from where we do. The Welfare Queen, she’s taking our money. The Immigrant, he’s taking our jobs. The believer condemns the nonbeliever as immoral, and the nonbeliever chides the believer for being intolerant.

And for most of this country’s history, we in the African-American community have been at the receiving end of man’s inhumanity to man. And all of us understand insidious -- All of us understand intimately the insidious role that race still sometimes plays on the job and in the schools, in our health care system, and in our criminal justice system.

And yet, if we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that none of our hands are entirely clean. If we’re honest with ourselves, we'll acknowledge that our own community has not always been true to King’s vision of a beloved community. If we’re honest with ourselves, we have to admit that there have been times when we've scorned our gay brothers and sisters instead of embracing them. The scourge of anti-Semitism has at times revealed itself in our community. For too long, some of us have seen immigrants only as competitors for jobs instead of companions in the fight for opportunity. Everyday our politics fuels and exploits this kind of division across all races and regions, across gender and party. It is played out on television; it is sensationalized by the media. Last week, it crept into the campaign for President with charges and countercharges that serve to obscure the issues instead of illuminating the critical choices we face as a nation. None of our hands are clean.

So let us say that on this day of all days, each of us carries with us the task of changing our hearts and minds. The divisions, the stereotypes, the scapegoating, the ease with which we blame the plight of ourselves on others -- all of that distracts us from the common challenges that we face, war and poverty, inequality and injustice. We can no longer afford to build ourselves up by tearing each other down. We can no longer afford to traffic in lies or fear or hate. It's the poison that we must purge from our politics, the wall that we must tear down before the hour grows too late. Because if Dr. King could love his jailer, if he could call on the faithful, who once sat where you do, to forgive those who had set dogs and fire hoses upon them, then surely we can look past what divides us in our time and bind up our wounds and erase the sympathy deficit that exists in our hearts.

But if changing our hearts and our minds is the first critical step, we cannot stop there. It’s not enough to bemoan the plight of the poor in this country and remain unwilling to push our elected officials to provide the resources to fix our schools. It's not enough to decry the disparities of health care and yet allow the insurance companies and the drug companies to block real reform in our health care system. It’s not enough -- It’s not enough for us to abhor the costs of a misguided war, and yet we continue to allow ourselves to be driven by a politics of fear that sees the threat of an attack as a way to scare up votes instead of a call to come together in a common effort.

Scripture tells us that we are judged not just by word but by deed. And if we are truly to bring about the unity that is needed, that is so crucial in this time, we have to find it within ourselves to act on what we know, to understand that living up to this country’s ideals and its possibilities is going to require great effort and great resources, sacrifice and stamina. We can’t pass a law called No Child Left Behind and then leave the money behind. That is not a serious effort in bringing about the unity that is needed. We can’t celebrate Dr. King’s dream, and yet still have insufficient funds to cash that promissory note that was promised at the beginning of this nation. That is what is at stake in this great debate we are having today. Changes that are needed are not just a matter of tinkering around the edges. They will not come if politicians simply tell us what we want to hear. All of us will be called upon to make some sacrifice. None of us will be exempt from responsibility. We've had to fight to fix our schools, but we also have to challenge ourselves to be better parents, and turn off the television set, and put away the video game, and our men have to be home with our children. That, too, is part of the challenge that we must make.

We will have to confront the biases in our criminal justice system, but we also have to acknowledge the deep-seeded violence that still resides in our own communities, in too many of the hearts of our young people, and we have to break the grip of that violence wherever we see it. That’s how we’re going to bring about the change that we seek. That’s how Dr. King led this country through the wilderness. He did it with words, words that he spoke not just to the children of slaves but the children of slave owners, words that inspired not just black but also white, not just Christian but also Jew and Muslim and Buddhists and Atheists, not just the southerner but also the northerner. He led with words, but he also led with deeds. He also led by example. He led by marching and going to jail and suffering threats and beatings and being away from his family. He led by taking a stand against a war knowing full well that it would diminish his popularity. He led by challenging our economic structures, understanding that it would cause discomfort. Dr. King understood that unity cannot be won on the cheap, that we would have to earn it through great effort and determination. That’s the unity, the hard earned unity that we need right now. That is the effort, the determination that can transform blind optimism into hope.

You know people have remarked on the fact that I talk about hope a lot in my campaign. You know they -- they tease me a little bit. Some have been scornful. They say, “Ah, he’s talking about hope again. He’s so idealistic. He’s so naÃ¯ve. He’s a hope monger.” That’s okay. It’s true. I talk about hope. I talk about it a lot because the odds of me standing here today are so small, so remote that I couldn’t of gotten here without some hope. You know my -- my daddy left me when I was two years old. I needed some hope to get here. I was raised by a single mother. I needed some hope to get here. I got in trouble when I was a teenager, did some things folks now like to talk about. I needed some hope to get here. I wasn’t born into money, or great wealth, or great privilege, or status. I was given love, an education, and some hope. That’s what I got. That’s my birthright.

So I talk about hope. I -- I put “Hope” on my campaign signs. It doesn’t even have my name on them sometimes -- just says “Hope.” Folks don’t know who they’re voting for, but it makes them feel good. Say, you know, huh? I spoke about hope at the Democratic Convention. I -- I wrote a book called The Audacity of Hope. And so I -- so I’m puzzled when -- when some people, some of the other candidates make a mockery of the idea. They say I’m pedaling false hopes. "Get a reality check," they tell me. And I have to -- I have to try to understand what they're saying. The implication is is that if you are hopeful, that you somehow must be engaging in wishful thinking. Your -- Your head must be in the clouds; that you must be passive and just sit back and wait for things to happen to you. That seems to be the implication.

And so I have to explain to people that’s not what hope is. Hope is not blind optimism. Hope is not ignorance of the barriers and hurdles and hazards that stand in your way. Hope’s just the opposite. I know how hard it will be to provide health care to every single American. The insurance companies, drug companies, they don’t want to give up their profits. I know it won’t be easy to have a energy policy that makes sense for America because the oil companies like writing the energy bills. I know that alleviating poverty, or making sure all our children can learn, or eliminating the scourge of racism in our society -- none of those things lend themselves to simple solutions.

I know because I fought on the streets as a community organizer in poor neighborhoods on the Southside of Chicago alongside those without jobs or without prospects for the future. I have fought in the courts as a civil rights attorney for those who had been denied opportunity on the job or denied access to the ballot box. I’ve seen good legislation die because -- Well, I’ve seen that too -- I’ve seen good legislation die because good intentions weren’t enough, because they weren’t fortified with a political majority and political will. I’ve seen this country -- this country’s judgment clouded by fear. I know how easily a country can be misled when it is afraid. I know how hard it is. Everybody here understands how difficult it is to bring about true change, change that we can believe in. But I also know this -- that nothing in this country worthwhile has ever happened except somebody somewhere decided to hope.

That’s how this country was founded because a group of patriots decided they were going to take on the British Empire. Nobody was putting their money on them. That’s how slaves and abolitionists resisted that evil system. That’s how a new President was able to chart a course to insure that this nation would no longer remain half slave and half free. That’s how the greatest generation defeated Fascism and overcame a Great Depression. That’s how women won the right to vote. That’s how workers won the right to organize. That’s how young people and old people and middle-aged folks were willing to walk instead of ride the bus, and folks came down on Freedom Rides. They marched, and they sat in, and they were beaten and fire houses were sent on them, and dogs were sent on them, and some went to jail, and some died for freedom's cause. That’s what hope is. Imagining and then fighting for and struggling for and sometimes dying for what didn’t seem possible before. There’s nothing naÃ¯ve about that. There are no false hopes in that.

I don’t believe in false hopes. Imagine if John F. Kennedy had looked up at the moon and said, "Well, that’s too far." False hopes, we can’t go there. If Dr. King had stood on the Lincoln Memorial and said, "Y’all go home; we can’t overcome." There’s no such thing as false hopes, but what I know deep in my heart is that we cannot bring about change unless we are unified, unless we do it together. Change does not happen from the top down -- in America or anywhere else. It happens from the bottom up. It happens because ordinary people dream extraordinary things. It’s because all of you decide that change must come. That I know.

It wasn’t just one voice -- It wasn't just one voice that shouted out before the walls of Jericho. All the voices came together, a chorus of voices. That’s what gives me hope: not just those who ascend to high office, but the changes that are happening in ordinary places. The stories that give me my hope don’t happen in the spotlight. When I think about Dr. King, I suspect he was sustained not by having dinner with Presidents; not by getting the Nobel Peace Prize; but coming back to church and seeing the mothers of the church and the deacons. Those who maintained their dignity were standing up straight in the face of injustice. That’s where he drew his hope. He saw God in their faces. Those stories don’t happen on a presidential stage; they happen in the quiet quarters of our lives. They happen in the moments we least expect. So, let me close by giving an example of one of those stories.

There is a young woman, 23 years old, white woman, named Ashley Baia, who organizes for our campaign in Florence, South Carolina. Ashley has been working to organize mostly black folks. She’s in Florence, South Carolina. She’s been doing it since the beginning of the campaign, and the other day she...set up a round table discussion where everyone around was telling their story about who they were and why they were there. And so, Ashley explained, she started things off, by explaining why she was there. And she explained that when she was nine years old her mother got cancer, and because she had to miss a day of work she was let go; and she lost her health care; and then she had to file for bankruptcy. They were on hard times, and that’s when Ashley, nine-years-old at the time, decided she had to do something to help her mom, and she knew that food was one of their most expensive costs. They didn’t have a lot of money. Ashley lived in a poor household.

And so Ashley convinced her mother that she really liked and really wanted to eat more than anything else mustard and relish sandwiches. She had heard that condiments like mustard and relish were cheap. And she -- she concocted in her own mind at the age of nine that she would convince her mother that that’s the only thing she wanted to eat everyday, because she figured that would be a way of saving money for the family and helping them alleviate their hardships. So she did this for a year until her mom got better. And in that round table she told everyone that the reason she joined our campaign was so that she could help millions of other children in the country who want and need to help their parents too. She had heard me speak about my mother having cancer and having to worry about maybe not getting the health care she needed because of a preexisting condition, and she had connected with that. She thought, maybe Barack would fight for my mother. And if he would fight for my mother, then maybe I will fight alongside him. That’s what had brought her to Florence.

So Ashley finishes her story and then goes around the room and asks everyone else why they’re supporting the campaign. They all have different stories and different reasons: some bring up specific issues; some talk about, upset about, affirmative action; some talk about, you know, "I want to see more jobs in the community"; some are frustrated about trade; some just like me.

So they all got a bunch of different reasons, and finally, at the end of this discussion, they come to this elderly black man. He’s been sitting there quiet the whole time, hasn’t been saying a word. And Ashley asks him why is he there. And he doesn’t bring up a specific issue. He does not say healthcare or the economy. He doesn’t talk about the Iraq War. He doesn’t say anything about education. He doesn’t say that he’s there because he likes Barack Obama, or he’s proud of the possibility of the first African American President. He simply says to everyone in the room, “I am here because of Ashley. I am here because of this young girl, and the fact that she's willing to fight for what she believes in. And that reminds me that I still have some fight left in me, and I’m going stand up for what I believe in.”

Now, by itself, that single moment of recognition between that young white girl and that old black man, that’s not enough to change a country. By itself, it’s not enough to give health care to the sick or jobs to the jobless or education to our children, but it is where we begin. It’s why I believe that the walls in that room began to shake at that moment. And if they can shake in that room, then they can shake here in Atlanta, and if they can shake in Atlanta, then they can shake in the state of Georgia, and if they can shake in Georgia, they can shake all across America. And if enough of our voices join together, if we see each other in each other’s eyes, we can bring those walls tumbling down. The walls of Jericho can finally come tumbling down.

That is our hope, but only if we pray together, if we work together, and if we march together. Ebenezer, we cannot walk alone. Brothers and sisters, we cannot walk alone. In the struggle for justice and for equality, we cannot walk alone. In the struggle for opportunity and justice, we cannot walk alone. In the struggle to heal this nation and repair the world, we cannot walk alone. So I ask you to walk with me and march with me and join your voices with mine, and together we will sing the song that tears down the walls that divide us and lift up an America that is truly indivisible with liberty and justice for all.

May God bless the memory of the great pastor of this church.

And may God bless the United States of America.

Thank you. Thank you.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# South Carolina Democratic Primary Victory Speech

Thank you, South Carolina.

Thank you to the rock of my life, Michelle Obama. Thank you to Malia and Sasha Obama, who haven't seen their daddy in a week. Thank you to Pete Skidmore for his outstanding service to our country and being such a great supporter of this campaign.

You know, over two weeks ago we saw the people of Iowa proclaim that our time for change has come. But there were those who doubted this country's desire for something new, who said Iowa was a fluke, not to be repeated again. Well, tonight the cynics who believed that what began in the snows of Iowa was just an illusion were told a different story by the good people of South Carolina.

After four great contests in every corner of this country, we have the most votes, the most delegates -- and the most diverse coalition of Americans that we've seen in a long, long time.

You can see it in the faces here tonight. There are young and old, rich and poor. They are black and white, Latino and Asian and Native American. They are Democrats from Des Moines and independents from Concord and, yes, some Republicans from rural Nevada. And we've got young people all across this country who've never had a reason to participate until now.

And in nine days, in nine short days, nearly half the nation will have the chance to join us in saying that we are tired of business as usual in Washington. We are hungry for change, and we are ready to believe again.

But if there's anything, though, that we've been reminded of since Iowa, it's that the kind of change we seek will not come easy. Now, partly because we have fine candidates in this field, fierce competitors who are worthy of our respect and our admiration -- and as contentious as this campaign may get, we have to remember that this is a contest for the Democratic nomination and that all of us share an abiding desire to end the disastrous policies of the current administration.

But there are real differences between the candidates. We are looking for more than just a change of party in the White House. We're looking to fundamentally change the status quo in Washington. It's a status quo that extends beyond any particular party. And right now that status quo is fighting back with everything it's got, with the same old tactics that divide and distract us from solving the problems people face, whether those problems are health care that folks can't afford or a mortgage they cannot pay.

So this will not be easy. Make no mistake about what we're up against. We're up against the belief that it's all right for lobbyists to dominate our government, that they are just part of the system in Washington. But we know that the undue influence of lobbyists is part of the problem, and this election is our chance to say that we are not going to let them stand in our way anymore.

We're up against the conventional thinking that says your ability to lead as president comes from longevity in Washington or proximity to the White House. But we know that real leadership is about candor and judgment and the ability to rally Americans from all walks of life around a common purpose, a higher purpose.

We're up against decades of bitter partisanship that cause politicians to demonize their opponents instead of coming together to make college affordable or energy cleaner. It's the kind of partisanship where you're not even allowed to say that a Republican had an idea, even if it's one you never agreed with. That's the kind of politics that is bad for our party. It is bad for our country. And this is our chance to end it once and for all.

We're up against the idea that it's acceptable to say anything and do anything to win an election. But we know that this is exactly what's wrong with our politics. This is why people don't believe what their leaders say anymore. This is why they tune out. And this election is our chance to give the American people a reason to believe again.

But let me say this, South Carolina. What we've seen in these last weeks is that we're also up against forces that are not the fault of any one campaign but feed the habits that prevent us from being who we want to be as a nation.

It's a politics that uses religion as a wedge and patriotism as a bludgeon, a politics that tells us that we have to think, act, and even vote within the confines of the categories that supposedly define us, the assumption that young people are apathetic, the assumption that Republicans won't cross over, the assumption that the wealthy care nothing for the poor and that the poor don't vote, the assumption that African-Americans can't support the white candidate, whites can't support the African-American candidate, blacks and Latinos cannot come together.

We are here tonight to say that that is not the America we believe in.

I did not travel around this state over the last year and see a white South Carolina or a black South Carolina. I saw South Carolina -- because in the end, we're not up just against the ingrained and destructive habits of Washington. We're also struggling with our own doubts, our own fears, our own cynicism. The change we seek has always required great struggle and great sacrifice. And so this is a battle in our own hearts and minds about what kind of country we want and how hard we're willing to work for it.

So let me remind you tonight that change will not be easy. Change will take time. There will be setbacks and false starts, and sometimes we'll make mistakes. But as hard as it may seem, we cannot lose hope, because there are people all across this great nation who are counting on us, who can't afford another four years without health care. They can't afford another four years without good schools. They can't afford another four years without decent wages because our leaders couldn't come together and get it done.

Theirs are the stories and voices we carry on from South Carolina -- the mother who can't get Medicaid to cover all the needs of her sick child. She needs us to pass a health care plan that cuts costs and makes health care available and affordable for every single American. That's what she's looking for.

The teacher who works another shift at Dunkin' Donuts after school just to make ends meet -- she needs us to reform our education system so that she gets better pay and more support and that students get the resources that they need to achieve their dreams.

The Maytag worker who's now competing with his own teenager for a $7-an-hour job at the local Wal-Mart because the factory he gave his life to shut its doors -- he needs us to stop giving tax breaks to companies that ship our jobs overseas and start putting them in the pockets of working Americans who deserve it -- and put them in the pockets of struggling homeowners who are having a tough time, and looking after seniors who should retire with dignity and respect.

That woman who told me that she hasn't been able to breathe since the day her nephew left for Iraq, or the soldier who doesn't know his child because he's on his third or fourth or even fifth tour of duty -- they need us to come together and put an end to a war that should have never been authorized and should have never been waged.

So understand this, South Carolina. The choice in this election is not between regions or religions or genders. It's not about rich versus poor, young versus old, and it is not about black versus white.

This election is about the past versus the future. It's about whether we settle for the same divisions and distractions and drama that passes for politics today or whether we reach for a politics of common sense and innovation, a politics of shared sacrifice and shared prosperity.

There are those who will continue to tell us that we can't do this, that we can't have what we're looking for, that we can't have what we want, that we're peddling false hopes. But here's what I know. I know that when people say we can't overcome all the big money and influence in Washington, I think of that elderly woman who sent me a contribution the other day, an envelope that had a money order for $3.01 -- along with a verse of Scripture tucked inside the envelope. So don't tell us change isn't possible. That woman knows change is possible.

When I hear the cynical talk that blacks and whites and Latinos can't join together and work together, I'm reminded of the Latino brothers and sisters I organized with and stood with and fought with side by side for jobs and justice on the streets of Chicago. So don't tell us change can't happen.

When I hear that we'll never overcome the racial divide in our politics, I think about that Republican woman who used to work for Strom Thurmond, who's now devoted to educating inner-city children, and who went out into the streets of South Carolina and knocked on doors for this campaign. Don't tell me we can't change.

Yes, we can. Yes, we can change. Yes, we can.

Yes, we can heal this nation. Yes, we can seize our future. And as we leave this great state with a new wind at our backs, and we take this journey across this great country, a country we love, with the message we've carried from the plains of Iowa to the hills of New Hampshire, from the Nevada desert to the South Carolina coast, the same message we had when we were up and when we were down, that out of many we are one, that while we breathe we will hope, and where we are met with cynicism and doubt and fear and those who tell us that we can't, we will respond with that timeless creed that sums up the spirit of the American people in three simple words: Yes, we can.

Thank you, South Carolina. I love you.

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# A More Perfect Union

Let me begin by thanking Harris Wofford for his contributions to this country. In so many different ways, he exemplifies what we mean by the word "citizen." And so we are very grateful to him for all the work he has done; and I'm thankful for the gracious and thoughtful introduction.

"We the people, in order to form a more perfect union." Two hundred and twenty one years ago, in a hall that still stands across the street, a group of men gathered and, with these simple words, launched America's improbable experiment in democracy. Farmers and scholars, statesmen and patriots who had traveled across the ocean to escape tyranny and persecution finally made real their Declaration of Independence at a Philadelphia convention that lasted through the spring of 1787.

The document they produced was eventually signed, but ultimately unfinished. It was stained by this nation's original sin of slavery, a question that divided the colonies and brought the convention to a stalemate until the founders chose to allow the slave trade to continue for at least 20 more years, and to leave any final resolution to future generations. Of course, the answer to the slavery question was already embedded within our Constitution -- a Constitution that had at is very core the ideal of equal citizenship under the law; a Constitution that promised its people liberty and justice, and a union that could be and should be perfected over time.

And yet words on a parchment would not be enough to deliver slaves from bondage, or provide men and women of every color and creed their full rights and obligations as citizens of the United States. What would be needed were Americans in successive generations who were willing to do their part -- through protests and struggles, on the streets and in the courts, through a civil war and civil disobedience, and always at great risk -- to narrow that gap between the promise of our ideals and the reality of their time.

This was one of the tasks we set forth at the beginning of this presidential campaign: to continue the long march of those who came before us, a march for a more just, more equal, more free, more caring, and more prosperous America. I chose to run for President at this moment in history because I believe deeply that we cannot solve the challenges of our time unless we solve them together, unless we perfect our union by understanding that we may have different stories, but we hold common hopes; that we may not look the same and may not have come from the same place, but we all want to move in the same direction: towards a better future for our children and our grandchildren. And this belief comes from my unyielding faith in the decency and generosity of the American people. But it also comes from my own story.

I'm the son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas. I was raised with the help of a white grandfather who survived a Depression to serve in Patton's army during World War II, and a white grandmother who worked on a bomber assembly line at Fort Leavenworth while he was overseas. I've gone to some of the best schools in America and I've lived in one of the world's poorest nations. I am married to a black American who carries within her the blood of slaves and slave owners, an inheritance we pass on to our two precious daughters. I have brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, uncles, and cousins of every race and every hue scattered across three continents. And for as long as I live, I will never forget that in no other country on earth is my story even possible. It's a story that hasn't made me the most conventional of candidates. But it is a story that has seared into my genetic makeup the idea that this nation is more than the sum of its parts -- that out of many, we are truly one.

Now throughout the first year of this campaign, against all predictions to the contrary, we saw how hungry the American people were for this message of unity. Despite the temptation to view my candidacy through a purely racial lens, we won commanding victories in states with some of the whitest populations in the country. In South Carolina, where the Confederate flag still flies, we built a powerful coalition of African Americans and white Americans. This is not to say that race has not been an issue in this campaign. At various stages in the campaign, some commentators have deemed me either "too black" or "not black enough." We saw racial tensions bubble to the surface during the week before the South Carolina primary. The press has scoured every single exit poll for the latest evidence of racial polarization, not just in terms of white and black, but black and brown as well.

And yet, it's only been in the last couple of weeks that the discussion of race in this campaign has taken a particularly divisive turn. On one end of the spectrum, we've heard the implication that my candidacy is somehow an exercise in affirmative action; that it's based solely on the desire of wild and wide-eyed liberals to purchase racial reconciliation on the cheap. On the other end, we've heard my former pastor, Jeremiah Wright, use incendiary language to express views that have the potential not only to widen the racial divide, but views that denigrate both the greatness and the goodness of our nation and that rightly offend white and black alike.

Now I've already condemned, in unequivocal terms, the statements of Reverend Wright that have caused such controversy, and in some cases, pain. For some, nagging questions remain: Did I know him to be an occasionally fierce critic of American domestic and foreign policy? Of course. Did I ever hear him make remarks that could be considered controversial while I sat in the church? Yes. Did I strongly disagree with many of his political views? Absolutely, just as I'm sure many of you have heard remarks from your pastors, priests, or rabbis with which you strongly disagree.

But the remarks that have caused this recent firestorm weren't simply controversial. They weren't simply a religious leader's efforts to speak out against perceived injustice. Instead, they expressed a profoundly distorted view of this country, a view that sees white racism as endemic and that elevates what is wrong with America above all that we know is right with America; a view that sees the conflicts in the Middle East as rooted primarily in the actions of stalwart allies like Israel instead of emanating from the perverse and hateful ideologies of radical Islam.

As such, Reverend Wright's comments were not only wrong but divisive, divisive at a time when we need unity; racially charged at a time when we need to come together to solve a set of monumental problems: two wars, a terrorist threat, a falling economy, a chronic health care crisis, and potentially devastating climate change -- problems that are neither black or white or Latino or Asian, but rather problems that confront us all.

Given my background, my politics, and my professed values and ideals, there will no doubt be those for whom my statements of condemnation are not enough. Why associate myself with Reverend Wright in the first place, they may ask? Why not join another church? And I confess that if all that I knew of Reverend Wright were the snippets of those sermons that have run in an endless loop on the television sets and YouTube, if Trinity United Church of Christ conformed to the caricatures being peddled by some commentators, there is no doubt that I would react in much the same way.

But the truth is, that isn't all that I know of the man. The man I met more than twenty years ago is a man who helped introduce me to my Christian faith, a man who spoke to me about our obligations to love one another, to care for the sick and lift up the poor. He is a man who served his country as a United States Marine, and who has studied and lectured at some of the finest universities and seminaries in the country, and who over 30 years has led a church that serves the community by doing God's work here on Earth -- by housing the homeless, ministering to the needy, providing day care services and scholarships and prison ministries, and reaching out to those suffering from HIV/AIDS.

In my first book, Dreams From My Father, I described the experience of my first service at Trinity, and it goes as follows:

People began to shout, to rise from their seats and clap and cry out, a forceful wind carrying the reverend's voice up to the rafters.

And in that single note -- hope -- I heard something else; at the foot of that cross, inside the thousands of churches across the city, I imagined the stories of ordinary black people merging with the stories of David and Goliath, Moses and Pharaoh, the Christians in the lion's den, Ezekiel's field of dry bones.

Those stories of survival and freedom and hope became our stories, my story. The blood that spilled was our blood; the tears our tears; until this black church, on this bright day, seemed once more a vessel carrying the story of a people into future generations and into a larger world. Our trials and triumphs became at once unique and universal, black and more than black. In chronicling our journey, the stories and songs gave us a meaning to reclaim memories that we didn't need to feel shame about -- memories that all people might study and cherish and with which we could start to rebuild.

That has been my experience at Trinity. Like other predominantly black churches across the country, Trinity embodies the black community in its entirety -- the doctor and the welfare mom, the model student and the former gang-banger. Like other black churches, Trinity's services are full of raucous laughter and sometimes bawdy humor. They are full of dancing and clapping and screaming and shouting that may seem jarring to the untrained ear. The church contains in full the kindness and cruelty, the fierce intelligence and the shocking ignorance, the struggles and successes, the love and, yes, the bitterness and biases that make up the black experience in America.

And this helps explain, perhaps, my relationship with Reverend Wright. As imperfect as he may be, he has been like family to me. He strengthens my faith, officiated my wedding, and baptized my children. Not once in my conversations with him have I heard him talk about any ethnic group in derogatory terms or treat whites with whom he interacted with anything but courtesy and respect. He contains within him the contradictions -- the good and the bad -- of the community that he has served diligently for so many years.

I can no more disown him than I can disown the black community. I can no more disown him than I can disown my white grandmother, a woman who helped raise me, a woman who sacrificed again and again for me, a woman who loves me as much as she loves anything in this world, but a woman who once confessed her fear of black men who passed her by on the street, and who on more than one occasion has uttered racial or ethnic stereotypes that made me cringe.

These people are part of me. And they are part of America, this country that I love.

Now, some will see this as an attempt to justify or excuse comments that are simply inexcusable. I can assure you it is not. And I suppose the politically safe thing to do would be to move on from this episode and just hope that it fades into the woodwork. We can dismiss Reverend Wright as a crank or a demagogue, just as some have dismissed Geraldine Ferraro in the aftermath of her recent statements as harboring some deep -- deep-seated bias.

But race is an issue that I believe this nation cannot afford to ignore right now. We would be making the same mistake that Reverend Wright made in his offending sermons about America: to simplify and stereotype and amplify the negative to the point that it distorts reality. The fact is that the comments that have been made and the issues that have surfaced over the last few weeks reflect the complexities of race in this country that we've never really worked through, a part of our union that we have not yet made perfect. And if we walk away now, if we simply retreat into our respective corners, we will never be able to come together and solve challenges like health care or education or the need to find good jobs for every American.

Understanding -- Understanding this reality requires a reminder of how we arrived at this point. As William Faulkner once wrote, "The past isn't dead and buried. In fact, it isn't even past." We do not need to recite here the history of racial injustice in this country. But we do need to remind ourselves that so many of the disparities that exist between the African-American community and the larger American community today can be traced directly to inequalities passed on from an earlier generation that suffered under the brutal legacy of slavery and Jim Crow. Segregated schools were, and are, inferior schools. We still haven't fixed them, 50 years after Brown versus Board of Education. And the inferior education they provided, then and now, helps explain the pervasive achievement gap between today's black and white students.

Legalized discrimination, where blacks were prevented, often through violence, from owning property, or loans were not granted to African-American business owners, or black homeowners could not access FHA mortgages, or blacks were excluded from unions, or the police force, or the fire department meant that black families could not amass any meaningful wealth to bequeath to future generations. That history helps explain the wealth and income gap between blacks and whites and the concentrated pockets of poverty that persist in so many of today's urban and rural communities. A lack of economic opportunity among black men and the shame and frustration that came from not being able to provide for one's family contributed to the erosion of black families, a problem that welfare policies for many years may have worsened. And the lack of basic services in so many urban black neighborhoods -- parks for kids to play in, police walking the beat, regular garbage pick-up, building code enforcement -- all helped create a cycle of violence, blight, and neglect that continues to haunt us.

This is the reality in which Reverend Wright and other African-Americans of his generation grew up. They came of age in the late '50s and early '60s, a time when segregation was still the law of the land and opportunity was systematically constricted. What's remarkable is not how many failed in the face of discrimination, but how many men and women overcame the odds, how many were able to make a way out of no way for those like me who would come after them.

But for all those who scratched and clawed their way to get a piece of the American Dream, there were many who didn't make it -- those who were ultimately defeated, in one way or another, by discrimination. That legacy of defeat was passed on to future generations -- those young men and increasingly young women who we see standing on street corners or languishing in our prisons, without hope or prospects for the future. Even for those blacks who did make it, questions of race, and racism, continue to define their world view in fundamental ways. For the men and women of Reverend Wright's generation, the memories of humiliation and doubt and fear have not gone away, nor has the anger and the bitterness of those years.

That anger may not get expressed in public, in front of white co-workers or white friends, but it does find voice in the barbershop or the beauty shop or around the kitchen table. At times, that anger is exploited by politicians to gin up votes along racial lines or to make up for a politician's own failings. And occasionally it finds voice in the church on Sunday morning, in the pulpit and in the pews. The fact that so many people are surprised to hear that anger in some of Reverend Wright's sermons simply reminds us of that old truism that the most segregated hour of American life occurs on Sunday morning.

That -- That anger is not always productive. Indeed, all too often it distracts attention from solving real problems. It keeps us from squarely facing our own complicity within the African-American community in our own condition. It prevents the African-American community from forging the alliances it needs to bring about real change. But the anger is real; it is powerful, and to simply wish it away, to condemn it without understanding its roots only serves to widen the chasm of misunderstanding that exists between the races.

In fact, a similar anger exists within segments of the white community. Most working and middle-class white Americans don't feel that they've been particularly privileged by their race. Their experience is the immigrant experience. As far as they're concerned, no one handed them anything; they built it from scratch. They've worked hard all their lives, many times only to see their jobs shipped overseas or their pensions dumped after a lifetime of labor. They are anxious about their futures, and they feel their dreams slipping away. And in an era of stagnant wages and global competition, opportunity comes to be seen as a zero sum game, in which your dreams come at my expense. So when they are told to bus their children to a school across town, when they hear that an African American is getting an advantage in landing a good job or a spot in a good college because of an injustice that they themselves never committed, when they're told that their fears about crime in urban neighborhoods are somehow prejudice, resentment builds over time.

Like the anger within the black community, these resentments aren't always expressed in polite company. But they have helped shape the political landscape for at least a generation. Anger over welfare and affirmative action helped forge the Reagan Coalition. Politicians routinely exploited fears of crime for their own electoral ends. Talk show hosts and conservative commentators built entire careers unmasking bogus claims of racism while dismissing legitimate discussions of racial injustice and inequality as mere political correctness or reverse racism. And just as black anger often proved counterproductive, so have these white resentments distracted attention from the real culprits of the middle class squeeze: a corporate culture rife with inside dealing, questionable accounting practices, and short-term greed; a Washington dominated by lobbyists and special interests; economic policies that favor the few over the many. And yet, to wish away the resentments of white Americans, to label them as misguided or even racist without recognizing they are grounded in legitimate concerns, this, too, widens the racial divide and blocks the path to understanding.

This is where we are right now.

It's a racial stalemate we've been stuck in for years. And contrary to the claims of some of my critics, black and white, I have never been so naive as to believe that we can get beyond our racial divisions in a single election cycle or with a single candidate, particularly -- particularly a candidacy as imperfect as my own. But I have asserted a firm conviction, a conviction rooted in my faith in God and my faith in the American people, that, working together, we can move beyond some of our old racial wounds and that, in fact, we have no choice -- we have no choice if we are to continue on the path of a more perfect union.

For the African-American community, that path means embracing the burdens of our past without becoming victims of our past. It means continuing to insist on a full measure of justice in every aspect of American life. But it also means binding our particular grievances, for better health care and better schools and better jobs, to the larger aspirations of all Americans -- the white woman struggling to break the glass ceiling, the white man who's been laid off, the immigrant trying to feed his family. And it means also taking full responsibility for our own lives -- by demanding more from our fathers, and spending more time with our children, and reading to them, and teaching them that while they may face challenges and discrimination in their own lives, they must never succumb to despair or cynicism. They must always believe -- They must always believe that they can write their own destiny.

Ironically, this quintessentially American -- and, yes, conservative -- notion of self-help found frequent expression in Reverend Wright's sermons. But what my former pastor too often failed to understand is that embarking on a program of self-help also requires a belief that society can change. The profound mistake of Reverend Wright's sermons is not that he spoke about racism in our society. It's that he spoke as if our society was static, as if no progress had been made, as if this country -- a country that has made it possible for one of his own members to run for the highest office in the land and build a coalition of white and black, Latino, Asian, rich, poor, young and old -- is still irrevocably bound to a tragic past. What we know, what we have seen, is that America can change. That is true genius of this nation. What we have already achieved gives us hope -- the audacity to hope -- for what we can and must achieve tomorrow.

Now, in the white community, the path to a more perfect union means acknowledging that what ails the African-American community does not just exist in the minds of black people; that the legacy of discrimination -- and current incidents of discrimination, while less overt than in the past -- that these things are real and must be addressed. Not just with words, but with deeds -- by investing in our schools and our communities; by enforcing our civil rights laws and ensuring fairness in our criminal justice system; by providing this generation with ladders of opportunity that were unavailable for previous generations. It requires all Americans to realize that your dreams do not have to come at the expense of my dreams, that investing in the health, welfare, and education of black and brown and white children will ultimately help all of America prosper.

In the end, then, what is called for is nothing more and nothing less than what all the world's great religions demand: that we do unto others as we would have them do unto us. Let us be our brother's keeper, Scripture tells us. Let us be our sister's keeper. Let us find that common stake we all have in one another, and let our politics reflect that spirit as well.

For we have a choice in this country. We can accept a politics that breeds division and conflict and cynicism. We can tackle race only as spectacle, as we did in the O.J. trial; or in the wake of tragedy, as we did in the aftermath of Katrina; or as fodder for the nightly news. We can play Reverend Wright's sermons on every channel every day and talk about them from now until the election, and make the only question in this campaign whether or not the American people think that I somehow believe or sympathize with his most offensive words. We can pounce on some gaffe by a Hillary supporter as evidence that she's playing the race card; or we can speculate on whether white men will all flock to John McCain in the general election regardless of his policies. We can do that. But if we do, I can tell you that in the next election, we'll be talking about some other distraction, and then another one, and then another one. And nothing will change.

That is one option.

Or, at this moment, in this election, we can come together and say, "Not this time." This time we want to talk about the crumbling schools that are stealing the future of black children and white children and Asian children and Hispanic children and Native-American children. This time we want to reject the cynicism that tells us that these kids can't learn; that those kids who don't look like us are somebody else's problem. The children of America are not "those kids," -- they are our kids, and we will not let them fall behind in a 21st-century economy. Not this time. This time we want to talk about how the lines in the emergency room are filled with whites and blacks and Hispanics who do not have health care, who don't have the power on their own to overcome the special interests in Washington, but who can take them on if we do it together.

This time we want to talk about the shuttered mills that once provided a decent life for men and women of every race, and the homes for sale that once belonged to Americans from every religion, every region, every walk of life. This time we want to talk about the fact that the real problem is not that someone who doesn't look like you might take your job; it's that the corporation you work for will ship it overseas for nothing more than a profit. This time -- This time we want to talk about the men and women of every color and creed who serve together, and fight together, and bleed together under the same proud flag. We want to talk about how to bring them home from a war that should've never been authorized and should've never been waged. And we want to talk about how we'll show our patriotism by caring for them, and their families, and giving them the benefits that they have earned.

I would not be running for President if I didn't believe with all my heart that this is what the vast majority of Americans want for this country. This union may never be perfect, but generation after generation has shown that it can always be perfected. And today, whenever I find myself feeling doubtful or cynical about this possibility, what gives me the most hope is the next generation -- the young people whose attitudes and beliefs and openness to change have already made history in this election.

There's one story in particular that I'd like to leave you with today, a story I told when I had the great honor of speaking on Dr. King's birthday at his home church, Ebenezer Baptist, in Atlanta. There's a young, 23-year-old woman, a white woman named Ashley Baia, who organized for our campaign in Florence, South Carolina. She'd been working to organize a mostly African-American community since the beginning of this campaign, and one day she was at a roundtable discussion where everyone went around telling their story and why they were there. And Ashley said that when she was 9 years old, her mother got cancer. And because she had to miss days of work, she was let go and lost her health care. They had to file for bankruptcy, and that's when Ashley decided that she had to do something to help her mom.

She knew that food was one of their most expensive costs, and so Ashley convinced her mother that what she really liked and really wanted to eat more than anything else was mustard and relish sandwiches -- because that was the cheapest way to eat. That's the mind of a 9 year old. She did this for a year until her mom got better. And so Ashley told everyone at the roundtable that the reason she had joined our campaign was so that she could help the millions of other children in the country who want and need to help their parents too.

Now, Ashley might have made a different choice. Perhaps somebody told her along the way that the source of her mother's problems were blacks who were on welfare and too lazy to work, or Hispanics who were coming into the country illegally. But she didn't. She sought out allies in her fight against injustice.

Anyway, Ashley finishes her story and then goes around the room and asks everyone else why they're supporting the campaign. They all have different stories and different reasons. Many bring up a specific issue. And finally they come to this elderly black man who's been sitting there quietly the entire time. And Ashley asks him why he's there. And he doesn't bring up a specific issue. He does not say health care or the economy. He does not say education or the war. He does not say that he was there because of Barack Obama. He simply says to everyone in the room, "I am here because of Ashley." "I'm here because of Ashley."

Now, by itself, that single moment of recognition between that young white girl and that old black man is not enough. It is not enough to give health care to the sick, or jobs to the jobless, or education to our children. But it is where we start. It is where our union grows stronger. And as so many generations have come to realize over the course of the 221 years since a band of patriots signed that document right here in Philadelphia, that is where perfection begins.

Thank you very much, everyone. Thank you.

# Democratic Nomination Victory Speech

Thank you....Thank you. What a -- What a wonderful reception. Thank you, Saint Paul. Thank you, Minnesota.

Thank you, JoAnn Syverson, for the wonderful introduction.

Thank you, Michelle Obama and Malia Obama and Sasha Obama. Thank you to my brothers and sisters. Thank you to -- Thank you to my staff. Thank you to our volunteers. Thank you to my political team. Thank you to our campaign manager, David Plouffe, who never gets any credit, but has built the best political organization in the country.

Thank you to my grandmother, who helped raise me, and is sitting in Hawaii somewhere right now because she can't travel, but who poured everything she had into me, and who helped to make me the man I am today. Tonight is for her.

Tonight, Minnesota, after 54 hard-fought contests, our primary season has finally come to an end. Sixteen -- Sixteen months have passed since we first stood together on the steps of the Old State Capitol in Springfield, Illinois. Thousands of miles have been traveled; millions of voices have been heard.

And because of what you said, because you decided that change must come to Washington, because you believed that this year must be different than all the rest, because -- because you chose to listen not to your doubts or your fears, but to your greatest hopes and highest aspirations, tonight we mark the end of one historic journey with the beginning of another, a journey -- a journey that will bring a new and better day to America.

Because of you, tonight I can stand here and say that I will be the Democratic nominee for the President of the United States of America.

I want to -- I want to thank -- I want to thank -- I want to thank all those in Montana and South Dakota who stood up for change today. I want to thank every American who stood with us over the course of this campaign, through the good days and the bad, from the snows of Cedar Rapids to the sunshine of Sioux Falls.

And, tonight, I also want to thank the men and woman who took this journey with me as fellow candidates for President. You know, at this defining moment -- At this defining moment for our nation, we should be proud that our Party put forth one of the most talented, qualified field of individuals ever to run for office. I have not just competed with them as rivals. I’ve learned from them as friends, as public servants, and as patriots who love America and are willing to work tirelessly to make this country better. They are leaders of this Party and leaders that America will turn to for years to come.

And that is particularly true for the candidate who has traveled further on this journey than anyone else: Senator Hillary Clinton has made history in this campaign. She has made history not -- not just because she’s a woman who has done what no woman has done before, but because she is a leader who inspires millions of Americans with her strength, her courage, and her commitment to the causes that brought us here tonight. I congratulate her on her victory in South Dakota, and I congratulate her on the race that she has run throughout this contest.

We’ve certainly had our differences over the last 16 months. But as someone who’s shared a stage with her many times, I can tell you that what gets Hillary Clinton up in the morning -- even in the face of tough odds -- is exactly what sent her and Bill Clinton to sign up for their first campaign in Texas all those years ago, what sent her to work at the Children’s Defense Fund and made her fight for health care as first lady, what led her to the United States Senate and fueled her barrier-breaking campaign for the presidency: an unyielding desire to improve the lives of ordinary Americans, no matter how difficult the fight may be.

And you can rest assured that when we finally win the battle for universal health care in this country -- and we will win that fight -- she will be central to that victory. When we transform our energy policy and lift our children out of poverty, it will be because she worked to help make it happen. Our Party and our country are better off because of her, and I am a better candidate for having had the honor to compete with Hillary Rodham Clinton.

There are those who say that this primary has somehow left us weaker and more divided. Well, I say that, because of this primary, there are millions of Americans who've cast their ballot for the very first time. There are -- There are Independents and Republicans who understand this election isn’t just about a change of Party in Washington, but also about the need to change Washington. There are -- There are young people, and African-Americans, and Hispanic-Americans, and women of all ages who have voted in numbers that have broken records and inspired a nation.

All of you chose to support a candidate you believe in deeply. But at the end of the day, we aren’t the reason you came out and waited in lines that stretched block after block to make your voice heard. You didn’t do that -- You didn’t do that because of me or Senator Clinton or anyone else. You did it because you know in your hearts that at this moment, a moment that will define a generation, we cannot afford to keep doing what we’ve been doing. We owe our children a better future. We owe our country a better future. And for all those who dream of that future tonight, I say: Let us begin the work together. Let us unite in common effort to chart a new course for America.

In just -- In just a few short months, the Republican Party will arrive in St. Paul with a very different agenda. They will -- They will come here to nominate John McCain, a man who has served this country heroically. I honor, we honor the service of John McCain, and I respect his many accomplishments, even if he chooses to deny mine. My -- My differences with him -- My differences with him are not personal. They are with the policies he has proposed in this campaign, because while John McCain can legitimately tout moments of independence from his Party in the past, such independence has not been the hallmark of his presidential campaign.

It’s not change when John McCain decided to stand with George Bush 95 percent of the time, as he did in the Senate last year.

It’s not change when he offers four more years of Bush economic policies that have failed to create well-paying jobs, or insure our workers, or help Americans afford the skyrocketing cost of college, policies that have lowered the real incomes of the average American family, and widened the gap between Wall Street and Main Street, and left our children with a mountain of debt.

It’s not change when he promises to continue a policy in Iraq that asks everything of our brave men and women in uniform and nothing of Iraqi politicians, a policy where all we look for are reasons to stay in Iraq, while we spend billions of dollars a month on a war that isn’t making the American people any safer. So -- So, I’ll say this: There are many words to describe John McCain’s attempt to pass off his embrace of George Bush’s policies as bipartisan and new, but “change” is not one of them. “Change” is not one of them, because change is a foreign policy that doesn’t begin and end with a war that should’ve never been authorized and never been waged.

I won’t stand here and pretend that there are many good options left in Iraq, but what’s not an option is leaving our troops in that country for the next hundred years, especially at a time when our military is overstretched, our nation is isolated, and nearly every other threat to America is being ignored. We -- We must be -- We must be as careful getting out of Iraq as we were careless getting in, but we -- but start leaving we must. It’s time for Iraqis to take responsibility for their future. It’s time to rebuild our military and give our veterans the care and the benefits they deserve when they come home.

It’s time -- It's time to refocus our efforts on Al Qaida’s leadership and Afghanistan, and rally the world against the common threats of the 21st century: terrorism and nuclear weapons, climate change and poverty, genocide and disease. That’s what change is.

Change -- Change, Minnesota, is realizing that meetings [sic] today’s threats requires not just our firepower, but the power of our diplomacy: tough -- tough, direct diplomacy, where the President of the United States isn’t afraid to let any petty dictator know where America stands and what we stand for. We must once again have the courage and the conviction to lead the free world. That is the legacy of Roosevelt and Truman and Kennedy. That’s what the American people demand. That’s what change is.

Change is building an economy that rewards not just wealth, but the work and the workers who created it. It’s understanding that the struggles facing working families can’t be solved by spending billions of dollars on more tax breaks for big corporations and wealthy CEOs, but by giving a middle-class tax break to those who need it, and investing in our crumbling infrastructure, and transforming how we use energy, and improving our schools, and renewing our commitment to science and innovation. It’s understanding that fiscal responsibility and shared prosperity can go hand-in-hand, as they did when Bill Clinton was President.

John McCain has spent a lot of time talking about trips to Iraq in the last few weeks, but maybe if he spent some time taking trips to the cities and towns that have been hardest hit by this economy -- cities in Michigan, and Ohio, and right here in Minnesota -- he’d understand the kind of change that people are looking for.

Maybe if he went to Iowa and met the student who works the night shift after a full day of class and still can’t pay the medical bills for a sister who’s ill, he’d understand she can’t afford four more years of a health care plan that only takes care of the healthy and the wealthy. She needs us to pass health care right now, a plan that guarantees insurance to every American who wants it and brings down premiums for every family who needs it. That’s the change we need, Minnesota.

Maybe -- Maybe if John McCain went to Pennsylvania and he met the man who lost his job, but can’t even afford the gas to drive around and look for a new one, he’d understand we can’t afford four more years of our addiction to oil from dictators. That man needs us to pass an energy policy that works with automakers to raise fuel standards, and makes corporations pay for their pollution, and oil companies invest their record profits in a clean energy future, an energy policy that will create millions of new jobs that pay well and can’t be outsourced. That’s the change we need, Minnesota.

And maybe if John McCain spent some time in the schools of South Carolina or St. Paul, Minnesota, or where he spoke tonight in New Orleans, Louisiana, he’d understand that we can’t afford to leave the money behind for No Child Left Behind; that we owe it to our children to invest in early-childhood education; and recruit an army of new teachers and give them better pay and more support; and finally decide that, in this global economy, the chance to get a college education should not be a privilege for the few, but a birthright of every American. That’s the change we need in America. That’s why I’m running for President of the United States.

Now -- Now, the other side will come here in September and offer a very different set of policies and positions, and that is a good thing. That is a debate I look forward to. It is a debate that the American people deserve on the issues that will help determine the future of this country and the future for our children. But what you don’t deserve is another election that’s governed by fear, and innuendo, and division. What you won’t hear from this campaign or this Party is the kind of politics that uses religion as a wedge and patriotism as a bludgeon. What you won’t see from this campaign or this Party is a politics that sees our opponents not as competitors to challenge, but enemies to polarize, because we may call ourselves Democrats and Republicans, but we are Americans first. We are always Americans first.

Despite -- Despite what the good senator from Arizona may have said tonight, I’ve seen people of differing views and opinions find common cause many times during my two decades in public life, and I’ve brought many together myself. I’ve walked arm-in-arm with community leaders on the south side of Chicago and watched tensions fade as black and white and Latino fought together for good jobs and good schools. I’ve sat across the table from law enforcement officials and civil rights advocates to reform a criminal justice system that sent 13 innocent people to death row. I’ve worked with friends in the other Party to provide more children with health insurance and more working families with a tax break, to curb the spread of nuclear weapons and ensure that the American people know where their tax dollars are being spent, and to reduce the influence of lobbyists who have all too often set the agenda in Washington.

In our country -- In our country, I have found that this cooperation happens not because we agree on everything, but because, behind all the false labels and false divisions and categories that define us, beyond all the petty bickering and point-scoring in Washington, Americans are a decent, generous, compassionate people, united by common challenges and common hopes.

And every so often, there are moments which call on that fundamental goodness to make this country great again. So it was for that band of patriots who declared in a Philadelphia hall the formation of a more perfect union, and for all those who gave on the fields of Gettysburg and Antietam their last full measure of devotion to save that same union. So it was for the greatest generation that conquered fear itself, and liberated a continent from tyranny, and made this country home to untold opportunity and prosperity. So it was for the workers who stood out on the picket lines, the women who shattered glass ceilings, the children who braved a Selma bridge for freedom’s cause. So it has been for every generation that faced down the greatest challenges and the most improbable odds to leave their children a world that’s better and kinder and more just.

And so it must be for us.

America, this is our moment. This is our time, our time to turn the page on the policies of the past, our time to bring new energy and new ideas to the challenges we face, our time to offer a new direction for this country that we love.

The journey will be difficult. The road will be long. I face this challenge -- I face this challenge with profound humility and knowledge of my own limitations, but I also face it with limitless faith in the capacity of the American people.

Because if we are willing to work for it, and fight for it, and believe in it, then I am absolutely certain that, generations from now, we will be able to look back and tell our children that this was the moment when we began to provide care for the sick and good jobs to the jobless.

This was the moment when the rise of the oceans began to slow and our planet began to heal.

This was the moment when we ended a war, and secured our nation, and restored our image as the last, best hope on Earth.

This was the moment, this was the time when we came together to remake this great nation so that it may always reflect our very best selves and our highest ideals.

Thank you, Minnesota. God bless you.

God bless the United States of America.

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# Campaign Policy Speech on Iraq at the Wilson Center

Thank you very much, everybody, and I very much appreciate your patience. I want to, first of all, thank Ambassador Gildenhorn for the outstanding work he does as board chairman here at the Woodrow Wilson Center, and to my great friend Lee Hamilton, who is, I think, an example of what's best in American public service, and has done so much to not only promote American interests all across the globe but also to educate the American people on our foreign policy. So, thank you very much.

Sixty-one years ago, George Marshal announced the plan that would come to bear his name. Much of Europe lay in ruins. The United States faced a powerful and ideological enemy intent on world domination. This menace was magnified by the recently discovered capability to destroy life on an unimaginable scale. The Soviet Union didn't yet have an atomic bomb, but before long it would.

The challenge facing the greatest generation of Americans -- the generation that had vanquished fascism on the battlefield -- was how to contain this threat while extending freedom's frontiers. Leaders like Truman and Acheson, Kennan and Marshall, knew that there was no single decisive blow that could be struck for freedom. We needed a new overarching strategy to meet the challenges of a new and dangerous world.

Such a strategy would join overwhelming military strength with sound judgment. It would shape events not just through military force, but through the force of our ideas; through economic power, intelligence and diplomacy. It would support strong allies that freely shared our ideals of liberty and democracy; open markets and the rule of law. It would foster new international institutions like the United Nations, NATO, and the World Bank, and focus on every corner of the globe. It was a strategy that saw clearly the world's dangers, while seizing its promise.

As a general, Marshall had spent years helping FDR wage war. But the Marshall Plan -- which was just one part of this strategy -- helped rebuild not just allies, but also the nation that Marshall had plotted to defeat. In the speech announcing his plan, he concluded not with tough talk or definitive declarations -- but rather with questions and a call for perspective. "The whole world of the future," Marshall said, "hangs on a proper judgment." To make that judgment, he asked the American people to examine distant events that directly affected their security and prosperity. He closed by asking: "What is needed? What can best be done? What must be done?"

What is needed? What can best be done? What must be done?

Today's dangers are different, though no less grave. The power to destroy life on a catastrophic scale now risks falling into the hands of terrorists. The future of our security -- and our planet -- is held hostage to our dependence on foreign oil and gas. From the cave- spotted mountains of northwest Pakistan, to the centrifuges spinning beneath Iranian soil, we know that the American people cannot be protected by oceans or the sheer might of our military alone.

The attacks of September 11 brought this new reality into a terrible and ominous focus. On that bright and beautiful day, the world of peace and prosperity that was the legacy of our Cold War victory seemed to suddenly vanish under rubble, and twisted steel, and clouds of smoke.

But the depth of this tragedy also drew out the decency and determination of our nation. At blood banks and vigils; in schools and in the United States Congress, Americans were united -- more united, even, than we were at the dawn of the Cold War. The world, too, was united against the perpetrators of this evil act, as old allies, new friends, and even long-time adversaries stood by our side. It was time -- once again -- for America's might and moral suasion to be harnessed; it was time to once again shape a new security strategy for an ever-changing world.

Imagine, for a moment, what we could have done in those days, and months, and years after 9/11.

We could have deployed the full force of American power to hunt down and destroy Osama bin Laden, Al Qaida, the Taliban, and all of the terrorists responsible for 9/11, while supporting real security in Afghanistan.

We could have secured loose nuclear materials around the world, and updated a 20th century non-proliferation framework to meet the challenges of the 21st.

We could have invested hundreds of billions of dollars in alternative sources of energy to grow our economy, save our planet, and end the tyranny of oil.

We could have strengthened old alliances, formed new partnerships, and renewed international institutions to advance peace and prosperity.

We could have called on a new generation to step into the strong currents of history, and to serve their country as troops and teachers, Peace Corps volunteers and police officers.

We could have secured our homeland -- investing in sophisticated new protection for our ports, our trains and our power plants.

We could have rebuilt our roads and bridges, laid down new rail and broadband and electricity systems, and made college affordable for every American to strengthen our ability to compete.

We could have done that.

Instead, we have lost thousands of American lives, spent nearly a trillion dollars, alienated allies and neglected emerging threats -- all in the cause of fighting a war for well over five years in a country that had absolutely nothing to do with the 9/11 attacks.

Our men and women in uniform have accomplished every mission we have given them. What's missing in our debate about Iraq -- what has been missing since before the war began -- is a discussion of the strategic consequences of Iraq and its dominance of our foreign policy. This war distracts us from every threat that we face and so many opportunities we could seize. This war diminishes our security, our standing in the world, our military, our economy, and the resources that we need to confront the challenges of the 21st century. By any measure, our single-minded and open-ended focus on Iraq is not a sound strategy for keeping America safe.

I am running for President of the United States to lead this country in a new direction -- to seize this moment's promise. Instead of being distracted from the most pressing threats that we face, I want to overcome them. Instead of pushing the entire burden of our foreign policy on to the brave men and women of our military, I want to use all elements of American power to keep us safe, and prosperous, and free. Instead of alienating ourselves from the world, I want America -- once again -- to lead.

As President, I will pursue a tough, smart and principled national security strategy -- one that recognizes that we have interests not just in Baghdad, but in Kandahar and Karachi, in Tokyo and London, in Beijing and Berlin. I will focus this strategy on five goals essential to making America safer: ending the war in Iraq responsibly; finishing the fight against Al Qaida and the Taliban; securing all nuclear weapons and materials from terrorists and rogue states; achieving true energy security; and rebuilding our alliances to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

My opponent in this campaign has served this country with honor, and we all respect his sacrifice. We both want to do what we think is best to defend the American people. But we've made different judgments, and would lead in very different directions. That starts with Iraq.

I opposed going to war in Iraq; Senator McCain was one of Washington's biggest supporters for war. I warned that the invasion of a country posing no imminent threat would fan the flames of extremism, and distract us from the fight against Al Qaida and the Taliban; Senator McCain claimed that we would be greeted as liberators, and that democracy would spread across the Middle East. Those were the judgments we made on the most important strategic question since the end of the Cold War.

Now, all of us recognize that we must do more than look back -- we must make a judgment about how to move forward. What is needed? What can best be done? What must be done? Senator McCain wants to talk of our tactics in Iraq; I want to focus on a new strategy for Iraq and the wider world.

It has been 18 months since President Bush announced the surge. As I have said many times, our troops have performed brilliantly in lowering the level of violence. General Petraeus has used new tactics to protect the Iraqi population. We have talked directly to Sunni tribes that used to be hostile to America, and supported their fight against Al Qaida. Shiite militias have generally respected a cease- fire. Those are the facts, and all Americans welcome them.

For weeks, now, Senator McCain has argued that the gains of the surge mean that I should change my commitment to end the war. But this argument misconstrues what is necessary to succeed in Iraq, and stubbornly ignores the facts of the broader strategic picture that we face.

In the 18 months since the surge began, the strain on our military has increased, our troops and their families have borne an enormous burden, and American taxpayers have spent another $200 billion in Iraq. That's over $10 billion each month. That is a consequence of our current strategy.

In the 18 months since the surge began, the situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated. June was our highest casualty month of the war. The Taliban has been on the offensive, even launching a brazen attack on one of our bases. Al Qaida has a growing sanctuary in Pakistan. That is a consequence of our current strategy.

In the 18 months since the surge began, as I warned at the outset -- Iraq's leaders have not made the political progress that was the purpose of the surge. They have not invested tens of billions of dollars in oil revenues to rebuild their country. They have not resolved their differences or shaped a new political compact.

That's why I strongly stand by my plan to end this war. Now, Prime Minister Maliki's call for a timetable for the removal of U.S. forces presents a real opportunity. It comes at a time when the American general in charge of training Iraq's Security Forces has testified that Iraq's Army and Police will be ready to assume responsibility for Iraq's security in 2009. Now is the time for a responsible redeployment of our combat troops that pushes Iraq's leaders toward a political solution, rebuilds our military, and refocuses on Afghanistan and our broader security interests.

George Bush and John McCain don't have a strategy for success in Iraq -- they have a strategy for staying in Iraq. They said we couldn't leave when violence was up, they say we can't leave when violence is down. They refuse to press the Iraqis to make tough choices, and they label any timetable to redeploy our troops "surrender," even though we would be turning Iraq over to a sovereign Iraqi government -- not to a terrorist enemy. Theirs is an endless focus on tactics inside Iraq, with no consideration of our strategy to face threats beyond Iraq's borders.

At some point, a judgment must be made. Iraq is not going to be a perfect place, and we don't have unlimited resources to try to make it one. We are not going to kill every Al Qaida sympathizer, eliminate every trace of Iranian influence, or stand up a flawless democracy before we leave -- General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker acknowledged this to me when they testified last April. That is why the accusation of surrender is false rhetoric used to justify a failed policy. In fact, true success in Iraq -- victory in Iraq -- will not take place in a surrender ceremony where an enemy lays down their arms. True success will take place when we leave Iraq to a government that is taking responsibility for its future -- a government that prevents sectarian conflict, and ensures that the Al Qaida threat which has been beaten back by our troops does not reemerge. That is an achievable goal if we pursue a comprehensive plan to press the Iraqis stand up.

To achieve that success, I will give our military a new mission on my first day in office: ending this war. Let me be clear: we must be as careful getting out of Iraq as we were careless getting in. We can safely redeploy our combat brigades at a pace that would remove them in 16 months. That would be the summer of 2010 -- one year after Iraqi Security Forces will be prepared to stand up; two years from now, and more than seven years after the war began. After this redeployment, we'll keep a residual force to perform specific missions in Iraq: targeting any remnants of Al Qaida; protecting our service members and diplomats; and training and supporting Iraq's Security Forces, so long as the Iraqis make political progress.

We will make tactical adjustments as we implement this strategy -- that is what any responsible Commander-in-Chief must do. As I have consistently said, I will consult with commanders on the ground and the Iraqi government. We will redeploy from secure areas first and volatile areas later. We will commit $2 billion to a meaningful international effort to support the more than 4 million displaced Iraqis. We will forge a new coalition to support Iraq's future -- one that includes all of Iraq's neighbors, and also the United Nations, the World Bank, and the European Union -- because we all have a stake in stability. And we will make it clear that the United States seeks no permanent bases in Iraq.

This is the future that Iraqis want. This is the future that the American people want. And this is what our common interests demand. Both America and Iraq will be more secure when the terrorist in Anbar is taken out by the Iraqi Army, and the criminal in Baghdad fears Iraqi Police, not just coalition forces. Both America and Iraq will succeed when every Arab government has an embassy open in Baghdad, and the child in Basra benefits from services provided by Iraqi dinars, not American tax dollars.

And this is the future we need for our military. We cannot tolerate this strain on our forces to fight a war that hasn't made us safer. I will restore our strength by ending this war, completing the increase of our ground forces by 65,000 soldiers and 27,000 marines, and investing in the capabilities we need to defeat conventional foes and meet the unconventional challenges of our time.

So let's be clear. Senator McCain would have our troops continue to fight tour after tour of duty, and our taxpayers keep spending $10 billion a month indefinitely; I want Iraqis to take responsibility for their own future, and to reach the political accommodation necessary for long-term stability. That's victory. That's success. That's what's best for Iraq, that's what's best for America, and that's why I will end this war as President.

In fact -- as should have been apparent to President Bush and Senator McCain -- the central front in the war on terror is not Iraq, and it never was. That's why the second goal of my new strategy will be taking the fight to Al Qaida in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

It is unacceptable that almost seven years after nearly 3,000 Americans were killed on our soil, the terrorists who attacked us on 9/11 are still at large. Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahari are recording messages to their followers and plotting more terror. The Taliban controls parts of Afghanistan. Al Qaida has an expanding base in Pakistan that is probably no farther from their old Afghan sanctuary than a train ride from Washington to Philadelphia. If another attack on our homeland comes, it will likely come from the same region where 9/11 was planned. And yet today, we have five times more troops in Iraq than Afghanistan.

Senator McCain said -- just months ago -- that "Afghanistan is not in trouble because of our diversion to Iraq." I could not disagree more. Our troops and our NATO allies are performing heroically in Afghanistan, but I have argued for years that we lack the resources to finish the job because of our commitment to Iraq. That's what the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said earlier this month. And that's why, as President, I will make the fight against Al Qaida and the Taliban the top priority that it should be. This is a war that we have to win.

I will send at least two additional combat brigades to Afghanistan, and use this commitment to seek greater contributions -- with fewer restrictions -- from NATO allies. I will focus on training Afghan security forces and supporting an Afghan judiciary, with more resources and incentives for American officers who perform these missions. Just as we succeeded in the Cold War by supporting allies who could sustain their own security, we must realize that the 21st century's front lines are not only on the field of battle -- they are found in the training exercise near Kabul, in the police station in Kandahar, and in the rule of law in Herat.

Moreover, lasting security will only come if we heed Marshall's lesson, and help Afghans grow their economy from the bottom up. That's why I've proposed an additional $1 billion in non-military assistance each year, with meaningful safeguards to prevent corruption and to make sure investments are made -- not just in Kabul -- but out in Afghanistan's provinces. As a part of this program, we'll invest in alternative livelihoods to poppy-growing for Afghan farmers, just as we crack down on heroin trafficking. We cannot lose Afghanistan to a future of narco-terrorism. The Afghan people must know that our commitment to their future is enduring, because the security of Afghanistan and the United States is shared.

The greatest threat to that security lies in the tribal regions of Pakistan, where terrorists train and insurgents strike into Afghanistan. We cannot tolerate a terrorist sanctuary, and as President, I won't. We need a stronger and sustained partnership between Afghanistan, Pakistan and NATO to secure the border, to take out terrorist camps, and to crack down on cross-border insurgents. We need more troops, more helicopters, more satellites, more Predator drones in the Afghan border region. And we must make it clear that if Pakistan cannot or will not act, we will take out high-level terrorist targets like bin Laden if we have them in our sights.

Make no mistake: we can't succeed in Afghanistan or secure our homeland unless we change our Pakistan policy. We must expect more of the Pakistani government, but we must offer more than a blank check to a General who has lost the confidence of his people. It's time to strengthen stability by standing up for the aspirations of the Pakistani people. That's why I'm cosponsoring a bill with Joe Biden and Richard Lugar to triple non-military aid to the Pakistani people and to sustain it for a decade, while ensuring that the military assistance we do provide is used to take the fight to the Taliban and Al Qaida. We must move beyond a purely military alliance built on convenience, or face mounting popular opposition in a nuclear-armed nation at the nexus of terror and radical Islam.

Only a strong Pakistani democracy can help us move toward my third goal -- securing all nuclear weapons and materials from terrorists and rogue states. One of the terrible ironies of the Iraq War is that President Bush used the threat of nuclear terrorism to invade a country that had no active nuclear program. But the fact that the President misled us into a misguided war doesn't diminish the threat of a terrorist with a weapon of mass destruction -- in fact, it has only increased it.

In those years after World War II, we worried about the deadly atom falling into the hands of the Kremlin. Now, we worry about 50 tons of highly enriched uranium -- some of it poorly secured -- at civilian nuclear facilities in over forty countries. Now, we worry about the breakdown of a non-proliferation framework that was designed for the bipolar world of the Cold War. Now, we worry -- most of all -- about a rogue state or nuclear scientist transferring the world's deadliest weapons to the world's most dangerous people: terrorists who won't think twice about killing themselves and hundreds of thousands in Tel Aviv or Moscow, in London or New York.

We cannot wait any longer to protect the American people. I've made this a priority in the Senate, where I worked with Republican Senator Dick Lugar to pass a law accelerating our pursuit of loose nuclear materials. I'll lead a global effort to secure all loose nuclear materials around the world during my first term as President. And I'll develop new defenses to protect against the 21st century threat of biological weapons and cyber-terrorism -- threats that I'll discuss in more detail tomorrow.

Beyond taking these immediate, urgent steps, it's time to send a clear message: America seeks a world with no nuclear weapons. As long as nuclear weapons exist, we must retain a strong deterrent. But instead of threatening to kick them out of the G-8, we need to work with Russia to take U.S. and Russian ballistic missiles off hair- trigger alert; to dramatically reduce the stockpiles of our nuclear weapons and material; to seek a global ban on the production of fissile material for weapons; and to expand the U.S.-Russian ban on intermediate-range missiles so that the agreement is global. By keeping our commitment under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, we'll be in a better position to press nations like North Korea and Iran to keep theirs. In particular, it will give us more credibility and leverage in dealing with Iran.

We cannot tolerate nuclear weapons in the hands of nations that support terror. Preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons is a vital national security interest of the United States. No tool of statecraft should be taken off the table, but Senator McCain would continue a failed policy that has seen Iran strengthen its position, advance its nuclear program, and stockpile 150 kilos of low enriched uranium. I will use all elements of American power to pressure the Iranian regime, starting with aggressive, principled and direct diplomacy -- diplomacy backed with strong sanctions and without preconditions.

There will be careful preparation. I commend the work of our European allies on this important matter, and we should be full partners in that effort. Ultimately the measure of any effort is whether it leads to a change in Iranian behavior. That's why we must pursue these tough negotiations in full coordination with our allies, bringing to bear our full influence -- including, if it will advance our interests, my meeting with the appropriate Iranian leader at a time and place of my choosing.

We will pursue this diplomacy with no illusions about the Iranian regime. Instead, we will present a clear choice. If you abandon your nuclear program, support for terror, and threats to Israel, there will be meaningful incentives. If you refuse, then we will ratchet up the pressure, with stronger unilateral sanctions; stronger multilateral sanctions in the Security Council, and sustained action outside the UN to isolate the Iranian regime. That's the diplomacy we need. And the Iranians should negotiate now; by waiting, they will only face mounting pressure.

The surest way to increase our leverage against Iran in the long- run is to stop bankrolling its ambitions. That will depend on achieving my fourth goal: ending the tyranny of oil in our time.

One of the most dangerous weapons in the world today is the price of oil. We ship nearly $700 million a day to unstable or hostile nations for their oil. It pays for terrorist bombs going off from Baghdad to Beirut. It funds petro-diplomacy in Caracas and radical madrasas from Karachi to Khartoum. It takes leverage away from America and shifts it to dictators.

This immediate danger is eclipsed only by the long-term threat from climate change, which will lead to devastating weather patterns, terrible storms, drought, and famine. That means people competing for food and water in the next fifty years in the very places that have known horrific violence in the last fifty: Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. Most disastrously, that could mean destructive storms on our shores, and the disappearance of our coastline.

This is not just an economic issue or an environmental concern -- this is a national security crisis. For the sake of our security -- and for every American family that is paying the price at the pump -- we must end this dependence on foreign oil. And as President, that's exactly what I'll do. Small steps and political gimmickry just won't do. I'll invest $150 billion over the next ten years to put America on the path to true energy security. This fund will fast track investments in a new green energy business sector that will end our addiction to oil and create up to 5 million jobs over the next two decades, and help secure the future of our country and our planet. We'll invest in research and development of every form of alternative energy -- solar, wind, and biofuels, as well as technologies that can make coal clean and nuclear power safe. And from the moment I take office, I will let it be known that the United States of America is ready to lead again.

Never again will we sit on the sidelines, or stand in the way of global action to tackle this global challenge. I will reach out to the leaders of the biggest carbon emitting nations and ask them to join a new Global Energy Forum that will lay the foundation for the next generation of climate protocols. We will also build an alliance of oil-importing nations and work together to reduce our demand, and to break the grip of OPEC on the global economy. We'll set a goal of an 80% reduction in global emissions by 2050. And as we develop new forms of clean energy here at home, we will share our technology and our innovations with all the nations of the world.

That is the tradition of American leadership on behalf of the global good. And that will be my fifth goal -- rebuilding our alliances to meet the common challenges of the 21st century.

For all of our power, America is strongest when we act alongside strong partners. We faced down fascism with the greatest war-time alliance the world has ever known. We stood shoulder to shoulder with our NATO allies against the Soviet threat, and paid a far smaller price for the first Gulf War because we acted together with a broad coalition. We helped create the United Nations -- not to constrain America's influence, but to amplify it by advancing our values.

Now is the time for a new era of international cooperation. It's time for America and Europe to renew our common commitment to face down the threats of the 21st century just as we did the challenges of the 20th. It's time to strengthen our partnerships with Japan, South Korea, Australia and the world's largest democracy -- India -- to create a stable and prosperous Asia. It's time to engage China on common interests like climate change, even as we continue to encourage their shift to a more open and market-based society. It's time to strengthen NATO by asking more of our allies, while always approaching them with the respect owed a partner. It's time to reform the United Nations, so that this imperfect institution can become a more perfect forum to share burdens, strengthen our leverage, and promote our values. It's time to deepen our engagement to help resolve the Arab- Israeli conflict, so that we help our ally Israel achieve true and lasting security, while helping Palestinians achieve their legitimate aspirations for statehood.

And just as we renew longstanding efforts, so must we shape new ones to meet new challenges. That's why I'll create a Shared Security Partnership Program -- a new alliance of nations to strengthen cooperative efforts to take down global terrorist networks, while standing up against torture and brutality. That's why we'll work with the African Union to enhance its ability to keep the peace. That's why we'll build a new partnership to roll back the trafficking of drugs, and guns, and gangs in the Americas. That's what we can do if we are ready to engage the world.

We will have to provide meaningful resources to meet critical priorities. I know development assistance is not the most popular program, but as President, I will make the case to the American people that it can be our best investment in increasing the common security of the entire world. That was true with the Marshall Plan, and that must be true today. That's why I'll double our foreign assistance to $50 billion by 2012, and use it to support a stable future in failing states, and sustainable growth in Africa; to halve global poverty and to roll back disease. To send once more a message to those yearning faces beyond our shores that says, "You matter to us. Your future is our future. And our moment is now."

This must be the moment when we answer the call of history. For eight years, we have paid the price for a foreign policy that lectures without listening; that divides us from one another -- and from the world -- instead of calling us to a common purpose; that focuses on our tactics in fighting a war without end in Iraq instead of forging a new strategy to face down the true threats that we face. We cannot afford four more years of a strategy that is out of balance and out of step with this defining moment. None of this will be easy, but we have faced great odds before. When General Marshall first spoke about the plan that would bear his name, the rubble of Berlin had not yet been built into a wall. But Marshall knew that even the fiercest of adversaries could forge bonds of friendship founded in freedom. He had the confidence to know that the purpose and pragmatism of the American people could outlast any foe. Today, the dangers and divisions that came with the dawn of the Cold War have receded. Now, the defeat of the threats of the past has been replaced by the transnational threats of today. We know what is needed. We know what can best be done. We know what must done. Now it falls to us to act with the same sense of purpose and pragmatism as an earlier generation, to join with friends and partners to lead the world anew.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill

# Address to the People of Berlin

\*Thank you to the citizens of Berlin and\* -- and thank you to the people of Germany. Let me thank Chancellor Merkel and Foreign Minister Steinmeier for welcoming me earlier today. Thank you Mayor Wowereit, the Berlin Senate, the police, and most of all thanks to all of you for this extraordinary welcome. Thank you.

I come to Berlin as so many of my countrymen have come before; although tonight, I speak to you not as a candidate for President, but as a citizen -- a proud citizen of the United States, and a fellow citizen of the world.

I know that I don’t look like the Americans who’ve previously spoken in this great city. The journey that led me here is improbable. My mother was born in the heartland of America, but my father grew up herding goats in Kenya. His father -- His father -- my grandfather -- was a cook, a domestic servant to the British.

At the height of the Cold War, my father decided, like so many others in the forgotten corners of the world, that his yearning -- his dream -- required the freedom and opportunity promised by the West. And so he wrote letter after letter to universities all across America until somebody, somewhere answered his prayer for a better life.

That is why I am here. And you are here because you too know that yearning. This city, of all cities, knows the dream of freedom. And you know that the only reason we stand here tonight is because men and women from both of our nations came together to work, and struggle, and sacrifice for that better life.

Ours is a partnership that truly began 60 years ago this summer, on the day when the first American plane touched down at Tempelhof. On that day -- On that day much of this continent still lay in ruin. The rubble of this city had yet to be built into a wall. The Soviet shadow had swept across Eastern Europe, while in the West, America, Britain, and France took their stock of their losses, and pondered how the world might be remade.

This is where the two sides met. And on the twenty-fourth of June, 1948, the Communists chose to blockade the western part of the city. They cut off food and supplies to more than two million Germans in an effort to extinguish the last flame of freedom in Berlin.

The size of our forces was no match for the larger Soviet Army. And yet retreat would have allowed Communism to march across Europe. Where the last war had ended, another World War could have easily begun. And all that stood in the way was Berlin. And that’s when -- that's when the airlift began, when the largest and most unlikely rescue in the history brought food and hope to the people of this city.

The odds were stacked against success. In the winter, a heavy fog filled the sky above, and many planes were forced to turn back without dropping off the needed supplies. The streets where we stand were filled with hungry families who had no comfort from the cold.

But in the darkest hours, the people of Berlin kept the flame of hope burning. The people of Berlin refused to give up. And on one fall day, hundreds of thousands of Berliners came here, to the Tiergarten, and heard the city’s mayor implore the world not to give up on freedom. “There is only one possibility,” he said. “For us to stand together united until this battle is won…The people of Berlin have spoken. We have done our duty," he said, "and we will keep on doing our duty. People of the world, now do your duty. People of the world, look at Berlin.”

People of the world -- look at Berlin!

Look at Berlin, where Germans and Americans learned to work together and trust each other less than three years after facing each other on the field of battle.

Look at Berlin, where the determination of a people met the generosity of the Marshall Plan and created a German miracle; where a -- where a victory over tyranny gave rise to NATO, the greatest alliance ever formed to defend our common security.

Look at Berlin, where the bullet holes in the buildings and the somber stones and pillars near the Brandenburg Gate insist that we never forget our common humanity.

People of the world -- look at Berlin, where a wall came down, a continent came together, and history proved that there is no challenge too great for a world that stands as one.

Sixty years after the airlift, we are called upon again. History has led us to a new crossroad, with new promise and new peril. When you, the German people, tore down that wall -- a wall that divided East and West; freedom and tyranny; fear and hope -- walls came tumbling down around the world. From Kiev to Cape Town, prison camps were closed, and the doors of democracy were opened. Markets opened too, and the spread of information and technology reduced barriers to opportunity and prosperity. While the 20th century taught us that we share a common destiny, the 21st century has revealed a world more intertwined than at any time in human history.

The fall of the Berlin Wall brought new hope. But that very closeness has given rise to new dangers -- dangers that cannot be contained within the borders of a country or by the distance of an ocean.

Think about it: The terrorists of September 11th plotted in Hamburg and trained in Kandahar and Karachi before killing thousands from all over the globe on American soil. As we speak, cars in Boston and factories in Beijing are melting the ice caps in the Arctic, shrinking coastlines in the Atlantic, and bringing drought to farms from Kansas to Kenya.

Poorly secured nuclear material in the former Soviet Union, or secrets from a scientist in Pakistan could help build a bomb that detonates in Paris. The poppies in Afghanistan come to Berlin in the form of the heroin. The poverty and violence in Somalia breeds the terror of tomorrow. The genocide in Darfur shames the conscience of us all.

In this new world, such dangerous currents have swept along faster than our efforts to contain them. And that is why we cannot afford to be divided. No one nation, no matter how large or powerful, can defeat such challenges alone. None of us can deny these threats, or escape responsi[bility] in meeting them. In the absence of Soviet tanks and a terrible wall, it has become easy to forget this truth. And if we’re honest with each other, we know that sometimes, on both sides of the Atlantic, we have drifted apart, and forgotten our shared destiny.

In Europe, the view that America is part of what has gone wrong in our world, rather than a force to help us make it right, has become all too common. In America, there are voices that deride and deny the importance of Europe’s role in our security and our future. Both views miss the truth: that Europeans today are bearing new burdens and taking more responsibility in critical parts of the world; and that just as American bases built in the last century still help to defend the security of this continent, so does our country still sacrifice greatly for freedom around the globe.

Yes, there have been differences between America and Europe. No doubt, there will be differences in the future. But the burdens of global citizenship continue to bind us together. A change of leadership in Washington will not lift this burden. In this new century, Americans and Europeans alike will be required to do more -- not less. Partnership and cooperation among nations is not a choice; it is the only way, the one way, to protect our common security and advance our common humanity.

That is why the greatest danger of all is to allow new walls to divide us from one another. The walls between old allies on either side of the Atlantic cannot stand. The walls between the countries with the most and those with the least cannot stand. The walls between races and tribes; natives and immigrants; Christians and Muslims and Jews cannot stand. These now are the walls we must tear down.

We know -- We know that these walls have fallen before. After centuries of strife, the people of Europe have formed a Union of promise and prosperity. Here, at the base of a column built to mark victory in war, we meet in the center of a Europe at peace. Not only have walls come down in Berlin, but they've come down in Belfast, where Protestant and Catholic found a way to live together; in the Balkans, where our Atlantic alliance ended wars and brought savage war criminals to justice; and in South Africa, where the struggle of a courageous people defeated apartheid.

So history reminds us that walls can be torn down. But the task is never easy. True partnership and true progress requires constant work and sustained sacrifice. They require sharing the burdens of development and diplomacy; of peace and progress. They require allies who will listen to each other, learn from each other and, most of all, trust each other.

That is why America cannot turn inward. That is why Europe cannot turn inward. America has no better partner than Europe. Now -- Now is the time to build new bridges across the globe as strong as the one that binds us across the Atlantic. Now is the time to join together, through constant cooperation and strong institutions and shared sacrifice and a global commitment to progress, to meet the challenges of the 21st century. It was this spirit that led airlift planes to appear in the sky above our heads, and people to assemble where we stand today. And this is the moment when our nations -- and all nations -- must summon that spirit anew.

This is the moment when we must defeat terror and dry up the well of extremism that supports it. This threat is real and we cannot shrink from our responsibility to combat it. If we could create NATO to face down the Soviet Union, we can join in a new and global partnership to dismantle the networks that have struck in Madrid and Amman; in London and Bali; in Washington and New York. If we could win a battle of ideas against the communists, we can stand with the vast majority of Muslims who reject the extremism that leads to hate instead of hope.

This is the moment when we must renew our resolve to rout the terrorists who threaten our security in Afghanistan, and the traffickers who sell drugs on your streets. No one welcomes war. I recognize the enormous difficulties in Afghanistan. But my country and yours have a stake in seeing that NATO’s first mission beyond Europe’s borders is a success. For the people of Afghanistan, and for our shared security, the work must be done. America can't do this alone. The Afghan people need our troops and your troops; our support and your support to defeat the Taliban and al Qaeda, to develop their economy, and to help them rebuild their nation. We have too much at stake to turn back now.

This -- This is the moment when we must renew the goal of a world without nuclear weapons. The two superpowers that faced each other across the wall of this city came too close too often to destroying all we have built and all that we love. With that wall gone, we need not stand idly by and watch the further spread of the deadly atom. It is time to secure all loose nuclear materials; to stop the spread of nuclear weapons; and to reduce the arsenals from another era. This is the moment to begin the work of seeking the peace of a world without nuclear weapons.

This is the moment when every nation in Europe must have the chance to choose its own tomorrow, free from the shadows of yesterday. In this century, we need a strong European Union that deepens the security and prosperity of this continent, while extending a hand abroad. In this century -- in this city of all cities -- we must reject the Cold War mind-set of the past, and resolve to work with Russia when we can, to stand up for our values when we must, and to seek a partnership that extends across this entire continent.

This is the moment when we must build on the wealth that opens [sic] markets have created, and share its benefits more equitably. Trade has been a cornerstone of our growth and global development. But we will not be able to sustain this growth if it favors the few, and not the many. Together -- Together we must forge trade that truly rewards the work that creates wealth, with meaningful protections for our people and our planet. This is the moment for trade that is free and fair for all.

This is the moment we must help answer the call for a new dawn in the Middle East. My country must stand with yours and with Europe in sending a direct message to Iran that it must abandon its nuclear ambitions. We must support the Lebanese who've marched and bled for democracy, and the Israelis and the Palestinians who seek a secure and lasting peace. And despite -- despite past differences, this is the moment when the world should support the millions of Iraqis who seek to rebuild their lives, even as we pass responsibility to the Iraqi government and finally bring this war to a close.

This -- This is the moment when we must come together to save this planet. Let us resolve that we will not leave our children to a world where the oceans rise and famine spreads and terrible storms devastate our lands. Let us resolve that all nations -- including my own -- will act with the same seriousness of purpose as has your nation, and reduce the carbon we send into our atmosphere. This -- This is the moment to give our children back their future. This is the moment to stand as one.

And this is the moment when we must give hope to those left behind in a globalized world. We must remember that the Cold War born in this city was not a battle for land or treasure. Sixty years ago, the planes that flew over Berlin did not drop bombs; instead they delivered food, and coal, and candy to grateful children. And in that show of solidarity, those pilots won more than a military victory. They won hearts and minds; love and loyalty and trust -- not just from the people in this city, but from all those who heard the story of what they did here.

Now the world will watch and remember what we do here -- what we do with this moment. Will we extend our hand to the people in the forgotten corners of this world who yearn for lives marked by dignity and opportunity, by security and justice? Will we lift the child in Bangladesh from poverty, and shelter the refugee in Chad, and banish the scourge of AIDS in our time?

Will we stand for the human rights of the dissident in Burma, the blogger in Iran, or the voter in Zimbabwe? Will we give meaning to the words “never again” in Darfur?

Will we acknowledge -- Will we acknowledge that there is no more powerful example than the one each of our nations projects to the world? Will we reject torture and stand for the rule of law? Will we -- Will we -- Will we welcome immigrants from different lands, and shun discrimination against those who don’t look like us or worship like we do, and keep the promise of equality and opportunity for all of our people?

People of Berlin -- people of the world -- this is our moment. This is our time.

I know my country has not perfected itself. At times, we’ve struggled to keep the promise of liberty and equality for all of our people. We’ve made our share of mistakes, and there are times when our actions around the world have not lived up to our best intentions.

But I also know how much I love America. I know that for more than two centuries, we have strived -- at great cost and great sacrifice -- to form a more perfect union; to seek, with other nations, a more hopeful world. Our allegiance has never been to any particular tribe or kingdom -- indeed, every language is spoken in our country; every culture has left its imprint on ours; every point of view is expressed in our public squares. What has always united us, what has always driven our people, what drew my father to America’s shores -- is a set of ideals that speak to aspirations shared by all people: that we can live free from fear and free from want; that we can speak our minds and assemble with whomever we choose and worship as we please.

These are the aspiration[s] that join the fates of all nations in this city. These aspirations are bigger than anything that drives us apart. It is because of these aspirations that the airlift began. It is because of these aspirations that all free people -- everywhere -- became citizens of Berlin. It is in pursuit of these aspirations that a new generation -- our generation -- must make our mark on the world.

People of Berlin -- and people of the world -- the scale of our challenge is great. The road ahead will be long. But I come before you to say that we are heirs to a struggle for freedom. We are a people of improbable hope. With an eye toward the future, with resolve in our heart, let us remember this history, and answer our destiny, and remake the world once again.

Thank you, Berlin. God bless you. Thank you. Thank you.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Democratic National Convention Presidential Nomination Acceptance

Thank you so much. Thank you very much. Thank you everybody.

To -- To Chairman Dean, and my great friend, Dick Durbin, and to all my fellow citizens of this great nation, with profound gratitude and great humility -- I accept your nomination for the presidency of the United States.

Let me -- Let me express -- Let me express my thanks to the historic slate of candidates who accompanied on this journey, and especially the one who traveled the farthest, a champion for working Americans and an inspiration to my daughters and yours: Hillary Rodham Clinton.

To President Clinton -- To President Bill Clinton, who made last night the case for change as only he can make it, to Ted Kennedy, who embodies the spirit of service, and to the next Vice President of the United States, Joe Biden, I thank you. I am grateful to finish this journey with one of the finest statesmen of our time, a man at ease with everyone from world leaders to the conductors on the Amtrak train he still takes home every night, to the love of my life -- the next First Lady, Michelle Obama; and to Mahlia and Sasha, I love you so much and I am so proud of you.

Four years ago, I stood before you and told you my story of the brief union between a young man from Kenya and a young woman from Kansas who weren't well-off or well-known, but shared a belief that in America, their son could achieve whatever he put his mind to. It is that promise that's always set this country apart -- that through hard work and sacrifice each of us can pursue our individual dreams but still come together as one American family, to ensure that the next generation can pursue their dreams as well. It's why I stand here tonight. Because for two hundred and thirty two years, at each moment when that promise was in jeopardy, ordinary men and women, students and soldiers, farmers and teachers, nurses and janitors -- found the courage to keep it alive. We meet at one of those defining moments -- a moment when our nation is at war, our economy is in turmoil, and the American promise has been threatened once more. Tonight, more Americans are out of work and more are working harder for less. More of you have lost your homes and even more are watching your home values plummet. More of you have cars you can't afford to drive, credit cards bills [sic] you can't afford to pay and tuition that's beyond your reach These challenges are not all of government's making. But the failure to respond is a direct result of a broken politics in Washington and the failed policies of George W. Bush. America, we are better than these last eight years. We are a better country than this. This country's more decent than one woman in Ohio on the brink of retirement finds herself one disaster after a lifetime of hard work.

We're a better country than one where a man in Indiana has to pack up the equipment that's he's worked on for twenty years and watch as its shipped off to China, and then chokes up as he explains how he felt like a failure when he went home to tell his family the news.

We are more compassionate than a government that lets veterans sleep on our streets, and families slide into poverty; that sits -- that sits on its hands while a major American city drowns before our eyes.

Tonight -- Tonight I say to the people of America, to Democrats and Republicans and Independents across this great land: Enough! This moment -- This moment -- this election is our chance to keep, in the 21st century, the American promise alive. Because next week, in Minnesota, the same Party that brought you two terms of George Bush and Dick Cheney will ask this country for a third. And we are here -- we are here because we love this country too much to let the next four years look just like the last eight. On November 4th -- On November 4th, we must stand up and say: "Eight is enough." Now -- Now let me -- let -- let there be no doubt: The Republican nominee, John McCain, has worn the uniform of our country with bravery and distinction, and for that we owe him our gratitude and our respect. And next week, we'll also hear about those occasions when he's broken with his Party as evidence that he can deliver the change that we need. But the record's clear: John McCain has voted with George Bush ninety percent of the time. Senator McCain likes to talk about judgment, but really, what does it say about your judgment when you think George Bush has been right more than ninety percent of the time? I -- I don't know about you, but I'm not ready to take a ten percent chance on change.

The truth is on issue after issue that would make a difference in your lives -- on health care and education and the economy, Senator McCain has been anything but independent. He says that our economy has made great progress under this President. He said that the fundamentals of the economy are strong. And when one of his chief advisors -- the man who wrote his economic plan -- was talking about the anxieties that Americans are feeling, he said that we were just suffering from a mental recession, and that we've become -- and I quote -- "a nation of whiners."

A nation of whiners.

Tell that to the proud autoworkers at a Michigan plant who, after they found out it was closing, kept showing up everyday and working as hard as ever because they knew there were people who counted on the brakes that they made. Tell that to the military families who shoulder their burden silently as they watch their loved ones leave for there third or fourth or fifth tour of duty.

These are not whiners. They work hard and they give back and they keep going without complaint. These are the Americans I know.

Now, I don't believe that Senator McCain doesn't care what's going on in the lives of Americans. I just think he doesn't know. Why else would he define "middle-class" as someone making under five million dollars a year? How else could he propose hundreds of billions in tax breaks for big corporations and oil companies but not one penny of tax relief to more than one hundred million Americans?

How else could he offer a health care plan that would actually tax people's benefits, or an education plan that would do nothing to help families pay for college, or a plan that would privatize Social Security and gamble your retirement?

It's not because John McCain doesn't care; it's because John McCain doesn't get it. For over two decades -- For over two decades, he's subscribed to that old, discredited Republican philosophy: Give more and more to those with the most and hope that prosperity trickles down to everyone else.

In Washington, they call this the "Ownership Society," but what it really means is that you're on your own. Out of work? Tough luck, you're on your own. No health care? The market will fix it. You're on your own. Born into poverty? Pull yourself up by your own bootstraps, even if you don't have boots. You are on your own. Well, it's time for them to own their failure. It's time for us to change America. And that's why I'm running for President of the United States.

You see -- You see, we Democrats have a very different measure of what constitutes progress in this country. We measure progress by how many people can find a job that pays the mortgage, whether you can put a little extra money away at the end of each month so you can someday watch your child receive her college diploma. We measure progress in the 23 million new jobs that were created when Bill Clinton was President, when the average American family saw its income go up 7,500 dollars instead of go down 2,000 dollars, like it has under George Bush.

We measure the strength of our economy not by the number of billionaires we have or the profits of the Fortune 500, but by whether someone with a good idea can take a risk and start a new business, or whether the waitress who lives on tips can take a day off and look after a sick kid without losing her job, an economy that honors the dignity of work.

The fundamentals we use to measure economic strength are whether we are living up to that fundamental promise that has made this country great, a promise that is the only reason I am standing here tonight.

Because, in the faces of those young veterans who come back from Iraq and Afghanistan, I see my grandfather, who signed up after Pearl Harbor, marched in Patton's army, and was rewarded by a grateful nation with the chance to go to college on the G.I. Bill.

In the face of that young student, who sleeps just three hours before working the night shift, I think about my mom, who raised my sister and me on her own while she worked and earned her degree, who once turned to food stamps, but was still able to send us to the best schools in the country with the help of student loans and scholarships.

When I -- When I listen to another worker tell me that his factory has shut down, I remember all those men and women on the South Side of Chicago who I stood by and fought for two decades ago after the local steel plant closed.

And when I hear a woman talk about the difficulties of starting her own business or making her way in the world, I think about my grandmother, who worked her way up from the secretarial pool to middle management, despite years of being passed over for promotions because she was a woman. She's the one who taught me about hard work. She's the one who put off buying a new car or a new dress for herself so that I could have a better life. She poured everything she had into me. And although she can no longer travel, I know that she's watching tonight and that tonight is her night, as well.

Now -- Now , I don't know what kind of lives John McCain thinks that celebrities lead, but this has been mine. These are my heroes; theirs are the stories that shaped my life. And it is on behalf of them that I intend to win this election and keep our promise alive as President of the United States.

What -- What is that American promise? It's a promise that says each of us has the freedom to make of our own lives what we will, but that we also have obligations to treat each other with dignity and respect.

It's a promise that says the market should reward drive and innovation and generate growth, but that businesses should live up to their responsibilities to create American jobs, to look out for American workers, and play by the rules of the road.

Ours -- Ours is a promise that says government cannot solve all our problems, but what it should do is that which we cannot do for ourselves: protect us from harm and provide every child a decent education; keep our water clean and our toys safe; invest in new schools, and new roads, and science, and technology.

Our government should work for us, not against us. It should help us, not hurt us. It should ensure opportunity not just for those with the most money and influence, but for every American who's willing to work.

That's the promise of America, the idea that we are responsible for ourselves, but that we also rise or fall as one nation, the fundamental belief that I am my brother's keeper, I am my sister's keeper.

That's the promise we need to keep. That's the change we need right now.

So -- So let me -- let me spell out exactly what that change would mean if I am President. Change means a tax code that doesn't reward the lobbyists who wrote it, but the American workers and small businesses who deserve it. You know, unlike John McCain, I will stop giving tax breaks to companies that ship jobs overseas, and I will start giving them to companies that create good jobs right here in America. I'll eliminate capital gains taxes for the small businesses and start-ups that will create the high-wage, high-tech jobs of tomorrow. I will -- listen now -- I will cut taxes -- cut taxes -- for 95 percent of all working families, because, in an economy like this, the last thing we should do is raise taxes on the middle class. And for the sake of our economy, our security, and the future of our planet, I will set a clear goal as President: In 10 years, we will finally end our dependence on oil from the Middle East.

We will do this.

Washington -- Washington has been talking about our oil addiction for the last 30 years. And, by the way, John McCain has been there for 26 of them. And in that time, he has said no to higher fuel-efficiency standards for cars, no to investment in renewable energy, no to renewable fuels. And today, we import triple the amount of oil than we had on the day that Senator McCain took office. Now is the time to end this addiction and to understand that drilling is a stop-gap measure, not a long-term solution, not even close.

As President -- As President, I will tap our natural gas reserves, invest in clean coal technology, and find ways to safely harness nuclear power. I'll help our auto companies re-tool, so that the fuel-efficient cars of the future are built right here in America. I'll make it easier for the American people to afford these new cars. And I'll invest 150 billion dollars over the next decade in affordable, renewable sources of energy -- wind power, and solar power, and the next generation of biofuels -- an investment that will lead to new industries and five million new jobs that pay well and can't be outsourced.

America, now is not the time for small plans. Now is the time to finally meet our moral obligation to provide every child a world-class education, because it will take nothing less to compete in the global economy.

You know, Michelle and I are only here tonight because we were given a chance at an education. And I will not settle for an America where some kids don't have that chance. I'll invest in early childhood education. I'll recruit an army of new teachers, and pay them higher salaries, and give them more support. And in exchange, I'll ask for higher standards and more accountability. And we will keep our promise to every young American: If you commit to serving your community or our country, we will make sure you can afford a college education.

Now -- Now is the time to finally keep the promise of affordable, accessible health care for every single American. If you have health care -- If you have health care, my plan will lower your premiums. If you don't, you'll be able to get the same kind of coverage that members of Congress give themselves. And -- And as someone who watched my mother argue with insurance companies while she lay in bed dying of cancer, I will make certain those companies stop discriminating against those who are sick and need care the most.

Now is the time to help families with paid sick days and better family leave, because nobody in America should have to choose between keeping their job and caring for a sick child or an ailing parent.

Now is the time to change our bankruptcy laws, so that your pensions are protected ahead of CEO bonuses, and the time to protect Social Security for future generations.

And now is the time to keep the promise of equal pay for an equal day's work, because I want my daughters to have the exact same opportunities as your sons.

Now, many of these plans will cost money, which is why I've laid out how I'll pay for every dime: by closing corporate loopholes and tax havens that don't help America grow. But I will also go through the federal budget line by line, eliminating programs that no longer work and making the ones we do need work better and cost less, because we cannot meet 21st-century challenges with a 20th-century bureaucracy.

And, Democrats -- Democrats, we must also admit that fulfilling America's promise will require more than just money. It will require a renewed sense of responsibility from each of us to recover what John F. Kennedy called our intellectual and moral strength. Yes, government must lead on energy independence, but each of us must do our part to make our homes and businesses more efficient. Yes, we must provide more ladders to success for young men who fall into lives of crime and despair. But we must also admit that programs alone can't replace parents, that government can't turn off the television and make a child do her homework, that fathers must take more responsibility to provide love and guidance to their children. Individual responsibility and mutual responsibility, that's the essence of America's promise. And just as we keep our promise to the next generation here at home, so must we keep America's promise abroad.

If John McCain wants to have a debate about who has the temperament and judgment to serve as the next Commander-in-Chief, that's a debate I'm ready to have.

For -- For while -- while Senator McCain was turning his sights to Iraq just days after 9/11, I stood up and opposed this war, knowing that it would distract us from the real threats that we face. When John McCain said we could just muddle through in Afghanistan, I argued for more resources and more troops to finish the fight against the terrorists who actually attacked us on 9/11, and made clear that we must take out Osama bin Laden and his lieutenants if we have them in our sights. You know, John McCain likes to say that he'll follow bin Laden to the gates of Hell, but he won't even follow him to the cave where he lives. And today -- today, as my call for a timeframe to remove our troops from Iraq has been echoed by the Iraqi government and even the Bush Administration, even after we learned that Iraq has 79 billion dollars in surplus while we are wallowing in deficit, John McCain stands alone in his stubborn refusal to end a misguided war.

That's not the judgment we need; that won't keep America safe. We need a President who can face the threats of the future, not keep grasping at the ideas of the past. You don't defeat -- You don't defeat a terrorist network that operates in 80 countries by occupying Iraq. You don't protect Israel and deter Iran just by talking tough in Washington. You can't truly stand up for Georgia when you've strained our oldest alliances. If John McCain wants to follow George Bush with more tough talk and bad strategy, that is his choice, but that is not the change that America needs.

We are the Party of Roosevelt. We are the Party of Kennedy. So don't tell me that Democrats won't defend this country. Don't tell me that Democrats won't keep us safe.

The Bush-McCain foreign policy has squandered the legacy that generations of Americans, Democrats and Republicans, have built, and we are here to restore that legacy.

As Commander-in-Chief, I will never hesitate to defend this nation, but I will only send our troops into harm's way with a clear mission and a sacred commitment to give them the equipment they need in battle and the care and benefits they deserve when they come home. I will end this war in Iraq responsibly and finish the fight against Al Qaida and the Taliban in Afghanistan. I will rebuild our military to meet future conflicts, but I will also renew the tough, direct diplomacy that can prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons and curb Russian aggression. I will build new partnerships to defeat the threats of the 21st century: terrorism and nuclear proliferation, poverty and genocide, climate change and disease. And I will restore our moral standing so that America is once again that last, best hope for all who are called to the cause of freedom, who long for lives of peace, and who yearn for a better future.

These -- These are the policies I will pursue. And in the weeks ahead, I look forward to debating them with John McCain.

But what I will not do is suggest that the senator takes his positions for political purposes, because one of the things that we have to change in our politics is the idea that people cannot disagree without challenging each other's character and each other's patriotism. The times are too serious; the stakes are too high for this same partisan playbook. So let us agree that patriotism has no Party. I love this country, and so do you, and so does John McCain. The men and women who serve in our battlefields may be Democrats and Republicans and independents, but they have fought together, and bled together, and some died together under the same proud flag. They have not served a red America or a blue America; they have served the United States of America. So I've got news for you, John McCain: We all put our country first.

America, our work will not be easy. The challenges we face require tough choices. And Democrats, as well as Republicans, will need to cast off the worn-out ideas and politics of the past, for part of what has been lost these past eight years can't just be measured by lost wages or bigger trade deficits. What has also been lost is our sense of common purpose, and that's what we have to restore.

We may not agree on abortion, but surely we can agree on reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies in this country.

The -- The reality of gun ownership may be different for hunters in rural Ohio than they are for those plagued by gang violence in Cleveland, but don't tell me we can't uphold the Second Amendment while keeping AK-47s out of the hands of criminals.

I know there are differences on same-sex marriage, but surely we can agree that our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters deserve to visit the person they love in a hospital and to live lives free of discrimination.

You know, passions may fly on immigration, but I don't know anyone who benefits when a mother is separated from her infant child or an employer undercuts American wages by hiring illegal workers.

But this, too, is part of America's promise, the promise of a democracy where we can find the strength and grace to bridge divides and unite in common effort.

I know there are those who dismiss such beliefs as happy talk. They claim that our insistence on something larger, something firmer, and more honest in our public life is just a Trojan Horse for higher taxes and the abandonment of traditional values. And that's to be expected, because if you don't have any fresh ideas, then you use stale tactics to scare voters. If you don't have a record to run on, then you paint your opponent as someone people should run from. You make a big election about small things. And you know what? It's worked before, because it feeds into the cynicism we all have about government. When Washington doesn't work, all its promises seem empty. If your hopes have been dashed again and again, then it's best to stop hoping and settle for what you already know.

I get it. I realize that I am not the likeliest candidate for this office. I don't fit the typical pedigree, and I haven't spent my career in the halls of Washington. But I stand before you tonight because all across America something is stirring. What the naysayers don't understand is that this election has never been about me; it's about you.

It's about you. For 18 long months, you have stood up, one by one, and said, "Enough," to the politics of the past. You understand that, in this election, the greatest risk we can take is to try the same, old politics with the same, old players and expect a different result. You have shown what history teaches us, that at defining moments like this one, the change we need doesn't come from Washington. Change comes to Washington. Change happens -- Change happens because the American people demand it, because they rise up and insist on new ideas and new leadership, a new politics for a new time.

America, this is one of those moments.

I believe that, as hard as it will be, the change we need is coming, because I've seen it, because I've lived it. Because I've seen it in Illinois, when we provided health care to more children and moved more families from welfare to work. I've seen it in Washington, where we worked across party lines to open up government and hold lobbyists more accountable, to give better care for our veterans, and keep nuclear weapons out of the hands of terrorists.

And I've seen it in this campaign, in the young people who voted for the first time and the young at heart, those who got involved again after a very long time; in the Republicans who never thought they'd pick up a Democratic ballot, but did.

I've seen it -- I've seen it in the workers who would rather cut their hours back a day, even though they can't afford it, than see their friends lose their jobs; in the soldiers who re-enlist after losing a limb; in the good neighbors who take a stranger in when a hurricane strikes and the floodwaters rise.

You know, this country of ours has more wealth than any nation, but that's not what makes us rich. We have the most powerful military on Earth, but that's not what makes us strong. Our universities and our culture are the envy of the world, but that's not what keeps the world coming to our shores.

Instead, it is that American spirit, that American promise, that pushes us forward even when the path is uncertain; that binds us together in spite of our differences; that makes us fix our eye not on what is seen, but what is unseen, that better place around the bend.

That promise is our greatest inheritance. It's a promise I make to my daughters when I tuck them in at night and a promise that you make to yours, a promise that has led immigrants to cross oceans and pioneers to travel west, a promise that led workers to picket lines and women to reach for the ballot.

And it is that promise that, 45 years ago today, brought Americans from every corner of this land to stand together on a Mall in Washington, before Lincoln's Memorial, and hear a young preacher from Georgia speak of his Dream.

The men and women who gathered there could've heard many things. They could've heard words of anger and discord. They could've been told to succumb to the fear and frustrations of so many dreams deferred. But what the people heard instead -- people of every creed and color, from every walk of life -- is that, in America, our destiny is inextricably linked, that together our dreams can be one. "We cannot walk alone," the preacher cried. "And as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead. We cannot turn back."

America, we cannot turn back, not with so much work to be done; not with so many children to educate, and so many veterans to care for; not with an economy to fix, and cities to rebuild, and farms to save; not with so many families to protect and so many lives to mend.

America, we cannot turn back. We cannot walk alone.

At this moment, in this election, we must pledge once more to march into the future. Let us keep that promise, that American promise, and in the words of Scripture hold firmly, without wavering, to the hope that we confess.

Thank you. God bless you. And God bless the United States of America.

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# Senate Floor Speech in Support of the Wall Street Bailout Bill

Thank you very much, Madam President. And thank you to the distinguished Senator from Connecticut not only for yielding time, but also for the extraordinarily hard work that he's put in over the last several days and, in fact, over a -- a week. And I want to thank his counterparts on the other side, including Senator Gregg, for their hard work.

Now, the fact that we're even here voting on a plan to rescue our economy from the greed and irresponsibility of Wall Street and some in Washington is an outrage. It's an outrage to every American who works hard, pays their taxes, is doing their best every day to make a better life for themselves and their families. And understandably, people are frustrated and they're angry that Wall Street's mistakes have put their tax dollars at risk. And they should be. I'm frustrated and angry, too.

But while there's plenty of blame to go around -- and many in Washington and Wall Street who deserve it, all of us -- all of us have a responsibility to solve this crisis, because it affects the financial well-being of every single American. There will be time to punish those who set this fire, but now is not the time to argue about how it got set, or did the neighbor sleep in his bed, or leave the stove on. Right now we want to put out that fire; and now's the time for us to come together and do that.

When the House of Representatives failed to act on Monday, we saw the single largest decline in the stock market in two decades. Over one trillion dollars of wealth was lost by the time the markets closed. And it wasn't just the wealth of a few CEOs or Wall Street executives. The 401(k)s and retirement accounts of millions became smaller. The state pension funds of teachers and government employees lost billions upon billions of dollars. Hard-working Americans who invested their nest egg to watch it grow saw it diminish and in some cases disappear.

And while that decline was devastating, the consequences of the credit crisis that caused it will be even worse if we do not act now. We're in a very dangerous situation, where financial institutions across this country are afraid to lend money. And if all that meant was the failure of a few banks in New York, that would be one thing. But that's not what it means. What it means is, if we don't act, it will be harder for Americans to get a mortgage for their home or loans they need to buy a car or send their children to college.

What it means is that businesses won't be able to get the loans they need to open a new factory or make payroll for their workers. And if they can't make payroll on Friday, then workers are laid off on Monday. And if workers are laid off on Monday, then they can't pay their bills or pay back their loans to somebody else. And it will go on and on and on, rippling through the entire economy. And potentially we could see thousands of businesses close, millions of jobs could be lost, and a long and painful recession could follow. In other words, this is not just a Wall Street crisis; it's an American crisis. And it's the American economy that needs this rescue plan.

I understand completely why people would be skeptical when this President asks for a blank check to solve this problem. I was, too, as was Senator Dodd and a whole bunch of us here. And that's why, over a week ago, I demanded that this plan include some specific proposals to protect taxpayers, protections that the Administration eventually agreed to, and, thanks to the hard work of Senator Dodd and Republican counterparts like Senator Gregg, we here in the Senate have agreed to, and now hopefully the House will agree to, as well.

Let me just go over those principles:

Number one, I said we needed an independent board to provide oversight and accountability for how and where this money is spent at every step of the way.

Number two, I said that we cannot help banks on Wall Street without helping the millions of innocent homeowners who are struggling to stay in their homes. They deserve a plan, too.

Number three, I said that I would not allow this plan to become a welfare program for Wall Street executives, whose greed and irresponsibility got us into this mess.

And, finally, I said that, if American taxpayers are financing this solution, then they have to be treated like investors. They should get every penny of their tax dollars back once the economy recovers.

Now, this last part is important, because it's been the most misunderstood and poorly communicated part of this plan. This is not a plan to just hand over 700 billion dollars of taxpayer money to a few banks. If this is managed correctly -- and that's an important "if" -- we will hopefully get most or all of our money back and possibly even turn a profit on the government's intervention, every penny of which will go directly back to the American people. And if we fall short, we will levy a fee on financial institutions so that they can repay for the losses that they caused.

Now, let me -- let's acknowledge, even with all these taxpayer protections, this plan is not perfect. Democrats and Republicans in Congress have legitimate concerns about it. Some of my closest colleagues, people I have the greatest respect for, still have problems with it and may choose to vote against this bill, and I think that we can respectfully disagree. I understand their frustrations.

I also know that many -- many Americans share their concerns. But it's clear that, from my perspective, this is what we need to do right now to prevent the possibility of a crisis turning into a catastrophe. It is conceivable -- it's possible that if we did nothing everything would turn out okay. It's -- There -- There's a possibility that that's true. And there's no doubt that there may be other plans out there that, had we had two or three or six months to develop, might be even more refined and might serve our purposes better.

But we don't have that kind of time. And we can't afford to take a risk that the economy of the United States of America and, as a consequence, the worldwide economy could be plunged into a very, very deep hole. So to Democrats and Republicans who've opposed this plan, I say: Step up to the plate. Let's do what's right for the country at this time, because the time to act is now.

I know many Americans are wondering what happens next. And passing this bill can't be the end of our work to strengthen our economy; it must be the beginning. Because one thing I -- I think all of us who may end up supporting this bill understand is that, even if we get this in place, we could still have enormous problems and probably will have big problems in the economy over the next several months and potentially longer; because the fact is, is that we have seen some mismanagement of the fundamentals of the economy for a very long time, and we are not going to dig ourselves out of that hole immediately.

So this is not the end. This is the beginning. As soon as we pass this rescue plan, we need to move aggressively with the same sense of urgency to rescue families on Main Street who are struggling to pay their bills and keep their jobs. They've been in crisis a lot longer than Wall Street has.

I've said it before and I say it again: We need to pass an economic stimulus package that will help ordinary Americans cope with rising food and gas prices, that can save one million jobs rebuilding our schools, and roads, and our infrastructure, and help states and cities avoid budget cuts and tax increase[s], a -- a plan that would extend expiring unemployment benefits for those Americans who've lost their jobs and cannot find new ones. That's the right thing to do at a time when consumer confidence is down and we are in great danger of slipping into a big recession.

We also must do more in this rescue package in order to help homeowners stay in their homes. I will continue to advocate bankruptcy reforms. I know my colleague from Illinois, Dick Durbin, has been a strong champion of this, as have many. It is the right thing to do to change our bankruptcy laws so that people have a better chance of staying in their homes and we're not seeing communities devastated all across the country. And we should encourage Treasury to study the option of buying individual mortgages, like we did successfully in the 1930s.

And finally, while we all hope that this rescue package succeeds, we should be prepared to take more vigorous actions in the months ahead to rebuild capital, if it's necessary.

Now, just as families are planning for their future in tough times, Washington's going to have to do the same. Runaway spending and record deficits are not how families run their budgets. It can't be how Washington handles people's tax dollars. So we're going to have to return to the fiscal responsibility we had in the 1990s. And the next White House and the next Congress is going to have to work together to make sure that we go through our budget, we get rid of programs that don't work, that we make the ones that do work better and cost less. With less money flowing into the Treasury, some useful programs or policies might need to be delayed. And some might be -- need to be stretched out over a longer period of time.

But there are certain investments in our future that we cannot delay, precisely because our economy is in turmoil.

Mr. President, I've exceeded the time a little bit. I would like unanimous consent for a couple more minutes.

Senate President: Is there objection? Seeing no objection --

Senator Obama: Thank you.

There are certain investments in our future that we can't delay precisely be -- because the economy's in turmoil. We can't wait to help Americans keep up with rising costs and shrinking paychecks, and we're going to do that by making sure that we are giving our workers a middle-class tax cut.

We can't wait to relieve the burden of crushing health care costs. We can't wait to create millions of new jobs by rebuilding our roads and our bridges, and investing in broadband lines in rural communities, and fixing our electricity grid so we can get renewable energy to population centers that need them. And we need to develop an energy policy that prevents us from sending 700 billion dollars a year to tyrants and dictators for their oil. We can't wait to educate the next generation of Americans with the skills and knowledge they need to compete with any workers anywhere in the world. These are the priorities we cannot delay.

Now, let me just close by saying this: I do not think this is going to be easy. It's not going to come without costs. We are all going to need to sacrifice. We're all going to need to pull our weight, because now, more than ever, we are all in this together. That's part of what this crisis has taught us -- that in the end of the day, there's no real separation between Wall Street and Main Street. There's only the road we're traveling on as Americans. And we will rise or fall on that journey as one nation and as one people.

I know that many Americans are feeling anxiety right now about their jobs, about their homes, about their life savings. But I also know this, that we can steer ourselves out of this crisis. We are -- always have. During the great financial crisis of the last century, in his first fireside chat, FDR told his fellow Americans that,

There is an element in the re-adjustment of our financial system more important than currency, more important than gold, and that is the confidence of the people themselves. Confidence and courage are the essentials of success in carrying out our plan.

Let us unite in banishing fear. Together we cannot fail. We cannot fail, not now, not tomorrow, not next year.

This is a nation that's faced down war and depression, great challenges and great threats. And at each and every moment, we have risen to meet up these challenges, not as Democrats, not as Republicans, but as Americans, with resolve and with confidence, with that fundamental belief that, here in America, our destiny is not written for us, it's written by us. And that's who we are. And that's the country I know we can be right now.

I want to thank again the extraordinary leadership of Chairman Dodd and Banking -- the Banking Committee, as well as Chairman Baucus and Majority Leader Reid. They have worked tirelessly. I want to thank the leadership in the House of Representatives.

I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this important legislation, understanding that this will not solve all our problems. It is a necessary but not sufficient step to make sure that this economy once again works on behalf of all Americans in their pursuit of the American dream.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor.

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# President-Elect Victory Speech

Hello, Chicago.

If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible; who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time; who still questions the power of our democracy: Tonight is your answer. It's the answer told by lines that stretched around schools and churches in numbers this nation has never seen; by people who waited three hours and four hours, many for the very first time in their lives, because they believed that this time must be different; that their voices could be that difference. It's the answer spoken by young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, gay, straight, disabled and not disabled -- Americans who sent a message to the world that we have never been just a collection of individuals or a collection of Red States and Blue States: we are, and always will be, the United States of America! It's the answer that -- that led those who have been told for so long by so many to be cynical, and fearful, and doubtful about what we can achieve to put their hands on the arc of history and bend it once more toward the hope of a better day.

It's been a long time coming, but tonight, because of what we did on this day, in this election, at this defining moment, change has come to America.

A little bit earlier this evening, I received an extraordinarily gracious call from Senator McCain. Senator McCain fought long and hard in this campaign, and he's fought even longer and harder for the country that he loves. He has endured sacrifices for America that most of us cannot begin to imagine. We are better off for the service rendered by this brave and selfless leader. I congratulate him; I congratulate Governor Palin for all that they've achieved, and I look forward to working with them to renew this nation's promise in the months ahead. I want to thank my partner in this journey, a man who campaigned from his heart and spoke for the men and women he grew up with on the streets of Scranton and rode with on the train home to Delaware, the Vice President-elect of the United States, Joe Biden. And I would not be standing here tonight without the unyielding support of my best friend for the last 16 years, the rock of our family, the love of my life, the nation's next First Lady: Michelle Obama. Sasha and Malia, I love you both more than you can imagine, and you have earned the new puppy that's coming with us to the White House. And while she's no longer with us, I know my grandmother's watching, along with the family that made me who I am. I miss them tonight, and I know that my debt to them is beyond measure. To my sister Maya, my sister Alma, all my other brothers and sisters -- thank you so much for the support that you've given me. I am grateful to them.

And to my campaign manager, David Plouffe -- the unsung hero of this campaign, who built the best -- the best political campaign, I think, in the history of the United States of America. To my chief strategist David Axelrod -- who's been a partner with me every step of the way. To the best campaign team ever assembled in the history of politics -- you made this happen, and I am forever grateful for what you've sacrificed to get it done.

But above all, I will never forget who this victory truly belongs to. It belongs to you. It belongs to you. I was never the likeliest candidate for this office. We didn't start with much money or many endorsements. Our campaign was not hatched in the halls of Washington. It began in the backyards of Des Moines and the living rooms of Concord and the front porches of Charleston. It was built by working men and women who dug into what little savings they had to give 5 dollars and 10 dollars and 20 dollars to the cause. It grew strength from the young people who rejected the myth of their generation's apathy, who left their homes and their families for jobs that offered little pay and less sleep. It drew strength from the not-so-young people who braved the bitter cold and scorching heat to knock on doors of perfect strangers, and from the millions of Americans who volunteered and organized and proved that more than two centuries later a government of the people, by the people, and for the people has not perished from the Earth. This is your victory.

And I know you didn't do this just to win an election. And I know you didn't do it for me. You did it because you understand the enormity of the task that lies ahead. For even as we celebrate tonight, we know the challenges that tomorrow will bring are the greatest of our lifetime: two wars, a planet in peril, the worst financial crisis in a century. Even as we stand here tonight, we know there are brave Americans waking up in the deserts of Iraq and the mountains of Afghanistan to risk their lives for us. There are mothers and fathers who will lie awake after the children fall asleep and wonder how they'll make the mortgage or pay their doctors' bills or save enough for their child's college education. There's new energy to harness, new jobs to be created, new schools to build, and threats to meet, alliances to repair.

The road ahead will be long. Our climb will be steep. We may not get there in one year or even in one term. But, America, I have never been more hopeful than I am tonight that we will get there. I promise you, we as a people will get there.

There will be setbacks and false starts. There are many who won't agree with every decision or policy I make as President. And we know the government can't solve every problem. But I will always be honest with you about the challenges we face. I will listen to you, especially when we disagree. And, above all, I will ask you to join in the work of remaking this nation, the only way it's been done in America for 221 years -- block by block, brick by brick, calloused hand by calloused hand. What began 21 months ago in the depths of winter cannot end on this autumn night.

This victory alone is not the change we seek. It is only the chance for us to make that change. And that cannot happen if we go back to the way things were. It can't happen without you, without a new spirit of service, a new spirit of sacrifice. So let us summon a new spirit of patriotism, of responsibility, where each of us resolves to pitch in and work harder and look after not only ourselves but each other. Let us remember that, if this financial crisis taught us anything, it's that we cannot have a thriving Wall Street while Main Street suffers. In this country, we rise or fall as one nation, as one people. Let's resist the temptation to fall back on the same partisanship and pettiness and immaturity that has poisoned our politics for so long.

Let's remember that it was a man from this state who first carried the banner of the Republican Party to the White House, a Party founded on the values of self-reliance and individual liberty and national unity. Those are values that we all share. And while the Democratic Party has won a great victory tonight, we do so with a measure of humility and determination to heal the divides that have held back our progress. As Lincoln said to a nation far more divided than ours: "We are not enemies but friends...." "Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection."

¹

And to those Americans who -- whose support I have yet to earn, I may not have won your vote tonight, but I hear your voices. I need your help. And I will be your President, too.

And to all those watching tonight from beyond our shores, from parliaments and palaces, to those who are huddled around radios in the forgotten corners of the world, our stories are singular, but our destiny is shared, and a new dawn of American leadership is at hand.

To those -- To those who would tear the world down: We will defeat you. To those who seek peace and security: We support you. And to all those who have wondered if America's beacon still burns as bright: Tonight we've proved once more that the true strength of our nation comes not from the might of our arms or the scale of our wealth, but from the enduring power of our ideals: democracy, liberty, opportunity, and unyielding hope.

That's the true genius of America: that America can change. Our union can be perfected. What we've already achieved gives us hope for what we can and must achieve tomorrow.

This election had many firsts and many stories that will be told for generations. But one that's on my mind tonight's about a woman who cast her ballot in Atlanta. She's a lot like the millions of others who stood in line to make their voice heard in this election except for one thing: Ann Nixon Cooper is 106 years old.

She was born just a generation past slavery; a time when there were no cars on the road or planes in the sky; when someone like her couldn't vote for two reasons: because she was a woman and because of the color of her skin.

And tonight, I think about all that she's seen throughout her century in America -- the heartache and the hope; the struggle and the progress; the times we were told that we can't, and the people who pressed on with that American creed: Yes we can.

At a time when women's voices were silenced and their hopes dismissed, she lived to see them stand up and speak out and reach for the ballot: Yes we can.

When there was despair in the dust bowl and depression across the land, she saw a nation conquer fear itself with a New Deal, new jobs, a new sense of common purpose: Yes we can.

When the bombs fell on our harbor and tyranny threatened the world, she was there to witness a generation rise to greatness and a democracy was saved: Yes we can.

She was there for the buses in Montgomery, the hoses in Birmingham, a bridge in Selma, and a preacher from Atlanta who told a people that "we shall overcome": Yes we can.

A man touched down on the moon, a wall came down in Berlin, a world was connected by our own science and imagination.

And this year, in this election, she touched her finger to a screen, and cast her vote, because after 106 years in America, through the best of times and the darkest of hours, she knows how America can change: Yes we can.

America, we have come so far. We have seen so much. But there is so much more to do. So tonight, let us ask ourselves -- if our children should live to see the next century; if my daughters should be so lucky to live as long as Ann Nixon Cooper, what change will they see? What progress will we have made?

This is our chance to answer that call. This is our moment. This is our time, to put our people back to work and open doors of opportunity for our kids; to restore prosperity and promote the cause of peace; to reclaim the American dream and reaffirm that fundamental truth, that, out of many, we are one;² that while we breathe, we hope. And where we are met with cynicism and doubt and those who tell us that we can't, we will respond with that timeless creed that sums up the spirit of a people: Yes, we can.

Thank you.

God bless you.

And may God bless the United States of America.

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²

# Opening Remarks During First Press Conference as President-Elect

This morning we woke up to more sobering news about the state of our economy. The 240,000 jobs lost in October marks the 10th consecutive month that our economy has shed jobs. In total, we've lost nearly 1.2 million jobs this year, and more than 10 million Americans are now unemployed. Tens of millions of families are struggling to figure out how to pay the bills and stay in their homes. Their stories are an urgent reminder that we are facing the greatest economic challenge of our lifetime, and we're going to have to act swiftly to resolve it.

Now, the United States has only one government and one President at a time, and until January 20th of next year, that government is the current Administration. I've spoken to President Bush. I appreciate his commitment to ensuring that his economic policy team keeps us fully informed as developments unfold. And I'm also thankful for his invitation to the White House.

Immediately after I become President, I'm going to confront this economic crisis head-on by taking all necessary steps to ease the credit crisis, help hardworking families, and restore growth and prosperity.

This morning I met with members of my Transition Economic Advisory Board, who are standing behind me, alongside my Vice President-elect, Joe Biden. They will help to guide the work of my transition team, working with Rahm Emanuel, my Chief of Staff, in developing a strong set of policies to respond to this crisis. We discussed in the earlier meeting several of the most immediate challenges facing our economy and key priorities on which to focus on in the days and weeks ahead.

First of all, we need a rescue plan for the middle class that invests in immediate efforts to create jobs and provide relief to families that are watching their paychecks shrink and their life savings disappear. A particularly urgent priority is a further extension of -- of unemployment insurance benefits for workers who cannot find work in the increasingly weak economy. A fiscal stimulus plan that will jump-start economic growth is long overdue. I've talked about it throughout this -- the last few months of the campaign. We should get it done.

Second, we have to address the spreading impact of the financial crisis on the other sectors of our economy -- small businesses that are struggling to meet their payrolls and finance their holiday inventories, and state and municipal governments facing devastating budget cuts and tax increases. We must also remember that the financial crisis is increasingly global and requires a global response.

The news coming out of the auto industry this week reminds us of the hardship it faces -- hardship that goes far beyond individual auto companies to the countless suppliers, small businesses, and communities throughout our nation who depend on a vibrant American auto industry. The auto industry is the backbone of American manufacturing and a critical part of our attempt to reduce our dependence on foreign oil.

I would like to see the Administration do everything it can to accelerate the retooling assistance that Congress has already enacted. In addition, I have made it a high priority for my transition team to work on additional policy options to help the auto industry adjust, weather the financial crisis, and succeed in producing fuel-efficient cars here in the United States of America. And I was glad to be joined today by Governor Jennifer Granholm, who obviously has great knowledge and great interest on this issue. I've asked my team to explore what we can do under current law and whether additional legislation will be needed for this purpose.

Third, we will review the implementation of this Administration's financial program to ensure that the government's efforts are achieving their central goal of stabilizing financial markets while protecting taxpayers, helping homeowners, and not unduly rewarding the management of financial firms that are receiving government assistance. It is absolutely critical that the Treasury work closely with the FDIC, HUD, and other government agencies to use the substantial authority that they already have to help families avoid foreclosure and stay in their homes.

Finally, as we monitor and address these immediate economic challenges, we will be moving forward in laying out a set of policies that will grow our middle class and strengthen our economy in the long term. We cannot afford to wait on moving forward on the key priorities that I identified during the campaign, including clean energy, health care, education, and tax relief for middle-class families. My transition team will be working on each of these priorities in the weeks ahead, and I intend to reconvene this advisory board to discuss the best ideas for responding to these immediate problems.

Let me close by saying this: I do not underestimate the enormity of the task that lies ahead. We have taken some major action to date, and we will need further action during this transition and subsequent months. Some of the choices that we make are going to be difficult. And I have said before and I will repeat again: It is not going to be quick and it is not going to be easy for us to dig ourselves out of the hole that we are in, but America is a strong and resilient country. And I know we will succeed if we put aside partisanship and politics and work together as one nation. That's what I intend to do.

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# Recorded Remarks to Global Climate Summit

Let me begin by thanking the bipartisan group of U.S. Governors who convened this meeting.

Few challenges facing America -- and the world -- are more urgent than combating climate change. The science is beyond dispute and the facts are clear. Sea levels are rising. Coastlines are shrinking. We’ve seen record drought, spreading famine, and storms that are growing stronger with each passing hurricane season.

Climate change and our dependence on foreign oil, if left unaddressed, will continue to weaken our economy and threaten our national security.

I know many of you are working to confront this challenge. In particular, I want to commend Governor Sebelius, Governor Doyle, Governor Crist, Governor Blagojevich and your host, Governor Schwarzenegger. All of you have shown true leadership in the fight to combat global warming. And we’ve also seen a number of businesses doing their part by investing in clean energy technologies.

But too often, Washington has failed to show the same kind of leadership. That will change when I take office. My presidency will mark a new chapter in America’s leadership on climate change that will strengthen our security and create millions of new jobs in the process. That will start with a federal cap and trade system. We'll establish strong annual targets that set us on a course to reduce emissions to their 1990 levels by 2020 and reduce them an additional 80% by 2050. Further, we'll invest 15 billion dollars each year to catalyze private sector efforts to build a clean energy future. We'll invest in solar power, wind power, and next-generation biofuels. We'll tap nuclear power, while making sure it’s safe; and we'll develop clean coal technologies.

This investment will not only help us reduce our dependence on foreign oil, making the United States more secure; and it will not only help us bring about a clean energy future, saving the planet. It will also help us transform our industries and steer our country out of this economic crisis by generating five million new green jobs that pay well and can’t be outsourced.

The truth is, the United States can't meet this challenge alone. Solving this problem will require all of us working together. I understand that your meeting is being attended by government officials from over a dozen countries, including the UK, Canada, Mexico, Brazil and Chile, Poland and Australia, India and Indonesia. And I look forward to working with all nations to meet this challenge in the coming years.

Let me also say a special word to the delegates from around the world who will gather at Poland next month. Your work is vital to the planet. While I won’t be President at the time of your meeting and while the United States has only one President at a time, I’ve asked Members of Congress who are attending the conference as observers to report back to me on what they learn there. And once I take office, you can be sure that the United States will once again engage vigorously in these negotiations, and help lead the world toward a new era of global cooperation on climate change.

Now is the time to confront this challenge once and for all. Delay is no longer an option. Denial is no longer an acceptable response. The stakes are too high; the consequences too serious. Stopping climate change won’t be easy and it won’t happen overnight. But I promise you this: When I am President, any governor who’s willing to promote clean energy will have a partner in the White House. Any company that’s willing to invest in clean energy will have an ally in Washington. And any nation that’s willing to join the cause of combating climate change will have an ally in the United States of America.

Thank you.

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# Announces Nominations of Key Economic Team Members

The news this past week, including this morning’s news about Citigroup, has made it even more clear that we are facing an economic crisis of historic proportions. Our financial markets are under stress. New home purchases in October were the lowest in half-a-century. Recently, more than half-a-million jobless claims were filed, the highest in 18 years. And if we do not act swiftly and boldly, most experts now believe that we could lose millions of jobs next year.

While we can’t underestimate the challenges that we face, we also can’t underestimate our capacity to overcome them, to summon that spirit of determination and optimism that has always defined us, and to move forward in a new direction to create new jobs, reform our financial system, and fuel long-term economic growth.

We know this won’t be easy, and it won’t happen overnight. We’ll need to bring together the best minds in America to guide us, and that is what I’ve sought to do in assembling my economic team. I’ve sought leaders who could offer both sound judgment and fresh thinking, both a depth of experience and a wealth of bold, new ideas, and most of all who share my fundamental belief that we cannot have a thriving Wall Street without a thriving Main Street, that in this country we rise or fall as one nation, as one people.

Today, Vice President-elect Biden and I are pleased to announce the nomination of four individuals who meet these criteria to lead our economic team: Timothy Geithner, as secretary of treasury; Lawrence Summers, as the director of our National Economic Council; Christina Romer, as chair of the Council of Economic Advisers; and Melody Barnes, as director of domestic -- the Domestic Policy Council.

Having served in senior roles at Treasury, the IMF, and the New York Fed, Tim Geithner offers not just extensive experience shaping economic policy and managing financial markets, he also has an unparalleled understanding of our current economic crisis in all of its depth, complexity, and urgency. Tim will waste no time getting up to speed. He will start his first day on the job with a unique insight into the failures of today’s markets and a clear vision of the steps we must take to revive them. The reality is that the economic crisis we face is no longer just an American crisis; it’s a global crisis. And we will need to reach out to countries around the world to craft a global response. Tim’s extensive international experience makes him uniquely suited to do that work.

Growing up partly in Africa and having lived and worked throughout Asia, having served as undersecretary of the treasury for international affairs, one of the many roles in the international arena, and having studied both Chinese and Japanese, Tim understands the language of today’s international markets in more ways than one. Tim served with distinction under both Democrats and Republicans and has a long history of working comfortably and as an honest broker on both sides of the aisle. With stellar performances and outstanding results at every stage of his career, Tim has earned the confidence and respect of business, financial, and community leaders, members of Congress, and political leaders around the world. And I know he will do so once again as America’s next treasury secretary, the chief economic spokesman for my Administration.

Now, like Tim, Larry Summers also brings a singular combination of skill, intellect, and experience to the role he will play in our Administration. As undersecretary, deputy secretary, and then secretary of the treasury, Larry helped guide us through several major international financial crises and was a central architect of the policies that led to the longest economic expansion in American history, with record surpluses, rising family incomes, and more than 20 million new jobs. He also championed a range of measures, from tax credits to enhanced lending programs to consumer financial protections, that greatly benefited middle-income families.

As a thought leader, Larry has urged us to confront the problems of income inequality and the middle-class squeeze, consistently arguing that the key to a strong economy is a strong, vibrant, growing middle class. This idea is at the core of my own economic philosophy and will be the foundation of all of my economic policies.

And as one of the great economic minds of our time, Larry has earned a global reputation for being able to cut to the heart of the most complex and novel policy challenges. With respect to both our current financial crisis and other pressing economic issues of our time, his thinking, writing, and speaking have set the terms of the debate. I’m glad he will be by my side, playing the critical role of coordinating my Administration’s economic policy in the White House, and I will rely heavily on his advice as we navigate the uncharted waters of this economic crisis.

As one of the most expert people in America on economic crises and how to solve them, my next nominee, Christina Romer, will bring a critically needed perspective to her work as chair of my Council of Economic Advisors. Christina is both a leading -- both a leading macroeconomist and a leading economic historian, perhaps best known for her work on America’s recovery from the Great Depression and the robust economic expansion that followed.

Since 2003, she’s been co-director of the National Bureau of Economic Research Monetary Economics program. She’s also a member of the bureau’s Business Cycle Dating Committee, the body charged with officially determining whether a recession has started and ended, experience which will serve her well as she advises me on our current economic challenges. Christina has done groundbreaking research on many of the topics our Administration will confront, from tax policy to fighting recessions. And her clear-eyed, independent analyses have received praise from both conservative and liberal thinkers alike. I look forward to her wise counsel in the White House.

Finally, we know that rebuilding our economy will require action on a great variety of fronts: from education and health care to energy and Social Security. Without sound policies in these areas, we can neither enjoy sustained economic growth nor realize our full potential as a people. So I am extraordinarily pleased that Melody Barnes, one of the most respected policy experts in America, will serve as my director of domestic -- the Domestic Policy Council, and that she will be working hand in hand with my economic policy team to chart a course to economic recovery. An integral part of that course will be health care reform, and she will work closely with my secretary of health and human services on that issue.

As executive vice president for policy at the Center of -- at the Center for American Progress, Melody directed a network of policy experts dedicated to finding solutions for struggling middle-class families. She also served as chief counsel to the great Senator Ted Kennedy on the state -- Senate Judiciary Committee, working on issues ranging from crime to immigration to bankruptcy, and fighting tirelessly to protect civil rights, women’s rights, and religious freedom. Melody’s brilliant legal mind and her long experience working to secure the liberties on which this nation was founded, as well as to secure the opportunities for those who’ve been left behind, make her a perfect fit for DPC director.

I'm grateful that Tim, Larry, Christina, and Melody have accepted my nomination, and I am looking forward to working closely with them in the months ahead. That work starts today, because the truth is, we do not have a minute to waste. Right now, our economy is trapped in a vicious cycle: The turmoil on Wall Street means a new round of belt-tightening for families and businesses on Main Street, and as folks produce less and consume less, that just deepens the problems in our financial markets. These extraordinary stresses on our financial system require extraordinary policy responses. And my Administration will honor the public commitments made by the current Administration to address this crisis.

Further, beyond any immediate actions we may take, we need a recovery plan for both Wall Street and Main Street, a plan that stabilizes our financial system and gets credit flowing again, while at the same time addressing our growing foreclosure crisis, helping our struggling auto industry, and creating and saving 2.5 million jobs, jobs rebuilding our infrastructure, our roads, our bridges, modernizing our schools, and creating the clean energy infrastructure of the 21st century. Because at this moment, we need to restore both confidence in the markets and restore confidence of middle-class families, who find themselves working harder, earning less, and falling further and further behind.

I’ve asked my economic team to develop recommendations for this plan and to consult with Congress, the current Administration, and the Federal Reserve on immediate economic developments over the next two months. I’ve requested that they brief me on these matters on a daily basis. And in the coming weeks, I will provide the American people and the incoming Congress with an overview of their initial recommendations. It is my hope that the new Congress will begin work on an aggressive economic recovery plan when they convene in early January so that our Administration can hit the ground running.

With our economy in distress, we cannot hesitate and we cannot delay. Our families can’t afford to keep on waiting and hoping for a solution. They can’t afford to watch another month of unpaid bills pile up, another semester of tuition slip out of reach, another month where, instead of saving for retirement, they’re dipping into their savings just to get by. And I want to repeat: This will not be easy. There are no shortcuts or quick fixes to this crisis, which has been many years in the making, and the economy is likely to get worse before it gets better. Full recovery will not happen immediately. And to make the investments we need, we’ll have to scour our federal budget, line by line, and make meaningful cuts and sacrifices, as well, something I’ll be discussing further tomorrow.

Despite all of this, I am hopeful about the future. I have full confidence in the wisdom and ingenuity of my economic team and in the hard work, courage, and sacrifice of the American people. And most of all, I believe deeply in the resilience and the spirit of this nation. I know we can work our way out of this crisis because we’ve done it before. And I know we will succeed once again if we put aside partisanship and politics and work together.

That’s exactly what I intend to do as President of the United States.

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# Nomination of Key Members of Management and Budget Office Leadership

Please be seated. Good morning, everybody.

Yesterday we talked about the need to jump-start our economy. I speak to you today, mindful that we meet at a moment of great challenge for America, as our credit markets are stressed, and our families are struggling. But as difficult as these times are, I’m confident that we're going to rise to meet this challenge -- if we’re willing to band together and recognize that Wall Street cannot thrive so long as Main Street is struggling; if we’re willing to summon a new spirit of ingenuity and determination; and if Americans of great intellect, broad experience, and good character are willing to serve in our government at its hour of need.

Yesterday, I announced four such Americans to help lead the economic team that will advise me as we seek to climb out of this crisis. Today, I'm pleased to announce two other key members of our team: Peter Orszag as Director, and Robert Nabors as Deputy Director of the Office of Management and Budget.

Before I explain why I selected these outstanding public servants, let me say a few words about the work that I'm asking them to undertake. As I said yesterday, the economic crisis we face demands that we invest immediately in a series of measures that will help save or create two and a half million jobs and put tax cuts in the pockets of the hard-pressed middle class. Many of those new jobs will come in areas such as energy independence, technology, and health care modernization that will strengthen our economy over the long term.

But if we are going to make the investments we need, we also have to be willing to shed the spending that we don’t need. In these challenging times, when we're facing both rising deficits and a shrinking economy, budget reform is not an option; it's a necessity. We can't sustain a system that bleeds billions of taxpayer dollars on programs that have outlived their usefulness, or exist solely because of the power of politicians, lobbyists, or interest groups. We simply can't afford it.

This isn’t about big government or small government. It’s about building a smarter government that focuses on what works. That's why I will ask my new team to think anew and act anew to meet our new challenges. We are going to go through our federal budget, as I promised during the campaign -- page by page, line by line -- eliminating those programs we don’t need, and insisting that those that we do need operate in a sensible, cost-effective way.

Let me just give you one example of what I’m talking about. There’s a report today from -- that from 2003 to 2006, millionaire farmers received 49 million dollars in crop subsidies even though they were earning more than the 2.5 million cutoff for such subsidies. Now, if this is true -- and this was just a report this morning -- but if it's true, it is a prime example of the kind of waste that I intend to end as President.

We're also going to focus on one of the biggest, long-run challenges that our budget faces -- namely, the rising cost of health care in both the public and private sectors. This is not just a challenge but also an opportunity to improve the health care that Americans rely on and to bring down the costs that taxpayers, businesses, and families have to pay.

Now, that's what the Office of Management and Budget will do in my Administration. It will not only help design a budget and manage its implementation, but it's also going to make sure that our government -- your government -- is more efficient and more effective at serving the American people.

And there is no better person to help lead this effort as Director of the OMB than my friend Peter Orszag. Peter's been one of our nation’s leading voices on budgetary issues. It's said that a nation’s budget reflects its values and its priorities. I believe that's true. And I know that Peter will bring to his work at the OMB a set of priorities that I -- and the American people -- share.

Throughout his career, he's made significant contributions in our understanding of all the major economic challenges that we're now confronting -- from reducing medical costs to saving Social Security to fighting global climate change to helping put the dream of a college degree within the reach for more students. As Director of the Congressional Budget Office, he reenergized and reinvigorated the agency, while shifting its focus to confront the health care crisis that is not only a cause of so much suffering for so many families, but a rapidly growing portion of our budget and a drag on our entire economy.

But it's not simply that Peter’s past career makes him qualified for this new appointment; it's also that he has a vision for the future that I share. He believes, as I do, that even as we take steps to restore discipline to our budget, we also have to take -- take the steps right now that are necessary to solve our immediate crisis. Peter doesn’t need a map to tell him where the bodies are buried in the federal budget. He knows what works and what doesn’t, what's worthy of our precious tax dollars and what is not. Just because a program, a special interest tax break, or corporate subsidy is hidden in this year’s budget, does not mean that it will survive the next. The old ways of Washington simply can’t meet the challenges of today and tomorrow.

And no one's more able or more qualified to assist Peter in this work than Deputy Director of the OMB that I am nominating, Robert Nabors. Rob will bring to this post experience in the Executive Branch, at the OMB, where he helped the Clinton Administration achieve balanced budgets, as well as in the Legislative Branch, where he led the Appropriations Committee staff as a driving force for a responsible budget. Together, Peter and Rob will help steer our budget through Congress so that I can sign it into law.

Now, let me be clear: These appointments, as well as the appointments that I announced yesterday, are not the sum of my economic team. These appointments are going to work closely with those that I have not ye[t] announced -- those including the secretaries of Energy and Labor, Commerce, and Health and Human Services, as well as others in my Administration -- to design a recovery path for both Wall Street and Main Street, and to put our economy on a path to long-term growth and prosperity.

Because at this moment, we must not only restore confidence in our markets. We also must restore the confidence of middle class families that their government is on their side, that it’s working for them and on their behalf to meet their families’ needs.

That's what I intend to do as President of the United States.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Nomination of Key National Security Team Members

Good morning, everybody. I hope you all had a wonderful Thanksgiving.

Last week, we announced our economic team, which is working as we speak to craft an Economic Recovery Program to create jobs and grow our struggling economy. Today, Vice President-elect Biden and I are pleased to announce our national security team.

The national security challenges we face are just as grave -- and just as urgent -- as our economic crisis. We are fighting two wars. Our old conflicts remain unresolved, and newly assertive powers have put strains on the international system. The spread of nuclear weapons raises the peril that the world’s deadliest technologies could fall into dangerous hands. Our dependence on foreign oil empowers authoritarian governments and endangers our planet.

America must also be strong at home to be strong abroad. We need to provide education and opportunity to all our citizens, so every American can compete with anyone, anywhere. And our economic power must sustain our military strength, our diplomatic leverage, and our global leadership.

The common thread linking these challenges is the fundamental reality that in the 21st century, our destiny is shared with the world's. From our markets to our security, from our public health to our climate, we must act with the understanding that, now more than ever, we have a stake in what happens across the globe. And as we learned so painfully on 9/11, terror cannot be contained by borders, nor safety provided by oceans alone.

Last week, we were reminded of this threat once again when terrorists took the lives of six American among nearly 200 victims in Mumbai. In the world we seek, there is no place for those who kill innocent civilians to advance hateful extremism. This weekend, I told Prime Minister Singh of India that Americans stand with the people of India in this dark time. And I am confident that India's great democracy is more resilient than killers who would tear it down.

And so, in this uncertain world, the time has come for a new beginning -- a new dawn of American leadership to overcome the challenges of the 21st century, and to seize the opportunities embedded in those challenges. We will strengthen our capacity to defeat our enemies and support our friends. We will renew old alliances and forge new and enduring partnerships. We will show the world once more that America is relentless in the defense of our people, steady in advancing our interests, and committed to the ideals that shine as a beacon to the world: democracy and justice; opportunity and unyielding hope -- because American values are America’s greatest export to the world.

To succeed, we must pursue a new strategy that skillfully uses, balances, and integrates all elements of American power: our military and diplomacy; our intelligence and law enforcement; our economy and the power of our moral example. The team that we've assembled here today is uniquely suited to do just that.

In their past service and plans for the future, these men and women represent all of those elements of American power, and the very best of the American example. They've served in uniform and as diplomats; they have worked as legislators, law enforcement officials, and executives. They share my pragmatism about the use of power, and my sense of purpose about America's role as a leader in the world.

I have known Hillary Clinton as a friend, a colleague, a source of counsel, and as a campaign opponent. She possesses an extraordinary intelligence and a remarkable work ethic. I am proud that she will be our next Secretary of State. She is an American of tremendous stature who will have my complete confidence, who knows many of the world's leaders, who will command respect in every capitol, and who will clearly have the ability to advance our interests around the world.

Hillary’s appointment is a sign to friend and foe of the seriousness of my commitment to renew American diplomacy and restore our alliances. There is much to do -- from preventing the spread of nuclear weapons to Iran and North Korea, to seeking a lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians, to strengthening international institutions. I have no doubt that Hillary Clinton is the right person to lead our State Department, and to work with me in tackling this ambitious foreign policy agenda.

At a time when we face unprecedented transition amidst two wars, I've have asked Robert Gates to continue as Secretary of Defense, and I'm pleased that he's accepted. Two years ago, he took over the Pentagon at a difficult time. He restored accountability. He won the confidence of military commanders and the trust of our brave men and women in uniform, as well as their families. He earned the respect of members of Congress on both sides of the aisle for his pragmatism and competence. He knows that we need a sustainable national security strategy -- and that includes a bipartisan consensus at home.

As I said throughout the campaign, I will be giving Secretary Gates and our military a new mission as soon as I take office: responsibly ending the war in Iraq through a successful transition to Iraqi control. We will also ensure that we have the strategy and resources to succeed against al Qaeda and the Taliban. As Bob said not too long ago, Afghanistan is where the war on terror began, and it is where it must end. And going forward, we will continue to make the investments necessary to strengthen our military and increase our ground forces to defeat the threats of the 21st century.

Eric Holder has the talent and commitment to succeed as Attorney General from his first day on the job, which is even more important in a transition that demands vigilance. He has distinguished himself as a prosecutor, a judge, and a senior official, and he is deeply familiar with the law enforcement challenges we face -- from terrorism to counter-intelligence, from white collar crime to public corruption. Eric also has the combination of toughness and independence that we need at the Justice Department. Let me be clear: The Attorney General serves the American people. And I have every expectation that Eric will protect our people, uphold the public trust, and adhere to our Constitution.

Janet Napolitano offers the experience and executive skills we need in the next Secretary of Homeland Security. She has spent her career protecting people -- as a US Attorney, an Attorney General, and as the Governor of Arizona. She understands the need for a Department of Homeland Security that has the capacity to help prevent terrorist attacks and respond to catastrophe -- be it manmade or natural. Janet assumes this critical role having learned the lessons -- some of them painful -- of the last several years, from 9/11 to Katrina. She insists on competence and accountability. She knows firsthand the need to have a partner in Washington that works well with state and local governments. She understands as well as anyone the danger of an unsecure border. And she will be a leader who can reform a sprawling Department while safeguarding our homeland.

Susan Rice will take on the crucial task of serving as Permanent Representative of the United States to the United Nations. Susan has been a close and trusted advisor. As in previous Administrations, the UN Ambassador will serve as a member of my cabinet and an integral member of my team. Her background as a scholar, on the National Security Council, and Assistant Secretary of State will serve our nation well at the United Nations. Susan knows that the global challenges we face demand global institutions that work. She shares my belief that the UN is an indispensable and imperfect forum. She will carry the message that our commitment to multilateral action must be coupled with a commitment to reform. We need the United Nations to be more effective as a venue for collective action -- against terror and proliferation, climate change and genocide, poverty and disease.

Finally, I am convinced that General James Jones is uniquely suited to be a strong and skilled National Security Advisor. Generations of Joneses have served heroically on the battlefield -- from the beaches of Tarawa in World War II, to Foxtrot Ridge in Vietnam. Jim's Silver Star is a proud part of that legacy. He will bring to the job the dual experience of serving in uniform and as a diplomat. He has commanded a platoon in battle, served as Supreme Allied Commander in a time of war, and worked on behalf of peace in the Middle East. Jim is focused on the threats of today and the future. He understands the connection between energy and national security, and has worked on the frontlines of global instability – from Kosovo to northern Iraq to Afghanistan. He will advise me and work effectively to integrate our efforts across the government, so that we are effectively using all elements of American power to defeat unconventional threats and promote our values.

I am confident that this team is what we need to make a new beginning for American national security. This morning, we met to discuss the situation in Mumbai and some of the challenges that we face in the months and years ahead. In the coming weeks, I will be in close contact with these advisors, who will be working with their counterparts in the Bush Administration to make sure that we are ready to hit the ground running on January 20th. Given the range of threats that we face and the vulnerability that can be a part of every presidential transition, I hope that we can proceed swiftly for those national security officials who demand confirmation.

We move forward with the humility that comes with knowing that there are brave men and women protecting us on our front lines: diplomats and intelligence officers in dangerous corners of the world, troops serving their second, third, or fourth tours; FBI agents in the field, cops on the beat, prosecutors in our courts, and cargo inspectors at our ports. These selfless Americans whose names are unknown to most of us will form the backbone of our effort. If we serve as well as they are serving, we will protect our country and promote our values.

And as we move forward with respect for America's tradition of a bipartisan national security policy and a commitment to national unity, we have to recall that when it comes to keeping our nation and our people safe, we are not Republicans or Democrats: We are Americans. There's no monopoly of power or wisdom in either party. Together, as one nation, as one people, we can shape our times instead of being shaped by them. Together, we will meet the challenges of the 21st century not with fear, but with hope.

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# Announces Nomination of Commerce Secretary, Bill Richardson

Morning, everybody.

Last week, Vice President-Elect Biden and I began the process of announcing our economic team. Today, we are pleased to name another key member of this team: our nominee for Secretary of Commerce, my great friend, Governor Bill Richardson.

With each passing day, the work our team has begun, developing plans to revive our economy, becomes more urgent. Earlier this week, we learned that the U.S. economy has been in recession since December of 2007 and that our manufacturing output is at a 26 year low -- two stark reminders of the magnitude of the challenges we face.

But while I know rebuilding our economy won’t be easy -- and it won’t be -- happen overnight -- I also know this: that right now, somewhere in America, a small business is at work with the next big idea; a scientist is on the cusp of the next big breakthrough discovery; an entrepreneur is sketching plans for the startup that will revolutionize an industry. Right now, across America, the finest products in the world are rolling off our assembly lines. And the proudest, most determined, most productive workers in the world are on the job -- some, already on their second shift of the day; many, putting in longer hours than ever before.

After nearly two years of traveling across this country, meeting with workers, visiting businesses large and small, I am more confident than ever that we have everything we need to renew our economy. We've got the ingenuity, the technology, the skill, and commitment; we just need to put it to work. It’s time to not just address the immediate economic threats, but to start laying the groundwork for long-term prosperity to help American businesses grow and thrive at home, and expand our efforts to promote American enterprise around the world.

This work is the core mission of the Secretary of Commerce. And with his breadth and depth of experience in public life, Governor Richardson is uniquely suited for this role as a leading economic diplomat for America. During his time in state government and Congress, and in tour -- two tours of duty in the cabinet, Bill has seen from just about every angle what makes our economy work and what keeps it from working better.

As Governor of New Mexico, Bill showed how government can act as a partner to support our businesses, helping to create 80,000 new jobs. And under his leadership, New Mexico saw the lowest unemployment rate in decades.

As a former Secretary of Energy, Bill understands the steps we must take to build a new, clean-energy industry and create the green jobs of the twenty-first century -- jobs that pay well and won’t be outsourced; jobs that will help us end our dependence on foreign oil.

And as a former Ambassador to the United Nations, Bill brings both international stature and a deep understanding of today’s global economy. He understands that the success of today’s business in Detroit or Columbus often depends on whether it can sell products in places like Santiago or Shanghai. And he knows that America’s reputation in the world is critical not just to our security, but to our prosperity -- (excuse me) -- that when the citizens of the world respect America’s leadership, they are more likely to buy America’s products.

To this crucial work of restoring America’s international standing, Bill will bring a leadership style all his own. Bill has never been content to just learn from briefing books, never satisfied with only the official version of the story. During his time in Congress, he held more than two -- 2,500 town-hall meetings, so he could hear directly from constituents. He was a regular in the U.N. cafeteria, mixing it up with U.N. employees over lunch. And during his 2002 campaign for record -- for Governor, he actually broke a world record by shaking nearly 14,000 hands in just eight hours.

(I've got to check that statistic.)

All of this reflects a determination to reach out and understand where people are coming from, what they hope for, and what he can do to help. This approach, I believe, has been the key to Bill’s success as a negotiator and will be key to his work on the critical functions of the Commerce Department -- from administering our census and monitoring our climate to protecting our intellectual property and restoring our economic diplomacy.

In the end, Bill Richardson is a leader who shares my values, and he must -- and he will be measured his progress the same way I do. Are we creating good jobs instead of losing them? Are incomes growing instead of shrinking? I know Bill will be an unyielding advocate for American business and American jobs at home and around the world. And I look forward to working with him in the years ahead.

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# Remarks on Economic Recovery After Meeting with Economic Team

All right. Well, thanks for taking the time to come in for a moment. You know, this is the core of my economic team, and the message of our meeting today is one that comes as no surprise to most Americans, and that is we are in a very difficult spot. The economy is bad. The situation is getting worse.

Last week, we learned that manufacturing had hit a 20-year low. On Friday, we're going to get the final jobs report from this year, and every indication is that we will have lost in 2008 more jobs than at any time since World War II.

It's clear that we have to act and we have to act now to address this crisis and break the momentum of the recession or the next few years could be dramatically worse. That's the message that I delivered to Speaker Pelosi this morning. I will be meeting with Harry Reid and with the bipartisan leadership group this afternoon.

And the most important message today is that the situation is getting worse, we've got to act boldly, and we've got to act swiftly. We cannot delay.

I said in my Web address this past Saturday, this is not a Republican problem or a Democratic problem at this stage. This is an American problem, and we're all going to have to chip in and do the hard work that's required and what the American people expect of us.

Over the last few weeks, our economic crisis has only grown deeper. Two million Americans have now lost their jobs over the last year. We have a substantial number -- in fact, Christina Romer, our economist from the Council of Economic Advisers, indicates to me that in addition to the 2 million who've lost jobs, you've got 2.8 million who have moved from full-time work to part-time work.

So when you start counting in people who are underemployed, then the situation is very dire for American families.

Again, manufacturing's hit a 28-year low.

Across America, millions of Americans are struggling with rising costs, growing debts, concerns about home foreclosure, a deepening sense of unease.

When I last met with my team, I asked them to continue their work on an American recovery and reinvestment plan that would not only create jobs in the short term, but also spur economic growth and lay the foundation for a sustained competitiveness in this global economy over the long term.

During today's meeting, I learned about the substantial progress that they've made in developing that plan. And we are beginning to share details of that plan with leadership on the Hill. And we will be rolling this out to the American people, assuring that there is clarity and transparency about the entire process.

One of the things that I've emphasized to my team -- and one of the things that I've emphasized to congressional leadership and will emphasize again today -- is that not only do we have to act boldly, swiftly and with a sufficient magnitude to make a difference, but we've also got to do things in a new way.

It's not going to be sufficient for us just to fall back into the old Washington ways and simply throw money at the problem. We need to demand vigorous oversight; we need to have strict accountability in terms of how the -- the recovery and reinvestment plan operates.

The American people have a right to know how every dime of their money is spent, and that is going to be built into the plan, so that everybody understands what is being done in order to address this crisis.

We also in this group talked today about the financial system that is still precarious. We have not seen the credit markets recover the way we would have liked to see them recover, despite the efforts of Treasury and of the Fed, the many unprecedented steps that have been taken.

And so part of this team's task is to shape the next phase of economic recovery so that it is more transparent, so that it is more consistent, so that the public and the markets and businesses all understand exactly how it is working, what our expectations are and what will be accomplished as a consequence of some of the extraordinary steps that have been taken.

Finally, we talked today about the tough choices that we're going to have to make to restore fiscal responsibility, so as the economy recovers, our deficit can start to be brought down. As I said earlier, right now, the most important task for us is to stabilize the patient. The economy is badly damaged; it is very sick. And so we have to take whatever is -- steps are required to make sure that it is stabilized.

But we also have to recognize that if we're going to grow this economy over the long term, if we're going to create a better future for our children and our grandchildren, then we can't be fiscally irresponsible about how we do it.

And so -- we have been in deep conversations and will continue over the next several weeks to shape our recovery and reinvestment package alongside very concrete, serious plans for midterm and long- term fiscal discipline. And that is something that we will be also be presenting to the American people as well as leadership on Capitol Hill.

So I'm looking forward to meeting with both the Democrats and Republicans this afternoon. My expectation is that they will share the same sense of urgency that I do, that we are going to move quickly, that we're not going to get bogged down in a lot of old-style politics on either side.

There's not going to be a lot of finger-pointing or posturing. The American people need action now. That's what I intend to provide as president of the United States. So with that, let me take a couple questions. Christie [ph], I'll start with you.

Question: Thank you. How fast does this plan need to move to passage? And in moving swiftly and boldly, are you concerned at all about sacrificing transparency and a full examination of the process? And also, if you don't mind, could you also talk about the extent to which the tax cut part of this plan is political [inaudible] getting it passed?

President-Elect Obama: Well, let take the second question first. Some of you, at least, were following the campaign. And for the last two years, I've talked about the need for middle-class tax cuts.

So the notion that me wanting to include relief for working families in this plan is somehow a political ploy, when this is -- was the centerpiece of my economic plan, for the last two years, doesn't make too much sense.

What -- in a bad situation, there is a happy convergence between what I had pledged during the campaign and what's required for the economy, right now, to put more money into the pockets of ordinary Americans who are more insecure about their jobs, who are continuing to see rising costs in an area like health care, who are struggling to make ends meet.

But, you know, we think it is very important to have a balanced recovery and reinvestment package. Part of it is going to be addressing consumers and making sure they've got money in their pockets.

Part of it is to provide incentives for businesses so that they start investing in plants and equipment that ultimately leads to jobs.

Part of it is going to be investing in the kinds of job-creating growth industries of the future, whether it's health IT, whether it's energy, that assure economic competitiveness over the long term.

So I wouldn't separate any of these parts. They're all of a piece.

And, as far as your first question, we are confident that we can accomplish unprecedented transparency, even as we move this package forward. Not only will Congress know exactly what's in this bill, but we're exploring steps, for example, like putting on a Web site very detailed information about all the projects that are taking place, what kind of impact we expect them to have, what kinds of job growth we hope to generate as a consequence of any of the discrete items that we are -- that we're putting forward.

Question: Good afternoon, sir. To what extent has the violence in the Middle East distracted your team on the economic plan? And is the deadline for your stimulus -- are you still hoping for -- has it slipped to February?

[crosstalk]

President-Elect Obama: Well, as I said before, I strongly believe that a president or a president-elect or his team should be able to do more than one thing at a time. And so, obviously, international affairs are of deep concern.

With the situation in Gaza, I've been getting briefed every day. I've had consistent conversations with members of the current administration about what's taking place. That will continue.

I will continue to insist that when it comes to foreign affairs, it is particularly important to adhere to the principle of one president at a time, because there are delicate negotiations taking place right now, and we can't have two voices coming out of the United States when you have so much at stake.

With respect to the timetable for the economic recovery and reinvestment plan, we are going to do most of this work this month. And, you know, we're not waiting. The reason I'm here today is that we are going to present our latest ideas to Congress. We expect them to begin this week on this process. And, you know, I expect to sign a bill to create 3 million jobs for the American people shortly after I get inaugurated.

Question: Sir, what do you mean by "shortly after?"

President-Elect Obama: Well, look, there are only so many days in the legislative process, and it's going to take some time, even on an expedited schedule, to get a bill passed and on my desk. But we anticipate that by the end of January or the first week in February we have gotten the bulk of this done.

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# Address at George Mason University on 21st Century Economy

Let me begin by thanking George Mason University for their extraordinary hospitality and to thank all the great friends, the governors, the mayors who are in attendance here today.

Throughout America's history, there have been some years that simply rolled into the next without much notice or fanfare. And then there are the years that come along once in a generation, the kind that mark a clean break from a troubled past and set a new course for our nation. This is one of those years.

We start 2009 in the midst of a crisis unlike any we have seen in our lifetime, a crisis that has only deepened over the last few weeks. Nearly two million jobs have been now lost. And on Friday, we're likely to learn that we lost more jobs last year than at any time since World War II. Just in the past year, another 2.8 million Americans who want and need full-time work have had to settle for part-time jobs. Manufacturing has hit a 28-year low. Many businesses cannot borrow or make payroll. Many families cannot pay their bills or their mortgage. Many workers are watching their life savings disappear. And many, many Americans are both anxious and uncertain of what the future will hold.

Now, I don't believe it's too late to change course, but it will be if we don't take dramatic action as soon as possible. If nothing is done, this recession could linger for years. The unemployment rate could reach double digits. Our economy could fall 1 trillion dollars short of its full capacity, which translates into more than 12,000 dollars in lost income for a family of four. We could lose a generation of potential and promise as more young Americans are forced to forego dreams of college or the chance to train for the jobs of the future. And our nation could lose the competitive edge that has served as a foundation for our strength and our standing in the world. In short, a bad situation could become dramatically worse.

This crisis did not happen solely by some accident of history or normal turn of the business cycle. And we won't get out of it by simply waiting for a better day to come or relying on the worn-out dogmas of the past. We arrived at this point due to an era of profound irresponsibility that stretched from corporate board rooms to the halls of power in Washington, D.C.

For years, too many Wall Street executives made imprudent and dangerous decisions, seeking profits with too little regard for risk, too little regulatory scrutiny, and too little accountability. Banks made loans without concern for whether borrowers could repay them, and some borrowers took advantage of cheap credit to take on debt they couldn't afford. Politicians spent taxpayer money without wisdom or discipline and too often focused on scoring political points instead of problems they were sent here to solve. The result has been a devastating loss of trust and confidence in our economy, our financial markets, and our government.

Now, the very fact that this crisis is largely of our own making means that it's not beyond our ability to solve. Our problems are rooted in past mistakes, not our capacity for future greatness. It will take time -- perhaps many years -- but we can rebuild that lost trust and confidence. We can restore opportunity and prosperity. We should never forget that our workers are still more productive than any on Earth. Our universities are still the envy of the world. We are still home to the most brilliant minds, the most creative entrepreneurs, and the most advanced technology and innovation that history has ever known. And we are still the nation that has overcome great fears and improbable odds. If we act with the urgency and seriousness that this moment requires, I know that we can do it again.

That is why I have moved quickly to work with my economic team and leaders of both parties on an American Recovery and Reinvestment Plan that will immediately jump-start job creation and long-term growth. It's a plan that represents not just new policy, but a whole new approach to meeting our most urgent challenges. For if we hope to end this crisis, we must end the culture of anything goes that helped create it, and this change must begin in Washington. It's time to trade old habits for a new spirit of responsibility. It's time to finally change the ways of Washington so that we can set a new and better course for America.

There is no doubt that the cost of this plan will be considerable. It will certainly add to the budget deficit in the short term. But equally certain are the consequences of doing too little or nothing at all, for that will lead to an even greater deficit of jobs, incomes, and confidence in our economy.

It is true that we cannot depend on government alone to create jobs or long-term growth. But at this particular moment, only government can provide the short-term boost necessary to lift us from a recession this deep and severe. Only government can break the cycle that are [sic] crippling our economy, where a lack of spending leads to lost jobs, which leads to even less spending, where an inability to lend and borrow stops growth and leads to even less credit. That's why we need to act boldly and act now to reverse these cycles. That's why we need to put money in the pockets of the American people, create new jobs, and invest in our future. That's why we need to restart the flow of credit and restore the rules of the road that will ensure a crisis like this never happens again.

Now this plan begins with -- this plan must begin today, a plan I am confident will save or create at least three million jobs over the next few years. It's not just another public works program. It's a plan that recognizes both the paradox and promise of this moment: the fact that there are millions of Americans trying to find work, even as all around the country there's so much work to be done. And that's why we'll invest in priorities like energy and education, health care and a new infrastructure that are necessary to keep us strong and competitive in the 21st century. That's why the overwhelming majority of the jobs created will be in the private sector, while our plan will save the public sector jobs of teachers, police officers, firefighters, and others who provide vital services.

To finally spark the creation of a clean energy economy, we will double the production of alternative energy in the next three years. We will modernize more than 75 percent of federal buildings and improve the energy efficiency of 2 million American homes, saving consumers and taxpayers billions on our energy bills.

In the process, we will put Americans to work in new jobs that pay well and can't be outsourced, jobs building solar panels and wind turbines, constructing fuel-efficient cars and buildings, and developing the new energy technologies that will lead to even more jobs, more savings, and a cleaner, safer planet in the bargain.

To improve the quality of our health care while lowering its cost, we will make the immediate investments necessary to ensure that, within five years, all of America's medical records are computerized. This will cut waste, eliminate red tape and reduce the need to repeat expensive medical tests. But it just won't save billions of dollars and thousands of jobs; it will save lives by reducing the deadly but preventable medical errors that pervade our health care system.

To give our children the chance to live out their dreams in a world that's never been more competitive, we will equip tens of thousands of schools, community colleges, and public universities with 21st century classrooms, labs, and libraries. We'll provide new computers, new technology, and new training for teachers so that students in Chicago and Boston can compete with children in Beijing for the high-tech, high-wage jobs of the future.

To build an economy that can lead this future, we will begin to rebuild America. Yes, we'll put people to work repairing crumbling roads, bridges, and schools by eliminating the backlog of well-planned, worthy, and needed infrastructure projects. But we'll also do more to retrofit America for a global economy. That means updating the way we get our electricity by starting to build a new smart grid that will save us money, protect our power sources from blackout or attack, and deliver clean, alternative forms of energy to every corner of our nation. It means expanding broadband lines across America, so that a small business in a rural town can connect and compete with their counterparts anywhere in the world. It means investing in the science, research, and technology that will lead to new medical breakthroughs, new discoveries, and entire new industries.

And finally, this recovery and reinvestment plan will provide immediate relief to states, workers, and families who are bearing the brunt of this recession. To get people spending again, 95% of working families will receive a thousand dollar tax cut -- the first stage of a middle-class tax cut that I promised during the campaign and will include in our next budget. To help Americans who have lost their jobs and can't find new ones, we'll continue the bipartisan extension of unemployment insurance and health care coverage to help them through this crisis. Government at every level will have to tighten its belt, but we'll help struggling states avoid harmful budget cuts, as long as they take responsibility and use the money to maintain essential services like police, fire, education, and health care.

Now I understand that some might be skeptical of this plan. Our government has already spent a good deal of money, but we haven't yet seen that translate into more jobs or higher incomes or renewed confidence in our economy. And that's why the American Recovery and Reinvestment Plan won't just throw money at our problems; we'll invest in what works. The true test of policies we'll pursue won't be whether they're Democratic or Republican ideas, whether they're conservative or liberal ideas, but whether they create jobs, grow our economy, and put the American Dream within the reach of the American people.

Instead of politicians doling out money behind a veil of secrecy, decisions about where we invest will be made transparently, and informed by independent experts wherever possible. Every American will be able to hold Washington accountable for these decisions by going online to see how and where their taxpayer dollars are being spent. And as I announced yesterday, we will launch an unprecedented effort to eliminate unwise and unnecessary spending that has never been more unaffordable for our nation and our children's future than it is right now.

We have to make tough choices and smart investments today so that as the economy recovers, the deficits start coming down. We cannot have a solid recovery if our people and our businesses don't have confidence that we're getting our fiscal house in order. And that's why our goal is not to create a slew of new government programs, but a foundation for long-term economic growth. That also means an economic recovery plan that is free from earmarks and pet projects. I understand that every member of Congress has ideas about how to spend money. Many of these projects are worthy. They benefit local communities. But this emergency legislation must not be the vehicle for those aspirations. This must be a time when leaders in both parties put the urgent needs of our nation above our own narrow interests.

Now, this recovery plan alone will not solve all the problems that led us into this crisis. We must also work with the same sense of urgency to stabilize and repair the financial system we all depend on. That means using our full arsenal of tools to get credit flowing again to families and businesses, while restoring confidence in our markets. It means launching a sweeping effort to address the foreclosure crisis so that we can keep responsible families in their homes. It means preventing the catastrophic failure of financial institutions whose collapse could endanger the entire economy, but only with maximum protections for taxpayers and a clear understanding that government support for any company is an extraordinary action that must come with significant restrictions on the firms that receive support. And it means reforming a weak and outdated regulatory system so that we can better withstand financial shocks and better protect consumers, investors, and businesses from the reckless greed and risk-taking that must never endanger our prosperity again.

No longer can we allow Wall Street wrongdoers to slip through regulatory cracks. No longer can we allow special interests to put their thumbs on the economic scales. No longer can we allow the unscrupulous lending and borrowing that leads only to destructive cycles of bubble and bust. It is time to set a new course for this economy, and that change must begin now.

We should have an open and honest discussion about this recovery plan in the days ahead, but I urge Congress to move as quickly as possible on behalf of the American people. For every day we wait or point fingers or drag our feet, more Americans will lose their jobs. More families will lose their savings. More dreams will be deferred and denied. And our nation will sink deeper into a crisis that, at some point, we may not be able to reverse.

That is not the country I know. It is not a future I accept as President of the United States. A world that depends on the strength of our economy is now watching and waiting for America to lead once more. And that is what we will do.

It will not come easy or happen overnight, and it is altogether likely that things may get worse before they get better. But that is all the more reason for Congress to act without delay. I know the scale of this plan is unprecedented, but so is the severity of our situation. We have already tried the wait-and-see approach to our problems, and it is the same approach that helped lead us to this day of reckoning.

And that is why the time has come to build a 21st century economy in which hard work and responsibility are once again rewarded. That's why I'm asking Congress to work with me and my team day and night, on weekends if necessary, to get the plan passed in the next few weeks. That's why I'm calling on all Americans -- Democrats and Republicans and Independents -- to put -- to put good ideas ahead of the old ideological battles; a sense of common purpose above the same narrow partisanship; and insist that the first question each of us asks isn't, "What's good for me?" but "What's good for the country my children will inherit?"

More than any program or policy, it is this spirit that will enable us to confront these challenges with the same spirit that has led previous generations to face down war, and depression, and fear itself. And if we do, if we are able to summon that spirit again, if we are able to look out for one another, and listen to one another, and do our part for our nation and for posterity, then I have no doubt that years from now, we will look back on 2009 as one of those years that marked another new and hopeful beginning for the United States of America.

Thank you, God Bless You, and may God Bless America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Announcement of Key Leaders of the National Intelligence Community

Good morning.

Before I discuss today’s announcement, I’d like to say a few words about the latest jobs numbers that we received this morning.

Yesterday, I spoke about the need to pass the America Recovery and Reinvestment Plan so that we can jumpstart job creation, invest in our future, and lay a foundation for long-term economic growth. This morning, we received a stark reminder about how urgently action is needed.

524,000 jobs were lost in December across nearly all major American industries. That means that our economy lost jobs in all 12 months of 2008, and that nearly 2.6 million jobs lost last year amount to the single worst year of job loss since World War II. The unemployment rate is now well over 7 percent. In addition, we have 3.4 million people who want full-time work but are only able to get part-time work. Clearly, the situation is dire; it is deteriorating, and it demands urgent and immediate action.

My staff and I have been engaged in a constructive dialogue with members of Congress over the last few days and weeks about my American Recovery and Reinvestment Plan which will save or create 3 million jobs, and make long-term investments in critical areas like energy, health care, and education. We've made good progress in these consultations, and I look forward to working closely with Congress to shape legislation that will work for the American people.

But let me be clear: Today’s job report only underscores the need for us to move with a sense of urgency and common purpose. Behind each and every one of those millions of jobs lost there are workers and families who are counting on us as they struggle to pay the bills or stay in their homes. There are American dreams that are being deferred and that are being denied because of the current economic climate. There is a devastating economic crisis that will become more and more difficult to contain with time. For the sake of our economy and our people, this is the moment to act and to act without delay.

Now I’d like to say a few words about today’s appointments. Over the past few weeks, Vice President-Elect Biden and I have been working with our national security appointees so that we’re ready to hit the ground running on January 20th. Today, I’m pleased to complete our team by announcing my choices to lead the intelligence community and the CIA.

It's hard to overstate the importance of good intelligence in the 21st century. When much of our intelligence community was founded, it was focused on one overarching threat: the Soviet Union. Today, we face a world of unconventional challenges -- from the spread of stateless terrorist networks and weapons of mass destruction, to the grave dangers posed by failed states and rogue regimes.

As we learned on 9/11, we are not protected by the distance of an ocean or the ability to deter an enemy. There is no margin for error. To keep our people safe, we must seamlessly collect, analyze, share, and act on information with a sense of urgency. This requires the selfless services of countless patriots, and the skillful management of our 16 intelligence agencies. Good intelligence is not a luxury: It is a necessity.

The men and women of the intelligence community have been on the front lines in this world of new and evolving dangers. They've served in the shadows, saved American lives, advanced our interests, and earned the respect of a grateful nation. There have been sound reforms and many successes to built over the last several years.

But here in Washington, we've also learned some tough lessons. We've learned that to make pragmatic policy choices, we must insist on assessments grounded solely on the facts, and not seek information to suit any ideological agenda. To support those who carry out our intelligence mission, we must give them the resources they need and the clear guidance they deserve. And we know that to be truly secure, we must adhere to our values as vigilantly as we protect our safety -- with no exceptions.

I am confident that Dennis Blair and Leon Panetta are the right leaders to advance the work of our intelligence community. They are public servants with unquestioned integrity, broad experience, strong management skills, and the core pragmatism we need in dangerous times. Together, they will form a team that is uniquely qualified to continue the good work that is being done, while making the changes we need to stay ahead of nimble threats and sustain the trust of the American people.

Admiral Dennis Blair has seen the diverse uses of intelligence from many different perspectives. Over several decades in uniform, he learned firsthand the necessity of good intelligence for our men and women in uniform. As Commander of U.S. forces in the Pacific, he developed a deep understanding of the critical importance of Asia, and carried out a major offensive against violent extremists. And as a former NF-- NSC staffer and the first Associate Director of Central Intelligence for Military Support, he is uniquely qualified to bridge -- to build bridges of cooperation among our national security institutions.

As DNI, Dennis will be the leader and manager of our intelligence community. He will have my full support as he develops our capabilities, strengthens information gathering and sharing, enhances cooperation with foreign governments, and provides policymakers with the information we need -- even if it’s not always the information that we want. As someone who has handled intelligence as a sailor at -- at sea and strategic thinker in Washington, he will have the expertise and authority to ensure that our 16 intelligence agencies act with unity of effort and of purpose.

Admiral Blair’s experience will be exceptionally complemented by Leon Panetta, my choice to be director of the CIA. Leon is one of the finest public servants of our time, and he's committed himself to his country since he put on the uniform of the United States Army. As a Congressman, OMB Director, and White House Chief of Staff, he has unparalleled experience in making the institutions of government work better for the American people. He has handled intelligence daily at the very highest levels, and time and again he has demonstrated sound judgment, grace under fire, and complete integrity.

Let me be clear: In Leon Panetta, the Agency will have a director who has my complete trust and substantial clout. He will be a strong manager and a strong advocate for the CIA. He knows how to focus resources where they are needed, and he has a proven track record of building consensus and working on a bipartisan basis with Congress. I am confident he will strengthen the CIA’s capabilities to protect the American people as it continues to adapt to reform our intelligence community.

I will also rely on the talent and expertise of several distinguished public servants with substantial intelligence experience. The current DNI, Mike McConnell, will continue to offer his counsel through my Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board. The National Counter-Terrorism Center -- the hub of our efforts to prevent attacks and root out terrorist networks -- will continue to benefit from the leadership of Michael Leiter. And I’m pleased to announce that John Brennan -- a close advisor, CIA veteran, and former leader of the National Counter-Terrorism Center -- will be my Homeland Security Advisor and Deputy National Security Advisor for Counterterrorism, serving with the rank of Assistant to the President. John has the experience, vision, and integrity to advance America’s security.

The demands on the intelligence community are huge and growing. To have a successful and sustainable national security strategy, I've made clear that we will need to deploy and balance all elements of American power -- our military, diplomacy, homeland security, economic might, and moral suasion. Good intelligence work is necessary to support each of these endeavors.

Right now, there are men and women working around the world to bear this burden. We may never know their names, but we will always honor -- always honor their sacrifice. The task for the team that I've assembled is to guide, support, and integrate their efforts so that we protect our security and safeguard the values that all of us have pledged to uphold.

With that, I would like to give Admiral Blair an opportunity to say a few words.

Admiral Dennis Blair: President-Elect Obama, thank you for this opportunity to carry out this responsibility that you've entrusted me with. Our mission in national security is absolutely clear: timely, accurate, relevant intelligence to those who keep this nation safe, and to you, so that you can make informed national security policy decisions.

And it's an honor to lead the U.S. intelligence services. As you stated so well, Mr. President, the American people do not always know about these thousands of men and women who serve with patriotism, with dedication, but without public recognition. They're outstanding public servants.

And we in that group will -- will perform out duties fully, and capably, and according to law. We will uphold the standards that you articulated, and that the American people have a right to expect. You've made it very clear, sir, that you are best served by hearing different perspectives, and by respectful debate. And the intelligence services will support you with facts, interpretations, assessments, in a straightforward manner. And we will tell you how well we know what we know, and, what we don't know. So I deeply appreciate the opportunity to lead our intelligence services, and if confirmed by the Senate, I look forward to joining the national security team.

And as President-Elect Obama has said, Leon Panetta's achievements have been remarkable. His services at the top level of the Executive Branch and in the Congress combine leadership and wisdom, and in this business we will count on him for both. I could not ask for a better leader of the Central Intelligence Agency, one of the key agencies within our intelligence community. Leon with your skill and background, the skill of professionals on your team, the agency is in superb hands, and so I welcome your counsel and support as together we seek to serve the President.

Thank you.

Leon Panetta: Thank you, Mr. President-Elect for this honor and this opportunity to once again server our great country. Throughout my 40 years in public life, I've had the honor and the privilege of serving this nation in a number of capacities. In recent years, my wife Sylvia and I established the Panetta Institute, whose mission is to inspire young people to lives of public service. Surely, we can now do no less.

Particularly at a time when our national security is threatened, I believe it is important to respond again to this call to duty like so many other brave Americans have done. And it's because of them that I will work tirelessly to defend this nation and to provide you, Mr. President-Elect, with the most accurate and objective intelligence that you need to lead this nation, at a time of great peril but also a time of great opportunity.

The Central Intelligence Agency has a rich and proud history. As you reference, the professionals at CIA serve bravely around the world, many in dangerous places and away from their families, often under cover, sometimes under fire. They are the front line of our defense at a very dangerous time, and they deserve, and will have, my complete confidence and support.

Strong intelligence requires a strong team, and I look forward to working with Admiral Blair, with John Brennan, as well as the other many talented and dedicated men and women of our intelligence community. And I look forward to working with the other members of your Administration, particularly those involved with the national security. And I commit to consulting closely with my former colleagues in the Congress to form the kind of partnership we need, if we're to win the war on terror.

The inscription on the wall at the old headquarters building at Langley quotes Scripture: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."¹ If confirmed, Mr. President-Elect, I will be honored to lead the men and women of the CIA to seek and speak the truth -- and in so doing, to help preserve this nation's freedom.

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# Pre-Inauguration Address at the Lincoln Memorial

Hello America!

I want to thank all the speakers and performers today for reminding us, through song and through words, just what it is that we love about America. I want to thank all of you for braving the cold and the crowds and traveling in some cases thousands of miles to join us here today. Welcome to Washington, and welcome to this celebration of American renewal.

In the course of our history, only a handful of generations have been asked to confront challenges as serious as the ones we face right now. Our nation is at war. Our economy is in crisis. Millions of Americans are losing their jobs and their homes. They're worried about how they'll afford college for their kids or pay the stack of bills on their kitchen table. And most of all, they're anxious and uncertain about the future -- about whether this generation of Americans will be able to pass on what's best about this country to our children and their children.

I won't pretend that meeting any one of these challenges will be easy. It will take more than a month or a year, and it will likely take many. Along the way there will be setbacks and false starts and days that test our resolve as a nation.

But despite all this -- despite the enormity of the task that lies ahead -- I stand here today as hopeful as ever that the United States of America will endure, that it will prevail, that the dream of our Founders will live on in our time.

What gives me hope is what I see when I look out across this mall. For in these monuments are chiseled those unlikely stories that affirm our unyielding faith -- a faith that anything is possible in America. Rising before us stands a memorial to a man who led a small band of farmers and shopkeepers in revolution against the army of an empire, all for the sake of an idea.

On the ground below is a tribute to a generation that withstood war and depression -- men and women like my grandparents who toiled on bomber assembly lines and marched across Europe to free the world from tyranny's grasp. Directly in front of us is a pool that still reflects the dream of a King, and the glory of a people who marched and bled so that their children might be judged by their character's content. And behind me, watching over the union he saved, sits the man who in so many ways made this day possible.

And yet, as I stand here today, what gives me the greatest hope of all is not the stone and marble that surrounds us, but what -- what fills the spaces in between. It is you -- Americans of every race and region and station who came here because you believe in what this country can be and because you want to help us get there.

It's the same thing that gave me hope from the day we began this campaign for the presidency nearly two years ago: a belief that if we could just recognize ourselves in one another and bring everyone together -- Democrats, Republicans, Independents; Latino, Asian and Native American; black and white, gay and straight, disabled and not -- then not only would we restore hope and opportunity in places that yearned for both, but maybe, just maybe, we might perfect our union in the process.

This is what I believed, but you made this belief real. You proved once more that people who love this country can change it. And as I prepare to assume the presidency, yours are the voices I will take with me every day when I walk into that Oval Office -- the voices of men and women who have different stories but hold common hopes; who ask only for what was promised us as Americans -- that we might make of our lives what we will and see our children climb higher than we did.

It is this thread that binds us together in common effort; that runs through every memorial on this mall; that connects us to all those who struggled and sacrificed and stood here before. It is how this nation has overcome the greatest differences and the longest odds -- because there is no obstacle that can stand in the way of millions of voices calling for change. That is the belief with which we began this campaign, and that is how we will overcome what ails us now.

There is no doubt that our road will be long, that our climb will be steep. But never forget that the true character of our nation is revealed not during times of comfort and ease, but by the right we do when the moment is hard. I ask you to help reveal that character once more, and together, we can carry forward as one nation, and one people, the legacy of our forefathers that we celebrate today.

Thank you, America. God bless you.

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# First Presidential Inaugural Address

1

Thank you, thank you.

My fellow citizens:

I stand here today humbled by the task before us, grateful for the trust you've bestowed, mindful of the sacrifices borne by our ancestors. I thank President Bush for his service to our nation, as well as the generosity and cooperation he has shown throughout this transition.

Forty-four Americans have now taken the presidential Oath. The words have been spoken during rising tides of prosperity and the still waters of peace. Yet, every so often the Oath is taken amidst gathering clouds and raging storms. At these moments, America has carried on not simply because of the skill or vision of those in high office, but because We the People have remained faithful to the ideals of our forebearers [sic], and true to our founding documents.

So it has been. So it must be with this generation of Americans.

That we are in the midst of crisis is now well understood. Our nation is at war, against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred. Our economy is badly weakened, a consequence of greed and irresponsibility on the part of some, but also our collective failure to make hard choices and prepare the nation for a new age. Homes have been lost; jobs shed; businesses shuttered. Our health care is too costly; our schools fail too many; and each day brings further evidence that the ways we use energy strengthen our adversaries and threaten our planet.

These are the indicators of crisis, subject to data and statistics. Less measurable, but no less profound, is a sapping of confidence across our land -- a nagging fear that America's decline is inevitable, that the next generation must lower its sights.

Today I say to you that the challenges we face are real. They are serious and they are many. They will not be met easily or in a short span of time. But know this, America: They will be met.

On this day, we gather because we have chosen hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord.

On this day, we come to proclaim an end to the petty grievances and false promises, the recriminations and worn out dogmas, that for far too long have strangled our politics.

We remain a young nation, but in the words of Scripture, the time has come to "set aside childish things."

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The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit; to choose our better history; to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea, passed on from generation to generation: the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness.

In reaffirming the greatness of our nation, we understand that greatness is never a given. It must be earned. Our journey has never been one of short-cuts or settling for less. It has not been the path for the faint-hearted -- for those who prefer leisure over work, or seek only the pleasures of riches and fame. Rather, it has been the risk-takers, the doers, the makers of things -- some celebrated but more often men and women obscure in their labor, who have carried us up the long, rugged path towards prosperity and freedom.

For us, they packed up their few worldly possessions and traveled across oceans in search of a new life.

For us, they toiled in sweatshops and settled the West; endured the lash of the whip and plowed the hard earth.

For us, they fought and died, in places like Concord and Gettysburg; Normandy and Khe Sahn.

Time and again these men and women struggled and sacrificed and worked till their hands were raw so that we might live a better life. They saw America as bigger than the sum of our individual ambitions; greater than all the differences of birth or wealth or faction.

This is the journey we continue today. We remain the most prosperous, powerful nation on Earth. Our workers are no less productive than when this crisis began. Our minds are no less inventive, our goods and services no less needed than they were last week or last month or last year. Our capacity remains undiminished. But our time of standing pat, of protecting narrow interests and putting off unpleasant decisions - that time has surely passed. Starting today, we must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the work of remaking America.

For everywhere we look, there is work to be done. The state of our economy calls for action, bold and swift, and we will act -- not only to create new jobs, but to lay a new foundation for growth. We will build the roads and bridges, the electric grids and digital lines that feed our commerce and bind us together. We will restore science to its rightful place, and wield technology's wonders to raise health care's quality and lower its cost. We will harness the sun and the winds and the soil to fuel our cars and run our factories. And we will transform our schools and colleges and universities to meet the demands of a new age.

All this we can do.

All this we will do.

Now, there are some who question the scale of our ambitions -- who suggest that our system cannot tolerate too many big plans. Their memories are short. For they have forgotten what this country has already done; what free men and women can achieve when imagination is joined to common purpose, and necessity to courage.

What the cynics fail to understand is that the ground has shifted beneath them -- that the stale political arguments that have consumed us for so long no longer apply. The question we ask today is not whether our government is too big or too small, but whether it works -- whether it helps families find jobs at a decent wage, care they can afford, a retirement that is dignified. Where the answer is yes, we intend to move forward. Where the answer is no, programs will end. And those of us who manage the public's dollars will be held to account -- to spend wisely, reform bad habits, and do our business in the light of day -- because only then can we restore the vital trust between a people and their government.

Nor is the question before us whether the market is a force for good or ill. Its power to generate wealth and expand freedom is unmatched, but this crisis has reminded us that without a watchful eye, the market can spin out of control. The nation cannot prosper long when it favors only the prosperous. The success of our economy has always depended not just on the size of our Gross Domestic Product, but on the reach of our prosperity; on the ability to extend opportunity to every willing heart -- not out of charity, but because it is the surest route to our common good.

As for our common defense, we reject as false the choice between our safety and our ideals. Our Founding Fathers -- Our Founding Fathers, faced with perils that we can scarcely imagine, drafted a charter to assure the rule of law and the rights of man, a charter expanded by the blood of generations. Those ideals still light the world, and we will not give them up for expedience'[s] sake. And so to all the other peoples and governments who are watching today, from the grandest capitals to the small village where my father was born: Know that America is a friend of each nation and every man, woman, and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity. And we are ready to lead once more.

Recall that earlier generations faced down fascism and communism not just with missiles and tanks, but with the sturdy alliances and enduring convictions. They understood that our power alone cannot protect us, nor does it entitle us to do as we please. Instead, they knew that our power grows through its prudent use; our security emanates from the justness of our cause, the force of our example, the tempering qualities of humility and restraint.

We are the keepers of this legacy. Guided by these principles once more, we can meet those new threats that demand even greater effort -- even greater cooperation and understanding between nations. We will begin to responsibly leave Iraq to its people, and forge a hard-earned peace in Afghanistan. With old friends and former foes, we will work tirelessly to lessen the nuclear threat, and roll back the specter of a warming planet. We will not apologize for our way of life, nor will we waver in its defense, and for those who seek to advance their aims by inducing terror and slaughtering innocents, we say to you now that our spirit is stronger and cannot be broken. You cannot outlast us, and we will defeat you!

For we know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus -- and non-believers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth; and because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation, and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united, we cannot help but believe that the old hatreds shall someday pass; that the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve; that as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself; and that America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace.

To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect. To those leaders around the globe who seek to sow conflict, or blame their society's ills on the West -- know that your people will judge you on what you can build, not what you destroy. To those -- To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history; but that we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist.

To the people of poor nations, we pledge to work alongside you to make your farms flourish and let clean waters flow; to nourish starved bodies and feed hungry minds. And to those nations like ours that enjoy relative plenty, we say we can no longer afford indifference to the suffering outside our borders; nor can we consume the world's resources without regard to effect. For the world has changed, and we must change with it.

As we consider the road that unfolds before us, we remember with humble gratitude those brave Americans who, at this very hour, patrol far-off deserts and distant mountains. They have something to tell us, just as the fallen heroes who lie in Arlington whisper through the ages. We honor them not only because they are the guardians of our liberty, but because they embody the spirit of service; a willingness to find meaning in something greater than themselves. And yet, at this moment -- a moment that will define a generation -- it is precisely this spirit that must inhabit us all.

For as much as government can do and must do, it is ultimately the faith and determination of the American people upon which this nation relies. It is the kindness to take in a stranger when the levees break, the selflessness of workers who would rather cut their hours than see a friend lose their job which sees us through our darkest hours. It is the firefighter's courage to storm a stairway filled with smoke, but also a parent's willingness to nurture a child, that finally decides our fate.

Our challenges may be new. The instruments with which we meet them may be new. But those values upon which our success depends -- honesty and hard work, courage and fair play, tolerance and curiosity, loyalty and patriotism -- these things are old. These things are true. They have been the quiet force of progress throughout our history. What is demanded then is a return to these truths. What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility -- a recognition, on the part of every American, that we have duties to ourselves, our nation, and the world, duties that we do not grudgingly accept but rather seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining of our character, than giving our all to a difficult task.

This is the price and the promise of citizenship.

This is the source of our confidence -- the knowledge that God calls on us to shape an uncertain destiny.

This is the meaning of our liberty and our creed -- why men and women and children of every race and every faith can join in celebration across this magnificent mall, and why a man whose father less than sixty years ago might not have been served at a local restaurant can now stand before you to take a most sacred Oath.

So let us mark this day with remembrance, of who we are and how far we have traveled. In the year of America's birth, in the coldest of months, a small band of patriots huddled by dying campfires on the shores of an icy river. The Capitol was abandoned. The enemy was advancing. The snow was stained with blood. At a moment when the outcome of our revolution was most in doubt, the father of our nation ordered these words be read to the people:

Let it be told to the future world...that in the depth of winter, when nothing but hope and virtue could survive...that the city and the country, alarmed at one common danger, came forth to meet [it].

America: In the face of our common dangers, in this winter of our hardship, let us remember these timeless words. With hope and virtue, let us brave once more the icy currents, and endure what storms may come. Let it be said by our children's children that when we were tested we refused to let this journey end, that we did not turn back nor did we falter; and with eyes fixed on the horizon and God's grace upon us, we carried forth that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations.

Thank you, God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.

1

# First Presidential Weekly Address

We begin this year and this Administration in the midst of an unprecedented crisis that calls for unprecedented action. Just this week, we saw more people file for unemployment than at any time in the last twenty-six years, and experts agree that if nothing is done, the unemployment rate could reach double digits. Our economy could fall $1 trillion short of its full capacity, which translates into more than $12,000 in lost income for a family of four. And we could lose a generation of potential, as more young Americans are forced to forgo college dreams or the chance to train for the jobs of the future.

In short, if we do not act boldly and swiftly, a bad situation could become dramatically worse.

That is why I have proposed an American Recovery and Reinvestment Plan to immediately jumpstart job creation as well as long-term economic growth. I am pleased to say that both parties in Congress are already hard at work on this plan, and I hope to sign it into law in less than a month.

It’s a plan that will save or create three to four million jobs over the next few years, and one that recognizes both the paradox and the promise of this moment -- the fact that there are millions of Americans trying to find work even as, all around the country, there’s so much work to be done. That’s why this is not just a short-term program to boost employment. It’s one that will invest in our most important priorities like energy and education; health care and a new infrastructure that are necessary to keep us strong and competitive in the 21st century.

Today I’d like to talk specifically about the progress we expect to make in each of these areas.

To accelerate the creation of a clean energy economy, we will double our capacity to generate alternative sources of energy like wind, solar, and biofuels over the next three years. We’ll begin to build a new electricity grid that lay down more than 3,000 miles of transmission lines to convey this new energy from coast to coast. We’ll save taxpayers $2 billion a year by making 75% of federal buildings more energy efficient, and save the average working family $350 on their energy bills by weatherizing 2.5 million homes.

To lower health care cost, cut medical errors, and improve care, we’ll computerize the nation’s health record in five years, saving billions of dollars in health care costs and countless lives. And we’ll protect health insurance for more than 8 million Americans who are in danger of losing their coverage during this economic downturn.

To ensure our children can compete and succeed in this new economy, we’ll renovate and modernize 10,000 schools, building state-of-the-art classrooms, libraries, and labs to improve learning for over five million students. We’ll invest more in Pell Grants to make college affordable for seven million more students, provide a $2,500 college tax credit to four million students, and triple the number of fellowships in science to help spur the next generation of innovation.

Finally, we will rebuild and retrofit America to meet the demands of the 21st century. That means repairing and modernizing thousands of miles of America’s roadways and providing new mass transit options for millions of Americans. It means protecting America by securing 90 major ports and creating a better communications network for local law enforcement and public safety officials in the event of an emergency. And it means expanding broadband access to millions of Americans, so business can compete on a level-playing field, wherever they’re located.

I know that some are skeptical about the size and scale of this recovery plan. I understand that skepticism, which is why this recovery plan must and will include unprecedented measures that will allow the American people to hold my Administration accountable for these results. We won’t just throw money at our problems -- we’ll invest in what works. Instead of politicians doling out money behind a veil of secrecy, decisions about where we invest will be made public, and informed by independent experts whenever possible. We’ll launch an unprecedented effort to root out waste, inefficiency, and unnecessary spending in our government, and every American will be able to see how and where we spend taxpayer dollars by going to a new website called recovery.gov.

No one policy or program will solve the challenges we face right now, nor will this crisis recede in a short period of time. But if we act now and act boldly; if we start rewarding hard work and responsibility once more; if we act as citizens and not partisans and begin again the work of remaking America, then I have faith that we will emerge from this trying time even stronger and more prosperous than we were before.

Thanks for listening.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Al-Arabiya Television Interview With Hisham Melhem

Mr. Melhem: Mr. President, thank you for this opportunity -- we really appreciate it. President Obama: Thank you so much. Mr. Melhem: Sir, you just met with your personal envoy to the Middle East, Senator Mitchell. Obviously, his first -- first task is to consolidate the cease-fire. But beyond that you've been saying that you want to pursue actively and aggressively peacemaking between the Palestinians and...the Israelis. Tell us a little bit about how do you see your personal role, because, you know, if the President of the United States is not involved, nothing happens -- as the history of peace making shows. Will you be proposing ideas, pitching proposals, parameters, as one of your predecessors did? Or just urging the parties to come up with their own resolutions, as -- as your immediate predecessor did? President Obama: Well, I -- I think the -- the most important thing is for the United States to get engaged right away.

Mr. Melhem: Right.

President Obama: And George Mitchell is somebody of enormous stature. He is one of the few people who have international experience brokering peace deals. And so what I told him is start by listening, because all too often the United States starts by dictating -- in the past on some of these issues -- and we don't always know all the factors that are involved. So, let's listen. He's going to be speaking to all the major parties involved and he will then report back to me. From there, we will formulate a specific response. Ultimately, we cannot tell either the Israelis or the Palestinians what's best for them. They're going to have to make some decisions. But I do believe that the moment is ripe for both sides to realize that the path that they are on is one that is not going to result in prosperity and security for their people, and that, instead, it's time to return to the negotiating table. It's going to be difficult; it's going to take time. I don't want to prejudge many of these issues, and I want to make sure that expectations are not raised so that we think that this is going to be resolved in a few months. But if we start steady progress on these issues, I'm absolutely confident that the United States -- working in tandem with the European Union, with Russia, with all the Arab states in the region -- I'm absolutely certain that we can make significant progress. Mr. Melhem: You've been saying essentially that we should not look at these issues -- like the Palestinian-Israeli track and separation from the border region -- you've been talking about a kind of holistic approach to the region. Are we expecting a different paradigm in the sense that in the past one of the critiques -- at least from the Arab side, the Muslim side -- is that everything the Americans always test -- tested with the Israelis, if it works. Now there is an Arab peace plan, there is a regional aspect to it. And -- And you've indicated that. Would there be any shift, a paradigm shift? President Obama: Well -- Well, here's what I think is important. You look at the proposal that was put forth by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia -- Mr. Melhem: Right.

President Obama: I might not agree with every aspect of the proposal, but it took great courage -- Mr. Melhem: Absolutely. President Obama: -- to put forward something that is as significant as that. I think that there are ideas across the region of how we might pursue peace. I do think that it is impossible for us to think only in terms of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and not think in terms of what's happening with Syria or Iran or Lebanon or Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Mr. Melhem: Sure. President Obama: These things are interrelated.

Mr. Melhem: Sure.

President Obama:

And what I've said -- and I think Hillary Clinton has expressed this in her confirmation -- is that if we are looking at the region as a whole and communicating a message to the Arab world and the Muslim world, that we are ready to initiate a new partnership based on mutual respect and mutual interest, then I think that we can make significant progress.

Now, Israel is a strong ally of the United States. They will not stop being a strong ally of the United States. And I will continue to believe that Israel's security is paramount. But I also believe that there are Israelis who recognize that it is important to achieve peace. They will be willing to make sacrifices if the time is appropriate and if there is serious partnership on the other side. And so what we want to do is to listen, set aside some of the preconceptions that have existed and -- and have built up over the last several years. And I think if we do that, then there's a possibility at least of -- of achieving some breakthroughs.

Mr. Melhem:

Now I want to ask you about the broader Muslim world, but let me -- one final thing about the Palestinian-Israeli theater. There are many Palestinians and Israelis who are very frustrated now with the -- with the current conditions and they are losing hope; they are disillusioned; and they believe that time is running out on the two-state solution because -- mainly because of the -- the settlement activities in...Palestinian-occupied territories. Will it still be possible to see a Palestinian state -- and you know the contours of it -- within the first Obama Administration?

President Obama: I think it is possible for us to see a Palestinian state -- I'm not going to put a time frame on it -- that is contiguous, that allows freedom of movement for its people, that allows for trade with other countries, that allows the creation of businesses and commerce so that people have a better life.

And, look, I think anybody who has studied the region recognizes that the situation for the ordinary Palestinian in many cases has not improved. And the bottom line in all these talks and all these conversations is: Is a child in the Palestinian Territories going to be better off? Do they have a future for themselves? And, is the child in Israel going to feel confident about his or her safety and security? And if we can keep our focus on making their lives better and look forward, and not simply think about all the conflicts and tragedies of the past, then I think that we have an opportunity to make real progress. But it is not going to be easy, and that's why we've got George Mitchell going there. This is somebody with extraordinary patience as well as extraordinary skill, and that's what's going to be necessary. Mr. Melhem: Let me take a broader look at the whole region. You are planning to address the Muslim world in your first 100 days from a Muslim capital. And everybody is speculating about the capital. If you have anything further, that would be great. How concerned are you -- because, let me tell you, honestly, when I -- when I see certain things about America -- in some parts, I don't want to exaggerate -- there is a demonization of America. President Obama: Absolutely. Mr. Melhem: It's become like a new religion, and like a new religion it has new converts, like a new religion has its own high priests. President Obama: Right. Mr. Melhem: It's own, even, religious texts. President Obama: Right. Mr. Melhem: And...in the last -- since 9/11 and because of Iraq, that alienation, you know, is -- is wider between the Americans. And...in generations past, the United States was held high. It was the only Western power with no colonial legacy. President Obama: Right. Mr. Melhem: How concerned are you and...because people sense that you have a different political discourse. And...I think, judging by [inaudible] and Zawahiri and Osama bin Laden and all these, that... --

President Obama: Yeah, I noticed.

Mr. Melhem: -- a chorus -- President Obama: They -- They seem nervous. Mr. Melhem: They seem very nervous, exactly. And...now, tell me why they should be more nervous?

President Obama: Well...I think that when you look at the rhetoric that they've been using against me before I even took office -- Mr. Melhem: I know, I know. President Obama: -- what that tells me is that their ideas are bankrupt.

Mr. Melhem: Absolutely.

President Obama: ...There's no actions that they've taken that say a child in the Muslim world is getting a better education because of them, or has better health care because of them. In my inauguration speech, I've spoke[n] about: You will be judged on what you built, not what you destroy. And what they've been doing is destroying things. And over time, I think the Muslim world has recognized that that path is leading no place, except more death and destruction. Now, my job is to communicate the fact that the United States has a stake in the well-being of the Muslim world that the language we use has to be language of respect. You know, I have Muslim members of my family.

Mr. Melhem: True.

President Obama: I have lived in Muslim countries. Mr. Melhem: The largest one. President Obama: The largest one, Indonesia. And so what I want to communicate is the fact that in all my travels throughout the Muslim world, what I've come to understand is is that regardless of your faith -- and America is a country of Muslim[s], Jews, Christians, non-believers -- regardless of your faith, people all have certain common hopes and common dreams.

And my job is to communicate to the American people --

Mr. Melhem: True.

President Obama: -- that the Muslim world is filled with extraordinary people who simply want to live their lives and see their children live better lives. My job to the Muslim world is to communicate that the Americans are not your enemy. We sometimes make mistakes. We have not been perfect. But if you look at the track record, as you say, America was not born as a colonial power, and that the same respect and partnership that America had with the Muslim world as recently as 20 or 30 years ago --

Mr. Melhem: True.

President Obama: -- there's no reason why we can't restore that. And -- And that I think is going to be an important task. But ultimately, people are going to judge me not by my words but by my actions and my Administration's actions. And I think that what you will see over the next several years is that I'm not going to agree with everything that some Muslim leader may say, or what's on a television station in the Arab world; but I think that what you'll see is somebody who is listening, who is respectful, and who is trying to promote the interests not just of the United States, but also ordinary people who right now are suffering from poverty and a lack of opportunity. I want to make sure that I'm speaking to them, as well. Mr. Melhem: And any decision on -- on from where you will -- you will be addressing the Muslim world or is too early? President Obama: Well, you know, I'm not -- I'm not going to break the news right here. Mr. Melhem: Maybe next time? President Obama: But maybe next time. ...But it is something that's going to be important.

Mr. Melhem: True.

President Obama: I -- I want people to recognize, though, that we are going to be making a series of initiatives. Us sending George Mitchell --

Mr. Melhem: Right. True.

President Obama: -- to the Middle East is fulfilling my campaign promise that we're not going to wait until the end of my Administration to deal with Palestinian and -- and Israeli peace. We're going to start now. It may take a long time to do --

Mr. Melhem: Sure.

President Obama: -- but we're going to do it now. We're going to follow through on our commitment for me to address the Muslim world from a Muslim capital. We are going to follow through on many of my commitments to do a more effective job of reaching out, listening, as well as speaking to the Muslim world. And I-- you're going to see me following through with dealing with a drawdown of troops in Iraq, so that Iraqis can start taking more responsibility. And finally, I think you've already seen a commitment, in terms of closing Guantanamo --

Mr. Melhem: Absolutely.

President Obama: -- and making clear that even as we are decisive in going after terrorist organizations that would kill innocent civilians, that we're going to do so on our terms, and we're going to do so respecting the rule of law that I think makes America great. Mr. Melhem: President Bush framed the war on -- on terror conceptually in a -- in a way that was very broad, "War on terror," and he used sometimes certain terminology that the -- that the many people -- "Islamofascism."1

President Obama: Right.

Mr. Melhem: You've always framed it in a different way, specifically against one group called al Qaeda --

President Obama: Right.

Mr. Melhem: -- and their collaborators. And -- And is this one way of -- President Obama: ...I think that you're making a very important point. And -- And that is that the language we use matters. And what we need to understand is, is that there are extremist organizations -- whether Muslim or any other faith in the past -- that will use faith as a justification for violence. We cannot paint with a broad brush a faith as a consequence of the violence that is done in that faith's name. And so you will I think see our Administration be very clear in distinguishing between organizations like al Qaeda -- that espouse violence --

Mr. Melhem: Right.

President Obama: -- espouse terror and act on it -- and people who may disagree with my Administration and certain actions, or may have a particular viewpoint in terms of how their countries should develop. We can have legitimate disagreements

Mr. Melhem: True.

President Obama: -- but still be respectful. I cannot respect terrorist organizations that would kill innocent civilians and we will hunt them down. But to the broader Muslim world what we are going to be offering is a hand of friendship. Mr. Melhem: Will the United States ever live with a nuclear Iran? And if not, how far are you going in...the direction of preventing it? President Obama: You know, I said during the campaign that it is very important for us to make sure that we are using all the tools of U.S. power, including diplomacy, in our relationship with Iran. Now, the Iranian people are a great people. The Persian civilization is a great civilization. Iran has acted in ways that's not conducive to peace and prosperity in the region -- their threats against Israel, their pursuit of a nuclear weapon which could potentially set off a[n] arms race in the region that would make everybody less safe; their support of terrorist organizations in the past -- none of these things have been helpful. But I do think that it is important for us to be willing to talk to Iran, to express very clearly where our differences are, but where there are potential avenues for progress. And we will, over the next several months, be laying out our general framework and approach. And as I said during my inauguration speech, if countries like Iran are willing to unclench their fist, they will find an extended hand from us.

Mr. Melhem: Sir, I really appreciate it. President Obama: Thank you so much. Mr. Melhem: Thanks a lot. President Obama: I appreciate it. Mr. Melhem: Thank you. President Obama: Thank you.

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# Remarks on the Economic Crisis & Executive Compensation

Thank you, Tim, for your hard work on this issue and on our economic recovery.

The economic crisis we face is unlike any we've seen in our lifetime. It's a crisis of falling confidence and rising debt, of widely distributed risk and narrowly concentrated reward; a crisis written in the fine print of sub-prime mortgages, on the ledger lines of once mighty financial institutions, and on the pink slips that have upended the lives of so many people across this country and cost the economy 2.6 million jobs last year alone. We know that even if we do everything that we should, this crisis was years in the making, and it will take more than weeks or months to turn things around. But make no mistake: A failure to act, and act now, will turn crisis into a catastrophe and guarantee a longer recession, a less robust recovery, and a more uncertain future. Millions more jobs will be lost. More businesses will be shuttered. More dreams will be deferred. And that's why I feel such a sense of urgency about the economic recovery and reinvestment plan that is before Congress today. With it, we can save or create more than three million jobs, doing things that will strengthen our country for years to come. It's not merely a prescription for short-term spending -- it's a strategy for long-term economic growth in areas like renewable energy and health care and education. Now, in the past few days I've heard criticisms that this plan is somehow wanting, and these criticisms echo the very same failed economic theories that led us into this crisis in the first place -- the notion that tax cuts alone will solve all our problems; that we can ignore fundamental challenges like energy independence and the high cost of health care; that we can somehow deal with this in a piecemeal fashion and still expect our economy and our country to thrive. I reject those theories. And so did the American people when they went to the polls in November and voted resoundingly for change. So I urge members of Congress to act without delay. No plan is perfect, and we should work to make it stronger. No one is more committed to making it stronger than me. But let's not make the perfect the enemy of the essential. Let's show people all over the country who are looking for leadership in this difficult time that we are equal to the task. At the same time, we know that this recovery and reinvestment plan is only the first part of what we need to do to restore prosperity and secure our future. We also need a strong and viable financial system to keep credit flowing to businesses and families alike. And my administration will do whatever it takes to restore our financial system. Our recovery depends on it. And so in the next week, Secretary Geithner will release a new strategy to get credit moving again -- a strategy that will reflect some of the lessons of past mistakes while laying the foundation of the future. But in order to restore trust in our financial system, we're going to have to do more than just put forward our plans. In order to restore trust, we've got to make certain that taxpayer funds are not subsidizing excessive compensation packages on Wall Street. We all need to take responsibility. And this includes executives at major financial firms who turned to the American people, hat in hand, when they were in trouble, even as they paid themselves customary lavish bonuses. As I said last week, this is the height of irresponsibility. It's shameful. And that's exactly the kind of disregard of the costs and consequences of their actions that brought about this crisis: a culture of narrow self-interest and short-term gain at the expense of everything else. This is America. We don't disparage wealth. We don't begrudge anybody for achieving success. And we certainly believe that success should be rewarded. But what gets people upset -- and rightfully so -- are executives being rewarded for failure, especially when those rewards are subsidized by U.S. taxpayers, many of whom are having a tough time themselves. For top executives to award themselves these kinds of compensation packages in the midst of this economic crisis isn't just bad taste -- it's bad strategy -- and I will not tolerate it as President. We're going to be demanding some restraint in exchange for federal aid -- so that when firms seek new federal dollars, we won't find them up to the same old tricks. As part of the reforms we're announcing today, top executives at firms receiving extraordinary help from U.S. taxpayers will have their compensation capped at 500,000 dollars -- a fraction of the salaries that have been reported recently. And if these executives receive any additional compensation, it will come in the form of stock that can't be paid up until taxpayers are paid back for their assistance. Companies receiving federal aid are going to have to disclose publicly all the perks and luxuries bestowed upon senior executives, and provide an explanation to the taxpayers and to shareholders as to why these expenses are justified. And we're putting a stop to these kinds of massive severance packages we've all read about with disgust; we're taking the air out of golden parachutes. We're asking these firms to take responsibility, to recognize the nature of this crisis and their role in it. We believe that what we've laid out should be viewed as fair and embraced as basic common sense. And finally, these guidelines we're putting in place are only the beginning of a long-term effort. We're going to examine the ways in which the means and manner of executive compensation have contributed to a reckless culture and a quarter-by-quarter mentality that in turn helped to wrought havoc in our financial system. We're going to be taking a look at broader reforms so that executives are compensated for sound risk management, and rewarded for growth measured over years, not just days or weeks. We all have to pull together and take our share of responsibility. That's true here in Washington. That's true on Wall Street. The American people are carrying a huge burden as a result of this economic crisis: bearing the brunt of its effects as well as the cost of extraordinary measures we're taking to address them. The American people expect and demand that we pursue policies that reflect the reality of this crisis -- and that will prevent these kinds of crises from occurring again in the future. Thank you very much.

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# First Presidential Prime Time Press Conference

Good evening, everybody. Please be seated.

Before I take your questions tonight, I'd like to speak briefly about the state of our economy and why I believe we need to put this recovery plan in motion as soon as possible.

I took a trip to Elkhart, Indiana, today. Elkhart is a place that has lost jobs faster than anywhere else in America.

In one year, the unemployment rate went from 4.7 percent to 15.3 percent. Companies that have sustained this community for years are shedding jobs at an alarming speed, and the people who've lost them have no idea what to do or who to turn to. They can't pay their bill and they've stopped spending money. And because they've stopped spending money, more businesses have been forced to lay off more workers. In fact, local TV stations have started running public service announcements that tell people where to find food banks, even as the food banks don't have enough to meet the demand.

As we speak, similar scenes are playing out in cities and towns across America. Last Monday, more than a thousand men and women stood in line for 35 firefighter jobs in Miami. Last month, our economy lost 598,000 jobs, which is nearly the equivalent of losing every single job in the state of Maine. And if there's anyone out there who still doesn't believe this constitutes a full-blown crisis, I suggest speaking to one of the millions of Americans whose lives have been turned upside down because they don't know where their next paycheck is coming from.

And that is why the single most important part of this Economic Recovery and Reinvestment Plan is the fact that it will save or create up to 4 million jobs, because that's what America needs most right now.

It is absolutely true that we can't depend on government alone to create jobs or economic growth. That is and must be the role of the private sector. But at this particular moment, with the private sector so weakened by this recession, the federal government is the only entity left with the resources to jolt our economy back into life. It is only government that can break the vicious cycle where lost jobs lead to people spending less money, which leads to even more layoffs. And breaking that cycle is exactly what the plan that's moving through Congress is designed to do.

When passed, this plan will ensure that Americans who've lost their jobs through no fault of their own can receive greater unemployment benefits and continue their health care coverage. We will also provide a $2,500 tax credit to folks who are struggling to pay the cost of their college tuition, and $1,000 worth of badly needed tax relief to working and middle-class families. These steps will put more money in the pockets of those Americans who are most likely to spend it, and that will help break the cycle and get our economy moving.

But as we've learned very clearly and conclusively over the last eight years, tax cuts alone can't solve all of our economic problems -- especially tax cuts that are targeted to the wealthiest few Americans.

We have tried that strategy, time and time again. And it's only helped lead us to the crisis we face right now.

And that's why we have come together, around a plan that combines hundreds of billions in tax cuts for the middle class with direct investment in areas like health care, energy, education and infrastructure, investments that will save jobs, create new jobs and new businesses and help our economy grow again, now and in the future.

More than 90 percent of the jobs created by this plan will be in the private sector. They're not going to be make-work jobs but jobs doing the work that America desperately needs done, jobs rebuilding our crumbling roads and bridges, repairing our dangerously deficient dams and levees, so that we don't face another Katrina.

They'll be jobs building the wind turbines and solar panels and fuel-efficient cars that will lower our dependence on foreign oil and modernizing our costly health care system that will save us billions of dollars and countless lives.

They'll be jobs creating the 21st-century classrooms, libraries and labs for millions of children across America. And they'll be the jobs of firefighters and teachers and police officers that would otherwise be eliminated, if we do not provide states with some relief.

Now after many weeks of debate and discussion, the plan that ultimately emerges from Congress must be big enough and bold enough to meet the size of the economic challenges that we face right now. It's a plan that is already supported by businesses representing almost every industry in America, by both the Chamber of Commerce and the AFL-CIO. It contains input, ideas and compromises from both Democrats and Republicans. It also contains an unprecedented level of transparency and accountability, so that every American will be able to go online and see where and how we're spending every dime.

What it does not contain, however, is a single pet project, not a single earmark, and it has been stripped of the projects members of both parties found most objectionable.

Now despite all of this, the plan's not perfect. No plan is. I can't tell you for sure that everything in this plan will work exactly as we hope, but I can tell you with complete confidence that a failure to act will only deepen this crisis, as well as the pain felt by millions of Americans.

My administration inherited a deficit of over $1 trillion, but because we also inherited the most profound economic emergency since the Great Depression, doing little or nothing at all will result in ever -- even greater deficits, even greater job loss, even greater loss of income and even greater loss of confidence.

Those are deficits that could turn a crisis into a catastrophe, and I refuse to let that happen. As long as I hold this office, I will do whatever it takes to put this economy back on track and put this country back to work.

I want to thank the members of Congress who've worked so hard to move this plan forward. But I also want to urge all members of Congress to act without delay in the coming week to resolve their differences and pass this plan.

We find ourselves in a rare moment where the citizens of our country and all countries are watching and waiting for us to lead. It's a responsibility that this generation did not ask for, but one that we must accept for the future of our children and our grandchildren.

The strongest democracies flourish from frequent and lively debate, but they endure when people of every background and belief find a way to set aside smaller differences in service of a greater purpose. That's the test facing the United States of America in this winter of our hardship, and it is our duty as leaders and citizens to stay -- stay true to that purpose in the weeks and months ahead.

After a day of speaking with and listening to the fundamentally decent men and women who call this nation home, I have full faith and confidence that we can do it.

But we're going to have to work together. That's what I intend to promote in the weeks and days ahead.

And with that, I'll take some of your questions. And let me go to Jennifer Loven at AP. There you are.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Earlier today in Indiana you said something striking. You said that this nation could end up in a crisis, without action, that we would be unable to reverse. Can you talk about what you know or what you're hearing that would lead you to say that our recession might be permanent when others in our history have not? And do you think that you risk losing some credibility or even talking down the economy by using dire language like that?

The latest on President Obama, the new administration and other news from Washington and around the nation.

President Obama: No, no, no, no. I think that what I've said is what other economists have said across the political spectrum, which is that if you delay acting on an economy of this severity, then you potentially create a negative spiral that becomes much more difficult for us to get out of.

We saw this happen in Japan in the 1990s, where they did not act boldly and swiftly enough, and as a consequence they suffered what was called the "lost decade," where essentially for the entire '90s, they did not see any significant economic growth.

So what I'm trying to underscore is what the people in Elkhart already understand, that this is not your ordinary, run-of-the-mill recession.

We are going through the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.

We've lost now 3.6 million jobs. But what's perhaps even more disturbing is that almost half of that job loss has taken place over the last three months, which means that the problems are accelerating instead of getting better.

Now, what I said in Elkhart today is what I'll repeat this evening, which is I'm absolutely confident that we can solve this problem, but it's going to require us to take some significant, important steps.

Step number one, we have to pass an economic recovery and reinvestment plan. And we've made progress. There was a vote this evening that moved the process forward in the Senate. We already have a House bill that's passed. I'm hoping over the next several days that the House and the Senate can reconcile their differences and get that bill on my desk.

There have been criticisms from a bunch of different directions about this bill. So let me just address a few of them.

Some of the criticisms really are with the basic idea that government should intervene at all in this moment of crisis. You have some people, very sincere, who philosophically just think the government has no business interfering in the marketplace.

And in fact there are several who have suggested that FDR was wrong to intervene back in the New Deal. They're fighting battles that I thought were resolved a pretty long time ago.

Most economists, almost unanimously, recognize that even if philosophically you're -- you're wary of government intervening in the economy, when you have the kind of problem we have right now -- what started on Wall Street goes to Main Street, suddenly businesses can't get credit, they start paring back their investment, they start laying off workers, workers start pulling back in terms of spending -- that when you have that situation, that government is an important element of introducing some additional demand into the economy. We stand to lose about $1 trillion worth of demand this year and another trillion next year, and what that means is you've got this gaping hole in the economy.

That's why the -- the figure that we initially came up with, of approximately $800 billion, was put forward. That wasn't just some random number that I plucked out of -- out of a hat. That was Republican and Democratic, conservative and liberal economists that I spoke to, who indicated that given the magnitude of the crisis and the fact that it's happening worldwide, it's important for us to have a bill of sufficient size and scope that we can save or create 4 million jobs. That still means that you're going to have some net job loss, but at least we can start slowing the trend and moving it in the right direction.

Now, the recovery and reinvestment package is not the only thing we have to do. It's one leg of the stool. We are still going to have to make sure that we are attracting private capital, get the credit markets flowing again, because that's the lifeblood of the economy. And so tomorrow my Treasury secretary, Tim Geithner, will be announcing some very clear and specific plans for how we are going to start loosening up credit once again.

The latest on President Obama, the new administration and other news from Washington and around the nation.

And that means having some transparency and oversight in the system.

It means that we correct some of the mistakes, with TARP, that were made earlier, the lack of consistency, the lack of clarity, in terms of how the program was going to move forward.

It means that we condition taxpayer dollars that are being provided, to the banks, on them showing some restraint when it comes to executive compensation, not using the money to charter corporate jets when they're not necessary.

It means that we focus on housing and how are we going to help homeowners that are suffering foreclosure or homeowners who are still making their mortgage payments but are seeing their property values decline.

So there's going to be a whole range of approaches that we have to take for dealing with the economy. My bottom line is to make sure that we are saving or creating 4 million jobs, we are making sure that the financial system is working again, that homeowners are getting some relief.

And I'm happy to get good ideas from across the political spectrum, from Democrats and Republicans.

What I won't do is return to the failed theories of the last eight years that got us into this fix in the first place, because those theories have been tested and they have failed. And that's part of what the election in November was all about. Okay?

Caren Bohan of Reuters.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. I'd like to shift gears to foreign policy. What is your strategy for engaging Iran, and when will you start to implement it? Will your time table be affected at all by the Iranian elections? And are you getting any indications that Iran is interested in a dialogue with the United States?

President Obama: I said during the campaign that Iran is a country that has extraordinary people, extraordinary history and traditions, but that its actions over many years now have been unhelpful when it comes to promoting peace and prosperity both in the region and around the world; that their attacks or -- or their -- their financing of terrorist organizations like Hezbollah and Hamas, the bellicose language that they've used towards Israel, their development of a nuclear weapon or their pursuit of a nuclear weapon -- that all of those things create the possibility of destabilizing the region and are not only contrary to our interests, but I think are contrary to the interests of international peace.

What I've also said is that we should take an approach with Iran that employs all of the resources at the United States' disposal, and that includes diplomacy. And so my national security team is currently reviewing our existing Iran policy, looking at areas where we can have constructive dialogue, where we can directly engage with them. And my expectation is, in the coming months, we will be looking for openings that can be created where we can start sitting across the table, face to face; of diplomatic overtures that will allow us to move our policy in a new direction.

There's been a lot of mistrust built up over the years, so it's not going to happen overnight.

And it's important that even as we engage in this direct diplomacy, we are very clear about certain deep concerns that we have as a country, that Iran understands that we find the funding of terrorist organizations unacceptable, that we're clear about the fact that a nuclear Iran could set off a nuclear arms race in the region that would be profoundly destabilizing. So there are going to be a set of objectives that we have in these conversations, but I think that there's the possibility, at least, of a relationship of mutual respect and progress.

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And I think that if you look at how we've approached the Middle East, my designation of George Mitchell as a special envoy to help deal with the Arab-Israeli situation, some of the interviews that I've given, it indicates the degree to which we want to do things differently in the region. Now it's time for Iran to send some signals that it wants to act differently as well and recognize that even as it is has some rights as a member of the international community, with those rights come responsibilities.

Okay.

President Obama: Chip Reid.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President.

You have often said that bipartisanship is extraordinarily important overall and in this stimulus package. But now when we ask your advisers about the lack of bipartisanship so far -- zero votes in the House, three in the Senate -- they say, well, it's not the number of votes that matters; it's the number of jobs that will be created.

Is that a sign that you are moving away, your White House is moving away, from this emphasis on bipartisanship? And what went wrong? Did you underestimate how hard it would be to change the way Washington worked?

President Obama: I don't think -- I don't think I underestimated it. I don't think the American people underestimated it. They understand that there have been a lot of bad habits built up here in Washington. And it's going to take time to break down some of those bad habits.

You know, when I made a series of overtures to the Republicans -- going over to meet with both Republican caucuses, you know, putting three Republicans in my Cabinet, something that is unprecedented, making sure that they were invited here to the White House, to talk about the economic recovery plan -- all those were not designed simply to get some short-term votes. They were designed to try to build up some trust over time.

And I think that, as I continue to make these overtures, over time, hopefully that will be reciprocated.

But understand the bottom line that I've got right now, which is what's happening to the people of Elkhart and what's happening across the country. I can't afford to see Congress play the usual political games. What we have to do right now is deliver for the American people. So my bottom line when it comes to the recovery package is send me a bill that creates or saves 4 million jobs, because everybody has to be possessed with a sense of urgency about putting people back to work, making sure that folks are staying in their homes, that they can send their kids to college.

That doesn't negate the continuing efforts that I'm going to make to listen and engage with my Republican colleagues. And hopefully the tone that I've taken, which has been consistently civil and respectful, will pay some dividends over the long term.

There are going to be areas where we disagree and there are going to be areas where we agree.

As I said, the one concern I've got on the stimulus package, in terms of the debate and listening to some of what's been said in Congress is that there seems to be a set of folks who -- I don't doubt their sincerity -- who just believe that we should do nothing. Now, if that's their opening position or their closing position in negotiations, then we're probably not going to make much progress, because I don't think that's economically sound and I don't think what -- that's what the American people expect, is for us to stand by and do nothing.

There are others who recognize that we've got to do a significant recovery package but they're concerned about the mix of what's in there. And if they're sincere about it, then I'm happy to have conversations about this tax cut versus that -- that tax cut or this infrastructure project versus that infrastructure project.

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But what I -- what I've been concerned about is some of the language that's been used suggesting that this is full of pork and this is wasteful government spending, so on and so forth. First of all, when I hear that from folks who presided over a doubling of the national debt, then, you know, I just want them to not engage in some revisionist history. I inherited the deficit that we have right now and the economic crisis that we have right now.

Number two is that, although there are some programs in there that I think are good policy, some of them aren't job creators. I think it's perfectly legitimate to say that those programs should be out of this particular recovery package, and we can deal with them later.

But when they start characterizing this as pork without acknowledging that there are no earmarks in this package -- something, again, that was pretty rare over the last eight years -- then you get a feeling that maybe we're playing politics instead of actually trying to solve problems for the American people.

So I'm going to keep on engaging. I hope that as we get the Senate and the House bills together, that everybody is willing to give a little bit. I suspect that the package that emerges is not going to be a hundred percent of what I want. But my bottom line is, are we creating 4 million jobs, and are we laying the foundation for long- term economic growth?

This is another concern that I've had in some of the arguments that I'm hearing. When people suggest that what a waste of money to make federal buildings more energy-efficient -- why would that be a waste of money? We're creating jobs immediately by retrofitting these buildings or weatherizing 2 million Americans' homes, as was called for in the package. So that right there creates economic stimulus, and we are saving taxpayers, when it comes to federal buildings, potentially $2 billion. In the case of homeowners, they will see more money in their pockets. And we're reducing our dependence on foreign oil in the Middle East. Why wouldn't we want to make that kind of investment?

Now, maybe philosophically you just don't think that the federal government should be involved in energy policy. I happen to disagree with that. I think that's the reason why we find ourselves importing more foreign oil right now than we did back in the early '70s, when OPEC first formed. And we can have a respectful debate about whether or not we should be involved in energy policymaking, but don't suggest that somehow that's wasteful spending. That's exactly what this country needs.

The same applies when it comes to information technologies and health care. We know that health care is crippling businesses and making us less competitive, as well as breaking the banks of families all across America. And part of the reason is we've got the most inefficient health care system imaginable. We're still using paper. We're -- we're still filing things in triplicate. Nurses can't read the prescriptions that doctors -- that doctors have written out. Why wouldn't we want to put that on an -- put that on an electronic medical record that will reduce error rates, reduce our long-term cost of health care, and create jobs right now?

Education, yet another example. The suggestion is, why should the federal government be involved in school construction? Well, I visited a school down in South Carolina that was built in the 1850s. Kids are still learning in that school -- as best they can. When the -- when the railroad -- when the -- it's right next to a railroad, and when the train runs by the whole building shakes and the teacher has to stop teaching for a while. The -- the auditorium is completely broken down and they can't use it. So why wouldn't we want to build state-of-the-art schools with science labs that are teaching our kids the skills they need for the 21st century, that will enhance our economy and, by the way, right now will create jobs?

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So, you know, we can differ on some of the particulars, but again, the question I think that the American people are asking is, do you just want government to do nothing, or do you want it to do something? If you want it to do something, then we can have a conversation. But doing nothing -- that's not an option from my perspective.

All right. Chuck Todd. Where's Chuck?

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. In your opening remarks, you talked about that if your plan works the way you want it to work, it's going to increase consumer spending. But isn't consumer spending, or over-spending, how we got into this mess? And if people get money back into their pockets, do you not want them saving it or paying down debt first, before they start spending money into the economy?

President Obama: Well, first of all, I don't think it's accurate to say that consumer spending got us into this mess. What got us into this mess initially were banks taking exorbitant, wild risks with other people's monies, based on shaky assets. And because of the enormous leverage, where they had $1 worth of assets and they were betting $30 on that $1, what we had was a crisis in the financial system.

That led to a contraction of credit, which in turn meant businesses couldn't make payroll or make inventories, which meant that everybody became uncertain about the future of the economy.

So people started making decisions accordingly, reducing investments, initiating layoffs, which in turn made things worse.

Now, you are making a legitimate point, Chuck, about the fact that our savings rate has declined. And this economy has been driven by consumer spending for a very long time. And that's not going to be sustainable. You know, if all we're doing is spending and we're not making things, then over time, other countries are going to get tired of lending us money. And eventually the party's going to be over.

Well, in fact, the party now is over. And so the sequence of how we're approaching this is as follows. Our immediate job is to stop the downward spiral. And that means putting money into consumers' pockets. It means loosening up credit.

It means putting forward investments that not only employ people immediately but also lay the groundwork for long-term economic growth. And that by the way is important, even if you're a fiscal conservative, because the biggest problem we're going to have, with our federal budget, is if we continue a situation in which there are no tax revenues, because economic growth is plummeting at the same time as we've got more demands for unemployment insurance; we've got more demands for people who've lost their health care, more demand for food stamps. That will put enormous strains on the federal budget as well as the state budget.

So the most important thing we can do for our budget crisis right now is to make sure that the economy doesn't continue to tank. And that's why passing the Economic Recovery Plan is the right thing to do, even though I recognize that it's expensive.

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Look, I would love not to have to spend money right now. I'd -- you know, this notion that somehow I came in here just ginned up to spend $800 billion, you know, that -- that wasn't -- that wasn't how I envisioned my presidency beginning. But we have to adapt to existing circumstances.

Now, what we are going to also have to do is to make sure that as soon as the economy stabilizes, investment begins again; we're no longer contracting, but we're growing; that our midterm and long-term budget is dealt with. And I think the same is true for individual consumers. Right now, they're just -- they're just trying to figure out how do I make sure that if I lose my job, you know, I'm still going to be able to make my mortgage payments.

Or they're worried about, how am I going to pay next month's bills? So they're not engaging in a lot of long-term financial planning.

Once the economy stabilizes and people are less fearful, then I do think that we're going to have to start thinking about how do we operate more prudently, because there's no such thing as a free lunch. So if -- if you want to get -- if you want to buy a house, then putting zero down and buying a house that is probably not affordable for you in case something goes wrong, that's something that has to be reconsidered.

So we're going to have to change our -- our bad habits. But right now, the key is making sure that we pull ourselves out of the economic slump that we're in.

All right. Julianna Goldman, Bloomberg.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President.

Many experts, from Nouriel Roubini to Senator Schumer, have said that it will cost the government more than a trillion dollars to really fix the financial system. During the campaign, you promised the American people that you won't just tell them what they want to hear, but what they need to hear. Won't the government need far more than the $350 billion that's remaining in the financial rescue fund to really solve the credit crisis?

President Obama: Well, the credit crisis is real. And it's not over. I mean, we averted catastrophe by passing the TARP legislation. But as I said before, because of a lack of clarity and consistency in how it was applied, a lack of oversight in -- in -- in how the money went out, we didn't get as a big of a bang for the buck as we should have.

My immediate task is making sure that the second half of that money, $350 billion, is spent properly. That's my first job. Before I even think about what else I've got to do, my first task is to make sure that my secretary of the Treasury, Tim Geithner, working with Larry Summers, my national economic adviser, and others, are coming up with the best possible plan to use this money wisely, in a way that's transparent, in a way that provides clear oversight; that we are conditioning any money that we give to banks on them reducing executive compensation to reasonable levels and to make sure that they're not wasting that money.

We are going to have to work with the banks in an effective way to clean up their balance sheets so that some trust is restored within the marketplace, because right now part of the problem is that nobody really knows what's on the banks' books. Any given bank, they're not sure what kinds of losses are there. We've got to open things up and restore some trust.

We also have to deal with the housing issue in a clear and consistent way.

I don't want to preempt my secretary of the Treasury; he's going to be laying out these principles in great detail tomorrow. But my instruction to him has been let's get this right, let's create a template in which we're restoring market confidence. And the reason that's so important is because we don't know yet whether we're going to need additional money or how much additional money we'll need until we've seen how successful we are at restoring a sense of confidence in a marketplace that the federal government and the Federal Reserve Bank and the FDIC, working in concert, know what they're doing.

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That can make a big difference, in terms of whether or not we attract private capital back into the marketplace. And ultimately the government cannot substitute for all the private capital that has been withdrawn from the system. We've got to restore confidence, so that private capital goes back in.

Okay.

Jake.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. My question follows Julianna's in content.

The American people have seen hundreds of billions of dollars spent already. And still the economy continues to free-fall. Beyond avoiding the national catastrophe that you've warned about, once all the legs of your stool are in place--

President Obama: Right.

Question: -- how can the American people gauge whether or not your programs are working?

Can they -- should they be looking at the metric of the stock market, home foreclosures, unemployment? What metric should they use? When? And how will they know if it's working or whether or not we need to go to a Plan B?

President Obama: I think my initial measure of success is creating or saving 4 million jobs. That's bottom line number one, because if people are working, then they've got enough confidence to make purchases, to make investments. Businesses start seeing that consumers are out there with a little more confidence. And they start making investments, which means they start hiring workers.

So step number one, job creation.

Step number two, are we seeing the credit markets operate effectively? You know, I can't tell you how many businesses that I talk to that are successful businesses but just can't get credit. Part of the problem in Elkhart that I heard about today was the fact that this is the RV capital of America. You've got a bunch of RV companies that have customers who want to purchase RVs, but even though their credit is good, they can't get the loan.

Now, the businesses also can't get loans to make payments to their suppliers. But when they have consumers, consumers can't get the loans that they need. So normalizing the credit markets is, I think, step number two.

Step number three is going to be housing. Have we stabilized the housing market? Now, you know, the federal government doesn't have complete control over that. But if our plan is effective, working with the Federal Reserve Bank, working with the FDIC, I think what we can do is stem the rate of foreclosure and we can start stabilizing housing values over time.

And the most -- the biggest measure of success is whether we stop contracting and shedding jobs, and we start growing again. Now, you know, I don't have a crystal ball, and as I said, this is an unprecedented crisis. But my hope is that after a difficult year -- and this year is going to be a difficult year -- that businesses start investing again, they start making decisions that, you know, in fact, there's money to be made out there; customers -- or consumers start feeling that their jobs are stable and safe, and they start making purchases again. And if we get things right then, starting next year, we can start seeing some significant improvement.

Ed Henry. Where's Ed? CNN. There he is.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. You've promised to send more troops to Afghanistan. And since you've been very clear about a time table to withdraw our combat troops from Iraq within 16 months, I wonder what's your time table to withdraw troops eventually from Afghanistan?

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And related to that, there's a Pentagon policy that bans media coverage of the flag-draped coffins from coming into Dover Air Force Base. And back in 2004, then-Senator Joe Biden said that it was shameful for dead soldiers to be, quote, snuck back into the country under the cover of night.

You've promised unprecedented transparency, openness in your government. Will you overturn that policy, so the American people can see the full human cost of war?

President Obama: Your question is timely. We got reports that four American service members have been killed in Iraq today. And you know, obviously our thoughts and prayers go out to the families.

I've said before that, you know, people have asked me, "When did it hit you that you are now president?" And what I told them was the most sobering moment is signing letters to the families of our fallen heroes. It reminds you of the responsibilities that you carry in this office and the consequences of decisions that you make.

Now with respect to the policy of opening up media to loved ones being brought back home, we are in the process of reviewing those policies in conversations with the Department of Defense. So I don't want to give you an answer now, before I've evaluated that review and understand all the implications involved.

With respect to Afghanistan, this is going to be a big challenge. I think, because of the extraordinary work done by our troops and some very good diplomatic work done by Ambassador Crocker in Iraq, we just saw an election in Iraq that went relatively peacefully, and you get a sense that the political system is now functioning in a meaningful way.

You do not see that yet in Afghanistan. They've got elections coming up, but effectively the national government seems very detached from what's going on in the surrounding community. In addition, you've got the Taliban and al Qaeda operating in the FATA and these border regions between Afghanistan and Pakistan. And what we haven't seen is the kind of concerted effort to root out those safe havens that would ultimately make our mission successful.

So we are undergoing a thorough-going review. Not only is General Petraeus, now the head of CENTCOM, conducting his own review, he's now working in concert with the special envoy that I've sent over -- Richard Holbrooke, one of our top diplomats -- to evaluate a regional approach. We are going to need more effective coordination of our military efforts with diplomatic efforts with development efforts with more effective coordination with our allies in order for us to be successful.

The bottom line, though -- and I just want to remember the American people, because this is going to be difficult -- is this is a situation in which a region served as the base to launch an attack that killed 3,000 Americans. And this past week I met with families of those who were lost in 9/11, a reminder of the costs of allowing those safe havens to exist.

My bottom line is that we cannot allow al Qaeda to operate. We cannot have those safe havens in that region. And we're going to have to work both smartly and effectively, but with consistency, in order to make sure that those safe havens don't exist.

I do not have yet a timetable for how long that's going to take. What I know is I'm not going to make -- I'm not going to allow al Qaeda or bin Laden to operate with impunity planning attacks on the U.S. homeland. All right.

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Helene Cooper. Where is Helene? Here you go.

Question: Thank you, sir.

I wanted to ask you, on the next bank bailout, are you going to impose a requirement that the financial institutions use this money to loosen up credit and make new lending? And if not, how do you make the case to the American people that this bailout will work when the last one didn't?

President Obama: Again, Helene, I -- I -- and I'm trying to avoid preempting my secretary of the Treasury; I want all of you to show up at his press conference as well. He's going to be terrific.

But this relates to Jake's earlier question. One of my bottom lines is whether or not credit is flowing to the people who need it. Is it flowing to banks? Is -- excuse me; is it flowing to businesses, large and small? Is it flowing to consumers? Are they able to operate in ways that translate into jobs and economic growth on Main Street?

And the package that we've put together is designed to help do that. And beyond that, I'm going to make sure that Tim gets his moment in the sun tomorrow, all right?

Major Garrett. Where is Major?

Question: Mr. President, at a speech Friday that many of us covered, Vice President Biden said the following thing about a conversation the two of you had in the Oval Office about a subject he didn't disclose. "If we do everything right, if we do it with absolute certainty, if we stand up there and we really make the tough decisions, there's still a 30 percent chance we're going to get it wrong."

Since the vice president brought it up, can you tell the American people, sir, what you were talking about? And if not, can you at least reassure them it wasn't the stimulus bill or the bank rescue plan and if in general you agree with that ratio of success, 30 percent failure, 70 percent success?

President Obama: You know, I don't remember exactly what Joe was referring to, not surprisingly. But let me try this out.

I think what Joe may have been suggesting, although I wouldn't put numerical -- I would ascribe any numerical percentage to any of this, is that given the magnitude of the challenges that we have, any single thing that we do is going to be part of the solution, not all of the solution.

And as I said in my introductory remarks, not everything we do is going to work out exactly as we intended it to work out. This is an unprecedented problem. And you know, when you talk to economists, there's some general sense of how we're going to move forward.

There's some strong consensus about the need for a recovery package of a certain magnitude. There's a strong consensus that you shouldn't put all your eggs in one basket, all tax cuts or all investment, but that there should be a range of approaches.

But even if we do everything right on that, we've still got to deal with what we just talked about, the financial system and making sure that banks are lending again. We're still going to have to deal with housing. We're still going to have to make sure that we've got a regulatory structure -- a regulatory architecture for the financial system that prevents crises like this from occurring again. Those are all big, complicated tasks.

So I don't know whether Joe was referring to that, but I use that as a launching point to make a general point about these issues.

President Obama: I have no idea. I really don't.

Michael Fletcher, The Washington Post.

Question: Yeah, thank you, sir. What's you're reaction to Alex Rodriguez's admission that he used steroids as a member of the Texas Rangers?

President Obama: Yeah, I think it's depressing news on top of what's been a flurry of depressing items, when it comes to Major League Baseball.

And if you're a fan of Major League Baseball, I think it -- it tarnishes an entire era, to some degree. And it's unfortunate, because I think there are a lot of ballplayers who played it straight.

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And you know, the thing I'm probably most concerned about the message that it sends to our kids.

What I'm pleased about is, Major League Baseball seems to finally be taking this seriously, to recognize how big of a problem this is for the sport, and that our kids hopefully are watching and saying: You know what? There are no shortcuts; that when you try to take shortcuts, you may end up tarnishing your entire career, and that your integrity's not worth it. That's the message I hope is communicated.

All right. Helen. This is my inaugural moment here. I'm really excited.

Question: Mr. President, do you think that Pakistan and -- are maintaining the safe havens in Afghanistan for these so-called terrorists? And also, do you know of any country in the Middle East that has nuclear weapons?

President Obama: Well, I think that Pakistan -- there is no doubt that in the FATA region of Pakistan, in the mountainous regions along the border of Afghanistan, that there are safe havens where terrorists are operating. And one of the goals of Ambassador Holbrooke as he is traveling throughout the region is to deliver a message to Pakistan that they are endangered as much as we are by the continuation of those operations, and that we've got to work in a regional fashion to root out those safe havens.

They're -- it's not acceptable for Pakistan or for us to have folks who, with impunity, will kill innocent men, women and children.

And you know, I -- I believe that the new government of Pakistan and -- and Mr. Zardari cares deeply about getting control of this situation, and we want to be effective partners with them on that issue.

Question: Did you get any promise from them?

President Obama: Well, Mr. Holbrooke is there, and that's exactly why he's being sent there, because I think that we have to make sure that Pakistan is a stalwart ally with us in battling this terrorist threat.

With respect to nuclear weapons, you know, I don't want to speculate. What I know is this: that if we see a nuclear arms race in a region as volatile as the Middle East, everybody will be in danger.

And one of my goals is to prevent nuclear proliferation generally.

I think that it's important for the United States, in concert with Russia, to lead the way on this. And you know, I've mentioned this in conversations with the Russian president, Mr. Medvedev, to let him know that it is important for us to restart the conversation, about how we can start reducing our nuclear arsenals in an effective way, so that --

President Obama: -- so that we then have the standing to go to other countries and start stitching back together the non- proliferation treaties that frankly have been weakened over the last several years.

Okay.

All right.

Sam Stein, Huffington Post. Where's Sam?

Question: Right here.

President Obama: There. Go ahead.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President.

Today, Senator Patrick Leahy announced that he wants to set up a truth and reconciliation committee to investigate the misdeeds of the Bush administration.

He said that before you turn the page, you have to read -- read the page first. Do you agree with such a proposal? And are you willing to rule out right here and now any prosecution of Bush administration officials?

President Obama: I haven't seen the proposal, so I don't want to express an opinion on something that I haven't seen.

What I have said is that my administration is going to operate in a way that leaves no doubt that we do not torture, that we abide by the Geneva Conventions, and that we observe our traditions of rule of law and due process as we are vigorously going after terrorists that can do us harm. And I don't think those are contradictory; I think they are potentially complementary.

My view is also that nobody's above the law, and if there are clear instances of wrongdoing, that people should be prosecuted just like any ordinary citizen. But that generally speaking, I'm more interested in looking forward than I am in looking backwards. I want to pull everybody together, including, by the way, the -- all the members of the intelligence community who have done things the right way and have been working hard to protect America, and I think sometimes are painted with a broad brush, without adequate information.

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So I will take a look at Senator Leahy's proposal, but my general orientation is to say let's get it right moving forward.

Mara Liasson.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. If it's this hard to get more than a handful of Republican votes on what is relatively easy -- spending tons of money and cutting people's taxes -- when you look down the road at health care and entitlement reform and energy reform, those are really tough choices. You're going to be asking some people to get less, and some people to pay more.

What do you think you're going to have to do to get more bipartisanship? Are you going to need a new legislative model, bringing in Republicans from the very beginning, getting more involved in the details yourself from the beginning, or using bipartisan commissions? What has this experience with the stimulus led you to think about when you think about these future challenges?

President Obama: Well, as I said before, Mara, I think that old habits are hard to break. And we're coming off of an election and I think people want to sort of test the limits of what they can get. You know, there's a lot of jockeying in this town and a lot of who's up and who's down and positioning for the next election. And what I've tried to suggest is that this is one of those times where we've got to put that kind of behavior aside, because the American people can't afford it. The people in Elkhart can't afford it. The single mom who's trying to figure out how to keep her house can't afford it.

And whether we're Democrats or Republicans, surely there's got to be some capacity for us to work together -- not agree on everything, but at least set aside small differences to get things done.

Now, just in terms of the historic record here, the Republicans were brought in early and were consulted. And you'll remember that when we initially introduced our framework, they were pleasantly surprised and complimentary about the tax cuts that were presented in that framework. Those tax cuts are still in there.

I mean, I suppose what I could have done is started off with no tax cuts, knowing that I was going to want some, and then let them take credit for all of them. And maybe that's the lesson I learned. But there was consultation. There will continue to be consultation.

One thing that I think is important is to recognize that because all these -- all these items that you listed are hard, that people have to break out of some of the ideological rigidity and gridlock that we've been carrying around for too long. And let me give you a prime example.

When it comes to how we approach the issue of fiscal responsibility, again, it's a little hard for me to take criticism from folks, about this recovery package, after they presided over a doubling of the national debt. I'm not sure they have a lot of credibility when it comes to fiscal responsibility.

Having said that, I think there are a lot of Republicans who are sincere in recognizing that unless we deal with entitlements in a serious way, the problems we have, with this year's deficit and next year's deficit, pale in comparison to what we're going to be seeing 10 or 15 years or 20 years down the road.

Both Democrats and Republicans are going to have to think differently in order to come together and solve that problem.

I think there are areas like education, where some in my party have been too resistant to reform, and have argued only money makes a difference. And there have been others on the Republican side or the conservative side who said, no matter how much money you spend, nothing makes a difference, so let's just blow up the public school systems. And -- and I think that both sides are going to have to acknowledge we're going to need more money for new science labs, to pay teachers more effectively. But we're also going to need more reform, which means that we've got to train teachers more effectively; bad teachers need to be fired after being given the opportunity to train effectively; that we should experiment with things like charter schools that are innovating in the classroom; that we should have high standards.

So my whole goal over the next four years is to make sure that whatever arguments are persuasive and backed up by evidence and facts and proof, that they can work, that we are pulling people together around that kind of pragmatic agenda. And I think that there was an opportunity to do this with this recovery package because, as I said, although there are some politicians who are arguing that we don't need a stimulus, there are very few economists who are making that argument. I mean, you've got economists who were advising John McCain, economists who were advisers to George Bush -- one and two -- all suggesting that we actually needed a serious recovery package.

And so when I hear people just saying we don't need to do anything; this is a spending bill, not a stimulus bill, without acknowledging that by definition part of any stimulus package would include spending -- that's the point -- then what I get a sense of is that there is some ideological blockage there that needs to be cleared up.

But I am the eternal optimist. I think that over time people respond to -- to civility and rational argument. I think that's what the people of Elkhart and people around America are looking for, and that's what I'm -- that's the kind of leadership I'm going to try to provide.

All right?

Staff: Thank you.

Question: One more, Mr. President.

President Obama: Thank you, guys.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Abraham Lincoln 200th Birthday Celebration Address

Thank you. Please, be seated. Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker, Leader Reid, members of Congress, dear friends, former colleagues:

It is a great honor to be here -- a place where Lincoln served, was inaugurated, and where the nation he saved bid him a last farewell. As we mark the bicentennial of our 16th President's birth, I cannot claim to know as much about his life and works as many who are also speaking today, but I can say that I feel a special gratitude to this singular figure who in so many ways made my own story possible -- and in so many ways made America's story possible.

It is fitting that we are holding this celebration here at the Capitol, for the life of this building is bound ever so closely to the times of this immortal President. Built by artisans and craftsmen, but also immigrants and slaves, it was here, in the rotunda, that Union soldiers received help from a makeshift hospital; it was downstairs, in the basement, that they were baked bread to give them strength; and it was in the Senate and House chambers where they slept at night and spent some of their days.

What those soldiers saw when they looked on this building was a very different sight than the one we see today, for it remained unfinished until the end of the war. The laborers who built the dome came to work wondering each day whether that would be their last; whether the metal they were using for its frame would be requisitioned for the war and melted down into bullets. But each day went by without any orders to halt construction, and so they kept on working, and kept on building.

And when President Lincoln was finally told of all the metal being used here, his response was short and clear: That is as it should be. The American people needed to be reminded, he believed, that even in a time of war, the work would go on; the people's business would continue; that even when the nation itself was in doubt, its future was being secured; and that on that distant day, when the guns fell silent, a national capitol would stand, with a statue of freedom at its peak, as a symbol of unity in a land still mending its divisions.

It is this sense of unity, this ability to plan for a shared future even at a moment where our nation was torn apart, that I reflect on today. And while there are any number of moments that reveal that particular side of this extraordinary man, Abraham Lincoln -- that particular aspect of his leadership -- there's one that I'd like to share with you today.

In the war's final weeks, aboard Grant's flagship, The River Queen, President Lincoln was asked what was to be done with the rebel armies once General Lee surrendered. With victory at hand, Lincoln could have sought revenge. He could have forced the South to pay a steep price for their rebellion. But despite all the bloodshed and all the misery that each side had exacted upon the other, and despite his absolute certainty in the rightness of the cause of ending slavery, no Confederate soldier was to be punished, Lincoln ordered. They were to be treated, as he put it, "liberally all round." What Lincoln wanted was for Confederate troops to go back home and return to work on their farms and in their shops. He was even willing, he said, to "let them have their horses to plow and their guns to shoot crows with."

That was the only way, Lincoln knew, to repair the rifts that had torn this country apart. It was the only way to begin the healing that our nation so desperately needed. What Lincoln never forgot, not even in the midst of civil war, was that despite all that divides us -- north and south, black and white -- we were, at heart, one nation and one people, sharing a bond as Americans that could bend but would not break.

And so even as we meet here today, in a moment when we are far less divided than in Lincoln's day, but when we are once again debating the critical issues of our time -- and debating them sometimes fiercely -- let us remember that we are doing so as servants of the same flag, as representatives of the same people, and as stakeholders in a common future. That is the most fitting tribute we can pay -- the most lasting monument we can build -- to that most remarkable of men, Abraham Lincoln.

Thank you.

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# 102nd Abraham Lincoln Association Anniversary Banquet Speech

Thank you very much. Well, it is wonderful to be back in Springfield, and I see so many familiar faces -- to Mr. Hart, to Marilyn, to my Secretary of Transportation, Ray LaHood -- to two of the finest governors that we've had in the past, Jim Thompson and Jim Edgar -- to Laura Lynn Ryan and to our new governor, who's going to be doing outstanding work for us in the future, Pat Quinn -- to Reverend McCants and to my dear friend, Loretta Durbin.

I do feel guilty because Dick was the one who brought this event to my attention. I'm here and he's there. But part of the reason that Dick Durbin has been such a great friend, not just to me but to the people of Illinois, is because his work always comes first, and he has been unbelievable in providing leadership in the Senate, through thick and through thin. I'm very, very grateful to him. He is one of my greatest friends, and I would not be standing here if it were not for Dick Durbin. So please give Dick Durbin a big round of applause.

So it is wonderful to be back in Springfield, the city where I got my start in elective office, where I served for nearly a decade. I see some of my colleagues, your Attorney General, Lisa Madigan, in the house. You've got some constitutional officers there. I think that's Alexi, your Treasurer, who's going to be playing basketball with me at some point -- Dan Hynes, Comptroller, and just an incredible supporter during this past race; and your new Senate President, John Cullerton, one of the sharpest legislators that we've ever had. Is the Speaker around? He's over there? Mr. Speaker, it's good to see you. Thank you.

So I've got a lot of friends here. I've got to stop there, otherwise I'm going to be using up all my time.

I served here for nearly a decade and, as has already been mentioned, this is where I launched my candidacy for President two years ago this week -- on the steps -- on the steps of the Old State Capitol where Abraham Lincoln served and prepared for the presidency.

It was here, nearly 150 years ago, that the man whose life we are celebrating today, who you've been celebrating all week, bid farewell to this city that he had come to call his own. And as has already been mentioned, on a platform at a train station not far from where we're gathered, Lincoln turned to the crowd that had come to see him off and said, "To this place, and the kindness of these people, I owe everything." And being here tonight, surrounded by all of you, I share his sentiment. But looking out at this room, full of so many who did so much for me, I'm also reminded of what Lincoln once said to a favor-seeker who claimed it was his efforts that made the difference in the election. Lincoln asked him, "So you think you made me President?" "Yes," the man replied, "under Providence, I think I did." "Well," said Lincoln, "it's a pretty mess you've got me into." "But I forgive you."

So whoever of you think you are responsible for this -- we're taking names.

It's a humbling task, marking the bicentennial of our 16th President's birth -- humbling for me in particular because it's fair to say that the presidency of this singular figure who we celebrate in so many ways made my own story possible.

Here in Springfield, it's easier, though, to reflect on Lincoln the man rather than the marble giant -- before Gettysburg, before Antietam, before Fredericksburg and Bull Run, before emancipation was proclaimed and the captives were set free. In 1854, Lincoln was simply a Springfield lawyer who'd served just a single term in Congress. Possibly in his law office, his feet on a cluttered desk, his sons playing around him, his clothes a bit too small to fit his uncommon frame, maybe wondering if somebody might call him up and ask him to be Commerce Secretary -- he put some thoughts on paper, and for what purpose we do not know: "The legitimate object of government," he wrote, "is to do for the people what needs to be done, but which they cannot, by individual effort, do at all, or do so well, by themselves."

To do for the people what needs to be done but which they cannot do on their own. It's a simple statement. But it answers a central question of Abraham Lincoln's life. Why did he land on the side of union? What was it that made him so unrelenting in pursuit of victory that he was willing to test the Constitution he ultimately preserved? What was it that led this man to give his last full measure of devotion so that our nation might endure?

These are not easy questions to answer, and I cannot know if I'm right. But I suspect that his devotion to the idea of union came not from a belief that government always had the answer. It came not from a failure to understand our individual rights and responsibilities. This rugged rail-splitter, born in a log cabin of pioneer stock; who cleared a path through the woods as a boy; who lost a mother and a sister to the rigors of frontier life; who taught himself all that he knew; and everything that he had was because of his hard work -- this man, our first Republican President, knew better than anybody what it meant to pull yourself up by your bootstraps. He understood that strain of personal liberty and self-reliance, that fierce independence at the heart of the American experience.

But he also understood something else. He recognized that while each of us must do our part, work as hard as we can, be as responsible as we can, although we are responsible for our own fates, in the end, there are certain things we cannot do on our own. There are certain things we can only do together. There are certain things only a union can do.

Only a union could harness the courage of our pioneers to settle the American West, which is why Lincoln passed a Homestead Act giving a tract of land to anyone seeking a stake in our growing economy.

Only a union could foster the ingenuity of our framers -- the ingenuity of our farmers, which is why he set up land-grant colleges that taught them how to make the most of their land while giving their children an education that let them dream the American Dream.

Only a union could speed our expansion and connect our coasts with a transcontinental railroad, and so, even in the midst of civil war, Lincoln built one. He fueled new enterprises with a national currency, spurred innovation, and ignited America's imagination with a national academy of sciences, believing we must, as he put it, add "the fuel of interest to the fire of genius in the discovery ¼ of new and useful things." And on this day, that is also the bicentennial of Charles Darwin's birth, it's worth a moment to pause and renew that commitment to science and innovation and discovery that Lincoln understood so well.

Only a union could serve the hopes of every citizen to knock down the barriers to opportunity and give each and every person the chance to pursue the American Dream. Lincoln understood what Washington understood when he led farmers and craftsmen and shopkeepers to rise up against an empire; what Roosevelt understood when he lifted us from Depression, built an arsenal of democracy, created the largest middle class in history with the GI bill. It's what Kennedy understood when he sent us to the moon.

All these Presidents recognized that America is -- and always has been -- more than a band of 13 colonies, or 50 states -- more than a bunch of Yankees and Confederates, more than a collection of Red States and Blue States. But we are the United States. There isn't any dream beyond our reach -- there is no dream beyond our reach, any obstacle that can stand in our way when we recognize that our individual liberty is served, not negated, by a recognition of the common good.

That is the spirit we are called to show once more. The challenges we face are very different now: two wars; an economic crisis unlike any we've seen in our lifetime. Jobs have been lost. Pensions are gone. Families' dreams have been endangered. Health care costs are exploding. Schools are falling short. We have an energy crisis that's hampering our economy and threatening our planet and enriching our adversaries.

And yet, while our challenges may be new, they did not come about overnight. Ultimately they result from a failure to meet the test that Lincoln set. I understand there have been times in our history when our government has misjudged what we can do by individual effort alone, and what we can only do together; when we didn't draw the line as effectively as we should have; when government has done things that people can -- and should -- do for themselves.

Our welfare system, before reform, too often dampened individual initiative, discouraging people from taking responsibility for their own upward mobility. In education, sometimes we've lost sight of the role of parents, rather than government, in cultivating a thirst for knowledge and instilling those qualities of good character, hard work and discipline and integrity -- that are so important to educational achievement and professional success.

But in recent years, we've seen the pendulum swing too far in the opposite direction. What's dominated is a philosophy that says every problem can be solved if only government would step out of the way; that if government were just dismantled and divvied up into tax breaks, that it would somehow benefit us all. Such knee-jerk disdain for government -- this constant rejection of any common endeavor -- cannot rebuild our levees or our roads or our bridges. It can't refurbish our schools or modernize our health care system. It can't lead to the next medical discovery or yield the research and technology that will spark a clean energy economy.

Only a nation can do those things. Only by coming together, all of us, in union, and expressing that sense of shared sacrifice and responsibility -- for ourselves, yes, but also for one another -- can we do the work that must be done in this country. That is -- that is part of the definition of being American.

It's only by rebuilding our economy and fostering the conditions of growth that willing workers can find a job, and companies can find capital, and the entrepreneurial spirit that is the key to our competitiveness can flourish. It's only by unleashing the potential of alternative fuels that will lower our energy bills and raise our industries' sights, make our nation safer and our planet cleaner. It's only by remaking our schools for the 21st century that our children will get those good jobs so they can make of their lives what they will. It's only by coming together to do what people need done that we will, in Lincoln's words, "lift artificial weights from all shoulders [and give] an unfettered start, and a fair chance, in the race of life." That's all people are looking for, fair chance in the race of life.

That's what's required of us -- now and in the years ahead. We will be remembered for what we choose to make of this moment. And when posterity looks back on our time, as we are looking back on Lincoln's, I don't want it said that we saw an economic crisis but did not stem it; that we saw our schools decline and our bridges crumble but we did not rebuild them; that the world changed in the 21st century but America did not lead it; that we were consumed with small things, petty things, when we were called to do great things. Instead, let them say that this generation -- our generation -- of Americans rose to the moment and gave America a new birth of freedom and opportunity in our time.

These are trying days and they will grow tougher in the months to come. And there will be moments when our doubts rise and our hopes recede. But let's always remember that we, as a people, have been here before. There were times when our revolution itself seemed altogether improbable, when the union was all but lost, when fascism seemed set to prevail around the world. And yet, what earlier generations discovered -- and what we must rediscover right now -- is that it is precisely when we are in the deepest valley, when the climb is steepest, that Americans relearn how to take the mountaintop. Together. As one nation. As one people. As one nation. As one people.

That's how we will beat back our present dangers. That is how we will surpass what trials may come. That's how we will do what Lincoln called on us all to do, and "nobly save ¼ the last best hope on earth." That's what this is, the last best hope on earth. Lincoln has passed that legacy onto us. It is now our responsibility to pass it on to the next generation.

Thank you, God bless you, and may God bless the United States of America.

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# First Speech to a Joint Session of Congress

Madame Speaker, Mr. Vice President, Members of Congress, the First Lady of the United States (who is around here somewhere):

I have come here tonight not only to address the distinguished men and women in this great chamber, but to speak frankly and directly to the men and women who sent us here.

I know that for many Americans watching right now, the state of our economy is a concern that rises above all others. And rightly so. If you haven’t been personally affected by this recession, you probably know someone who has -- a friend; a neighbor; a member of your family. You don’t need to hear another list of statistics to know that our economy is in crisis, because you live it every day. It’s the worry you wake up with and the source of sleepless nights. It’s the job you thought you’d retire from but now have lost; the business you built your dreams upon that’s now hanging by a thread; the college acceptance letter your child had to put back in the envelope. The impact of this recession is real, and it is everywhere.

But while our economy may be weakened and our confidence shaken; though we are living through difficult and uncertain times, tonight I want every American to know this:

We will rebuild, we will recover, and the United States of America will emerge stronger than before.

The weight of this crisis will not determine the destiny of this nation. The answers to our problems don’t lie beyond our reach. They exist in our laboratories and universities; in our fields and our factories; in the imaginations of our entrepreneurs and the pride of the hardest-working people on Earth. Those qualities that have made America the greatest force of progress and prosperity in human history we still possess in ample measure. What is required now is for this country to pull together, confront boldly the challenges we face, and take responsibility for our future once more.

Now, if we’re honest with ourselves, we’ll admit that for too long, we have not always met these responsibilities -- as a government or as a people. I say this not to lay blame or look backwards, but because it is only by understanding how we arrived at this moment that we’ll be able to lift ourselves out of this predicament.

The fact is, our economy did not fall into decline overnight. Nor did all of our problems begin when the housing market collapsed or the stock market sank. We have known for decades that our survival depends on finding new sources of energy. Yet we import more oil today than ever before. The cost of health care eats up more and more of our savings each year, yet we keep delaying reform. Our children will compete for jobs in a global economy that too many of our schools do not prepare them for. And though all these challenges went unsolved, we still managed to spend more money and pile up more debt, both as individuals and through our government, than ever before.

In other words, we have lived through an era where too often, short-term gains were prized over long-term prosperity; where we failed to look beyond the next payment, the next quarter, or the next election. A surplus became an excuse to transfer wealth to the wealthy instead of an opportunity to invest in our future. Regulations were gutted for the sake of a quick profit at the expense of a healthy market. People bought homes they knew they couldn’t afford from banks and lenders who pushed those bad loans anyway. And all the while, critical debates and difficult decisions were put off for some other time on some other day.

Well that day of reckoning has arrived, and the time to take charge of our future is here.

Now is the time to act boldly and wisely -- to not only revive this economy, but to build a new foundation for lasting prosperity. Now is the time to jumpstart job creation, re-start lending, and invest in areas like energy, health care, and education that will grow our economy, even as we make hard choices to bring our deficit down. That is what my economic agenda is designed to do, and that’s what I’d like to talk to you about tonight.

It’s an agenda that begins with jobs.

As soon as I took office, I asked this Congress to send me a recovery plan by President’s Day that would put people back to work and put money in their pockets. Not because I believe in bigger government -- I don’t. Not because I’m not mindful of the massive debt we’ve inherited -- I am. I called for action because the failure to do so would have cost more jobs and caused more hardships. In fact, a failure to act would have worsened our long-term deficit by assuring weak economic growth for years. That’s why I pushed for quick action. And tonight, I am grateful that this Congress delivered, and pleased to say that the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act is now law.

Over the next two years, this plan will save or create 3.5 million jobs. More than 90% of these jobs will be in the private sector -- jobs rebuilding our roads and bridges; constructing wind turbines and solar panels; laying broadband and expanding mass transit.

Because of this plan, there are teachers who can now keep their jobs and educate our kids. Health care professionals can continue caring for our sick. There are 57 police officers who are still on the streets of Minneapolis tonight because this plan prevented the layoffs their department was about to make.

Because of this plan, 95% of the working households in America will receive a tax cut -- a tax cut that you will see in your paychecks beginning on April 1st.

Because of this plan, families who are struggling to pay tuition costs will receive a $2,500 tax credit for all four years of college. And Americans who have lost their jobs in this recession will be able to receive extended unemployment benefits and continued health care coverage to help them weather this storm.

I know there are some in this chamber and watching at home who are skeptical of whether this plan will work. I understand that skepticism. Here in Washington, we’ve all seen how quickly good intentions can turn into broken promises and wasteful spending. And with a plan of this scale comes enormous responsibility to get it right.

That is why I have asked Vice President Biden to lead a tough, unprecedented oversight effort -- because nobody messes with Joe. I have told each member of my Cabinet as well as mayors and governors across the country that they will be held accountable by me and the American people for every dollar they spend. I have appointed a proven and aggressive Inspector General to ferret out any and all cases of waste and fraud. And we have created a new website called recovery.gov so that every American can find out how and where their money is being spent.

So the recovery plan we passed is the first step in getting our economy back on track. But it is just the first step. Because even if we manage this plan flawlessly, there will be no real recovery unless we clean up the credit crisis that has severely weakened our financial system.

I want to speak plainly and candidly about this issue tonight, because every American should know that it directly affects you and your family’s well-being. You should also know that the money you’ve deposited in banks across the country is safe; your insurance is secure; and you can rely on the continued operation of our financial system. That is not the source of concern.

The concern is that if we do not re-start lending in this country, our recovery will be choked off before it even begins.

You see, the flow of credit is the lifeblood of our economy. The ability to get a loan is how you finance the purchase of everything from a home to a car to a college education; how stores stock their shelves, farms buy equipment, and businesses make payroll.

But credit has stopped flowing the way it should. Too many bad loans from the housing crisis have made their way onto the books of too many banks. With so much debt and so little confidence, these banks are now fearful of lending out any more money to households, to businesses, or to each other. When there is no lending, families can’t afford to buy homes or cars. So businesses are forced to make layoffs. Our economy suffers even more, and credit dries up even further.

That is why this administration is moving swiftly and aggressively to break this destructive cycle, restore confidence, and re-start lending.

We will do so in several ways. First, we are creating a new lending fund that represents the largest effort ever to help provide auto loans, college loans, and small business loans to the consumers and entrepreneurs who keep this economy running.

Second, we have launched a housing plan that will help responsible families facing the threat of foreclosure lower their monthly payments and re-finance their mortgages. It’s a plan that won’t help speculators or that neighbor down the street who bought a house he could never hope to afford, but it will help millions of Americans who are struggling with declining home values -- Americans who will now be able to take advantage of the lower interest rates that this plan has already helped bring about. In fact, the average family who re-finances today can save nearly $2000 per year on their mortgage.

Third, we will act with the full force of the federal government to ensure that the major banks that Americans depend on have enough confidence and enough money to lend even in more difficult times. And when we learn that a major bank has serious problems, we will hold accountable those responsible, force the necessary adjustments, provide the support to clean up their balance sheets, and assure the continuity of a strong, viable institution that can serve our people and our economy.

I understand that on any given day, Wall Street may be more comforted by an approach that gives banks bailouts with no strings attached, and that holds nobody accountable for their reckless decisions. But such an approach won’t solve the problem. And our goal is to quicken the day when we re-start lending to the American people and American business and end this crisis once and for all.

I intend to hold these banks fully accountable for the assistance they receive, and this time, they will have to clearly demonstrate how taxpayer dollars result in more lending for the American taxpayer. This time, CEOs won’t be able to use taxpayer money to pad their paychecks or buy fancy drapes or disappear on a private jet. Those days are over.

Still, this plan will require significant resources from the federal government -- and yes, probably more than we’ve already set aside. But while the cost of action will be great, I can assure you that the cost of inaction will be far greater, for it could result in an economy that sputters along for not months or years, but perhaps a decade. That would be worse for our deficit, worse for business, worse for you, and worse for the next generation. And I refuse to let that happen.

I understand that when the last administration asked this Congress to provide assistance for struggling banks, Democrats and Republicans alike were infuriated by the mismanagement and results that followed. So were the American taxpayers. So was I.

So I know how unpopular it is to be seen as helping banks right now, especially when everyone is suffering in part from their bad decisions. I promise you -- I get it.

But I also know that in a time of crisis, we cannot afford to govern out of anger, or yield to the politics of the moment. My job -- our job -- is to solve the problem. Our job is to govern with a sense of responsibility. I will not spend a single penny for the purpose of rewarding a single Wall Street executive, but I will do whatever it takes to help the small business that can’t pay its workers or the family that has saved and still can’t get a mortgage.

That’s what this is about. It’s not about helping banks -- it’s about helping people. Because when credit is available again, that young family can finally buy a new home. And then some company will hire workers to build it. And then those workers will have money to spend, and if they can get a loan too, maybe they’ll finally buy that car, or open their own business. Investors will return to the market, and American families will see their retirement secured once more. Slowly, but surely, confidence will return, and our economy will recover.

So I ask this Congress to join me in doing whatever proves necessary. Because we cannot consign our nation to an open-ended recession. And to ensure that a crisis of this magnitude never happens again, I ask Congress to move quickly on legislation that will finally reform our outdated regulatory system. It is time to put in place tough, new common-sense rules of the road so that our financial market rewards drive and innovation, and punishes short-cuts and abuse.

The recovery plan and the financial stability plan are the immediate steps we’re taking to revive our economy in the short-term. But the only way to fully restore America’s economic strength is to make the long-term investments that will lead to new jobs, new industries, and a renewed ability to compete with the rest of the world. The only way this century will be another American century is if we confront at last the price of our dependence on oil and the high cost of health care; the schools that aren’t preparing our children and the mountain of debt they stand to inherit. That is our responsibility.

In the next few days, I will submit a budget to Congress. So often, we have come to view these documents as simply numbers on a page or laundry lists of programs. I see this document differently. I see it as a vision for America -- as a blueprint for our future.

My budget does not attempt to solve every problem or address every issue. It reflects the stark reality of what we’ve inherited -- a trillion dollar deficit, a financial crisis, and a costly recession.

Given these realities, everyone in this chamber -- Democrats and Republicans -- will have to sacrifice some worthy priorities for which there are no dollars. And that includes me.

But that does not mean we can afford to ignore our long-term challenges. I reject the view that says our problems will simply take care of themselves; that says government has no role in laying the foundation for our common prosperity.

For history tells a different story. History reminds us that at every moment of economic upheaval and transformation, this nation has responded with bold action and big ideas. In the midst of civil war, we laid railroad tracks from one coast to another that spurred commerce and industry. From the turmoil of the Industrial Revolution came a system of public high schools that prepared our citizens for a new age. In the wake of war and depression, the GI Bill sent a generation to college and created the largest middle-class in history. And a twilight struggle for freedom led to a nation of highways, an American on the moon, and an explosion of technology that still shapes our world.

In each case, government didn’t supplant private enterprise; it catalyzed private enterprise. It created the conditions for thousands of entrepreneurs and new businesses to adapt and to thrive.

We are a nation that has seen promise amid peril, and claimed opportunity from ordeal. Now we must be that nation again. That is why, even as it cuts back on the programs we don’t need, the budget I submit will invest in the three areas that are absolutely critical to our economic future: energy, health care, and education.

It begins with energy.

We know the country that harnesses the power of clean, renewable energy will lead the 21st century. And yet, it is China that has launched the largest effort in history to make their economy energy efficient. We invented solar technology, but we’ve fallen behind countries like Germany and Japan in producing it. New plug-in hybrids roll off our assembly lines, but they will run on batteries made in Korea.

Well I do not accept a future where the jobs and industries of tomorrow take root beyond our borders -- and I know you don’t either. It is time for America to lead again.

Thanks to our recovery plan, we will double this nation’s supply of renewable energy in the next three years. We have also made the largest investment in basic research funding in American history -- an investment that will spur not only new discoveries in energy, but breakthroughs in medicine, science, and technology.

We will soon lay down thousands of miles of power lines that can carry new energy to cities and towns across this country. And we will put Americans to work making our homes and buildings more efficient so that we can save billions of dollars on our energy bills.

But to truly transform our economy, protect our security, and save our planet from the ravages of climate change, we need to ultimately make clean, renewable energy the profitable kind of energy. So I ask this Congress to send me legislation that places a market-based cap on carbon pollution and drives the production of more renewable energy in America. And to support that innovation, we will invest fifteen billion dollars a year to develop technologies like wind power and solar power; advanced biofuels, clean coal, and more fuel-efficient cars and trucks built right here in America.

As for our auto industry, everyone recognizes that years of bad decision-making and a global recession have pushed our automakers to the brink. We should not, and will not, protect them from their own bad practices. But we are committed to the goal of a re-tooled, re-imagined auto industry that can compete and win. Millions of jobs depend on it. Scores of communities depend on it. And I believe the nation that invented the automobile cannot walk away from it.

None of this will come without cost, nor will it be easy. But this is America. We don’t do what’s easy. We do what is necessary to move this country forward.

For that same reason, we must also address the crushing cost of health care.

This is a cost that now causes a bankruptcy in America every thirty seconds. By the end of the year, it could cause 1.5 million Americans to lose their homes. In the last eight years, premiums have grown four times faster than wages. And in each of these years, one million more Americans have lost their health insurance. It is one of the major reasons why small businesses close their doors and corporations ship jobs overseas. And it’s one of the largest and fastest-growing parts of our budget.

Given these facts, we can no longer afford to put health care reform on hold.

Already, we have done more to advance the cause of health care reform in the last thirty days than we have in the last decade. When it was days old, this Congress passed a law to provide and protect health insurance for eleven million American children whose parents work full-time. Our recovery plan will invest in electronic health records and new technology that will reduce errors, bring down costs, ensure privacy, and save lives. It will launch a new effort to conquer a disease that has touched the life of nearly every American by seeking a cure for cancer in our time. And it makes the largest investment ever in preventive care, because that is one of the best ways to keep our people healthy and our costs under control.

This budget builds on these reforms. It includes an historic commitment to comprehensive health care reform -- a down-payment on the principle that we must have quality, affordable health care for every American. It’s a commitment that’s paid for in part by efficiencies in our system that are long overdue. And it’s a step we must take if we hope to bring down our deficit in the years to come.

Now, there will be many different opinions and ideas about how to achieve reform, and that is why I’m bringing together businesses and workers, doctors and health care providers, Democrats and Republicans to begin work on this issue next week.

I suffer no illusions that this will be an easy process. It will be hard. But I also know that nearly a century after Teddy Roosevelt first called for reform, the cost of our health care has weighed down our economy and the conscience of our nation long enough. So let there be no doubt: health care reform cannot wait, it must not wait, and it will not wait another year.

The third challenge we must address is the urgent need to expand the promise of education in America.

In a global economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity -- it is a pre-requisite.

Right now, three-quarters of the fastest-growing occupations require more than a high school diploma. And yet, just over half of our citizens have that level of education. We have one of the highest high school dropout rates of any industrialized nation. And half of the students who begin college never finish.

This is a prescription for economic decline, because we know the countries that out-teach us today will out-compete us tomorrow. That is why it will be the goal of this administration to ensure that every child has access to a complete and competitive education -- from the day they are born to the day they begin a career.

Already, we have made an historic investment in education through the economic recovery plan. We have dramatically expanded early childhood education and will continue to improve its quality, because we know that the most formative learning comes in those first years of life. We have made college affordable for nearly seven million more students. And we have provided the resources necessary to prevent painful cuts and teacher layoffs that would set back our children’s progress.

But we know that our schools don’t just need more resources. They need more reform. That is why this budget creates new incentives for teacher performance; pathways for advancement, and rewards for success. We’ll invest in innovative programs that are already helping schools meet high standards and close achievement gaps. And we will expand our commitment to charter schools.

It is our responsibility as lawmakers and educators to make this system work. But it is the responsibility of every citizen to participate in it. And so tonight, I ask every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training. This can be community college or a four-year school; vocational training or an apprenticeship. But whatever the training may be, every American will need to get more than a high school diploma. And dropping out of high school is no longer an option. It’s not just quitting on yourself, it’s quitting on your country -- and this country needs and values the talents of every American. That is why we will provide the support necessary for you to complete college and meet a new goal: by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world.

I know that the price of tuition is higher than ever, which is why if you are willing to volunteer in your neighborhood or give back to your community or serve your country, we will make sure that you can afford a higher education. And to encourage a renewed spirit of national service for this and future generations, I ask this Congress to send me the bipartisan legislation that bears the name of Senator Orrin Hatch as well as an American who has never stopped asking what he can do for his country -- Senator Edward Kennedy.

These education policies will open the doors of opportunity for our children. But it is up to us to ensure they walk through them. In the end, there is no program or policy that can substitute for a mother or father who will attend those parent/teacher conferences, or help with homework after dinner, or turn off the TV, put away the video games, and read to their child. I speak to you not just as a President, but as a father when I say that responsibility for our children's education must begin at home.

There is, of course, another responsibility we have to our children. And that is the responsibility to ensure that we do not pass on to them a debt they cannot pay. With the deficit we inherited, the cost of the crisis we face, and the long-term challenges we must meet, it has never been more important to ensure that as our economy recovers, we do what it takes to bring this deficit down.

I’m proud that we passed the recovery plan free of earmarks, and I want to pass a budget next year that ensures that each dollar we spend reflects only our most important national priorities.

Yesterday, I held a fiscal summit where I pledged to cut the deficit in half by the end of my first term in office. My administration has also begun to go line by line through the federal budget in order to eliminate wasteful and ineffective programs. As you can imagine, this is a process that will take some time. But we’re starting with the biggest lines. We have already identified two trillion dollars in savings over the next decade.

In this budget, we will end education programs that don’t work and end direct payments to large agribusinesses that don’t need them. We’ll eliminate the no-bid contracts that have wasted billions in Iraq, and reform our defense budget so that we’re not paying for Cold War-era weapons systems we don’t use. We will root out the waste, fraud, and abuse in our Medicare program that doesn’t make our seniors any healthier, and we will restore a sense of fairness and balance to our tax code by finally ending the tax breaks for corporations that ship our jobs overseas.

In order to save our children from a future of debt, we will also end the tax breaks for the wealthiest 2% of Americans. But let me perfectly clear, because I know you’ll hear the same old claims that rolling back these tax breaks means a massive tax increase on the American people: if your family earns less than $250,000 a year, you will not see your taxes increased a single dime. I repeat: not one single dime. In fact, the recovery plan provides a tax cut -- that’s right, a tax cut -- for 95% of working families. And these checks are on the way.

To preserve our long-term fiscal health, we must also address the growing costs in Medicare and Social Security. Comprehensive health care reform is the best way to strengthen Medicare for years to come. And we must also begin a conversation on how to do the same for Social Security, while creating tax-free universal savings accounts for all Americans.

Finally, because we’re also suffering from a deficit of trust, I am committed to restoring a sense of honesty and accountability to our budget. That is why this budget looks ahead ten years and accounts for spending that was left out under the old rules -- and for the first time, that includes the full cost of fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. For seven years, we have been a nation at war. No longer will we hide its price.

We are now carefully reviewing our policies in both wars, and I will soon announce a way forward in Iraq that leaves Iraq to its people and responsibly ends this war.

And with our friends and allies, we will forge a new and comprehensive strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan to defeat al Qaeda and combat extremism. Because I will not allow terrorists to plot against the American people from safe havens half a world away.

As we meet here tonight, our men and women in uniform stand watch abroad and more are readying to deploy. To each and every one of them, and to the families who bear the quiet burden of their absence, Americans are united in sending one message: we honor your service, we are inspired by your sacrifice, and you have our unyielding support. To relieve the strain on our forces, my budget increases the number of our soldiers and Marines. And to keep our sacred trust with those who serve, we will raise their pay, and give our veterans the expanded health care and benefits that they have earned.

To overcome extremism, we must also be vigilant in upholding the values our troops defend -- because there is no force in the world more powerful than the example of America. That is why I have ordered the closing of the detention center at Guantanamo Bay, and will seek swift and certain justice for captured terrorists -- because living our values doesn’t make us weaker, it makes us safer and it makes us stronger. And that is why I can stand here tonight and say without exception or equivocation that the United States of America does not torture.

In words and deeds, we are showing the world that a new era of engagement has begun. For we know that America cannot meet the threats of this century alone, but the world cannot meet them without America. We cannot shun the negotiating table, nor ignore the foes or forces that could do us harm. We are instead called to move forward with the sense of confidence and candor that serious times demand.

To seek progress toward a secure and lasting peace between Israel and her neighbors, we have appointed an envoy to sustain our effort. To meet the challenges of the 21st century -- from terrorism to nuclear proliferation; from pandemic disease to cyber threats to crushing poverty -- we will strengthen old alliances, forge new ones, and use all elements of our national power.

And to respond to an economic crisis that is global in scope, we are working with the nations of the G-20 to restore confidence in our financial system, avoid the possibility of escalating protectionism, and spur demand for American goods in markets across the globe. For the world depends on us to have a strong economy, just as our economy depends on the strength of the world’s.

As we stand at this crossroads of history, the eyes of all people in all nations are once again upon us -- watching to see what we do with this moment; waiting for us to lead.

Those of us gathered here tonight have been called to govern in extraordinary times. It is a tremendous burden, but also a great privilege -- one that has been entrusted to few generations of Americans. For in our hands lies the ability to shape our world for good or for ill.

I know that it is easy to lose sight of this truth -- to become cynical and doubtful; consumed with the petty and the trivial.

But in my life, I have also learned that hope is found in unlikely places; that inspiration often comes not from those with the most power or celebrity, but from the dreams and aspirations of Americans who are anything but ordinary.

I think about Leonard Abess, the bank president from Miami who reportedly cashed out of his company, took a $60 million bonus, and gave it out to all 399 people who worked for him, plus another 72 who used to work for him. He didn’t tell anyone, but when the local newspaper found out, he simply said, ''I knew some of these people since I was 7 years old. I didn't feel right getting the money myself."

I think about Greensburg, Kansas, a town that was completely destroyed by a tornado, but is being rebuilt by its residents as a global example of how clean energy can power an entire community -- how it can bring jobs and businesses to a place where piles of bricks and rubble once lay. "The tragedy was terrible," said one of the men who helped them rebuild. "But the folks here know that it also provided an incredible opportunity."

And I think about Ty’Sheoma Bethea, the young girl from that school I visited in Dillon, South Carolina -- a place where the ceilings leak, the paint peels off the walls, and they have to stop teaching six times a day because the train barrels by their classroom. She has been told that her school is hopeless, but the other day after class she went to the public library and typed up a letter to the people sitting in this room. She even asked her principal for the money to buy a stamp. The letter asks us for help, and says, "We are just students trying to become lawyers, doctors, congressmen like yourself and one day president, so we can make a change to not just the state of South Carolina but also the world. We are not quitters."

We are not quitters.

These words and these stories tell us something about the spirit of the people who sent us here. They tell us that even in the most trying times, amid the most difficult circumstances, there is a generosity, a resilience, a decency, and a determination that perseveres; a willingness to take responsibility for our future and for posterity.

Their resolve must be our inspiration. Their concerns must be our cause. And we must show them and all our people that we are equal to the task before us.

I know that we haven’t agreed on every issue thus far, and there are surely times in the future when we will part ways. But I also know that every American who is sitting here tonight loves this country and wants it to succeed. That must be the starting point for every debate we have in the coming months, and where we return after those debates are done. That is the foundation on which the American people expect us to build common ground.

And if we do -- if we come together and lift this nation from the depths of this crisis; if we put our people back to work and restart the engine of our prosperity; if we confront without fear the challenges of our time and summon that enduring spirit of an America that does not quit, then someday years from now our children can tell their children that this was the time when we performed, in the words that are carved into this very chamber, "something worthy to be remembered." Thank you, God Bless you, and may God Bless the United States of America.

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# Responsibly Ending the War in Iraq

Thank you very much. Please be seated. To General Haley for the outstanding work he is doing. Thank you so much.

Good morning Marines. Good morning Camp Lejeune. Good morning Jacksonville. Thank you for that outstanding welcome. I want to thank Lieutenant General Hejlik for hosting me here today.

I also want to acknowledge all of our soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. That includes the Camp Lejeune Marines now serving with – or soon joining – the Second Marine Expeditionary Force in Iraq; those with Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Force in Afghanistan; and those among the 8,000 Marines who are preparing to deploy to Afghanistan. We have you in our prayers. We pay tribute to your service. We thank you and your families for all that you do for America. And I want all of you to know that there is no higher honor or greater responsibility than serving as your Commander-in-Chief.

I also want to take this opportunity to acknowledge Ryan Crocker, who recently completed his service as our Ambassador to Iraq. Throughout his career, Ryan always took on the toughest assignments. He is an example of the very best that this nation has to offer, and we owe him a great debt of gratitude. He carried on his work with an extraordinary degree of cooperation with two of our finest Generals – General David Petraeus, and General Ray Odierno – who will be critical in carrying forward the strategy that I will outline today.

Next month will mark the sixth anniversary of the war in Iraq. By any measure, this has already been a long war. For the men and women of America’s armed forces – and for your families – this war has been one of the most extraordinary chapters of service in the history of our nation. You have endured tour after tour after tour of duty. You have known the dangers of combat and the lonely distance of loved ones. You have fought against tyranny and disorder. You have bled for your best friends and for unknown Iraqis. And you have borne an enormous burden for your fellow citizens, while extending a precious opportunity to the people of Iraq. Under tough circumstances, the men and women of the United States military have served with honor, and succeeded beyond any expectation.

Today, I have come to speak to you about how the war in Iraq will end.

To understand where we need to go in Iraq, it is important for the American people to understand where we now stand. Thanks in great measure to your service, the situation in Iraq has improved. Violence has been reduced substantially from the horrific sectarian killing of 2006 and 2007. Al Qaeda in Iraq has been dealt a serious blow by our troops and Iraq’s Security Forces, and through our partnership with Sunni Arabs. The capacity of Iraq’s Security Forces has improved, and Iraq’s leaders have taken steps toward political accommodation. The relative peace and strong participation in January’s provincial elections sent a powerful message to the world about how far Iraqis have come in pursuing their aspirations through a peaceful political process.

But let there be no doubt: Iraq is not yet secure, and there will be difficult days ahead. Violence will continue to be a part of life in Iraq. Too many fundamental political questions about Iraq’s future remain unresolved. Too many Iraqis are still displaced or destitute. Declining oil revenues will put an added strain on a government that has had difficulty delivering basic services. Not all of Iraq’s neighbors are contributing to its security. Some are working at times to undermine it. And even as Iraq’s government is on a surer footing, it is not yet a full partner – politically and economically – in the region, or with the international community

In short, today there is a renewed cause for hope in Iraq, but that hope rests upon an emerging foundation.

On my first full day in office, I directed my national security team to undertake a comprehensive review of our strategy in Iraq to determine the best way to strengthen that foundation, while strengthening American national security. I have listened to my Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and commanders on the ground. We have acted with careful consideration of events on the ground; with respect for the security agreements between the United States and Iraq; and with a critical recognition that the long-term solution in Iraq must be political – not military. Because the most important decisions that have to be made about Iraq’s future must now be made by Iraqis.

We have also taken into account the simple reality that America can no longer afford to see Iraq in isolation from other priorities: we face the challenge of refocusing on Afghanistan and Pakistan; of relieving the burden on our military; and of rebuilding our struggling economy – and these are challenges that we will meet.

Today, I can announce that our review is complete, and that the United States will pursue a new strategy to end the war in Iraq through a transition to full Iraqi responsibility.

This strategy is grounded in a clear and achievable goal shared by the Iraqi people and the American people: an Iraq that is sovereign, stable, and self-reliant. To achieve that goal, we will work to promote an Iraqi government that is just, representative, and accountable, and that provides neither support nor safe-haven to terrorists. We will help Iraq build new ties of trade and commerce with the world. And we will forge a partnership with the people and government of Iraq that contributes to the peace and security of the region.

What we will not do is let the pursuit of the perfect stand in the way of achievable goals. We cannot rid Iraq of all who oppose America or sympathize with our adversaries. We cannot police Iraq’s streets until they are completely safe, nor stay until Iraq’s union is perfected. We cannot sustain indefinitely a commitment that has put a strain on our military, and will cost the American people nearly a trillion dollars. America’s men and women in uniform have fought block by block, province by province, year after year, to give the Iraqis this chance to choose a better future. Now, we must ask the Iraqi people to seize it.

The first part of this strategy is therefore the responsible removal of our combat brigades from Iraq.

As a candidate for President, I made clear my support for a timeline of 16 months to carry out this drawdown, while pledging to consult closely with our military commanders upon taking office to ensure that we preserve the gains we’ve made and protect our troops. Those consultations are now complete, and I have chosen a timeline that will remove our combat brigades over the next 18 months.

Let me say this as plainly as I can: by August 31, 2010, our combat mission in Iraq will end.

As we carry out this drawdown, my highest priority will be the safety and security of our troops and civilians in Iraq. We will proceed carefully, and I will consult closely with my military commanders on the ground and with the Iraqi government. There will surely be difficult periods and tactical adjustments. But our enemies should be left with no doubt: this plan gives our military the forces and the flexibility they need to support our Iraqi partners, and to succeed.

After we remove our combat brigades, our mission will change from combat to supporting the Iraqi government and its Security Forces as they take the absolute lead in securing their country. As I have long said, we will retain a transitional force to carry out three distinct functions: training, equipping, and advising Iraqi Security Forces as long as they remain non-sectarian; conducting targeted counter-terrorism missions; and protecting our ongoing civilian and military efforts within Iraq. Initially, this force will likely be made up of 35-50,000 U.S. troops.

Through this period of transition, we will carry out further redeployments. And under the Status of Forces Agreement with the Iraqi government, I intend to remove all U.S. troops from Iraq by the end of 2011. We will complete this transition to Iraqi responsibility, and we will bring our troops home with the honor that they have earned.

As we responsibly remove our combat brigades, we will pursue the second part of our strategy: sustained diplomacy on behalf of a more peaceful and prosperous Iraq.

The drawdown of our military should send a clear signal that Iraq’s future is now its own responsibility. The long-term success of the Iraqi nation will depend upon decisions made by Iraq’s leaders and the fortitude of the Iraqi people. Iraq is a sovereign country with legitimate institutions; America cannot – and should not – take their place. However, a strong political, diplomatic, and civilian effort on our part can advance progress and help lay a foundation for lasting peace and security.

This effort will be led by our new Ambassador to Iraq – Chris Hill. From his time in the Peace Corps, to his work in Kosovo and Korea, Ambassador Hill has been tested, and he has shown the pragmatism and skill that we need right now. He will be supported by the courageous and capable work of so many American diplomats and aid workers who are serving in Iraq.

Going forward, we can make a difference on several fronts. We will work with the United Nations to support national elections, while helping Iraqis improve local government. We can serve as an honest broker in pursuit of fair and durable agreements on issues that have divided Iraq’s leaders. And just as we will support Iraq’s Security Forces, we will help Iraqi institutions strengthen their capacity to protect the rule of law, confront corruption, and deliver basic services.

Diplomacy and assistance is also required to help the millions of displaced Iraqis. These men, women and children are a living consequence of this war and a challenge to stability in the region, and they must become a part of Iraq’s reconciliation and recovery. America has a strategic interest – and a moral responsibility – to act. In the coming months, my administration will provide more assistance and take steps to increase international support for countries already hosting refugees; we’ll cooperate with others to resettle Iraqis facing great personal risk; and we will work with the Iraqi government over time to resettle refugees and displaced Iraqis within Iraq – because there are few more powerful indicators of lasting peace than displaced citizens returning home.

Now, before I go any further, I want to take a moment to speak directly to the people of Iraq.

You are a great nation, rooted in the cradle of civilization. You are joined together by enduring accomplishments, and a history that connects you as surely as the two rivers carved into your land. In years past, you have persevered through tyranny and terror; through personal insecurity and sectarian violence. And instead of giving in to the forces of disunion, you stepped back from a descent into civil war, and showed a proud resilience that deserves respect.

Our nations have known difficult times together. But ours is a bond forged by shared bloodshed, and countless friendships among our people. We Americans have offered our most precious resource -- our young men and women -- to work with you to rebuild what was destroyed by despotism; to root out our common enemies; and to seek peace and prosperity for our children and grandchildren, and for yours.

There are those who will try to prevent that future for Iraq – who will insist that Iraq’s differences cannot be reconciled without more killing. They represent the forces that destroy nations and lead only to despair, and they will test our will in the months and years to come. America, too, has known these forces. We endured the pain of Civil War, and bitter divisions of region and race. But hostility and hatred are no match for justice; they offer no pathway to peace; and they must not stand between the people of Iraq and a future of reconciliation and hope.

So to the Iraqi people, let me be clear about America’s intentions. The United States pursues no claim on your territory or your resources. We respect your sovereignty and the tremendous sacrifices you have made for your country. We seek a full transition to Iraqi responsibility for the security of your country. And going forward, we can build a lasting relationship founded upon mutual interests and mutual respect as Iraq takes its rightful place in the community of nations.

That leads me to the third part of our strategy -- comprehensive American engagement across the region.

The future of Iraq is inseparable from the future of the broader Middle East, so we must work with our friends and partners to establish a new framework that advances Iraq’s security and the region’s. It is time for Iraq to be a full partner in a regional dialogue, and for Iraq’s neighbors to establish productive and normalized relations with Iraq. And going forward, the United States will pursue principled and sustained engagement with all of the nations in the region, and that will include Iran and Syria.

This reflects a fundamental truth: we can no longer deal with regional challenges in isolation – we need a smarter, more sustainable and comprehensive approach. That is why we are renewing our diplomacy, while relieving the burden on our military. That is why we are refocusing on al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan; developing a strategy to use all elements of American power to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon; and actively seeking a lasting peace between Israel and the Arab world. And that is why we have named three of America’s most accomplished diplomats – George Mitchell, Dennis Ross and Richard Holbrooke – to support Secretary Clinton and me as we carry forward this agenda.

Every nation and every group must know -- whether you wish America good or ill -- that the end of the war in Iraq will enable a new era of American leadership and engagement in the Middle East. And that era has just begun.

Finally, I want to be very clear that my strategy for ending the war in Iraq does not end with military plans or diplomatic agendas – it endures through our commitment to uphold our sacred trust with every man and woman who has served in Iraq.

You make up a fraction of the American population, but in an age when so many people and institutions have acted irresponsibly, you did the opposite – you volunteered to bear the heaviest burden. And for you and for your families, the war does not end when you come home. It lives on in memories of your fellow soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines who gave their lives. It endures in the wound that is slow to heal, the disability that isn’t going away, the dream that wakes you at night, or the stiffening in your spine when a car backfires down the street.

You and your families have done your duty – now a grateful nation must do ours. That is why I am increasing the number of soldiers and Marines, so that we lessen the burden on those who are serving. And that is why I have committed to expanding our system of veterans health care to serve more patients, and to provide better care in more places. We will continue building new wounded warrior facilities across America, and invest in new ways of identifying and treating the signature wounds of this war: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury, as well as other combat injuries.

We also know that service does not end with the person wearing the uniform. In her visits with military families across the country, my wife Michelle has learned firsthand about the unique burden that your families endure every day. I want you to know this: military families are a top priority for Michelle and me, and they will be a top priority for my administration. We’ll raise military pay, and continue providing quality child-care, job-training for spouses, and expanded counseling and outreach to families that have known the separation and stress of war. We will also heed the lesson of history – that those who fight in battle can form the backbone of our middle class – by implementing a 21st century GI Bill to help our veterans live their dreams.

As a nation, we have had our share of debates about the war in Iraq. It has, at times, divided us as a people. To this very day, there are some Americans who want to stay in Iraq longer, and some who want to leave faster. But there should be no disagreement on what the men and women of our military have achieved.

And so I want to be very clear: We sent our troops to Iraq to do away with Saddam Hussein’s regime – and you got the job done. We kept our troops in Iraq to help establish a sovereign government – and you got the job done. And we will leave the Iraqi people with a hard-earned opportunity to live a better life – that is your achievement; that is the prospect that you have made possible.

There are many lessons to be learned from what we’ve experienced. We have learned that America must go to war with clearly defined goals, which is why I’ve ordered a review of our policy in Afghanistan. We have learned that we must always weigh the costs of action, and communicate those costs candidly to the American people, which is why I’ve put Iraq and Afghanistan into my budget. We have learned that in the 21st century, we must use all elements of American power to achieve our objectives, which is why I am committed to building our civilian national security capacity so that the burden is not continually pushed on to our military. We have learned that our political leaders must pursue the broad and bipartisan support that our national security policies depend upon, which is why I will consult with Congress and in carrying out my plans. And we have learned the importance of working closely with friends and allies, which is why we are launching a new era of engagement in the world.

The starting point for our policies must always be the safety of the American people. I know that you – the men and women of the finest fighting force in the history of the world – can meet any challenge, and defeat any foe. And as long as I am your Commander-in-Chief, I promise you that I will only send you into harm’s way when it is absolutely necessary, and provide you with the equipment and support you need to get the job done. That is the most important lesson of all – for the consequences of war are dire, the sacrifices immeasurable.

You know because you have seen those sacrifices. You have lived them. And we all honor them.

"Semper Fidelis" – it means always being faithful to Corps, and to country, and to the memory of fallen comrades like Corporal Jonathan Yale and Lance Corporal Jordan Haerter. These young men enlisted in a time of war, knowing they would face great danger. They came here, to Camp Lejeune, as they trained for their mission. And last April, they were standing guard in Anbar. In an age when suicide is a weapon, they were suddenly faced with an oncoming truck filled with explosives. These two Marines stood their ground. These two Marines opened fire. And these two Marines stopped that truck. When the thousands of pounds of explosives detonated, they had saved fifty Marines and Iraqi police who would have been in the truck’s path, but Corporal Yale and Lance Corporal Haerter lost their own lives. Jonathan was 21. Jordan was 19.

In the town where Jordan Haerter was from, a bridge was dedicated in his name. One Marine who traveled to the ceremony said: "We flew here from all over the country to pay tribute to our friend Jordan, who risked his life to save us. We wouldn’t be here without him."

America’s time in Iraq is filled with stories of men and women like this. Their names are written into bridges and town squares. They are etched into stones at Arlington, and in quiet places of rest across our land. They are spoken in schools and on city blocks. They live on in the memories of those who wear your uniform, in the hearts of those they loved, and in the freedom of the nation they served.

Each American who has served in Iraq has their own story. Each of you has your own story. And that story is now a part of the history of the United States of America – a nation that exists only because free men and women have bled for it from the beaches of Normandy to the deserts of Anbar; from the mountains of Korea to the streets of Kandahar. You teach us that the price of freedom is great. Your sacrifice should challenge all of us – every single American – to ask what we can do to be better citizens.

There will be more danger in the months ahead. We will face new tests and unforeseen trials. But thanks to the sacrifices of those who have served, we have forged hard-earned progress, we are leaving Iraq to its people, and we have begun the work of ending this war.

Thank you, God Bless you, and God Bless the United States of America. Semper Fi.

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# Speech to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce on Education

Please, everybody have a seat. Thank you for the wonderful introduction, David. And thank you for the great work that you are doing each and every day. And I appreciate such a warm welcome. Some of you I've gotten a chance to know; many of you I'm meeting for the first time. But the spirit of the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the desire to create jobs and provide opportunity to people who sometimes have been left out -- that's exactly what this administration is about. That's the essence of the American Dream. And so I'm very proud to have a chance to speak with all of you.

You know, every so often, throughout our history, a generation of Americans bears the responsibility of seeing this country through difficult times and protecting the dream of its founding for posterity. This is a responsibility that's fallen to our generation. Meeting it will require steering our nation's economy through a crisis unlike anything that we have seen in our time.

In the short term, that means jump-starting job creation and restarting lending, and restoring confidence in our markets and our financial system. But it also means taking steps that not only advance our recovery, but lay the foundation for lasting, shared prosperity.

I know there's some who believe we can only handle one challenge at a time. And they forget that Lincoln helped lay down the transcontinental railroad and passed the Homestead Act and created the National Academy of Sciences in the midst of civil war. Likewise, President Roosevelt didn't have the luxury of choosing between ending a depression and fighting a war; he had to do both. President Kennedy didn't have the luxury of choosing between civil rights and sending us to the moon. And we don't have the luxury of choosing between getting our economy moving now and rebuilding it over the long term.

America will not remain true to its highest ideals -- and America's place as a global economic leader will be put at risk -- unless we not only bring down the crushing cost of health care and transform the way we use energy, but also if we do -- if we don't do a far better job than we've been doing of educating our sons and daughters; unless we give them the knowledge and skills they need in this new and changing world.

For we know that economic progress and educational achievement have always gone hand in hand in America. The land-grant colleges and public high schools transformed the economy of an industrializing nation. The GI Bill generated a middle class that made America's economy unrivaled in the 20th century. Investments in math and science under President Eisenhower gave new opportunities to young scientists and engineers all across the country. It made possible somebody like a Sergei Brin to attend graduate school and found an upstart company called Google that would forever change our world.

The source of America's prosperity has never been merely how ably we accumulate wealth, but how well we educate our people. This has never been more true than it is today. In a 21st-century world where jobs can be shipped wherever there's an Internet connection, where a child born in Dallas is now competing with a child in New Delhi, where your best job qualification is not what you do, but what you know -- education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity and success, it's a prerequisite for success.

That's why workers without a four-year degree have borne the brunt of recent layoffs, Latinos most of all. That's why, of the 30 fastest growing occupations in America, half require a Bachelor's degree or more. By 2016, four out of every 10 new jobs will require at least some advanced education or training.

So let there be no doubt: The future belongs to the nation that best educates its citizens -- and my fellow Americans, we have everything we need to be that nation. We have the best universities, the most renowned scholars. We have innovative principals and passionate teachers and gifted students, and we have parents whose only priority is their child's education. We have a legacy of excellence, and an unwavering belief that our children should climb higher than we did.

And yet, despite resources that are unmatched anywhere in the world, we've let our grades slip, our schools crumble, our teacher quality fall short, and other nations outpace us. Let me give you a few statistics. In 8th grade math, we've fallen to 9th place. Singapore's middle-schoolers outperform ours three to one. Just a third of our 13- and 14-year-olds can read as well as they should. And year after year, a stubborn gap persists between how well white students are doing compared to their African American and Latino classmates. The relative decline of American education is untenable for our economy, it's unsustainable for our democracy, it's unacceptable for our children -- and we can't afford to let it continue.

What's at stake is nothing less than the American Dream. It's what drew my father and so many of your fathers and mothers to our shores in pursuit of an education. It's what led Linda Brown and Gonzalo and Felicitas Mendez to bear the standard of all who were attending separate and unequal schools. It's what has led generations of Americans to take on that extra job, to sacrifice the small pleasures, to scrimp and save wherever they can, in hopes of putting away enough, just enough, to give their child the education that they never had. It's that most American of ideas, that with the right education, a child of any race, any faith, any station, can overcome whatever barriers stand in their way and fulfill their God-given potential.

Of course, we've heard all this year after year after year after year -- and far too little has changed. Certainly it hasn't changed in too many overcrowded Latino schools; it hasn't changed in too many inner-city schools that are seeing dropout rates of over 50 percent. It's not changing not because we're lacking sound ideas or sensible plans -- in pockets of excellence across this country, we're seeing what children from all walks of life can and will achieve when we set high standards, have high expectations, when we do a good job of preparing them. Instead, it's because politics and ideology have too often trumped our progress that we're in the situation that we're in.

For decades, Washington has been trapped in the same stale debates that have paralyzed progress and perpetuated our educational decline. Too many supporters of my party have resisted the idea of rewarding excellence in teaching with extra pay, even though we know it can make a difference in the classroom. Too many in the Republican Party have opposed new investments in early education, despite compelling evidence of its importance. So what we get here in Washington is the same old debate about it's more money versus more reform, vouchers versus the status quo. There's been partisanship and petty bickering, but little recognition that we need to move beyond the worn fights of the 20th century if we're going to succeed in the 21st century.

I think you'd all agree that the time for finger-pointing is over. The time for holding us -- holding ourselves accountable is here. What's required is not simply new investments, but new reforms. It's time to expect more from our students. It's time to start rewarding good teachers, stop making excuses for bad ones. It's time to demand results from government at every level. It's time to prepare every child, everywhere in America, to out-compete any worker, anywhere in the world. It's time to give all Americans a complete and competitive education from the cradle up through a career. We've accepted failure for far too long. Enough is enough. America's entire education system must once more be the envy of the world -- and that's exactly what we intend to do.

That's exactly what the budget I'm submitting to Congress has begun to achieve. Now, at a time when we've inherited a trillion-dollar deficit, we will start by doing a little housekeeping, going through our books, cutting wasteful education programs. My outstanding Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, who's here today -- stand up, Arne, so everybody can see you. I'm assuming you also saw my Secretary of Labor, Hilda Solis. But Secretary Duncan will use only one test when deciding what ideas to support with your precious tax dollars: It's not whether an idea is liberal or conservative, but whether it works. And this will help free up resources for the first pillar of reforming our schools -- investing in early childhood initiatives.

This isn't just about keeping an eye on our children, it's about educating them. Studies show that children in early childhood education programs are more likely to score higher in reading and math, more likely to graduate from high school and attend college, more likely to hold a job, and more likely to earn more in that job. For every dollar we invest in these programs, we get nearly $10 back in reduced welfare rolls, fewer health care costs, and less crime. That's why the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act that I signed into law invests $5 billion in growing Early Head Start and Head Start, expanding access to quality child care for 150,000 more children from working families, and doing more for children with special needs. And that's why we are going to offer 55,000 first-time parents regular visits from trained nurses to help make sure their children are healthy and prepare them for school and for life.

Even as we invest in early childhood education, let's raise the bar for early learning programs that are falling short. Now, today, some children are enrolled in excellent programs. Some children are enrolled in mediocre programs. And some are wasting away their most formative years in bad programs. That includes the one-fourth of all children who are Hispanic, and who will drive America's workforce of tomorrow, but who are less likely to have been enrolled in an early childhood education program than anyone else.

That's why I'm issuing a challenge to our states: Develop a cutting-edge plan to raise the quality of your early learning programs; show us how you'll work to ensure that children are better prepared for success by the time they enter kindergarten. If you do, we will support you with an Early Learning Challenge Grant that I call on Congress to enact. That's how we will reward quality and incentivize excellence, and make a down payment on the success of the next generation.

So that's the first pillar of our education reform agenda. The second, we will end what has become a race to the bottom in our schools and instead spur a race to the top by encouraging better standards and assessments. Now, this is an area where we are being outpaced by other nations. It's not that their kids are any smarter than ours -- it's that they are being smarter about how to educate their children. They're spending less time teaching things that don't matter, and more time teaching things that do. They're preparing their students not only for high school or college, but for a career. We are not. Our curriculum for 8th graders is two full years behind top performing countries. That's a prescription for economic decline. And I refuse to accept that America's children cannot rise to this challenge. They can, and they must, and they will meet higher standards in our time.

So let's challenge our states -- let's challenge our states to adopt world-class standards that will bring our curriculums to the 21st century. Today's system of 50 different sets of benchmarks for academic success means 4th grade readers in Mississippi are scoring nearly 70 points lower than students in Wyoming -- and they're getting the same grade. Eight of our states are setting their standards so low that their students may end up on par with roughly the bottom 40 percent of the world.

That's inexcusable. That's why I'm calling on states that are setting their standards far below where they ought to be to stop low-balling expectations for our kids. The solution to low test scores is not lowering standards -- it's tougher, clearer standards. Standards like those in Massachusetts, where 8th graders are -- we have a Massachusetts contingent here. In Massachusetts, 8th graders are now tying for first -- first in the whole world in science. Other forward-thinking states are moving in the same direction by coming together as part of a consortium. And more states need to do the same. And I'm calling on our nation's governors and state education chiefs to develop standards and assessments that don't simply measure whether students can fill in a bubble on a test, but whether they possess 21st century skills like problem-solving and critical thinking and entrepreneurship and creativity.

That is what we'll help them do later this year -- that what we're going to help them do later this year when we finally make No Child Left Behind live up to its name by ensuring not only that teachers and principals get the funding that they need, but that the money is tied to results. And Arne Duncan will also back up this commitment to higher standards with a fund to invest in innovation in our school districts.

Of course, raising standards alone will not make much of a difference unless we provide teachers and principals with the information they need to make sure students are prepared to meet those standards. And far too few states have data systems like the one in Florida that keep track of a student's education from childhood through college. And far too few districts are emulating the example of Houston and Long Beach, and using data to track how much progress a student is making and where that student is struggling. That's a resource that can help us improve student achievement, and tell us which students had which teachers so we can assess what's working and what's not. That's why we're making a major investment in this area that we will cultivate a new culture of accountability in America's schools.

Now, to complete our race to the top requires the third pillar of reform -- recruiting, preparing, and rewarding outstanding teachers. From the moment students enter a school, the most important factor in their success is not the color of their skin or the income of their parents, it's the person standing at the front of the classroom. That's why our Recovery Act will ensure that hundreds of thousands of teachers and school personnel are not laid off -- because those Americans are not only doing jobs they can't afford to lose, they're rendering a service our nation cannot afford to lose, either.

America's future depends on its teachers. And so today, I'm calling on a new generation of Americans to step forward and serve our country in our classrooms. If you want to make a difference in the life of our nation, if you want to make the most of your talents and dedication, if you want to make your mark with a legacy that will endure -- then join the teaching profession. America needs you. We need you in our suburbs. We need you in our small towns. We especially need you in our inner cities. We need you in classrooms all across our country.

And if you do your part, then we'll do ours. That's why we're taking steps to prepare teachers for their difficult responsibilities, and encourage them to stay in the profession. That's why we're creating new pathways to teaching and new incentives to bring teachers to schools where they're needed most. That's why we support offering extra pay to Americans who teach math and science to end a teacher shortage in those subjects. It's why we're building on the promising work being done in places like South Carolina's Teachers Advancement Program, and making an unprecedented commitment to ensure that anyone entrusted with educating our children is doing the job as well as it can be done.

Now, here's what that commitment means: It means treating teachers like the professionals they are while also holding them more accountable -– in up to 150 more school districts. New teachers will be mentored by experienced ones. Good teachers will be rewarded with more money for improved student achievement, and asked to accept more responsibilities for lifting up their schools. Teachers throughout a school will benefit from guidance and support to help them improve.

And just as we've given our teachers all the support they need to be successful, we need to make sure our students have the teacher they need to be successful. And that means states and school districts taking steps to move bad teachers out of the classroom. But let me be clear -- Let me be clear -- the overwhelming number of teachers are doing an outstanding job under difficult circumstances. My sister is a teacher, so I know how tough teaching can be. But let me be clear: If a teacher is given a chance or two chances or three chances but still does not improve, there's no excuse for that person to continue teaching. I reject a system that rewards failure and protects a person from its consequences. The stakes are too high. We can afford nothing but the best when it comes to our children's teachers and the schools where they teach.

Now, that leads me to the fourth part of America's education strategy –- promoting innovation and excellence in America's schools. One of the places where much of that innovation occurs is in our most effective charter schools. And these are public schools founded by parents, teachers, and civic or community organizations with broad leeway to innovate -– schools I supported as a state legislator and a United States senator.

But right now, there are many caps on how many charter schools are allowed in some states, no matter how well they're preparing our students. That isn't good for our children, our economy, or our country. Of course, any expansion of charter schools must not result in the spread of mediocrity, but in the advancement of excellence. And that will require states adopting both a rigorous selection and review process to ensure that a charter school's autonomy is coupled with greater accountability –- as well as a strategy, like the one in Chicago, to close charter schools that are not working. Provided this greater accountability, I call on states to reform their charter rules, and lift caps on the number of allowable charter schools, wherever such caps are in place.

Now, even as we foster innovation in where our children are learning, let's also foster innovation in when our children are learning. We can no longer afford an academic calendar designed for when America was a nation of farmers who needed their children at home plowing the land at the end of each day. That calendar may have once made sense, but today it puts us at a competitive disadvantage. Our children -- listen to this -- our children spend over a month less in school than children in South Korea -- every year. That's no way to prepare them for a 21st century economy. That's why I'm calling for us not only to expand effective after-school programs, but to rethink the school day to incorporate more time -– whether during the summer or through expanded-day programs for children who need it.

Now, I know longer school days and school years are not wildly popular ideas. Not with Malia and Sasha -- not in my family, and probably not in yours. But the challenges of a new century demand more time in the classroom. If they can do that in South Korea, we can do it right here in the United States of America.

Of course, no matter how innovative our schools or how effective our teachers, America cannot succeed unless our students take responsibility for their own education. That means showing up for school on time, paying attention in class, seeking out extra tutoring if it's needed, staying out of trouble. To any student who's watching, I say this: Don't even think about dropping out of school. Don't even think about it.

As I said a couple of weeks ago, dropping out is quitting on yourself, it's quitting on your country, and it's not an option -- not anymore. Not when our high school dropout rate has tripled in the past 30 years. Not when high school dropouts earn about half as much as college graduates. Not when Latino students are dropping out faster than just about anyone else. It's time for all of us, no matter what our backgrounds, to come together and solve this epidemic.

Stemming the tide of dropouts will require turning around our low-performing schools. Just 2,000 high schools in cities like Detroit and Los Angeles and Philadelphia produce over 50 percent of America's dropouts. And yet there are too few proven strategies to transform these schools. And there are too few partners to get the job done.

So today, I'm issuing a challenge to educators and lawmakers, parents and teachers alike: Let us all make turning around our schools our collective responsibility as Americans. And that will require new investments in innovative ideas -- that's why my budget invests in developing new strategies to make sure at-risk students don't give up on their education; new efforts to give dropouts who want to return to school the help they need to graduate; and new ways to put those young men and women who have left school back on a pathway to graduation.

Now, the fifth part of America's education strategy is providing every American with a quality higher education -– whether it's college or technical training. Never has a college degree been more important. Never has it been more expensive. And at a time when so many of our families are bearing enormous economic burdens, the rising cost of tuition threatens to shatter dreams. And that's why we will simplify federal college assistance forms so it doesn't take a Ph.D to apply for financial aid.

That's why we're already taking steps to make college or technical training affordable. For the first time ever, Pell Grants will not be subject to the politics of the moment or the whim of the market –- they will be a commitment that Congress is required to uphold each and every year. Not only that; because rising costs mean Pell Grants cover less than half as much tuition as they did 30 years ago, we're raising the maximum Pell Grant to $5,550 a year and indexing it above inflation. We're also providing a $2,500-a-year tuition tax credit for students from working families. And we're modernizing and expanding the Perkins Loan Program to make sure schools like UNLV don't get a tenth as many Perkins loans as schools like Harvard.

To help pay for all of this, we're putting students ahead of lenders by eliminating wasteful student loan subsidies that cost taxpayers billions each year. All in all, we are making college affordable for 7 million more students with a sweeping investment in our children's futures and America's success. And I call on Congress to join me and the American people by making these investments possible.

This is how we will help meet our responsibility as a nation to open the doors of college to every American. But it will also be the responsibility of colleges and universities to control spiraling costs. We can't just keep on putting more money in and universities and colleges not doing their part to hold down tuitions. And it's the responsibility of our students to walk through the doors of opportunity.

In just a single generation, America has fallen from 2nd place to 11th place in the portion of students completing college. That is unfortunate, but it's by no means irreversible. With resolve and the right investments, we can retake the lead once more. And that's why, in my address to the nation the other week, I called on Americans to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training, with the goal of having the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by the year 2020. And to meet that goal, we are investing $2.5 billion to identify and support innovative initiatives across the country that achieve results in helping students persist and graduate.

So let's not stop at education with college. Let's recognize a 21st century reality: Learning doesn't end in our early 20s. Adults of all ages need opportunities to earn new degrees and new skills -- especially in the current economic environment. That means working with all our universities and schools, including community colleges -- a great and undervalued asset -- to prepare workers for good jobs in high-growth industries; and to improve access to job training not only for young people who are just starting their careers, but for older workers who need new skills to change careers. And that's going to be one of the key tasks that Secretary Solis is involved with, is making sure that lifelong learning is a reality and a possibility for more Americans.

It's through initiatives like these that we'll see more Americans earn a college degree, or receive advanced training, and pursue a successful career. And that's why I'm calling on Congress to work with me to enact these essential reforms, and to reauthorize the Workforce Reinvestment Act. That's how we will round out a complete and competitive education in the United States of America.

So here's the bottom line: Yes, we need more money; yes, we need more reform; yes, we need to hold ourselves more accountable for every dollar we spend. But there's one more ingredient I want to talk about. No government policy will make any difference unless we also hold ourselves more accountable as parents -- because government, no matter how wise or efficient, cannot turn off the TV or put away the video games. Teachers, no matter how dedicated or effective, cannot make sure your child leaves for school on time and does their homework when they get back at night. These are things only a parent can do. These are things that our parents must do.

I say this not only as a father, but also as a son. When I was a child my mother and I lived overseas, and she didn't have the money to send me to the fancy international school where all the American kids went to school. So what she did was she supplemented my schooling with lessons from a correspondence course. And I can still picture her waking me up at 4:30 a.m., five days a week, to go over some lessons before I went to school. And whenever I'd complain and grumble and find some excuse and say, "Awww, I'm sleepy," she'd patiently repeat to me her most powerful defense. She'd say, "This is no picnic for me either, buster."

And when you're a kid you don't think about the sacrifices they're making. She had to work; I just had to go to school. But she'd still wake up every day to make sure I was getting what I needed for my education. And it's because she did this day after day, week after week, because of all the other opportunities and breaks that I got along the way, all the sacrifices that my grandmother and my grandfather made along the way, that I can stand here today as President of the United States. It's because of the sacrifices -- See, I want every child in this country to have the same chance that my mother gave me, that my teachers gave me, that my college professors gave me, that America gave me.

You know these stories; you've lived them, as well. All of you have a similar story to tell. You know, it's -- I want children like Yvonne Bojorquez to have that chance. Yvonne is a student at Village Academy High School in California. Now, Village Academy is a 21st century school where cutting edge technologies are used in the classroom, where college prep and career training are offered to all who seek it, and where the motto is "respect, responsibility, and results."

Now, a couple of months ago, Yvonne and her class made a video talking about the impact that our struggling economy was having on their lives. And some of them spoke about their parents being laid off, or their homes facing foreclosure, or their inability to focus on school with everything that was happening at home. And when it was her turn to speak, Yvonne said: "We've all been affected by this economic crisis. [We] are all college bound students; we're all businessmen, and doctors and lawyers and all this great stuff. And we have all this potential -- but the way things are going, we're not going to be able to [fulfill it]."

It was heartbreaking that a girl so full of promise was so full of worry that she and her class titled their video, "Is anybody listening?" So, today, there's something I want to say to Yvonne and her class at Village Academy: I am listening. We are listening. America is listening. And we will not rest until your parents can keep your jobs -- we will not rest until your parents can keep their jobs and your families can keep their homes, and you can focus on what you should be focusing on -- your own education; until you can become the businessmen, doctors, and lawyers of tomorrow, until you can reach out and grasp your dreams for the future.

For in the end, Yvonne's dream is a dream shared by all Americans. It's the founding promise of our nation: That we can make of our lives what we will; that all things are possible for all people; and that here in America, our best days lie ahead. I believe that. I truly believe if I do my part, and you, the American people, do yours, then we will emerge from this crisis a stronger nation, and pass the dream of our founding on to posterity, ever safer than before.

Thank you very much. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

Thank you.

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# Post G20 Economic Summit Remarks and Press Conference

Good afternoon, or good evening -- we're running a little bit late.

Earlier today, we finished a very productive summit that will be, I believe, a turning point in our pursuit of global economic recovery.

By any measure, the London summit was historic. It was historic because of the size and the scope of the challenges that we face, and because of the timeliness and magnitude of our response.

The challenge is clear. The global economy is contracting. Trade is shrinking. Unemployment is rising. The international finance system is nearly frozen. Even these facts can't fully capture the crisis that we're confronting, because behind them is the pain and uncertainty that so many people are facing. We see it back in the United States. We see it here in London. We see it around the world: families losing their homes, workers losing their jobs and their savings, students who are deferring their dreams. So many have lost so much. Just to underscore this point, back in the United States, jobless claims released today were the highest in 26 years. We owe it to all of our citizens to act, and to act with a sense of urgency.

In an age where our economies are linked more closely than ever before, the whole world has been touched by this devastating downturn. And today, the world's leaders have responded with an unprecedented set of comprehensive and coordinated actions.

Now, just keep in mind some historical context. Faced with similar global challenges in the past, the world was slow to act, and people paid an enormous price. That was true in the Great Depression, when nations prolonged and worsened the crisis by turning inward, waiting for more than a decade to meet the challenge together. Even as recently as the 1980s, the slow global response deepened and widened a debt crisis in Latin America that pushed millions into poverty.

Today, we've learned the lessons of history. I know that in the days leading up to the summit, some of you in the press, some commentators, confused honest and open debate with irreconcilable differences. But after weeks of preparation, and two days of careful negotiation, we have agreed on a series of unprecedented steps to restore growth and prevent a crisis like this from happening again.

Let me outline what I think has been most significant.

Number one, we are committed to growth and job creation. All G20 nations have acted to stimulate demand, which will total well over $2 trillion in global fiscal expansion. The United States is also partnering with the private sector to clean out the troubled assets, the legacy assets that are crippling some banks, and using the full force of the government to ensure that our action leads directly to loans to businesses large and small, as well as individuals who depend on credit. And these efforts will be amplified by our G20 partners, who are pursuing similarly comprehensive programs.

And we also agreed on bold action to support developing countries, so that we aren't faced with declining markets that the global economy depends on. Together, the G20 is tripling the IMF's lending capacity and promoting lending by multilateral development banks to increase the purchasing power and expand markets in every country.

We've also rejected the protectionism that could deepen this crisis. History tells us that turning inward can help turn a downturn into a depression. And this cooperation between the world's leading economies signals our support for open markets, as does our multilateral commitment to trade finance that will grow our exports and create new jobs.

That's all on the growth front.

And next we made enormous strides in committing ourselves to comprehensive reform of a failed regulatory system. And together, I believe that we must put an end to the bubble-and-bust economy that has stood in the way of sustained growth and enabled abusive risk-taking that endangers our prosperity.

At home, back in the States, our efforts began with the approach that Secretary Geithner proposed last week, the strongest regulatory reforms any nation has contemplated so far to prevent the massive failure of responsibility that we have already seen. Today, these principles have informed and enabled the coordinated action that we will take with our G20 partners.

To prevent future crises, we agreed to increased transparency and capital protections for financial institutions. We're extending supervision to all systemically important institutions, markets and products, including hedge funds. We'll identify jurisdictions that fail to cooperate, including tax havens, and take action to defend our financial system. We will reestablish the Financial Stability Forum with a stronger mandate. And we will reform and expand the IMF and World Bank so they are more efficient, effective and representative.

Finally, we are protecting those who don't always have a voice at the G20, but who have suffered greatly in this crisis. And the United States is ready to lead in this endeavor. In the coming days, I intend to work with Congress to provide $448 million in immediate assistance to vulnerable populations -- from Africa to Latin America -- and to double support for food safety to over $1 billion so that we are giving people the tools they need to lift themselves out of poverty. We will also support the United Nations and World Bank as they coordinate the rapid assistance necessary to prevent humanitarian catastrophe.

I have to say, though, that this is not just charity. These are all future markets for all countries, and future drivers of world economic growth.

Let me also underscore my appreciation to Prime Minister Brown, his entire team, and all my colleagues from around the world who contributed to the summit's success. You know, it's hard for 20 heads of state to bridge their differences. We've all got our own national policies; we all have our own assumptions, our own political cultures. But our citizens are all hurting. They all need us to come together. So I'm pleased that the G20 has agreed to meet again this fall, because I believe that this is just the beginning. Our problems are not going to be solved in one meeting; they're not going to be solved in two meetings. We're going to have to be proactive in shaping events and persistent in monitoring our progress to determine whether further action is needed.

I also want to just make a few remarks about additional meetings I had outside of the G20 context. While here in London I had the opportunity to hold bilateral meetings with leaders of Russia, China, South Korea, Saudi Arabia and India, as well as Great Britain. And these discussions were extraordinarily valuable and productive. Of course, we spoke about additional steps to promote economic recovery and growth. But we also discussed coordinated actions on a range of issues: how we could reduce the nuclear threat; how we could forge a coordinated response to North Korea's planned missile launch; how we can turn back terrorism and stabilize Afghanistan; how we can protect our planet from the scourge of climate change. I'm encouraged that we laid the groundwork for real and lasting progress on a host of these issues.

Ultimately, the challenges of the 21st century can't be met without collective action. Agreement will almost never be easy, and results won't always come quickly. But I am committed to respecting different points of view, and to forging a consensus instead of dictating our terms. That's how we made progress in the last few days. And that's how we will advance and uphold our ideals in the months and years to come.

You know, at home, I've often spoken about a new era of responsibility. And I believe strongly that this era must not end at our borders. In a world that's more and more interconnected, we all have responsibilities to work together to solve common challenges. And although it will take time, I am confident that we will rebuild global prosperity if we act with a common sense of purpose, persistence, and the optimism that the moment demands.

So I appreciate your attention, and I'm going to take a few questions. I've got a list of a few people I'm going to call on and then I will intersperse some folks I'm calling on randomly.

Helene Cooper. (There you are.)

Question: [Questions calling for President Obama to assess his performance during this, his first G20 conference.]

President Obama: Well, I think we did okay. You know, when I came here, it was with the intention of listening and learning, but also providing American leadership. And I think that the document that has been produced as well as the concrete actions that will follow reflect a range of our priorities.

We wanted to make sure that we had a strong, coordinated response to growth -- and that's reflected in the document and in the actions that will be taken. We thought it was important to make sure that we had a strong, coordinated regulatory response -- and many of the details of the regulatory response draw from principles that we had developed prior to coming here.

We felt that it was very important to strengthen our international financial institutions because developing countries, emerging markets are threatened -- even though they may not have been the cause of this crisis -- they are threatened by capital flight; they're threatened by reduced trade finance; drops in consumer demand in developed countries that were their export markets, and so we knew that it was going to be important to provide those countries with assistance. And we have created as fundamental a reworking of the resources available to these international financial institutions as anything we've done in the last several decades.

So, overall, I'm pleased with the product. And I'll leave it to others to determine whether me and my team had anything to do with that. All right?

Chuck Todd. Chuck.

Question: What concrete items that you got out of this G20 can you tell the American people back home who are hurting, the family struggling, seeing their retirement go down, or worrying about losing their job -- what happened here today that helps that family back home in the heartland?

President Obama: Well, as I said before, we've got a global economy, and if we're taking actions in isolation in the United States, but those actions are contradicted overseas, then we're only going to be halfway effective -- maybe not even half.

You've seen, for example, a drastic decline in U.S. exports over the last several months. You look at a company like Caterpillar, in my home state of Illinois, which up until last year was doing extraordinarily well; in fact, export growth was what had sustained it even after the recession had begun. As a consequence of the world recession, as a consequence of the contagion from the financial markets debilitating the economies elsewhere, Caterpillar is now in very bad shape. So if we want to get Caterpillar back on its feet, if we want to get all those export companies back on their feet, so that they are hiring, putting people back to work, putting money in people's pockets, we've got to make sure that the global economy as a whole is successful.

And this document, which affirms the need for all countries to take fiscal responses that increase demand, that encourages the openness of markets, those are all going to be helpful in us being able to fix what ails the economy back home.

Let me mix in a -- Justin Webb, BBC. Where's Justin? There he is. Go ahead.

Question: Mr. President, in the spirit of openness, with which you say you're --

President Obama: Why don't you get a microphone? See, everybody is complaining. I'm sure that's all your fellow British journalists.

Question: They're extraordinarily well behaved, Mr. President. In the spirit of openness, with which you say you're going to run your Administration, could you give us an insight into an area or areas where you came to London wanting something and you didn't get it; where you compromised, where you gave something away to achieve the wider breakthrough agreement?

President Obama: Well, I think that if you look at the language of the document, there are probably some areas where it wasn't so much of a sacrifice as it might not have been our number-one priority, but it became clear that it was very important to certain other actors.

I'd rather not specify what those precise items would be, because this is a collective document. But there's no doubt that each country has its own quirks and own particular issues that a leader may decide is really, really important; something that is non-negotiable for them. And what we tried to do as much as possible was to accommodate those issues in a way that didn't -- did not hamper the effectiveness of the overall document to address what I think are the core issues related to this crisis.

Now, keep in mind -- I think that this kind of coordination really is historic. I said in the meeting that if you had imagined 10 years ago, or 20 years ago, or 30 years ago, that you'd have the leaders of Germany, France, China, Russia, Brazil, South Africa, a President of the United States named Obama -- former adversaries, in some cases former mortal enemies, negotiating this swiftly on behalf of fixing the global economy, you would have said, that's crazy. And yet it was happening, and it happened with relatively little -- relatively few hiccups. And I think that's a testimony to the great work that Gordon Brown did, and his team, in organizing the summit, the collective work in our teams in doing some good preparation, some good ground work. So I'm very proud of what's been done.

This alone is not enough. And obviously the actions that each of us take in our individual countries are still absolutely vital. So we have a set of principles, for example, around dealing with systemic risk that I think will be very important in preventing the kinds of financial crises that we've seen.

That does not entirely solve the problem of toxic assets that are still in U.S. banks and certain British banks and certain European banks. And how each individual nation acts to deal with that is still going to be vitally important. How well we execute the respective stimulus programs around the world is going to be very important. The quicker they are, the more effective they are at actually boosting demand, the more all of us will benefit. The more encumbered they are by bureaucracy and mismanagement and corruption, that will hamper our development efforts as a whole.

So this is not a panacea, but it is a critical step, and I think it lays the foundation so that, should the actions that we've taken individually and collectively so far not succeed in boosting global demand and growth, should you continue to see a freezing of credit or a hemorrhaging of jobs around the world, I think we've created a good foundation for this leadership to come back together again and take additional steps until we get it right.

Okay, Michael Shear. Where's Michael?

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. I wonder if you view this trip that you're on and the actions that you've taken here at the G20 and with the bilateral meetings that you've had as representing a break from the foreign policy of your predecessor. And if so, could you describe where you see and how you see the principles that guide a different view of the world?

President Obama: Well, you know, I didn't accompany President Bush on his various summits, so I don't know how he was operating. And I won't -- I won't warrant a guess on that.

I can tell you that what I've tried to do since I started running for President and since I was sworn in as President, is to communicate the notion that America is a critical actor and leader on the world stage, and that we shouldn't be embarrassed about that, but that we exercise our leadership best when we are listening; when we recognize that the world is a complicated place and that we are going to have to act in partnership with other countries; when we lead by example; when we show some element of humility and recognize that we may not always have the best answer, but we can always encourage the best answer and support the best answer.

So I think that's the -- that's the approach that we've tried to take in our foreign policy since my Administration came in. Now, we come in at extraordinarily challenging times, and yet I actually think that that calls for this type of leadership even more. But, ultimately, we won't know how effective we are until we look back a year from now, or two years from now, or three years from now and see if it worked.

And what the American people care about I suspect are the same thing that the British people care about, and that is, are you putting people back to work? Are businesses growing again? Is business -- is credit flowing again? And, you know -- and that's just true with respect to this summit. But when it comes to our Afghanistan policy, the question is going to be, have we made ourselves safer; have we reduced the risks and incidents of terrorism?

And so the proof of the pudding is in the eating. But hopefully, I think at least we've set a tone internationally where people don't -- where they give us the benefit of the doubt. They're still going to have their interests, and we're going to have ours. There are going to be tough negotiations, and sometimes we're going to have to walk away from those negotiations if we can't arrive at a common accord. There are going to be real dangers that can't always be talked through and have to be addressed. But at least we can start with the notion that we're prepared to listen and to work cooperatively with countries around the world.

All right, let me sprinkle in another -- it's got to be an international person. All right, this young lady right there.

Question: Mr. President, Emma Alberici from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. At the moment, in the U.S., the U.K., and in Australia, executive salaries and bonuses are decided in the boardrooms of major publicly listed companies. Who will be making those decisions on salaries and bonuses as a result of the agreement you've made here today? And if it is still the boards, will they be guided by principles or legislation?

President Obama: The principles that we outlined I think put in place or move us in the direction of what I consider to be best practices, which is that there is some accountability with respect to executive compensation.

Now, theoretically, that should be the shareholders. But the way that too many corporations have operated for too long is that you have a CEO who basically selects his board; the board, in a fairly cozy relationship oftentimes with the executive, hires a executive compensation firm, which, surprisingly, tends to think that it's necessary to retain the best talent to pay people $20 or $30 million a year; and we get into the kinds of habits and practices that I think have not been -- have not served shareholders well, I think ultimately distort the decision-making of many CEOs.

When I was in the United States Senate, I actually worked on a piece of legislation that would -- made the simple proposition that executive compensation should be subject to a shareholder vote, even if it was nonbinding, so that there was transparency and accountability and perhaps a shame function that would take place. And that principle, I think, is reflected in these guidelines.

What it says is, is that if you get shareholders involved and those shareholders are given a set of principles and best practices by which they can judge executive compensation, then you can still have outsized rewards and success for successful business people, but it will be based on not short-term performance, not three-month performance, not your ability to flip quick profits off products like derivatives that don't turn out to be particularly productive to the company, but based on sustained, effective growth. And that's what's embodied in these documents, and I think that you're going to see a lot of countries try to encourage that kind of transparency and accountability.

It doesn't mean the state micromanaging -- [sneezes] -- excuse me -- I've been fighting this all week -- it doesn't mean that we want the state dictating salaries; we don't. We -- I strongly believe in a free-market system, and as I -- as I think people understand in America, at least, people don't resent the rich; they want to be rich. And that's good. But we want to make sure that there's mechanisms in place that holds people accountable and produces results. Okay?

Got to go back to my crew. Jake Tapper.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Two questions. One, can you say with confidence that the steps the G20 nations are taking today -- committing to today will help the world, or will prevent the world to avoid a depression or a deeper recession?

And two, your friend and ally, Prime Minister Brown, said that "The old Washington consensus is over; today we have reached a new consensus." Is he right? And what do you think he meant by that?

President Obama: In life there are no guarantees; in economics there are no guarantees. The people who thought they could provide guarantees, many of them worked at AIG and it didn't work out so well. So there are always risks involved.

I have no doubt, though, that the steps that have been taken are critical to preventing us sliding into a depression. They are bolder and more rapid than any international response that we've seen to a financial crisis in memory. And I think that they will have a concrete effect in our ability, individually, in each nation, to create jobs, save jobs that exist, grow the economy, loosen up credit, restore trust and confidence in the financial markets.

So these steps -- another way of putting it is I think the steps in the communiquÃ© were necessary. Whether they're sufficient, we've got to -- we've got to wait and see. I'm actually confident, though, that given the common commitment in the United States and in the other G20 countries to act rapidly and boldly, that if we see other inklings of panic in the marketplace, or things unwinding, that this group, once again, will respond as needed.

So I guess maybe just to use an analogy that was used several times in this meeting, an analogy that I've used in the past: You got a sick patient; I think we applied the right medicine; I think the patient is stabilized; there's still wounds that have to heal and there's still emergencies that could arise, but I think that you've got some pretty good care being applied.

You had a second, follow-up question?

Question: Prime Minister Brown saying --

President Obama: Oh, the Washington consensus. Well, the Washington consensus, as I'm sure you're aware, Jake, is sort of a term of art about a certain set of policies surrounding globalization and the application of a cookie-cutter model to economic growth, trade liberalization, deregulation that was popular and did help globalize and grow the economy, and was led by some of our leading economists and policymakers in Washington.

I think that there's always been a spectrum of opinion about how unfettered the free market is. And along that spectrum, I think there have been some who believe in very fierce regulation and are very suspicious of globalization, and there are others who think that it's always -- that the market is always king. And I think what we've learned here, but if anybody had been studying history they would have understood earlier, is that the market is the most effective mechanism for creating wealth and distributing resources to produce goods and services that history has ever known, but that it goes off the rail sometimes; that if it's completely unregulated, that if there are no thoughtful frameworks to channel the creative energy of the market, that it can end up in a very bad place.

And so, in that sense, I think that we just went through a couple of decades where there was an artificial complacency about the dangers of markets going off the rails. And a crisis like this reminds us that we just have to put in some common-sense rules of the road, without throwing out the enormous benefits that globalization have brought in terms of improving living standards, reducing the cost of goods, and bringing the world closer together.

All right, I've got time for just a couple more questions. I'm going to find a journalist here --

Question: -- [inaudible]

Question: How about me?

President Obama: All right, I'm going to call on this gentleman right here. He's been very persistent.

Question: Excuse me. China Central Television. Since the world leaders have been talking about increasing the voice and voting rights of developing countries, I would like to ask two questions instead of just one. First of all, on behalf of China --

President Obama: I may choose which one I want to answer.

Question: Of course.

President Obama: That's always the danger of asking two questions.

Question: First of all, you've had a very fruitful meeting with our President. And during the Clinton Administration, U.S.-China relationship were characterized, in Clinton's words, "strategic, constructive partnership." During the Bush era, it was -- the catchphrase was "stakeholder." The Bush Administration expects China to become a responsible stakeholder in international affairs. Have you come up with a catchphrase of your own? And certainly it is not the G2, is it?

My second question is, on behalf of the world, politics is very local, even though we've been talking about global solution, as indicated by your recent preference over American journalists and British -- which is okay. How can you make sure that you will do whatever you can so that -- that local politics will not trump or negatively affect good international economics? Thank you, Mr. President.

President Obama: Well, those are excellent questions. On the first question, your American counterparts will tell you I'm terrible with those little catchphrases and sound bites. So I haven't come up with anything catchy yet, but if you have any suggestions, let me know. I'll be happy to use them.

In terms of local politics, look, I'm the President of the United States. I'm not the President of China, I'm not the President of Japan, I'm not the President of the other participants here. And so I have a direct responsibility to my constituents to make their lives better. That's why they put me in there. That accounts for some of the questions here, about how concretely does me being here help them find a job, pay for their home, send their kids to college, live what we call the American Dream. And I will be judged by my effectiveness in meeting their needs and concerns.

But in an era of integration and interdependence, it is also my responsibility to lead America into recognizing that its interests, its fate is tied up with the larger world; that if we neglect or abandon those who are suffering in poverty, that not only are we depriving ourselves of potential opportunities for markets and economic growth, but ultimately that despair may turn to violence that turns on us; that unless we are concerned about the education of all children and not just our children, not only may we be depriving ourselves of the next great scientist who's going to find the next new energy source that saves the planet, but we also may make people around the world much more vulnerable to anti-American propaganda.

So if I'm effective as America's President right now, part of that effectiveness involves holding a -- providing Americans insight into how their self-interest is tied up with yours. And that's an ongoing project because it's not always obvious.

And there are going to be times where short-term interests are going to differ; there's no doubt about it. And protectionism is the classic example. You can make arguments that if you can get away with protecting your markets, as long as the other folks don't protect theirs, then in the short term you may benefit. And it then becomes important not only for me to try to give people a sense of why, over the long term, that's counterproductive, but also it becomes important for me to put policies in place in the United States that provide a cushion, provide support for those people who may suffer local dislocations because of globalization. And that's something that I think every government has to think about.

There are individuals who will be harmed by a trade deal. There are businesses who will go out of business because of free trade. And to the extent that a government is not there to help them reshape their company or retrain for the new jobs that are being created, over time you're going to get people who see -- who rightly see their personal self-interest in very narrow terms. Okay?

Two more questions. Jonathan Weisman.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. During the campaign you often spoke of a diminished power and authority of the United States over the last decade. This is your first time in an international summit like this, and I'm wondering what evidence you saw of what you spoke of during the campaign. And specifically, is the declaration of the end of the Washington consensus evidence of the diminished authority that you feared was out there?

President Obama: Well, first of all, during the campaign I did not say that some of that loss of authority was inevitable. I said it was traced to very specific decisions that the previous Administration had made that I believed had lowered our standing in the world. And that wasn't simply my opinion; that was, it turns out, the opinion of many people around the world.

I would like to think that with my election and the early decisions that we've made, that you're starting to see some restoration of America's standing in the world. And although, as you know, I always mistrust polls, international polls seem to indicate that you're seeing people more hopeful about America's leadership.

Now, we remain the largest economy in the world by a pretty significant margin. We remain the most powerful military on Earth. Our production of culture, our politics, our media still have -- I didn't mean to say that with such scorn, guys -- you know I'm teasing -- still has enormous influence. And so I do not buy into the notion that America can't lead in the world. I wouldn't be here if I didn't think that we had important things to contribute.

I just think in a world that is as complex as it is, that it is very important for us to be able to forge partnerships as opposed to simply dictating solutions. Just a -- just to try to crystallize the example, there's been a lot of comparison here about Bretton Woods. "Oh, well, last time you saw the entire international architecture being remade." Well, if there's just Roosevelt and Churchill sitting in a room with a brandy, that's a -- that's an easier negotiation. But that's not the world we live in, and it shouldn't be the world that we live in.

And so that's not a loss for America; it's an appreciation that Europe is now rebuilt and a powerhouse. Japan is rebuilt, is a powerhouse. China, India -- these are all countries on the move. And that's good. That means there are millions of people -- billions of people -- who are working their way out of poverty. And over time, that potentially makes this a much more peaceful world. And that's the kind of leadership we need to show -- one that helps guide that process of orderly integration without taking our eyes off the fact that it's only as good as the benefits of individual families, individual children: Is it giving them more opportunity; is it giving them a better life? If we judge ourselves by those standards, then I think America can continue to show leadership for a very long time.

I'm going to call one foreigner -- actually, I'm the foreigner. That's why I smiled. One correspondent not from America. And then I will -- [vociferous commotion] -- we're not doing bidding here. But I also want to make sure that I'm not showing gender bias. So this young lady right here -- not you, sir, I'm sorry. Question: Hi, Mr. President.

President Obama: How are you?

Question: Thank you for choosing me. I'm very well. I'm from the Times of India.

President Obama: Wonderful.

Question: You met with our Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh. What did you -- what is America doing to help India tackle terrorism emanating from Pakistan?

President Obama: Well, first of all, your Prime Minister is a wonderful man.

Question: Thank you. I agree.

President Obama: Well --

Question: I agree.

President Obama: Did you have something to do with that, or -- You seem to kind of take -- take credit for it a little bit there. Question: Really proud of him, sir.

President Obama: Of course. You should be proud of him. I'm teasing you.

I think he's a very wise and decent man, and has done a wonderful job in guiding India, even prior to being Prime Minister, along a path of extraordinary economic growth that is a marvel, I think, for all the world.

We did discuss the issue of terrorism. And we discussed it not simply in terms of terrorism emanating from Pakistan, although obviously we are very concerned about extremists and terrorists who have made camp in the border regions of Pakistan as well as in Afghanistan. But we spoke about it more broadly in terms of how we can coordinate effectively on issues of counterterrorism.

We also spoke about the fact that in a nuclear age, at a time when perhaps the greatest enemy of both India and Pakistan should be poverty, that it may make sense to create a more effective dialogue between India and Pakistan. But obviously we didn't go in depth into those issues.

We talked about a whole range of other issues related to, for example, energy, and how important it is for the United States to lead by example in reducing our carbon footprint so that we can help to forge agreements with countries like China and India that, on a per-capita basis, have a much smaller footprint and so justifiably chafe at the idea that they should have to sacrifice their development for our efforts to control climate change; but also acknowledging that if China and India, with their populations, had the same energy usage as the average American, then we would have all melted by now.

And so that was a very interesting conversation that I will be pursuing not just with India, but hopefully with China and with other countries around the world. In some ways our European counterparts have moved more quickly than we have on this issue. But I think even the Europeans have recognized that it's not easy. It's even harder during times of economic downturn.

And so we're going to have to combine the low-hanging fruit of energy efficiency with rapid technological advances. And to the extent that in some cases we can get international cooperation and pool our scientific and technical knowledge around things like developing coal sequestration, for example, that can be extremely helpful. Okay?

I'm going to call on my last American correspondent, Chip. And, Chip, my heart goes out to you.

Question: Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. President. I appreciate that.

President Obama: I just heard about that.

Question: Certainly there is a lot of sentiment in G20 countries that the United States was a major cause of the global economic meltdown. To what degree did that topic come up in your discussions? Did it make it difficult for some countries to accept advice from the United States when they blame the United States and its economic system for causing this in the first place? And how do you respond to people who do blame America?

President Obama: Well, you know, I don't think that -- I think my colleagues in the G20 were extraordinarily gracious about my participation. I think that they continue to express the desire to work with America, admiration about many things American. There were occasional comments, usually wedged into some other topic, that indicated from their perspective that this started in America, or this started on Wall Street, or this started with particular banks or companies.

Perhaps what helped was my willingness to acknowledge that -- and it's hard to deny -- that some of this contagion did start on Wall Street. And as I've said back home, as I've said in public and as I would say in private, we had a number of firms that took wild and unjustified risks, we had regulators that were asleep at the switch, and it has taken an enormous toll on the U.S. economy and has spread to the world economy.

Now, I think that part of the reason people didn't give me too hard a time is because if you look at European banks or Asian banks, that they've had their own issues both in the past and in the future. And I think there was a very constructive discussion about the fact that, given global financial flows, that unless we've got much more effective coordinated regulatory strategies, supervision, standards, that these problems will appear again.

Money is -- can move around the globe in a second. And it will seek out the highest returns, and if those highest returns end up being built on a house of cards, then we're going to be seeing another threat to the world financial system wherever that house of cards might be.

And so, overall, I think there was an extraordinarily constructive approach among all the leaders. I was very impressed with them. I'm very grateful to them. And I'm excited about the ability not just to help heal this economy but also to make progress on a sustainable model of economic growth that relies less on a cycle of bubble and bust -- something that I've spoken about back home.

All right? Thank you, everybody. Appreciate it.

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# Address in Strasbourg Town Hall

Thank you so much. Good afternoon. Bon aprÃ¨s-midi. And guten tag. It is a great honor for me to be here in Europe, to be here in Strasbourg. I want to make just a few acknowledgements. I want to thank the President of France, Nicolas Sarkozy, for being such a terrific friend. I want to thank his wife, Madam Sarkozy. They just hosted us at the palace and could not have been more gracious.

I want to thank the Charge d'Affaires, Mark Pekala, and his wife, Maria, who were helping to organize us; Vincent Carver, who's the Counsel General in Strasbourg. And I want to thank the Mayor of Strasbourg, Roland Ries, for his hospitality.

It is wonderful to be here with all of you and to have an opportunity not only to speak to you but also to take some questions. You know, oftentimes during these foreign trips you see everything from behind a window, and what we thought was important was for me to have an opportunity to not only speak with you but also to hear from you, because that's ultimately how we can learn about each other. But before I take some questions, I hope you don't mind me making a few remarks about my country and yours; the relationship between the United States and the relationship between Europe.

Strasbourg has been known throughout history as a city at the crossroads. Over thousands of years, you straddled many kingdoms and many cultures. Two rivers are joined here. Two religions have flourished in your churches. Three languages comprise an ancient oath that bears the city's name. You served as a center of industry and commerce, a seat of government and education, where Goethe studied and Pasteur taught and Gutenberg imagined his printing press.

So it's fitting because we find ourselves at a crossroads as well -- all of us -- for we've arrived at a moment where each nation and every citizen must choose at last how we respond to a world that has grown smaller and more connected than at any time in its existence.

We've known for a long time that the revolutions in communications and technology that took place in the 20th century would hold out enormous promise for the 21st century -- the promise of broader prosperity and mobility; of new breakthroughs and discoveries that could help us lead richer and fuller lives. But the same forces that have brought us closer together have also given rise to new dangers that threaten to tear our world apart -- dangers that cannot be contained by the nearest border or the furthest ocean.

Even with the Cold War now over, the spread of nuclear weapons or the theft of nuclear material could lead to the extermination of any city on the planet. And this weekend in Prague, I will lay out an agenda to seek the goal of a world without nuclear weapons.

We also know that the pollution from cars in Boston or from factories in Beijing are melting the ice caps in the Arctic, and that that will disrupt weather patterns everywhere. The terrorists who struck in London, in New York, plotted in distant caves and simple apartments much closer to your home. And the reckless speculation of bankers that has new fueled a global economic downturn that's inflicting pain on workers and families is happening everywhere all across the globe.

The economic crisis has proven the fact of our interdependence in the most visible way yet. Not more than a generation ago, it would have been difficult to imagine that the inability of somebody to pay for a house in Florida could contribute to the failure of the banking system in Iceland. Today what's difficult to imagine is that we did not act sooner to shape our future.

Now, there's plenty of blame to go around for what has happened, and the United States certainly shares its -- shares blame for what has happened. But every nation bears responsibility for what lies ahead, especially now, for whether it's the recession or climate change, or terrorism, or drug trafficking, poverty, or the proliferation of nuclear weapons, we have learned that without a doubt there's no quarter of the globe that can wall itself off from the threats of the 21st century.

The one way forward -- the only way forward -- is through a common and persistent effort to combat fear and want wherever they exist. That is the challenge of our time -- and we can not fail to meet it, together.

Now, we take for granted the peace of a Europe that's united, but for centuries Strasbourg has been attacked and occupied and claimed by the warring nations of this continent. Now, today in this city, the presence of the European Parliament and the Council of Europe stand as symbols of a Europe that is united peaceful and free.

Now, we take this peace and prosperity for granted, but this destination was not easily reached, nor was it predestined. The buildings that are now living monuments to European unity were not drawn from simple blueprints. They were born out of the blood of the first half of the 20th century and the resolve of the second. Men and women had to have the imagination to see a better future, and the courage to reach for it. Europeans and Americans had to have the sense of common purpose to join one another, and the patience and the persistence to see a long twilight struggle through.

It was 61 years ago this April that a Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe helped to deliver hope to a continent that had been decimated by war. Amid the ashes and the rubble that surrounded so many cities like this one, America joined with you in an unprecedented effort that secured a lasting prosperity not just in Europe, but around the world -- on both sides of the Atlantic.

One year later, exactly 60 years ago tomorrow, we ensured our shared security when 12 of our nations signed a treaty in Washington that spelled out a simple agreement: An attack on one would be viewed as an attack on all. Without firing a single shot, this Alliance would prevent the Iron Curtain from descending on the free nations of Western Europe. It would lead eventually to the crumbling of a wall in Berlin and the end of the Communist threat. Two decades later, with 28 member nations that stretched from the Baltic to the Mediterranean, NATO remains the strongest alliance that the world has ever known.

At the crossroads where we stand today, this shared history gives us hope -- but it must not give us rest. This generation cannot stand still. We cannot be content merely to celebrate the achievements of the 20th century, or enjoy the comforts of the 21st century; we must learn from the past to build on its success. We must renew our institutions, our alliances. We must seek the solutions to the challenges of this young century.

This is our generation. This is our time. And I am confident that we can meet any challenge as long as we are together.

Such an effort is never easy. It's always harder to forge true partnerships and sturdy alliances than to act alone, or to wait for the action of somebody else. It's more difficult to break down walls of division than to simply allow our differences to build and our resentments to fester. So we must be honest with ourselves. In recent years we've allowed our Alliance to drift. I know that there have been honest disagreements over policy, but we also know that there's something more that has crept into our relationship. In America, there's a failure to appreciate Europe's leading role in the world. Instead of celebrating your dynamic union and seeking to partner with you to meet common challenges, there have been times where America has shown arrogance and been dismissive, even derisive.

But in Europe, there is an anti-Americanism that is at once casual but can also be insidious. Instead of recognizing the good that America so often does in the world, there have been times where Europeans choose to blame America for much of what's bad.

On both sides of the Atlantic, these attitudes have become all too common. They are not wise. They do not represent the truth. They threaten to widen the divide across the Atlantic and leave us both more isolated. They fail to acknowledge the fundamental truth that America cannot confront the challenges of this century alone, but that Europe cannot confront them without America.

So I've come to Europe this week to renew our partnership, one in which America listens and learns from our friends and allies, but where our friends and allies bear their share of the burden. Together, we must forge common solutions to our common problems.

So let me say this as clearly as I can: America is changing, but it cannot be America alone that changes. We are confronting the greatest economic crisis since World War II. The only way to confront this unprecedented crisis is through unprecedented coordination.

Over the last few days, I believe that we have begun that effort. The G20 summit in London was a success of nations coming together, working out their differences, and moving boldly forward. All of us are moving aggressively to restore growth and lending. All of us have agreed to the most substantial overhaul of our international financial system in a generation. No one is exempt. No more will the world's financial players be able to make risky bets at the expense of ordinary people. Those days are over. We are ushering a new era of responsibility, and that is something we should all be proud of.

As we take these steps, we also affirm that we must not erect new barriers to commerce; that trade wars have no victors. We can't give up on open markets, even as we work to ensure that trade is both free and fair. We cannot forget how many millions that trade has lifted out of poverty and into the middle class. We can't forget that part of the freedom that our nations stood for throughout the Cold War was the opportunity that comes from free enterprise and individual liberty.

I know it can be tempting to turn inward, and I understand how many people and nations have been left behind by the global economy. And that's why the United States is leading an effort to reach out to people around the world who are suffering, to provide them immediate assistance and to extend support for food security that will help them lift themselves out of poverty.

All of us must join together in this effort, not just because it is right, but because by providing assistance to those countries most in need, we will provide new markets, we will drive the growth of the future that lifts all of us up. So it's not just charity; it's a matter of understanding that our fates are tied together -- not just the fate of Europe and America, but the fate of the entire world.

And as we restore our common prosperity, we must stand up for our common security. As we meet here today, NATO has still embarked on its first mission overseas in Afghanistan, and my administration has just completed a review of our policy in that region.

Now, I understand that this war has been long. Our allies have already contributed greatly to this endeavor. You've sent your sons and daughters to fight alongside ours, and we honor and respect their service and sacrifice.

And I also know that there's some who have asked questions about why are we still in Afghanistan? What does this mean? What's its purpose? Understand we would not deploy our own troops if this mission was not indispensable to our common security. As President, I can tell you there's no decision more difficult, there's no duty more painful, than signing a letter to the family of somebody who has died in war.

So I understand that there is doubt about this war in Europe. There's doubt at times even in the United States. But know this: The United States of America did not choose to fight a war in Afghanistan. We were attacked by an al Qaeda network that killed thousands on American soil, including French and Germans. Along the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan, those terrorists are still plotting today. And they're -- if there is another al Qaeda attack, it is just as likely, if not more, that it will be here in Europe in a European city.

So I've made a commitment to Afghanistan, and I've asked our NATO partners for more civilian and military support and assistance. We do this with a clear purpose: to root out the terrorists who threaten all of us, to train the Afghan people to sustain their own security and to help them advance their own opportunity, and to quicken the day when our troops come home.

We have no interest in occupying Afghanistan. We have more than enough to do in rebuilding America. But this is a mission that tests whether nations can come together in common purpose on behalf of our common security. That's what we did together in the 20th century. And now we need an alliance that is even stronger than when it brought down a mighty wall in Berlin.

That's why we applaud France's decision to expand and deepen its participation in NATO, just as we support a strong European defense. That's why we welcome Croatia and Albania into the fold. And that is why we must ensure that NATO is equipped and capable of facing down the threats and challenges of this new age. This is one of our central tasks.

And we also know that in the 21st century, security is more complex than military power. This is the generation that must also stop the spread of the pollution that is slowly killing our planet, from shrinking coastlines and devastating storms to widespread misery and famine and drought. The effects of climate change are now in plain sight.

Europe has acted with a seriousness of purpose that this challenge demands. And in the last few months I'm proud to say that America has begun to take unprecedented steps to transform the way that we use energy. We appointed a special envoy to help us lead a global effort to reduce the carbon that we send in the atmosphere.

But we all know that time is running out. And that means that America must do more. Europe must do more. China and India must do more. Rolling back the tide of a warming planet is a responsibility that we have to ourselves, to our children, and all of those who will inherit God's creation long after we are gone. So let us meet that responsibility together. I am confident that we can meet it. But we have to begin today.

And let us resolve that when future generations look back on ours, they will be able to say that we did our part to make this world more peaceful.

It's perhaps the most difficult work of all to resolve age-old conflicts, to heal ancient hatreds, to dissolve the lines of suspicion between religions and cultures, and people who may not look like us, or have the same faith that we do, or come from the same place. But just because it's difficult does not make the work any less important. It does not absolve us from trying.

And to that end, America will sustain our effort to forge and secure a lasting peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. I've sent a clear message to the leaders and peoples of Iran that while we have real differences, we also have mutual interests, and we seek new engagement based on mutual respect. And it is in that spirit that America and Europe must reach out to the vast majority of Muslims in our nations and in all nations. We seek only hope of peace and partnership, and the opportunity of a better life.

We cannot simply solve these conflicts militarily. We have to open our minds and we have to open our hearts to the differences among us and the commonalities between us. With every threat that we face, a new day is possible. We can't get there alone. As it was in the darkest days after World War II, when a continent lay in ruins and an atomic cloud had settled over the world, we must make the journey together.

We know that transformational change is possible. We know this because of three reasons: First, because, for all our differences, there are certain values that bind us together and reveal our common humanity: the universal longing to live a life free from fear, and free from want; a life marked by dignity and respect and simple justice.

Our two republics were founded in service of these ideals. In America, it is written into our founding documents as "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." In France: "LibertÃ©" -- absolutely -- "egalitÃ©, fraternitÃ©." Our moral authority is derived from the fact that generations of our citizens have fought and bled to uphold these values in our nations and others.

And that's why we can never sacrifice them for expedience's sake. That's why I've ordered the closing of the detention center in Guantanamo Bay. That's why I can stand here today and say without equivocation or exception that the United States of America does not and will not torture.

The second way that we can turn challenge into opportunity is through our persistence in the face of difficulty. In an age of instant gratification, it's tempting to believe that every problem can and should be solved in the span of a week. When these problems aren't solved, we conclude that our efforts to solve them must have been in vain. But that's not how progress is made. Progress is slow. It comes in fits and starts, because we try and we fail and then we try something else. And when there are setbacks and disappointments we keep going. We hold firm to our core values, and we hold firm to our faith in one another.

The third reason we know that we can change this world is because of men and women like the young people who are here today. Each time we find ourselves at a crossroads, paralyzed by worn debates and stale thinking, the old ways of doing things, a new generation rises up and shows the way forward. As Robert Kennedy once told a crowd of students in South Africa, "It is a revolutionary world that we live in, and thus, it is young people who must take the lead." Because young people are unburdened by the biases or prejudices of the past. That is a great privilege of youth. But it's also a tremendous responsibility because it is you who must ultimately decide what we do with this incredible moment in history.

We just emerged from an era marked by irresponsibility, and it would be easy to choose the path of selfishness or apathy, of blame or division. But that is a danger that we cannot afford. The challenges are too great. It is a revolutionary world that we live in, and history shows us that we can do improbable, sometimes impossible things. We stand here in a city that used to stand at the center of European conflict; only now it is the center of European union. We did that together. Now we must not give up on one another. We must renew this relationship for a new generation, in a new century. We must hold firm to our common values, hold firm to our faith in one another. Together, I'm confident that we can achieve the promise of a new day.

Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Q & A

Please, everybody have a seat. So the way this works -- do we have microphones in the audience? Yes? So just raise your hand if you want a question, and I will call on you. I think we have some translators. If you want to speak French and German, my French and German are terrible. But we have people who speak very good French and very good German who will translate your question, and translate my answer. And I will try to get as many questions as I can get in, in the remaining 20 minutes or so that we have.

And I will start with this young lady right here. Yes, you, right there. Please introduce yourself. Hold on, I can't hear you yet. Can we increase the sound on the mic? Let's try again. Oh, I called -- now, I just want to say I did not call on the American on purpose.

Q [Inaudible.]

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Well, after only two months, that's kind of a big question. But here's what I would like to see. And, look, you aim high knowing that you'll make mistakes and sometimes you'll fall short.

Number one, my first task is to restore the economy of the United States, but, in concert with other nations, to restore global economic growth. That's my number one task, because we are going through the worst crisis since the 1930s.

That means that not only do we have to fix the banking system, put common-sense regulations in place to prevent a crisis like this from ever happening again, making sure that we are keeping trade relationships between countries open -- but it also means helping developing countries and poor countries who, through no fault of their own, have been devastated by this crisis, and if we allow them to collapse will ultimately be a drag on our ability to prosper.

Emerging markets have actually been the drivers of economic growth over the last several years. If we can get millions of Chinese to prosper, that is ultimately good for us. If we can get all the Indians in poverty to suddenly be able to buy a refrigerator or send their children to college, that will raise everybody's living standards, because those will be enormous new markets for all of us.

So what I want to be able to do is not only fix the immediate crisis, but, working in partnership with other countries, create a path for sustainable, responsible growth. And I think we can do that. There are a lot of people who benefit from globalization, but there are also people who have been harmed by globalization. Globalization in and of itself can be good, but can also be destructive.

If we create the right framework so that what happened in the banking system can't happen again, then globalization can be good for everybody and lift everybody's living standards up. And by the way, history has shown us that we are most vulnerable to war and conflict when people are desperate economically. And nobody knows that history more than Europe.

So that would be number one. Number two is I would like to be able to say that as a consequence of my work, that we drastically lessened the threat of not only terrorism but also nuclear terrorism. And we can't reduce the threat of a nuclear weapon going off unless those who possess the most nuclear weapons -- the United States and Russia -- take serious steps to actually reduce our stockpiles.

So we are going to -- so we want to pursue that vigorously in the years ahead. And I had a excellent meeting with President Medvedev of Russia to get started that process of reducing our nuclear stockpiles, which will then give us greater moral authority to say to Iran, don't develop a nuclear weapon; to say to North Korea, don't proliferate nuclear weapons.

In my own country, what I think is very important is that we finally get a health care system that is reliable and cost-effective. That's something that -- you know, that's a social safety net that exits in almost all of Europe that doesn't exist in the United States. You have millions of people who work hard every single day, but if they get sick they could potentially lose everything. And in a country as wealthy as ours, that's not acceptable to me.

So we are going to work hard to make sure that we have a health care system that won't be identical to what you have in Europe -- each country has its own traditions and approaches -- but that provides people quality, affordable, accessible health care.

And then, I would like to see us in the United States take the lead on a new approach to energy -- because none of the developed countries are going to be able to sustain their growth if we don't start using energy differently, and the world cannot survive all countries using energy in the same ways that we use it.

I was meeting with the Indian Prime Minister yesterday after the summit -- a very good and wise man, Prime Minister Singh -- and he was talking about how Indian growth rates have gone up 9 percent every year. They need to grow at that pace in order to bring hundreds of millions of people in their country out of abject poverty, desperate poverty. They have to grow at a rapid pace.

Now, he actually is committed to working towards dealing with the climate change issue, but he made a very simple point, which is a point that I understood before the meeting and all of us should not forget -- and that is that you cannot expect poor countries, or relatively poor countries, to be partners with us on climate change if we are not taking the lead, given that our carbon footprint is many times more than theirs per capita. I mean, each one of us in the developed world, I don't care how environmentally conscious you are, how green you are -- I'm sure there are some green folks here --

Q Yes!

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Yes! I don't care how green you are, you are -- you have a much bigger carbon footprint than the average Indian, or the average person from China. And so we in developed countries then -- it's critical for us to lead by example by becoming more energy efficient, and we also have to harness technology and shared scientific breakthroughs in order to find more sustainable energy patterns.

Now, I've got other things that I want to do, but that's a pretty long list. Let me go on to a few more questions.

All right, now, I know there's some other Americans in the crowd. But do me a favor, Americans, wait till we get back home and I'll do a town hall there -- because I want to hear from my French and German and European friends. All right. And -- wait, wait, wait -- this gentleman right here in the glasses.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. I'm a student from Heidelberg, Germany, and -- my mother tongue is German, but my French is not good enough, so I ask my question in English.

You mentioned in your speech that we are a lucky generation. We live in peace, we live in democracies and free states, and we really -- we are very pleased to have this situation in Europe. But this is not the case all over the world, even not in Europe. Look to Belarus, for example; there's an autocratic regime.

And so my question concerns the many children all over the world that live in poverty, under human rights violation. They have hunger, they have no education, and other problems. So what is your strategy, Mr. President, to solve this problem?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Well, it's an excellent question, and the -- first of all, I think one of the things that we should be very proud of from the G20 summit yesterday was that we made a significant commitment to additional resources through the IMF and other mechanisms to provide assistance to emerging markets and poor countries that, as I said, are bearing the burden of a collapse in the financial system that they had nothing to do with.

The problem is so many of these countries had export-oriented markets, and when the economies contracted in our developing nations, it made them extremely vulnerable. You know, you have a country like Botswana, which is actually a well-managed country that has made enormous progress, but their main revenue generator is diamond sales, and they have literally seen the diamond market collapse -- in part because they couldn't get trade financing, in part because the demand in developed countries has dropped off. So we started to make progress there. Our most important task right now is helping them get through this crisis.

Over the long term, though, we've got to have a strategy that recognizes that the interest of the developed world in feeding the hungry, in educating children, that that's not just charity; it's in our interest. There's not a direct correlation between poverty and violence and conflict and terrorism. But I can tell you that if children have no education whatsoever, if young men are standing idle each and every day, and feel completely detached and completely removed from the modern world, they are more likely, they are more susceptible to ideologies that appeal to violence and destruction.

If you have no health facilities whatsoever in countries in Africa, these days a pandemic can get on a plane and be in Strasbourg or New York City or Chicago overnight. So we better think about making sure that there are basic public health facilities and public health infrastructure in those countries, because we can't shield ourselves from these problems. So that means developed countries have to increase aid, but it also means that the countries who are receiving aid have to use it wisely.

My father was from Kenya. And when I traveled to Kenya -- I had just been elected to the United States Senate -- everybody was very excited and they greeted me as if I was already a head of state, and there were people waving and lining the streets. I went to speak at a university and I had to be honest, which was, America has an obligation to provide Kenya help on a whole range of issues, but if Kenya doesn't solve its own corruption problem, then Kenya will never grow. It will never be able to provide for its own.

And so there's nothing wrong with the developed nations insisting that we will increase our commitments, that we will design our aid programs more effectively, that we will open up our markets to trade from poor countries, but that we will also insist that there is good governance and rule of law, and other critical factors in order to make these countries work.

We spend so much time talking about democracy -- and obviously we should be promoting democracy everywhere we can. But democracy, a well-functioning society that promotes liberty and equality and fraternity, a well-functioning society does not just depend on going to the ballot box. It also means that you're not going to be shaken down by police because the police aren't getting properly paid. It also means that if you want to start a business, you don't have to pay a bribe. I mean, there are a whole host of other factors that people need to -- need to recognize in building a civil society that allows a country to be successful. And hopefully that will -- that approach will be reflected not just in my administration's policies but in the policies that are pursued by international agencies around the world. Okay, good.

All right, right up -- I've got two of you, so you have to choose one. Which one should I call on? I don't want to -- you're standing right next to each other. Oops. Well, I'm sorry, you know what, he actually called on the -- no, no, no, I was actually pointing down here. I didn't see those two ladies back there. Here you go, this one right here. Go ahead.

Q Well, hello, Mr. President. I'm sorry, I'm from Chicago, excuse me.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Are you?

Q I'm also a student in the high school -- the international high school --

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Well, no, I'm sorry, if you're American I can't --

Q I'm also French.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Wait, wait, wait, wait, hold on. She said she's also French. What does that mean?

Q Double nationality.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Dual nationality. What do you think, should we let her ask the question? Okay, go ahead.

Q Thank you. Do you think that the economic crisis is an opportunity to restructure our industries in an ecological and sustainable way? And I also was wondering whether the dog was already in the White House or not.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: The -- we are getting a dog. This is a very important question in the United States -- what kind of dog we're getting and when we're getting it. It should be there soon.

I do think that in crisis there's always opportunity if it's used properly. So, for example, in the United States we decided to pass a large stimulus package to help growth at a time when the private sector was having a very difficult time.

Now, we could have just spent the money on the same old ways of doing things, but part of what we've decided was, if we're going to be spending a lot of government money anyway, why not spend it to double the amount of renewable energy? Why not spend it on retrofitting existing government buildings so that we drastically reduce their energy consumption? Why not start building high-speed rail?

One thing that, as an American who is proud as anybody of my country, I am always jealous about European trains. And I said to myself, why can't we have -- why can't we have high-speech rail? And so we're investing in that as well.

So on the transportation front, on -- with respect to building construction, on a whole range of issues, we are investing in new technologies that will make us more energy efficient. And that is one of the building blocks that's needed in order for us to reduce our carbon footprint and to work with other countries to achieve the climate change goals that I think are going to be so important.

I'm getting the signal that I've only got time for two more questions. Oh! I'm going to ask that young man in the suit -- because he got dressed up today. I know he doesn't usually wear a suit -- yes. Go ahead, go ahead.

Q I just want to know what do you expect from the French and the European countries regarding the war on terror?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Good. That's a good question. Look, I think that over the last seven, eight years, as I said in my speech, a lot of tensions have developed between the United States and Europe. And one of the legacies, I hope, from my administration is, is that we start bringing our historic alliance back together in a much more effective way.

Now, that doesn't mean that we're not going to have honest disagreements. All countries have disagreements between themselves. But I think that we can work much more effectively and cooperatively, and maintain that core trust that we have towards each other.

Nowhere have we seen more suspicion than around questions of war and peace and how we respond to terrorism. When 9/11 happened, Europe responded as a true friend would respond to the United States, saying, "We are all Americans." All of us have a stake in ensuring that innocent people who were just going about their business, going to work, suddenly find themselves slaughtered -- all of us have an interest in preventing that kind of vicious, evil act.

But after the initial NATO engagement in Afghanistan, we got sidetracked by Iraq, and we have not fully recovered that initial insight that we have a mutual interest in ensuring that organizations like al Qaeda cannot operate. And I think that it is important for Europe to understand that even though I'm now President and George Bush is no longer President, al Qaeda is still a threat, and that we cannot pretend somehow that because Barack Hussein Obama got elected as President, suddenly everything is going to be okay.

It is going to be a very difficult challenge. Al Qaeda is still bent on carrying out terrorist activity. It is -- don't fool yourselves -- because some people say, well, you know, if we changed our policies with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or if we were more respectful towards the Muslim world, suddenly these organizations would stop threatening us. That's just not the case.

It is true that we have to change our behavior in showing the Muslim world greater respect, and changing our language and changing our tone. It is true that we have to work very hard for Israeli-Palestinian peace. But what is also true is that these organizations are willing to kill innocent people because of a twisted, distorted ideology. And we, as democracies and as people who value human life, can't allow those organizations to operate.

So here's the bottom line. The United States has reviewed and redesigned its approach to Afghanistan. We believe that we cannot just win militarily. We have to win through development aid. We have to win through increasing the capacity of the Afghan government to provide basic services to its people and to uphold rule of law. We have to work with the Pakistani government so that they are more trusted by their population and have more control so that they can then go -- help us go after these terrorists. We have to encourage diplomacy in the region.

So it can't just be a military strategy and we will be in partnership with Europe on the development side and on the diplomatic side. But there will be a military component to it, and Europe should not simply expect the United States to shoulder that burden alone. We should not because this is a joint problem and it requires joint effort.

One last point I will make. In dealing with terrorism, we can't lose sight of our values and who we are. That's why I closed Guantanamo. That's why I made very clear that we will not engage in certain interrogation practices. I don't believe that there is a contradiction between our security and our values. And when you start sacrificing your values, when you lose yourself, then over the long term that will make you less secure. When we saw what happened in Abu Ghraib, that wasn't good for our security -- that was a recruitment tool for terrorism. Humiliating people is never a good strategy to battle terrorism.

So we are going to conduct our operations in a way that reflect our best selves and make sure that we are proud. And that, in turn, will allow the Europeans, I think, to feel good about our joint efforts, and also not to have excuses not to participate in those joint efforts. All right?

Okay, last question. All right, let me see here. All right, that young lady in the red right there, right there. She had all her friends helping her out.

Q Thank you. Hi, I'm Enis Otto [phonetic] from Heidelberg. And I'm totally European. And first of all, I wanted to tell you that your name in Hungarian means "peach."

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Peach?

Q Yes.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Oh, okay. Well, how about that. I did not know that.

Q Yes, now you know it. And we wanted to know if you -- did you ever regret to have run for presidency till now? I mean, well, did you ever ask yourself, am I sure to manage -- yes.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Yes, it's a good question. Michelle definitely asked that question. You know, there are -- there have been times, certainly, during the campaign, and there have been times over the last several months where you feel a lot of weight on your shoulders. There's no doubt about it.

During the campaign, the biggest sacrifice -- the thing that was most difficult was that I was away from my family all the time. In addition to missing -- in addition to being jealous about high-speed rail and the nice trains here, I'm also jealous of the fact that campaigns here only last a few months, whereas in the United States we were running for two years. So I was away from home all the time, and that was very difficult because not only do I have a wonderful wife, but I have two perfect daughters. And so, you know, I missed them a lot.

But the nice thing is now that I'm President, it turns out I have this really nice office in my house called the Oval Office, and so it only takes me a few seconds to get upstairs, and I'm home for dinner every night.

You also lose privacy and autonomy -- or anonymity. You know, it's very frustrating now -- it used to be when I came to Europe, that I could just wander down to a cafÃ© and sit and have some wine and watch people go by, and go into a little shop, and watch the sun go down. Now I'm in hotel rooms all the time and I have security around me all the time. And so just -- you know, losing that ability to just take a walk, that is something that is frustrating.

But having said all that, I truly believe that there's nothing more noble than public service. Now, that doesn't mean that you have to run for President. You know, you might work for Doctors Without Borders, or you might volunteer for an -- or you might be somebody working for the United Nations, or you might be the mayor of Strasbourg. Right? I mean, they're all -- you might volunteer in your own community.

But the point is that what I found at a very young age was that if you only think about yourself -- how much money can I make, what can I buy, how nice is my house, what kind of fancy car do I have -- that over the long term I think you get bored. I think your life becomes -- I think if you're only thinking about yourself, your life becomes diminished; and that the way to live a full life is to think about, what can I do for others? How can I be a part of this larger project of making a better world?

Now, that could be something as simple as making -- as the joy of taking care of your family and watching your children grow and succeed. But I think especially for the young people here, I hope you also consider other ways that you can serve, because the world has so many challenges right now, there's so many opportunities to make a difference, and it would be a tragedy if all of you who are so talented and energetic, if you let that go to waste; if you just stood back and watched the world pass you by.

Better to jump in, get involved. And it does mean that sometimes you'll get criticized and sometimes you'll fail and sometimes you'll be disappointed, but you'll have a great adventure, and at the end of your life hopefully you'll be able to look back and say, I made a difference.

All right. Thank you, everybody.

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# Speech at Hradcany Square in Prague

\*

Thank you so much. Thank you for this wonderful welcome. Thank you to the people of Prague. Thank you to the people of the Czech Republic.\*

Today, I'm proud to stand here with you in the middle of this great city, in the center of Europe. And, to paraphrase one of my predecessors, I am also proud to be the man who brought Michelle Obama to Prague.1

To Mr. President, Mr. Prime Minister, to all the dignitaries who are here, thank you for your extraordinary hospitality. And to the people of the Czech Republic, thank you for your friendship to the United States.

I've learned over many years to appreciate the good company and the good humor of the Czech people in my hometown of Chicago. Behind me is a statue of a hero of the Czech people -- Tomas Masaryk. In 1918, after America had pledged its support for Czech independence, Masaryk spoke to a crowd in Chicago that was estimated to be over 100,000. I don't think I can match his record -- but I am honored to follow his footsteps from Chicago to Prague.

For over a thousand years, Prague has set itself apart from any other city in any other place. You've known war and peace. You've seen empires rise and fall. You've led revolutions in the arts and science, in politics and in poetry. Through it all, the people of Prague have insisted on pursuing their own path, and defining their own destiny. And this city -- this Golden City which is both ancient and youthful -- stands as a living monument to your unconquerable spirit.

When I was born, the world was divided, and our nations were faced with very different circumstances. Few people would have predicted that someone like me would one day become the President of the United States. Few people would have predicted that an American President would one day be permitted to speak to an audience like this in Prague. Few would have imagined that the Czech Republic would become a free nation, a member of NATO, a leader of a united Europe. Those ideas would have been dismissed as dreams.

We are here today because enough people ignored the voices who told them that the world could not change.

We're here today because of the courage of those who stood up and took risks to say that freedom is a right for all people, no matter what side of a wall they live on, and no matter what they look like.

We are here today because of the Prague Spring -- because the simple and principled pursuit of liberty and opportunity shamed those who relied on the power of tanks and arms to put down the will of a people.

We are here today because 20 years ago, the people of this city took to the streets to claim the promise of a new day, and the fundamental human rights that had been denied them for far too long. SametovÃ¡ Revoluce -- the Velvet Revolution taught us many things. It showed us that peaceful protest could shake the foundations of an empire, and expose the emptiness of an ideology. It showed us that small countries can play a pivotal role in world events, and that young people can lead the way in overcoming old conflicts. And it proved that moral leadership is more powerful than any weapon.

That's why I'm speaking to you in the center of a Europe that is peaceful, united and free -- because ordinary people believed that divisions could be bridged, even when their leaders did not. They believed that walls could come down; that peace could prevail.

We are here today because Americans and Czechs believed against all odds that today could be possible.

Now, we share this common history. But now this generation -- our generation -- cannot stand still. We, too, have a choice to make. As the world has become less divided, it has become more interconnected. And we've seen events move faster than our ability to control them -- a global economy in crisis, a changing climate, the persistent dangers of old conflicts, new threats and the spread of catastrophic weapons.

None of these challenges can be solved quickly or easily. But all of them demand that we listen to one another and work together; that we focus on our common interests, not on occasional differences; and that we reaffirm our shared values, which are stronger than any force that could drive us apart. That is the work that we must carry on. That is the work that I have come to Europe to begin.

To renew our prosperity, we need action coordinated across borders. That means investments to create new jobs. That means resisting the walls of protectionism that stand in the way of growth. That means a change in our financial system, with new rules to prevent abuse and future crisis.

And we have an obligation to our common prosperity and our common humanity to extend a hand to those emerging markets and impoverished people who are suffering the most, even though they may have had very little to do with financial crises, which is why we set aside over a trillion dollars for the International Monetary Fund earlier this week, to make sure that everybody -- everybody -- receives some assistance.

Now, to protect our planet, now is the time to change the way that we use energy. Together, we must confront climate change by ending the world's dependence on fossil fuels, by tapping the power of new sources of energy like the wind and sun, and calling upon all nations to do their part. And I pledge to you that in this global effort, the United States is now ready to lead.

To provide for our common security, we must strengthen our alliance. NATO was founded 60 years ago, after Communism took over Czechoslovakia. That was when the free world learned too late that it could not afford division. So we came together to forge the strongest alliance that the world has ever known. And we should -- stood shoulder to shoulder -- year after year, decade after decade -- until an Iron Curtain was lifted, and freedom spread like flowing water.

This marks the 10th year of NATO membership for the Czech Republic. And I know that many times in the 20th century, decisions were made without you at the table. Great powers let you down, or determined your destiny without your voice being heard. I am here to say that the United States will never turn its back on the people of this nation. We are bound by shared values, shared history -- We are bound by shared values and shared history and the enduring promise of our alliance. NATO's Article V states it clearly: An attack on one is an attack on all. That is a promise for our time, and for all time.

The people of the Czech Republic kept that promise after America was attacked; thousands were killed on our soil, and NATO responded. NATO's mission in Afghanistan is fundamental to the safety of people on both sides of the Atlantic. We are targeting the same al Qaeda terrorists who have struck from New York to London, and helping the Afghan people take responsibility for their future. We are demonstrating that free nations can make common cause on behalf of our common security. And I want you to know that we honor the sacrifices of the Czech people in this endeavor, and mourn the loss of those you've lost.

But no alliance can afford to stand still. We must work together as NATO members so that we have contingency plans in place to deal with new threats, wherever they may come from. We must strengthen our cooperation with one another, and with other nations and institutions around the world, to confront dangers that recognize no borders. And we must pursue constructive relations with Russia on issues of common concern.

Now, one of those issues that I'll focus on today is fundamental to the security of our nations and to the peace of the world -- that's the future of nuclear weapons in the 21st century.

The existence of thousands of nuclear weapons is the most dangerous legacy of the Cold War. No nuclear war was fought between the United States and the Soviet Union, but generations lived with the knowledge that their world could be erased in a single flash of light. Cities like Prague that existed for centuries, that embodied the beauty and the talent of so much of humanity, would have ceased to exist.

Today, the Cold War has disappeared but thousands of those weapons have not. In a strange turn of history, the threat of global nuclear war has gone down, but the risk of a nuclear attack has gone up. More nations have acquired these weapons. Testing has continued. Black market trade in nuclear secrets and nuclear materials abound. The technology to build a bomb has spread. Terrorists are determined to buy, build or steal one. Our efforts to contain these dangers are centered on a global non-proliferation regime, but as more people and nations break the rules, we could reach the point where the center cannot hold.

Now, understand, this matters to people everywhere. One nuclear weapon exploded in one city -- be it New York or Moscow, Islamabad or Mumbai, Tokyo or Tel Aviv, Paris or Prague -- could kill hundreds of thousands of people. And no matter where it happens, there is no end to what the consequences might be -- for our global safety, our security, our society, our economy, to our ultimate survival.

Some argue that the spread of these weapons cannot be stopped, cannot be checked -- that we are destined to live in a world where more nations and more people possess the ultimate tools of destruction. Such fatalism is a deadly adversary, for if we believe that the spread of nuclear weapons is inevitable, then in some way we are admitting to ourselves that the use of nuclear weapons is inevitable.

Just as we stood for freedom in the 20th century, we must stand together for the right of people everywhere to live free from fear in the 21st century. And as nuclear power -- as a nuclear power, as the only nuclear power to have used a nuclear weapon, the United States has a moral responsibility to act. We cannot succeed in this endeavor alone, but we can lead it, we can start it.

So today, I state clearly and with conviction America's commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons. I'm not naive. This goal will not be reached quickly -- perhaps not in my lifetime. It will take patience and persistence. But now we, too, must ignore the voices who tell us that the world cannot change. We have to insist, "Yes, we can."

Now, let me describe to you the trajectory we need to be on. First, the United States will take concrete steps towards a world without nuclear weapons. To put an end to Cold War thinking, we will reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy, and urge others to do the same. Make no mistake: As long as these weapons exist, the United States will maintain a safe, secure and effective arsenal to deter any adversary, and guarantee that defense to our allies -- including the Czech Republic. But we will begin the work of reducing our arsenal.

To reduce our warheads and stockpiles, we will negotiate a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty with the Russians this year. President Medvedev and I began this process in London, and will seek a new agreement by the end of this year that is legally binding and sufficiently bold. And this will set the stage for further cuts, and we will seek to include all nuclear weapons states in this endeavor.

To achieve a global ban on nuclear testing, my administration will immediately and aggressively pursue U.S. ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. After more than five decades of talks, it is time for the testing of nuclear weapons to finally be banned.

And to cut off the building blocks needed for a bomb, the United States will seek a new treaty that verifiably ends the production of fissile materials intended for use in state nuclear weapons. If we are serious about stopping the spread of these weapons, then we should put an end to the dedicated production of weapons-grade materials that create them. That's the first step.

Second, together we will strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as a basis for cooperation.

The basic bargain is sound: Countries with nuclear weapons will move towards disarmament, countries without nuclear weapons will not acquire them, and all countries can access peaceful nuclear energy. To strengthen the treaty, we should embrace several principles. We need more resources and authority to strengthen international inspections. We need real and immediate consequences for countries caught breaking the rules or trying to leave the treaty without cause.

And we should build a new framework for civil nuclear cooperation, including an international fuel bank, so that countries can access peaceful power without increasing the risks of proliferation. That must be the right of every nation that renounces nuclear weapons, especially developing countries embarking on peaceful programs. And no approach will succeed if it's based on the denial of rights to nations that play by the rules. We must harness the power of nuclear energy on behalf of our efforts to combat climate change, and to advance peace opportunity for all people.

But we go forward with no illusions. Some countries will break the rules. That's why we need a structure in place that ensures when any nation does, they will face consequences.

Just this morning, we were reminded again of why we need a new and more rigorous approach to address this threat. North Korea broke the rules once again by testing a rocket that could be used for long range missiles. This provocation underscores the need for action -- not just this afternoon at the U.N. Security Council, but in our determination to prevent the spread of these weapons.

Rules must be binding. Violations must be punished. Words must mean something. The world must stand together to prevent the spread of these weapons. Now is the time for a strong international response -- now is the time for a strong international response, and North Korea must know that the path to security and respect will never come through threats and illegal weapons. All nations must come together to build a stronger, global regime. And that's why we must stand shoulder to shoulder to pressure the North Koreans to change course.

Iran has yet to build a nuclear weapon. My administration will seek engagement with Iran based on mutual interests and mutual respect. We believe in dialogue. But in that dialogue we will present a clear choice. We want Iran to take its rightful place in the community of nations, politically and economically. We will support Iran's right to peaceful nuclear energy with rigorous inspections. That's a path that the Islamic Republic can take. Or the government can choose increased isolation, international pressure, and a potential nuclear arms race in the region that will increase insecurity for all.

So let me be clear: Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile activity poses a real threat, not just to the United States, but to Iran's neighbors and our allies. The Czech Republic and Poland have been courageous in agreeing to host a defense against these missiles. As long as the threat from Iran persists, we will go forward with a missile defense system that is cost-effective and proven. If the Iranian threat is eliminated, we will have a stronger basis for security, and the driving force for missile defense construction in Europe will be removed.

So, finally, we must ensure that terrorists never acquire a nuclear weapon. This is the most immediate and extreme threat to global security. One terrorist with one nuclear weapon could unleash massive destruction. Al Qaeda has said it seeks a bomb and that it would have no problem with using it. And we know that there is unsecured nuclear material across the globe. To protect our people, we must act with a sense of purpose without delay.

So today I am announcing a new international effort to secure all vulnerable nuclear material around the world within four years. We will set new standards, expand our cooperation with Russia, pursue new partnerships to lock down these sensitive materials.

We must also build on our efforts to break up black markets, detect and intercept materials in transit, and use financial tools to disrupt this dangerous trade. Because this threat will be lasting, we should come together to turn efforts such as the Proliferation Security Initiative and the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism into durable international institutions. And we should start by having a Global Summit on Nuclear Security that the United States will host within the next year.

Now, I know that there are some who will question whether we can act on such a broad agenda. There are those who doubt whether true international cooperation is possible, given inevitable differences among nations. And there are those who hear talk of a world without nuclear weapons and doubt whether it's worth setting a goal that seems impossible to achieve.

But make no mistake: We know where that road leads. When nations and peoples allow themselves to be defined by their differences, the gulf between them widens. When we fail to pursue peace, then it stays forever beyond our grasp. We know the path when we choose fear over hope. To denounce or shrug off a call for cooperation is an easy but also a cowardly thing to do. That's how wars begin. That's where human progress ends.

There is violence and injustice in our world that must be confronted. We must confront it not by splitting apart but by standing together as free nations, as free people. I know that a call to arms can stir the souls of men and women more than a call to lay them down. But that is why the voices for peace and progress must be raised together.

Those are the voices that still echo through the streets of Prague. Those are the ghosts of 1968. Those were the joyful sounds of the Velvet Revolution. Those were the Czechs who helped bring down a nuclear-armed empire without firing a shot.

Human destiny will be what we make of it. And here in Prague, let us honor our past by reaching for a better future. Let us bridge our divisions, build upon our hopes, accept our responsibility to leave this world more prosperous and more peaceful than we found it. Together we can do it.

Thank you very much. Thank you, Prague.

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# Speech to the Turkish Parliament

Mr. Speaker, Madam Deputy Speaker, distinguished members, I am honored to speak in this chamber, and I am committed to renewing the alliance between our nations and the friendship between our people.

This is my first trip overseas as President of the United States. I've been to the G20 summit in London, and the NATO summit in Strasbourg, and the European Union summit in Prague. Some people have asked me if I chose to continue my travels to Ankara and Istanbul to send a message to the world. And my answer is simple: Evet -- yes. Turkey is a critical ally. Turkey is an important part of Europe. And Turkey and the United States must stand together -- and work together -- to overcome the challenges of our time.

This morning I had the great privilege of visiting the tomb of your extraordinary founder of your republic. And I was deeply impressed by this beautiful memorial to a man who did so much to shape the course of history. But it is also clear that the greatest monument to Ataturk's life is not something that can be cast in stone and marble. His greatest legacy is Turkey's strong, vibrant, secular democracy, and that is the work that this assembly carries on today.

This future was not easily assured, it was not guaranteed. At the end of World War I, Turkey could have succumbed to the foreign powers that were trying to claim its territory, or sought to restore an ancient empire. But Turkey chose a different future. You freed yourself from foreign control, and you founded a republic that commands the respect of the United States and the wider world.

And there is a simple truth to this story: Turkey's democracy is your own achievement. It was not forced upon you by any outside power, nor did it come without struggle and sacrifice. Turkey draws strength from both the successes of the past, and from the efforts of each generation of Turks that makes new progress for your people.

Now, my country's democracy has its own story. The general who led America in revolution and governed as our first President was, as many of you know, George Washington. And like you, we built a grand monument to honor our founding father -- a towering obelisk that stands in the heart of the capital city that bears Washington's name. I can see the Washington Monument from the window of the White House every day.

It took decades to build. There were frequent delays. Over time, more and more people contributed to help make this monument the inspiring structure that still stands tall today. Among those who came to our aid were friends from all across the world who offered their own tributes to Washington and the country he helped to found.

And one of those tributes came from Istanbul. Ottoman Sultan Abdulmecid sent a marble plaque that helped to build the Washington Monument. Inscribed in the plaque was a poem that began with a few simple words: "So as to strengthen the friendship between the two countries." Over 150 years have passed since those words were carved into marble. Our nations have changed in many ways. But our friendship is strong, and our alliance endures.

It is a friendship that flourished in the years after World War II, when President Truman committed our nation to the defense of Turkey's freedom and sovereignty, and Turkey committed itself into the NATO Alliance. Turkish troops have served by our side from Korea to Kosovo to Kabul. Together, we withstood the great test of the Cold War. Trade between our nations has steadily advanced. So has cooperation in science and research.

The ties among our people have deepened, as well, and more and more Americans of Turkish origin live and work and succeed within our borders. And as a basketball fan, I've even noticed that Hedo Turkoglu and Mehmet Okur have got some pretty good basketball games.

The United States and Turkey have not always agreed on every issue, and that's to be expected -- no two nations do. But we have stood together through many challenges over the last 60 years. And because of the strength of our alliance and the endurance of our friendship, both America and Turkey are stronger and the world is more secure.

Now, our two democracies are confronted by an unprecedented set of challenges: An economic crisis that recognizes no borders; extremism that leads to the killing of innocent men and women and children; strains on our energy supply and a changing climate; the proliferation of the world's deadliest weapons; and the persistence of tragic conflict.

These are the great tests of our young century. And the choices that we make in the coming years will determine whether the future will be shaped by fear or by freedom; by poverty or by prosperity; by strife or by a just, secure and lasting peace.

This much is certain: No one nation can confront these challenges alone, and all nations have a stake in overcoming them. That is why we must listen to one another, and seek common ground. That is why we must build on our mutual interests, and rise above our differences. We are stronger when we act together. That is the message that I've carried with me throughout this trip to Europe. That is the message that I delivered when I had the privilege of meeting with your President and with your Prime Minister. That will be the approach of the United States of America going forward.

Already, America and Turkey are working with the G20 on an unprecedented response to an unprecedented economic crisis. Now, this past week, we came together to ensure that the world's largest economies take strong and coordinated action to stimulate growth and restore the flow of credit; to reject the pressures of protectionism, and to extend a hand to developing countries and the people hit hardest by this downturn; and to dramatically reform our regulatory system so that the world never faces a crisis like this again.

As we go forward, the United States and Turkey can pursue many opportunities to serve prosperity for our people. The President and I this morning talked about expanding the ties of commerce and trade. There's enormous opportunity when it comes to energy to create jobs. And we can increase new sources to not only free ourselves from dependence of other energies -- other countries' energy sources, but also to combat climate change. We should build on our Clean Technology Fund to leverage efficiency and renewable energy investments in Turkey. And to power markets in Turkey and Europe, the United States will continue to support your central role as an East-West corridor for oil and natural gas.

This economic cooperation only reinforces the common security that Europe and the United States share with Turkey as a NATO ally, and the common values that we share as democracies. So in meeting the challenges of the 21st century, we must seek the strength of a Europe that is truly united, peaceful and free.

So let me be clear: The United States strongly supports Turkey's bid to become a member of the European Union. We speak not as members of the EU, but as close friends of both Turkey and Europe. Turkey has been a resolute ally and a responsible partner in transatlantic and European institutions. Turkey is bound to Europe by more than the bridges over the Bosphorous. Centuries of shared history, culture, and commerce bring you together. Europe gains by the diversity of ethnicity, tradition and faith -- it is not diminished by it. And Turkish membership would broaden and strengthen Europe's foundation once more.

Now, of course, Turkey has its own responsibilities. And you've made important progress towards membership. But I also know that Turkey has pursued difficult political reforms not simply because it's good for EU membership, but because it's right for Turkey.

In the last several years, you've abolished state security courts, you've expanded the right to counsel. You've reformed the penal code and strengthened laws that govern the freedom of the press and assembly. You've lifted bans on teaching and broadcasting Kurdish, and the world noted with respect the important signal sent through a new state Kurdish television station.

These achievements have created new laws that must be implemented, and a momentum that should be sustained. For democracies cannot be static -- they must move forward. Freedom of religion and expression lead to a strong and vibrant civil society that only strengthens the state, which is why steps like reopening Halki Seminary will send such an important signal inside Turkey and beyond. An enduring commitment to the rule of law is the only way to achieve the security that comes from justice for all people. Robust minority rights let societies benefit from the full measure of contributions from all citizens.

I say this as the President of a country that not very long ago made it hard for somebody who looks like me to vote, much less be President of the United States. But it is precisely that capacity to change that enriches our countries. Every challenge that we face is more easily met if we tend to our own democratic foundation. This work is never over. That's why, in the United States, we recently ordered the prison at Guantanamo Bay closed. That's why we prohibited -- without exception or equivocation -- the use of torture. All of us have to change. And sometimes change is hard.

Another issue that confronts all democracies as they move to the future is how we deal with the past. The United States is still working through some of our own darker periods in our history. Facing the Washington Monument that I spoke of is a memorial of Abraham Lincoln, the man who freed those who were enslaved even after Washington led our Revolution. Our country still struggles with the legacies of slavery and segregation, the past treatment of Native Americans.

Human endeavor is by its nature imperfect. History is often tragic, but unresolved, it can be a heavy weight. Each country must work through its past. And reckoning with the past can help us seize a better future. I know there's strong views in this chamber about the terrible events of 1915. And while there's been a good deal of commentary about my views, it's really about how the Turkish and Armenian people deal with the past. And the best way forward for the Turkish and Armenian people is a process that works through the past in a way that is honest, open and constructive.

We've already seen historic and courageous steps taken by Turkish and Armenian leaders. These contacts hold out the promise of a new day. An open border would return the Turkish and Armenian people to a peaceful and prosperous coexistence that would serve both of your nations. So I want you to know that the United States strongly supports the full normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia. It is a cause worth working towards.

It speaks to Turkey's leadership that you are poised to be the only country in the region to have normal and peaceful relations with all the South Caucasus nations. And to advance that peace, you can play a constructive role in helping to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which has continued for far too long.

Advancing peace also includes the disputes that persist in the Eastern Mediterranean. And here there's a cause for hope. The two Cypriot leaders have an opportunity through their commitment to negotiations under the United Nations Good Offices Mission. The United States is willing to offer all the help sought by the parties as they work towards a just and lasting settlement that reunifies Cyprus into a bizonal and bicommunal federation.

These efforts speak to one part of the critical region that surrounds Turkey. And when we consider the challenges before us, on issue after issue, we share common goals.

In the Middle East, we share the goal of a lasting peace between Israel and its neighbors. Let me be clear: The United States strongly supports the goal of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. That is a goal shared by Palestinians, Israelis, and people of goodwill around the world. That is a goal that the parties agreed to in the road map and at Annapolis. That is a goal that I will actively pursue as President of the United States.

We know the road ahead will be difficult. Both Israelis and Palestinians must take steps that are necessary to build confidence and trust. Both Israelis and Palestinians, both must live up to the commitments they have made. Both must overcome longstanding passions and the politics of the moment to make progress towards a secure and lasting peace.

The United States and Turkey can help the Palestinians and Israelis make this journey. Like the United States, Turkey has been a friend and partner in Israel's quest for security. And like the United States, you seek a future of opportunity and statehood for the Palestinians. So now, working together, we must not give into pessimism and mistrust. We must pursue every opportunity for progress, as you've done by supporting negotiations between Syria and Israel. We must extend a hand to those Palestinians who are in need, while helping them strengthen their own institutions. We must reject the use of terror, and recognize that Israel's security concerns are legitimate.

The peace of the region will also be advanced if Iran forgoes any nuclear weapons ambitions. Now, as I made clear in Prague yesterday, no one is served by the spread of nuclear weapons, least of all Turkey. You live in a difficult region and a nuclear arm race would not serve the security of this nation well. This part of the world has known enough violence. It has known enough hatred. It does not need a race for an ever-more powerful tool of destruction.

Now, I have made it clear to the people and leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran that the United States seeks engagement based on mutual interest and mutual respect. We want Iran to play its rightful role in the community of nations. Iran is a great civilization. We want them to engage in the economic and political integration that brings prosperity and security. But Iran's leaders must choose whether they will try to build a weapon or build a better future for their people.

So both Turkey and the United States support a secure and united Iraq that does not serve as a safe haven for terrorists. I know there were differences about whether to go to war. There were differences within my own country, as well. But now we must come together as we end this war responsibly, because the future of Iraq is inseparable from the future of the broader region. As I've already announced, and many of you are aware, the United States will remove our combat brigades by the end of next August, while working with the Iraqi government as they take responsibility for security. And we will work with Iraq, Turkey, and all Iraq's neighbors, to forge a new dialogue that reconciles differences and advances our common security.

Make no mistake, though: Iraq, Turkey, and the United States face a common threat from terrorism. That includes the al Qaeda terrorists who have sought to drive Iraqis apart and destroy their country. That includes the PKK. There is no excuse for terror against any nation. As President, and as a NATO ally, I pledge that you will have our support against the terrorist activities of the PKK or anyone else. These efforts will be strengthened by the continued work to build ties of cooperation between Turkey, the Iraqi government, and Iraq's Kurdish leaders, and by your continued efforts to promote education and opportunity and democracy for the Kurdish population here inside Turkey.

Finally, we share the common goal of denying al Qaeda a safe haven in Pakistan or Afghanistan. The world has come too far to let this region backslide, and to let al Qaeda terrorists plot further attacks. That's why we are committed to a more focused effort to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda. That is why we are increasing our efforts to train Afghans to sustain their own security, and to reconcile former adversaries. That's why we are increasing our support for the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan, so that we stand on the side not only of security, but also of opportunity and the promise of a better life.

Turkey has been a true partner. Your troops were among the first in the International Security Assistance Force. You have sacrificed much in this endeavor. Now we must achieve our goals together. I appreciate that you've offered to help us train and support Afghan security forces, and expand opportunity across the region. Together, we can rise to meet this challenge like we have so many before.

I know there have been difficulties these last few years. I know that the trust that binds the United States and Turkey has been strained, and I know that strain is shared in many places where the Muslim faith is practiced. So let me say this as clearly as I can: The United States is not, and will never be, at war with Islam. In fact, our partnership with the Muslim world is critical not just in rolling back the violent ideologies that people of all faiths reject, but also to strengthen opportunity for all its people.

I also want to be clear that America's relationship with the Muslim community, the Muslim world, cannot, and will not, just be based upon opposition to terrorism. We seek broader engagement based on mutual interest and mutual respect. We will listen carefully, we will bridge misunderstandings, and we will seek common ground. We will be respectful, even when we do not agree. We will convey our deep appreciation for the Islamic faith, which has done so much over the centuries to shape the world -- including in my own country. The United States has been enriched by Muslim Americans. Many other Americans have Muslims in their families or have lived in a Muslim-majority country. I know, because I am one of them.

Above all, above all we will demonstrate through actions our commitment to a better future. I want to help more children get the education that they need to succeed. We want to promote health care in places where people are vulnerable. We want to expand the trade and investment that can bring prosperity for all people. In the months ahead, I will present specific programs to advance these goals. Our focus will be on what we can do, in partnership with people across the Muslim world, to advance our common hopes and our common dreams. And when people look back on this time, let it be said of America that we extended the hand of friendship to all people.

There's an old Turkish proverb: "You cannot put out fire with flames." America knows this. Turkey knows this. There's some who must be met by force, they will not compromise. But force alone cannot solve our problems, and it is no alternative to extremism. The future must belong to those who create, not those who destroy. That is the future we must work for, and we must work for it together.

I know there are those who like to debate Turkey's future. They see your country at the crossroads of continents, and touched by the currents of history. They know that this has been a place where civilizations meet, and different peoples come together. They wonder whether you will be pulled in one direction or another.

But I believe here is what they don't understand: Turkey's greatness lies in your ability to be at the center of things. This is not where East and West divide -- this is where they come together. In the beauty of your culture. In the richness of your history. In the strength of your democracy. In your hopes for tomorrow.

I am honored to stand here with you -- to look forward to the future that we must reach for together -- and to reaffirm America's commitment to our strong and enduring friendship.

Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you.

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# Address to Multi-National Forces Serving in Iraq

Thank you. Thank you, guys. Let me say Multinational Force Iraq, Multinational Corps Iraq, Multinational Security Transition Command Iraq First Corps, America's Corp Band: Thanks to all of you. Listen, I am so honored.

Audience Member: We love you.

President Obama: I love you back. I am honored -- I'm honored and grateful to be with all of you. And I'm not going to talk long because I want to shake as many hands as I can. And I've been talking all week. But there's a couple of things I want to say. Number one, thank you.

You know, when I was at Camp Lejeune I spoke about what it means for America to see our best and brightest, our finest young men and women serve us. And what I said then is something that I want to repeat to you, which is: You have performed brilliantly in every mission that has been given to you.

Under enormous strain and under enormous sacrifice, through controversy and difficulty and politics, you've kept your eyes focused on just doing your job. And because of that, every mission that's been assigned -- from getting rid of Saddam, to reducing violence, to stabilizing the country, to facilitating elections -- you have given Iraq the opportunity to stand on its own as a democratic country. That is an extraordinary achievement, and for that you have the thanks of the American people. That's point number one.

Point number two is, this is going to be a critical period, these next 18 months. I was just discussing this with your commander, but I think it's something that all of you know. It is time for us to transition to the Iraqis. They need to take responsibility for their country and for their sovereignty.

And in order for them to do that, they have got to make political accommodations. They're going to have to decide that they want to resolve their differences through constitutional means and legal means. They are going to have to focus on providing government services that encourage confidence among their citizens.

All those things they have to do. We can't do it for them. But what we can do is make sure that we are a stalwart partner, that we are working alongside them, that we are committed to their success, that in terms of training their security forces, training their civilian forces in order to achieve a more effective government, they know that they have a steady partner with us.

And so just as we thank you for what you've already accomplished, I want to say thank you because you will be critical in terms of us being able to make sure that Iraq is stable, that it is not a safe haven for terrorists, that it is a good neighbor and a good ally, and we can start bringing our folks home. So now is not the time to lose focus. We have to be even more focused than we've been in order to achieve success.

The last point I want to make is I know how hard it's been on a lot of you. You've been away from your families, many of you for multiple rotations. You've seen buddies of yours injured and you remember those who have made the ultimate sacrifice.

There are probably some people here who have seen children born and have been missing watching them grow up. There are many of you who have listened to your spouse and the extraordinary sacrifices that they have to make when you're gone.

And so I want you to know that Michelle and myself are doing everything -- are doing everything we can to provide additional support for military families. The federal budget that I have introduced increases support for military families. We are going to do everything required to make sure that the commitment we make to our veterans is met, and that people don't have to fight for what they have earned as a consequence of their service.

The main point I want to make is we have not forgotten what you have already done, we are grateful for what you will do, and as long as I am in the White House, you are going to get the support that you need and the thanks that you deserve from a grateful nation.

So thank you very much everybody. God bless you.

God bless the United States of America.

# A New Foundation

Well, to President DeGioia, thank you so much for the gracious introduction, and thanks for bringing your family -- including JT -- appreciate you. We're going to invite him over, hang out with the girls. He's a pretty good-looking young man.

To Mayor Adrian Fenty, who's doing such a great job in this city, thank you so much for your attendance. To Representative Donna Edwards, who is here and represents Maryland's 4th District, thank you.

To Georgetown University students, it is great to be here. Well, it is good to be back. I appeared in this room during the campaign and had a wonderful reception then, and it's wonderful to be back and be with all of you.

We're going to talk about the economy today. And I was telling President DeGioia this may be a slightly longer speech than I usually give, but it's a slightly bigger topic, and that is how we are going to deal with so many of our economic challenges.

You know, it's been 12 weeks now since my administration began. And I think that even our critics would agree that at the very least, we've been busy. In just under three months, we've responded to an extraordinary set of economic challenges with extraordinary action -- action that's been unprecedented both in terms of its scale and its speed.

And I know that some have accused us of taking on too much at once. Others believe we haven't done enough. And many Americans are simply wondering how all of our different programs and policies fit together in a single, overarching strategy that will move this economy from recession to recovery and ultimately to prosperity.

So today, I want to step back for a moment and explain our strategy as clearly as I can. This is going to be prose, and not poetry. I want to talk about what we've done, why we've done it, and what we have left to do. I want to update you on the progress we've made, but I also want to be honest about the pitfalls that may still lie ahead.

Most of all, I want every American to know that each action we take and each policy we pursue is driven by a larger vision of America's future -- a future where sustained economic growth creates good jobs and rising incomes; a future where prosperity is fueled not by excessive debt, or reckless speculation, or fleeting profits, but is instead built by skilled, productive workers, by sound investments that will spread opportunity at home and allow this nation to lead the world in the technologies and the innovation and discoveries that will shape the 21st century. That's the America I see. That's the America that Georgetown is preparing so many of you for. That is the future that I know that we can have.

Now, to understand how we get there, we first need to understand how we got here.

Recessions are not uncommon. Markets and economies naturally ebb and flow, as we've seen many times in our history. But this recession is different. This recession was not caused by a normal downturn in the business cycle. It was caused by a perfect storm of irresponsibility and poor decision-making that stretched from Wall Street to Washington to Main Street.

As has been widely reported, it started in the housing market. During the course of the decade, the formula for buying a house changed: Instead of saving their pennies to buy their dream house, many Americans found that suddenly they could take out loans that by traditional standards their incomes just could not support. Others were tricked into signing these subprime loans by lenders who were trying to make a quick profit. The reason these loans were so readily available was that Wall Street saw big profits to be made. Investment banks would buy and package together these questionable mortgages into securities, arguing that by pooling the mortgages the risks had somehow been reduced. And credit agencies that are supposed to help investors determine the soundness of various investments stamped the securities with their safest rating when they should have been labeled "Buyer Beware."

No one really knew what the actual value of these securities were, no one fully understood what the risks were. But since the housing market was booming and prices were rising, banks and investors just kept buying and selling them, always passing off the risk to someone else for a greater profit without having to take any of the ultimate responsibility. Banks took on more debt than they could handle.

The government-chartered companies Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, whose traditional mandate was to help support traditional mortgages, decided to get in on the action by buying and holding billions of dollars of these securities. AIG, the biggest insurer in the world that had a very traditional insurance business that was very profitable, decided to make profits suddenly by selling billions of dollars of complicated financial instruments that supposedly insured these securities. Everybody was making record profits -- except the wealth created was real only on paper. And as the bubble grew, there was almost no accountability or oversight from anyone in Washington.

Then the housing bubble burst. Home prices fell. People began to default on their subprime mortgages. And the value of all those loans and securities plummeted. Banks and investors couldn't find anyone to buy them. Greed gave way to fear. Investors pulled their money out of the market. Large financial institutions that didn't have enough money on hand to pay off all their obligations collapsed. Other banks held on tight to their money and simply stopped lending.

Now, this is when the crisis spread from Wall Street to Main Street. After all, the ability to get a loan is how you finance the purchase of everything from a home to a car to, as you all know very well, a college education. It's how stores stock their shelves, and farms buy equipment, and businesses make payroll. So when banks stopped lending money, businesses started laying off workers. When laid-off workers had less money to spend, businesses were forced to lay off even more workers. When people couldn't get a car loan, a bad situation at the auto companies became even worse. When people couldn't get home loans, the crisis in the housing market only deepened. Because the infected securities were being traded worldwide and other nations also had weak regulations, this recession soon became global. And when other nations can't afford to buy our goods, it slows our economy even further.

So this is the situation, the downward spiral that we confronted on the day that we took office. So our most urgent task has been to clear away the wreckage, repair the immediate damage to the economy, and do everything we can to prevent a larger collapse. And since the problems we face are all working off each other to feed a vicious economic downturn, we've had no choice but to attack all fronts of our economic crisis simultaneously.

The first step was to fight a severe shortage of demand in the economy. So the Federal Reserve did this by dramatically lowering interest rates last year in order to boost investment. My administration and Congress boosted demand by passing the largest recovery plan in our nation's history. It's a plan that's already in the process of saving or creating 3.5 million jobs over the next two years. It's putting money directly into people's pockets with a tax cut for 95 percent of working families that's now showing up in paychecks across America. And to cushion the blow of this recession, we also provided extended unemployment benefits and continued health care coverage to Americans who've lost their jobs through no fault of their own.

Now, you will recall that some argued this recovery plan is a case of irresponsible government spending, that it's somehow to blame for our long-term deficit projections, and that the federal government should be cutting instead of increasing spending right now. So I want to tackle this argument head on.

To begin with, economists on both the left and the right agree that the last thing a government should do in the middle of a recession is to cut back on spending. You see, when this recession began, many families sat around the kitchen table and tried to figure out where they could cut back. And so have many businesses. And this is a completely reasonable and understandable reaction. But if everybody -- if everybody -- if every family in America, if every business in America cuts back all at once, then no one is spending any money, which means there are no customers, which means there are more layoffs, which means the economy gets even worse. That's why the government has to step in and temporarily boost spending in order to stimulate demand. That's exactly what we're doing right now.

Second, I absolutely agree that our long-term deficit is a major problem that we have to fix. But the fact is that this recovery plan represents only a tiny fraction of that long-term deficit. As I'll discuss in a moment, the key to dealing with our long-term deficit and our national debt is to get a handle on out-of-control health care costs -- not to stand idly by as the economy goes into free fall.

So the recovery plan has been the first step in confronting this economic crisis. The second step has been to heal our financial system so that credit is once again flowing to the businesses and families who rely on it.

The heart of this financial crisis is that too many banks and other financial institutions simply stopped lending money. In a climate of fear, banks were unable to replace their losses from some of those bad mortgages by raising new capital on their own, and they were unwilling to lend the money they did have because they were afraid that no one would pay it back. It's for this reason that the last administration used what they called the Troubled Asset Relief Program, or TARP, to provide these banks with temporary financial assistance in order to get them lending again.

Now, I understand that TARP is not popular, and I have to say that I don't agree with some of the ways the TARP program was managed, but I do agree with the broader rationale that we must provide banks with the capital and the confidence necessary to start lending again. That's the purpose of the stress tests that will soon tell us how much additional capital will be needed to support lending at our largest banks. Ideally, these needs will be met by private investors who are willing to put in money to these banks. But where that's not possible, and banks require substantial additional resources from the government, then we will hold accountable those who are responsible, we'll force the necessary adjustments, we'll provide the support to clean up those bank balance sheets, and we will assure the continuity of a strong and viable institution that can serve our people and our economy.

Of course, there are some who differ with our approach. On the one hand, there are some who argue that the government should stand back and simply let these banks fail -- especially since in many cases it was their bad decisions that helped create the crisis in the first place. But whether we like it or not, history has shown repeatedly that when nations do not take early and aggressive action to get credit flowing again, they have crises that last years and years instead of months and months -- years of low growth, years of low job creation, years of low investment, all of which cost these nations far more than a course of bold, upfront action.

And although there are a lot of Americans who understandably think that government money would be better spent going directly to families and businesses instead of to banks -- one of my most frequent questions in the letters that I get from constituents is, "Where's my bailout?" -- and I understand the sentiment. It makes sense intuitively, and morally it makes sense, but the truth is that a dollar of capital in a bank can actually result in $8 or $10 of loans to families and businesses. So that's a multiplier effect that can ultimately lead to a faster pace of economic growth. That's why we have to fix the banks.

Now, on the other hand, there have been some who don't dispute that we need to shore up the banking system, but they suggest that we've been too timid in how we go about it. This is essentially the nationalization argument that some of you may have heard. And the argument says that the federal government should have already preemptively stepped in and taken over major financial institutions the way that the FDIC currently intervenes in smaller banks, and that our failure, my administration's failure to do so is yet another example of Washington coddling Wall Street -- "Why aren't you tougher on the banks?"

So let me be clear: The reason we have not taken this step has nothing to do with any ideological or political judgment we've made about government involvement in banks. It's certainly not because of any concern we have for the management and shareholders whose actions helped to cause this mess. Rather, it's because we believe that preemptive government takeovers are likely to end up costing taxpayers even more in the end, and because it's more likely to undermine than create confidence.

Governments should practice the same principle as doctors: First, do no harm. So rest assured -- we will do whatever is necessary to get credit flowing again, but we will do so in ways that minimize risks to taxpayers and to the broader economy. To that end, in addition to the program to provide capital to the banks, we've launched a plan that will pair government resources with private investment in order to clear away the old loans and securities -- the so-called toxic assets -- that are also preventing our banks from lending money.

Now, what we've also learned during this crisis is that our banks aren't the only institutions affected by these toxic assets that are clogging the financial system. AIG, for example, is not a bank, it's an insurance company, as I mentioned -- and yet because it chose to insure billions of dollars worth of risky assets, essentially creating a hedge fund on top of an insurance company, its failure could threaten the entire financial system and freeze lending even more. And that's why, as frustrating as it is -- and I promise you, nobody is more frustrated than me with AIG -- I promise -- we had to provide support for AIG, because the entire system, as fragile as it is, could be profoundly endangered if AIG went into a liquidation bankruptcy.

It's also why we need new legal authority so that we have the power to intervene in such financial institutions, the same way that bankruptcy courts currently do with businesses that hit hard times but don't pose systemic risks -- and that way we can restructure these businesses in an orderly way that doesn't induce panic in the financial system -- and, by the way, will allow us to restructure inappropriate bonus contracts without creating a perception the government can just change compensation rules on a whim.

This is also why we're moving aggressively to unfreeze markets and jumpstart lending outside the banking system, where more than half of all lending in America actually takes place. To do this, we've started a program that will increase guarantees for small business loans and unlock the market for auto loans and student loans. And to stabilize the housing market, we've launched a plan that will save up to four million responsible homeowners from foreclosure and help many millions more to refinance their homes.

In a few weeks, we will also reassess the state of Chrysler and General Motors, two companies with an important place in our history and a large footprint in our economy -- but two companies that have also fallen on hard times.

Late last year, the companies were given transitional loans by the previous administration to tide them over as they worked to develop viable business plans. Unfortunately, the plans they developed fell short, so we've given them some additional time to work these complex issues through. And by the way, we owed that not to the executives whose bad bets contributed to the weakening of their companies, but to the hundreds of thousands of workers whose livelihoods hang in the balance -- entire towns, entire communities, entire states are profoundly impacted by what happens in the auto industry.

Now, it is our fervent hope that in the coming weeks, Chrysler will find a viable partner and GM will develop a business plan that will put it on a path to profitability without endless support from American taxpayer. In the meantime, we're taking steps to spur demand for American cars and provide relief for autoworkers and their communities. And we will continue to reaffirm this nation's commitment to a 21st-century American auto industry that creates new jobs and builds the fuel-efficient cars and trucks that will carry us toward a clean-energy future.

Finally, to coordinate a global response to this global recession, I went to the meeting of the G20 nations in London the other week. Each nation has undertaken significant stimulus to spur demand. All agreed to pursue tougher regulatory reforms. We also agreed to triple the lending capacity of the International Monetary Fund -- which, as many of you know, is an international financial institution supported by all the major economies -- so that they can provide direct assistance to developing nations and vulnerable populations. That's not just charity; because America's success depends on whether other nations have the ability to buy what we sell, it's important that we pay attention to these emerging markets.

We pledged to avoid the trade barriers and protectionism that hurts us all in the end. And we decided to meet again in the fall to gauge our progress and take additional steps if necessary.

So that's where we've been, that's what we've done in the last three months. All of these actions -- the Recovery Act, the bank capitalization program, the housing plan, the strengthening of the non-bank credit market, the auto plan, and our work at the G20 -- all have been necessary pieces of the recovery puzzle. They've been designed to increase aggregate demand to get credit flowing again to families and businesses and to help families and businesses ride out the storm. And taken together, these actions are starting to generate signs of economic progress.

Because of our recovery plan, schools and police departments have cancelled planned layoffs; clean energy companies and construction companies are re-hiring workers to build everything from energy-efficient windows to new roads and highways. Our housing plan has helped lead to a spike in the number of homeowners who are taking advantage of historically-low mortgage rates by refinancing, which is like putting a $2,000 tax cut in your pocket. Our program to support the market for auto loans and student loans has started to unfreeze this market and securitize more of this lending in the last few weeks. And small businesses are seeing a jump in loan activity for the first time in months.

Now, this is all welcome and encouraging news. It does not mean the hard times are over; 2009 will continue to be a difficult year for America's economy, and obviously, most difficult for those who've lost their jobs. The severity of this recession will cause more job loss, more foreclosures, and more pain before it ends. The market will continue to rise and fall. Credit is still not flowing nearly as easily as it should. The process for restructuring AIG and the auto companies will involve difficult and sometimes unpopular choices; we are not finished yet on that front. And all of this means that there's much more work to be done. But all of this also means that you can continue to expect an unrelenting, unyielding, day-by-day effort from this administration to fight for economic recovery on all fronts.

But even as we continue to clear away the wreckage and address the immediate crisis, it is my firm belief that our next task, beginning now, is to make sure such a crisis never happens again. Even as we clean up balance sheets and get credit flowing again, even as people start spending and businesses start hiring -- all that's going to happen -- we have to realize that we cannot go back to the bubble-and-bust economy that led us to this point.

It is simply not sustainable to have a 21st-century financial system that is governed by 20th-century rules and regulations that allowed the recklessness of a few to threaten the entire economy. It is not sustainable to have an economy where in one year, 40 percent of our corporate profits came from a financial sector that was based on inflated home prices, maxed-out credit cards, over-leveraged banks and overvalued assets. It's not sustainable to have an economy where the incomes of the top 1 percent has skyrocketed while the typical working household has seen their incomes decline by nearly $2,000. That's just not a sustainable model for long-term prosperity.

For even as too many were out there chasing ever-bigger bonuses and short-term profits over the last decade, we continued to neglect the long-term threats to our prosperity: the crushing burden that the rising cost of health care is placing on families and businesses; the failure of our education system to prepare our workers for a new age; the progress that other nations are making on clean energy industries and technologies while we -- we remain addicted to foreign oil; the growing debt that we're passing on to our children. Even after we emerge from the current recession, these challenges will still represent major obstacles that stand in the way of our success in the 21st century. So we've got a lot of work to do.

Now, there's a parable at the end of the Sermon on the Mount that tells the story of two men. The first built his house on a pile of sand, and it was soon destroyed when a storm hit. But the second is known as the wise man, for when "the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock."

It was founded upon a rock. We cannot rebuild this economy on the same pile of sand. We must build our house upon a rock. We must lay a new foundation for growth and prosperity -- a foundation that will move us from an era of borrow and spend to one where we save and invest; where we consume less at home and send more exports abroad.

It's a foundation built upon five pillars that will grow our economy and make this new century another American century: Number one, new rules for Wall Street that will reward drive and innovation, not reckless risk-taking; number two, new investments in education that will make our workforce more skilled and competitive; number three, new investments in renewable energy and technology that will create new jobs and new industries; number four, new investments in health care that will cut costs for families and businesses; and number five, new savings in our federal budget that will bring down the debt for future generations.

That's the new foundation we must build. That's our house built upon a rock. That must be our future -- and my administration's policies are designed to achieve that future.

Let me talk about each of these steps in turn. The first step we will take to build this foundation is to reform the outdated rules and regulations that allowed this crisis to happen in the first place. It is time to lay down tough new rules of the road for Wall Street to ensure that we never find ourselves here again. Just as after the Great Depression new rules were designed for banks to avoid the kind of reckless speculation that helped to create the depression, so we've got to make adaptations to our current set of rules: create rules that punish shortcuts and abuse; rules that tie someone's pay to their actual job performance --- a novel concept; rules that protect typical American families when they buy a home, get a credit card or invest in a 401(k). So we've already begun to work with Congress to shape this comprehensive new regulatory framework -- and I expect a bill to arrive on my desk for my signature before the year is out.

The second pillar of this new foundation is an education system that finally prepares our workers for a 21st century economy. You know, in the 20th century, the G.I. Bill helped send a generation to college. For decades we led the world in educational attainment, and as a consequence we led the world in economic growth. But in this new economy, we've come to trail the world's leaders in graduation rates, in educational achievement, in the production of scientists and engineers. That's why we have set a goal that will greatly enhance our ability to compete for the high-wage, high-tech jobs of the 21st century: By 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world. That is the goal that we have set and we intend to do.

To meet that goal, we have to start early. So we've already dramatically expanded early childhood education. We are investing in innovative programs that have proven to help schools meet high standards and close achievement gaps. We're creating new rewards that tie teachers' performance and new pathways for advancement. And I've asked every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training, and we have provided tax credits to make a college education more affordable for every American, even those who attend Georgetown.

And, by the way, one of the changes that I would like to see -- and I'm going to be talking about this in weeks to come -- is once again seeing our best and our brightest commit themselves to making things -- engineers, scientists, innovators. For so long, we have placed at the top of our pinnacle folks who can manipulate numbers and engage in complex financial calculations. And that's good, we need some of that. But you know what we can really use is some more scientists and some more engineers, who are building and making things that we can export to other countries.

Now, the third pillar of this new foundation is to harness the renewable energy that can create millions of new jobs and new industries. We all know that the country that harnesses this new energy source will lead the 21st century. Yet we've allowed other countries to outpace us on this race to the future. I don't know about you, but I do not accept a future where the jobs and industries of tomorrow take root beyond our borders. I think it's time for America to lead again.

So the investments we made in the Recovery Act will double this nation's supply of renewable energy in the next three years. And we are putting Americans to work making our homes and buildings more efficient so that we can save billions on our energy bills and grow our economy at the same time.

Now, the only though that we can truly spark the transformation that's need is through a gradual, market-based cap on carbon pollution, so that clean energy is the profitable kind of energy.

There are those who've argued that we shouldn't attempt, we shouldn't even be thinking, we shouldn't even be talking about such a transition until the economy recovers. And they are right that we have to take into account the costs of transition. Transitioning to a clean energy economy will not be easy. But we can no longer delay putting a framework for a clean energy economy in place. That needs to be done now.

If businesses and entrepreneurs know today that we are closing this carbon pollution loophole, they'll start investing in clean energy now. And pretty soon, we'll see more companies constructing solar panels, and workers building wind turbines, and car companies manufacturing fuel-efficient cars. Investors will put some money into a new energy technology, and a small business will open to start selling it. That's how we can grow this economy, enhance our security, and protect our planet at the same time.

Now, the fourth pillar of our new foundation is a 21st century health care system where families, businesses and government budgets aren't dragged down by skyrocketing insurance premiums. One and a half million Americans could lose their homes this year just because of a medical crisis. Major American corporations are struggling to compete with their foreign counterparts. Small businesses are closing their doors. We can't allow the cost of health care to continue strangling our economy.

And that's why our Recovery Act will invest in electronic health records with strict privacy standards that can save money and lives and reduce medical error. That's why we've made the largest investment ever in preventive care, because that's one of the best ways to keep costs under control. And included in the budgets that just passed Congress is an historic commitment to reform that will finally make quality health care affordable for every American. So I'm looking forward in the next few months to working with both parties in Congress to make this reform a reality. We can get this done -- and we have to get it done.

Now, fixing our health care system will -- will require resources; it's not going to be free. But in my budget we've made a commitment to fully pay for reform without increasing the deficit, and we've identified specific savings that will make the health care system more efficient and reduce costs for us all.

In fact, we've undertaken an unprecedented effort to find this kind of savings in every corner of the budget, because the final pillar in building our new foundation is restoring fiscal discipline once this economy recovers.

Already we've identified $2 trillion dollars in deficit reductions over the next decade. We need to do more, but we've already done that. We've announced procurement reform that will greatly reduce no-bid contracts and save the government $40 billion. We need to do more, but that's an important start. Secretary Gates recently announced a courageous set of reforms that go right at the hundreds of billions of dollars in waste and cost overruns that have bloated our defense budget without making America safer. We need to do more, but that proposal by Secretary Gates is right on target. We will end education programs that don't work, we will root out waste and fraud and abuse in our Medicare program.

Altogether, this budget will reduce discretionary spending for domestic programs as a share of the economy by more than 10 percent over the next decade to the lowest level we've seen since we began keeping records nearly half a century ago. And as we continue to go through the federal budget line by line, we will be announcing additional savings, secured by eliminating and consolidating programs that we don't need so we can make room for the things that we do need.

That's what we're doing now. Of course, I realize that for some, this isn't enough. I know there's a criticism out there that my administration has been spending with reckless abandon, pushing a liberal social agenda while mortgaging our children's future. You've heard the argument.

Well, let me make three points. First, as I said earlier, the worst thing that we could do in a recession this severe is to try to cut government spending at the same time as families and businesses around the world are cutting back on their spending. So as serious as our deficit and debt problems are -- and they are very serious -- major efforts to deal with them have to focus on the medium and long-term budget picture, not on the short-term. And that's exactly what we've done.

Second, in tackling the deficit issue, we simply cannot sacrifice the long-term investments that we so desperately need to generate long-term prosperity. That's the argument that some critics have made: Well, you're proposing health care reform, you shouldn't be doing that; you're proposing education investments, you shouldn't be doing that, that adds to the deficit.

Look, just as a cash-strapped family may cut back on all kinds of luxuries, but will still insist on spending money to get their children through college, will refuse to have their kids drop out of college and go to work in some fast-food place, even though that might bring in some income in the short-term, because they're thinking about the long term -- so we as a country have to make current choices with an eye for the future.

If we don't invest now in renewable energy, if we don't invest now in a skilled workforce, if we don't invest now in a more affordable health care system, this economy simply won't grow at the pace it needs to in two or five or 10 years down the road. If we don't lay this new foundation now, it won't be long before we're right back where we are today. And I can assure you that chronically slow growth will not help our long-term budget situation. That's the second point.

Third point, the problem with our deficit and debt is not new. It has been building dramatically over the past eight years, largely because big tax cuts combined with increased spending on two wars and the increased costs of government health care programs have pushed it ever upwards. This structural gap in our budget, between the amount of money that's coming in and the amount of money that's going out, will only get worse as the baby boomers age, and will in fact lead us down an unsustainable path.

But let's not kid ourselves and suggest that we can solve this problem by trimming a few earmarks or cutting the budget for the National Endowment for the Arts. That's just not true. Along with defense and interest on the national debt, the biggest cost drivers in our budget are entitlement programs like Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security -- all of which get more and more expensive every year. So if we want to get serious about fiscal discipline, and I do, then we're going to not only have to trim waste out of our discretionary budget -- which we've already begun -- we will also have to get serious about entitlement reform.

Now, nothing will be more important to this goal than passing health care reform that brings down costs across the system, including in Medicare and Medicaid. So make no mistake, health care reform is entitlement reform. That's not just my opinion -- that was the conclusion of a wide range of participants at the Fiscal Responsibility Summit that we held at the White House in February. And that's one of the reasons why I firmly believe we need to get health care reform done this year.

Once we tackle rising health care costs, we must also work to put Social Security on firmer footing. It's time for both parties to come together and find a way to keep the promise of a sound retirement for future generations. And we should restore a sense of fairness and balance to our tax code including by shutting down corporate loopholes and ensuring that everyone pays what they owe.

All of these efforts will require tough choices. All these efforts will require compromise. But the difficulties can't serve as an excuse for inaction -- not anymore -- which brings me to one final point I'd like to make today. I've talked a lot about the fundamental weakness in our economy that led us to this day of reckoning. But we also arrived here because of a fundamental weakness in our political system.

For too long, too many in Washington put off hard decisions for some other time on some other day. There's been a tendency to spend a lot of time scoring political points instead of rolling up sleeves to solve real problems.

There's also an impatience that characterizes this town -- an attention span that has only grown shorter with the 24-hour news cycle that insists on instant gratification in the form of immediate results or higher poll numbers. When a crisis hits, there's all too often a lurch from shock to trance, with everyone responding to the tempest of the moment until the furor has died down, the media coverage has moved on to something else, instead of confronting the major challenges that will shape our future in a sustained and focused way.

This can't be one of those times. The challenges are too great. The stakes are too high. I know how difficult it is for members of Congress in both parties to grapple with some of the big decisions we face right now. I'd love if these problems were coming at us one at a time instead of five or six at a time. It's more than most Congresses and most Presidents have to deal with in a lifetime.

But we have been called to govern in extraordinary times. And that requires an extraordinary sense of responsibility -- to ourselves, to the men and women who sent us here, to the many generations whose lives will be affected for good or for ill because of what we do here.

There is no doubt that times are still tough. By no means are we out of the woods just yet. But from where we stand, for the very first time, we're beginning to see glimmers of hope. And beyond that, way off in the distance, we can see a vision of an America's future that is far different than our troubled economic past. It's an America teeming with new industry and commerce, humming with new energy and discoveries that light the world once more -- a place where anyone from anywhere with a good idea or the will to work can live the dream they've heard so much about.

That is the house upon the rock -- proud, sturdy, unwavering in the face of the greatest storms. And we will not finish it in one year. We will not finish it in many. But if we use this moment to lay that new foundation, if we come together and begin the hard work of rebuilding, if we persist and persevere against the disappointments and setbacks that will surely lie ahead, then I have no doubt that this house will stand and the dream of our founders will live on in our time.

Thank you. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

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# First Address at the Central Intelligence Agency

Thank you for the extraordinary welcome. And thanks for those of you who prepared, from the CIA gift shop, the t-shirts, the caps, the water bottles. Michelle and the girls will appreciate that very much.

It is a great honor to be here with the men and women of the CIA. I’ve been eager to come out here to Langley for some time so I can deliver a simple message to you in person on behalf of the American people: Thank you. Thank you for all the work that you do to protect the American people and the freedom that we all cherish.

The CIA is fundamental to America’s national security. And I want you to know that that’s why I nominated such an outstanding public servant and close friend, Leon Panetta, to lead -- to lead the agency. He is one of our nation’s finest public servants. He has my complete confidence. And he is a strong voice in my national security team, as well as a strong advocate for the men and women of the CIA.

I also benefit from the counsel of several agency veterans -- chief among them, Steve Kappes, who’s stayed on to serve as Leon’s deputy. He’s -- and he’s done outstanding work.

I have to add, just as an aside, by the way, I just met with a smaller group of about 50, so we could have a dialogue. And all of you look really young. And so to have a graybeard literally and figuratively like Steve Kappes here, I think, is absolutely critical.

I also want you to know that we have one of your own, John Brennan, who is doing a terrific job as my adviser for counterterrorism and homeland security. And we are very grateful for the work that he does and the insights that he brings, from his long years of service here at the CIA.

And I would be remiss if I didn’t mention the extraordinary former CIA officer and Director of Central Intelligence, Bob Gates, who is also part of our Cabinet and every once in a while gives me a few tips.

So let me share with you just a few thoughts about the situation in which we find ourselves.

First, I want to underscore the importance of the CIA. When the CIA was founded, you were focused on one overarching threat, the Soviet Union. And for decades, the CIA carried out a critically important mission. And with the end of the Cold War, some wondered how important the CIA would be to our future. Now we know.

Here in the 21st century, we’ve learned that the CIA is more important than ever. For as Leon mentioned, we face a wide range of unconventional challenges: stateless terrorist networks like al-Qaeda, the spread of catastrophic weapons, cyberthreats, failed states, rogue regimes, persistent conflict. And now we have to add to our list piracy.

The CIA is unique in the capabilities of collection, analysis and operation that you bring to bear. So you are an indispensable tool, the tip of the spear in America’s intelligence mission and our national security.

It is because of you that I can make good decisions. You prove that the key to good intelligence is not simply technology. It’s the quality of the men and women who have signed up to serve.

You’re on the front lines against unconventional challenges.

You help us understand the world as it is. You support the work of our troops and our diplomats and law enforcement officers. You disrupt terrorist plots, and you’re critical to our efforts to destroy terrorist networks. You serve capably, courageously, and from here in Virginia to dangerous outposts around the globe, you make enormous sacrifices on our behalf.

So you should be proud of what you do.

Second, you need to know that you’ve got my full support. For decades, the American people have counted on you to protect them. I know that I’ve come to personally count on your services. I rely on your reporting and your analysis, which finds its way onto my desk every single day.

And I know you’ve got a tough job. I know there’s no margin for error. And I know there are endless demands for intelligence. There is an urgent necessity to collect and analyze information and to work seamlessly with other agencies to act on it.

And -- And what makes it tougher is when you succeed, as you so often do, that success usually has to stay secret. So you don’t get credit when things go good, but you sure get some blame when things don’t.

Audience Member: [Words indistinct.]

President Obama: Now -- I got an amen corner out there.

Now, in that context, I know that the last few days have been difficult.

As I made clear, in releasing the OLC memos as a consequence of a court case that was pending and to which it was very difficult for us to mount an effective legal defense, I acted primarily because of the exceptional circumstances that surrounded these memos, particularly the fact that so much of the information was public -- had been publicly acknowledged. The covert nature of the information had been compromised.

I have fought to protect the integrity of classified information in the past, and I will do so in the future. And there is nothing more important than protecting the identities of CIA officers. So I need everybody to be clear: we will protect your identities and your security as you vigorously pursue your missions. I will be as vigorous in protecting you as you are vigorous in protecting the American people.

Now, I have put an end to the interrogation techniques described in those OLC memos. And I want to -- I want to be very clear and very blunt. I’ve done so for a simple reason: because I believe that our nation is stronger and more secure when we deploy the full measure of both our power and the power of our values, including the rule of law. I know I can count on you to do exactly that.

You know, there have been some conversations that I’ve had with senior folks here at Langley in which I think people have expressed understandable anxiety and concern. So I -- I -- I want to make a point that I just made in the smaller group. I understand that it’s hard when you are asked to protect the American people against people who have no scruples and would willingly and gladly kill innocents.

Al-Qaeda’s not constrained by a constitution. Many of our adversaries are not constrained by a belief in freedom of speech or representation in court or rule of law. So I’m sure that sometimes it seems as if that means we’re operating with one hand tied behind our back or that those who would argue for a higher standard are naive. I understand that. You know, I’ve -- I watch the cable shows once in a while.

What makes the United States special, and what makes you special, is precisely the fact that we are willing to uphold our values and ideals even when it’s hard -- not just when it’s easy; even when we are afraid and under threat -- not just when it’s expedient to do so. That’s what makes us different.

So yes, you’ve got a harder job. And so do I. And that’s okay, because that’s why we can take such extraordinary pride in being Americans.

And over the long term, that is why I believe we will defeat our enemies: because we’re on the better side of history.

So don’t be discouraged by what’s happened in the last few weeks. Don’t be discouraged that we have to acknowledge potentially we’ve made some mistakes. That’s how we learn. But the fact that we are willing to acknowledge them and then move forward, that is precisely why I am proud to be President of the United States, and that’s why you should be proud to be members of the CIA. All right?

Third point -- Third point -- I want you to know how much the American people appreciate your service. Sometimes it’s hard to acknowledge sacrifices made by the people whose work, or even identity, must remain secret, and that’s part of the enormous burden that you carry when you sign up. But you make the extraordinary sacrifice of giving up parts of your life in service to your country. Many of you take long deployments overseas. You miss seeing your families; you miss weekend barbecues and the birthday parties, watching your children grow up. You can’t even exchange in the simplest pleasures of talking about your job -- or complaining about your job openly.

There are few signs of patriotism more powerful than offering to serve out of the limelight, and so many of you have signed up to serve after 9/11 -- that’s partly why you’re all so young -- fully aware of the dangers before you. You serve courageously, but your courage is only known to a few. You accomplish remarkable things, but the credit you receive is the private knowledge that you’ve done something to secure this country. That’s a sacrifice that’s carved into those marble walls. Those 89 stars stand as a testament to both the men and women of the CIA who gave their lives in service to their country, and to all who dedicate themselves to the mission of this agency.

Now we must look forward to the future with confidence. All that you’ve achieved, I believe that the CIA’s best days are still yet to come. And you will have my support and appreciation as you carry on this critical work.

We live in dangerous times. I am going to need you more than ever, precisely because we’re seeing changes in our foreign policy, and we want to send a new message to the world. That requires better intelligence, not less of it. That means that we’re going to have to operate smarter and more effectively than ever. So I’m going to be relying on you, and the American people are going to rely on you. And I hope that you will continue to take extraordinary pride in the challenges that come with the job.

Thank you very much.

God bless you.

And God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Holocaust Days of Remembrance Commemoration Address

Thank you very much. To Sara Bloomfield, for the wonderful introduction and the outstanding work she's doing; to Fred Zeidman; Joel Geiderman; Mr. Wiesel -- thank you for your wisdom and your witness; Speaker Nancy Pelosi; Senator Dick Durbin; members of Congress; our good friend the Ambassador of Israel; members of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council; and most importantly, the survivors and rescuers and their families who are here today. It is a great honor for me to be here, and I'm grateful that I have the opportunity to address you briefly.

We gather today to mourn the loss of so many lives, and celebrate those who saved them; honor those who survived, and contemplate the obligations of the living.

It is the grimmest of ironies that one of the most savage, barbaric acts of evil in history began in one of the most modernized societies of its time, where so many markers of human progress became tools of human depravity: science that can heal used to kill; education that can enlighten used to rationalize away basic moral impulses; the bureaucracy that sustains modern life used as the machinery of mass death -- a ruthless, chillingly efficient system where many were responsible for the killing, but few got actual blood on their hands.

While the uniqueness of the Holocaust in scope and in method is truly astounding, the Holocaust was driven by many of the same forces that have fueled atrocities throughout history: the scapegoating that leads to hatred and blinds us to our common humanity; the justifications that replace conscience and allow cruelty to spread; the willingness of those who are neither perpetrators nor victims to accept the assigned role of bystander, believing the lie that good people are ever powerless or alone, the fiction that we do not have a choice.

But while we are here today to bear witness to the human capacity to destroy, we are also here to pay tribute to the human impulse to save. In the moral accounting of the Holocaust, as we reckon with numbers like 6 million, as we recall the horror of numbers etched into arms, we also factor in numbers like these: 7,200 -- the number of Danish Jews ferried to safety, many of whom later returned home to find the neighbors who rescued them had also faithfully tended their homes and businesses and belongings while they were gone.

We remember the number five -- the five righteous men and women who join us today from Poland. We are awed by your acts of courage and conscience. And your presence today compels each of us to ask ourselves whether we would have done what you did. We can only hope that the answer is yes.

We also remember the number 5,000 -- the number of Jews rescued by the villagers of Le Chambon, France -- one life saved for each of its 5,000 residents. Not a single Jew who came there was turned away, or turned in. But it was not until decades later that the villagers spoke of what they had done -- and even then, only reluctantly. The author of a book on the rescue found that those he interviewed were baffled by his interest. "How could you call us 'good'?" they said. "We were doing what had to be done."

That is the question of the righteous -- those who would do extraordinary good at extraordinary risk not for affirmation or acclaim or to advance their own interests, but because it is what must be done. They remind us that no one is born a savior or a murderer -- these are choices we each have the power to make. They teach us that no one can make us into bystanders without our consent, and that we are never truly alone -- that if we have the courage to heed that "still, small voice" within us, we can form a minyan for righteousness that can span a village, even a nation.

Their legacy is our inheritance. And the question is, how do we honor and preserve it? How do we ensure that "never again" isn't an empty slogan, or merely an aspiration, but also a call to action?

I believe we start by doing what we are doing today -- by bearing witness, by fighting the silence that is evil's greatest co-conspirator.

In the face of horrors that defy comprehension, the impulse to silence is understandable. My own great uncle returned from his service in World War II in a state of shock, saying little, alone with painful memories that would not leave his head. He went up into the attic, according to the stories that I've heard, and wouldn't come down for six months. He was one of the liberators -- someone who at a very tender age had seen the unimaginable. And so some of the liberators who are here today honor us with their presence -- all of whom we honor for their extraordinary service. My great uncle was part of the 89th Infantry Division -- the first Americans to reach a Nazi concentration camp. And they liberated Ohrdruf, part of Buchenwald, where tens of thousands had perished.

The story goes that when the Americans marched in, they discovered the starving survivors and the piles of dead bodies. And General Eisenhower made a decision. He ordered Germans from the nearby town to tour the camp, so they could see what had been done in their name. And he ordered American troops to tour the camp, so they could see the evil they were fighting against. Then he invited congressmen and journalists to bear witness. And he ordered that photographs and films be made. Some of us have seen those same images, whether in the Holocaust Museum or when I visited Yad Vashem, and they never leave you. Eisenhower said that he wanted "to be in a position to give firsthand evidence of these things, if ever, in the future, there develops a tendency to charge these allegations merely to propaganda."

Eisenhower understood the danger of silence. He understood that if no one knew what had happened, that would be yet another atrocity -- and it would be the perpetrators' ultimate triumph.

What Eisenhower did to record these crimes for history is what we are doing here today. That's what Elie Wiesel and the survivors we honor here do by fighting to make their memories part of our collective memory. That's what the Holocaust Museum does every day on our National Mall, the place where we display for the world our triumphs and failures and the lessons we've learned from our history. It's the very opposite of silence.

But we must also remember that bearing witness is not the end of our obligation -- it's just the beginning. We know that evil has yet to run its course on Earth. We've seen it in this century in the mass graves and the ashes of villages burned to the ground, and children used as soldiers and rape used as a weapon of war. To this day, there are those who insist the Holocaust never happened; who perpetrate every form of intolerance -- racism and anti-Semitism, homophobia, xenophobia, sexism, and more -- hatred that degrades its victim and diminishes us all.

Today, and every day, we have an opportunity, as well as an obligation, to confront these scourges -- to fight the impulse to turn the channel when we see images that disturb us, or wrap ourselves in the false comfort that others' sufferings are not our own. Instead we have the opportunity to make a habit of empathy; to recognize ourselves in each other; to commit ourselves to resisting injustice and intolerance and indifference in whatever forms they may take -- whether confronting those who tell lies about history, or doing everything we can to prevent and end atrocities like those that took place in Rwanda, those taking place in Darfur. That is my commitment as President. I hope that is yours, as well.

It will not be easy. At times, fulfilling these obligations require self-reflection. But in the final analysis, I believe history gives us cause for hope rather than despair -- the hope of a chosen people who have overcome oppression since the days of Exodus; of the nation of Israel rising from the destruction of the Holocaust; of the strong and enduring bonds between our nations.

It is the hope, too, of those who not only survived, but chose to live, teaching us the meaning of courage and resilience and dignity. I'm thinking today of a study conducted after the war that found that Holocaust survivors living in America actually had a higher birthrate than American Jews. What a stunning act of faith -- to bring a child in a world that has shown you so much cruelty; to believe that no matter what you have endured, or how much you have lost, in the end, you have a duty to life.

We find cause for hope as well in Protestant and Catholic children attending school together in Northern Ireland; in Hutus and Tutsis living side by side, forgiving neighbors who have done the unforgivable; in a movement to save Darfur that has thousands of high school and college chapters in 25 countries, and brought 70,000 people to the Washington Mall -- people of every age and faith and background and race united in common cause with suffering brothers and sisters halfway around the world.

Those numbers can be our future -- our fellow citizens of the world showing us how to make the journey from oppression to survival, from witness to resistance, and ultimately to reconciliation. That is what we mean when we say "never again."

So today, during this season when we celebrate liberation, resurrection, and the possibility of redemption, may each of us renew our resolve to do what must be done. And may we strive each day, both individually and as a nation, to be among the righteous.

Thank you, God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Joint Press Meeting with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

President Obama: I first of all want to thank Prime Minister Netanyahu for making this visit. I think we had a extraordinarily productive series of conversations, not only between the two of us but also at the staff and agency levels. Obviously this reflects the extraordinary relationship, the special relationship between the United States and Israel. It is a stalwart ally of the United States. We have historical ties, emotional ties. As the only true democracy of the Middle East it is a source of admiration and inspiration for the American people. I have said from the outset that when it comes to my policies towards Israel and the Middle East that Israel’s security is paramount, and I repeated that to Prime Minister Netanyahu. It is in U.S. national security interests to assure that Israel’s security as an independent Jewish state is maintained. One of the areas that we discussed is the deepening concern

around the potential pursuit of a nuclear weapon by Iran. It’s something the Prime Minister has been very vocal in his concerns about, but is a concern that is shared by his countrymen and women across the political spectrum. I indicated to him the view of our administration, that Iran is a country of extraordinary history and extraordinary potential, that we want them to be a full-fledged member of the international community and be in a position to provide opportunities and prosperity for their people, but that the way to achieve those goals is not through the pursuit of a nuclear weapon. And I indicated to Prime Minister Netanyahu in private what I have said publicly, which is that Iran obtaining a nuclear weapon would not only be a threat to Israel and a threat to the United States, but would be profoundly destabilizing in the international community as a whole and could set off a nuclear arms race in the Middle East that would be extraordinarily dangerous for all concerned, including for Iran. We are engaged in a process to reach out to Iran and persuade them that it is not in their interest to pursue a nuclear weapon and that they should change course. But I assured the Prime Minister that we are not foreclosing a range of steps, including much stronger international sanctions, in assuring that Iran understands that we are serious. And obviously the Prime Minister emphasized his seriousness around this issue as well -- I’ll allow him to speak for himself on that subject. We also had an extensive discussion about the possibilities of restarting serious negotiations on the issue of Israel and the Palestinians. I have said before and I will repeat again that it is I believe in the interest not only of the Palestinians, but also the Israelis and the United States and the international community to achieve a two-state solution in which Israelis and Palestinians are living side by side in peace and security. We have seen progress stalled on this front, and I suggested to the Prime Minister that he has an historic opportunity to get a serious movement on this issue during his tenure. That means that all the parties involved have to take seriously obligations that they’ve previously agreed to. Those obligations were outlined in the road map; they were discussed extensively in Annapolis. And I think that we can -- there is no reason why we should not seize this opportunity and this moment for all the parties concerned to take seriously those obligations and to move forward in a way that assures Israel’s security, that stops the terrorist attacks that have been such a source of pain and hardship, that we can stop rocket attacks on Israel; but that also allow Palestinians to govern themselves as an independent state, that allows economic development to take place, that allows them to make serious progress in meeting the aspirations of their people. And I am confident that in the days, weeks and months to come we are going to be able to make progress on that issue. So let me just summarize by saying that I think Prime Minister Netanyahu has the benefit of having served as Prime Minister previously. He has both youth and wisdom -- Prime Minister Netanyahu: I’ll dispute youth, but -- President Obama: -- and I think is in a position to achieve the security objectives of Israel, but also bring about historic peace. And I’m confident that he’s going to seize this moment. And the United States is going to do everything we can to be constructive, effective partners in this process. PRIME MINISTER NETANYAHU: President Obama, thank you. Thank you for your friendship to Israel and your friendship to me. You’re a great leader -- a great leader of the United States, a great leader of the world, a great friend of Israel, and someone who is acutely cognizant of our security concerns. And the entire people of Israel appreciate it, and I speak on their behalf. We met before, but this is the first time that we’re meeting as President and Prime Minister. So I was particularly pleased at your reaffirmation of the special relationship between Israel and the United States. We share the same goals and we face the same threats. The common goal is peace. Everybody in Israel, as in the United States, wants peace. The common threat we face are terrorist regimes and organizations that seek to undermine the peace and endanger both our peoples. In this context, the worst danger we face is that Iran would develop nuclear military capabilities. Iran openly calls for our destruction, which is unacceptable by any standard. It threatens the moderate Arab regimes in the Middle East. It threatens U.S. interests worldwide. But if Iran were to acquire nuclear weapons, it could give a nuclear umbrella to terrorists, or worse, it could actually give terrorists nuclear weapons. And that would put us all in great peril. So in that context, I very much appreciate, Mr. President, your firm commitment to ensure that Iran does not develop nuclear military capability, and also your statement that you’re leaving all options on the table. I share with you very much the desire to move the peace process forward. And I want to start peace negotiations with the Palestinians immediately. I would like to broaden the circle of peace to include others in the Arab world, if we could, Mr. President, so -- this (inaudible) that one shouldn’t let go, maybe peace with the entire Arab world. I want to make it clear that we don’t want to govern the Palestinians. We want to live in peace with them. We want them to govern themselves, absent a handful of powers that could endanger the state of Israel. And for this there has to be a clear goal. The goal has to be an end to conflict. There will have to be compromises by Israelis and Palestinians alike. We’re ready to do our share. We hope the Palestinians will do their share, as well. If we resume negotiations, as we plan to do, then I think that the Palestinians will have to recognize Israel as a Jewish state; will have to also enable Israel to have the means to defend itself. And if those conditions are met, Israel’s security conditions are met, and there’s recognition of Israel’s legitimacy, its permanent legitimacy, then I think we can envision an arrangement where Palestinians and Israelis live side by side in dignity, in security, and in peace. And I look forward, Mr. President, to working with you, a true friend of Israel, to the achievement of our common goals, which are security, prosperity, and above all, peace.

President Obama: Thank you. We’re going to take a couple of questions. We’re going to start with Steve. Question: Mr. President, you spoke at length, as did the Prime Minister, about Iran’s nuclear program. Your program of engagement, policy of engagement, how long is that going to last? Is there a deadline? President Obama: You know, I don’t want to set an artificial deadline. I think it’s important to recognize that Iran is in the midst of its own elections. As I think all of you, since you’re all political reporters, are familiar with, election time is not always the best time to get business done. Their elections will be completed in June, and we are hopeful that, at that point, there is going to be a serious process of engagement, first through the P5-plus-one process that’s already in place, potentially through additional direct talks between the United States and Iran. I want to reemphasize what I said earlier, that I believe it is not only in the interest of the international community that Iran not develop nuclear weapons, I firmly believe it is in Iran’s interest not to develop nuclear weapons, because it would trigger a nuclear arms race in the Middle East and be profoundly destabilizing in all sorts of ways. Iran can achieve its interests of security and international respect and prosperity for its people through other means, and I am prepared to make what I believe will be a persuasive argument, that there should be a different course to be taken. The one thing we’re also aware of is the fact that the history, of least, of negotiation with Iran is that there is a lot of talk but not always action and follow-through. And that’s why it is important for us, I think, without having set an artificial deadline, to be mindful of the fact that we’re not going to have talks forever. We’re not going to create a situation in which talks become an excuse for inaction while Iran proceeds with developing a nuclear -- and deploying a nuclear weapon. That’s something, obviously, Israel is concerned about, but it’s also an issue of concern for the United States and for the international community as a whole. My expectation would be that if we can begin discussions soon, shortly after the Iranian elections, we should have a fairly good sense by the end of the year as to whether they are moving in the right direction and whether the parties involved are making progress and that there’s a good faith effort to resolve differences. That doesn’t mean every issue would be resolved by that point, but it does mean that we’ll probably be able to gauge and do a reassessment by the end of the year of this approach. Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Aren’t you concerned that your outstretched hand has been interpreted by extremists, especially Ahmadinejad, Nasrallah, Meshal, as weakness? And since my colleague already asked about the deadline, if engagement fails, what then, Mr. President? President Obama: Well, it’s not clear to me why my outstretched hand would be interpreted as weakness. Question: Qatar, an example. President Obama: I’m sorry? Question: The example of Qatar. They would have preferred to be on your side and then moved to the extremists, to Iran. President Obama: Oh, I think -- yes, I’m not sure about that interpretation. Look, we’ve been in office a little over a hundred days now -- close to four months. We have put forward a clear principle that where we can resolve issues through negotiations and diplomacy, we should. We didn’t expect -- and I don’t think anybody in the international community or anybody in the Middle East, for that matter -- would expect that 30 years of antagonism and suspicion between Iran and the United States would be resolved in four months. So we think it’s very important for us to give this a chance. Now, understand that part of the reason that it’s so important for us to take a diplomatic approach is that the approach that we’ve been taking, which is no diplomacy, obviously has not worked. Nobody disagrees with that. Hamas and Hezbollah have gotten stronger. Iran has been pursuing its nuclear capabilities undiminished. And so not talking -- that clearly hasn’t worked. That’s what’s been tried. And so what we’re going to do is try something new, which is actually engaging and reaching out to the Iranians. The important thing is to make sure that there is a clear timetable of -- at which point we say these talks don’t seem to be making any serious progress. It hasn’t been tried before so we don’t want to prejudge that, but as I said, by the end of the year I think we should have some sense as to whether or not these discussions are starting to yield significant benefits, whether we’re starting to see serious movement on the part of the Iranians. If that hasn’t taken place, then I think the international community will see that it’s not the United States or Israel or other countries that are seeking to isolate or victimize Iran; rather, it is Iran itself which is isolating itself by willing to -- being unwilling to engage in serious discussions about how they can preserve their security without threatening other people’s security -- which ultimately is what we want to achieve. We want to achieve a situation where all countries in the region can pursue economic development and commercial ties and trade and do so without the threat that their populations are going to be subject to bombs and destruction. That’s what I think the Prime Minister is interested in, that’s what I’m interested in, and I hope that ends up being what the ruling officials in Iran are interested in, as well. Don Gonyea. Where’s Gonyea? Question: Right here. Thank you. Mr. President and Mr. Prime Minister, can you each react to King Abdullah’s statement of a week ago that we really are at a critical place in the conflict and that if this moment isn’t seized and if a peace isn’t achieved now, soon, that in a year, year and a half, we could see renewed major conflict, perhaps war? And do you agree with that assessment? Prime Minister Netanyahu: I think we have to seize the moment and I think we’re fortunate in having a leader like President Obama and a new government in Israel and perhaps a new understanding in the Arab world that I haven’t seen in my lifetime. And you’re very kind to be calling me young, but I’m more than half a century old and in my 59 years in the life of the Jewish state, there’s never been a time when Arabs and Israelis see a common threat the way we see it today and also see the need to join together in working towards peace while simultaneously defending ourselves against this common threat. I think we have -- we have ways to capitalize on this sense of urgency and we’re prepared to move with the President and with others in the Arab world if they’re prepared to move, as well. And I think the important thing that we discussed, among other things, is how to buttress the Israeli-Palestinian peace tracks, which we want to resume right away, with participation from others in the Arab world; how we give confidence to each other that would -- changes the reality, it changes the reality on the ground, changing political realities top-down, as well, while we work to broaden the circle of peace. And I think that the sense of urgency that King Abdullah expressed is shared by me and shared by many others and I definitely know it’s shared by President Obama. President Obama: Look, I think there’s an extraordinary opportunity and the Prime Minister said it well. You have Arab states in the region -- the Jordanians, the Egyptians, the Saudis -- who I think are looking for an opportunity to break this long-standing impasse but aren’t sure how to do it, and share concerns about Iran’s potential development of a nuclear weapon. In order for us to potentially realign interests in the region in a constructive way, bolstering, to use the Prime Minister’s word, the Palestinian-Israeli peace track is critical. It will not be easy. It never has been easy. In discussions, I don’t think the Prime Minister would mind me saying to him -- or saying publically what I said privately, which is that there is a recognition that the Palestinians are going to have to do a better job providing the kinds of security assurances that Israelis would need to achieve a two-state solution; that, you know, the leadership of the Palestinians will have to gain additional legitimacy and credibility with their own people, and delivering services. And that’s something that the United States and Israel can be helpful in seeing them accomplish. The other Arab states have to be more supportive and be bolder in seeking potential normalization with Israel. And next week I will have the Palestinian Authority President Abbas as well as President Mubarak here and I will deliver that message to them. Now, Israel is going to have to take some difficult steps as well, and I shared with the Prime Minister the fact that under the roadmap and under Annapolis that there’s a clear understanding that we have to make progress on settlements. Settlements have to be stopped in order for us to move forward. That’s a difficult issue. I recognize that, but it’s an important one and it has to be addressed. I think the humanitarian situation in Gaza has to be addressed. Now, I was along the border in Sderot and saw the evidence of weapons that had been raining down on the heads of innocents in those Israeli cities, and that’s unacceptable. So we’ve got to work with the Egyptians to deal with the smuggling of weapons and it has to be meaningful because no Prime Minister of any country is going to tolerate missiles raining down on their citizens’ heads. On the other hand, the fact is, is that if the people of Gaza have no hope, if they can’t even get clean water at this point, if the border closures are so tight that it is impossible for reconstruction and humanitarian efforts to take place, then that is not going to be a recipe for Israel’s long-term security or a constructive peace track to move forward. So all these things are going to have to come together and it’s going to be difficult, but the one thing that I’ve committed to the Prime Minister is we are going to be engaged, the United States is going to roll up our sleeves. We want to be a strong partner in this process. I have great confidence in Prime Minister Netanyahu’s political skills, but also his historical vision and his recognition that during the years that he is Prime Minister this second go-around, he is probably going to be confronted with as many important decisions about the long-term strategic interests of Israel as any Prime Minister that we’ve seen in a very long time. And I have great confidence that he’s going to rise to the occasion and I actually think that you’re going to see movement in -- among Arab states that we have not seen before. But the trick is to try to coordinate all this in a very delicate political environment. And that’s why I’m so pleased to have George Mitchell, who is standing behind the scrum there, as our special envoy, because I’m very confident that as somebody who was involved in equally delicate negotiations in Northern Ireland, he is somebody who recognizes that if you apply patience and determination, and you keep your eye on the long-term goal, as the Prime Minister articulated -- which is a wide-ranging peace, not a grudging peace, not a transitory peace, but a wide-ranging, regional peace -- that we can make great progress. Question: Mr. President, the Israeli Prime Minister and the Israeli administration have said on many occasions -- on some occasions that only if the Iranian threat will be solved, they can achieve real progress on the Palestinian threat. Do you agree with that kind of linkage? And to the Israeli Prime Minister, you were speaking about the political track. Are you willing to get into final status issues/negotiations like borders, like Jerusalem in the near future, based on the two-state solution? And do you still hold this opinion about the linkage between the Iranian threat and your ability to achieve any progress on the Palestinian threat? President Obama: Well, let me say this. There’s no doubt that it is difficult for any Israeli government to negotiate in a situation in which they feel under immediate threat. That’s not conducive to negotiations. And as I’ve said before, I recognize Israel’s legitimate concerns about the possibility of Iran obtaining a nuclear weapon when they have a president who has in the past said that Israel should not exist. That would give any leader of any country pause. Having said that, if there is a linkage between Iran and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, I personally believe it actually runs the other way. To the extent that we can make peace with the Palestinians -- between the Palestinians and the Israelis, then I actually think it strengthens our hand in the international community in dealing with a potential Iranian threat. Having said that, I think that dealing with Iran’s potential nuclear capacity is something that we should be doing even if there already was peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. And I think that pursuing Israeli-Palestinian peace is something that is in Israeli’s security interests and the United States’ national security interests, even if Iran was not pursuing a nuclear weapon. They’re both important. And we have to move aggressively on both fronts. And I think that based on my conversations with Prime Minister Netanyahu, he agrees with me that they’re both important. That’s not to say that he’s not making a calculation, as he should, about what are some of the most immediate threats to Israeli’s security, and I understand that. But, look, imagine how much less mischief a Hezbollah or a Hamas could do if in fact we had moved a Palestinian-Israeli track in a direction that gave the Palestinian people hope. And if Hezbollah and Hamas is weakened, imagine how that impacts Iran’s ability to make mischief, and vice versa. I mean, so obviously these things are related, but they are important separately. And I’m confident that the United States, working with Israel, can make progress on both fronts. Question: Thank you. Prime Minister Netanyahu: We’ve had extraordinarily friendly and constructive talks here today, and I’m very grateful to the President for that. We want to move peace forward, and we want to ward off the great threats. There isn’t a policy linkage, and that’s what I hear the President saying, and that’s what I’m saying too. And I’ve always said there’s not a policy linkage between pursuing simultaneously peace between Israel and the Palestinians and the rest of the Arab world, and to trying to deal with removing the threat of a nuclear bomb. There are causal links. The President talked about one of them. It would help, obviously, unite a broad front against Iran if we had peace between Israel and the Palestinians. And conversely, if Iran went nuclear, it would threaten the progress towards peace and destabilize the entire area, and threaten existing peace agreement. So it’s very clear to us. I think we actually -- we don’t see closely on it, we see exactly eye to eye on this -- that we want to move simultaneously and then parallel on two fronts: the front of peace, and the front of preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear capability. On the front of peace, the important thing for me is to resume negotiations as rapidly as possible, and to -- and my view is less one of terminology, but one of substance. And I ask myself, what do we end up with? If we end up with another Gaza -- the President has described to you there’s rockets falling out of Gaza -- that is something we don’t want to happen, because a terror base next to our cities that doesn’t call -- recognize Israel’s existence and calls for our destruction and asks for our destruction is not arguing peace. If, however, the Palestinians recognize Israel as the Jewish state, if they -- if they fight terror, if they educate their children for peace and to a better future, then I think we can come at a substantive solution that allows the two people to live side by side in security and peace and I add prosperity, because I’m a great believer in this. So I think the terminology will take care of itself if we have the substantive understanding. And I think we can move forward on this. I have great confidence in your leadership, Mr. President, and in your friendship to my country, and in your championing of peace and security. And the answer is, both come together -- peace and security are intertwined. They’re inseparable. And I look forward, Mr. President, to working with you to achieve both. President Obama: Thank you, everybody.

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# Commencement Address at the University of Notre Dame

Thank you very much. Thank you, Notre Dame. Thank you. Thank you. Please, have a seat. Thank you...

Well first of all, congratulations, Class of 2009. Congratulations to all the parents, the cousins, the aunts, the uncles -- the -- all the people who helped to bring you to the point that you are here today. Thank you so much to Father Jenkins for that extraordinary introduction, even though you said what I want to say much more elegantly. You are doing an extraordinary job as president of this extraordinary institution, and your continued and courageous and contagious commitment to honest, thoughtful dialogue is an inspiration to us all.

So, good afternoon, to Father Hesburgh, to Notre Dame trustees, to faculty, to family. I am honored to be here today. And...I am grateful to all of you for allowing me to be a part of your graduation. And I also want to thank you for the honorary degree that I received. I know it has not been without controversy. I don't know if you're aware of this, but these honorary degrees are apparently pretty hard to come by. So far I'm only 1 for 2 as President. Father...Hesburgh is 150 for 150. I guess that's better. So, Father Ted after the ceremony maybe you can give me some pointers to boost my average.

I also want to congratulate the Class of 2009 for all your accomplishments. And since --

President Obama: And since -- this is Notre Dame, I mean -- That's...all right. And since --

President Obama: We're fine, everybody. We're -- We're following Brennan's adage that we don't do things easily. We want to -- We're -- We're not going to shy away from things that are uncomfortable sometimes.

Now, since -- since this is Notre Dame I think we should talk not only about your accomplishments in the classroom, but also in the competitive arena. No, don't worry, I'm not going to talk about that. We all know about this university's proud and storied football team, but I also hear that Notre Dame holds the largest outdoor 5-on-5 basketball tournament in the world -- "Bookstore Basketball."

Now this excites me. I want to congratulate the winners of this year's tournament, a team by the name of "Hallelujah Holla Back." Congratulations. Well done. Though I have to say, I'm personally disappointed that the "Barack O'Ballers" did not pull it out this year. So next year, if you need a 6'2" forward with a decent jumper, you know where I live.

Now, every one of you should be proud of what you've achieved at this institution. One hundred and sixty-three classes of Notre Dame graduates have sat where you sit today. Some were here during years that simply rolled into the next without much notice or fanfare -- periods of relative peace and prosperity that required little by way of sacrifice or struggle.

You, however, are not getting off that easy. You have a different deal. Your class has come of age at a moment of great consequence for our nation and for the world -- a rare inflection point in history where the size and scope of the challenges before us require that we remake our world to renew its promise, that we align our deepest values and commitments to the demands of a new age. It's a privilege and a responsibility afforded to few generations -- and a task that you're now called to fulfill.

This generation, your generation is the one that must find a path back to prosperity and decide how we respond to a global economy that left millions behind even before the most recent crisis hit -- an economy where greed and short-term thinking were too often rewarded at the expense of fairness, and diligence, and an honest day's work.

Your generation -- Your generation must decide how to save God's creation from a changing climate that threatens to destroy it. Your generation must seek peace at a time when there are those who will stop at nothing to do us harm, and when weapons in the hands of a few can destroy the many. And we must find a way to reconcile our ever-shrinking world with its ever-growing diversity -- diversity of thought, diversity of culture, and diversity of belief.

In short, we must find a way to live together as one human family. And -- And it's this last challenge that I'd like to talk about today, despite the fact that Father John stole all my best lines. For the major threats we face in the 21st century -- whether it's global recession or violent extremism, the spread of nuclear weapons or pandemic disease -- these things do not discriminate. They do not recognize borders. They do not see color. They do not target specific ethnic groups. Moreover, no one person, or religion, or nation can meet these challenges alone. Our very survival has never required greater cooperation and greater understanding among all people from all places than at this moment in history.

Unfortunately, finding that common ground -- recognizing that our fates are tied up, as Dr. King said, in a "single garment of destiny" -- is not easy. And part of the problem, of course, lies in the imperfections of man -- our selfishness, our pride, our stubbornness, our acquisitiveness, our insecurities, our egos -- all the cruelties large and small that those of us in the Christian tradition understand to be rooted in original sin. We too often seek advantage over others. We cling to outworn prejudice and fear those who are unfamiliar. Too many of us view life only through the lens of immediate self-interest and crass materialism -- in which the world is necessarily a zero-sum game. The strong too often dominate the weak, and too many of those with wealth and with power find all manner of justification for their own privilege in the face of poverty and injustice.

And so for all our technology and scientific advances, we see here in this country and around the globe violence and want and strife that would seem sadly familiar to those in ancient times. We know these things. And hopefully one of the benefits of the wonderful education that you have received here at Notre Dame is that you've had time to consider these wrongs in the world, perhaps recognized impulses in yourself that you want to leave behind. You've grown determined -- each in your own way -- to right them. And yet one of the vexing things for those of us interested in promoting greater understanding and cooperation among people is the discovery that even bringing together persons of good will, bringing together men and women of principle and purpose -- even accomplishing that can be difficult.

The soldier and the lawyer may both love this country with equal passion, and yet reach very different conclusions on the specific steps needed to protect us from harm. The gay activist and the evangelical pastor may both deplore the ravages of HIV/AIDS, but find themselves unable to bridge the cultural divide that might unite their efforts. Those who speak out against stem cell research may be rooted in an admirable conviction about the sacredness of life, but so are the parents of a child with juvenile diabetes who are convinced that their son's or daughter's hardships might be relieved.

The -- The question, then -- The question, then, is how do we work through these conflicts? Is it possible for us to join hands in common effort? As citizens of a vibrant and varied democracy, how do we engage in vigorous debate? How does each of us remain firm in our principles, and fight for what we consider right, without, as Father John said, demonizing those with just as strongly held convictions on the other side? And of course, nowhere do these questions come up more powerfully than on the issue of abortion.

As I considered the controversy surrounding my visit here, I was reminded of an encounter I had during my Senate campaign, one that I describe in a book I wrote called The Audacity of Hope. In a few days after I won the Democratic nomination, I received an e-mail from a doctor who told me that while he voted for me in the Illinois primary, he had a serious concern that might prevent him from voting for me in the general election. He described himself as a Christian who was strongly pro-life -- but that was not what was preventing him potentially from voting for me.

What bothered the doctor was an entry that my campaign staff had posted on my website -- an entry that said I would fight, quote, "right-wing ideologues who want to take away a woman's right to choose," unquote. The doctor said he had assumed I was a reasonable person. He supported my policy initiatives to help the poor and to lift up our educational system, but that if I truly believed that every pro-life individual was simply an ideologue who wanted to inflict suffering on women, then I was not very reasonable. He wrote, "I do not ask at this point that you oppose abortion, only that you speak about this issue in fair-minded words."

Fair-minded words.

After I read the doctor's letter, I wrote back to him and I thanked him. And I didn't change my underlying position, but I did tell my staff to change the words on my website. And I said a prayer that night that I might extend the same presumption of good faith to others that the doctor had extended to me; because when we do that -- when we open up our hearts and our minds to those who may not think precisely like we do or believe precisely what we believe -- that's when we discover at least the possibility of common ground. That's when we begin to say, "Maybe we won't agree on abortion, but we can still agree that this heart-wrenching decision for any woman is not made casually, and it has both moral and spiritual dimensions.

So let us work together to reduce the number of women seeking abortions. Let's reduce unintended pregnancies. Let's make adoption more available. Let's -- Let's provide care and support for women who do carry their children to term. Let's honor the conscience of those who disagree with abortion, and draft a sensible conscience clause, and make sure that all of our health care policies are grounded not only in sound science, but also in clear ethics, as well as respect for the equality of women. Those are things we can do.

Now, understand -- understand, Class of 2009, I do not suggest that the debate surrounding abortion can or should go away, because no matter how much we may want to fudge it -- indeed, while we know that the views of most Americans on the subject are complex and even contradictory -- the fact is that at some level, the views of the two camps are irreconcilable. Each side will continue to make its case to the public with passion and conviction. But surely we can do so without reducing those with differing views to caricature.

Open hearts. Open minds. Fair-minded words. It's a way of life that has always been the Notre Dame tradition. You know, Father -- Father Hesburgh has long spoken of this institution as both a -- a lighthouse and a crossroads, a lighthouse that stands apart, shining with the wisdom of the Catholic tradition, while the crossroads is where "differences of culture and religion and conviction can co-exist with friendship, civility, hospitality, and especially love." And I want to join him and Father John in saying how inspired I am by the maturity and responsibility with which this class has approached the debate surrounding today's ceremony. You are an example of what Notre Dame is about.

Now, this tradition of cooperation and understanding is one that I learned in my own life many years ago -- also with the help of the Catholic Church. You see, I was not raised in a particularly religious household, but my mother instilled in me a sense of service and empathy that eventually led me to become a community organizer after I graduated college. And a group of Catholic churches in Chicago helped fund an organization known as the "Developing Communities Project," and we worked to lift up South Side neighborhoods that had been devastated when the local steel plant closed.

And it was quite an eclectic crew -- Catholic and Protestant churches, Jewish and African American organizers, working-class black, white, and Hispanic residents -- all of us with different experiences, all of us with different beliefs; but all of us learned to work side by side because all of us saw in these neighborhoods other human beings who needed our help to find jobs and improve schools. We were bound together in the service of others.

And something else happened during the time I spent in these neighborhoods, perhaps because the church folks I worked with were so welcoming and understanding; perhaps because they invited me to their services and sang with me from their hymnals; perhaps because I was really broke and they fed me; perhaps because I witnessed all of the good works their faith inspired them to perform, I found myself drawn not just to the work with the church; I was drawn to be in the church. It was through this service that I was brought to Christ.

And at the time, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin was the Archbishop of Chicago. And for those of you -- for those of you too young to have known him or known of him, he was a kind and good and wise man; a saintly man. I can still remember him speaking at one of the first organizing meetings I attended on the South Side. He stood as both a lighthouse and a crossroads -- unafraid to speak his mind on moral issues ranging from poverty and AIDS and abortion to the death penalty and nuclear war. And yet, he was congenial and gentle in his persuasion, always trying to bring people together, always trying to find common ground. And just before he died, a reporter asked Cardinal Bernardin about this approach to his ministry. And he said, "You can't really get on with preaching the Gospel until you've touched hearts and minds."

My heart and mind were touched by him. They were touched by the words and deeds of the men and women I worked alongside in parishes across Chicago. And I'd like to think that we touched the hearts and minds of the neighborhood families whose lives we helped change. For this, I believe, is our highest calling.

Now, you, Class of 2009, are about to enter the next phase of your life at a time of great uncertainty. You'll be called to help restore a free market that's also fair to all who are willing to work. You'll be called to seek new sources of energy that can save our planet; to give future generations the same chance that you had to receive an extraordinary education. And whether as a person drawn to public service, or simply someone who insists on being an active citizen, you will be exposed to more opinions and ideas broadcast through more means of communication than ever existed before. You'll hear talking heads scream on cable; and you'll read blogs that claim definitive knowledge; and you will watch politicians pretend they know what they're talking about. Occasionally, you may have the great fortune of actually seeing important issues debated by people who do know what they're talking about -- by well-intentioned people with brilliant minds and mastery of the facts. In fact, I suspect that some of you will be among those brightest stars.

And in this world of competing claims about what is right and what is true, have confidence in the values with which you've been raised and educated. Be unafraid to speak your mind when those values are at stake. Hold firm to your faith and allow it to guide you on your journey. In other words, stand as a lighthouse. But remember, too, that you can be a crossroads. Remember, too, that the ultimate irony of faith is that it necessarily admits doubt. It's the belief in things not seen. It's beyond our capacity as human beings to know with certainty what God has planned for us or what He asks of us. And those of us who believe must trust that His wisdom is greater than our own.

And this doubt should not push us away our faith. But it should humble us. It should temper our passions, cause us to be wary of too much self-righteousness. It should compel us to remain open and curious and eager to continue the spiritual and moral debate that began for so many of you within the walls of Notre Dame. And within our vast democracy, this doubt should remind us even as we cling to our faith to persuade through reason, through an appeal, whenever we can, to universal rather than parochial principles, and most of all through an abiding example of good works and charity and kindness and service that moves hearts and minds.

For if there is one law that we can be most certain of, it is the law that binds people of all faiths and no faith together. It's no coincidence that it exists in Christianity and Judaism, in Islam and Hinduism, in Buddhism and humanism. It is, of course, the Golden Rule -- the call to treat one another as we wish to be treated. The call to love. The call to serve. To do what we can to make a difference in the lives of those with whom we share the same brief moment on this Earth. So many of you at Notre Dame -- by the last count, upwards of 80 percent -- have lived this law of love through the service you've performed at schools and hospitals, international relief agencies and local charities. Brennan is just one example of what your class has accomplished. That's incredibly impressive, a powerful testament to this institution.

And now -- now you must carry the tradition forward. Make it a way of life. Because when you serve, it doesn't just improve your community, it makes you a part of your community. It breaks down walls. It fosters cooperation. And when that happens -- when -- when people set aside their differences, even for a moment, to work in common effort toward a common goal; when they struggle together, and sacrifice together, and learn from one another -- then all things are possible.

After all, I stand here today, as President and as an African American, on the 55th anniversary of the day that the Supreme Court handed down the decision in Brown versus Board of Education. Now, Brown was of course the first major step in dismantling the "separate but equal" doctrine. But it would take a number of years and a nationwide movement to fully realize the dream of civil rights for all of God's children. There were freedom rides and lunch counters and Billy clubs, and there was also a Civil Rights Commission appointed by President Eisenhower. It was the 12 resolutions recommended by this commission that would ultimately become law in the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

There were six members of this commission. It included five whites and one African American, Democrats and Republicans, two Southern governors, the dean of a Southern law school, a Midwestern university president, and your own Father Ted Hesburgh, President of Notre Dame. So they worked for two years, and at times President Eisenhower had to intervene personally since no hotel or restaurant in the South would serve the black and white members of the commission together. And finally when they reached an impasse in Louisiana, Father Ted flew them all to Notre Dame's retreat in Land O'Lakes, Wisconsin -- where they eventually -- where they eventually overcame their differences and hammered out a final deal.

And years later, President Eisenhower asked Father Ted how on earth he was able to broker an agreement between men of such different backgrounds and beliefs. And Father Ted simply said that during their first dinner in Wisconsin they discovered they were all fishermen. And so he quickly readied a boat for a twilight trip out on the lake. They fished, and they talked, and they changed the course of history.

I will not pretend that the challenges we face will be easy, or that the answers will come quickly, or that all our differences and divisions will fade happily away -- because life is not that simple. It never has been. But as you leave here today, remember the lessons of Cardinal Bernardin, of Father Hesburgh, of movements for change both large and small. Remember that each of us, endowed with the dignity possessed by all children of God, has the grace to recognize ourselves in one another; to understand that we all seek the same love of family, the same fulfillment of a life well lived. Remember that in the end, in some way we are all fishermen.

If nothing else, that knowledge should give us faith that through our collective labor, and God's providence, and our willingness to shoulder each other's burdens, America will continue on its precious journey towards that more perfect union. Congratulations, Class of 2009.

May God bless you, and may God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Speech on American Values and National Security

Let me just acknowledge the presence of some of my outstanding Cabinet members and advisors. We've got our Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton. We have our CIA Director Leon Panetta. We have our Secretary of Defense William Gates; Secretary Napolitano of Department of Homeland Security; Attorney General Eric Holder; my National Security Advisor Jim Jones. And I want to especially thank our Acting Archivist of the United States, Adrienne Thomas.

I also want to acknowledge several members of the House who have great interest in intelligence matters. I want to thank Congressman Reyes, Congressman Hoekstra, Congressman King, as well as Congressman Thompson, for being here today. Thank you so much.

These are extraordinary times for our country. We're confronting a historic economic crisis. We're fighting two wars. We face a range of challenges that will define the way that Americans will live in the 21st century. So there's no shortage of work to be done, or responsibilities to bear.

And we've begun to make progress. Just this week, we've taken steps to protect American consumers and homeowners, and to reform our system of government contracting so that we better protect our people while spending our money more wisely. The -- it's a good bill. The engines of our economy are slowly beginning to turn, and we're working towards historic reform on health care and on energy. I want to say to the members of Congress, I welcome all the extraordinary work that has been done over these last four months on these and other issues.

In the midst of all these challenges, however, my single most important responsibility as President is to keep the American people safe. It's the first thing that I think about when I wake up in the morning. It's the last thing that I think about when I go to sleep at night.

And this responsibility is only magnified in an era when an extremist ideology threatens our people, and technology gives a handful of terrorists the potential to do us great harm. We are less than eight years removed from the deadliest attack on American soil in our history. We know that al Qaeda is actively planning to attack us again. We know that this threat will be with us for a long time, and that we must use all elements of our power to defeat it.

Already, we've taken several steps to achieve that goal. For the first time since 2002, we're providing the necessary resources and strategic direction to take the fight to the extremists who attacked us on 9/11 in Afghanistan and Pakistan. We're investing in the 21st century military and intelligence capabilities that will allow us to stay one step ahead of a nimble enemy. We have re-energized a global non-proliferation regime to deny the world's most dangerous people access to the world's deadliest weapons. And we've launched an effort to secure all loose nuclear materials within four years. We're better protecting our border, and increasing our preparedness for any future attack or natural disaster. We're building new partnerships around the world to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda and its affiliates. And we have renewed American diplomacy so that we once again have the strength and standing to truly lead the world.

These steps are all critical to keeping America secure. But I believe with every fiber of my being that in the long run we also cannot keep this country safe unless we enlist the power of our most fundamental values. The documents that we hold in this very hall -- the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights -- these are not simply words written into aging parchment. They are the foundation of liberty and justice in this country, and a light that shines for all who seek freedom, fairness, equality, and dignity around the world.

I stand here today as someone whose own life was made possible by these documents. My father came to these shores in search of the promise that they offered. My mother made me rise before dawn to learn their truths when I lived as a child in a foreign land. My own American journey was paved by generations of citizens who gave meaning to those simple words -- "to form a more perfect union." I've studied the Constitution as a student, I've taught it as a teacher, I've been bound by it as a lawyer and a legislator. I took an oath to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution as Commander-in-Chief, and as a citizen, I know that we must never, ever, turn our back on its enduring principles for expedience sake.

I make this claim not simply as a matter of idealism. We uphold our most cherished values not only because doing so is right, but because it strengthens our country and it keeps us safe. Time and again, our values have been our best national security asset -- in war and peace; in times of ease and in eras of upheaval.

Fidelity to our values is the reason why the United States of America grew from a small string of colonies under the writ of an empire to the strongest nation in the world.

It's the reason why enemy soldiers have surrendered to us in battle, knowing they'd receive better treatment from America's Armed Forces than from their own government.

It's the reason why America has benefitted from strong alliances that amplified our power, and drawn a sharp, moral contrast with our adversaries.

It's the reason why we've been able to overpower the iron fist of fascism and outlast the iron curtain of communism, and enlist free nations and free peoples everywhere in the common cause and common effort of liberty.

From Europe to the Pacific, we've been the nation that has shut down torture chambers and replaced tyranny with the rule of law. That is who we are. And where terrorists offer only the injustice of disorder and destruction, America must demonstrate that our values and our institutions are more resilient than a hateful ideology.

After 9/11, we knew that we had entered a new era -- that enemies who did not abide by any law of war would present new challenges to our application of the law; that our government would need new tools to protect the American people, and that these tools would have to allow us to prevent attacks instead of simply prosecuting those who try to carry them out.

Unfortunately, faced with an uncertain threat, our government made a series of hasty decisions. I believe that many of these decisions were motivated by a sincere desire to protect the American people. But I also believe that all too often our government made decisions based on fear rather than foresight; that all too often our government trimmed facts and evidence to fit ideological predispositions. Instead of strategically applying our power and our principles, too often we set those principles aside as luxuries that we could no longer afford. And during this season of fear, too many of us -- Democrats and Republicans, politicians, journalists, and citizens -- fell silent.

In other words, we went off course. And this is not my assessment alone. It was an assessment that was shared by the American people who nominated candidates for President from both major parties who, despite our many differences, called for a new approach -- one that rejected torture and one that recognized the imperative of closing the prison at Guantanamo Bay.

Now let me be clear: We are indeed at war with al Qaeda and its affiliates. We do need to update our institutions to deal with this threat. But we must do so with an abiding confidence in the rule of law and due process; in checks and balances and accountability. For reasons that I will explain, the decisions that were made over the last eight years established an ad hoc legal approach for fighting terrorism that was neither effective nor sustainable -- a framework that failed to rely on our legal traditions and time-tested institutions, and that failed to use our values as a compass. And that's why I took several steps upon taking office to better protect the American people.

First, I banned the use of so-called enhanced interrogation techniques by the United States of America.

I know some have argued that brutal methods like waterboarding were necessary to keep us safe. I could not disagree more. As Commander-in-Chief, I see the intelligence. I bear the responsibility for keeping this country safe. And I categorically reject the assertion that these are the most effective means of interrogation. What's more, they undermine the rule of law. They alienate us in the world. They serve as a recruitment tool for terrorists, and increase the will of our enemies to fight us, while decreasing the will of others to work with America. They risk the lives of our troops by making it less likely that others will surrender to them in battle, and more likely that Americans will be mistreated if they are captured. In short, they did not advance our war and counterterrorism efforts -- they undermined them, and that is why I ended them once and for all.

Now, I should add, the arguments against these techniques did not originate from my administration. As Senator McCain once said, torture "serves as a great propaganda tool for those who recruit people to fight against us." And even under President Bush, there was recognition among members of his own administration -- including a Secretary of State, other senior officials, and many in the military and intelligence community -- that those who argued for these tactics were on the wrong side of the debate, and the wrong side of history. That's why we must leave these methods where they belong -- in the past. They are not who we are, and they are not America.

The second decision that I made was to order the closing of the prison camp at Guantanamo Bay.

For over seven years, we have detained hundreds of people at Guantanamo. During that time, the system of military commissions that were in place at Guantanamo succeeded in convicting a grand total of three suspected terrorists. Let me repeat that: three convictions in over seven years. Instead of bringing terrorists to justice, efforts at prosecution met setback after setback, cases lingered on, and in 2006 the Supreme Court invalidated the entire system. Meanwhile, over 525 detainees were released from Guantanamo under not my administration, under the previous administration. Let me repeat that: Two-thirds of the detainees were released before I took office and ordered the closure of Guantanamo.

There is also no question that Guantanamo set back the moral authority that is America's strongest currency in the world. Instead of building a durable framework for the struggle against al Qaeda that drew upon our deeply held values and traditions, our government was defending positions that undermined the rule of law. In fact, part of the rationale for establishing Guantanamo in the first place was the misplaced notion that a prison there would be beyond the law -- a proposition that the Supreme Court soundly rejected. Meanwhile, instead of serving as a tool to counter terrorism, Guantanamo became a symbol that helped al Qaeda recruit terrorists to its cause. Indeed, the existence of Guantanamo likely created more terrorists around the world than it ever detained.

So the record is clear: Rather than keeping us safer, the prison at Guantanamo has weakened American national security. It is a rallying cry for our enemies. It sets back the willingness of our allies to work with us in fighting an enemy that operates in scores of countries. By any measure, the costs of keeping it open far exceed the complications involved in closing it. That's why I argued that it should be closed throughout my campaign, and that is why I ordered it closed within one year.

The third decision that I made was to order a review of all pending cases at Guantanamo. I knew when I ordered Guantanamo closed that it would be difficult and complex. There are 240 people there who have now spent years in legal limbo. In dealing with this situation, we don't have the luxury of starting from scratch. We're cleaning up something that is, quite simply, a mess -- a misguided experiment that has left in its wake a flood of legal challenges that my administration is forced to deal with on a constant, almost daily basis, and it consumes the time of government officials whose time should be spent on better protecting our country.

Indeed, the legal challenges that have sparked so much debate in recent weeks here in Washington would be taking place whether or not I decided to close Guantanamo. For example, the court order to release 17 Uighurs -- 17 Uighur detainees took place last fall, when George Bush was President. The Supreme Court that invalidated the system of prosecution at Guantanamo in 2006 was overwhelmingly appointed by Republican Presidents -- not wild-eyed liberals. In other words, the problem of what to do with Guantanamo detainees was not caused by my decision to close the facility; the problem exists because of the decision to open Guantanamo in the first place.

Now let me be blunt. There are no neat or easy answers here. I wish there were. But I can tell you that the wrong answer is to pretend like this problem will go away if we maintain an unsustainable status quo. As President, I refuse to allow this problem to fester. I refuse to pass it on to somebody else. It is my responsibility to solve the problem. Our security interests will not permit us to delay. Our courts won't allow it. And neither should our conscience.

Now, over the last several weeks, we've seen a return of the politicization of these issues that have characterized the last several years. I'm an elected official; I understand these problems arouse passions and concerns. They should. We're confronting some of the most complicated questions that a democracy can face. But I have no interest in spending all of our time relitigating the policies of the last eight years. I'll leave that to others. I want to solve these problems, and I want to solve them together as Americans.

And we will be ill-served by some of the fear-mongering that emerges whenever we discuss this issue. Listening to the recent debate, I've heard words that, frankly, are calculated to scare people rather than educate them; words that have more to do with politics than protecting our country. So I want to take this opportunity to lay out what we are doing, and how we intend to resolve these outstanding issues. I will explain how each action that we are taking will help build a framework that protects both the American people and the values that we hold most dear. And I'll focus on two broad areas: first, issues relating to Guantanamo and our detention policy; but, second, I also want to discuss issues relating to security and transparency.

Now, let me begin by disposing of one argument as plainly as I can: We are not going to release anyone if it would endanger our national security, nor will we release detainees within the United States who endanger the American people. Where demanded by justice and national security, we will seek to transfer some detainees to the same type of facilities in which we hold all manner of dangerous and violent criminals within our borders -- namely, highly secure prisons that ensure the public safety.

As we make these decisions, bear in mind the following face: Nobody has ever escaped from one of our federal, supermax prisons, which hold hundreds of convicted terrorists. As Republican Lindsey Graham said, the idea that we cannot find a place to securely house 250-plus detainees within the United States is not rational.

We are currently in the process of reviewing each of the detainee cases at Guantanamo to determine the appropriate policy for dealing with them. And as we do so, we are acutely aware that under the last administration, detainees were released and, in some cases, returned to the battlefield. That's why we are doing away with the poorly planned, haphazard approach that let those detainees go in the past. Instead we are treating these cases with the care and attention that the law requires and that our security demands.

Now, going forward, these cases will fall into five distinct categories.

First, whenever feasible, we will try those who have violated American criminal laws in federal courts -- courts provided for by the United States Constitution. Some have derided our federal courts as incapable of handling the trials of terrorists. They are wrong. Our courts and our juries, our citizens, are tough enough to convict terrorists. The record makes that clear. Ramzi Yousef tried to blow up the World Trade Center. He was convicted in our courts and is serving a life sentence in U.S. prisons. Zacarias Moussaoui has been identified as the 20th 9/11 hijacker. He was convicted in our courts, and he too is serving a life sentence in prison. If we can try those terrorists in our courts and hold them in our prisons, then we can do the same with detainees from Guantanamo.

Recently, we prosecuted and received a guilty plea from a detainee, al-Marri, in federal court after years of legal confusion. We're preparing to transfer another detainee to the Southern District Court of New York, where he will face trial on charges related to the 1998 bombings of our embassies in Kenya and Tanzania -- bombings that killed over 200 people. Preventing this detainee from coming to our shores would prevent his trial and conviction. And after over a decade, it is time to finally see that justice is served, and that is what we intend to do.

The second category of cases involves detainees who violate the laws of war and are therefore best tried through military commissions. Military commissions have a history in the United States dating back to George Washington and the Revolutionary War. They are an appropriate venue for trying detainees for violations of the laws of war. They allow for the protection of sensitive sources and methods of intelligence-gathering; they allow for the safety and security of participants; and for the presentation of evidence gathered from the battlefield that cannot always be effectively presented in federal courts.

Now, some have suggested that this represents a reversal on my part. They should look at the record. In 2006, I did strongly oppose legislation proposed by the Bush administration and passed by the Congress because it failed to establish a legitimate legal framework, with the kind of meaningful due process rights for the accused that could stand up on appeal.

I said at that time, however, that I supported the use of military commissions to try detainees, provided there were several reforms, and in fact there were some bipartisan efforts to achieve those reforms. Those are the reforms that we are now making. Instead of using the flawed commissions of the last seven years, my administration is bringing our commissions in line with the rule of law. We will no longer permit the use of evidence -- as evidence statements that have been obtained using cruel, inhuman, or degrading interrogation methods. We will no longer place the burden to prove that hearsay is unreliable on the opponent of the hearsay. And we will give detainees greater latitude in selecting their own counsel, and more protections if they refuse to testify. These reforms, among others, will make our military commissions a more credible and effective means of administering justice, and I will work with Congress and members of both parties, as well as legal authorities across the political spectrum, on legislation to ensure that these commissions are fair, legitimate, and effective.

The third category of detainees includes those who have been ordered released by the courts. Now, let me repeat what I said earlier: This has nothing to do with my decision to close Guantanamo. It has to do with the rule of law. The courts have spoken. They have found that there's no legitimate reason to hold 21 of the people currently held at Guantanamo. Nineteen of these findings took place before I was sworn into office. I cannot ignore these rulings because as President, I too am bound by the law. The United States is a nation of laws and so we must abide by these rulings.

The fourth category of cases involves detainees who we have determined can be transferred safely to another country. So far, our review team has approved 50 detainees for transfer. And my administration is in ongoing discussions with a number of other countries about the transfer of detainees to their soil for detention and rehabilitation.

Now, finally, there remains the question of detainees at Guantanamo who cannot be prosecuted yet who pose a clear danger to the American people. And I have to be honest here -- this is the toughest single issue that we will face. We're going to exhaust every avenue that we have to prosecute those at Guantanamo who pose a danger to our country. But even when this process is complete, there may be a number of people who cannot be prosecuted for past crimes, in some cases because evidence may be tainted, but who nonetheless pose a threat to the security of the United States. Examples of that threat include people who've received extensive explosives training at al Qaeda training camps, or commanded Taliban troops in battle, or expressed their allegiance to Osama bin Laden, or otherwise made it clear that they want to kill Americans. These are people who, in effect, remain at war with the United States.

Let me repeat: I am not going to release individuals who endanger the American people. Al Qaeda terrorists and their affiliates are at war with the United States, and those that we capture -- like other prisoners of war -- must be prevented from attacking us again. Having said that, we must recognize that these detention policies cannot be unbounded. They can't be based simply on what I or the executive branch decide alone. That's why my administration has begun to reshape the standards that apply to ensure that they are in line with the rule of law. We must have clear, defensible, and lawful standards for those who fall into this category. We must have fair procedures so that we don't make mistakes. We must have a thorough process of periodic review, so that any prolonged detention is carefully evaluated and justified.

I know that creating such a system poses unique challenges. And other countries have grappled with this question; now, so must we. But I want to be very clear that our goal is to construct a legitimate legal framework for the remaining Guantanamo detainees that cannot be transferred. Our goal is not to avoid a legitimate legal framework. In our constitutional system, prolonged detention should not be the decision of any one man. If and when we determine that the United States must hold individuals to keep them from carrying out an act of war, we will do so within a system that involves judicial and congressional oversight. And so, going forward, my administration will work with Congress to develop an appropriate legal regime so that our efforts are consistent with our values and our Constitution.

Now, as our efforts to close Guantanamo move forward, I know that the politics in Congress will be difficult. These are issues that are fodder for 30-second commercials. You can almost picture the direct mail pieces that emerge from any vote on this issue -- designed to frighten the population. I get it. But if we continue to make decisions within a climate of fear, we will make more mistakes. And if we refuse to deal with these issues today, then I guarantee you that they will be an albatross around our efforts to combat terrorism in the future.

I have confidence that the American people are more interested in doing what is right to protect this country than in political posturing. I am not the only person in this city who swore an oath to uphold the Constitution -- so did each and every member of Congress. And together we have a responsibility to enlist our values in the effort to secure our people, and to leave behind the legacy that makes it easier for future Presidents to keep this country safe.

Now, let me touch on a second set of issues that relate to security and transparency.

National security requires a delicate balance. One the one hand, our democracy depends on transparency. On the other hand, some information must be protected from public disclosure for the sake of our security -- for instance, the movement of our troops, our intelligence-gathering, or the information we have about a terrorist organization and its affiliates. In these and other cases, lives are at stake.

Now, several weeks ago, as part of an ongoing court case, I released memos issued by the previous administration's Office of Legal Counsel. I did not do this because I disagreed with the enhanced interrogation techniques that those memos authorized, and I didn't release the documents because I rejected their legal rationales -- although I do on both counts. I released the memos because the existence of that approach to interrogation was already widely known, the Bush administration had acknowledged its existence, and I had already banned those methods. The argument that somehow by releasing those memos we are providing terrorists with information about how they will be interrogated makes no sense. We will not be interrogating terrorists using that approach. That approach is now prohibited.

In short, I released these memos because there was no overriding reason to protect them. And the ensuing debate has helped the American people better understand how these interrogation methods came to be authorized and used.

On the other hand, I recently opposed the release of certain photographs that were taken of detainees by U.S. personnel between 2002 and 2004. Individuals who violated standards of behavior in these photos have been investigated and they have been held accountable. There was and is no debate as to whether what is reflected in those photos is wrong. Nothing has been concealed to absolve perpetrators of crimes. However, it was my judgment -- informed by my national security team -- that releasing these photos would inflame anti-American opinion and allow our enemies to paint U.S. troops with a broad, damning, and inaccurate brush, thereby endangering them in theaters of war.

In short, there is a clear and compelling reason to not release these particular photos. There are nearly 200,000 Americans who are serving in harm's way, and I have a solemn responsibility for their safety as Commander-in-Chief. Nothing would be gained by the release of these photos that matters more than the lives of our young men and women serving in harm's way.

Now, in the press's mind and in some of the public's mind, these two cases are contradictory. They are not to me. In each of these cases, I had to strike the right balance between transparency and national security. And this balance brings with it a precious responsibility. There's no doubt that the American people have seen this balance tested over the last several years. In the images from Abu Ghraib and the brutal interrogation techniques made public long before I was President, the American people learned of actions taken in their name that bear no resemblance to the ideals that generations of Americans have fought for. And whether it was the run-up to the Iraq war or the revelation of secret programs, Americans often felt like part of the story had been unnecessarily withheld from them. And that caused suspicion to build up. And that leads to a thirst for accountability.

I understand that. I ran for President promising transparency, and I meant what I said. And that's why, whenever possible, my administration will make all information available to the American people so that they can make informed judgments and hold us accountable. But I have never argued -- and I never will -- that our most sensitive national security matters should simply be an open book. I will never abandon -- and will vigorously defend -- the necessity of classification to defend our troops at war, to protect sources and methods, and to safeguard confidential actions that keep the American people safe. Here's the difference though: Whenever we cannot release certain information to the public for valid national security reasons, I will insist that there is oversight of my actions -- by Congress or by the courts.

We're currently launching a review of current policies by all those agencies responsible for the classification of documents to determine where reforms are possible, and to assure that the other branches of government will be in a position to review executive branch decisions on these matters. Because in our system of checks and balances, someone must always watch over the watchers -- especially when it comes to sensitive administration -- information.

Now, along these same lines, my administration is also confronting challenges to what is known as the "state secrets" privilege. This is a doctrine that allows the government to challenge legal cases involving secret programs. It's been used by many past Presidents -- Republican and Democrat -- for many decades. And while this principle is absolutely necessary in some circumstances to protect national security, I am concerned that it has been over-used. It is also currently the subject of a wide range of lawsuits. So let me lay out some principles here. We must not protect information merely because it reveals the violation of a law or embarrassment to the government. And that's why my administration is nearing completion of a thorough review of this practice.

And we plan to embrace several principles for reform. We will apply a stricter legal test to material that can be protected under the state secrets privilege. We will not assert the privilege in court without first following our own formal process, including review by a Justice Department committee and the personal approval of the Attorney General. And each year we will voluntarily report to Congress when we have invoked the privilege and why because, as I said before, there must be proper oversight over our actions.

On all these matters related to the disclosure of sensitive information, I wish I could say that there was some simple formula out there to be had. There is not. These often involve tough calls, involve competing concerns, and they require a surgical approach. But the common thread that runs through all of my decisions is simple: We will safeguard what we must to protect the American people, but we will also ensure the accountability and oversight that is the hallmark of our constitutional system. I will never hide the truth because it's uncomfortable. I will deal with Congress and the courts as co-equal branches of government. I will tell the American people what I know and don't know, and when I release something publicly or keep something secret, I will tell you why.

Now, in all the areas that I've discussed today, the policies that I've proposed represent a new direction from the last eight years. To protect the American people and our values, we've banned enhanced interrogation techniques. We are closing the prison at Guantanamo. We are reforming military commissions, and we will pursue a new legal regime to detain terrorists. We are declassifying more information and embracing more oversight of our actions, and we're narrowing our use of the state secrets privilege. These are dramatic changes that will put our approach to national security on a surer, safer, and more sustainable footing. Their implementation will take time, but they will get done.

There's a core principle that we will apply to all of our actions. Even as we clean up the mess at Guantanamo, we will constantly reevaluate our approach, subject our decisions to review from other branches of government, as well as the public. We seek the strongest and most sustainable legal framework for addressing these issues in the long term -- not to serve immediate politics, but to do what's right over the long term. By doing that we can leave behind a legacy that outlasts my administration, my presidency, that endures for the next President and the President after that -- a legacy that protects the American people and enjoys a broad legitimacy at home and abroad.

Now, this is what I mean when I say that we need to focus on the future. I recognize that many still have a strong desire to focus on the past. When it comes to actions of the last eight years, passions are high. Some Americans are angry; others want to re-fight debates that have been settled, in some cases debates that they have lost. I know that these debates lead directly, in some cases, to a call for a fuller accounting, perhaps through an independent commission.

I've opposed the creation of such a commission because I believe that our existing democratic institutions are strong enough to deliver accountability. The Congress can review abuses of our values, and there are ongoing inquiries by the Congress into matters like enhanced interrogation techniques. The Department of Justice and our courts can work through and punish any violations of our laws or miscarriages of justice.

It's no secret there is a tendency in Washington to spend our time pointing fingers at one another. And it's no secret that our media culture feeds the impulse that lead to a good fight and good copy. But nothing will contribute more than that than a extended relitigation of the last eight years. Already, we've seen how that kind of effort only leads those in Washington to different sides to laying blame. It can distract us from focusing our time, our efforts, and our politics on the challenges of the future.

We see that, above all, in the recent debate -- how the recent debate has obscured the truth and sends people into opposite and absolutist ends. On the one side of the spectrum, there are those who make little allowance for the unique challenges posed by terrorism, and would almost never put national security over transparency. And on the other end of the spectrum, there are those who embrace a view that can be summarized in two words: "Anything goes." Their arguments suggest that the ends of fighting terrorism can be used to justify any means, and that the President should have blanket authority to do whatever he wants -- provided it is a President with whom they agree.

Both sides may be sincere in their views, but neither side is right. The American people are not absolutist, and they don't elect us to impose a rigid ideology on our problems. They know that we need not sacrifice our security for our values, nor sacrifice our values for our security, so long as we approach difficult questions with honesty and care and a dose of common sense. That, after all, is the unique genius of America. That's the challenge laid down by our Constitution. That has been the source of our strength through the ages. That's what makes the United States of America different as a nation.

I can stand here today, as President of the United States, and say without exception or equivocation that we do not torture, and that we will vigorously protect our people while forging a strong and durable framework that allows us to fight terrorism while abiding by the rule of law. Make no mistake: If we fail to turn the page on the approach that was taken over the past several years, then I will not be able to say that as President. And if we cannot stand for our core values, then we are not keeping faith with the documents that are enshrined in this hall.

The Framers who drafted the Constitution could not have foreseen the challenges that have unfolded over the last 222 years. But our Constitution has endured through secession and civil rights, through World War and Cold War, because it provides a foundation of principles that can be applied pragmatically; it provides a compass that can help us find our way. It hasn't always been easy. We are an imperfect people. Every now and then, there are those who think that America's safety and success requires us to walk away from the sacred principles enshrined in this building. And we hear such voices today. But over the long haul the American people have resisted that temptation. And though we've made our share of mistakes, required some course corrections, ultimately we have held fast to the principles that have been the source of our strength and a beacon to the world.

Now this generation faces a great test in the specter of terrorism. And unlike the Civil War or World War II, we can't count on a surrender ceremony to bring this journey to an end. Right now, in distant training camps and in crowded cities, there are people plotting to take American lives. That will be the case a year from now, five years from now, and -- in all probability -- 10 years from now. Neither I nor anyone can stand here today and say that there will not be another terrorist attack that takes American lives. But I can say with certainty that my administration -- along with our extraordinary troops and the patriotic men and women who defend our national security -- will do everything in our power to keep the American people safe. And I do know with certainty that we can defeat al Qaeda. Because the terrorists can only succeed if they swell their ranks and alienate America from our allies, and they will never be able to do that if we stay true to who we are, if we forge tough and durable approaches to fighting terrorism that are anchored in our timeless ideals. This must be our common purpose.

I ran for President because I believe that we cannot solve the challenges of our time unless we solve them together. We will not be safe if we see national security as a wedge that divides America -- it can and must be a cause that unites us as one people and as one nation. We've done so before in times that were more perilous than ours. We will do so once again.

Thank you, God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Securing U.S. Cyber Infrastructure

We meet today at a transformational moment -- a moment in history when our interconnected world presents us, at once, with great promise but also great peril.

Now, over the past four months my Administration has taken decisive steps to seize the promise and confront these perils. We're working to recover from a global recession while laying a new foundation for lasting prosperity. We're strengthening our armed forces as they fight two wars, at the same time we're renewing American leadership to confront unconventional challenges, from nuclear proliferation to terrorism, from climate change to pandemic disease. And we're bringing to government -- and to this White House -- unprecedented transparency and accountability and new ways for Americans to participate in their democracy.

But none of this progress would be possible, and none of these 21st century challenges can be fully met, without America's digital infrastructure -- the backbone that underpins a prosperous economy and a strong military and an open and efficient government. Without that foundation we can't get the job done.

It's long been said that the revolutions in communications and information technology have given birth to a virtual world. But make no mistake: This world -- cyberspace -- is a world that we depend on every single day. It's our hardware and our software, our desktops and laptops and cell phones and Blackberries that have become woven into every aspect of our lives.

It's the broadband networks beneath us and the wireless signals around us, the local networks in our schools and hospitals and businesses, and the massive grids that power our nation. It's the classified military and intelligence networks that keep us safe, and the World Wide Web that has made us more interconnected than at any time in human history.

So cyberspace is real. And so are the risks that come with it.

It's the great irony of our Information Age -- the very technologies that empower us to create and to build also empower those who would disrupt and destroy. And this paradox -- seen and unseen -- is something that we experience every day.

It's about the privacy and the economic security of American families. We rely on the Internet to pay our bills, to bank, to shop, to file our taxes. But we've had to learn a whole new vocabulary just to stay ahead of the cyber criminals who would do us harm: spyware and malware and spoofing and phishing and botnets. Millions of Americans have been victimized, their privacy violated, their identities stolen, their lives upended, and their wallets emptied. According to one survey, in the past two years alone cyber crime has cost Americans more than 8 billion dollars.

I know how it feels to have privacy violated because it has happened to me and the people around me. It's no secret that my presidential campaign harnessed the Internet and technology to transform our politics. What isn't widely known is that during the general election hackers managed to penetrate our computer systems. To all of you who donated to our campaign, I want you to all rest assured, our fundraising website was untouched. So your confidential personal and financial information was protected.

But between August and October, hackers gained access to emails and a range of campaign files, from policy position papers to travel plans. And we worked closely with the CIA, with the FBI and the Secret Service, and hired security consultants to restore the security of our systems. It was a powerful reminder: In this Information Age, one of your greatest strengths -- in our case, our ability to communicate to a wide range of supporters through the Internet -- could also be one of your greatest vulnerabilities.

This is a matter, as well, of America's economic competitiveness. The small businesswoman in St. Louis, the bond trader in the New York Stock Exchange, the workers at a global shipping company in Memphis, the young entrepreneur in Silicon Valley -- they all need the networks to make the next payroll, the next trade, the next delivery, the next great breakthrough. E-commerce alone last year accounted for some 132 billion dollars in retail sales.

But every day we see waves of cyber thieves trolling for sensitive information -- the disgruntled employee on the inside, the lone hacker a thousand miles away, organized crime, the industrial spy and, increasingly, foreign intelligence services. In one brazen act last year, thieves used stolen credit card information to steal millions of dollars from 130 ATM machines in 49 cities around the world -- and they did it in just 30 minutes.

A single employee of an American company was convicted of stealing intellectual property reportedly worth 400 million dollars. It's been estimated that last year alone cyber criminals stole intellectual property from businesses worldwide worth up to 1 trillion dollars.

In short, America's economic prosperity in the 21st century will depend on cybersecurity.

And this is also a matter of public safety and national security. We count on computer networks to deliver our oil and gas, our power and our water. We rely on them for public transportation and air traffic control. Yet we know that cyber intruders have probed our electrical grid and that in other countries cyber attacks have plunged entire cities into darkness.

Our technological advantage is a key to America's military dominance. But our defense and military networks are under constant attack. Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups have spoken of their desire to unleash a cyber attack on our country -- attacks that are harder to detect and harder to defend against. Indeed, in today's world, acts of terror could come not only from a few extremists in suicide vests but from a few key strokes on the computer -- a weapon of mass disruption.

In one of the most serious cyber incidents to date against our military networks, several thousand computers were infected last year by malicious software -- malware. And while no sensitive information was compromised, our troops and defense personnel had to give up those external memory devices -- thumb drives -- changing the way they used their computers every day.

And last year we had a glimpse of the future face of war. As Russian tanks rolled into Georgia, cyber attacks crippled Georgian government websites. The terrorists that sowed so much death and destruction in Mumbai relied not only on guns and grenades but also on GPS and phones using voice-over-the-Internet.

For all these reasons, it's now clear this cyber threat is one of the most serious economic and national security challenges we face as a nation.

It's also clear that we're not as prepared as we should be, as a government or as a country. In recent years, some progress has been made at the federal level. But just as we failed in the past to invest in our physical infrastructure -- our roads, our bridges and rails -- we've failed to invest in the security of our digital infrastructure.

No single official oversees cybersecurity policy across the federal government, and no single agency has the responsibility or authority to match the scope and scale of the challenge. Indeed, when it comes to cybersecurity, federal agencies have overlapping missions and don't coordinate and communicate nearly as well as they should -- with each other or with the private sector. We saw this in the disorganized response to Conficker, the Internet worm that in recent months has infected millions of computers around the world.

This status quo is no longer acceptable -- not when there's so much at stake. We can and we must do better.

And that's why shortly after taking office I directed my National Security Council and Homeland Security Council to conduct a top-to-bottom review of the federal government's efforts to defend our information and communications infrastructure and to recommend the best way to ensure that these networks are able to secure our networks as well as our prosperity.

Our review was open and transparent. I want to acknowledge, Melissa Hathaway -- who is here -- who is the Acting Senior Director for Cyberspace on our National Security Council, who led the review team, as well as the Center for Strategic and International Studies bipartisan Commission on Cybersecurity, and all who were part of our 60-day review team. They listened to a wide variety of groups, many of which are represented here today and I want to thank for their input: industry and academia, civil liberties and private -- privacy advocates. We listened to every level and branch of government -- from local to state to federal, civilian, military, homeland as well as intelligence, Congress and international partners, as well. I consulted with my national security teams, my homeland security teams, and my economic advisors.

Today I'm releasing a report on our review, and can announce that my Administration will pursue a new comprehensive approach to securing America's digital infrastructure.

This new approach starts at the top, with this commitment from me: From now on, our digital infrastructure -- the networks and computers we depend on every day -- will be treated as they should be: as a strategic national asset. Protecting this infrastructure will be a national security priority. We will ensure that these networks are secure, trustworthy and resilient. We will deter, prevent, detect, and defend against attacks and recover quickly from any disruptions or damage.

To give these efforts the high-level focus and attention they deserve -- and as part of the new, single National Security Staff announced this week -- I'm creating a new office here at the White House that will be led by the Cybersecurity Coordinator. Because of the critical importance of this work, I will personally select this official. I'll depend on this official in all matters relating to cybersecurity, and this official will have my full support and regular access to me as we confront these challenges.

Today, I want to focus on the important responsibilities this office will fulfill: orchestrating and integrating all cybersecurity policies for the government; working closely with the Office of Management and Budget to ensure agency budgets reflect those priorities; and, in the event of major cyber incident or attack, coordinating our response.

To ensure that federal cyber policies enhance our security and our prosperity, my Cybersecurity Coordinator will be a member of the National Security Staff as well as the staff of my National Economic Council. To ensure that policies keep faith with our fundamental values, this office will also include an official with a portfolio specifically dedicated to safeguarding the privacy and civil liberties of the American people.

There's much work to be done, and the report we're releasing today outlines a range of actions that we will pursue in five key areas.

First, working in partnership with the communities represented here today, we will develop a new comprehensive strategy to secure America's information and communications networks. To ensure a coordinated approach across government, my Cybersecurity Coordinator will work closely with my Chief Technology Officer, Aneesh Chopra, and my Chief Information Officer, Vivek Kundra. To ensure accountability in federal agencies, cybersecurity will be designated as one of my key management priorities. Clear milestones and performances metrics will measure progress. And as we develop our strategy, we will be open and transparent, which is why you'll find today's report and a wealth of related information on our Web site, www.whitehouse.gov.

Second, we will work with all the key players -- including state and local governments and the private sector -- to ensure an organized and unified response to future cyber incidents. Given the enormous damage that can be caused by even a single cyber attack, ad hoc responses will not do. Nor is it sufficient to simply strengthen our defenses after incidents or attacks occur. Just as we do for natural disasters, we have to have plans and resources in place beforehand -- sharing information, issuing warnings and ensuring a coordinated response.

Third, we will strengthen the public/private partnerships that are critical to this endeavor. The vast majority of our critical information infrastructure in the United States is owned and operated by the private sector. So let me be very clear: My Administration will not dictate security standards for private companies. On the contrary, we will collaborate with industry to find technology solutions that ensure our security and promote prosperity.

Fourth, we will continue to invest in the cutting-edge research and development necessary for the innovation and discovery we need to meet the digital challenges of our time. And that's why my Administration is making major investments in our information infrastructure: laying broadband lines to every corner of America; building a smart electric grid to deliver energy more efficiently; pursuing a next generation of air traffic control systems; and moving to electronic health records, with privacy protections, to reduce costs and save lives.

And finally, we will begin a national campaign to promote cybersecurity awareness and digital literacy from our boardrooms to our classrooms, and to build a digital workforce for the 21st century. And that's why we're making a new commitment to education in math and science, and historic investments in science and research and development. Because it's not enough for our children and students to master today's technologies -- social networking and e-mailing and texting and blogging -- we need them to pioneer the technologies that will allow us to work effectively through these new media and allow us to prosper in the future. So these are the things we will do.

Let me also be clear about what we will not do. Our pursuit of cybersecurity will not -- I repeat, will not include -- monitoring private sector networks or Internet traffic.

We will preserve and protect the personal privacy and civil liberties that we cherish as Americans. Indeed, I remain firmly committed to net neutrality so we can keep the Internet as it should be -- open and free.

The task I have described will not be easy. Some 1.5 billion people around the world are already online, and more are logging on every day. Groups and governments are sharpening their cyber capabilities. Protecting our prosperity and security in this globalized world is going to be a long, difficult struggle demanding patience and persistence over many years.

But we need to remember: We're only at the beginning. The epochs of history are long -- the Agricultural Revolution; the Industrial Revolution. By comparison, our Information Age is still in its infancy. We're only at Web 2.0. Now our virtual world is going viral. And we've only just begun to explore the next generation of technologies that will transform our lives in ways we can't even begin to imagine.

So a new world awaits -- a world of greater security and greater potential prosperity -- if we reach for it, if we lead. So long as I'm President of the United States, we will do just that. And the United States -- the nation that invented the Internet, that launched an information revolution, that transformed the world -- will do what we did in the 20th century and lead once more in the 21st.

Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you.

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# A New Beginning: Speech at Cairo University

Thank you so much. Good afternoon. I am honored to be in the timeless city of Cairo, and to be hosted by two remarkable institutions. For over a thousand years, Al-Azhar has stood as a beacon of Islamic learning; and for over a century, Cairo University has been a source of Egypt's advancement. And together, you represent the harmony between tradition and progress. I'm grateful for your hospitality and the hospitality of the people of Egypt. And I'm also proud to carry with me the goodwill of the American people, and a greeting of peace from Muslim communities in my country: As-salāmu ʿalaykum [Peace be upon you].

We meet at a time of great tension between the United States and Muslims around the world, tension rooted in historical forces that go beyond any current policy debate. The relationship between Islam and the West includes centuries of coexistence and cooperation, but also conflict and religious wars. More recently, tension has been fed by colonialism that denied rights and opportunities to many Muslims, and a Cold War in which Muslim-majority countries were too often treated as proxies without regard to their own aspirations. Moreover, the sweeping change brought by modernity and globalization led many Muslims to view the West as hostile to the traditions of Islam.

Violent extremists have exploited these tensions in a small but potent minority of Muslims. The attacks of September 11, 2001 and the continued efforts of these extremists to engage in violence against civilians has led some in my country to view Islam as inevitably hostile not only to America and Western countries, but also to human rights. All this has bred more fear and more mistrust.

So long as our relationship is defined by our differences, we will empower those who sow hatred rather than peace, those who promote conflict rather than the cooperation that can help all of our people achieve justice and prosperity. And this cycle of suspicion and discord must end.

I've come here to Cairo to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world, one based on mutual interest and mutual respect, and one based upon the truth that America and Islam are not exclusive and need not be in competition. Instead, they overlap and share common principles -- principles of justice and progress, tolerance and the dignity of all human beings.

I do so recognizing that change cannot happen overnight. I know there's been a lot of publicity about this speech, but no single speech can eradicate years of mistrust, nor can I answer in the time that I have this afternoon all the complex questions that brought us to this point. But I am convinced that in order to move forward, we must say openly to each other the things we hold in our hearts and that too often are said only behind closed doors. There must be a sustained effort to listen to each other, to learn from each other, to respect one another, and to seek common ground. As the Holy Qur’an tells us, "Be conscious of God and speak always the truth." That is what I will try to do today -- to speak the truth as best I can, humbled by the task before us, and firm in my belief that the interests we share as human beings are far more powerful than the forces that drive us apart.

Now part of this conviction is rooted in my own experience. I'm a Christian, but my father came from a Kenyan family that includes generations of Muslims. As a boy, I spent several years in Indonesia and heard the call of the azaan at the break of dawn and at the fall of dusk. As a young man, I worked in Chicago communities where many found dignity and peace in their Muslim faith.

As a student of history, I also know civilization's debt to Islam. It was Islam -- at places like Al-Azhar -- that carried the light of learning through so many centuries, paving the way for Europe's Renaissance and Enlightenment. It was innovation in Muslim communities -- It was innovation in Muslim communities that developed the order of algebra, our magnetic compass and tools of navigation, our mastery of pens and printing, our understanding of how disease spreads and how it can be healed. Islamic culture has given us majestic arches and soaring spires; timeless poetry and cherished music; elegant calligraphy and places of peaceful contemplation. And throughout history, Islam has demonstrated through words and deeds the possibilities of religious tolerance and racial equality.

I also know that Islam has always been a part of America's story. The first nation to recognize my country was Morocco. In signing the Treaty of Tripoli in 1796, our second President, John Adams, wrote, "The United States has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion, or tranquility of Muslims." And since our founding, American Muslims have enriched the United States. They have fought in our wars; they have served in our government; they have stood for civil rights; they have started businesses; they have taught at our universities; they've excelled in our sports arenas; they've won Nobel Prizes, built our tallest building, and lit the Olympic Torch. And when the first Muslim American was recently elected to Congress, he took the oath to defend our Constitution using the same Holy Qur’an that one of our Founding Fathers -- Thomas Jefferson -- kept in his personal library.

So I have known Islam on three continents before coming to the region where it was first revealed. That experience guides my conviction that partnership between America and Islam must be based on what Islam is, not what it isn't. And I consider it part of my responsibility as President of the United States to fight against negative stereotypes of Islam wherever they appear.

But, that same principle must apply to Muslim perceptions of America. Just as Muslims -- Just as Muslims do not fit a crude stereotype, America is not the crude stereotype of a self-interested empire. The United States has been one of the greatest sources of progress that the world has ever known. We were born out of revolution against an empire. We were founded upon the ideal that all are created equal. And we have shed blood and struggled for centuries to give meaning to those words -- within our borders and around the world. We are shaped by every culture, drawn from every end of the Earth, and dedicated to a simple concept: E pluribus unum -- "Out of many, one."

Now much has been made of the fact that an African American with the name Barack Hussein Obama could be elected President. But my personal story is not so unique. The dream of opportunity for all people has not come true for everyone in America, but its promise exists for all who come to our shores -- and that includes nearly 7 million American Muslims in our country today who, by the way, enjoy incomes and educational levels that are higher than the American average.

Moreover, freedom in America is indivisible from the freedom to practice one's religion. That is why there is a mosque in every state in our union, and over 1200 mosques within our borders. That's why the United States government has gone to court to protect the right of women and girls to wear the hijab -- and to punish those who would deny it.

So let there be no doubt -- let there be no doubt: Islam is a part of America. And I believe that America holds within her the truth that regardless of race, religion, or station in life, all of us share common aspirations -- to live in peace and security; to get an education and to work with dignity; to love our families, our communities, and our God. These things we share. This is the hope of all humanity.

Of course, recognizing our common humanity is only the beginning of our task. Words alone cannot meet the needs of our people. These needs will be met only if we act boldly in the years ahead, and if we understand that the challenges we face are shared and our failure to meet them will hurt us all.

For we have learned from recent experience that when a financial system weakens in one country, prosperity is hurt everywhere. When a new flu infects one human being, all are at risk. When one nation pursues a nuclear weapon, the risk of nuclear attack rises for all nations. When violent extremists operate in one stretch of mountains, people are endangered across an ocean. When innocents in Bosnia and Darfur are slaughtered, that is a stain on our collective conscience. That is what it means to share this world in the 21st century. That is the responsibility we have to one another as human beings.

And this is a difficult responsibility to embrace. For human history has often been a record of nations and tribes -- and, yes, religions -- subjugating one another in pursuit of their own interests. Yet in this new age, such attitudes are self-defeating. Given our interdependence, any world order that elevates one nation or group of people over another will inevitably fail. So whatever we think of the past, we must not be prisoners to it. Our problems must be dealt with through partnership; our progress must be shared. Now, that does not mean we should ignore sources of tension. Indeed, it suggests the opposite: We must face these tensions squarely. And so in that spirit, let me speak as clearly and as plainly as I can about some specific issues that I believe we must finally confront together.

The first issue that we have to confront is violent extremism in all of its forms.

In Ankara, I made clear that America is not -- and never will be -- at war with Islam. We will, however, relentlessly confront violent extremists who pose a grave threat to our security -- because we reject the same thing that people of all faiths reject: the killing of innocent men, women, and children. And it is my first duty as President to protect the American people.

The situation in Afghanistan demonstrates America's goals, and our need to work together. Over seven years ago, the United States pursued al Qaeda and the Taliban with broad international support. We did not go by choice; we went because of necessity. I'm aware that there's still some who would question or even justify the events of 9/11. But let us be clear: Al Qaeda killed nearly 3,000 people on that day. The victims were innocent men, women, and children from America and many other nations who had done nothing to harm anybody. And yet al Qaeda chose to ruthlessly murder these people, claimed credit for the attack, and even now states their determination to kill on a massive scale. They have affiliates in many countries and are trying to expand their reach. These are not opinions to be debated; these are facts to be dealt with.

Now, make no mistake: We do not want to keep our troops in Afghanistan. We see no military -- We seek no military bases there. It is agonizing for America to lose our young men and women. It is costly and politically difficult to continue this conflict. We would gladly bring every single one of our troops home if we could be confident that there were not violent extremists in Afghanistan and now Pakistan determined to kill as many Americans as they possibly can. But that is not yet the case.

And that's why we're partnering with a coalition of 46 countries. And despite the costs involved, America's commitment will not weaken. Indeed, none of us should tolerate these extremists. They have killed in many countries. They have killed people of different faiths. But more than any other, they have killed Muslims. Their actions are irreconcilable with the rights of human beings, the progress of nations, and with Islam. The Qur’an teaches that whoever kills an innocent is as -- it is as if he has killed all mankind. And the Holy Qur’an also says whoever -- whoever saves a person, it is as if he has saved all mankind. The enduring faith of over a billion people is so much bigger than the narrow hatred of a few. Islam is not part of the problem in combating violent extremism -- it is an important part of promoting peace.

Now, we also know that military power alone is not going to solve the problems in Afghanistan and Pakistan. That's why we plan to invest 1.5 billion dollars each year over the next five years to partner with Pakistanis to build schools and hospitals, roads and businesses, and hundreds of millions to help those who've been displaced. That's why we are providing more than 2.8 billion dollars to help Afghans develop their economy and deliver services that people depend on.

Let me also address the issue of Iraq. Unlike Afghanistan, Iraq was a war of choice that provoked strong differences in my country and around the world. Although I believe that the Iraqi people are ultimately better off without the tyranny of Saddam Hussein, I also believe that events in Iraq have reminded America of the need to use diplomacy and build international consensus to resolve our problems whenever possible. Indeed, we can recall the words of Thomas Jefferson, who said: "I hope that our wisdom will grow with our power, and teach us that the less we use our power the greater it will be."

Today, America has a dual responsibility: to help Iraq forge a better future; and to leave Iraq to Iraqis. And I have made it clear to the Iraqi people -- I have made it clear to the Iraqi people that we pursue no bases, and no claim on their territory or resources. Iraq's sovereignty is its own. And that's why I ordered the removal of our combat brigades by next August. That is why we will honor our agreement with Iraq's democratically elected government to remove combat troops from Iraqi cities by July, and to remove all of our troops from Iraq by 2012. We will help Iraq train its security forces and develop its economy. But we will support a secure and united Iraq as a partner, and never as a patron.

And finally, just as America can never tolerate violence by extremists, we must never alter or forget our principles. Nine-eleven was an enormous trauma to our country. The fear and anger that it provoked was understandable, but in some cases it led us to act contrary to our traditions and our ideals. We are taking concrete actions to change course. I have unequivocally prohibited the use of torture by the United States, and I have ordered the prison at Guantanamo Bay closed by early next year. So America will defend itself, respectful of the sovereignty of nations and the rule of law. And we will do so in partnership with Muslim communities which are also threatened. The sooner the extremists are isolated and unwelcome in Muslim communities, the sooner we will all be safer.

The second major source of tension that we need to discuss is the situation between Israelis, Palestinians, and the Arab world.

America's strong bonds with Israel are well known. This bond is unbreakable. It is based upon cultural and historical ties, and the recognition that the aspiration for a Jewish homeland is rooted in a tragic history that cannot be denied.

Around the world, the Jewish people were persecuted for centuries, and anti-Semitism in Europe culminated in an unprecedented Holocaust. Tomorrow, I will visit Buchenwald, which was part of a network of camps where Jews were enslaved, tortured, shot, and gassed to death by the Third Reich. Six million Jews were killed -- more than the entire Jewish population of Israel today. Denying that fact is baseless; it is ignorant; and it is hateful. Threatening Israel with destruction, or repeating vile stereotypes about Jews, is deeply wrong and only serves to evoke in the minds of Israelis this most painful of memories while preventing the peace that the people of this region deserve.

On the other hand, it is also undeniable that the Palestinian people -- Muslims and Christians -- has suffered in pursuit of a homeland. For more than 60 years they've endured the pain of dislocation. Many wait in refugee camps in the West Bank, Gaza, and neighboring lands for a life of peace and security that they have never been able to lead. They endure the daily humiliations -- large and small -- that come with occupation. So let there be no doubt: The situation for the Palestinian people is intolerable. And America will not turn our backs on the legitimate Palestinian aspiration for dignity, opportunity, and a state of their own.

For decades then, there has been a stalemate: two peoples with legitimate aspirations, each with a painful history that makes compromise elusive. It's easy to point fingers -- for Palestinians to point to the displacement brought about by Israel's founding, and for Israelis to point to the constant hostility and attacks throughout its history from within its borders as well as beyond. But if we see this conflict only from one side or the other, then we will be blind to the truth: The only resolution is for the aspirations of both sides to be met through two states, where Israelis and Palestinians each live in peace and security.

That is in Israel's interest, Palestine's interest, America's interest, and the world's interest. And that is why I intend to personally pursue this outcome with all the patience and dedication that the task requires. The obligations -- The obligations that the parties have agreed to under the road map are clear. For peace to come, it is time for them -- and all of us -- to live up to our responsibilities.

Palestinians must abandon violence. Resistance through violence and killing is wrong and it does not succeed. For centuries, black people in America suffered the lash of the whip as slaves and the humiliation of segregation. But it was not violence that won full and equal rights. It was a peaceful and determined insistence upon the ideals at the center of America's founding. This same story can be told by people from South Africa to South Asia; from Eastern Europe to Indonesia. It's a story with a simple truth: Violence is a dead end. It is a sign neither of courage nor power to shoot rockets at sleeping children, or to blow up old women on a bus. That's not how moral authority is claimed; that's how it is surrendered.

Now is the time for Palestinians to focus on what they can build. The Palestinian Authority must develop its capacity to govern, with institutions that serve the needs of its peoples. Hamas does have support among some Palestinians, but they also have to recognize they have responsibilities. To play a role in fulfilling Palestinian aspirations, to unify the Palestinian people, Hamas must put an end to violence, recognize past agreements, recognize Israel's right to exist.

At the same time, Israelis must acknowledge that just as Israel's right to exist cannot be denied, neither can Palestine's. The United States does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements. This construction violates previous agreements and undermines efforts to achieve peace. It is time for these settlements to stop.

And Israel must also live up to its obligation to ensure that Palestinians can live and work and develop their society. Just as it devastates Palestinian families, the continuing humanitarian crisis in Gaza does not serve Israel's security; neither does the continuing lack of opportunity in the West Bank. Progress in the daily lives of the Palestinian people must be a critical part of a road to peace, and Israel must take concrete steps to enable such progress.

And finally, the Arab states must recognize that the Arab Peace Initiative was an important beginning, but not the end of their responsibilities. The Arab-Israeli conflict should no longer be used to distract the people of Arab nations from other problems. Instead, it must be a cause for action to help the Palestinian people develop the institutions that will sustain their state, to recognize Israel's legitimacy, and to choose progress over a self-defeating focus on the past.

America will align our policies with those who pursue peace, and we will say in public what we say in private to Israelis and Palestinians and Arabs. We cannot impose peace. But privately, many Muslims recognize that Israel will not go away. Likewise, many Israelis recognize the need for a Palestinian state. It is time for us to act on what everyone knows to be true.

Too many tears have been shed. Too much blood has been shed. All of us have a responsibility to work for the day when the mothers of Israelis and Palestinians can see their children grow up without fear; when the Holy Land of the three great faiths is the place of peace that God intended it to be; when Jerusalem is a secure and lasting home for Jews and Christians and Muslims, and a place for all of the children of Abraham to mingle peacefully together as in the story of Isra -- as in the story of Isra, when Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed, peace be upon them, joined in prayer.

The third source of tension is our shared interest in the rights and responsibilities of nations on nuclear weapons.

This issue has been a source of tension between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran. For many years, Iran has defined itself in part by its opposition to my country, and there is in fact a tumultuous history between us. In the middle of the Cold War, the United States played a role in the overthrow of a democratically elected Iranian government. Since the Islamic Revolution, Iran has played a role in acts of hostage-taking and violence against U.S. troops and civilians. This history is well known. Rather than remain trapped in the past, I've made it clear to Iran's leaders and people that my country is prepared to move forward. The question now is not what Iran is against, but rather what future it wants to build.

I recognize it will be hard to overcome decades of mistrust, but we will proceed with courage, rectitude, and resolve. There will be many issues to discuss between our two countries, and we are willing to move forward without preconditions on the basis of mutual respect. But it is clear to all concerned that when it comes to nuclear weapons, we have reached a decisive point. This is not simply about America's interests. It's about preventing a nuclear arms race in the Middle East that could lead this region and the world down a hugely dangerous path.

I understand those who protest that some countries have weapons that others do not. No single nation should pick and choose which nation holds nuclear weapons. And that's why I strongly reaffirmed America's commitment to seek a world in which no nations hold nuclear weapons. And any nation -- including Iran -- should have the right to access peaceful nuclear power if it complies with its responsibilities under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. That commitment is at the core of the treaty, and it must be kept for all who fully abide by it. And I am hopeful that all countries in the region can share in this goal.

The fourth issue that I will address is democracy.

I know -- I know there has been controversy about the promotion of democracy in recent years, and much of this controversy is connected to the war in Iraq. So let me be clear: No system of government can or should be imposed by one nation by any other.

That does not lessen my commitment, however, to governments that reflect the will of the people. Each nation gives life to this principle in its own way, grounded in the traditions of its own people. America does not presume to know what is best for everyone, just as we would not presume to pick the outcome of a peaceful election. But I do have an unyielding belief that all people yearn for certain things: the ability to speak your mind and have a say in how you are governed; confidence in the rule of law and the equal administration of justice; government that is transparent and doesn't steal from the people; the freedom to live as you choose. These are not just American ideas; they are human rights. And that is why we will support them everywhere.

Now, there is no straight line to realize this promise. But this much is clear: Governments that protect these rights are ultimately more stable, successful, and secure. Suppressing ideas never succeeds in making them go away. America -- America respects the right of all peaceful and law-abiding voices to be heard around the world, even if we disagree with them. And we will welcome all elected, peaceful governments -- provided they govern with respect for all their people.

This last point is important because there are some who advocate for democracy only when they're out of power. Once in power, they are ruthless in suppressing the rights of others. So no matter where it takes hold, government of the people and by the people sets a single standard for all who would hold power: You must maintain your power through consent, not coercion; you must respect the rights of minorities, and participate with a spirit of tolerance and compromise; you must place the interests of your people and the legitimate workings of the political process above your party. Without these ingredients, elections alone do not make true democracy.

Thank you. The fifth issue that we must address together is religious freedom.

Islam has a proud tradition of tolerance. We see it in the history of Andalusia and Cordoba during the Inquisition. I saw it firsthand as a child in Indonesia, where devout Christians worshiped freely in an overwhelmingly Muslim country. That is the spirit we need today. People in every country should be free to choose and live their faith based upon the persuasion of the mind and the heart and the soul. This tolerance is essential for religion to thrive, but it's being challenged in many different ways.

Among some Muslims, there's a disturbing tendency to measure one's own faith by the rejection of somebody else's faith. The richness of religious diversity must be upheld -- whether it is for Maronites in Lebanon or the Copts in Egypt. And if we are being honest, fault lines must be closed among Muslims, as well, as the divisions between Sunni and Shia have led to tragic violence, particularly in Iraq.

Freedom of religion is central to the ability of peoples to live together. We must always examine the ways in which we protect it. For instance, in the United States, rules on charitable giving have made it harder for Muslims to fulfill their religious obligation. That's why I'm committed to working with American Muslims to ensure that they can fulfill zakat. Likewise, it is important for Western countries to avoid impeding Muslim citizens from practicing religion as they see fit -- for instance, by dictating what clothes a Muslim woman should wear.

We can't disguise hostility towards any religion behind the pretence of liberalism. In fact, faith should bring us together. And that's why we're forging service projects in America to bring together Christians, Muslims, and Jews. That's why we welcome efforts like Saudi Arabian King Abdullah's interfaith dialogue and Turkey's leadership in the Alliance of Civilizations. Around the world, we can turn dialogue into interfaith service, so bridges between peoples lead to action -- whether it is combating malaria in Africa, or providing relief after a natural disaster.

The sixth issue -- The sixth issue that I want to address is women's rights.

I know --- I know -- and you can tell from this audience, that there is a healthy debate about this issue. I reject the view of some in the West that a woman who chooses to cover her hair is somehow less equal, but I do believe that a woman who is denied an education is denied equality. And it is no coincidence that countries where women are well educated are far more likely to be prosperous. Now, let me be clear: Issues of women's equality are by no means simply an issue for Islam. In Turkey, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, we've seen Muslim-majority countries elect a woman to lead. Meanwhile, the struggle for women's equality continues in many aspects of American life, and in countries around the world.

I am convinced that our daughters can contribute just as much to society as our sons. Our common prosperity will be advanced by allowing all humanity -- men and women -- to reach their full potential. I do not believe that women must make the same choices as men in order to be equal, and I respect those women who choose to live their lives in traditional roles. But it should be their choice. And that is why the United States will partner with any Muslim-majority country to support expanded literacy for girls, and to help young women pursue employment through micro-financing that helps people live their dreams.

Finally, I want to discuss economic development and opportunity.

I know that for many, the face of globalization is contradictory. The Internet and television can bring knowledge and information, but also offensive sexuality and mindless violence into the home. Trade can bring new wealth and opportunities, but also huge disruptions and change in communities. In all nations -- including America -- this change can bring fear; fear that because of modernity we lose control over our economic choices, our politics, and most importantly our identities -- those things we most cherish about our communities, our families, our traditions, and our faith.

But I also know that human progress cannot be denied. There need not be contradictions between development and tradition. Countries like Japan and South Korea grew their economies enormously while maintaining distinct cultures. The same is true for the astonishing progress within Muslim-majority countries from Kuala Lumpur to Dubai. In ancient times and in our times, Muslim communities have been at the forefront of innovation and education.

And this is important because no development strategy can be based only upon what comes out of the ground, nor can it be sustained while young people are out of work. Many Gulf states have enjoyed great wealth as a consequence of oil, and some are beginning to focus it on broader development. But all of us must recognize that education and innovation will be the currency of the 21st century -- and in too -- and in too many Muslim communities, there remains underinvestment in these areas. I'm emphasizing such investment within my own country. And while America in the past has focused on oil and gas when it comes to this part of the world, we now seek a broader engagement.

On education, we will expand exchange programs, and increase scholarships, like the one that brought my father to America. At the same time, we will encourage more Americans to study in Muslim communities. And we will match promising Muslim students with internships in America, invest in online learning for teachers and children around the world, and create a new online network, so a young person in Kansas can communicate instantly with a young person in Cairo.

On economic development, we will create a new corps of business volunteers to partner with counterparts in Muslim-majority countries. And I will host a summit on entrepreneurship this year to identify how we can deepen ties between business leaders, foundations, and social entrepreneurs in the United States and Muslim communities around the world.

On science and technology, we will launch a new fund to support technological development in Muslim-majority countries, and to help transfer ideas to -- to the marketplace so they can create more jobs. We'll open centers of scientific excellence in Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia, and appoint new science envoys to collaborate on programs that develop new sources of energy, create green jobs, digitize records, clean water, grow new crops. Today I'm announcing a new global effort with the Organization of the Islamic Conference to eradicate polio. And we will also expand partnerships with Muslim communities to promote child and maternal health.

All these things must be done in partnership. Americans are ready to join with citizens and governments; community organizations, religious leaders, and businesses in Muslim communities around the world to help our people pursue a better life.

Now the issues that I have described will not be easy to address. But we have a responsibility to join together on behalf of the world that we seek -- a world where extremists no longer threaten our people, and American troops have come home; a world where Israelis and Palestinians are each secure in a state of their own, and nuclear energy is used for peaceful purposes; a world where governments serve their citizens, and the rights of all God's children are respected. Those are mutual interests. That is the world we seek. But we can only achieve it together.

I know there are many, Muslim and non-Muslim, who question whether we can forge this new beginning. Some are eager to stoke the flames of division, and to stand in the way of progress. Some suggest that it isn't worth the effort -- that we are fated to disagree, and civilizations are doomed to clash. Many more are simply skeptical that real change can occur. There's so much fear, so much mistrust that has built up over the years. But if we choose to be bound by the past, we will never move forward.

And I want to particularly say this to young people of every faith, in every country: You, more than anyone, have the ability to reimagine the world, to remake this world. All of us share this world for but a brief moment in time. The question is whether we spend that time focused on what pushes us apart, or whether we commit ourselves to an effort -- a sustained effort -- to find common ground, to focus on the future we seek for our children, and to respect the dignity of all human beings.

It's easier to start wars than to end them. It's easier to blame others than to look inward. It's easier to see what is different about someone than to find the things we share. But we should choose the right path, not just the easy path. There's one rule that lies at the heart of every religion -- that we do unto others as we would have them do unto us. This truth transcends nations and peoples -- a belief that isn't new; that isn't black or white or brown; that isn't Christian or Muslim or Jew. It's a belief that pulsed in the cradle of civilization, and that still beats in the hearts of billions around the world. It's a faith in other people, and it's what brought me here today.

We have the power to make the world we seek, but only if we have the courage to make a new beginning, keeping in mind what has been written.

The Holy Qur’an tells us: "O mankind! We have created you male and a female; and we have made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another."

1

The Talmud tells us: "The whole of the Torah is for the purpose of promoting peace."

The Holy Bible tells us: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

3

The people of the world can live together in peace. We know that is God's vision. Now that must be our work here on Earth.

Thank you. And may God's peace be upon you. Thank you very much. Thank you.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

al-Hujurat 49:13

# Speech at Buchenwald Concentration Camp

Chancellor Merkel and I have just finished our tour here at Buchenwald. I want to thank Dr. Volkhard Knigge, who gave an outstanding account of what we were witnessing. I am particularly grateful to be accompanied by my friend Elie Wiesel, as well as Mr. Bertrand Herz, both of whom are survivors of this place.

We saw the area known as Little Camp where Elie and Bertrand were sent as boys. In fact, at the place that commemorates this camp, there is a photograph in which we can see a 16-year-old Elie in one of the bunks along with the others. We saw the ovens of the crematorium, the guard towers, the barbed wire fences, the foundations of barracks that once held people in the most unimaginable conditions.

We saw the memorial to all the survivors -- a steel plate, as Chancellor Merkel said, that is heated to 37 degrees Celsius, the temperature of the human body; a reminder -- where people were deemed inhuman because of their differences -- of the mark that we all share.

Now these sights have not lost their horror with the passage of time. As we were walking up, Elie said, "if these trees could talk." And there's a certain irony about the beauty of the landscape and the horror that took place here.

More than half a century later, our grief and our outrage over what happened have not diminished. I will not forget what I've seen here today.

I've known about this place since I was a boy, hearing stories about my great uncle, who was a very young man serving in World War II. He was part of the 89th Infantry Division, the first Americans to reach a concentration camp. They liberated Ohrdruf, one of Buchenwald's sub-camps.

And I told this story, he returned from his service in a state of shock saying little and isolating himself for months on end from family and friends, alone with the painful memories that would not leave his head. And as we see -- as we saw some of the images here, it's understandable that someone who witnessed what had taken place here would be in a state of shock.

My great uncle's commander, General Eisenhower, understood this impulse to silence. He had seen the piles of bodies and starving survivors and deplorable conditions that the American soldiers found when they arrived, and he knew that those who witnessed these things might be too stunned to speak about them or be able -- be unable to find the words to describe them; that they might be rendered mute in the way my great uncle had. And he knew that what had happened here was so unthinkable that after the bodies had been taken away, that perhaps no one would believe it.

And that's why he ordered American troops and Germans from the nearby town to tour the camp. He invited congressmen and journalists to bear witness and ordered photographs and films to be made. And he insisted on viewing every corner of these camps so that -- and I quote -- he could "be in a position to give first-hand evidence of these things if ever in the future there develops a tendency to charge these allegations merely to propaganda."

We are here today because we know this work is not yet finished. To this day, there are those who insist that the Holocaust never happened -- a denial of fact and truth that is baseless and ignorant and hateful. This place is the ultimate rebuke to such thoughts; a reminder of our duty to confront those who would tell lies about our history.

Also to this day, there are those who perpetuate every form of intolerance -- racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, xenophobia, sexism, and more -- hatred that degrades its victims and diminishes us all. In this century, we've seen genocide. We've seen mass graves and the ashes of villages burned to the ground; children used as soldiers and rape used as a weapon of war. This places teaches us that we must be ever vigilant about the spread of evil in our own time, that we must reject the false comfort that others' suffering is not our problem and commit ourselves to resisting those who would subjugate others to serve their own interests.

But as we reflect today on the human capacity for evil and our shared obligation to defy it, we're also reminded of the human capacity for good. For amidst the countless acts of cruelty that took place here, we know that there were many acts of courage and kindness, as well. The Jews who insisted on fasting on Yom Kippur. The camp cook who hid potatoes in the lining of his prison uniform and distributed them to his fellow inmates, risking his own life to help save theirs. The prisoners who organized a special effort to protect the children here, sheltering them from work and giving them extra food. They set up secret classrooms, some of the inmates, and taught history and math and urged the children to think about their future professions. And we were just hearing about the resistance that formed and the irony that the base for the resistance was in the latrine areas because the guards found it so offensive that they wouldn't go there. And so out of the filth, that became a space in which small freedoms could thrive.

When the American GIs arrived they were astonished to find more than 900 children still alive, and the youngest was just three years old. And I'm told that a couple of the prisoners even wrote a Buchenwald song that many here sang. Among the lyrics were these: "...whatever our fate, we will say yes to life, for the day will come when we are free...in our blood we carry the will to live and in our hearts, in our hearts -- faith."

These individuals never could have known the world would one day speak of this place. They could not have known that some of them would live to have children and grandchildren who would grow up hearing their stories and would return here so many years later to find a museum and memorials and the clock tower set permanently to 3:15, the moment of liberation.

They could not have known how the nation of Israel would rise out of the destruction of the Holocaust and the strong, enduring bonds between that great nation and my own. And they could not have known that one day an American President would visit this place and speak of them and that he would do so standing side by side with the German Chancellor in a Germany that is now a vibrant democracy and a valued American ally.

They could not have known these things. But still surrounded by death they willed themselves to hold fast to life. In their hearts they still had faith that evil would not triumph in the end, that while history is unknowable it arches towards progress, and that the world would one day remember them. And it is now up to us, the living, in our work, wherever we are, to resist injustice and intolerance and indifference in whatever forms they may take, and ensure that those who were lost here did not go in vain. It is up to us to redeem that faith. It is up to us to bear witness; to ensure that the world continues to note what happened here; to remember all those who survived and all those who perished, and to remember them not just as victims, but also as individuals who hoped and loved and dreamed just like us.

And just as we identify with the victims, it's also important for us I think to remember that the perpetrators of such evil were human, as well, and that we have to guard against cruelty in ourselves. And I want to express particular thanks to Chancellor Merkel and the German people, because it's not easy to look into the past in this way and acknowledge it and make something of it, make a determination that they will stand guard against acts like this happening again.

Rather than have me end with my remarks I thought it was appropriate to have Elie Wiesel provide some reflection and some thought as he returns here so many years later to the place where his father died.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address Marking the 65th Anniversary of D-Day

Good afternoon. Thank you, President Sarkozy, Prime Minister Brown, Prime Minister Harper, and Prince Charles for being here today. Thank you to our Secretary of Veterans Affairs, General Eric Shinseki, for making the trip out here to join us. Thanks also to Susan Eisenhower, whose grandfather began this mission 65 years ago with a simple charge: "Ok, let's go." And to a World War II veteran who returned home from this war to serve a proud and distinguished career as a United States Senator and a national leader: Bob Dole.

I'm not the first American President to come and mark this anniversary, and I likely will not be the last. This is an event that has long brought to this coast both heads of state and grateful citizens; veterans and their loved ones; the liberated and their liberators. It's been written about and spoken of and depicted in countless books and films and speeches. And long after our time on this Earth has passed, one word will still bring forth the pride and awe of men and women who will never meet the heroes who sit before us: D-Day.

Why is this? Of all the battles in all the wars across the span of human history, why does this day hold such a revered place in our memory? What is it about the struggle that took place on the sands a few short steps from here that brings us back to remember year after year after year?

Part of it, I think, is the size of the odds that weighed against success. For three centuries, no invader had ever been able to cross the English Channel into Normandy. And it had never been more difficult than in 1944.

That was the year that Hitler ordered his top field marshal to fortify the Atlantic Wall against a seaborne invasion. From the tip of Norway to southern France, the Nazis lined steep cliffs with machine guns and artillery. Low-lying areas were flooded to block passage. Sharpened poles awaited paratroopers. Mines were laid on the beaches and beneath the water. And by the time of the invasion, half a million Germans waited for the Allies along the coast between Holland and northern France.

At dawn on June 6th, the Allies came. The best chance for victory had been for the British Royal Air Corps to take out the guns on the cliffs while airborne divisions parachuted behind enemy lines. But all did not go according to plan. Paratroopers landed miles from their mark, while the fog and clouds prevented Allied planes from destroying the guns on the cliffs. So when the ships landed here at Omaha, an unimaginable hell rained down on the men inside. Many never made it out of the boats.

And yet, despite all of this, one by one, the Allied forces made their way to shore -- here, and at Utah and Juno; Gold and Sword. They were American, British, and Canadian. Soon, the paratroopers found each other and fought their way back. The Rangers scaled the cliffs. And by the end of the day, against all odds, the ground on which we stand was free once more.

The sheer improbability of this victory is part of what makes D-Day so memorable. It also arises from the clarity of purpose with which this war was waged.

We live in a world of competing beliefs and claims about what is true. It's a world of varied religions and cultures and forms of government. In such a world, it's all too rare for a struggle to emerge that speaks to something universal about humanity.

The Second World War did that. No man who shed blood or lost a brother would say that war is good. But all know that this war was essential. For what we faced in Nazi totalitarianism was not just a battle of competing interests. It was a competing vision of humanity. Nazi ideology sought to subjugate and humiliate and exterminate. It perpetrated murder on a massive scale, fueled by a hatred of those who were deemed different and therefore inferior. It was evil.

The nations that joined together to defeat Hitler's Reich were not perfect. They had made their share of mistakes, had not always agreed with one another on every issue. But whatever God we prayed to, whatever our differences, we knew that the evil we faced had to be stopped. Citizens of all faiths and of no faith came to believe that we could not remain as bystanders to the savage perpetration of death and destruction. And so we joined and sent our sons to fight and often die so that men and women they never met might know what it is to be free.

In America, it was an endeavor that inspired a nation to action. A President who asked his country to pray on D-Day also asked its citizens to serve and sacrifice to make the invasion possible. On farms and in factories, millions of men and women worked three shifts a day, month after month, year after year. Trucks and tanks came from plants in Michigan and Indiana, New York and Illinois. Bombers and fighter planes rolled off assembly lines in Ohio and Kansas, where my grandmother did her part as an inspector. Shipyards on both coasts produced the largest fleet in history, including the landing craft from New Orleans that eventually made it here to Omaha.

But despite all the years of planning and preparation, despite the inspiration of our leaders, the skill of our generals, the strength of our firepower and the unyielding support from our home front, the outcome of the entire struggle would ultimately rest on the success of one day in June.

Lyndon Johnson once said that there are certain moments when "¼history and fate meet at a single time in a single place to shape a turning point in man's unending search for freedom."

D-Day was such a moment. One newspaper noted that "we have come to the hour for which we were born." Had the Allies failed here, Hitler's occupation of this continent might have continued indefinitely. Instead, victory here secured a foothold in France. It opened a path to Berlin. It made possible the achievements that followed the liberation of Europe: the Marshall Plan, the NATO alliance, the shared prosperity and security that flowed from each.

It was unknowable then, but so much of the progress that would define the 20th century, on both sides of the Atlantic, came down to the battle for a slice of beach only six miles long and two miles wide.

More particularly, it came down to the men who landed here -- those who now rest in this place for eternity, and those who are with us here today. Perhaps more than any other reason, you, the veterans of that landing, are why we still remember what happened on D-Day. You're why we keep coming back.

For you remind us that in the end, human destiny is not determined by forces beyond our control. You remind us that our future is not shaped by mere chance or circumstance. Our history has always been the sum total of the choices made and the actions taken by each individual man and woman. It has always been up to us.

You could have done what Hitler believed you would do when you arrived here. In the face of a merciless assault from these cliffs, you could have idled the boats offshore. Amid a barrage of tracer bullets that lit the night sky, you could have stayed in those planes. You could have hid in the hedgerows or waited behind the seawall. You could have done only what was necessary to ensure your own survival.

But that's not what you did. That's not the story you told on D-Day. Your story was written by men like Zane Schlemmer of the 82nd Airborne, who parachuted into a dark marsh, far from his objective and his men. Lost and alone, he still managed to fight his way through the gunfire and help liberate the town in which he landed -- a town where a street now bears his name.

It's a story written by men like Anthony Ruggiero, an Army Ranger who saw half the men on his landing craft drown when it was hit by shellfire just a thousand yards off this beach. He spent three hours in freezing water, and was one of only 90 Rangers to survive out of the 225 who were sent to scale the cliffs.

And it's a story written by so many who are no longer with us, like Carlton Barrett. Private Barrett was only supposed to serve as a guide for the 1st Infantry Division, but he instead became one of its heroes. After wading ashore in neck-deep water, he returned to the water again and again and again to save his wounded and drowning comrades. And under the heaviest possible enemy fire, he carried them to safety. He carried them in his own arms.

This is the story of the Allied victory. It's the legend of units like Easy Company and the All-American 82nd. It's the tale of the British people, whose courage during the Blitz forced Hitler to call off the invasion of England; the Canadians, who came even though they were never attacked; the Russians, who sustained some of the war's heaviest casualties on the Eastern front; and all those French men and women who would rather have died resisting tyranny than lived within its grasp.

It is the memories that have been passed on to so many of us about the service or sacrifice of a friend or relative. For me, it is my grandfather, Stanley Dunham, who arrived on this beach six weeks after D-Day and marched across Europe in Patton's Army. And it is my great uncle who was part of the first American division to reach and liberate a Nazi concentration camp. His name is Charles Payne, and I'm so proud that he's with us here today.

I know this trip doesn't get any easier as the years pass, but for those of you who make it, there's nothing that could keep you away. One such veteran, a man named Jim Norene, was a member of the 502nd Parachute Infantry Division of the 101st Airborne. Last night, after visiting this cemetery for one last time, he passed away in his sleep. Jim was gravely ill when he left his home, and he knew that he might not return. But just as he did 65 years ago, he came anyway. May he now rest in peace with the boys he once bled with, and may his family always find solace in the heroism he showed here.

In the end, Jim Norene came back to Normandy for the same reason we all come back. He came for the reason articulated by Howard Huebner, another former paratrooper who is here with us today. When asked why he made the trip, Howard said, "It's important that we tell our stories. It doesn't have to be something big¼just a little story about what happened -- so people don't forget."

So people don't forget.

Friends and veterans, we cannot forget. What we must not forget is that D-Day was a time and a place where the bravery and the selflessness of a few was able to change the course of an entire century. At an hour of maximum danger, amid the bleakest of circumstances, men who thought themselves ordinary found within themselves the ability to do something extraordinary. They fought for their moms and sweethearts back home, for the fellow warriors they came to know as brothers. And they fought out of a simple sense of duty -- a duty sustained by the same ideals for which their countrymen had once fought and bled for over two centuries.

That is the story of Normandy -- but also the story of America; of the Minutemen who gathered on a green in Lexington; of the Union boys from Maine who repelled a charge at Gettysburg; of the men who gave their last full measure of devotion at Inchon and Khe San; of all the young men and women whose valor and goodness still carry forward this legacy of service and sacrifice. It's a story that has never come easy, but one that always gives us hope. For as we face down the hardships and struggles of our time, and arrive at that hour for which we were born, we cannot help but draw strength from those moments in history when the best among us were somehow able to swallow their fears and secure a beachhead on an unforgiving shore.

To those men who achieved that victory 65 years ago, we thank you for your service.

May God bless you, and may God bless the memory of all those who rest here.

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# Speech to the American Medical Association

Thank you so much. Please, everybody, be seated. Thank you very much. You're very kind. Thank you.

Let me begin by thanking Nancy for the wonderful introduction. I want to thank Dr. Joseph Heyman, the chair of the Board of Trustees, as well as Dr. Jeremy Lazarus, speaker of House of Delegates. Thanks to all of you for bringing me home, even if it's just for a day.

From the moment I took office as President, the central challenge we've confronted as a nation has been the need to lift ourselves out of the worst recession since World War II. In recent months, we've taken a series of extraordinary steps, not just to repair the immediate damage to our economy, but to build a new foundation for lasting and sustained growth. We're here to create new jobs, to unfreeze our credit markets. We're stemming the loss of homes and the decline of home values.

All this is important. But even as we've made progress, we know that the road to prosperity remains long and it remains difficult. And we also know that one essential step on our journey is to control the spiraling cost of health care in America. And in order to do that, we're going to need the help of the AMA.

Today, we are spending over $2 trillion a year on health care -- almost 50 percent more per person than the next most costly nation. And yet, as I think many of you are aware, for all of this spending, more of our citizens are uninsured, the quality of our care is often lower, and we aren't any healthier. In fact, citizens in some countries that spend substantially less than we do are actually living longer than we do.

Make no mistake: The cost of our health care is a threat to our economy. It's an escalating burden on our families and businesses. It's a ticking time bomb for the federal budget. And it is unsustainable for the United States of America.

It's unsustainable for Americans like Laura Klitzka, a young mother that I met in Wisconsin just last week, who's learned that the breast cancer she thought she'd beaten had spread to her bones, but who's now being forced to spend time worrying about how to cover the $50,000 in medical debts she's already accumulated, worried about future debts that she's going to accumulate, when all she wants to do is spend time with her two children and focus on getting well. These are not the worries that a woman like Laura should have to face in a nation as wealthy as ours.

Stories like Laura's are being told by women and men all across this country -- by families who've seen out-of-pocket costs soar, and premiums double over the last decade at a rate three times faster than wages. This is forcing Americans of all ages to go without the checkups or the prescriptions they need -- that you know they need. It's creating a situation where a single illness can wipe out a lifetime of savings.

Our costly health care system is unsustainable for doctors like Michael Kahn in New Hampshire, who, as he puts it, spends 20 percent of each day supervising a staff explaining insurance problems to patients, completing authorization forms, writing appeal letters -- a routine that he calls disruptive and distracting, giving him less time to do what he became a doctor to do and actually care for his patients.

Small business owners like Chris and Becky Link in Nashville are also struggling. They've always wanted to do right by the workers at their family-run marketing firm, but they've recently had to do the unthinkable and lay off a number of employees -- layoffs that could have been deferred, they say, if health care costs weren't so high. Across the country, over one-third of small businesses have reduced benefits in recent years and one-third have dropped their workers' coverage altogether since the early '90s.

Our largest companies are suffering, as well. A big part of what led General Motors and Chrysler into trouble in recent decades were the huge costs they racked up providing health care for their workers -- costs that made them less profitable and less competitive with automakers around the world. If we do not fix our health care system, America may go the way of GM -- paying more, getting less, and going broke.

When it comes to the cost of our health care, then, the status quo is unsustainable. So reform is not a luxury; it is a necessity. When I hear people say, well, why are you taking this on right now, you've got all these other problems, I keep on reminding people I'd love to be able to defer these issues, but we can't. I know there's been much discussion about what reform would cost, and rightly so. This is a test of whether we -- Democrats and Republicans alike -- are serious about holding the line on new spending and restoring fiscal discipline.

But let there be no doubt -- the cost of inaction is greater. If we fail to act -- if we fail to act -- and you know this because you see it in your own individual practices -- if we fail to act, premiums will climb higher, benefits will erode further, the rolls of the uninsured will swell to include millions more Americans -- all of which will affect your practice.

If we fail to act, one out of every five dollars we earn will be spent on health care within a decade. And in 30 years, it will be about one out of every three -- a trend that will mean lost jobs, lower take-home pay, shuttered businesses, and a lower standard of living for all Americans.

And if we fail to act, federal spending on Medicaid and Medicare will grow over the coming decades by an amount almost equal to the amount our government currently spends on our nation's defense. It will, in fact, eventually grow larger than what our government spends on anything else today. It's a scenario that will swamp our federal and state budgets, and impose a vicious choice of either unprecedented tax hikes, or overwhelming deficits, or drastic cuts in our federal and state budgets.

So to say it as plainly as I can, health care is the single most important thing we can do for America's long-term fiscal health. That is a fact. That's a fact.

It's a fact, and the truth is most people know that it's a fact. And yet, as clear as it is that our system badly needs reform, reform is not inevitable. There's a sense out there among some, and perhaps some members who are gathered here today of the AMA, that as bad as our current system may be -- and it's pretty bad -- the devil we know is better than the devil we don't. There's a fear of change -- a worry that we may lose what works about our health care system while trying to fix what doesn't.

I'm here to tell you I understand that fear. And I understand the cynicism. They're scars left over from past efforts at reform. After all, Presidents have called for health care reform for nearly a century. Teddy Roosevelt called for it. Harry Truman called for it. Richard Nixon called for it. Jimmy Carter called for it. Bill Clinton called for it. But while significant individual reforms have been made -- such as Medicare, Medicaid, and the Children's Health Insurance Program -- efforts at comprehensive reform that covers everyone and brings down costs have largely failed.

Part of the reason is because the different groups involved -- doctors, insurance companies, businesses, workers, and others -- simply couldn't agree on the need for reform or what shape it would take. And if we're honest, another part of the reason has been the fierce opposition fueled by some interest groups and lobbyists -- opposition that has used fear tactics to paint any effort to achieve reform as an attempt to, yes, socialize medicine.

And despite this long history of failure, I'm standing here because I think we're in a different time. One sign that things are different is that just this past week, the Senate passed a bill that will protect children from the dangers of smoking, a reform the AMA has long championed -- this organization long championed; it went nowhere when it was proposed a decade ago -- I'm going to sign this into law.

Now, what makes this moment different is that this time -- for the first time -- key stakeholders are aligning not against, but in favor of reform. They're coming out -- they're coming together out of a recognition that while reform will take everyone in our health care community to do their part -- everybody is going to have to pitch in -- ultimately, everybody will benefit.

And I want to commend the AMA, in particular, for offering to do your part to curb costs and achieve reform. Just a week ago, you joined together with hospitals, labor unions, insurers, medical device manufacturers and drug companies to do something that would have been unthinkable just a few years ago -- you promised to work together to cut national health care spending by $2 trillion over the next decade, relative to what it would have otherwise been. And that will bring down costs; that will bring down premiums. That's exactly the kind of cooperation we need, and we appreciate that very much. Thank you.

Now, the question is how do we finish the job? How do we permanently bring down costs and make quality, affordable health care available to every single American? That's what I've come to talk about today. We know the moment is right for health care reform. We know this is a historic opportunity we've never seen before and may not see again. But we also know that there are those who will try and scuttle this opportunity no matter what -- who will use the same scare tactics and fear-mongering that's worked in the past; who will give warnings about socialized medicine and government takeovers, long lines and rationed care, decisions made by bureaucrats and not doctors. We have heard this all before. And because these fear tactics have worked, things have kept getting worse.

So let me begin by saying this to you and to the American people: I know that there are millions of Americans who are content with their health care coverage -- they like their plan and, most importantly, they value their relationship with their doctor. They trust you. And that means that no matter how we reform health care, we will keep this promise to the American people: If you like your doctor, you will be able to keep your doctor, period. If you like your health care plan, you'll be able to keep your health care plan, period. No one will take it away, no matter what. My view is that health care reform should be guided by a simple principle: Fix what's broken and build on what works. And that's what we intend to do.

If we do that, we can build a health care system that allows you to be physicians instead of administrators and accountants; a system that gives Americans -- a system that gives Americans the best care at the lowest cost; a system that eases up the pressure on businesses and unleashes the promise of our economy, creating hundreds of thousands of jobs, making take-home wages thousands of dollars higher, and growing our economy by tens of billions of dollars more every year. That's how we'll stop spending tax dollars to prop up an unsustainable system, and start investing those dollars in innovations and advances that will make our health care system and our economy stronger.

That's what we can do with this opportunity. And that's what we must do with this moment.

Now, the good news is that in some instances, there's already widespread agreement on the steps necessary to make our health care system work better.

First, we need to upgrade our medical records by switching from a paper to an electronic system of record keeping. And we've already begun to do this with an investment we made as part of our Recovery Act.

It simply doesn't make sense that patients in the 21st century are still filling out forms with pens on papers that have to be stored away somewhere. As Newt Gingrich has rightly pointed out -- and I don't quote Newt Gingrich that often -- we do a better job tracking a FedEx package in this country than we do tracking patients' health records.

You shouldn't have to tell every new doctor you see about your medical history or what prescriptions you're taking. You shouldn't have to repeat costly tests. All that information should be stored securely in a private medical record so that your information can be tracked from one doctor to another -- even if you change jobs, even if you move, even if you have to see a number of different specialists. That's just common sense.

And that will not only mean less paper-pushing and lower administrative costs, saving taxpayers billions of dollars; it will also mean all of you physicians will have an easier time doing your jobs. It will tell you, the doctors, what drugs a patient is taking so you can avoid prescribing a medication that could cause a harmful interaction. It will prevent the wrong dosages from going to a patient. It will reduce medical errors, it's estimated, that lead to 100,000 lives lost unnecessarily in our hospitals every year.

So there shouldn't be an argument there. And we want to make sure that we're helping providers computerize so that we can get this system up and running.

The second step that we can all agree on is to invest more in preventive care so we can avoid illness and disease in the first place. That starts with each of us taking more responsibility for our health and for the health of our children. It means quitting smoking. It means going in for that mammogram or colon cancer screening. It means going for a run or hitting the gym, and raising our children to step away from the video games and spend more time playing outside.

It also means cutting down on all the junk food that's fueling an epidemic of obesity -- which puts far too many Americans, young and old, at greater risk of costly, chronic conditions. That's a lesson Michelle and I have tried to instill in our daughters. As some of you know, we started a White House vegetable garden. I say "we" generously, because Michelle has done most of the work. That's a lesson that we should work with local school districts to incorporate into their school lunch programs.

Building a health care system that promotes prevention rather than just managing diseases will require all of us to do our parts. It will take doctors telling us what risk factors we should avoid and what preventive measures we should pursue. It will take employers following the example of places like Safeway that is rewarding workers for taking better care of their health while reducing health care costs in the process.

If you're one of three-quarters of Safeway workers enrolled in their "Healthy Measures" program, you can get screened for problems like high cholesterol or high blood pressure. And if you score well, you can pay lower premiums; you get more money in your paycheck. It's a program that has helped Safeway cut health care spending by 13 percent, and workers save over 20 percent on their premiums. And we're open to doing more to help employers adopt and expand programs like this one.

Our federal government also has to step up its efforts to advance the cause of healthy living. Five of the costliest illnesses and conditions -- cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, lung disease, and strokes -- can be prevented. And yet only a fraction of every health care dollar goes to prevention or public health. And that's starting to change with an investment we're making in prevention and wellness programs that can help us avoid disease that harm our health and the health of our economy.

But as important as they are, investments in electronic records and preventive care, all the things that I've just mentioned, they're just preliminary steps. They will only make a dent in the epidemic of rising costs in this country.

Despite what some have suggested, the reason we have these spiraling costs is not simply because we've got an aging population; demographics do account for part of rising costs because older, sicker societies pay more on health care than younger, healthier ones, and there's nothing intrinsically wrong in us taking better care of ourselves. But what accounts for the bulk of our costs is the nature of our health care delivery system itself -- a system where we spend vast amounts of money on things that aren't necessarily making our people any healthier; a system that automatically equates more expensive care with better care.

Now, a recent article in the New Yorker, for example, showed how McAllen, Texas, is spending twice as much as El Paso County -- twice as much -- not because people in McAllen, Texas, are sicker than they are in El Paso; not because they're getting better care or getting better outcomes. It's simply because they're using more treatments -- treatments that, in some cases, they don't really need; treatments that, in some cases, can actually do people harm by raising the risk of infection or medical error.

And the problem is this pattern is repeating itself across America. One Dartmouth study shows that you're less likely -- you're no less likely to die from a heart attack and other ailments in a higher-spending area than in a lower-spending one.

There are two main reasons for this. The first is a system of incentives where the more tests and services are provided, the more money we pay. And a lot of people in this room know what I'm talking about. It's a model that rewards the quantity of care rather than the quality of care; that pushes you, the doctor, to see more and more patients even if you can't spend much time with each, and gives you every incentive to order that extra MRI or EKG, even if it's not necessary. It's a model that has taken the pursuit of medicine from a profession -- a calling -- to a business.

That's not why you became doctors. That's not why you put in all those hours in the Anatomy Suite or the O.R. That's not what brings you back to a patient's bedside to check in, or makes you call a loved one of a patient to say it will be fine. You didn't enter this profession to be bean-counters and paper-pushers. You entered this profession to be healers. And that's what our health care system should let you be. That's what this health care system should let you be.

Now, that starts with reforming the way we compensate our providers -- doctors and hospitals. We need to bundle payments so you aren't paid for every single treatment you offer a patient with a chronic condition like diabetes, but instead paid well for how you treat the overall disease. We need to create incentives for physicians to team up, because we know that when that happens, it results in a healthier patient. We need to give doctors bonuses for good health outcomes, so we're not promoting just more treatment, but better care.

And we need to rethink the cost of a medical education, and do more to reward medical students who choose a career as a primary care physician -- who choose to work in underserved areas instead of the more lucrative paths. That's why we're making a substantial investment in the National Health Service Corps that will make medical training more affordable for primary care doctors and nurse practitioners so they aren't drowning in debt when they enter the workforce. Somebody back there is drowning in debt.

The second structural reform we need to make is to improve the quality of medical information making its way to doctors and patients. We have the best medical schools, the most sophisticated labs, the most advanced training of any nation on the globe. Yet we're not doing a very good job harnessing our collective knowledge and experience on behalf of better medicine.

Less than 1 percent of our health care spending goes to examining what treatments are most effective -- less than 1 percent. And even when that information finds its way into journals, it can take up to 17 years to find its way to an exam room or operating table. As a result, too many doctors and patients are making decisions without the benefit of the latest research.

A recent study, for example, found that only half of all cardiac guidelines are based on scientific evidence -- half. That means doctors may be doing a bypass operation when placing a stent is equally effective; or placing a stent when adjusting a patient's drug and medical management is equally effective -- all of which drives up costs without improving a patient's health.

So one thing we need to do is to figure out what works, and encourage rapid implementation of what works into your practices. That's why we're making a major investment in research to identify the best treatments for a variety of ailments and conditions.

Now, let me be clear -- I just want to clear something up here -- identifying what works is not about dictating what kind of care should be provided. It's about providing patients and doctors with the information they need to make the best medical decisions. See, I have the assumption that if you have good information about what makes your patients well, that's what you're going to do. I have confidence in that. We're not going to need to force you to do it. We just need to make sure you've got the best information available.

Still, even when we do know what works, we are often not making the most of it. And that's why we need to build on the examples of outstanding medicine at places like the Cincinnati Children's Hospital, where the quality of care for cystic fibrosis patients shot up after the hospital began incorporating suggestions from parents. And places like Tallahassee Memorial Health Care, where deaths were dramatically reduced with rapid response teams that monitored patients' conditions, and "multidisciplinary rounds" with everyone from physicians to pharmacists. And places like Geisinger Health System in rural Pennsylvania, and Intermountain Health in Salt Lake City, where high-quality care is being provided at a cost well below the national average. These are all islands of excellence that we need to make the standard in our health care system.

So replicating best practices, incentivizing excellence, closing cost disparities -- any legislation sent to my desk that does not these -- does not achieve these goals in my mind does not earn the title of reform.

But my signature on a bill is not enough. I need your help, doctors, because to most Americans you are the health care system. The fact is Americans -- and I include myself and Michelle and our kids in this -- we just do what you tell us to do. That's what we do. We listen to you, we trust you. And that's why I will listen to you and work with you to pursue reform that works for you.

Together, if we take all these steps, I am convinced we can bring spending down, bring quality up; we can save hundreds of billions of dollars on health care costs while making our health care system work better for patients and doctors alike. And when we align the interests of patients and doctors, then we're going to be in a good place.

Now, I recognize that it will be hard to make some of these changes if doctors feel like they're constantly looking over their shoulders for fear of lawsuits. I recognize that. Don't get too excited yet. Now, I understand some doctors may feel the need to order more tests and treatments to avoid being legally vulnerable. That's a real issue. Now, just hold on to your horses here, guys. I want to be honest with you. I'm not advocating caps on malpractice awards -- which I personally believe can be unfair to people who've been wrongfully harmed.

But I do think we need to explore a range of ideas about how to put patient safety first; how to let doctors focus on practicing medicine; how to encourage broader use of evidence-based guidelines. I want to work with the AMA so we can scale back the excessive defensive medicine that reinforces our current system, and shift to a system where we are providing better care, simply -- rather than simply more treatment.

So this is going to be a priority for me. And I know, based on your responses, it's a priority for you. And I look forward to working with you. And it's going to be difficult. But all this stuff is going to be difficult. All of it's going to be important.

Now, I know this has been a long speech, but we got more to do. The changes that I have already spoken about, all that is going to need to go hand-in-hand with other reforms. Because our health care system is so complex and medicine is always evolving, we need a way to continually evaluate how we can eliminate waste, reduce costs, and improve quality.

That's why I'm open to expanding the role of a commission created by a Republican Congress called the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission, which happens to include a number of physicians on the commission. In recent years, this commission proposed roughly $200 billion in savings that never made it into law. These recommendations have now been incorporated into our broader reform agenda, but we need to fast-track their proposals, the commission's proposals, in the future so that we don't miss another opportunity to save billions of dollars, as we gain more information about what works and what doesn't work in our health care system.

And as we seek to contain the cost of health care, we also have to ensure that every American can get coverage they can afford. We must do so in part because it's in all of our economic interests. Each time an uninsured American steps foot into an emergency room with no way to reimburse the hospital for care, the cost is handed over to every American family as a bill of about $1,000 that's reflected in higher taxes, higher premiums, and higher health care costs. It's a hidden tax, a hidden bill that will be cut as we insure all Americans. And as we insure every young and healthy American, it will spread out risk for insurance companies, further reducing costs for everyone.

But alongside these economic arguments, there's another, more powerful one. And it is simply this: We are not a nation that accepts nearly 46 million uninsured men, women and children. We are not a nation that lets hardworking families go without coverage, or turns its back on those in need. We're a nation that cares for its citizens. We look out for one another. That's what makes us the United States of America. We need to get this done.

So we need to do a few things to provide affordable health insurance to every single American. The first thing we need to do is to protect what's working in our health care system. So just in case you didn't catch it the first time, let me repeat: If you like your health care system and your doctor, the only thing reform will mean to you is your health care will cost less. If anyone says otherwise, they are either trying to mislead you or don't have their facts straight.

Now, if you don't like your health care coverage or you don't have any insurance at all, you'll have a chance, under what we've proposed, to take part in what we're calling a Health Insurance Exchange. This exchange will allow you to one-stop shop for a health care plan, compare benefits and prices, and choose a plan that's best for you and your family -- the same way, by the way, that federal employees can do, from a postal worker to a member of Congress. You will have your choice of a number of plans that offer a few different packages, but every plan would offer an affordable, basic package.

Again, this is for people who aren't happy with their current plan. If you like what you're getting, keep it. Nobody is forcing you to shift. But if you're not, this gives you some new options. And I believe one of these options needs to be a public option that will give people a broader range of choices -- and inject competition into the health care market so that force -- so that we can force waste out of the system and keep the insurance companies honest.

Now, I know that there's some concern about a public option. Even within this organization there's healthy debate about it. In particular, I understand that you're concerned that today's Medicare rates, which many of you already feel are too low, will be applied broadly in a way that means our cost savings are coming off your backs.

And these are legitimate concerns, but they're ones, I believe, that can be overcome. As I stated earlier, the reforms we propose to reimbursement are to reward best practices, focus on patient care, not on the current piecework reimbursements. What we seek is more stability and a health care system that's on a sounder financial footing.

And the fact is these reforms need to take place regardless of whether there's a public option or not. With reform, we will ensure that you are being reimbursed in a thoughtful way that's tied to patient outcomes, instead of relying on yearly negotiations about the Sustainable Growth Rate formula that's based on politics and the immediate state of the federal budget in any given year.

And I just want to point out the alternative to such reform is a world where health care costs grow at an unsustainable rate. And if you don't think that's going to threaten your reimbursements and the stability of our health care system, you haven't been paying attention.

So the public option is not your enemy; it is your friend, I believe.

Let me also say that -- let me also address a illegitimate concern that's being put forward by those who are claiming that a public option is somehow a Trojan horse for a single-payer system. I'll be honest; there are countries where a single-payer system works pretty well. But I believe -- and I've taken some flak from members of my own party for this belief -- that it's important for our reform efforts to build on our traditions here in the United States. So when you hear the naysayers claim that I'm trying to bring about government-run health care, know this: They're not telling the truth.

What I am trying to do -- and what a public option will help do -- is put affordable health care within reach for millions of Americans. And to help ensure that everyone can afford the cost of a health care option in our exchange, we need to provide assistance to families who need it. That way, there will be no reason at all for anyone to remain uninsured.

Indeed, it's because I'm confident in our ability to give people the ability to get insurance at an affordable rate that I'm open to a system where every American bears responsibility for owning health insurance -- so long as we provide a hardship waiver for those who still can't afford it as we move towards this system.

The same is true for employers. While I believe every business has a responsibility to provide health insurance for its workers, small businesses that can't afford it should receive an exemption. And small business workers and their families will be able to seek coverage in the exchange if their employer is not able to provide it.

Now, here's some good news. Insurance companies have expressed support for the idea of covering the uninsured and they certainly are in favor of a mandate. I welcome their willingness to engage constructively in the reform debate. I'm glad they're at the table. But what I refuse to do is simply create a system where insurance companies suddenly have a whole bunch of more customers on Uncle Sam's dime, but still fail to meet their responsibilities. We're not going to do that.

Let me give you an example of what I'm talking about. We need to end the practice of denying coverage on the basis of preexisting conditions. The days of cherry-picking who to cover and who to deny, those days are over. I know you see it in your practices, and how incredibly painful and frustrating it is -- you want to give somebody care and you find out that the insurance companies are wiggling out of paying.

This is personal for me also. I've told this story before. I'll never forget watching my own mother, as she fought cancer in her final days, spending time worrying about whether her insurer would claim her illness was a preexisting condition so it could get out of providing coverage. Changing the current approach to preexisting conditions is the least we can do -- for my mother and for every other mother, father, son, and daughter, who has suffered under this practice, who've been paying premiums and don't get care. We need to put health care within the reach for millions of Americans.

Now, even if we accept all of the economic and moral reasons for providing affordable coverage to all Americans, there is no denying that expanding coverage will come at a cost, at least in the short run. But it is a cost that will not -- I repeat -- will not add to our deficits. I've set down a rule for my staff, for my team -- and I've said this to Congress -- health care reform must be, and will be, deficit-neutral in the next decade.

Now, there are already voices saying the numbers don't add up. They're wrong. Here's why. Making health care affordable for all Americans will cost somewhere on the order of $1 trillion over the next 10 years. That's real money, even in Washington. But remember, that's less than we are projected to have spent on the war in Iraq. And also remember, failing to reform our health care system in a way that genuinely reduces cost growth will cost us trillions of dollars more in lost economic growth and lower wages.

That said, let me explain how we will cover the price tag. First, as part of the budget that was passed a few months ago, we put aside $635 billion over 10 years in what we're calling a Health Reserve Fund. Over half of that amount -- more than $300 billion -- will come from raising revenue by doing things like modestly limiting the tax deductions the wealthiest Americans can take to the same level that it was at the end of the Reagan years -- same level that it was under Ronald Reagan. Some are concerned that this will dramatically reduce charitable giving, for example, but statistics show that's not true. And the best thing for our charities is the stronger economy that we will build with health care reform.

But we can't just raise revenues. We're also going to have to make spending cuts, in part by examining inefficiencies in our current Medicare program. There are going to be robust debates about where these cuts should be made, and I welcome that debate. But here's where I think these cuts should be made.

First, we should end overpayments to Medicare Advantage. Today, we're paying Medicare Advantage plans much more than we pay for traditional Medicare services. Now, this is a good deal for insurance companies. It's a subsidy to insurance companies. It's not a good deal for you. It's not a good deal for the American people. And by the way, it doesn't follow free market principles, for those who are always talking about free market principles. That's why we need to introduce competitive bidding into the Medicare Advantage program, a program under which private insurance companies are offering Medicare coverage. That alone will save $177 billion over the next decade, just that one step.

Second, we need to use Medicare reimbursements to reduce preventable hospital readmissions. Right now, almost 20 percent of Medicare patients discharged from hospitals are readmitted within a month, often because they're not getting the comprehensive care that they need. This puts people at risk; it drives up cost. By changing how Medicare reimburses hospitals, we can discourage them from acting in a way that boosts profits but drives up costs for everyone else. That will save us $25 billion over the next decade.

Third, we need to introduce generic biologic drugs into the marketplace.These are drugs used to treat illnesses like anemia. But right now, there is no pathway at the FDA for approving generic versions of these drugs. Creating such a pathway will save us billions of dollars. We can save another roughly $30 billion by getting a better deal for our poorer seniors while asking our well-off seniors to pay a little more for their drugs.

So that's the bulk of what's in the Health Reserve Fund. I've also proposed saving another $313 billion in Medicare and Medicaid spending in several other ways. One way is by adjusting Medicare payments to reflect new advances and productivity gains in our economy. Right now, Medicare payments are rising each year by more than they should. These adjustments will create incentives for providers to deliver care more efficiently, and save us roughly $109 billion in the process.

Another way we can achieve savings is by reducing payments to hospitals for treating uninsured people. I know hospitals rely on these payments now, legitimately, because of the large number of uninsured patients that they treat. But if we put in a system where people have coverage and the number of uninsured people goes down with our reforms, the amount we pay hospitals to treat uninsured people should go down, as well. Reducing these payments gradually, as more and more people have coverage, will save us over $106 billion. And we'll make sure the difference goes to the hospitals that need it most.

We can also save about $75 billion through more efficient purchasing of prescription drugs. And we can save about $1 billion more by rooting out waste, abuse, fraud throughout our health care system so that no one is charging more for a service than it's worth or charging a dime for a service that they don't provide.

Let me be clear: I'm committed to making these cuts in a way that protects our senior citizens. In fact, these proposals will actually extend the life of the Medicare Trust Fund by seven years, and reduce premiums for Medicare beneficiaries by roughly $43 billion over the next 10 years. And I'm working with AARP to uphold that commitment.

Now, for those of you who took out your pencil and paper -- altogether, these savings mean that we've put about $950 billion on the table -- and that doesn't count some of the long-term savings that we think will come about from reform -- from medical IT, for example, or increased investment in prevention. So that stuff in congressional jargon is not scorable; the Congressional Budget Office won't count that as savings, so we're setting that aside. We think that's going to come, but even separate and far from that, we've put $950 billion on the table, taking us almost all the way to covering the full cost of health care reform.

In the weeks and months ahead, I look forward to working with Congress to make up the difference so that health care reform is fully paid for -- in a real, accountable way. And let me add that this does not count longer-term savings. I just want to repeat that. By insisting that the reforms that we're introducing are deficit-neutral over the next decade, and by making the reforms that will help slow the growth rate of health care costs over the coming decades -- bending the curve -- we can look forward to faster economic growth, higher living standards, and falling, instead of rising, budget deficits.

Now, let me just wrap up by saying this. I know people are cynical whether we can do this or not. I know there will be disagreements about how to proceed in the days ahead. There's probably healthy debate within the AMA. That's good. I also know this: We can't let this moment pass us by.

You know, the other day, a friend of mine, Congressman Earl Blumenauer, handed me a magazine with a special issue titled, "The Crisis in American Medicine." One article notes "soaring charges." Another warns about the "volume of utilization of services." Another asks if we can find a "better way than fee-for-service for paying for medical care." It speaks to many of the challenges we face today. The thing is, this special issue was published by Harper's Magazine in October of 1960 -- before I was born.

Members of the American Medical Association, and my fellow Americans, I'm here today because I don't want our children and their children to still be speaking of a crisis in American medicine 50 years from now. I don't want them to still be suffering from spiraling costs that we did not stem, or sicknesses that we did not cure. I don't want them to be burdened with massive deficits we did not curb or a worsening economy that we did not rebuild.

I want them to benefit from a health care system that works for all of us; where families can open a doctor's bill without dreading what's inside; where parents are talking to their kids and getting them to get regular checkups, and testing themselves for preventable ailments; where parents are feeding their kids healthier food and kids are exercising more; where patients are spending more time with their doctors, and doctors can pull up on a computer all the medical information and latest research they'll ever want to know to meet patients' needs; where orthopedists and nephrologists and oncologists are all working together to treat a single human being; where what's best about America's health care system has become the hallmark of America's health care system.

That's the health care system we can build. That's the future I'm convinced is within our reach. And if we're willing to come together and bring about that future, then we will not only make Americans healthier, we will not only unleash America's economic potential, but we will reaffirm the ideals that led you into this noble profession and we'll build a health care system that lets all Americans heal.

Thank you very much, AMA. Appreciate it, thank you.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# On the Courage and Dignity of the People of Iran

Good afternoon, everybody. Today I want to start by addressing three issues, and then I'll take your questions. First, I'd like to say a few words about the situation in Iran. The United States and the international community have been appalled and outraged by the threats, the beatings, and imprisonments of the last few days. I strongly condemn these unjust actions, and I join with the American people in mourning each and every innocent life that is lost.

I've made it clear that the United States respects the sovereignty of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and is not interfering with Iran's affairs. But we must also bear witness to the courage and the dignity of the Iranian people, and to a remarkable opening within Iranian society. And we deplore the violence against innocent civilians anywhere that it takes place.

The Iranian people are trying to have a debate about their future. Some in Iran -- Some in the Iranian government, in particular, are trying to avoid that debate by accusing the United States and others in the West of instigating protests over the election. These accusations are patently false. They're an obvious attempt to distract people from what is truly taking place within Iran's borders. This tired strategy of using old tensions to scapegoat other countries won't work anymore in Iran. This is not about the United States or the West; this is about the people of Iran, and the future that they -- and only they -- will choose. The Iranian people can speak for themselves. That's precisely what's happened in the last few days.

In 2009, no iron fist is strong enough to shut off the world from bearing witness to peaceful protests of justice. Despite the Iranian government's efforts to expel journalists and isolate itself, powerful images and poignant words have made their way to us through cell phones and computers, and so we've watched what the Iranian people are doing.

This is what we've witnessed.

We've seen the timeless dignity of tens of thousands of Iranians marching in silence. We've seen people of all ages risk everything to insist that their votes are counted and that their voices are heard. Above all, we've seen courageous women stand up to the brutality and threats, and we've experienced the searing image of a woman bleeding to death on the streets. While this loss is raw and extraordinarily painful, we also know this: Those who stand up for justice are always on the right side of history.

As I said in Cairo, suppressing ideas never succeeds in making them go away. The Iranian people have a universal right to assembly and free speech. If the Iranian government seeks the respect of the international community, it must respect those rights and heed the will of its own people. It must govern through consent and not coercion. That's what Iran's own people are calling for, and the Iranian people will ultimately judge the actions of their own government.

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# Third Major Press Conference -- On Iran and Health Care

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Now, the second issue I want to address is our ongoing effort to build a clean energy economy.

This week, the House of Representatives is moving ahead on historic legislation that will transform the way we produce and use energy in America. This legislation will spark a clean energy transformation that will reduce our dependence on foreign oil and confront the carbon pollution that threatens our planet.

This energy bill will create a set of incentives that will spur the development of new sources of energy, including wind, solar, and geothermal power. It will also spur new energy savings, like efficient windows and other materials that reduce heating costs in the winter and cooling costs in the summer.

These incentives will finally make clean energy the profitable kind of energy. And that will lead to the development of new technologies that lead to new industries that could create millions of new jobs in America -- jobs that can't be shipped overseas.

At a time of great fiscal challenges, this legislation is paid for by the polluters who currently emit the dangerous carbon emissions that contaminate the water we drink and pollute the air that we breathe. It also provides assistance to businesses and communities as they make the gradual transition to clean energy technologies.

So I believe that this legislation is extraordinarily important for our country; it's taken great effort on the part of many over the course of the past several months. And I want to thank the Chair of the Energy and Commerce Committee, Henry Waxman; his colleagues on that committee, including Congressmen Dingell, Ed Markey, and Rick Boucher. I also want to thank Charlie Rangel, the Chair of the Ways and Means Committee, and Collin Peterson, the Chair of the Agriculture Committee, for their many and ongoing contributions to this process. And I want to express my appreciation to Nancy Pelosi and Steny Hoyer for their leadership.

We all know why this is so important. The nation that leads in the creation of a clean energy economy will be the nation that leads the 21st century's global economy. That's what this legislation seeks to achieve -- it's a bill that will open the door to a better future for this nation. And that's why I urge members of Congress to come together and pass it.

The last issue I'd like to address is health care.

Right now, Congress is debating various health care reform proposals. This is obviously a complicated issue, but I am very optimistic about the progress that they're making.

Like energy, this is legislation that must and will be paid for. It will not add to our deficits over the next decade. We will find the money through savings and efficiencies within the health care system -- some of which we've already announced.

We will also ensure that the reform we pass brings down the crushing cost of health care. We simply can't have a system where we throw good money after bad habits. We need to control the skyrocketing costs that are driving families, businesses, and our government into greater and greater debt.

There's no doubt that we must preserve what's best about our health care system, and that means allowing Americans who like their doctors and their health care plans to keep them. But unless we fix what's broken in our current system, everyone's health care will be in jeopardy. Unless we act, premiums will climb higher, benefits will erode further, and the rolls of the uninsured will swell to include millions more Americans. Unless we act, one out of every five dollars that we earn will be spent on health care within a decade. And the amount our government spends on Medicare and Medicaid will eventually grow larger than what our government spends on everything else today.

When it comes to health care, the status Q: uo is unsustainable and unacceptable. So reform is not a luxury, it's a necessity. And I hope that Congress will continue to make significant progress on this issue in the weeks ahead.

So let me open it up for questions, and I'll start with you, Jennifer.

Q: Thank you, Mr. President. Your administration has said that the offer to talk to Iran's leaders remains open. Can you say if that's still so, even with all the violence that has been committed by the government against the peaceful protesters? And if it is, is there any red line that your administration won't cross where that offer will be shut off?

President Obama: Well, obviously what's happened in Iran is profound. And we're still waiting to see how it plays itself out. My position coming into this office has been that the United States has core national security interests in making sure that Iran doesn't possess a nuclear weapon and it stops exporting terrorism outside of its borders.

We have provided a path whereby Iran can reach out to the international community, engage, and become a part of international norms. It is up to them to make a decision as to whether they choose that path. What we've been seeing over the last several days, the last couple of weeks, obviously is not encouraging, in terms of the path that this regime may choose to take. And the fact that they are now in the midst of an extraordinary debate taking place in Iran may end up coloring how they respond to the international community as a whole.

We are going to monitor and see how this plays itself out before we make any judgments about how we proceed. But just to reiterate, there is a path available to Iran in which their sovereignty is respected, their traditions, their culture, their faith is respected, but one in which they are part of a larger community that has responsibilities and operates according to norms and international rules that are universal. We don't know how they're going to respond yet, and that's what we're waiting to see.

Q: So should there be consequences for what's happened so far?

President Obama: I think that the international community is, as I said before, bearing witness to what's taking place. And the Iranian government should understand that how they handle the dissent within their own country, generated indigenously, internally, from the Iranian people, will help shape the tone not only for Iran's future but also its relationship to other countries.

Since we're on Iran, I know Nico Pitney is here from Huffington Post.

Q: Thank you, Mr. President.

President Obama: Nico, I know that you, and all across the Internet, we've been seeing a lot of reports coming directly out of Iran. I know that there may actually be Questions from people in Iran who are communicating through the Internet. Do you have a question?

Q: Yes, I did, I wanted to use this opportunity to ask you a question directly from an Iranian. We solicited questions last night from people who are still courageous enough to be communicating online, and one of them wanted to ask you this: Under which conditions would you accept the election of Ahmadinejad? And if you do accept it without any significant changes in the conditions there, isn't that a betrayal of what the demonstrators there are working towards?

President Obama: Well, look, we didn't have international observers on the ground. We can't say definitively what exactly happened at polling places throughout the country. What we know is that a sizeable percentage of the Iranian people themselves, spanning Iranian society, consider this election illegitimate. It's not an isolated instance -- a little grumbling here or there. There is significant questions about the legitimacy of the election.

And so ultimately the most important thing for the Iranian government to consider is legitimacy in the eyes of its own people, not in the eyes of the United States. And that's why I've been very clear: Ultimately, this is up to the Iranian people to decide who their leadership is going to be and the structure of their government.

What we can do is to say unequivocally that there are sets of international norms and principles about violence, about dealing with peaceful dissent, that spans cultures, spans borders. And what we've been seeing over the Internet and what we've been seeing in news reports violates those norms and violates those principles.

I think it is not too late for the Iranian government to recognize that there is a peaceful path that will lead to stability and legitimacy and prosperity for the Iranian people. We hope they take it.

Jeff Mason of Reuters.

Q: Right here, sir. Switching gears slightly, in light of the financial regulation and reform that you have made, how do you rate the performance of the Fed in handling the financial crisis? And more specifically, how do you rate the performance of Ben Bernanke, and would you like him to stay on when his term ends in January?

President Obama: I'm not going to make news about Ben Bernanke -- although I think he has done a fine job under very difficult circumstances.

I would say that all financial regulators didn't do everything that needed to be done to prevent the crisis from happening. And that's why we've put forward the boldest set of reforms in financial regulation in 75 years, because there were too many gaps where there were laws on the books that would have brought about a prevention of the crisis; the enforcement wasn't there. In some cases, there just weren't sufficient laws on the books -- for example, with the non-banking sector.

I think that the Fed probably performed better than most other regulators prior to the crisis taking place, but I think they'd be the first to acknowledge that in dealing with systemic risk and anticipating systemic risk, they didn't do everything that needed to be done.

I think since the crisis has occurred, Ben Bernanke has performed very well. And one of the central concepts behind our financial regulatory reform is that there's got to be somebody who is responsible not just for monitoring the health of individual institutions, but somebody who's monitoring the systemic risks of the system as a whole. And we believe that the Fed has the most technical expertise and the best track record in terms of doing that.

But that's not the only part of financial regulation. One of the things that we're putting a huge amount of emphasis on is the issue of consumer protection -- whether it's subprime loans that were given out because nobody was paying attention to what was being peddled to consumers, whether it's how credit cards are handled, how annuities are dealt with, what people can expect in terms of understanding their 401(k)s. There's a whole bunch of financial transactions out there where consumers are not protected the way they should, and that's why we said we're going to put forward a consumer financial protection agency whose only job it is to focus on those issues.

Now, the Fed was one of the regulators that had some of those consumer responsibilities. We actually think that they're better off focusing on issues of broad systemic risk, and we have just one agency that's focused on the consumer protection side.

Q: But is the Fed getting too powerful?

President Obama: If you look at what we've proposed, we are not so much expanding the Fed's power as we are focusing what the Fed needs to do to prevent the kinds of crises that are happening again. Another good example is the issue of resolution authority. I think it wasn't that long ago where everybody was properly outraged about AIG, and the enormous amounts of money the taxpayers had to put into AIG in order to prevent it from dragging the entire financial system down with it.

Had we had the kinds of resolution authority, the kinds of laws that were in place that would allow a orderly winding down of AIG, then potentially taxpayers could have saved a huge amount of money. We want that power to be available so that taxpayers aren't on the hook.

All right? Major Garrett. Where's Major?

Q: Right here, sir. In your opening remarks, sir, you were -- you said about Iran that you were appalled and outraged. What took you so long to say those words?

President Obama: I don't think that's accurate. Track what I've been saying. Right after the election, I said that we had profound concerns about the nature of the election, but that it was not up to us to determine what the outcome was. As soon as violence broke out -- in fact, in anticipation of potential violence -- we were very clear in saying that violence was unacceptable, that that was not how governments operate with respect to their people.

So we've been entirely consistent, Major, in terms of how we've approached this. My role has been to say the United States is not going to be a foil for the Iranian government to try to blame what's happening on the streets of Tehran on the CIA or on the White House; that this is an issue that is led by and given voice to the frustrations of the Iranian people. And so we've been very consistent the first day, and we're going to continue to be consistent in saying this is not an issue about the United States; this is about an issue of the Iranian people.

What we've also been consistent about is saying that there are some universal principles, including freedom of assembly and freedom of speech, making sure that governments are not using coercion and violence and repression in terms of how they interact with peaceful demonstrators. And we have been speaking out very clearly about that fact.

Q: Are Iranian diplomats still welcome at the embassy on the Fourth of July, sir?

President Obama: Well, I think as you're aware, Major, we don't have formal diplomatic relations with -- we don't have formal diplomatic relations with Iran. I think that we have said that if Iran chooses a path that abides by international norms and principles, then we are interested in healing some of the wounds of 30 years, in terms of U.S.-Iranian relations. But that is a choice that the Iranians are going to have to make.

Q: But the offer still stands?

President Obama: That's a choice the Iranians are going to have to make.

David Jackson.

Q: Thank you, Mr. President. Two of the key players in the insurance industry, America's Health Insurance Plans and Blue Cross-Blue Shield, sent a letter to the Senate this morning saying that a government health insurance plan would "dismantle" private insurers. Why are they wrong? And secondly, this public plan, is this non-negotiable? Would you sign a health care bill without it?

President Obama: Well, let's talk first of all about health care reform more broadly.

I think in this debate there's been some notion that if we just stand pat we're okay. And that's just not true. You know, there are polls out that show that 70 or 80 percent of Americans are satisfied with the health insurance that they currently have. The only problem is that premiums have been doubling every nine years, going up three times faster than wages. The U.S. government is not going to be able to afford Medicare and Medicaid on its current trajectory. Businesses are having to make very tough decisions about whether we drop coverage or we further restrict coverage.

So the notion that somehow we can just keep on doing what we're doing and that's okay, that's just not true. We have a longstanding critical problem in our health care system that is pulling down our economy, it's burdening families, it's burdening businesses, and it is the primary driver of our federal deficits. All right?

So if we start from the premise that the status Q: uo is unacceptable, then that means we're going to have to bring about some serious changes. What I've said is, our top priority has to be to control costs. And that means not just tinkering around the edges. It doesn't mean just lopping off reimbursements for doctors in any given year because we're trying to fix our budget. It means that we look at the kinds of incentives that exist, what our delivery system is like, why it is that some communities are spending 30 percent less than other communities but getting better health care outcomes, and figuring out how can we make sure that everybody is benefiting from lower costs and better quality by improving practices. It means health IT. It means prevention.

So all these things are the starting point, I think, for reform. And I've said very clearly: If any bill arrives from Congress that is not controlling costs, that's not a bill I can support. It's going to have to control costs. It's going to have to be paid for. So there's been a lot of talk about, well, a trillion-dollar price tag. What I've said is, if we're going to spend that much money, then it's going to be largely funded through reallocating dollars that are already in the health care system but aren't being spent well. If we're spending $177 billion over 10 years to subsidize insurance companies under Medicare Advantage, when there's no showing that people are healthier using that program than the regular Medicare program, well, that's not a good deal for taxpayers. And we're going to take that money and we're going to use it to provide better care at a cheaper cost to the American people. So that's point number one.

Number two, while we are in the process of dealing with the cost issue, I think it's also wise policy and the right thing to do to start providing coverage for people who don't have health insurance or are underinsured, are paying a lot of money for high deductibles. I get letters -- two, three letters a day -- that I read of families who don't have health insurance, are going bankrupt, are on the brink of losing their insurance; have deductibles that are so high that even with insurance they end up with $50,000, $100,000 worth of debt; are at risk of losing their homes.

And that has to be part of reform, making sure that even if you've got health insurance now, you are not worried that when you lose your job or your employer decides to change policies that somehow you're going to be out of luck. I think about the woman who was in Wisconsin that I was with, who introduced me up in Green Bay -- 36 years old, double mastectomy; breast cancer has now moved to her bones and she's got two little kids, a husband with a job. They had health insurance, but they're still $50,000 in debt, and she's thinking, my main legacy, if I don't survive this thing, is going to be leaving $100,000 worth of debt. So those are the things that I'm prioritizing.

Now, the public plan I think is a important tool to discipline insurance companies. What we've said is, under our proposal, let's have a system the same way that federal employees do, same way that members of Congress do, where -- we call it an "exchange," or you can call it a "marketplace" -- where essentially you've got a whole bunch of different plans. If you like your plan and you like your doctor, you won't have to do a thing. You keep your plan. You keep your doctor. If your employer is providing you good health insurance, terrific, we're not going to mess with it.

But if you're a small business person, if the insurance that's being offered is something you can't afford, if you want to shop for a better price, then you can go to this exchange, this marketplace, and you can look: Okay, this is how much this plan costs, this is how much that plan costs, this is what the coverage is like, this is what fits for my family. As one of those options, for us to be able to say, here's a public option that's not profit-driven, that can keep down administrative costs and that provides you good, quality care for a reasonable price -- as one of the options for you to choose, I think that makes sense.

Q: Won't that drive private insurers out of business?

President Obama: Why would it drive private insurers out of business? If private insurers say that the marketplace provides the best quality health care, if they tell us that they're offering a good deal, then why is it that the government -- which they say can't run anything -- suddenly is going to drive them out of business? That's not logical.

Now, I think that there's going to be some healthy debates in Congress about the shape that this takes. I think there can be some legitimate concerns on the part of private insurers that if any public plan is simply being subsidized by taxpayers endlessly, that over time they can't compete with the government just printing money.

So there are going to be some I think legitimate debates to be had about how this private plan takes shape. But just conceptually, the notion that all these insurance companies who say they're giving consumers the best possible deal, that they can't compete against a public plan as one option, with consumers making the decision what's the best deal. That defies logic, which is why I think you've seen in the polling data overwhelming support for a public plan. All right?

Q: Is that non-negotiable?

President Obama: Chip.

Q: Thank you, Mr. President. Following up on Major's question, some republicans on Capitol Hill -- John McCain and Lindsey Graham, for example -- have said that up to this point, your response on Iran has been timid and weak. Today, it sounded a lot stronger. It sounded like the kind of speech John McCain has been urging you to give, saying that those who stand up for justice are always on the right side of history, referring to an iron fist in Iran -- "deplore," "appalled," "outraged." Were you influenced at all by John McCain and Lindsey Graham accusing you of being timid and weak?

President Obama: What do you think? Look, the -- I think John McCain has genuine passion about many of these international issues, and I think that all of us share a belief that we want justice to prevail. But only I'm the President of the United States, and I've got responsibilities in making certain that we are continually advancing our national security interests and that we are not used as a tool to be exploited by other countries.

I mean, you guys must have seen the reports. They've got some of the comments that I've made being mistranslated in Iran, suggesting that I'm telling rioters to go out and riot some more. There are reports suggesting that the CIA is behind all this -- all of which are patently false. But it gives you a sense of the narrative that the Iranian government would love to play into. So the -- members of Congress, they've got their constitutional duties, and I'm sure they will carry them out in the way that they think is appropriate. I'm President of the United States, and I'll carry out my duties as I think are appropriate. All right?

Q: By speaking so strongly today, aren't you giving the leadership in Iran the fodder to make those arguments that it is about the United States?

President Obama: Look, I mean, I think that -- we can parse this as much as we want. I think if you look at the statements that I've made, they've been very consistent. I just made a statement on Saturday in which we said we deplore the violence. And so I think that in the hothouse of Washington, there may be all kinds of stuff going back and forth in terms of Republican critics versus the administration. That's not what is relevant to the Iranian people. What's relevant to them right now is, are they going to have their voices heard?

And, frankly, a lot of them aren't paying a lot of attention to what's being said on Capitol Hill, and probably aren't spending a lot of time thinking about what's being said here. They're trying to figure out how can they make sure justice is served in Iran.

Q: So there's no news in your statement today?

President Obama: Chuck Todd.

Q: Mr. President, I want to follow up on Iran. You have avoided twice spelling out consequences. You've hinted that there would be, from the international community, if they continue to violate -- you said violate these norms. You seem to hint that there are human rights violations taking place./

President Obama: I'm not hinting. I think that when a young woman gets shot on the street when she gets out of her car, that's a problem.

Q: Then why won't you spell out the consequences that the Iranian --

President Obama: Because I think, Chuck, that we don't know yet how this thing is going to play out. I know everybody here is on a 24-hour news cycle. I'm not.

Q: But shouldn't -- I mean, shouldn't the world and Iran --

President Obama: Chuck, I answered --

Q: -- but shouldn't the Iranian regime know that there are consequences?

President Obama: I answered the question, Chuck, which is that we don't yet know how this is going to play out.

Jake Tapper.

Q: Thank you, Mr. President. Before I ask my question, I'm wondering if you could actually answer David's. Is the public plan non-negotiable?

President Obama: That's your question.

Q: Well, you didn't answer --

President Obama: You think you're going to -- are you the ombudsman for the White House press corps? What's your -- is that your question?

Q: Then I have a two-part question. Is the public plan non-negotiable? And while I appreciate your Spock-like language about the logic of the health care plan, the public plan, it does seem logical to a lot of people that if the government is offering a cheaper health care plan, then lots of employers will want to have their employees covered by that cheaper plan, which will not have to be for profit, unlike private plans, and may possibly benefit from some government subsidies, who knows. And then their employees would be signed up for this public plan, which would violate what you're promising the American people, that they will not have to change health care plans if they like the plan they have.

President Obama: I got you. You're pitching, I'm catching. I got the question. First of all, was the reference to Spock -- is that a crack on my ears? All right, I just want to make sure. No?

Q: I would never make fun of your ears, sir.

President Obama: In answer to David's question, which you co-opted, we are still early in this process, so we have not drawn lines in the sand other than that reform has to control costs and that it has to provide relief to people who don't have health insurance or are underinsured. Those are the broad parameters that we've discussed.

There are a whole host of other issues where ultimately I may have a strong opinion, and I will express those to members of Congress as this is shaping up. It's too early to say that. Right now I will say that our position is that a public plan makes sense.

Now, let me go to the broader question you made about the public plan. As I said before, I think that there is a legitimate concern if the public plan was simply eating off the taxpayer trough, that it would be hard for private insurers to complete. If, on the other hand, the public plan is structured in such a way where they've got to collect premiums and they've got to provide good services, then if what the insurance companies are saying is true, that they're doing their best to serve their customers, that they're in the business of keeping people well and giving them security when they get sick, they should be able to compete.

Now, if it turns out that the public plan, for example, is able to reduce administrative costs significantly, then you know what? I'd like insurance companies to take note and say, hey, if the public plan can do that, why can't we? And that's good for everybody in the system. And I don't think there should be any objection to that.

Now, by the way, I should point out that part of the reform that we've suggested is that if you want to be a private insurer as part of the exchange, as part of this marketplace, this menu of options that people can choose from, we're going to have some different rules for all insurance companies -- one of them being that you can't preclude people from getting health insurance because of a pre-existing condition, you can't cherry pick and just take the healthiest people.

So there are going to be some ground rules that are going to apply to all insurance companies, because I think the American people understand that, too often, insurance companies have been spending more time thinking about how to take premiums and then avoid providing people coverage than they have been thinking about how can we make sure that insurance is there, health care is there when families need it.

But I'm confident that if -- I take those advocates of the free market to heart when they say that the free market is innovative and is going to compete on service and is going to compete on their ability to deliver good care to families. And if that's the case then this just becomes one more option. If it's not the case then I think that that's something that the American people should know.

Q: I'm sorry, but what about keeping your promise to the American people that they won't have to change plans even if employers --

President Obama: Well, no, no, I mean -- when I say if you have your plan and you like it and your doctor has a plan, or you have a doctor and you like your doctor that you don't have to change plans, what I'm saying is the government is not going to make you change plans under health reform.

Now, are there going to be employers right now -- assuming we don't do anything -- let's say that we take the advice of some folks who are out there and say, oh, this is not the time to do health care, we can't afford it, it's too complicated, let's take our time, et cetera. So let's assume that nothing happened. I can guarantee you that there's a possibility for a whole lot of Americans out there that they're not going to end up having the same health care they have, because what's going to happen is, as costs keep on going up, employers are going to start making decisions: We've got to raise premiums on our employees; in some cases, we can't provide health insurance at all.

And so there are going to be a whole set of changes out there. That's exactly why health reform is so important.

Margaret, from McClatchy. Where's Margaret? There you are.

Q: Thank you, Mr. President. As a former smoker, I understand the frustration and the fear that comes with quitting. But with the new law that you signed yesterday regulating the tobacco industry, I'd like to ask you a few questions. How many cigarettes a day --

President Obama: A few questions?

Q: How many cigarettes a day do you now smoke? Do you smoke alone or in the presence of other people? And do you believe the new law would help you to Q: uit? If so, why?

President Obama: Well, first of all, the new law that was put in place is not about me, it's about the next generation of kids coming up. So I think it's fair, Margaret, to just say that you just think it's neat to ask me about my smoking, as opposed to it being relevant to my new law. But that's fine, I understand. It's an interesting human -- it's an interesting human interest story.

But I've said before that, as a former smoker, I constantly struggle with it. Have I fallen off the wagon sometimes? Yes. Am I a daily smoker, a constant smoker? No. I don't do it in front of my kids, I don't do it in front of my family, and I would say that I am 95 percent cured, but there are times where -- there are times where I mess up. And, I mean, I've said this before. I get this question about once every month or so, and I don't know what to tell you, other than the fact that, like folks who go to AA, once you've gone down this path, then it's something you continually struggle with, which is precisely why the legislation we signed was so important, because what we don't want is kids going down that path in the first place. Okay?

Macarena Vidal?

Q: Mr. President, you're meeting today with Chilean President Michelle Bachelet. You're meeting next week with Alvaro Uribe from Colombia. Two months ago in Trinidad at the Summit of the Americas, you said that -- you called on Latin American countries to help you with deeds, not words, particularly towards less democratic countries. Have you noticed any particular progress in these two months, and can you give us examples?

President Obama: Well, first of all, I'm very much looking forward to seeing President Bachelet. I think she's one of the finest leaders in Latin America, a very capable person. If you look at how Chile has handled the recession, they've handled it very well in part because the surpluses that they got when copper prices were high they set aside. And so they had the resources to deal with the downturn. It's a good lesson for the United States. When we had surpluses, they got dissipated.

We think that there's enormous possibilities of making progress in Latin America generally. One of the things that I'll be talking about with President Bachelet is the coordination and cooperation between the United State and Chile on clean energy. We'll have an announcement when we do our press conference after my bilateral meeting on some important clean energy partnerships. We're making important progress when it comes to exchanges on cancer research. We continue to have a robust trade regime with Chile. And, by the way, Chile has actually entered into some very interesting partnerships not just with the federal government, but also with state governments like California.

So I think the relationship that we have with Chile -- which, by the way, does not fall in line with U.S. foreign policy on every single issue -- but it's a respectful policy. Chile is an important partner. I think that's the model that we want: partnership. The United States doesn't dictate how Chile should view its own interests, but in fact we've achieved great cooperation. And I will be looking at President Bachelet giving us further advice in terms of how we can take the kind of relationship we have with Chile and expand that to our relationships throughout Latin America.

Q: But my question is not only about that -- Chile, but about Latin American countries giving you a hand on -- against less democratic countries.

President Obama: Well, the point is, is that I think Chile is leading by example. So I'm using Chile as an example. But the same is true in Brazil, for example. I mean, President Lula came in, and he's got a very different political orientation than most Americans do. He came up through the trade union movement. He was perceived as a strong leftist. It turns out that he was a very practical person, who although maintains relationships across the political spectrum in Latin America, has instituted all sorts of smart market reforms that have made Brazil prosper.

And so if you take a Bachelet or a Lula, and the United States has a good working relationship with them, then I think that points the way for other countries that may be where the democratic tradition is not as deeply embedded as we'd like it to be. And we can make common cause in showing those countries that, in fact, democracy, respect for property rights, respects for market-based economies, rule of law -- that all those things can in fact lead to greater prosperity, that that's not just a U.S. agenda, but that's a smart way to increase the prosperity of your own people.

Okay, Hans Nichols. Hans.

Q: Thank you, Mr. President. If I can just return to the economy more generally. When you were selling the economic stimulus package, you talked and your advisors and economists talked about keeping unemployment below 8 percent. Last week you acknowledged that unemployment is likely to reach double digits, being 10 percent. Do you think you need a second stimulus package?

President Obama: Well, not yet, because I think it's important to see how the economy evolves and how effective the first stimulus is. I think it's fair to say that -- keep in mind the stimulus package was the first thing we did, and we did it a couple of weeks after inauguration. At that point nobody understood what the depths of this recession were going to look like. If you recall, it was only significantly later that we suddenly get a report that the economy had tanked.

And so it's not surprising then that we missed the mark in terms of our estimates of where unemployment would go. I think it's pretty clear now that unemployment will end up going over 10 percent, if you just look at the pattern, because of the fact that even after employers and businesses start investing again and start hiring again, typically it takes a while for that employment number to catch up with economic recovery. And we're still not at actual recovery yet.

So I anticipate that this is going to be a difficult -- difficult year, a difficult period.

Q: What's the high water mark, then, for unemployment? Eleven percent?

President Obama: Well, I'm not suggesting that I have a crystal ball. Since you just threw back at us our last prognosis, let's not -- let's not engage in another one.

Q: Does that mean you won't be making predictions ever?

President Obama: But what I am saying is that -- here are some things I know for certain. In the absence of the stimulus, I think our recession would be much worse. It would have declined -- without the Recovery Act -- we know for a fact that states, for example, would have laid off a lot more teachers, a lot more police officers, a lot more firefighters, every single one of those individuals whose jobs were saved. As a consequence, they are still making their mortgage payments, they are still shopping. So we know that the Recovery Act has had an impact.

Now, what we also know is this was the worst recession since the Great Depression, and people are going through a very tough time right now. And I don't expect them to be satisfied. I mean, one thing that -- as I sometimes glance at the various news outlets represented here, I know that they're sometimes reporting of, oh, the administration is worried about this, or their poll numbers are going down there -- look, the American people have a right to feel like this is a tough time right now. What's incredible to me is how resilient the American people have been and how they are still more optimistic than the facts alone would justify, because this is a tough, tough period.

And I don't feel satisfied with the progress that we've made. We've got to get our Recovery Act money out faster. We've got to make sure that the programs that we've put in place are working the way they're supposed to. I think, for example, our mortgage program has actually helped to modify mortgages for a lot of people, but it hasn't been keeping pace with all the foreclosures that are taking place. I get letters every day from people who say, you know, I appreciate that you put out this mortgage program, but the bank is still not letting me modify my mortgage and I'm about to lose my home. And then I've got to call my staff and team and find out why isn't it working for these folks, and can we adjust it, can we tweak it, can we make it more aggressive?

This is a very, very difficult process. And what I've got to do is to make sure that we're focused both on the short term, how can we provide families immediate relief and jumpstart the economy as quickly as possible; and I've got to keep my eye on the long term, and the long term is making sure that by reforming our health care system, by passing serious energy legislation that makes us a clean energy economy, by revamping our education system, by finally getting the financial regulatory reforms in place that are necessary for the 21st century -- by doing all those things, we've got a foundation for long-term economic growth, and we don't end up having to juice up the economy artificially through the kinds of bubble strategies that helped to get us in the situation that we're in today.

Okay. I've got time for two more questions. April. Where's April?

Q: Right here.

President Obama: There you are. How are you?

Q: I'm fine. Back on the economy, Mr. President, people are criticizing this road to recovery plan. Specifically, there are reports in The Washington Post that say that the African America unemployment rate will go to 20 percent by the end of this year. And then you had your Chairman of Economic Advisers say the target intervention may come next year if nothing changes. Why not target intervention now to stop the bloodletting in the black unemployment rate?

President Obama: Look, first of all, we know that the African American unemployment rate, the Latino unemployment rate, are consistently higher than the national average. And so, if the economy as a whole is doing poorly, then you know that the African American community is going to be doing poorly, and they're going to be hit even harder. And the best thing that I can do for the African American community or the Latino community or the Asian community, whatever community, is to get the economy as a whole moving. If I don't -- hold on one second, let me answer the question -- if I don't do that, then I'm not going to be able to help anybody. So that's priority number one.

It is true that in certain inner-city communities, the unemployment rate is -- was already sky high even before this recession. The ladders available for people to enter into the job market are even worse. And so we are interested in looking at proven programs that help people on a pathway to jobs.

There was a reason why right before Father's Day I went to a program here locally in Washington called Year Up, which has a proven track record of taking young, mostly minority people, some of whom have graduated from high school, some maybe who've just gotten their GED, and trained them on computers and provide them other technical skills, but also train them on how to carry themselves in an office, how to write an e-mail -- some of the social skills that will allow them to be more employable. They've got a terrific placement rate after this one-year program. If there are ways that we can potentially duplicate some of those programs, then we're going to do so.

So part of what we want to do is to find tools that will give people more opportunity, but the most important thing I can do is to lift the economy overall. And that's what my strategy is focused on.

All right. Last Question. Suzanne.

Q: Thank you. Back to Iran, putting a human face on this. Over the weekend, we saw a shocking video of this woman, Neda, who had been shot in the chest and bled to death. Have you seen this video?

President Obama: I have.

Q: What's your reaction?

President Obama: It's heartbreaking. It's heartbreaking. And I think that anybody who sees it knows that there's something fundamentally unjust about that.

Q: We also have people on the ground who have been saying that the streets are quieter now and that is because they feel that they're paralyzed by fear -- fear of people gone missing, fear of violence, that perhaps this is a movement that's gone underground or perhaps is dying. Do you have any concern over that?

President Obama: Yes. I have concern about how peaceful demonstrators and people who want their votes counted may be stifled from expressing those concerns. I think, as I said before, there are certain international norms of freedom of speech, freedom of expression --

Q: Then why won't you allow the photos --

President Obama: Hold on a second, Helen. That's a different question. And I think it's important for us to make sure that we let the Iranian people know that we are watching what's happening, that they are not alone in this process. Ultimately, though, what's going to be most important is what happens in Iran. And we've all been struck by the courage of people. And I mentioned this I think in a statement that I made a couple of days ago. Some of you who had been covering my campaigns know this is one of my favorite expressions, was Dr. King's expression that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice." We have to believe that ultimately justice will prevail.

All right. Thank you, guys.

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# Address to the New Economic School Graduating Class

Good morning. It is a great honor for me to join you at the New Economic School. Michelle and I are so pleased to be in Moscow. And as somebody who was born in Hawaii, I'm glad to be here in July instead of January.

I know that NES is a young school, but I speak to you today with deep respect for Russia's timeless heritage. Russian writers have helped us understand the complexity of the human experience, and recognize eternal truths. Russian painters, composers, and dancers have introduced us to new forms of beauty. Russian scientists have cured disease, sought new frontiers of progress, and helped us go to space.

These are contributions that are not contained by Russia's borders, as vast as those borders are. Indeed, Russia's heritage has touched every corner of the world, and speaks to the humanity that we share. That includes my own country, which has been blessed with Russian immigrants for decades; we've been enriched by Russian culture, and enhanced by Russian cooperation. And as a resident of Washington, D.C., I continue to benefit from the contributions of Russians -- specifically, from Alexander Ovechkin. We're very pleased to have him in Washington, D.C.

Here at NES, you have inherited this great cultural legacy, but your focus on economics is no less fundamental to the future of humanity. As Pushkin said, "Inspiration is needed in geometry just as much as poetry." And today, I want particularly to speak to those of you preparing to graduate. You're poised to be leaders in academia and industry; in finance and government. But before you move forward, it's worth reflecting on what has already taken place during your young lives.

Like President Medvedev and myself, you're not old enough to have witnessed the darkest hours of the Cold War, when hydrogen bombs were tested in the atmosphere, and children drilled in fallout shelters, and we reached the brink of nuclear catastrophe. But you are the last generation born when the world was divided. At that time, the American and Soviet armies were still massed in Europe, trained and ready to fight. The ideological trenches of the last century were roughly in place. Competition in everything from astrophysics to athletics was treated as a zero-sum game. If one person won, then the other person had to lose.

And then, within a few short years, the world as it was ceased to be. Now, make no mistake: This change did not come from any one nation. The Cold War reached a conclusion because of the actions of many nations over many years, and because the people of Russia and Eastern Europe stood up and decided that its end would be peaceful.

With the end of the Cold War, there were extraordinary expectations -- for peace and for prosperity; for new arrangements among nations, and new opportunities for individuals. Like all periods of great change, it was a time of ambitious plans and endless possibilities. But, of course, things don't always work out exactly as planned. Back in 1993, shortly after this school opened, one NES student summed up the difficulty of change when he told a reporter, and I quote him: "The real world is not so rational as on paper." The real world is not so rational as on paper.

Over two tumultuous decades, that truth has been borne out around the world. Great wealth has been created, but it has not eliminated vast pockets of crushing poverty. Poverty exists here, it exists in the United States, and it exists all around the world. More people have gone to the ballot box, but too many governments still fail to protect the rights of their people. Ideological struggles have diminished, but they've been replaced by conflicts over tribe and ethnicity and religion. A human being with a computer can hold the same amount of information stored in the Russian State Library, but that technology can also be used to do great harm.

In a new Russia, the disappearance of old political and economic restrictions after the end of the Soviet Union brought both opportunity and hardship. A few prospered, but many more did not. There were tough times. But the Russian people showed strength and made sacrifices, and you achieved hard-earned progress through a growing economy and greater confidence. And despite painful times, many in Eastern Europe and Russia are much better off today than 20 years ago.

We see that progress here at NES -- a school founded with Western support that is now distinctly Russian; a place of learning and inquiry where the test of an idea is not whether it is Russian or American or European, but whether it works. Above all, we see that progress in all of you -- young people with a young century to shape as you see fit. Your lifetime coincides with this era of transition. But think about the fundamental questions asked when this school was founded. What kind of future is Russia going to have? What kind of future are Russia and America going to have together? What world order will replace the Cold War? Those questions still don't have clear answers, and so now they must be answered by you -- by your generation in Russia, in America, and around the world. You get to decide. And while I cannot answer those questions for you, I can speak plainly about the future that America is seeking.

To begin with, let me be clear: America wants a strong, peaceful, and prosperous Russia. This belief is rooted in our respect for the Russian people, and a shared history between our nations that goes beyond competition. Despite our past rivalry, our people were allies in the greatest struggle of the last century. Recently, I noted this when I was in Normandy -- for just as men from Boston and Birmingham risked all that they had to storm those beaches and scale those cliffs, Soviet soldiers from places like Kazan and Kiev endured unimaginable hardships to repeal -- to repel an invasion, and turn the tide in the east. As President John Kennedy said, "No nation in history of battle ever suffered more than the Soviet Union in the Second World War."

So as we honor this past, we also recognize the future benefit that will come from a strong and vibrant Russia. Think of the issues that will define your lives: security from nuclear weapons and extremism; access to markets and opportunity; health and the environment; an international system that protects sovereignty and human rights, while promoting stability and prosperity. These challenges demand global partnership, and that partnership will be stronger if Russia occupies its rightful place as a great power.

Yet unfortunately, there is sometimes a sense that old assumptions must prevail, old ways of thinking; a conception of power that is rooted in the past rather than in the future. There is the 20th century view that the United States and Russia are destined to be antagonists, and that a strong Russia or a strong America can only assert themselves in opposition to one another. And there is a 19th century view that we are destined to vie for spheres of influence, and that great powers must forge competing blocs to balance one another.

These assumptions are wrong. In 2009, a great power does not show strength by dominating or demonizing other countries. The days when empires could treat sovereign states as pieces on a chess board are over. As I said in Cairo, given our independence, any world order that -- given our interdependence, any world order that tries to elevate one nation or one group of people over another will inevitably fail. The pursuit of power is no longer a zero-sum game -- progress must be shared.

That's why I have called for a "reset" in relations between the United States and Russia. This must be more than a fresh start between the Kremlin and the White House -- though that is important and I've had excellent discussions with both your President and your Prime Minister. It must be a sustained effort among the American and Russian people to identify mutual interests, and expand dialogue and cooperation that can pave the way to progress.

This will not be easy. It's difficult to forge a lasting partnership between former adversaries, it's hard to change habits that have been ingrained in our governments and our bureaucracies for decades. But I believe that on the fundamental issues that will shape this century, Americans and Russians share common interests that form a basis for cooperation. It is not for me to define Russia's national interests, but I can tell you about America's national interests, and I believe that you will see that we share common ground.

First, America has an interest in reversing the spread of nuclear weapons and preventing their use.

In the last century, generations of Americans and Russians inherited the power to destroy nations, and the understanding that using that power would bring about our own destruction. In 2009, our inheritance is different. You and I don't have to ask whether American and Russian leaders will respect a balance of terror -- we understand the horrific consequences of any war between our two countries. But we do have to ask this question: We have to ask whether extremists who have killed innocent civilians in New York and in Moscow will show that same restraint. We have to ask whether 10 or 20 or 50 nuclear-armed nations will protect their arsenals and refrain from using them.

This is the core of the nuclear challenge in the 21st century. The notion that prestige comes from holding these weapons, or that we can protect ourselves by picking and choosing which nations can have these weapons, is an illusion. In the short period since the end of the Cold War, we've already seen India, Pakistan, and North Korea conduct nuclear tests. Without a fundamental change, do any of us truly believe that the next two decades will not bring about the further spread of these nuclear weapons?

That's why America is committed to stopping nuclear proliferation, and ultimately seeking a world without nuclear weapons. That is consistent with our commitment under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. That is our responsibility as the world's two leading nuclear powers. And while I know this goal won't be met soon, pursuing it provides the legal and moral foundation to prevent the proliferation and eventual use of nuclear weapons.

We're already taking important steps to build this foundation. Yesterday, President Medvedev and I made progress on negotiating a new treaty that will substantially reduce our warheads and delivery systems. We renewed our commitment to clean, safe and peaceful nuclear energy, which must be a right for all nations that live up to their responsibilities under the NPT. And we agreed to increase cooperation on nuclear security, which is essential to achieving the goal of securing all vulnerable nuclear material within four years.

As we keep our own commitments, we must hold other nations accountable for theirs. Whether America or Russia, neither of us would benefit from a nuclear arms race in East Asia or the Middle East. That's why we should be united in opposing North Korea's efforts to become a nuclear power, and opposing Iran's efforts to acquire a nuclear weapon. And I'm pleased that President Medvedev and I agreed upon a joint threat assessment of the ballistic challenges -- ballistic missile challenges of the 21st century, including from Iran and North Korea.

This is not about singling out individual nations -- it's about the responsibilities of all nations. If we fail to stand together, then the NPT and the Security Council will lose credibility, and international law will give way to the law of the jungle. And that benefits no one. As I said in Prague, rules must be binding, violations must be punished, and words must mean something.

The successful enforcement of these rules will remove causes of disagreement. I know Russia opposes the planned configuration for missile defense in Europe. And my administration is reviewing these plans to enhance the security of America, Europe and the world. And I've made it clear that this system is directed at preventing a potential attack from Iran. It has nothing to do with Russia. In fact, I want to work together with Russia on a missile defense architecture that makes us all safer. But if the threat from Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile program is eliminated, the driving force for missile defense in Europe will be eliminated, and that is in our mutual interests.

Now, in addition to securing the world's most dangerous weapons, a second area where America has a critical national interest is in isolating and defeating violent extremists.

For years, al Qaeda and its affiliates have defiled a great religion of peace and justice, and ruthlessly murdered men, women and children of all nationalities and faiths. Indeed, above all, they have murdered Muslims. And these extremists have killed in Amman and Bali; Islamabad and Kabul; and they have the blood of Americans and Russians on their hands. They're plotting to kill more of our people, and they benefit from safe havens that allow them to train and operate -- particularly along the border of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

And that's why America has a clear goal: to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda and its allies in Afghanistan and Pakistan. We seek no bases, nor do we want to control these nations. Instead, we want to work with international partners, including Russia, to help Afghans and Pakistanis advance their own security and prosperity. And that's why I'm pleased that Russia has agreed to allow the United States to supply our coalition forces through your territory. Neither America nor Russia has an interest in an Afghanistan or Pakistan governed by the Taliban. It's time to work together on behalf of a different future -- a future in which we leave behind the great game of the past and the conflict of the present; a future in which all of us contribute to the security of Central Asia.

Now, beyond Afghanistan, America is committed to promoting the opportunity that will isolate extremists. We are helping the Iraqi people build a better future, and leaving Iraq to the Iraqis. We're pursuing the goal of two states, Israel and Palestine, living in peace and security. We're partnering with Muslim communities around the world to advance education, health, and economic development. In each of these endeavors, I believe that the Russian people share our goals, and will benefit from success -- and we need to partner together.

Now, in addition to these security concerns, the third area that I will discuss is America's interest in global prosperity. And since we have so many economists and future businessmen and women in the room, I know this is of great interest to you.

We meet in the midst of the worst global recession in a generation. I believe that the free market is the greatest force for creating and distributing wealth that the world has known. But wherever the market is allowed to run rampant -- through excessive risk-taking, a lack of regulation, or corruption -- then all are endangered, whether we live on the Mississippi or on the Volga.

In America, we're now taking unprecedented steps to jumpstart our economy and reform our system of regulation. But just as no nation can wall itself off from the consequences of a global crisis, no one can serve as the sole engine of global growth. You see, during your lives, something fundamental has changed. And while this crisis has shown us the risks that come with change, that risk is overwhelmed by opportunity. Think of what's possible today that was unthinkable two decades ago. A young woman with an Internet connection in Bangalore, India can compete with anybody anywhere in the world. An entrepreneur with a start-up company in Beijing can take his business global. An NES professor in Moscow can collaborate with colleagues at Harvard or Stanford. That's good for all of us, because when prosperity is created in India, that's a new market for our goods; when new ideas take hold in China, that pushes our businesses to innovate; when new connections are forged among people, all of us are enriched.

There is extraordinary potential for increased cooperation between Americans and Russians. We can pursue trade that is free and fair and integrated with the wider world. We can boost investment that creates jobs in both our countries, we can forge partnerships on energy that tap not only traditional resources, like oil and gas, but new sources of energy that will drive growth and combat climate change. All of that, Americans and Russians can do together.

Now, government can promote this cooperation, but ultimately individuals must advance this cooperation, because the greatest resource of any nation in the 21st century is you. It's people; it's young people especially. And the country which taps that resource will be the country that will succeed. That success depends upon economies that function within the rule of law. As President Medvedev has rightly said, a mature and effective legal system is a condition for sustained economic development. People everywhere should have the right to do business or get an education without paying a bribe. Whether they are in America or Russia or Africa or Latin America, that's not a American idea or a Russian idea -- that's how people and countries will succeed in the 21st century.

And this brings me to the fourth issue that I will discuss -- America's interest in democratic governments that protect the rights of their people.

By no means is America perfect. But it is our commitment to certain universal values which allows us to correct our imperfections, to improve constantly, and to grow stronger over time. Freedom of speech and assembly has allowed women, and minorities, and workers to protest for full and equal rights at a time when they were denied. The rule of law and equal administration of justice has busted monopolies, shut down political machines that were corrupt, ended abuses of power. Independent media have exposed corruption at all levels of business and government. Competitive elections allow us to change course and hold our leaders accountable. If our democracy did not advance those rights, then I, as a person of African ancestry, wouldn't be able to address you as an American citizen, much less a President. Because at the time of our founding, I had no rights -- people who looked like me. But it is because of that process that I can now stand before you as President of the United States.

So around the world, America supports these values because they are moral, but also because they work. The arc of history shows that governments which serve their own people survive and thrive; governments which serve only their own power do not. Governments that represent the will of their people are far less likely to descend into failed states, to terrorize their citizens, or to wage war on others. Governments that promote the rule of law, subject their actions to oversight, and allow for independent institutions are more dependable trading partners. And in our own history, democracies have been America's most enduring allies, including those we once waged war with in Europe and Asia -- nations that today live with great security and prosperity.

Now let me be clear: America cannot and should not seek to impose any system of government on any other country, nor would we presume to choose which party or individual should run a country. And we haven't always done what we should have on that front. Even as we meet here today, America supports now the restoration of the democratically-elected President of Honduras, even though he has strongly opposed American policies. We do so not because we agree with him. We do so because we respect the universal principle that people should choose their own leaders, whether they are leaders we agree with or not.

And that leads me to the final area that I will discuss, which is America's interest in an international system that advances cooperation while respecting the sovereignty of all nations.

State sovereignty must be a cornerstone of international order. Just as all states should have the right to choose their leaders, states must have the right to borders that are secure, and to their own foreign policies. That is true for Russia, just as it is true for the United States. Any system that cedes those rights will lead to anarchy. That's why we must apply this principle to all nations -- and that includes nations like Georgia and Ukraine. America will never impose a security arrangement on another country. For any country to become a member of an organization like NATO, for example, a majority of its people must choose to; they must undertake reforms; they must be able to contribute to the Alliance's mission. And let me be clear: NATO should be seeking collaboration with Russia, not confrontation.

And more broadly, we need to foster cooperation and respect among all nations and peoples. As President of the United States, I will work tirelessly to protect America's security and to advance our interests. But no one nation can meet the challenges of the 21st century on its own, nor dictate its terms to the world. That is something that America now understands, just as Russia understands. That's why America seeks an international system that lets nations pursue their interests peacefully, especially when those interests diverge; a system where the universal rights of human beings are respected, and violations of those rights are opposed; a system where we hold ourselves to the same standards that we apply to other nations, with clear rights and responsibilities for all.

There was a time when Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin could shape the world in one meeting. Those days are over. The world is more complex today. Billions of people have found their voice, and seek their own measure of prosperity and self-determination in every corner of the planet. Over the past two decades, we've witnessed markets grow, wealth spread, and technology used to build -- not destroy. We've seen old hatreds pass, illusions of differences between people lift and fade away; we've seen the human destiny in the hands of more and more human beings who can shape their own destinies. Now, we must see that the period of transition which you have lived through ushers in a new era in which nations live in peace, and people realize their aspirations for dignity, security, and a better life for their children. That is America's interest, and I believe that it is Russia's interest as well.

I know that this future can seem distant. Change is hard. In the words of that NES student back in 1993, the real world is not so rational as on paper. But think of the change that has unfolded with the passing of time. One hundred years ago, a czar ruled Russia, and Europe was a place of empire. When I was born, segregation was still the law of the land in parts of America, and my father's Kenya was still a colony. When you were born, a school like this would have been impossible, and the Internet was only known to a privileged few.

You get to decide what comes next. You get to choose where change will take us, because the future does not belong to those who gather armies on a field of battle or bury missiles in the ground; the future belongs to young people with an education and the imagination to create. That is the source of power in this century. And given all that has happened in your two decades on Earth, just imagine what you can create in the years to come.

Every country charts its own course. Russia has cut its way through time like a mighty river through a canyon, leaving an indelible mark on human history as it goes. As you move this story forward, look to the future that can be built if we refuse to be burdened by the old obstacles and old suspicions; look to the future that can be built if we partner on behalf of the aspirations we hold in common. Together, we can build a world where people are protected, prosperity is enlarged, and our power truly serves progress. And it is all in your hands. Good luck to all of you.

Thank you very much.

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# Address to the Ghanaian Parliament

I like this. Thank you. Thank you.

I think Congress needs one of those horns.

That sounds pretty good. Sounds like Louis Armstrong back there.

Good afternoon, everybody. It is a great honor for me to be in Accra and to speak to the representatives of the people of Ghana. I am deeply grateful for the welcome that I've received, as are Michelle and Malia and Sasha Obama. Ghana's history is rich, the ties between our two countries are strong, and I am proud that this is my first visit to sub-Saharan Africa as President of the United States of America.

I want to thank Madam Speaker and all the members of the House of Representatives for hosting us today. I want to thank President Mills for his outstanding leadership. To the former Presidents -- Jerry Rawlings, former President Kufuor -- Vice President, Chief Justice -- thanks to all of you for your extraordinary hospitality and the wonderful institutions that you've built here in Ghana.

I'm speaking to you at the end of a long trip. I began in Russia for a summit between two great powers. I traveled to Italy for a meeting of the world's leading economies. And I've come here to Ghana for a simple reason: The 21st century will be shaped by what happens not just in Rome or Moscow or Washington, but by what happens in Accra, as well.

This is the simple truth of a time when the boundaries between people are overwhelmed by our connections. Your prosperity can expand America's prosperity. Your health and security can contribute to the world's health and security. And the strength of your democracy can help advance human rights for people everywhere.

So I do not see the countries and peoples of Africa as a world apart; I see Africa as a fundamental part of our interconnected world -- as partners with America on behalf of the future we want for all of our children. That partnership must be grounded in mutual responsibility and mutual respect. And that is what I want to speak with you about today.

We must start from the simple premise that Africa's future is up to Africans.

I say this knowing full well the tragic past that has sometimes haunted this part of the world. After all, I have the blood of Africa within me, and my family's -- my family's own story encompasses both the tragedies and triumphs of the larger African story.

Some you know my grandfather was a cook for the British in Kenya, and though he was a respected elder in his village, his employers called him "boy" for much of his life. He was on the periphery of Kenya's liberation struggles, but he was still imprisoned briefly during repressive times. In his life, colonialism wasn't simply the creation of unnatural borders or unfair terms of trade -- it was something experienced personally, day after day, year after year.

My father grew up herding goats in a tiny village, an impossible distance away from the American universities where he would come to get an education. He came of age at a moment of extraordinary promise for Africa. The struggles of his own father's generation were giving birth to new nations, beginning right here in Ghana. Africans were educating and asserting themselves in new ways, and history was on the move.

But despite the progress that has been made -- and there has been considerable progress in many parts of Africa -- we also know that much of that promise has yet to be fulfilled. Countries like Kenya had a per capita economy larger than South Korea's when I was born. They have badly been outpaced. Disease and conflict have ravaged parts of the African continent.

In many places, the hope of my father's generation gave way to cynicism, even despair. Now, it's easy to point fingers and to pin the blame of these problems on others. Yes, a colonial map that made little sense helped to breed conflict. The West has often approached Africa as a patron or a source of resources rather than a partner. But the West is not responsible for the destruction of the Zimbabwean economy over the last decade, or wars in which children are enlisted as combatants. In my father's life, it was partly tribalism and patronage and nepotism in an independent Kenya that for a long stretch derailed his career, and we know that this kind of corruption is still a daily fact of life for far too many.

Now, we know that's also not the whole story. Here in Ghana, you show us a face of Africa that is too often overlooked by a world that sees only tragedy or a need for charity. The people of Ghana have worked hard to put democracy on a firmer footing, with repeated peaceful transfers of power even in the wake of closely contested elections. And by the way, can I say that for that the minority deserves as much credit as the majority. And with improved governance and an emerging civil society, Ghana's economy has shown impressive rates of growth.

This progress may lack the drama of 20th century liberation struggles, but make no mistake: It will ultimately be more significant. For just as it is important to emerge from the control of other nations, it is even more important to build one's own nation.

So I believe that this moment is just as promising for Ghana and for Africa as the moment when my father came of age and new nations were being born. This is a new moment of great promise. Only this time, we've learned that it will not be giants like Nkrumah and Kenyatta who will determine Africa's future. Instead, it will be you -- the men and women in Ghana's parliament -- the people you represent. It will be the young people brimming with talent and energy and hope who can claim the future that so many in previous generations never realized.

Now, to realize that promise, we must first recognize the fundamental truth that you have given life to in Ghana: Development depends on good governance. That is the ingredient which has been missing in far too many places, for far too long. That's the change that can unlock Africa's potential. And that is a responsibility that can only be met by Africans.

As for America and the West, our commitment must be measured by more than just the dollars we spend. I've pledged substantial increases in our foreign assistance, which is in Africa's interests and America's interests. But the true sign of success is not whether we are a source of perpetual aid that helps people scrape by -- it's whether we are partners in building the capacity for transformational change.

This mutual responsibility must be the foundation of our partnership. And today, I'll focus on four areas that are critical to the future of Africa and the entire developing world: democracy, opportunity, health, and the peaceful resolution of conflict.

First, we must support strong and sustainable democratic governments.

As I -- As I said in Cairo, each nation gives life to democracy in its own way, and in line with its own traditions. But history offers a clear verdict: Governments that respect the will of their own people, that govern by consent and not coercion, are more -- more prosperous, they are more stable, and more successful than governments that do not.

This is about more than just holding elections. It's also about what happens between elections. Repression can take many forms, and too many nations, even those that have elections, are plagued by problems that condemn their people to poverty. No country is going to create wealth if its leaders exploit the economy to enrich themselves -- or -- or if police -- if police can be bought off by drug traffickers. No business -- No business wants to invest in a place where the government skims 20 percent off the top -- or the head of the Port Authority is corrupt. No person wants to live in a society where the rule of law gives way to the rule of brutality and bribery. That is not democracy, that is tyranny, even if occasionally you sprinkle an election in there. And now is the time for that style of governance to end.

In the 21st century, capable, reliable, and transparent institutions are the key to success -- strong parliaments; honest police forces; independent judges; an independent press; a vibrant private sector; a civil society. Those are the things that give life to democracy, because that is what matters in people's everyday lives.

Now, time and again, Ghanaians have chosen constitutional rule over autocracy, and shown a democratic spirit that allows the energy of your people to break through. We see that in leaders who accept defeat graciously -- the fact that President Mills' opponents were standing beside him last night to greet me when I came off the plane spoke volumes about Ghana; victors who resist calls to wield power against the opposition in unfair ways. We see that spirit in courageous journalists like Anas Aremeyaw Anas, who risked his life to report the truth. We see it in police like Patience Quaye, who helped prosecute the first human trafficker in Ghana. We see it in the young people who are speaking up against patronage, and participating in the political process.

Across Africa, we've seen countless examples of people taking control of their destiny, and making change from the bottom up. We saw it in Kenya, where civil society and business came together to help stop post-election violence. We saw it in South Africa, where over three-quarters of the country voted in the recent election -- the fourth since the end of Apartheid. We saw it in Zimbabwe, where the Election Support Network braved brutal repression to stand up for the principle that a person's vote is their sacred right.

Now, make no mistake: History is on the side of these brave Africans, not with those who use coups or change constitutions to stay in power. Africa -- Africa doesn't need strongmen; it needs strong institutions.

Now, America will not seek to impose any system of government on any other nation. The essential truth of democracy is that each nation determines its own destiny. But what America will do is increase assistance for responsible individuals and responsible institutions, with a focus on supporting good governance -- on parliaments, which check abuses of power and ensure that opposition voices are heard; on the rule of law, which ensures the equal administration of justice; on civic participation, so that young people get involved; and on concrete solutions to corruption like forensic accounting and automating services -- strengthening hotlines, protecting whistle-blowers to advance transparency and accountability.

And we provide this support. I have directed my Administration to give greater attention to corruption in our human rights reports. People everywhere should have the right to start a business or get an education without paying a bribe. We have a responsibility to support those who act responsibly and to isolate those who don't, and that is exactly what America will do.

Now, this leads directly to our second area of partnership: supporting development that provides opportunity for more people.

With better governance, I have no doubt that Africa holds the promise of a broader base of prosperity. Witness the extraordinary success of Africans in my country, America. They're doing very well. So they've got the talent, they've got the entrepreneurial spirit. The question is, how do we make sure that they're succeeding here in their home countries? The continent is rich in natural resources. And from cell phone entrepreneurs to small farmers, Africans have shown the capacity and commitment to create their own opportunities. But old habits must also be broken. Dependence on commodities -- or a single export -- has a tendency to concentrate wealth in the hands of the few, and leaves people too vulnerable to downturns.

So in Ghana, for instance, oil brings great opportunities, and you have been very responsible in preparing for new revenue. But as so many Ghanaians know, oil cannot simply become the new cocoa. From South Korea to Singapore, history shows that countries thrive when they invest in their people and in their infrastructure; when they promote multiple export industries, develop a skilled workforce, and create space for small and medium-sized businesses that create jobs.

As Africans reach for this promise, America will be more responsible in extending our hand. By cutting costs that go to Western consultants and administration, we want to put more resources in the hands of those who need it, while training people to do more for themselves. That's why our 3.5 billion dollar food security initiative is focused on new methods and technologies for farmers -- not simply sending American producers or goods to Africa. Aid is not an end in itself. The purpose of foreign assistance must be creating the conditions where it's no longer needed. I want to see Ghanaians not only self-sufficient in food, I want to see you exporting food to other countries and earning money. You can do that.

Now, America can also do more to promote trade and investment. Wealthy nations must open our doors to goods and services from Africa in a meaningful way. That will be a commitment of my Administration. And where there is good governance, we can broaden prosperity through public-private partnerships that invest in better roads and electricity; capacity-building that trains people to grow a business; financial services that reach not just the cities but also the poor and rural areas. This is also in our own interests -- for if people are lifted out of poverty and wealth is created in Africa, guess what? New markets will open up for our own goods. So it's good for both.

One area that holds out both undeniable peril and extraordinary promise is energy. Africa gives off less greenhouse gas than any other part of the world, but it is the most threatened by climate change. A warming planet will spread disease, shrink water resources, and deplete crops, creating conditions that produce more famine and more conflict. All of us -- particularly the developed world -- have a responsibility to slow these trends -- through mitigation, and by changing the way that we use energy. But we can also work with Africans to turn this crisis into opportunity.

Together, we can partner on behalf of our planet and prosperity, and help countries increase access to power while skipping -- leapfrogging the dirtier phase of development. Think about it: Across Africa, there is bountiful wind and solar power; geothermal energy and biofuels. From the Rift Valley to the North African deserts; from the Western coasts to South Africa's crops -- Africa's boundless natural gifts can generate its own power, while exporting profitable, clean energy abroad.

These steps are about more than growth numbers on a balance sheet. They're about whether a young person with an education can get a job that supports a family; a farmer can transfer their goods to market; an entrepreneur with a good idea can start a business. It's about the dignity of work; it's about the opportunity that must exist for Africans in the 21st century.

Just as governance is vital to opportunity, it's also critical to the third area I want to talk about: strengthening public health.

In recent years, enormous progress has been made in parts of Africa. Far more people are living productively with HIV/AIDS, and getting the drugs they need. I just saw a wonderful clinic and hospital that is focused particularly on maternal health. But too many still die from diseases that shouldn't kill them. When children are being killed because of a mosquito bite, and mothers are dying in childbirth, then we know that more progress must be made.

Yet because of incentives -- often provided by donor nations -- many African doctors and nurses go overseas, or work for programs that focus on a single disease. And this creates gaps in primary care and basic prevention. Meanwhile, individual Africans also have to make responsible choices that prevent the spread of disease, while promoting public health in their communities and countries.

So across Africa, we see examples of people tackling these problems. In Nigeria, an Interfaith effort of Christians and Muslims has set an example of cooperation to confront malaria. Here in Ghana and across Africa, we see innovative ideas for filling gaps in care -- for instance, through E-Health initiatives that allow doctors in big cities to support those in small towns.

America will support these efforts through a comprehensive, global health strategy, because in the 21st century, we are called to act by our conscience but also by our common interest, because when a child dies of a preventable disease in Accra, that diminishes us everywhere. And when disease goes unchecked in any corner of the world, we know that it can spread across oceans and continents.

And that's why my Administration has committed 63 billion dollars to meet these challenges -- 63 billion dollars. Building on the strong efforts of President Bush, we will carry forward the fight against HIV/AIDS. We will pursue the goal of ending deaths from malaria and tuberculosis, and we will work to eradicate polio. We will fight -- we will fight neglected tropical disease. And we won't confront illnesses in isolation -- we will invest in public health systems that promote wellness and focus on the health of mothers and children.

Now, as we partner on behalf of a healthier future, we must also stop the destruction that comes not from illness, but from human beings -- and so the final area that I will address is conflict.

Let me be clear: Africa is not the crude caricature of a continent at perpetual war. But if we are honest, for far too many Africans, conflict is a part of life, as constant as the sun. There are wars over land and wars over resources. And it is still far too easy for those without conscience to manipulate whole communities into fighting among faiths and tribes.

These conflicts are a millstone around Africa's neck. Now, we all have many identities -- of tribe and ethnicity; of religion and nationality. But defining oneself in opposition to someone who belongs to a different tribe, or who worships a different prophet, has no place in the 21st century. Africa's diversity should be a source of strength, not a cause for division. We are all God's children. We all share common aspirations -- to live in peace and security; to access education and opportunity; to love our families and our communities and our faith. That is our common humanity.

That is why we must stand up to inhumanity in our midst. It is never justified -- never justifiable to target innocents in the name of ideology. It is the death sentence of a society to force children to kill in wars. It is the ultimate mark of criminality and cowardice to condemn women to relentless and systemic rape. We must bear witness to the value of every child in Darfur and the dignity of every woman in the Congo. No faith or culture should condone the outrages against them. And all of us must strive for the peace and security necessary for progress.

Africans are standing up for this future. Here, too, in Ghana we are seeing you help point the way forward. Ghanaians should take pride in your contributions to peacekeeping from Congo to Liberia to Lebanon -- and your efforts to resist the scourge of the drug trade. We welcome the steps that are being taken by organizations like the African Union and ECOWAS to better resolve conflicts, to keep the peace, and support those in need. And we encourage the vision of a strong, regional security architecture that can bring effective, transnational forces to bear when needed.

America has a responsibility to work with you as a partner to advance this vision, not just with words, but with support that strengthens African capacity. When there's a genocide in Darfur or terrorists in Somalia, these are not simply African problems -- they are global security challenges, and they demand a global response.

And that's why we stand ready to partner through diplomacy and technical assistance and logistical support, and we will stand behind efforts to hold war criminals accountable. And let me be clear: Our Africa Command is focused not on establishing a foothold in the continent, but on confronting these common challenges to advance the security of America, Africa, and the world.

In Moscow, I spoke of the need for an international system where the universal rights of human beings are respected, and violations of those rights are opposed. And that must include a commitment to support those who resolve conflicts peacefully, to sanction and stop those who don't, and to help those who have suffer -- suffered. But ultimately, it will be vibrant democracies like Botswana and Ghana which roll back the causes of conflict and advance the frontiers of peace and prosperity.

As I said earlier, Africa's future is up to Africans.

The people of Africa are ready to claim that future. And in my country, African Americans -- including so many recent immigrants -- have thrived in every sector of society. We've done so despite a difficult past, and we've drawn strength from our African heritage. With strong institutions and a strong will, I know that Africans can live their dreams in Nairobi and Lagos, Kigali, Kinshasa, Harare, and right here in Accra.

You know, 52 years ago, the eyes of the world were on Ghana. And a young preacher named Martin Luther King traveled here, to Accra, to watch the Union Jack come down and the Ghanaian flag go up. This was before the march on Washington or the success of the civil rights movement in my country. Dr. King was asked how he felt while watching the birth of a nation. And he said: "It renews my conviction in the ultimate triumph of justice."

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Now that triumph must be won once more, and it must be won by you. And I am particularly speaking to the young people all across Africa and right here in Ghana. In places like Ghana, young people make up over half of the population.

And here is what you must know: The world will be what you make of it. You have the power to hold your leaders accountable, and to build institutions that serve the people. You can serve in your communities, and harness your energy and education to create new wealth and build new connections to the world. You can conquer disease, and end conflicts, and make change from the bottom up. You can do that. Yes you can -- because in this moment, history is on the move.

But these things can only be done if all of you take responsibility for your future. And it won't be easy. It will take time and effort. There will be suffering and setbacks. But I can promise you this: America will be with you every step of the way -- as a partner, as a friend. Opportunity won't come from any other place, though. It must come from the decisions that all of you make, the things that you do, the hope that you hold in your heart.

Ghana, freedom is your inheritance. Now, it is your responsibility to build upon freedom's foundation. And if you do, we will look back years from now to places like Accra and say this was the time when the promise was realized; this was the moment when prosperity was forged, when pain was overcome, and a new era of progress began. This can be the time when we witness the triumph of justice once more. Yes we can.

Thank you very much. God bless you.

Thank you.

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# Nomination of Regina M. Benjamin for U.S. Surgeon General

Good morning, everybody. Before I introduce America's next Surgeon General, I'd like to say a few words about our ongoing efforts to reform the health care system that she will help oversee.

We are now closer to the goal of health care reform than we have ever been. Over the last several weeks, key committees in the House and the Senate have made important and unprecedented progress on a plan that will lower costs, provide better care for patients, and curb the worst practices of the insurance companies. It's a plan that will not add to our deficit over the next decade. Let me repeat that: It is a plan that will not add to our deficit over the next decade -- and eventually will help lower our deficit by slowing the skyrocketing cost of Medicare and Medicaid.

Even though we are close, I've got no illusions that it's going to be easy to get over the finish line. There are going to be more debates and more disagreements before all is said and done. But health care reform must be done.

I know there are those who believe we should wait to solve this problem, or take a more incremental approach, or simply do nothing. But this is the kind of criticism we heard when the country tried to pass Medicare, a program that is now providing quality care to generations of American seniors. It's the kind of criticism we heard when we tried to pass the Children's Health Insurance Program, which has provided quality care and coverage to millions of kids. It's the same Washington thinking that has ignored big challenges and put off tough decisions for decades. And it is precisely that kind of small thinking that has led us into the current predicament.

So make no mistake: The status quo on health care is no longer an option for the United States of America. If we step back from this challenge right now, we will leave our children a legacy of debt -- a future of crushing costs that bankrupt our families, our businesses, and because we will have done nothing to bring down the cost of Medicare and Medicaid, will crush our government. Premiums will continue to skyrocket -- placing what amounts to another tax on American families struggling to pay bills. The insurance companies and special interests that have killed reform in the past will only continue to benefit even more -- and they'll continue to deny coverage to Americans with pre-existing medical conditions. People will continue to lose health insurance just because they lose their job or they change jobs.

This is a future that we cannot afford. This country can't afford to have health care premiums rise three times faster than people's wages, as they did over the last decade. We can't afford 14,000 Americans losing their health care every single day. We can't afford a future where our government will eventually spend more on Medicare and Medicaid than what we spend on everything else.

And during the campaign, I promised health care reform that would control costs, expand coverage, and ensure choice. And I promised that Americans making $250,000 a year or less would not pay more in taxes. These are promises that we're keeping as reform moves forward.

This is no longer a problem we can wait to fix. This is about who we are as a country. Health care reform is about every family's health, but it's also about the health of the economy.

So I just want to put everybody on notice, because there was a lot of chatter during the week that I was gone: We are going to get this done. Inaction is not an option. And for those nay-sayers and cynics who think that this is not going to happen, don't bet against us. We are going to make this thing happen, because the American people desperately need it.

And even those who are satisfied with their health care right now, they understand that if premiums keep on doubling and if employers keep on shedding health insurance because it's unsustainable and if you look at the trajectory of where Medicare and Medicaid are going, then inaction will create the biggest crisis of all.

And so I understand people are a little nervous and a little scared about making change. The muscles in this town to bring about big changes are a little atrophied, but we're whipping folks back into shape. We are going to get this done. And if there's anyone who understands the urgency of meeting this challenge in a personal and powerful way, it's the woman who will become our nation's next Surgeon General, Dr. Regina Benjamin.

The list of qualifications that make Dr. Benjamin an outstanding candidate to be America's leading spokesperson on issues of public health are long indeed. She was in the second class at Morehouse School of Medicine and went on to earn an MD from the University of Alabama at Birmingham and an MBA from Tulane. She served as Associate Dean for Rural Health at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine, and in 1995, she became the first physician under 40 and the first African American woman to be named to the American Medical Association's Board of Trustees. In 2002, she became President of Alabama's State Medical Association. And she has received numerous awards and recognitions, including the MacArthur Genius Award. It's very impressive.

But of all these achievements and experience, none has been more pertinent to today's challenges or closer to Regina's heart than the rural health clinic that she has built and rebuilt in Bayou La Batre -- did I say that right? Well, tell me how to say it.

Dr. Benjamin: Bayou La Batre.

President Obama: Bayou La Batre. That's in Alabama, people.

Bayou La Batre is a rural town of about 2,500 people. It's a shrimping town, where a lot of folks work for themselves, scrape by, and can't usually afford health insurance. And by the way, Dr. Benjamin, while we were talking in the Oval Office, described for me the demographics of this town are actually very interesting, because you've got whites, blacks, and Asians in this community. There are a lot of Laotians and Cambodians who have moved there and are part of this shrimping town, so it's a diverse but very poor rural community. And like so many other rural communities, doctors and hospitals are hard to come by. And that's why, even though she could have left the state to make more money as a specialist or as a doctor in a wealthier community, Regina Benjamin returned to Alabama and opened a small clinic in Bayou La Batre.

When people couldn't pay, she didn't charge them. When the clinic wasn't making money, she didn't take a salary for herself. When Hurricane George destroyed the clinic in 1998, she made house calls to all her patients while it was rebuilt. When Hurricane Katrina destroyed it again and left most of her town homeless, she mortgaged her house and maxed out her credit cards to rebuild that clinic for a second time. She tended to those who had been wounded in the storm, and when folks needed medicine, she asked the pharmacist to send the bill her way.

And when Regina's clinic was about to open for the third time, and a fire burned it to the ground before it could serve the first patient, well, you can guess what Dr. Benjamin did. With help from her community, she is rebuilding it again. One disabled patient brought her an envelope with $20 inside. Another elderly man said simply, "Maybe I can help. I got a hammer."

For nearly two decades, Dr. Regina Benjamin has seen in a very personal way what is broken about our health care system. She's seen an increasing number of patients who've had health insurance their entire lives suddenly lose it because they lost their jobs or because it's simply become too expensive. She's been a relentless promoter of prevention and wellness programs, having treated too many costly and -- diseases and complications that didn't have to happen. And she's witnessed the shortage of primary care physicians in the rural and underserved areas where she works.

But for all that she's seen and all the tremendous obstacles that she has overcome, Regina Benjamin also represents what's best about health care in America -- doctors and nurses who give and care and sacrifice for the sake of their patients; those Americans who would do anything to heal a fellow citizen. Through floods and fires and severe want, Regina Benjamin has refused to give up. Her patients have refused to give up. And when we were talking in the Oval Office, she said: The one thing I want to do is make sure that this Surgeon General's Office gives voice to patients, that patients have a seat at the table; somebody is advocating for them and speaking for them.

And now we in Washington and across America have to refuse to give up on the goal of health care that is affordable and accessible for every last one of us. We don't have to deal with hurricanes and we don't have to deal with floods and we don't have to deal with fires; all we have to do is pass a bill to make sure that the American people have a decent shot at getting the kind of choice and high-quality health care that's affordable.

And I know that Dr. Benjamin is going to help us get there as the next Surgeon General. And I am truly honored to nominate her for that post, and Secretary Sebelius is equally excited, even though she's just standing here.

With that, let me introduce the next Surgeon General of the United States, Dr. Regina Benjamin.

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# American Graduation Initiative Address

Hello, Michigan! Thank you. Thank you so much. First of all, give Joe a big round of applause for the wonderful introduction. We've got some special guests here -- now, if everybody has chairs, go ahead and use them. Feel free. We've got some special guests here today that I just want to acknowledge. All of you are special, but these folks I want to make sure that you have a chance to see them.

First of all, one of the best governors in the country, please give Jennifer Granholm a big round of applause. Lieutenant Governor John Cherry -- give John a big round of applause. One of my favorite people, a former colleague of mine, still just a fighter on behalf of working families each and every day -- Senator Debbie Stabenow. We've got Speaker of the House, Andy Dillon, in the house. We've got a lot of other local elected officials, and I just want to thank them.

A couple of people who are missing: Carl Levin, who is doing great work. He's in the Senate right now fighting on behalf of a bill to make sure that we're not loading up a bunch of necessary defense spending with unnecessary defense spending. So he's the point person on it. The only reason he's not here is because he is working alongside the administration to get this bill done. Please give him a big round of applause. Congressman Sandy Levin, also working hard on your behalf each and every day, but is not here today. I want to go ahead and acknowledge the new mayor, since he's the new mayor -- Mayor Dave Bing, great ball player. My game is a little like Dave Bing's -- except I don't have the jump shot or the speed or the ball handling skills -- or the endurance. Also don't have the afro. Don't think I forgot that, Dave. I remember. I remember that.

I also want to acknowledge that we've got the Executive Director of the White House Council on Auto Communities and Workers, who's working hard, has a direct line to me each and every day. He's traveling constantly back here -- Ed Montgomery. Please give Ed a big round of applause.

And the Chairman of the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indian Tribe, Derek Bailey is here. Please give Derek a big round of applause.

And finally, the president of the college where we are here, Jim Jacobs. Give Jim Jacobs a big round of applause.

And those of you who I've missed, you know how grateful I am that you're here. And thank you all. It is wonderful to be back at Macomb. It was terrific visiting this campus as a candidate, but I have to admit, it's even better visiting as a President.

Now, this is a place where anyone -- anyone with a desire to learn and to grow, to take their career to a new level or start a new career altogether -- has the opportunity to pursue their dream, right here in Macomb. This is a place where people of all ages and all backgrounds -- even in the face of obstacles, even in the face of very difficult personal challenges -- can take a chance on a brighter future for themselves and their families.

There are folks like Joe, who just told us his story. When Joe lost his job, he decided to take advantage of assistance for displaced workers. He earned his associate degree here at Macomb, and with a pretty impressive GPA, I might add. And with the help of that degree, Joe found a new job, working for the new Henry Ford West Bloomfield Hospital as a maintenance mechanic, using the skills he learned here and the talents that he brought to make a fresh start.

There are workers like Kellie Kulman, who is here today. Where's Kellie? Raise your hand, Kellie. Where are you? There you are. There's Kellie right there. Kellie is a UAW worker at a Ford plant in Sterling Heights, Michigan. She used to drive a fork lift, right? But then she decided to train here at Macomb for a job that required new skills, and now she's an apprentice pipe fitter. It's a telling example: Even as this painful restructuring takes place in our auto industry, workers are seeking out training for new auto jobs. And Joe and Kellie's story make clear what all of you know: Community colleges are an essential part of our recovery in the present -- and our prosperity in the future. This place can make the future better, not just for these individuals but for America.

Now, since this recession began 20 months ago, 6.5 million Americans have lost their jobs, and I don't have to tell you Michigan in particular has been hard-hit. Now, I -- the statistics are daunting. The whole country now, the unemployment rate is approaching 10 percent. Here in Michigan, it's about five points higher. And new jobs of course are going to be coming out and we're going to see continuing job loss even as the economy is beginning to stabilize.

Now, that's not just abstractions. Those just aren't numbers on a page. Those are extraordinary hardships, tough times, for families and individuals who've worked hard all their lives and have done the right things all their lives. If you haven't lost a job, chances are you know somebody who has: a family member, a neighbor, a friend, a coworker. And you know that as difficult as the financial struggle can be, the sense of loss is about more than just a paycheck, because most of us define ourselves by the work we do. That's part of what it means to be an American. We take pride in work -- that sense that you're contributing, supporting your family, meeting your responsibilities. People need work not just for income, but because it makes you part of that fabric of a community that's so important. And so when you lose your job, and when entire communities are losing thousands of jobs, that's a heavy burden, that's a heavy weight.

Now, my administration has a job to do, as well, and that job is to get this economy back on its feet. That's my job. And it's a job I gladly accept. I love these folks who helped get us in this mess and then suddenly say, well, this is Obama's economy. That's fine. Give it to me. My job is to solve problems, not to stand on the sidelines and harp and gripe.

So I welcome the job. I want the responsibility. And I know that -- let's just take an example. Many questioned our efforts to help save GM and Chrysler from collapse earlier this year. Their feeling was these companies were driven to the brink by poor management decisions over a long period of time, and like any business they should be held accountable for those decisions. I agree that they should be held accountable. But I also recognize the historic significance and economic prominence of these companies in communities all across Michigan and all across the country.

I thought about the hundreds of thousands of Americans whose livelihoods are still connected to the American auto industry, and the impact on an already struggling economy, especially right here in Michigan. So I said that if Chrysler and GM were willing to fundamentally restructure their businesses and make the hard choices necessary to become competitive now and in the future, it was a process worth supporting.

Now today, after a painful period of soul-searching and sacrifice, both GM and Chrysler have emerged from bankruptcy. Remember, folks said there was no way they could do it? They've gotten it done already, in record time -- far faster than anybody thought possible. They've got a leaner structure, they've got new management, and a viable vision of how to compete and win in the 21st century. Those sacrifices were shared among all the stakeholders: workers and management; creditors and shareholders; retirees and communities. And together, they've made the rebirth of Chrysler and GM possible.

It was the right thing to do.

But even with this positive news, the hard truth is, is that some of the jobs that have been lost in the auto industry and elsewhere won't be coming back. They're the casualties of a changing economy. In some cases, just increased productivity in the plants themselves means that some jobs aren't going to return. And that only underscores the importance of generating new businesses and new industries to replace the ones that we've lost, and of preparing our workers to fill the jobs they create. For even before this recession hit, we were faced with an economy that was simply not creating or sustaining enough new, well-paying jobs.

So now is the time to change all that. What we face is far more than a passing crisis. This is a transformative moment. And in this moment we must do what other generations have done. It's not the time to shrink from the challenges we face or put off tough decisions. That's what Washington has done for decades, and it's exactly why I ran for President -- to change that mindset. Now is the time to build a firmer, stronger foundation for growth that will not only withstand future economic storms, but that will help us thrive and compete in a global economy. To build that foundation, we have to slow the growth of health care costs that are driving us into debt. We're going to have to do that, and there's going to be a major debate over the next three weeks. And don't be fooled by folks trying to scare you, saying we can't change the health care system. We have no choice but to change the health care system, because right now it's broken for too many Americans.

We're going to have to make tough choices necessary to bring down deficits. But don't let folks fool you -- the best way to start bringing down deficits is to get control of our health care costs, which is why we need reform.

Now is the time to create the jobs of the future by growing industries, including a new clean energy economy. And Jennifer Granholm has been all on top of this as the governor of Michigan. She is bring cleaning [sic] energy jobs right here to Michigan, and we've got to support her in that effort.

I want Michigan to build windmills and wind turbines and solar panels and biofuel plants and energy-efficient light bulbs and weatherize all our -- because, Michigan, you know bad weather. So you can be all on top of weatherizing. You need to weatherize. I know about that in Chicago too.

But we also have to ensure that we're educating and preparing our people for the new jobs of the 21st century. We've got to prepare our people with the skills they need to compete in this global economy. Time and again, when we placed our bet for the future on education, we have prospered as a result -- by tapping the incredible innovative and generative potential of a skilled American workforce. That's what happened when President Lincoln signed into law legislation creating the land grant colleges, which not only transformed higher education, but also our entire economy. That's what took place when President Roosevelt signed the GI Bill which helped educate a generation, and ushered in an era of unprecedented prosperity. That was the foundation for the American middle class.

And that's why, at the start of my administration I set a goal for America: By 2020, this nation will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world. We used to have that. We're going to have it again. And we've begun to take historic steps to achieve this goal. Already we've increased Pell grants by $500. We've created a $2,500 tax credit for four years of college tuition. We've simplified student aid applications and ensured that aid is not based on the income of a job that you just lost. A new GI Bill of Rights for the 21st century is beginning to help soldiers coming home from Iraq and Afghanistan to begin a new life -- in a new economy. And the recovery plan has helped close state budget shortfalls -- which put enormous pressure on public universities and community colleges -- at the same time making historic investments in school libraries and classrooms and facilities all across America. So we've already taken some steps that are building the foundation for a 21st century education system here in America, one that will allow us to compete with China and India and everybody else all around the world.

But today I'm announcing the most significant down payment yet on reaching the goal of having the highest college graduation rate of any nation in the world. We're going to achieve this in the next 10 years. And it's called the American Graduation Initiative. It will reform and strengthen community colleges like this one from coast to coast so they get the resources that students and schools need -- and the results workers and businesses demand. Through this plan, we seek to help an additional 5 million Americans earn degrees and certificates in the next decade -- 5 million.

Not since the passage of the original GI Bill and the work of President Truman's Commission on Higher Education -- which helped to double the number of community colleges and increase by seven-fold enrollment in those colleges -- have we taken such a historic step on behalf of community colleges in America. And let me be clear: We pay for this plan -- this isn't adding to the deficit; we're paying for this plan -- by ending the wasteful subsidies we currently provide to banks and private lenders for student loans. That will save tens of billions of dollars over the next 10 years. Instead of lining the pockets of special interests, it's time this money went towards the interests of higher education in America. That's what my administration is committed to doing.

Now, I know that for a long time there have been politicians who have spoken of training as a silver bullet and college as a cure-all. It's not, and we know that. I can't tell you how many workers who've been laid off, you talk to them about training and they say, "Training for what?" So I understand the frustrations that a lot of people have, especially if the training is not well designed for the specific jobs that are being created out there.

But we know that in the coming years, jobs requiring at least an associate degree are projected to grow twice as fast as jobs requiring no college experience. We will not fill those jobs -- or even keep those jobs here in America -- without the training offered by community colleges. That's why I want to applaud Governor Granholm for the No Worker Left Behind program. It's providing up to two years' worth of free tuition at community colleges and universities across the state. The rest of the country should learn from the effort.

This is training to become a medical technician, or a health IT worker, or a lab specialist, or a nurse. In fact, 59 percent of all new nurses come from community colleges. This is training to install solar panels and build those wind turbines we were talking about and develop a smarter electricity grid. And this is the kind of education that more and more Americans are using to improve their skills and broaden their horizons. Many young people are saving money by spending two years at community college before heading to a four-year college. And more workers who have lost their jobs -- or fear losing a job -- are seeking an edge at schools like this one.

At the same time, community colleges are under increasing pressure to cap enrollments and scrap courses and cut costs as states and municipalities face budget shortfalls. And this is in addition to the challenges you face in the best of times, as these schools receive far less funding per student than typical four-year colleges and universities. So community colleges are an undervalued asset in our country. Not only is that not right, it's not smart. That's why I've asked Dr. Jill Biden -- who happens to be a relation of the Vice President, Joe Biden, but who is also a community college educator for more than 16 years -- to promote community colleges and help us make community colleges stronger. And that's why we're putting in place this American Graduation Initiative.

Let me describe for you the specifics of what we're going to do. Number one, we will offer competitive grants, challenging community colleges to pursue innovative, results-oriented strategies in exchange for federal funding. We'll fund programs that connect students looking for jobs with businesses that are looking to hire. We'll challenge these schools to find new and better ways to help students catch up on the basics, like math and science, that are essential to our competitiveness. We'll put colleges and employers together to create programs that match curricula in the classroom with the needs of the boardroom.

These are all kinds of -- there are all kinds of examples of what's possible. We've seen Cisco, for example, working with community colleges to prepare students and workers for jobs ranging from work in broadband to health IT. We know that the most successful community colleges are those that partner with the private sector. So we want to encourage more companies to work with schools to build these type of relationships. That way, when somebody goes through a training program, they know that there's a job at the end of that training.

We'll also create a new research center with a simple mission: to measure what works and what doesn't. All too often, we don't know what happens when somebody walks out of a classroom and onto the factory floor or into the library or -- the laboratory or the office. And that means businesses often can't be sure what a degree is really worth. And schools themselves don't have the facts to make informed choices about which programs receive -- achieve results and which programs don't. And this is important, not just for businesses and colleges, but for students and workers, as well. If a parent is going to spend time in the classroom and away from his or her family -- especially after a long day at work -- that degree really has to mean something. They have to know that when they get that degree, this is going to help advance their goals. If a worker is going to spend two years training to enter into a whole new profession, that certificate has to mean that he or she is ready, and that businesses are ready to hire.

In addition, we want to propose new funding for innovative strategies that promote not just enrollment in a community college program, but completion of that program. See, more than half -- more than half of all students who enter community college to earn an associate degree, or transfer to a four-year school to earn a bachelor's degree, unfortunately fail to reach their goal. That's not just a waste of a valuable resource, that's a tragedy for these students. Oftentimes they've taken out debt and they don't get the degree, but they still have to pay back the debt. And it's a disaster for our economy.

So we'll fund programs that track student progress inside and outside the classroom. Let's figure out what's keeping students from crossing that finish line, and then put in place reforms that will remove those barriers. Maybe it becomes too difficult for a parent to be away from home, or too expensive for a waiter or a nurse to miss a shift. Maybe a young student just isn't sure if her education will lead to employment. The point is, we need to figure out solutions for these kinds of challenges -- because facing these impediments shouldn't prevent you from reaching your potential.

All right, so that's a big chunk of this first part of this initiative. The second part: We're going to back $10 billion in loans to renovate and rebuild college classrooms and buildings all across the country. All too often, community colleges are treated like the stepchild of the higher education system; they're an afterthought, if they're thought of at all. And that means schools are often years behind in the facilities they provide, which means, in a 21st century economy, they're years behind in the education they can offer. That's a mistake and it's one that we'll help to correct. Through this fund, schools will have the chance to borrow at a more affordable rate to modernize facilities, and they'll be building on the funds in the recovery plan that are already helping to renovate schools, including community colleges all across the country. And by the way, not only does this improve the schools and the training that they're providing, guess what? You also have to hire some workers and some tradesmen and women to do the work on those schools. So it means it's putting people to work in Michigan right here right now.

Number three: Even as we repair bricks and mortar, we have an opportunity to build a new virtual infrastructure to complement the education and training community colleges can offer. So we're going to support the creation of a new online, open-source clearinghouse of courses so that community colleges across the country can offer more classes without building more classrooms. And this will make a big difference especially for rural campuses that a lot of times have struggled -- attract -- have to struggle to attract students and faculty. And this will make it possible for a professor to complement his lecture with an online exercise, or for a student who can't be away from her family to still keep up with her coursework. We don't know where this kind of experiment will lead, but that's exactly why we ought to try it because I think there's a possibility that online education can provide especially for people who are already in the workforce and want to retrain the chance to upgrade their skills without having to quit their job.

So let me say this more: The road to recovery, the road to prosperity, is going to be hard. It was never going to be easy. When I was sworn in, we were seeing 700 [thousand] jobs lost that month. Then we had the same amount lost for two more consecutive months. Now we've got an average of about 400,000 jobs lost -- but we're still losing too many jobs. We will get to the point where we're not losing jobs, but then we've got to start getting to the point where we're actually creating jobs.

And it's going to take time. There are going to be false starts and there are going to be setbacks. But I am confident that we can meet the challenges we face, because that's what we've always done. That's what America does. We hit some challenges, we fuss and argue about it, and then we go ahead and go about the business of solving our problems. That's what we see on display right here at Macomb Community College. That's what I've seen at colleges and universities all across this country. At every juncture in our history when we've been challenged, we have summoned the resilience and the industriousness -- that can-do American spirit -- that has allowed us to succeed in the face of even the toughest odds.

That's what we can and must do now, not just to overcome this crisis, but to leave something better behind, to lay a foundation on which our children and our grandchildren can prosper and take responsibility for their future -- just as the students at this school, at this difficult moment, are taking responsibility for theirs.

I am absolutely confident that if I've got your help, that we can make it happen, and we are going to see a stronger, more prosperous Michigan in the years to come.

Thank you very much, Warren. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Eulogy for Ted Kennedy

Your Eminence, Vicki, Kara, Edward, Patrick, Curran, Caroline, members of the Kennedy family, distinguished guests, and fellow citizens:

Today we say goodbye to the youngest child of Rose and Joseph Kennedy. The world will long remember their son Edward as the heir to a weighty legacy; a champion for those who had none; the soul of the Democratic Party; and the lion of the U.S. Senate - a man whose name graces nearly one thousand laws, and who penned more than three hundred himself.

But those of us who loved him, and ache with his passing, know Ted Kennedy by the other titles he held: Father. Brother. Husband. Uncle Teddy, or as he was often known to his younger nieces and nephews, "The Grand Fromage," or "The Big Cheese." I, like so many others in the city where he worked for nearly half a century, knew him as a colleague, a mentor, and above all, a friend.

Ted Kennedy was the baby of the family who became its patriarch; the restless dreamer who became its rock. He was the sunny, joyful child, who bore the brunt of his brothers' teasing, but learned quickly how to brush it off. When they tossed him off a boat because he didn't know what a jib was, six-year-old Teddy got back in and learned to sail. When a photographer asked the newly-elected Bobby to step back at a press conference because he was casting a shadow on his younger brother, Teddy quipped, "It'll be the same in Washington."

This spirit of resilience and good humor would see Ted Kennedy through more pain and tragedy than most of us will ever know. He lost two siblings by the age of sixteen. He saw two more taken violently from the country that loved them. He said goodbye to his beloved sister, Eunice, in the final days of his own life. He narrowly survived a plane crash, watched two children struggle with cancer, buried three nephews, and experienced personal failings and setbacks in the most public way possible.

It is a string of events that would have broken a lesser man. And it would have been easy for Teddy to let himself become bitter and hardened; to surrender to self-pity and regret; to retreat from public life and live out his years in peaceful quiet. No one would have blamed him for that.

But that was not Ted Kennedy. As he told us, "...[I]ndividual faults and frailties are no excuse to give in - and no exemption from the common obligation to give of ourselves." Indeed, Ted was the "Happy Warrior" that the poet William Wordsworth spoke of when he wrote:

As tempted more; more able to endure,

As more exposed to suffering and distress;

Thence, also, more alive to tenderness.

Through his own suffering, Ted Kennedy became more alive to the plight and suffering of others - the sick child who could not see a doctor; the young soldier sent to battle without armor; the citizen denied her rights because of what she looks like or who she loves or where she comes from. The landmark laws that he championed -- the Civil Rights Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, immigration reform, children's health care, the Family and Medical Leave Act -all have a running thread. Ted Kennedy's life's work was not to champion those with wealth or power or special connections. It was to give a voice to those who were not heard; to add a rung to the ladder of opportunity; to make real the dream of our founding. He was given the gift of time that his brothers were not, and he used that gift to touch as many lives and right as many wrongs as the years would allow.

We can still hear his voice bellowing through the Senate chamber, face reddened, fist pounding the podium, a veritable force of nature, in support of health care or workers' rights or civil rights. And yet, while his causes became deeply personal, his disagreements never did. While he was seen by his fiercest critics as a partisan lightning rod, that is not the prism through which Ted Kennedy saw the world, nor was it the prism through which his colleagues saw him. He was a product of an age when the joy and nobility of politics prevented differences of party and philosophy from becoming barriers to cooperation and mutual respect - a time when adversaries still saw each other as patriots.

And that's how Ted Kennedy became the greatest legislator of our time. He did it by hewing to principle, but also by seeking compromise and common cause - not through deal-making and horse-trading alone, but through friendship, and kindness, and humor. There was the time he courted Orrin Hatch's support for the Children's Health Insurance Program by having his Chief of Staff serenade the Senator with a song Orrin had written himself; the time he delivered shamrock cookies on a china plate to sweeten up a crusty Republican colleague; and the famous story of how he won the support of a Texas Committee Chairman on an immigration bill. Teddy walked into a meeting with a plain manila envelope, and showed only the Chairman that it was filled with the Texan's favorite cigars. When the negotiations were going well, he would inch the envelope closer to the Chairman. When they weren't, he would pull it back. Before long, the deal was done.

It was only a few years ago, on St. Patrick's Day, when Teddy buttonholed me on the floor of the Senate for my support on a certain piece of legislation that was coming up for vote. I gave him my pledge, but expressed my skepticism that it would pass. But when the roll call was over, the bill garnered the votes it needed, and then some. I looked at Teddy with astonishment and asked how he had pulled it off. He just patted me on the back, and said "Luck of the Irish!"

Of course, luck had little to do with Ted Kennedy's legislative success, and he knew that. A few years ago, his father-in-law told him that he and Daniel Webster just might be the two greatest senators of all time. Without missing a beat, Teddy replied, "What did Webster do?"

But though it is Ted Kennedy's historic body of achievements we will remember, it is his giving heart that we will miss. It was the friend and colleague who was always the first to pick up the phone and say, "I'm sorry for your loss," or "I hope you feel better," or "What can I do to help?" It was the boss who was so adored by his staff that over five hundred spanning five decades showed up for his 75th birthday party. It was the man who sent birthday wishes and thank you notes and even his own paintings to so many who never imagined that a U.S. Senator would take the time to think about someone like them. I have one of those paintings in my private study - a Cape Cod seascape that was a gift to a freshman legislator who happened to admire it when Ted Kennedy welcomed him into his office the first week he arrived in Washington; by the way, that's my second favorite gift from Teddy and Vicki after our dog Bo. And it seems like everyone has one of those stories - the ones that often start with "You wouldn't believe who called me today."

Ted Kennedy was the father who looked after not only his own three children, but John's and Bobby's as well. He took them camping and taught them to sail. He laughed and danced with them at birthdays and weddings; cried and mourned with them through hardship and tragedy; and passed on that same sense of service and selflessness that his parents had instilled in him. Shortly after Ted walked Caroline down the aisle and gave her away at the altar, he received a note from Jackie that read, "On you the carefree youngest brother fell a burden a hero would have begged to be spared. We are all going to make it because you were always there with your love."

Not only did the Kennedy family make it because of Ted's love - he made it because of theirs; and especially because of the love and the life he found in Vicki. After so much loss and so much sorrow, it could not have been easy for Ted Kennedy to risk his heart again. That he did is a testament to how deeply he loved this remarkable woman from Louisiana. And she didn't just love him back. As Ted would often acknowledge, Vicki saved him. She gave him strength and purpose; joy and friendship; and stood by him always, especially in those last, hardest days.

We cannot know for certain how long we have here. We cannot foresee the trials or misfortunes that will test us along the way. We cannot know God's plan for us.

What we can do is to live out our lives as best we can with purpose, and love, and joy. We can use each day to show those who are closest to us how much we care about them, and treat others with the kindness and respect that we wish for ourselves. We can learn from our mistakes and grow from our failures. And we can strive at all costs to make a better world, so that someday, if we are blessed with the chance to look back on our time here, we can know that we spent it well; that we made a difference; that our fleeting presence had a lasting impact on the lives of other human beings.

This is how Ted Kennedy lived. This is his legacy. He once said of his brother Bobby that he need not be idealized or enlarged in death beyond what he was in life, and I imagine he would say the same about himself. The greatest expectations were placed upon Ted Kennedy's shoulders because of who he was, but he surpassed them all because of who he became. We do not weep for him today because of the prestige attached to his name or his office. We weep because we loved this kind and tender hero who persevered through pain and tragedy - not for the sake of ambition or vanity; not for wealth or power; but only for the people and the country he loved.

In the days after September 11th, Teddy made it a point to personally call each one of the 177 families of this state who lost a loved one in the attack. But he didn't stop there. He kept calling and checking up on them. He fought through red tape to get them assistance and grief counseling. He invited them sailing, played with their children, and would write each family a letter whenever the anniversary of that terrible day came along. To one widow, he wrote the following:

"As you know so well, the passage of time never really heals the tragic memory of such a great loss, but we carry on, because we have to, because our loved one would want us to, and because there is still light to guide us in the world from the love they gave us."

We carry on.

Ted Kennedy has gone home now, guided by his faith and by the light of those he has loved and lost. At last he is with them once more, leaving those of us who grieve his passing with the memories he gave, the good he did, the dream he kept alive, and a single, enduring image - the image of a man on a boat; white mane tousled; smiling broadly as he sails into the wind, ready for what storms may come, carrying on toward some new and wondrous place just beyond the horizon. May God Bless Ted Kennedy, and may he rest in eternal peace.

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# Back-to-School Speech at Wakefield High School

Hello, everybody! Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, everybody. All right, everybody go ahead and have a seat. How is everybody doing today? How about Tim Spicer? I am here with students at Wakefield High School in Arlington, Virginia. And we've got students tuning in from all across America, from kindergarten through 12th grade. And I am just so glad that all could join us today. And I want to thank Wakefield for being such an outstanding host. Give yourselves a big round of applause.

I know that for many of you, today is the first day of school. And for those of you in kindergarten, or starting middle or high school, it's your first day in a new school, so it's understandable if you're a little nervous. I imagine there are some seniors out there who are feeling pretty good right now -- with just one more year to go. And no matter what grade you're in, some of you are probably wishing it were still summer and you could've stayed in bed just a little bit longer this morning.

I know that feeling. When I was young, my family lived overseas. I lived in Indonesia for a few years. And my mother, she didn't have the money to send me where all the American kids went to school, but she thought it was important for me to keep up with an American education. So she decided to teach me extra lessons herself, Monday through Friday. But because she had to go to work, the only time she could do it was at 4:30 in the morning.

Now, as you might imagine, I wasn't too happy about getting up that early. And a lot of times, I'd fall asleep right there at the kitchen table. But whenever I'd complain, my mother would just give me one of those looks and she'd say, "This is no picnic for me either, buster."

So I know that some of you are still adjusting to being back at school. But I'm here today because I have something important to discuss with you. I'm here because I want to talk with you about your education and what's expected of all of you in this new school year.

Now, I've given a lot of speeches about education. And I've talked about responsibility a lot.

I've talked about teachers' responsibility for inspiring students and pushing you to learn.

I've talked about your parents' responsibility for making sure you stay on track, and you get your homework done, and don't spend every waking hour in front of the TV or with the Xbox.

I've talked a lot about your government's responsibility for setting high standards, and supporting teachers and principals, and turning around schools that aren't working, where students aren't getting the opportunities that they deserve.

But at the end of the day, we can have the most dedicated teachers, the most supportive parents, the best schools in the world -- and none of it will make a difference, none of it will matter unless all of you fulfill your responsibilities, unless you show up to those schools, unless you pay attention to those teachers, unless you listen to your parents and grandparents and other adults and put in the hard work it takes to succeed. That's what I want to focus on today: the responsibility each of you has for your education.

I want to start with the responsibility you have to yourself. Every single one of you has something that you're good at. Every single one of you has something to offer. And you have a responsibility to yourself to discover what that is. That's the opportunity an education can provide.

Maybe you could be a great writer -- maybe even good enough to write a book or articles in a newspaper -- but you might not know it until you write that English paper -- that English class paper that's assigned to you. Maybe you could be an innovator or an inventor -- maybe even good enough to come up with the next iPhone or the new medicine or vaccine -- but you might not know it until you do your project for your science class. Maybe you could be a mayor or a senator or a Supreme Court justice -- but you might not know that until you join student government or the debate team.

And no matter what you want to do with your life, I guarantee that you'll need an education to do it. You want to be a doctor, or a teacher, or a police officer? You want to be a nurse or an architect, a lawyer or a member of our military? You're going to need a good education for every single one of those careers. You cannot drop out of school and just drop into a good job. You've got to train for it and work for it and learn for it.

And this isn't just important for your own life and your own future. What you make of your education will decide nothing less than the future of this country. The future of America depends on you. What you're learning in school today will determine whether we as a nation can meet our greatest challenges in the future.

You'll need the knowledge and problem-solving skills you learn in science and math to cure diseases like cancer and AIDS, and to develop new energy technologies and protect our environment. You'll need the insights and critical-thinking skills you gain in history and social studies to fight poverty and homelessness, crime and discrimination, and make our nation more fair and more free. You'll need the creativity and ingenuity you develop in all your classes to build new companies that will create new jobs and boost our economy.

We need every single one of you to develop your talents and your skills and your intellect so you can help us old folks solve our most difficult problems. If you don't do that -- if you quit on school -- you're not just quitting on yourself, you're quitting on your country.

Now, I know it's not always easy to do well in school. I know a lot of you have challenges in your lives right now that can make it hard to focus on your schoolwork.

I get it. I know what it's like. My father left my family when I was two years old, and I was raised by a single mom who had to work and who struggled at times to pay the bills and wasn't always able to give us the things that other kids had. There were times when I missed having a father in my life. There were times when I was lonely and I felt like I didn't fit in.

So I wasn't always as focused as I should have been on school, and I did some things I'm not proud of, and I got in more trouble than I should have. And my life could have easily taken a turn for the worse.

But I was -- I was lucky. I got a lot of second chances, and I had the opportunity to go to college and law school and follow my dreams. My wife, our First Lady Michelle Obama, she has a similar story. Neither of her parents had gone to college, and they didn't have a lot of money. But they worked hard, and she worked hard, so that she could go to the best schools in this country.

Some of you might not have those advantages. Maybe you don't have adults in your life who give you the support that you need. Maybe someone in your family has lost their job and there's not enough money to go around. Maybe you live in a neighborhood where you don't feel safe, or have friends who are pressuring you to do things you know aren't right.

But at the end of the day, the circumstances of your life -- what you look like, where you come from, how much money you have, what you've got going on at home -- none of that is an excuse for neglecting your homework or having a bad attitude in school. That's no excuse for talking back to your teacher, or cutting class, or dropping out of school. There is no excuse for not trying.

Where you are right now doesn't have to determine where you'll end up. No one's written your destiny for you, because here in America, you write your own destiny. You make your own future.

That's what young people like you are doing every day, all across America.

Young people like Jazmin Perez, from Roma, Texas. Jazmin didn't speak English when she first started school. Neither of her parents had gone to college. But she worked hard, earned good grades, and got a scholarship to Brown University -- is now in graduate school, studying public health, on her way to becoming Dr. Jazmin Perez.

I'm thinking about Andoni Schultz, from Los Altos, California, who's fought brain cancer since he was three. He's had to endure all sorts of treatments and surgeries, one of which affected his memory, so it took him much longer -- hundreds of extra hours -- to do his schoolwork. But he never fell behind. He's headed to college this fall.

And then there's Shantell Steve, from my hometown of Chicago, Illinois. Even when bouncing from foster home to foster home in the toughest neighborhoods in the city, she managed to get a job at a local health care center, start a program to keep young people out of gangs, and she's on track to graduate high school with honors and go on to college.

And Jazmin, Andoni, and Shantell aren't any different from any of you. They face challenges in their lives just like you do. In some cases they've got it a lot worse off than many of you. But they refused to give up. They chose to take responsibility for their lives, for their education, and set goals for themselves. And I expect all of you to do the same.

That's why today I'm calling on each of you to set your own goals for your education -- and do everything you can to meet them. Your goal can be something as simple as doing all your homework, paying attention in class, or spending some time each day reading a book. Maybe you'll decide to get involved in an extracurricular activity, or volunteer in your community. Maybe you'll decide to stand up for kids who are being teased or bullied because of who they are or how they look, because you believe, like I do, that all young people deserve a safe environment to study and learn. Maybe you'll decide to take better care of yourself so you can be more ready to learn. And along those lines, by the way, I hope all of you are washing your hands a lot, and that you stay home from school when you don't feel well, so we can keep people from getting the flu this fall and winter.

But whatever you resolve to do, I want you to commit to it. I want you to really work at it.

I know that sometimes you get that sense from TV that you can be rich and successful without any hard work -- that your ticket to success is through rapping or basketball or being a reality TV star. Chances are you're not going to be any of those things.

The truth is, being successful is hard. You won't love every subject that you study. You won't click with every teacher that you have. Not every homework assignment will seem completely relevant to your life right at this minute. And you won't necessarily succeed at everything the first time you try.

That's okay. Some of the most successful people in the world are the ones who've had the most failures. J.K. Rowling's -- who wrote Harry Potter -- her first Harry Potter book was rejected 12 times before it was finally published. Michael Jordan was cut from his high school basketball team. He lost hundreds of games and missed thousands of shots during his career. But he once said, "I have failed over and over and over again in my life. And that's why I succeed."

These people succeeded because they understood that you can't let your failures define you -- you have to let your failures teach you. You have to let them show you what to do differently the next time. So if you get into trouble, that doesn't mean you're a troublemaker, it means you need to try harder to act right. If you get a bad grade, that doesn't mean you're stupid, it just means you need to spend more time studying.

No one's born being good at all things. You become good at things through hard work. You're not a varsity athlete the first time you play a new sport. You don't hit every note the first time you sing a song. You've got to practice. The same principle applies to your schoolwork. You might have to do a math problem a few times before you get it right. You might have to read something a few times before you understand it. You definitely have to do a few drafts of a paper before it's good enough to hand in.

Don't be afraid to ask questions. Don't be afraid to ask for help when you need it. I do that every day. Asking for help isn't a sign of weakness, it's a sign of strength because it shows you have the courage to admit when you don't know something, and that then allows you to learn something new. So find an adult that you trust -- a parent, a grandparent or teacher, a coach or a counselor -- and ask them to help you stay on track to meet your goals.

And even when you're struggling, even when you're discouraged, and you feel like other people have given up on you, don't ever give up on yourself, because when you give up on yourself, you give up on your country.

The story of America isn't about people who quit when things got tough. It's about people who kept going, who tried harder, who loved their country too much to do anything less than their best.

It's the story of students who sat where you sit 250 years ago, and went on to wage a revolution and they founded this nation. Young people. Students who sat where you sit 75 years ago who overcame a Depression and won a world war; who fought for civil rights and put a man on the moon. Students who sat where you sit 20 years ago who founded Google and Twitter and Facebook and changed the way we communicate with each other.

So today, I want to ask all of you, what's your contribution going to be? What problems are you going to solve? What discoveries will you make? What will a President who comes here in 20 or 50 or 100 years say about what all of you did for this country?

Now, your families, your teachers, and I are doing everything we can to make sure you have the education you need to answer these questions. I'm working hard to fix up your classrooms and get you the books and the equipment and the computers you need to learn. But you've got to do your part, too. So I expect all of you to get serious this year. I expect you to put your best effort into everything you do. I expect great things from each of you. So don't let us down. Don't let your family down or your country down. Most of all, don't let yourself down. Make us all proud.

Thank you very much, everybody.

God bless you. God bless America.

Thank you.

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# Eulogy for Walter Cronkite

To Chip, Kathy, and Nancy, who graciously shared your father with a nation that loved him; to Walter's friends, colleagues, protÃ©gÃ©s, and all who considered him a hero; to the men of the Intrepid; to all of you who are gathered here today; I am honored to be here to pay tribute to the life and times of the man who chronicled our time.

I did not know Mr. Cronkite personally. And my regret is made more acute by the stories that have been shared here today. Nor, for that matter, did I know him any better than the tens of millions who turned to him each night in search of the answer to a simple question: "What happened today?" But like them and like all of you, I have benefited as a citizen from his dogged pursuit of the truth, his passionate defense of objective reporting, and his view that journalism is more than just a profession; it is a public good vital to our democracy.

Even in his early career, Walter Cronkite resisted the temptation to get the story first in favor of getting it right. He wanted to get it first, but he understood the importance of getting it right. During one of his first jobs in Kansas City, Walter's program manager urged him to go on the air reporting a massive blaze -- and we just heard how much he loved fires -- a massive blaze at city hall that had already claimed lives. When Walter reached for the telephone, his boss asked, "What are you doing; get on the air!" Walter replied that he was calling the fire department to confirm the story. "You don't need to confirm it," the manager shouted, "my wife is watching the whole thing!"

Needless to say, Walter made the call, and even as the program manager took to the air himself to broadcast the unfolding tragedy, Walter discovered that it had been nothing more than a small fire that hadn't resulted in any injuries. He lost his job -- but he got the story right.

Walter wasn't afraid to rattle the high and the mighty, either; but he never dared to compromise his integrity. He got along with elected officials, even if they were wary of one another's motives. One politician once remarked, "Walter, my friend, you've got to believe me, fully 85 percent of everything I told you today is the absolute truth."

He shared a complicated relationship with Presidents of both parties, who wanted him on their side even as they were convinced that he wasn't. President Johnson called Walter after the evening news from time to time to voice his displeasure over a certain story. But Walter knew that if he was receiving vociferous complaints from both sides, he must be doing his job.

His endless inquisitiveness about our world, I can imagine, came from a mother who sold encyclopedias for a living. As a boy, Walter spent countless hours getting lost within their pages, endlessly sidetracked by new and interesting entries that branched off from one another, fascinated by the world around us and how it worked.

And that's the way he lived his life -- with curiosity, exploring our planet, seeking to make sense of it and explaining it to others. He went everywhere and he did everything. He raced cars and boats; he traveled everywhere from the Amazon to the Arctic; he plunged 8,000 feet below the sea, trekked 18,000 feet up into the Himalayas, and experienced weightlessness in the upper reaches of our atmosphere -- all with one mission: to make it come alive for the rest of us.

And as our world began to change, he helped us understand those changes. He was forever there, reporting through world war and cold war; marches and milestones; scandal and success; calmly and authoritatively telling us what we needed to know. He was a voice of certainty in a world that was growing more and more uncertain. And through it all, he never lost the integrity or the plainspoken speaking style that he gained growing up in the heartland. He was a familiar and welcome voice that spoke to each and every one of us personally.

So it may have seemed inevitable that he was named the most trusted man in America. But here's the thing: That title wasn't bestowed on him by a network. We weren't told to believe it by some advertising campaign. It was earned. It was earned by year after year and decade after decade of painstaking effort; a commitment to fundamental values; his belief that the American people were hungry for the truth, unvarnished and unaccompanied by theatre or spectacle. He didn't believe in dumbing down. He trusted us.

When he was told of this extraordinary honor that he was the most trusted man in America, he naturally downplayed it by saying the people had not polled his wife. When people of both political parties actually tried to recruit him to run for office, without even asking for his stances on the issues, he said no -- to the relief of all potential opponents. And when, even a decade and a half after his retirement, he still ranked first in seven of eight categories for television journalists, he was disbelieving that he hadn't won the eighth category, "attractiveness."

Through all the events that came to define the 20th century, through all our moments of deepest hurt and brightest hope, Walter Cronkite was there, telling the story of the American age.

And this is how we remember him today. But we also remember and celebrate the journalism that Walter practiced -- a standard of honesty and integrity and responsibility to which so many of you have committed your careers. It's a standard that's a little bit harder to find today. We know that this is a difficult time for journalism. Even as appetites for news and information grow, newsrooms are closing. Despite the big stories of our era, serious journalists find themselves all too often without a beat. Just as the news cycle has shrunk, so has the bottom line.

And too often, we fill that void with instant commentary and celebrity gossip and the softer stories that Walter disdained, rather than the hard news and investigative journalism he championed. "What happened today?" is replaced with "Who won today?" The public debate cheapens. The public trust falters. We fail to understand our world or one another as well as we should –- and that has real consequences in our own lives and in the life of our nation. We seem stuck with a choice between what cuts to our bottom line and what harms us as a society. Which price is higher to pay? Which cost is harder to bear?

"This democracy," Walter said, "cannot function without a reasonably well-informed electorate." That's why the honest, objective, meticulous reporting that so many of you pursue with the same zeal that Walter did is so vital to our democracy and our society: Our future depends on it.

Walter was no naive idealist. He understood the challenges and the pressures and the temptations facing journalism in this new era. He believed that a media company has an obligation to pursue a profit, but also an obligation to invest a good chunk of that profit back into news and public affairs. He was excited about all the stories that a high-tech world of journalism would be able to tell, and all the newly-emerging means with which to tell it.

Naturally, we find ourselves wondering how he would have covered the monumental stories of our time. In an era where the news that city hall is on fire can sweep around the world at the speed of the Internet, would he still have called to double-check? Would he have been able to cut through the murky noise of the blogs and the tweets and the sound bites to shine the bright light on substance? Would he still offer the perspective that we value? Would he have been able to remain a singular figure in an age of dwindling attention spans and omnipresent media?

And somehow, we know that the answer is yes. The simple values Walter Cronkite set out in pursuit of -- to seek the truth, to keep us honest, to explore our world the best he could -- they are as vital today as they ever were.

Our American story continues. It needs to be told. And if we choose to live up to Walter's example, if we realize that the kind of journalism he embodied will not simply rekindle itself as part of a natural cycle, but will come alive only if we stand up and demand it and resolve to value it once again, then I'm convinced that the choice between profit and progress is a false one -- and that the golden days of journalism still lie ahead.

Walter Cronkite invited a nation to believe in him -- and he never betrayed that trust. That's why so many of you entered the profession in the first place. That's why the standards he set for journalists still stand. And that's why he loved and valued all of you, but we loved and valued Walter not only as the rarest of men, but as an indispensable pillar of our society.

He's reunited with his beloved Betsy now, watching the stories of this century unfold with boundless optimism -- every so often punctuating the air with a gleeful "oh, boy!" We are grateful to him for altering and illuminating our time, and for the opportunity he gave to us to say that, yes, we, too, were there.

Thank you very much.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Speech to a Joint Session of Congress on Health Care Reform

Madam Speaker, Vice President Biden, members of Congress, and the American people:

When I spoke here last winter, this nation was facing the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. We were losing an average of 700,000 jobs per month. Credit was frozen. And our financial system was on the verge of collapse.

As any American who is still looking for work or a way to pay their bills will tell you, we are by no means out of the woods. A full and vibrant recovery is still many months away. And I will not let up until those Americans who seek jobs can find them -- until those businesses that seek capital and credit can thrive; until all responsible homeowners can stay in their homes. That is our ultimate goal. But thanks to the bold and decisive action we've taken since January, I can stand here with confidence and say that we have pulled this economy back from the brink.

I want to thank the members of this body for your efforts and your support in these last several months, and especially those who've taken the difficult votes that have put us on a path to recovery. I also want to thank the American people for their patience and resolve during this trying time for our nation.

But we did not come here just to clean up crises. We came here to build a future. So tonight, I return to speak to all of you about an issue that is central to that future -- and that is the issue of health care.

I am not the first President to take up this cause, but I am determined to be the last. It has now been nearly a century since Theodore Roosevelt first called for health care reform. And ever since, nearly every President and Congress, whether Democrat or Republican, has attempted to meet this challenge in some way. A bill for comprehensive health reform was first introduced by John Dingell Sr. in 1943. Sixty-five years later, his son continues to introduce that same bill at the beginning of each session.

Our collective failure to meet this challenge -- year after year, decade after decade -- has led us to the breaking point. Everyone understands the extraordinary hardships that are placed on the uninsured, who live every day just one accident or illness away from bankruptcy. These are not primarily people on welfare. These are middle-class Americans. Some can't get insurance on the job. Others are self-employed, and can't afford it, since buying insurance on your own costs you three times as much as the coverage you get from your employer. Many other Americans who are willing and able to pay are still denied insurance due to previous illnesses or conditions that insurance companies decide are too risky or too expensive to cover.

We are the only democracy -- the only advanced democracy on Earth -- the only wealthy nation -- that allows such hardship for millions of its people. There are now more than 30 million American citizens who cannot get coverage. In just a two-year period, one in every three Americans goes without health care coverage at some point. And every day, 14,000 Americans lose their coverage. In other words, it can happen to anyone.

But the problem that plagues the health care system is not just a problem for the uninsured. Those who do have insurance have never had less security and stability than they do today. More and more Americans worry that if you move, lose your job, or change your job, you'll lose your health insurance too. More and more Americans pay their premiums, only to discover that their insurance company has dropped their coverage when they get sick, or won't pay the full cost of care. It happens every day.

One man from Illinois lost his coverage in the middle of chemotherapy because his insurer found that he hadn't reported gallstones that he didn't even know about. They delayed his treatment, and he died because of it. Another woman from Texas was about to get a double mastectomy when her insurance company canceled her policy because she forgot to declare a case of acne. By the time she had her insurance reinstated, her breast cancer had more than doubled in size. That is heart-breaking, it is wrong, and no one should be treated that way in the United States of America.

Then there's the problem of rising cost. We spend one and a half times more per person on health care than any other country, but we aren't any healthier for it. This is one of the reasons that insurance premiums have gone up three times faster than wages. It's why so many employers -- especially small businesses -- are forcing their employees to pay more for insurance, or are dropping their coverage entirely. It's why so many aspiring entrepreneurs cannot afford to open a business in the first place, and why American businesses that compete internationally -- like our automakers -- are at a huge disadvantage. And it's why those of us with health insurance are also paying a hidden and growing tax for those without it -- about $1,000 per year that pays for somebody else's emergency room and charitable care.

Finally, our health care system is placing an unsustainable burden on taxpayers. When health care costs grow at the rate they have, it puts greater pressure on programs like Medicare and Medicaid. If we do nothing to slow these skyrocketing costs, we will eventually be spending more on Medicare and Medicaid than every other government program combined. Put simply, our health care problem is our deficit problem. Nothing else even comes close. Nothing else.

Now, these are the facts. Nobody disputes them. We know we must reform this system. The question is how.

There are those on the left who believe that the only way to fix the system is through a single-payer system like Canada's -- where we would severely restrict the private insurance market and have the government provide coverage for everybody. On the right, there are those who argue that we should end employer-based systems and leave individuals to buy health insurance on their own.

I've said -- I have to say that there are arguments to be made for both these approaches. But either one would represent a radical shift that would disrupt the health care most people currently have. Since health care represents one-sixth of our economy, I believe it makes more sense to build on what works and fix what doesn't, rather than try to build an entirely new system from scratch. And that is precisely what those of you in Congress have tried to do over the past several months.

During that time, we've seen Washington at its best and at its worst.

We've seen many in this chamber work tirelessly for the better part of this year to offer thoughtful ideas about how to achieve reform. Of the five committees asked to develop bills, four have completed their work, and the Senate Finance Committee announced today that it will move forward next week. That has never happened before. Our overall efforts have been supported by an unprecedented coalition of doctors and nurses; hospitals, seniors' groups, and even drug companies -- many of whom opposed reform in the past. And there is agreement in this chamber on about 80 percent of what needs to be done, putting us closer to the goal of reform than we have ever been.

But what we've also seen in these last months is the same partisan spectacle that only hardens the disdain many Americans have towards their own government. Instead of honest debate, we've seen scare tactics. Some have dug into unyielding ideological camps that offer no hope of compromise. Too many have used this as an opportunity to score short-term political points, even if it robs the country of our opportunity to solve a long-term challenge. And out of this blizzard of charges and counter-charges, confusion has reigned.

Well, the time for bickering is over. The time for games has passed. Now is the season for action. Now is when we must bring the best ideas of both parties together, and show the American people that we can still do what we were sent here to do. Now is the time to deliver on health care. Now is the time to deliver on health care.

The plan I'm announcing tonight would meet three basic goals. It will provide more security and stability to those who have health insurance. It will provide insurance for those who don't. And it will slow the growth of health care costs for our families, our businesses, and our government. It's a plan that asks everyone to take responsibility for meeting this challenge -- not just government, not just insurance companies, but everybody including employers and individuals. And it's a plan that incorporates ideas from senators and congressmen, from Democrats and Republicans -- and yes, from some of my opponents in both the primary and general election.

Here are the details that every American needs to know about this plan. First, if you are among the hundreds of millions of Americans who already have health insurance through your job, or Medicare, or Medicaid, or the VA, nothing in this plan will require you or your employer to change the coverage or the doctor you have. Let me repeat this: Nothing in our plan requires you to change what you have.

What this plan will do is make the insurance you have work better for you. Under this plan, it will be against the law for insurance companies to deny you coverage because of a preexisting condition. As soon as I sign this bill, it will be against the law for insurance companies to drop your coverage when you get sick or water it down when you need it the most. They will no longer be able to place some arbitrary cap on the amount of coverage you can receive in a given year or in a lifetime. We will place a limit on how much you can be charged for out-of-pocket expenses, because in the United States of America, no one should go broke because they get sick. And insurance companies will be required to cover, with no extra charge, routine checkups and preventive care, like mammograms and colonoscopies -- because there's no reason we shouldn't be catching diseases like breast cancer and colon cancer before they get worse. That makes sense, it saves money, and it saves lives.

Now, that's what Americans who have health insurance can expect from this plan -- more security and more stability.

Now, if you're one of the tens of millions of Americans who don't currently have health insurance, the second part of this plan will finally offer you quality, affordable choices. If you lose your job or you change your job, you'll be able to get coverage. If you strike out on your own and start a small business, you'll be able to get coverage. We'll do this by creating a new insurance exchange -- a marketplace where individuals and small businesses will be able to shop for health insurance at competitive prices. Insurance companies will have an incentive to participate in this exchange because it lets them compete for millions of new customers. As one big group, these customers will have greater leverage to bargain with the insurance companies for better prices and quality coverage. This is how large companies and government employees get affordable insurance. It's how everyone in this Congress gets affordable insurance. And it's time to give every American the same opportunity that we give ourselves.

Now, for those individuals and small businesses who still can't afford the lower-priced insurance available in the exchange, we'll provide tax credits, the size of which will be based on your need. And all insurance companies that want access to this new marketplace will have to abide by the consumer protections I already mentioned. This exchange will take effect in four years, which will give us time to do it right. In the meantime, for those Americans who can't get insurance today because they have preexisting medical conditions, we will immediately offer low-cost coverage that will protect you against financial ruin if you become seriously ill. This was a good idea when Senator John McCain proposed it in the campaign, it's a good idea now, and we should all embrace it.

Now, even if we provide these affordable options, there may be those -- especially the young and the healthy -- who still want to take the risk and go without coverage. There may still be companies that refuse to do right by their workers by giving them coverage. The problem is, such irresponsible behavior costs all the rest of us money. If there are affordable options and people still don't sign up for health insurance, it means we pay for these people's expensive emergency room visits. If some businesses don't provide workers health care, it forces the rest of us to pick up the tab when their workers get sick, and gives those businesses an unfair advantage over their competitors. And unless everybody does their part, many of the insurance reforms we seek -- especially requiring insurance companies to cover preexisting conditions -- just can't be achieved.

And that's why under my plan, individuals will be required to carry basic health insurance -- just as most states require you to carry auto insurance. Likewise -- likewise, businesses will be required to either offer their workers health care, or chip in to help cover the cost of their workers. There will be a hardship waiver for those individuals who still can't afford coverage, and 95 percent of all small businesses, because of their size and narrow profit margin, would be exempt from these requirements. But we can't have large businesses and individuals who can afford coverage game the system by avoiding responsibility to themselves or their employees. Improving our health care system only works if everybody does their part.

And while there remain some significant details to be ironed out, I believe -- I believe a broad consensus exists for the aspects of the plan I just outlined: consumer protections for those with insurance, an exchange that allows individuals and small businesses to purchase affordable coverage, and a requirement that people who can afford insurance get insurance.

And I have no doubt that these reforms would greatly benefit Americans from all walks of life, as well as the economy as a whole. Still, given all the misinformation that's been spread over the past few months, I realize --I realize that many Americans have grown nervous about reform. So tonight I want to address some of the key controversies that are still out there.

Some of people's concerns have grown out of bogus claims spread by those whose only agenda is to kill reform at any cost. The best example is the claim made not just by radio and cable talk show hosts, but by prominent politicians, that we plan to set up panels of bureaucrats with the power to kill off senior citizens. Now, such a charge would be laughable if it weren't so cynical and irresponsible. It is a lie, plain and simple.

There are also those who claim that our reform efforts would insure illegal immigrants. This, too, is false. The reforms -- the reforms I'm proposing would not apply to those who are here illegally.

Rep. Joe Wilson, R-South Carolina: You lie!

President Obama: It's not true. And one more misunderstanding I want to clear up -- under our plan, no federal dollars will be used to fund abortions, and federal conscience laws will remain in place.

Now, my health care proposal has also been attacked by some who oppose reform as a "government takeover" of the entire health care system. As proof, critics point to a provision in our plan that allows the uninsured and small businesses to choose a publicly sponsored insurance option, administered by the government just like Medicaid or Medicare.

So let me set the record straight here. My guiding principle is, and always has been, that consumers do better when there is choice and competition. That's how the market works. Unfortunately, in 34 states, 75 percent of the insurance market is controlled by five or fewer companies. In Alabama, almost 90 percent is controlled by just one company. And without competition, the price of insurance goes up and quality goes down. And it makes it easier for insurance companies to treat their customers badly -- by cherry-picking the healthiest individuals and trying to drop the sickest, by overcharging small businesses who have no leverage, and by jacking up rates.

Insurance executives don't do this because they're bad people; they do it because it's profitable. As one former insurance executive testified before Congress, insurance companies are not only encouraged to find reasons to drop the seriously ill, they are rewarded for it. All of this is in service of meeting what this former executive called "Wall Street's relentless profit expectations."

Now, I have no interest in putting insurance companies out of business. They provide a legitimate service, and employ a lot of our friends and neighbors. I just want to hold them accountable. And the insurance reforms that I've already mentioned would do just that. But an additional step we can take to keep insurance companies honest is by making a not-for-profit public option available in the insurance exchange. Now, let me be clear. Let me be clear. It would only be an option for those who don't have insurance. No one would be forced to choose it, and it would not impact those of you who already have insurance. In fact, based on Congressional Budget Office estimates, we believe that less than 5 percent of Americans would sign up.

Despite all this, the insurance companies and their allies don't like this idea. They argue that these private companies can't fairly compete with the government. And they'd be right if taxpayers were subsidizing this public insurance option. But they won't be. I've insisted that like any private insurance company, the public insurance option would have to be self-sufficient and rely on the premiums it collects. But by avoiding some of the overhead that gets eaten up at private companies by profits and excessive administrative costs and executive salaries, it could provide a good deal for consumers, and would also keep pressure on private insurers to keep their policies affordable and treat their customers better, the same way public colleges and universities provide additional choice and competition to students without in any way inhibiting a vibrant system of private colleges and universities.

Now, it is -- it's worth noting that a strong majority of Americans still favor a public insurance option of the sort I've proposed tonight. But its impact shouldn't be exaggerated -- by the left or the right or the media. It is only one part of my plan, and shouldn't be used as a handy excuse for the usual Washington ideological battles. To my progressive friends, I would remind you that for decades, the driving idea behind reform has been to end insurance company abuses and make coverage available for those without it. The public option -- the public option is only a means to that end -- and we should remain open to other ideas that accomplish our ultimate goal. And to my Republican friends, I say that rather than making wild claims about a government takeover of health care, we should work together to address any legitimate concerns you may have.

For example -- For example, some have suggested that the public option go into effect only in those markets where insurance companies are not providing affordable policies. Others have proposed a co-op or another non-profit entity to administer the plan. These are all constructive ideas worth exploring. But I will not back down on the basic principle that if Americans can't find affordable coverage, we will provide you with a choice. And I will make sure that no government bureaucrat or insurance company bureaucrat gets between you and the care that you need.

Finally, let me discuss an issue that is a great concern to me, to members of this chamber, and to the public -- and that's how we pay for this plan.

And here's what you need to know. First, I will not sign a plan that adds one dime to our deficits -- either now or in the future. I will not sign it if it adds one dime to the deficit, now or in the future, period. And to prove that I'm serious, there will be a provision in this plan that requires us to come forward with more spending cuts if the savings we promised don't materialize. Now, part of the reason I faced a trillion-dollar deficit when I walked in the door of the White House is because too many initiatives over the last decade were not paid for -- from the Iraq war to tax breaks for the wealthy. I will not make that same mistake with health care.

Second, we've estimated that most of this plan can be paid for by finding savings within the existing health care system, a system that is currently full of waste and abuse. Right now, too much of the hard-earned savings and tax dollars we spend on health care don't make us any healthier. That's not my judgment -- it's the judgment of medical professionals across this country. And this is also true when it comes to Medicare and Medicaid.

In fact, I want to speak directly to seniors for a moment, because Medicare is another issue that's been subjected to demagoguery and distortion during the course of this debate.

More than four decades ago, this nation stood up for the principle that after a lifetime of hard work, our seniors should not be left to struggle with a pile of medical bills in their later years. That's how Medicare was born. And it remains a sacred trust that must be passed down from one generation to the next. And that is why not a dollar of the Medicare trust fund will be used to pay for this plan.

The only thing this plan would eliminate is the hundreds of billions of dollars in waste and fraud, as well as unwarranted subsidies in Medicare that go to insurance companies -- subsidies that do everything to pad their profits but don't improve the care of seniors. And we will also create an independent commission of doctors and medical experts charged with identifying more waste in the years ahead.

Now, these steps will ensure that you -- America's seniors -- get the benefits you've been promised. They will ensure that Medicare is there for future generations. And we can use some of the savings to fill the gap in coverage that forces too many seniors to pay thousands of dollars a year out of their own pockets for prescription drugs. That's what this plan will do for you. So don't pay attention to those scary stories about how your benefits will be cut, especially since some of the same folks who are spreading these tall tales have fought against Medicare in the past and just this year supported a budget that would essentially have turned Medicare into a privatized voucher program. That will not happen on my watch. I will protect Medicare.

Now, because Medicare is such a big part of the health care system, making the program more efficient can help usher in changes in the way we deliver health care that can reduce costs for everybody. We have long known that some places -- like the Intermountain Healthcare in Utah or the Geisinger Health System in rural Pennsylvania -- offer high-quality care at costs below average. So the commission can help encourage the adoption of these common-sense best practices by doctors and medical professionals throughout the system -- everything from reducing hospital infection rates to encouraging better coordination between teams of doctors.

Reducing the waste and inefficiency in Medicare and Medicaid will pay for most of this plan. Now, much of the rest would be paid for with revenues from the very same drug and insurance companies that stand to benefit from tens of millions of new customers. And this reform will charge insurance companies a fee for their most expensive policies, which will encourage them to provide greater value for the money -- an idea which has the support of Democratic and Republican experts. And according to these same experts, this modest change could help hold down the cost of health care for all of us in the long run.

Now, finally, many in this chamber -- particularly on the Republican side of the aisle -- have long insisted that reforming our medical malpractice laws can help bring down the cost of health care. Now -- there you go. There you go. Now, I don't believe malpractice reform is a silver bullet, but I've talked to enough doctors to know that defensive medicine may be contributing to unnecessary costs.So I'm proposing that we move forward on a range of ideas about how to put patient safety first and let doctors focus on practicing medicine. I know that the Bush administration considered authorizing demonstration projects in individual states to test these ideas. I think it's a good idea, and I'm directing my Secretary of Health and Human Services to move forward on this initiative today.

Now, add it all up, and the plan I'm proposing will cost around $900 billion over 10 years -- less than we have spent on the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, and less than the tax cuts for the wealthiest few Americans that Congress passed at the beginning of the previous administration. Now, most of these costs will be paid for with money already being spent -- but spent badly -- in the existing health care system. The plan will not add to our deficit. The middle class will realize greater security, not higher taxes. And if we are able to slow the growth of health care costs by just one-tenth of 1 percent each year -- one-tenth of 1 percent -- it will actually reduce the deficit by $4 trillion over the long term.

Now, this is the plan I'm proposing. It's a plan that incorporates ideas from many of the people in this room tonight -- Democrats and Republicans. And I will continue to seek common ground in the weeks ahead. If you come to me with a serious set of proposals, I will be there to listen. My door is always open.

But know this: I will not waste time with those who have made the calculation that it's better politics to kill this plan than to improve it. I won't stand by while the special interests use the same old tactics to keep things exactly the way they are. If you misrepresent what's in this plan, we will call you out. And I will not -- and I will not accept the status quo as a solution. Not this time. Not now.

Everyone in this room knows what will happen if we do nothing. Our deficit will grow. More families will go bankrupt. More businesses will close. More Americans will lose their coverage when they are sick and need it the most. And more will die as a result. We know these things to be true.

That is why we cannot fail. Because there are too many Americans counting on us to succeed -- the ones who suffer silently, and the ones who shared their stories with us at town halls, in e-mails, and in letters.

I received one of those letters a few days ago. It was from our beloved friend and colleague, Ted Kennedy. He had written it back in May, shortly after he was told that his illness was terminal. He asked that it be delivered upon his death.

In it, he spoke about what a happy time his last months were, thanks to the love and support of family and friends, his wife, Vicki, his amazing children, who are all here tonight. And he expressed confidence that this would be the year that health care reform -- "that great unfinished business of our society," he called it -- would finally pass. He repeated the truth that health care is decisive for our future prosperity, but he also reminded me that "it concerns more than material things." "What we face," he wrote, "is above all a moral issue; at stake are not just the details of policy, but fundamental principles of social justice and the character of our country."

I've thought about that phrase quite a bit in recent days -- the character of our country. One of the unique and wonderful things about America has always been our self-reliance, our rugged individualism, our fierce defense of freedom and our healthy skepticism of government. And figuring out the appropriate size and role of government has always been a source of rigorous and, yes, sometimes angry debate. That's our history.

For some of Ted Kennedy's critics, his brand of liberalism represented an affront to American liberty. In their minds, his passion for universal health care was nothing more than a passion for big government.

But those of us who knew Teddy and worked with him here -- people of both parties -- know that what drove him was something more. His friend Orrin Hatch -- he knows that. They worked together to provide children with health insurance. His friend John McCain knows that. They worked together on a Patient's Bill of Rights. His friend Chuck Grassley knows that. They worked together to provide health care to children with disabilities.

On issues like these, Ted Kennedy's passion was born not of some rigid ideology, but of his own experience. It was the experience of having two children stricken with cancer. He never forgot the sheer terror and helplessness that any parent feels when a child is badly sick. And he was able to imagine what it must be like for those without insurance, what it would be like to have to say to a wife or a child or an aging parent, there is something that could make you better, but I just can't afford it.

That large-heartedness -- that concern and regard for the plight of others -- is not a partisan feeling. It's not a Republican or a Democratic feeling. It, too, is part of the American character -- our ability to stand in other people's shoes; a recognition that we are all in this together, and when fortune turns against one of us, others are there to lend a helping hand; a belief that in this country, hard work and responsibility should be rewarded by some measure of security and fair play; and an acknowledgment that sometimes government has to step in to help deliver on that promise.

This has always been the history of our progress. In 1935, when over half of our seniors could not support themselves and millions had seen their savings wiped away, there were those who argued that Social Security would lead to socialism, but the men and women of Congress stood fast, and we are all the better for it. In 1965, when some argued that Medicare represented a government takeover of health care, members of Congress -- Democrats and Republicans -- did not back down. They joined together so that all of us could enter our golden years with some basic peace of mind.

You see, our predecessors understood that government could not, and should not, solve every problem. They understood that there are instances when the gains in security from government action are not worth the added constraints on our freedom. But they also understood that the danger of too much government is matched by the perils of too little; that without the leavening hand of wise policy, markets can crash, monopolies can stifle competition, the vulnerable can be exploited. And they knew that when any government measure, no matter how carefully crafted or beneficial, is subject to scorn; when any efforts to help people in need are attacked as un-American; when facts and reason are thrown overboard and only timidity passes for wisdom, and we can no longer even engage in a civil conversation with each other over the things that truly matter -- that at that point we don't merely lose our capacity to solve big challenges. We lose something essential about ourselves.

That was true then. It remains true today. I understand how difficult this health care debate has been. I know that many in this country are deeply skeptical that government is looking out for them. I understand that the politically safe move would be to kick the can further down the road -- to defer reform one more year, or one more election, or one more term.

But that is not what the moment calls for. That's not what we came here to do. We did not come to fear the future. We came here to shape it. I still believe we can act even when it's hard. I still believe -- I still believe that we can act when it's hard. I still believe we can replace acrimony with civility, and gridlock with progress. I still believe we can do great things, and that here and now we will meet history's test.

Because that's who we are. That is our calling. That is our character. Thank you, God bless you, and may God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# 9/11 Pentagon Memorial Speech

Secretary Gates, Admiral Mullen and members of the Armed Forces, fellow Americans, family and friends of those that we lost this day: Michelle and I are deeply humbled to be with you.

Eight Septembers have come and gone. Nearly 3,000 days have passed -- almost one for each of those taken from us. But no turning of the seasons can diminish the pain and the loss of that day. No passage of time and no dark skies can ever dull the meaning of this moment. So on this solemn day, at this sacred hour, once more we pause. Once more we pray -- as a nation and as a people; in city streets where our two towers were turned to ashes and dust; in a quiet field where a plane fell from the sky; and here, where a single stone of this building is still blackened by the fires.

We remember with reverence the lives we lost. We read their names. We press their photos to our hearts. And on this day that marks their death, we recall the beauty and meaning of their lives; men and women and children of every color and every creed, from across our nation and from more than 100 others. They were innocent. Harming no one, they went about their daily lives. Gone in a horrible instant, they now "dwell in the House of the Lord forever."

We honor all those who gave their lives so that others might live, and all the survivors who battled burns and wounds and helped each other rebuild their lives; men and women who gave life to that most simple of rules: I am my brother's keeper; I am my sister's keeper.

We pay tribute to the service of a new generation -- young Americans raised in a time of peace and plenty who saw their nation in its hour of need and said, "I choose to serve"; "I will do my part." And once more we grieve. For you and your families, no words can ease the ache of your heart. No deeds can fill the empty places in your homes. But on this day and all that follow, you may find solace in the memory of those you loved, and know that you have the unending support of the American people.

Scripture teaches us a hard truth. The mountains may fall and the earth may give way; the flesh and the heart may fail. But after all our suffering, God and grace will "restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast." So it is -- so it has been for these families. So it must be for our nation.

Let us renew our resolve against those who perpetrated this barbaric act and who plot against us still. In defense of our nation we will never waver; in pursuit of al Qaeda and its extremist allies, we will never falter.

Let us renew our commitment to all those who serve in our defense -- our courageous men and women in uniform and their families and all those who protect us here at home. Mindful that the work of protecting America is never finished, we will do everything in our power to keep America safe.

Let us renew the true spirit of that day. Not the human capacity for evil, but the human capacity for good. Not the desire to destroy, but the impulse to save, and to serve, and to build. On this first National Day of Service and Remembrance, we can summon once more that ordinary goodness of America -- to serve our communities, to strengthen our country, and to better our world.

Most of all, on a day when others sought to sap our confidence, let us renew our common purpose. Let us remember how we came together as one nation, as one people, as Americans, united not only in our grief, but in our resolve to stand with one another, to stand up for the country we all love.

This may be the greatest lesson of this day, the strongest rebuke to those who attacked us, the highest tribute to those taken from us -- that such sense of purpose need not be a fleeting moment. It can be a lasting virtue. For through their own lives -- and through you, the loved ones that they left behind -- the men and women who lost their lives eight years ago today leave a legacy that still shines brightly in the darkness, and that calls on all of us to be strong and firm and united. That is our calling today and in all the Septembers still to come.

May God bless you and comfort you. And may God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# First Speech Before the United Nations General Assembly (64th Session)

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary General, fellow delegates, ladies and gentlemen:

It is my honor to address you for the first time as the 44th President of the United States. I -- I come before you humbled by the responsibility that the American people have placed upon me, mindful of the enormous challenges of our moment in history, and determined to act boldly and collectively on behalf of justice and prosperity at home and abroad.

I have been in office for just nine months -- though some days it seems a lot longer. I am well aware of the expectations that accompany my presidency around the world. These expectations are not about me. Rather, they are rooted, I believe, in a discontent with a status quo that has allowed us to be increasingly defined by our differences, and outpaced by our problems. But they are also rooted in hope -- the hope that real change is possible, and the hope that America will be a leader in bringing about such change.

I took office at a time when many around the world had come to view America with skepticism and distrust. Part of this was due to misperceptions and misinformation about my country. Part of this was due to opposition to specific policies, and a belief that on certain critical issues, America has acted unilaterally, without regard for the interests of others. And this has fed an almost reflexive anti-Americanism, which too often has served as an excuse for collective inaction.

Now, like all of you, my responsibility is to act in the interest of my nation and my people, and I will never apologize for defending those interests. But it is my deeply held belief that in the year 2009 -- more than at any point in human history -- the interests of nations and peoples are shared. The religious convictions that we hold in our hearts can forge new bonds among people, or they can tear us apart. The technology we harness can light the path to peace, or forever darken it. The energy we use can sustain our planet, or destroy it. What happens to the hope of a single child -- anywhere -- can enrich our world, or impoverish it.

In this hall, we come from many places, but we share a common future. No longer do we have the luxury of indulging our differences to the exclusion of the work that we must do together. I have carried this message from London to Ankara; from Port of Spain to Moscow; from Accra to Cairo; and it is what I will speak about today -- because the time has come for the world to move in a new direction. We must embrace a new era of engagement based on mutual interest and mutual respect, and our work must begin now.

We know the future will be forged by deeds and not simply words. Speeches alone will not solve our problems -- it will take persistent action. For those who question the character and cause of my nation, I ask you to look at the concrete actions we have taken in just nine months.

On my first day in office, I prohibited -- without exception or equivocation -- the use of torture by the United States of America. I ordered the prison at Guantanamo Bay closed, and we are doing the hard work of forging a framework to combat extremism within the rule of law. Every nation must know: America will live its values, and we will lead by example.

We have set a clear and focused goal: to work with all members of this body to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda and its extremist allies -- a network that has killed thousands of people of many faiths and nations, and that plotted to blow up this very building. In Afghanistan and Pakistan, we and many nations here are helping these governments develop the capacity to take the lead in this effort, while working to advance opportunity and security for their people.

In Iraq, we are responsibly ending a war. We have removed American combat brigades from Iraqi cities, and set a deadline of next August to remove all our combat brigades from Iraqi territory. And I have made clear that we will help Iraqis transition to full responsibility for their future, and keep our commitment to remove all American troops by the end of 2011.

I have outlined a comprehensive agenda to seek the goal of a world without nuclear weapons. In Moscow, the United States and Russia announced that we would pursue substantial reductions in our strategic warheads and launchers. At the Conference on Disarmament, we agreed on a work plan to negotiate an end to the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons. And this week, my Secretary of State will become the first senior American representative to the annual Members Conference of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

Upon taking office, I appointed a Special Envoy for Middle East Peace, and America has worked steadily and aggressively to advance the cause of two states -- Israel and Palestine -- in which peace and security take root, and the rights of both Israelis and Palestinians are respected. To confront climate change, we have invested $80 billion in clean energy. We have substantially increased our fuel-efficiency standards. We have provided new incentives for conservation, launched an energy partnership across the Americas, and moved from a bystander to a leader in international climate negotiations.

To overcome an economic crisis that touches every corner of the world, we worked with the G20 nations to forge a coordinated international response of over $2 trillion in stimulus to bring the global economy back from the brink. We mobilized resources that helped prevent the crisis from spreading further to developing countries. And we joined with others to launch a $20 billion global food security initiative that will lend a hand to those who need it most, and help them build their own capacity. We've also re-engaged the United Nations. We have paid our bills. We have joined the Human Rights Council. We have signed the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. We have fully embraced the Millennium Development Goals. And we address our priorities here, in this institution -- for instance, through the Security Council meeting that I will chair tomorrow on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, and through the issues that I will discuss today.

This is what we have already done. But this is just a beginning. Some of our actions have yielded progress. Some have laid the groundwork for progress in the future. But make no mistake: This cannot solely be America's endeavor. Those who used to chastise America for acting alone in the world cannot now stand by and wait for America to solve the world's problems alone. We have sought -- in word and deed -- a new era of engagement with the world. And now is the time for all of us to take our share of responsibility for a global response to global challenges.

Now, if we are honest with ourselves, we need to admit that we are not living up to that responsibility. Consider the course that we're on if we fail to confront the status quo: Extremists sowing terror in pockets of the world; protracted conflicts that grind on and on; genocide; mass atrocities; more nations with nuclear weapons; melting ice caps and ravaged populations; persistent poverty and pandemic disease. I say this not to sow fear, but to state a fact: The magnitude of our challenges has yet to be met by the measure of our actions.

This body was founded on the belief that the nations of the world could solve their problems together. Franklin Roosevelt, who died before he could see his vision for this institution become a reality, put it this way -- and I quote: "The structure of world peace cannot be the work of one man, or one party, or one nation…. It cannot be a peace of large nations -- or of small nations. It must be a peace which rests on the cooperative effort of the whole world."

The cooperative effort of the whole world. Those words ring even more true today, when it is not simply peace, but our very health and prosperity that we hold in common. Yet we also know that this body is made up of sovereign states. And sadly, but not surprisingly, this body has often become a forum for sowing discord instead of forging common ground; a venue for playing politics and exploiting grievances rather than solving problems. After all, it is easy to walk up to this podium and point figures -- point fingers and stoke divisions. Nothing is easier than blaming others for our troubles, and absolving ourselves of responsibility for our choices and our actions. Anybody can do that. Responsibility and leadership in the 21st century demand more.

In an era when our destiny is shared, power is no longer a zero-sum game. No one nation can or should try to dominate another nation. No world order that elevates one nation or group of people over another will succeed. No balance of power among nations will hold. The traditional divisions between nations of the South and the North make no sense in an interconnected world; nor do alignments of nations rooted in the cleavages of a long-gone Cold War.

The time has come to realize that the old habits, the old arguments, are irrelevant to the challenges faced by our people. They lead nations to act in opposition to the very goals that they claim to pursue -- and to vote, often in this body, against the interests of their own people. They build up walls between us and the future that our people seek, and the time has come for those walls to come down. Together, we must build new coalitions that bridge old divides -- coalitions of different faiths and creeds; of north and south, east, west, black, white, and brown.

The choice is ours. We can be remembered as a generation that chose to drag the arguments of the 20th century into the 21st; that put off hard choices, refused to look ahead, failed to keep pace because we defined ourselves by what we were against instead of what we were for. Or we can be a generation that chooses to see the shoreline beyond the rough waters ahead; that comes together to serve the common interests of human beings, and finally gives meaning to the promise embedded in the name given to this institution: the United Nations.

That is the future America wants -- a future of peace and prosperity that we can only reach if we recognize that all nations have rights, but all nations have responsibilities as well. That is the bargain that makes this work. That must be the guiding principle of international cooperation.

Today, let me put forward four pillars that I believe are fundamental to the future that we want for our children: non-proliferation and disarmament; the promotion of peace and security; the preservation of our planet; and a global economy that advances opportunity for all people.

First, we must stop the spread of nuclear weapons, and seek the goal of a world without them.

This institution was founded at the dawn of the atomic age, in part because man's capacity to kill had to be contained. For decades, we averted disaster, even under the shadow of a superpower stand-off. But today, the threat of proliferation is growing in scope and complexity. If we fail to act, we will invite nuclear arms races in every region, and the prospect of wars and acts of terror on a scale that we can hardly imagine.

A fragile consensus stands in the way of this frightening outcome, and that is the basic bargain that shapes the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. It says that all nations have the right to peaceful nuclear energy; that nations with nuclear weapons have a responsibility to move toward disarmament; and those without them have the responsibility to forsake them. The next 12 months could be pivotal in determining whether this compact will be strengthened or will slowly dissolve.

America intends to keep our end of the bargain. We will pursue a new agreement with Russia to substantially reduce our strategic warheads and launchers. We will move forward with ratification of the Test Ban Treaty, and work with others to bring the treaty into force so that nuclear testing is permanently prohibited. We will complete a Nuclear Posture Review that opens the door to deeper cuts and reduces the role of nuclear weapons. And we will call upon countries to begin negotiations in January on a treaty to end the production of fissile material for weapons.

I will also host a summit next April that reaffirms each nation's responsibility to secure nuclear material on its territory, and to help those who can't -- because we must never allow a single nuclear device to fall into the hands of a violent extremist. And we will work to strengthen the institutions and initiatives that combat nuclear smuggling and theft.

All of this must support efforts to strengthen the NPT. Those nations that refuse to live up to their obligations must face consequences. Let me be clear, this is not about singling out individual nations -- it is about standing up for the rights of all nations that do live up to their responsibilities. Because a world in which IAEA inspections are avoided and the United Nation's demands are ignored will leave all people less safe, and all nations less secure.

In their actions to date, the governments of North Korea and Iran threaten to take us down this dangerous slope. We respect their rights as members of the community of nations. I've said before and I will repeat, I am committed to diplomacy that opens a path to greater prosperity and more secure peace for both nations if they live up to their obligations.

But if the governments of Iran and North Korea choose to ignore international standards; if they put the pursuit of nuclear weapons ahead of regional stability and the security and opportunity of their own people; if they are oblivious to the dangers of escalating nuclear arms races in both East Asia and the Middle East -- then they must be held accountable. The world must stand together to demonstrate that international law is not an empty promise, and that treaties will be enforced. We must insist that the future does not belong to fear.

That brings me to the second pillar for our future: the pursuit of peace.

The United Nations was born of the belief that the people of the world can live their lives, raise their families, and resolve their differences peacefully. And yet we know that in too many parts of the world, this ideal remains an abstraction -- a distant dream. We can either accept that outcome as inevitable, and tolerate constant and crippling conflict, or we can recognize that the yearning for peace is universal, and reassert our resolve to end conflicts around the world.

That effort must begin with an unshakeable determination that the murder of innocent men, women and children will never be tolerated. On this, no one can be -- there can be no dispute. The violent extremists who promote conflict by distorting faith have discredited and isolated themselves. They offer nothing but hatred and destruction. In confronting them, America will forge lasting partnerships to target terrorists, share intelligence, and coordinate law enforcement and protect our people. We will permit no safe haven for al Qaeda to launch attacks from Afghanistan or any other nation. We will stand by our friends on the front lines, as we and many nations will do in pledging support for the Pakistani people tomorrow. And we will pursue positive engagement that builds bridges among faiths, and new partnerships for opportunity.

Our efforts to promote peace, however, cannot be limited to defeating violent extremists. For the most powerful weapon in our arsenal is the hope of human beings -- the belief that the future belongs to those who would build and not destroy; the confidence that conflicts can end and a new day can begin.

And that is why we will support -- we will strengthen our support for effective peacekeeping, while energizing our efforts to prevent conflicts before they take hold. We will pursue a lasting peace in Sudan through support for the people of Darfur and the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, so that we secure the peace that the Sudanese people deserve. And in countries ravaged by violence -- from Haiti to Congo to East Timor -- we will work with the U.N. and other partners to support an enduring peace.

I will also continue to seek a just and lasting peace between Israel, Palestine, and the Arab world. We will continue to work on that issue. Yesterday, I had a constructive meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas. We have made some progress. Palestinians have strengthened their efforts on security. Israelis have facilitated greater freedom of movement for the Palestinians. As a result of these efforts on both sides, the economy in the West Bank has begun to grow. But more progress is needed. We continue to call on Palestinians to end incitement against Israel, and we continue to emphasize that America does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements.

The time has come -- the time has come to re-launch negotiations without preconditions that address the permanent status issues: security for Israelis and Palestinians, borders, refugees, and Jerusalem. And the goal is clear: Two states living side by side in peace and security -- a Jewish state of Israel, with true security for all Israelis; and a viable, independent Palestinian state with contiguous territory that ends the occupation that began in 1967, and realizes the potential of the Palestinian people.

As we pursue this goal, we will also pursue peace between Israel and Lebanon, Israel and Syria, and a broader peace between Israel and its many neighbors. In pursuit of that goal, we will develop regional initiatives with multilateral participation, alongside bilateral negotiations. Now, I am not naÃ¯ve. I know this will be difficult. But all of us -- not just the Israelis and the Palestinians, but all of us -- must decide whether we are serious about peace, or whether we will only lend it lip service. To break the old patterns, to break the cycle of insecurity and despair, all of us must say publicly what we would acknowledge in private. The United States does Israel no favors when we fail to couple an unwavering commitment to its security with an insistence that Israel respect the legitimate claims and rights of the Palestinians. And -- And nations within this body do the Palestinians no favors when they choose vitriolic attacks against Israel over constructive willingness to recognize Israel's legitimacy and its right to exist in peace and security.

We must remember that the greatest price of this conflict is not paid by us. It's not paid by politicians. It's paid by the Israeli girl in Sderot who closes her eyes in fear that a rocket will take her life in the middle of the night. It's paid for by the Palestinian boy in Gaza who has no clean water and no country to call his own. These are all God's children. And after all the politics and all the posturing, this is about the right of every human being to live with dignity and security. That is a lesson embedded in the three great faiths that call one small slice of Earth the Holy Land. And that is why, even though there will be setbacks and false starts and tough days, I will not waver in my pursuit of peace.

Third, we must recognize that in the 21st century, there will be no peace unless we take responsibility for the preservation of our planet. And I thank the Secretary General for hosting the subject of climate change yesterday.

The danger posed by climate change cannot be denied. Our responsibility to meet it must not be deferred. If we continue down our current course, every member of this Assembly will see irreversible changes within their borders. Our efforts to end conflicts will be eclipsed by wars over refugees and resources. Development will be devastated by drought and famine. Land that human beings have lived on for millennia will disappear. Future generations will look back and wonder why we refused to act; why we failed to pass on -- why we failed to pass on an environment that was worthy of our inheritance.

And that is why the days when America dragged its feet on this issue are over. We will move forward with investments to transform our energy economy, while providing incentives to make clean energy the profitable kind of energy. We will press ahead with deep cuts in emissions to reach the goals that we set for 2020, and eventually 2050. We will continue to promote renewable energy and efficiency, and share new technologies with countries around the world. And we will seize every opportunity for progress to address this threat in a cooperative effort with the entire world.

And those wealthy nations that did so much damage to the environment in the 20th century must accept our obligation to lead. But responsibility does not end there. While we must acknowledge the need for differentiated responses, any effort to curb carbon emissions must include the fast-growing carbon emitters who can do more to reduce their air pollution without inhibiting growth. And any effort that fails to help the poorest nations both adapt to the problems that climate change have already wrought and help them travel a path of clean development simply will not work.

It's hard to change something as fundamental as how we use energy. I know that. It's even harder to do so in the midst of a global recession. Certainly, it will be tempting to sit back and wait for others to move first. But we cannot make this journey unless we all move forward together. As we head into Copenhagen, let us resolve to focus on what each of us can do for the sake of our common future.

And this leads me to the final pillar that must fortify our future: a global economy that advances opportunity for all people.

The world is still recovering from the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. In America, we see the engine of growth beginning to churn, and yet many still struggle to find a job or pay their bills. Across the globe, we find promising signs, but little certainty about what lies ahead. And far too many people in far too many places live through the daily crises that challenge our humanity -- the despair of an empty stomach; the thirst brought on by dwindling water supplies; the injustice of a child dying from a treatable disease; or a mother losing her life as she gives birth.

In Pittsburgh, we will work with the world's largest economies to chart a course for growth that is balanced and sustained. That means vigilance to ensure that we do not let up until our people are back to work. That means taking steps to rekindle demand so that global recovery can be sustained. And that means setting new rules of the road and strengthening regulation for all financial centers, so that we put an end to the greed and the excess and the abuse that led us into this disaster, and prevent a crisis like this from ever happening again.

At a time of such interdependence, we have a moral and pragmatic interest, however, in broader questions of development -- the questions of development that existed even before this crisis happened. And so America will continue our historic effort to help people feed themselves. We have set aside $63 billion to carry forward the fight against HIV/AIDS, to end deaths from tuberculosis and malaria, to eradicate polio, and to strengthen public health systems. We are joining with other countries to contribute H1N1 vaccines to the World Health Organization. We will integrate more economies into a system of global trade. We will support the Millennium Development Goals, and approach next year's summit with a global plan to make them a reality. And we will set our sights on the eradication of extreme poverty in our time.

Now is the time for all of us to do our part. Growth will not be sustained or shared unless all nations embrace their responsibilities. And that means that wealthy nations must open their markets to more goods and extend a hand to those with less, while reforming international institutions to give more nations a greater voice. And developing nations must root out the corruption that is an obstacle to progress -- for opportunity cannot thrive where individuals are oppressed and business have to pay bribes. That is why we support honest police and independent judges; civil society and a vibrant private sector. Our goal is simple: a global economy in which growth is sustained, and opportunity is available to all.

Now, the changes that I've spoken about today will not be easy to make. And they will not be realized simply by leaders like us coming together in forums like this, as useful as that may be. For as in any assembly of members, real change can only come through the people we represent. That is why we must do the hard work to lay the groundwork for progress in our own capitals. That's where we will build the consensus to end conflicts and to harness technology for peaceful purposes, to change the way we use energy, and to promote growth that can be sustained and shared.

I believe that the people of the world want this future for their children. And that is why we must champion those principles which ensure that governments reflect the will of the people. These principles cannot be afterthoughts -- democracy and human rights are essential to achieving each of the goals that I've discussed today, because governments of the people and by the people are more likely to act in the broader interests of their own people, rather than narrow interests of those in power.

The test of our leadership will not be the degree to which we feed the fears and old hatreds of our people. True leadership will not be measured by the ability to muzzle dissent, or to intimidate and harass political opponents at home. The people of the world want change. They will not long tolerate those who are on the wrong side of history.

This Assembly's Charter commits each of us -- and I quote -- "to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women." Among those rights is the freedom to speak your mind and worship as you please; the promise of equality of the races, and the opportunity for women and girls to pursue their own potential; the ability of citizens to have a say in how you are governed, and to have confidence in the administration of justice. For just as no nation should be forced to accept the tyranny of another nation, no individual should be forced to accept the tyranny of their own people.

As an African American, I will never forget that I would not be here today without the steady pursuit of a more perfect union in my country. And that guides my belief that no matter how dark the day may seem, transformative change can be forged by those who choose to side with justice. And I pledge that America will always stand with those who stand up for their dignity and their rights -- for the student who seeks to learn; the voter who demands to be heard; the innocent who longs to be free; the oppressed who yearns to be equal.

Democracy cannot be imposed on any nation from the outside. Each society must search for its own path, and no path is perfect. Each country will pursue a path rooted in the culture of its people and in its past traditions. And I admit that America has too often been selective in its promotion of democracy. But that does not weaken our commitment; it only reinforces it. There are basic principles that are universal; there are certain truths which are self-evident -- and the United States of America will never waver in our efforts to stand up for the right of people everywhere to determine their own destiny.

Sixty-five years ago, a weary Franklin Roosevelt spoke to the American people in his fourth and final inaugural address. After years of war, he sought to sum up the lessons that could be drawn from the terrible suffering, the enormous sacrifice that had taken place. "We have learned," he said, "to be citizens of the world, members of the human community."

The United Nations was built by men and women like Roosevelt from every corner of the world -- from Africa and Asia, from Europe to the Americas. These architects of international cooperation had an idealism that was anything but naÃ¯ve -- it was rooted in the hard-earned lessons of war; rooted in the wisdom that nations could advance their interests by acting together instead of splitting apart.

Now it falls to us -- for this institution will be what we make of it. The United Nations does extraordinary good around the world -- feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, mending places that have been broken. But it also struggles to enforce its will, and to live up to the ideals of its founding.

I believe that those imperfections are not a reason to walk away from this institution -- they are a calling to redouble our efforts. The United Nations can either be a place where we bicker about outdated grievances, or forge common ground; a place where we focus on what drives us apart, or what brings us together; a place where we indulge tyranny, or a source of moral authority. In short, the United Nations can be an institution that is disconnected from what matters in the lives of our citizens, or it can be an indispensable factor in advancing the interests of the people we serve.

We have reached a pivotal moment. The United States stands ready to begin a new chapter of international cooperation -- one that recognizes the rights and responsibilities of all nations. And so, with confidence in our cause, and with a commitment to our values, we call on all nations to join us in building the future that our people so richly deserve.

Thank you very much, everybody.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Speech at the Memorial Service for Fort Hood Servicemen and Servicewomen

To the Fort Hood community; to Admiral Mullen; General Casey; General Cone; Secretary McHugh; Secretary Gates; most importantly, to family, friends, and members of our Armed Forces: We come together filled with sorrow for the 13 Americans that we have lost, with gratitude for the lives that they led, and with a determination to honor them through the work we carry on.

This is a time of war. Yet these Americans did not die on a foreign field of battle. They were killed here, on American soil, in the heart of this great state and the heart of this great American community. This is the fact that makes the tragedy even more painful, even more incomprehensible.

For those families who have lost a loved one, no words can fill the void that's been left. We knew these men and women as soldiers and caregivers. You knew them as mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, sisters and brothers.

But here is what you must also know: Your loved ones endure through the life of our nation. Their memory will be honored in the places they lived and by the people they touched. Their life's work is our security, and the freedom that we all too often take for granted. Every evening that the sun sets on a tranquil town; every dawn that a flag is unfurled; every moment that an American enjoys life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness -- that is their legacy.

Neither this country, nor the values upon which we were founded, could exist without men and women like these 13 Americans. And that is why we must pay tribute to their stories.

Chief Warrant Officer Michael Cahill had served in the National Guard and worked as a physician's assistant for decades. A husband and father of three, he was so committed to his patients that on the day he died he was back at work just weeks after having had a heart attack.

Major Libardo Eduardo Caraveo spoke little English when he came to America as a teenager. But he put himself through college, earned a Ph.D., and was helping combat units cope with the stress of deployment. He's survived by his wife, sons, and step-daughters. Staff Sergeant Justin DeCrow joined the Army right after high school, married his high school sweetheart, and had served as a light wheeled mechanic and satellite communications operator. He was known as an optimist, a mentor, and a loving husband and loving father.

After retiring from the Army as a major, John Gaffaney cared for society's most vulnerable during two decades as a psychiatric nurse. He spent three years trying to return to active duty in this time of war, and he was preparing to deploy to Iraq as a captain. He leaves behind a wife and son.

Specialist Frederick Greene was a Tennessean who wanted to join the Army for a long time, and did so in 2008, with the support of his family. As a combat engineer he was a natural leader, and he is survived by his wife and two daughters.

Specialist Jason Hunt was also recently married, with three children to care for. He joined the Army after high school. He did a tour in Iraq, and it was there that he reenlisted for six more years on his 21st birthday so that he could continue to serve.

Staff Sergeant Amy Krueger was an athlete in high school, joined the Army shortly after 9/11, and had since returned home to speak to students about her experience. When her mother told her she couldn't take on Osama bin Laden by herself, Amy replied: "Watch me."

Private First Class Aaron Nemelka was an Eagle Scout who just recently signed up to do one of the most dangerous jobs in the service -- diffuse bombs -- so that he could help save lives. He was proudly carrying on a tradition of military service that runs deep within his family.

Private First Class Michael Pearson loved his family and loved his music, and his goal was to be a music teacher. He excelled at playing the guitar, and could create songs on the spot and show others how to play. He joined the military a year ago, and was preparing for his first deployment.

Captain Russell Seager worked as a nurse for the VA, helping veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress. He had extraordinary respect for the military, and signed up to serve so that he could help soldiers cope with the stress of combat and return to civilian life. He leaves behind a wife and son.

Private Francheska Velez, daughter of a father from Colombia and a Puerto Rican mother, had recently served in Korea and in Iraq, and was pursuing a career in the Army. When she was killed she was pregnant with her first child, and was excited about becoming a mother.

Lieutenant Colonel Juanita Warman was the daughter and granddaughter of Army veterans. She was a single mom who put herself through college and graduate school, and served as a nurse practitioner while raising her two daughters. She also left behind a loving husband.

Private First Class Kham Xiong came to America from Thailand as a small child. He was a husband and father who followed his brother into the military because his family had a strong history of service. He was preparing for his first deployment to Afghanistan.

These men and women came from all parts of the country. Some had long careers in the military. Some had signed up to serve in the shadow of 9/11. Some had known intense combat in Iraq and Afghanistan, and some cared for those did. Their lives speak to the strength, the dignity, the decency of those who serve, and that's how they will be remembered.

For that same spirit is embodied in the community here at Fort Hood, and in the many wounded who are still recovering. As was already mentioned, in those terrible minutes during the attack, soldiers made makeshift tourniquets out of their clothes. They braved gunfire to reach the wounded, and ferried them back to safety in the backs of cars and a pickup truck.

One young soldier, Amber Bahr, was so intent on helping others, she did not realize for some time that she, herself, had been shot in the back. Two police officers -- Mark Todd and Kim Munley -- saved countless lives by risking their own. One medic -- Francisco de la Serna -- treated both Officer Munley and the gunman who shot her.

It may be hard to comprehend the twisted logic that led to this tragedy. But this much we do know: No faith justifies these murderous and craven acts. No just and loving God looks upon them with favor. For what he has done, we know that the killer will be met with justice -- in this world, and the next.

These are trying times for our country. In Afghanistan and Pakistan, the same extremists who killed nearly 3,000 Americans continue to endanger America, our allies, and innocent Afghans and Pakistanis. In Iraq, we're working to bring a war to a successful end, as there are still those who would deny the Iraqi people the future that Americans and Iraqis have sacrificed so much for.

As we face these challenges, the stories of those at Fort Hood reaffirm the core values that we are fighting for, and the strength that we must draw upon. Theirs are the tales of American men and women answering an extraordinary call -- the call to serve their comrades, their communities, and their country. In an age of self -- selfishness, they embody responsibility. In an era of division, they call upon us to come together. In a time of cynicism, they remind us of who we are as Americans.

We are a nation that endures because of the courage of those who defend it. We saw that valor in those who braved bullets here at Fort Hood, just as surely as we see it in those who signed up knowing they would serve in harm’s way.

We are a nation of laws whose commitment to justice is so enduring that we would treat a gunman and give him due process, just as surely as we will see that he pays for his crimes.

We're a nation that guarantees the freedom to worship as one chooses. And instead of claiming God for our side, we remember Lincoln’s words, and always pray to be on the side of God.

We're a nation that is dedicated to the proposition that all men and women are created equal. We live that truth within our military, and see it in the varied backgrounds of those we lay to rest today. We defend that truth at home and abroad, and we know that Americans will always be found on the side of liberty and equality. That's who we are as a people.

Tomorrow is Veterans Day. It's a chance to pause, and to pay tribute -- for students to learn the struggles that preceded them; for families to honor the service of parents and grandparents; for citizens to reflect upon the sacrifices that have been made in pursuit of a more perfect union.

For history is filled with heroes. You may remember the stories of a grandfather who marched across Europe; an uncle who fought in Vietnam; a sister who served in the Gulf. But as we honor the many generations who have served, all of us -- every single American -- must acknowledge that this generation has more than proved itself the equal of those who've come before.1 We need not look to the past for greatness, because it is before our very eyes.

This generation of soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen have volunteered in the time of certain danger. They are part of the finest fighting force that the world has ever known. They have served tour after tour of duty in distant, different, and difficult places. They have stood watch in blinding deserts and on snowy mountains. They have extended the opportunity of self-government to peoples that have suffered tyranny and war. They are men and women -- white, black, and brown -- of all faiths and all stations -- all Americans, serving together to protect our people, while giving others half a world away the chance to lead a better life.

In today’s wars, there's not always a simple ceremony that signals our troops’ success -- no surrender papers to be signed, or capital to be claimed. But the measure of the impact of these young men and women is no less great. In a world of threats that no know borders, their legacy will be marked in the safety of our cities and towns, and the security and opportunity that's extended abroad. It will serve as testimony to the character of those who served, and the example that all of you in uniform set for America and for the world.

Here at Fort Hood, we pay tribute to 13 men and women who were not able to escape the horror of war, even in the comfort of home. Later today at Fort Lewis, one community will gather to remember so many in one Stryker Brigade who have fallen in Afghanistan.

Long after they are laid to rest -- when the fighting has finished, and our nation has endured; when today’s servicemen and women are veterans and their children have grown -- it will be said that this generation believed under the most trying of tests; believed in perseverance -- not just when it was easy, but when it was hard; that they paid the price and bore the burden to secure this nation, and stood up for the values that live in the hearts of all free peoples.

So we say goodbye to those who now belong to eternity.

We press ahead in pursuit of the peace that guided their service.

May God bless the memory of those that we have lost.

And may God bless the United States of America.

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# Shanghai Town Hall With Future Chinese Leaders

Neih hou. Good afternoon. It is a great honor for me to be here in Shanghai, and to have this opportunity to speak with all of you. I'd like to thank Fudan University's President Yang [Yuliang] for his hospitality and his gracious welcome. I'd also like to thank our outstanding Ambassador, Jon Huntsman, who exemplifies the deep ties and respect between our nations.

I don't know what he said, but I hope it was good.

What I'd like to do is to make some opening comments, and then what I'm really looking forward to doing is taking questions, not only from students who are in the audience, but also we've received questions online, which will be asked by some of the students who are here in the audience, as well as by Ambassador Huntsman. And I am very sorry that my Chinese is not as good as your English, but I am looking forward to this chance to have a dialogue.

This is my first time traveling to China, and I'm excited to see this majestic country. Here, in Shanghai, we see the growth that has caught the attention of the world -- the soaring skyscrapers, the bustling streets and entrepreneurial activity. And just as I'm impressed by these signs of China's journey to the 21st century, I'm eager to see those ancient places that speak to us from China's distant past.

Tomorrow and the next day I hope to have a chance when I'm in Beijing to see the majesty of the Forbidden City and the wonder of the Great Wall. Truly, this is a nation that encompasses both a rich history and a belief in the promise of the future.

The same can be said of the relationship between our two countries. Shanghai, of course, is a city that has great meaning in the history of the relationship between the United States and China. It was here, 37 years ago, that the Shanghai Communique opened the door to a new chapter of engagement between our governments and among our people. However, America's ties to this city -- and to this country -- stretch back further, to the earliest days of America's independence.

In 1784, our founding father, George Washington, commissioned the Empress of China, a ship that set sail for these shores so that it could pursue trade with the Qing Dynasty. Washington wanted to see the ship carry the flag around the globe, and to forge new ties with nations like China. This is a common American impulse -- the desire to reach for new horizons, and to forge new partnerships that are mutually beneficial.

Over the two centuries that have followed, the currents of history have steered the relationship between our countries in many directions. And even in the midst of tumultuous winds, our people had opportunities to forge deep and even dramatic ties. For instance, Americans will never forget the hospitality shown to our pilots who were shot down over your soil during World War II, and cared for by Chinese civilians who risked all that they had by doing so. And Chinese veterans of that war still warmly greet those American veterans who return to the sites where they fought to help liberate China from occupation.

A different kind of connection was made nearly 40 years ago when the frost between our countries began to thaw through the simple game of table tennis. The very unlikely nature of this engagement contributed to its success -- because for all our differences, both our common humanity and our shared curiosity were revealed. As one American player described his visit to China -- "[The] people are just like us...The country is very similar to America, but still very different."

Of course this small opening was followed by the achievement of the Shanghai Communique, and the eventual establishment of formal relations between the United States and China in 1979. And in three decades, just look at how far we have come.

In 1979, trade between the United States and China stood at roughly 5 billion dollars -- today it tops over 400 billion dollars each year. The commerce affects our people's lives in so many ways. America imports from China many of the computer parts we use, the clothes we wear; and we export to China machinery that helps power your industry. This trade could create even more jobs on both sides of the Pacific, while allowing our people to enjoy a better quality of life. And as demand becomes more balanced, it can lead to even broader prosperity.

In 1979, the political cooperation between the United States and China was rooted largely in our shared rivalry with the Soviet Union. Today, we have a positive, constructive and comprehensive relationship that opens the door to partnership on the key global issues of our time -- economic recovery and the development of clean energy; stopping the spread of nuclear weapons and the scourge of climate change; the promotion of peace and security in Asia and around the globe. All of these issues will be on the agenda tomorrow when I meet with President Hu [Jintao].

And in 1979, the connections among our people were limited. Today, we see the curiosity of those ping-pong players manifested in the ties that are being forged across many sectors. The second highest number of foreign students in the United States come from China, and we've seen a 50 percent increase in the study of Chinese among our own students. There are nearly 200 "friendship cities" drawing our communities together. American and Chinese scientists cooperate on new research and discovery. And of course, Yao Ming is just one signal of our shared love of basketball -- I'm only sorry that I won't be able to see a Shanghai Sharks game while I'm visiting.

It is no coincidence that the relationship between our countries has accompanied a period of positive change. China has lifted hundreds of millions of people out of poverty -- an accomplishment unparalleled in human history -- while playing a larger role in global events. And the United States has seen our economy grow along with the standard of living enjoyed by our people, while bringing the Cold War to a successful conclusion.

There is a Chinese proverb: "Consider the past, and you shall know the future." Surely, we have known setbacks and challenges over the last 30 years. Our relationship has not been without disagreement and difficulty. But the notion that we must be adversaries is not predestined -- not when we consider the past. Indeed, because of our cooperation, both the United States and China are more prosperous and more secure. We have seen what is possible when we build upon our mutual interests, and engage on the basis of mutual respect.

And yet the success of that engagement depends upon understanding -- on sustaining an open dialogue, and learning about one another and from one another. For just as that American table tennis player pointed out -- we share much in common as human beings, but our countries are different in certain ways.

I believe that each country must chart its own course. China is an ancient nation, with a deeply rooted culture. The United States, by comparison, is a young nation, whose culture is determined by the many different immigrants who have come to our shores, and by the founding documents that guide our democracy.

Those documents put forward a simple vision of human affairs, and they enshrine several core principles -- that all men and women are created equal, and possess certain fundamental rights; that government should reflect the will of the people and respond to their wishes; that commerce should be open, information freely accessible; and that laws, and not simply men, should guarantee the administration of justice.

Of course, the story of our nation is not without its difficult chapters. In many ways -- over many years -- we have struggled to advance the promise of these principles to all of our people, and to forge a more perfect union. We fought a very painful civil war, and freed a portion of our population from slavery. It took time for women to be extended the right to vote, workers to win the right to organize, and for immigrants from different corners of the globe to be fully embraced. Even after they were freed, African Americans persevered through conditions that were separate and not equal, before winning full and equal rights.

None of this was easy. But we made progress because of our belief in those core principles, which have served as our compass through the darkest of storms. That is why Lincoln could stand up in the midst of civil war and declare it a struggle to see whether any nation, conceived in liberty, and "dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal" could long endure. That is why Dr. Martin Luther King could stand on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and ask that our nation live out the true meaning of its creed. That's why immigrants from China to Kenya could find a home on our shores; why opportunity is available to all who would work for it; and why someone like me, who less than 50 years ago would have had trouble voting in some parts of America, is now able to serve as its President.

And that is why America will always speak out for these core principles around the world. We do not seek to impose any system of government on any other nation, but we also don't believe that the principles that we stand for are unique to our nation. These freedoms of expression and worship -- of access to information and political participation -- we believe are universal rights. They should be available to all people, including ethnic and religious minorities -- whether they are in the United States, China, or any nation. Indeed, it is that respect for universal rights that guides America's openness to other countries; our respect for different cultures; our commitment to international law; and our faith in the future.

These are all things that you should know about America. I also know that we have much to learn about China. Looking around at this magnificent city -- and looking around this room -- I do believe that our nations hold something important in common, and that is a belief in the future. Neither the United States nor China is content to rest on our achievements. For while China is an ancient nation, you are also clearly looking ahead with confidence, ambition, and a commitment to see that tomorrow's generation can do better than today's.

In addition to your growing economy, we admire China's extraordinary commitment to science and research -- a commitment borne out in everything from the infrastructure you build to the technology you use. China is now the world's largest Internet user -- which is why we were so pleased to include the Internet as a part of today's event. This country now has the world's largest mobile phone network, and it is investing in the new forms of energy that can both sustain growth and combat climate change -- and I'm looking forward to deepening the partnership between the United States and China in this critical area tomorrow. But above all, I see China's future in you -- young people whose talent and dedication and dreams will do so much to help shape the 21st century.

I've said many times that I believe that our world is now fundamentally interconnected. The jobs we do, the prosperity we build, the environment we protect, the security that we seek -- all of these things are shared. And given that interconnection, power in the 21st century is no longer a zero-sum game; one country's success need not come at the expense of another. And that is why the United States insists we do not seek to contain China's rise. On the contrary, we welcome China as a strong and prosperous and successful member of the community of nations -- a China that draws on the rights, strengths, and creativity of individual Chinese like you.

To return to the proverb -- consider the past. We know that more is to be gained when great powers cooperate than when they collide. That is a lesson that human beings have learned time and again, and that is the example of the history between our nations. And I believe strongly that cooperation must go beyond our government. It must be rooted in our people -- in the studies we share, the business that we do, the knowledge that we gain, and even in the sports that we play. And these bridges must be built by young men and women just like you and your counterparts in America.

That's why I'm pleased to announce that the United States will dramatically expand the number of our students who study in China to 100,000. And these exchanges mark a clear commitment to build ties among our people, as surely as you will help determine the destiny of the 21st century. And I'm absolutely confident that America has no better ambassadors to offer than our young people. For they, just like you, are filled with talent and energy and optimism about the history that is yet to be written.

So let this be the next step in the steady pursuit of cooperation that will serve our nations, and the world. And if there's one thing that we can take from today's dialogue, I hope that it is a commitment to continue this dialogue going forward.

So thank you very much. And I look forward now to taking some questions from all of you. Thank you very much.

So -- I just want to make sure this works. This is a tradition, by the way, that is very common in the United States at these town hall meetings. And what we're going to do is I will just -- if you are interested in asking a question, you can raise your hands. I will call on you. And then I will alternate between a question from the audience and an Internet question from one of the students who prepared the questions, as well as I think Ambassador Huntsman may have a question that we were able to obtain from the Web site of our embassy.

So let me begin, though, by seeing -- and then what I'll do is I'll call on a boy and then a girl and then -- so we'll go back and forth, so that you know it's fair. All right? So I'll start with this young lady right in the front. Why don't we wait for this microphone so everyone can hear you. And what's your name?

Question: My name is [inaudible] and I am a student from Fudan University. Shanghai and Chicago have been sister cities since 1985, and these two cities have conduct a wide range of economic, political, and cultural exchanges. So what measures will you take to deepen this close relationship between cities of the United States and China?

And Shanghai will hold the World Exposition next year. Will you bring your family to visit the Expo? Thank you.

President Obama: Well, thank you very much for the question. I was just having lunch before I came here with the Mayor of Shanghai, and he told me that he has had an excellent relationship with the city of Chicago -- my home town -- that he's visited there twice. And I think it's wonderful to have these exchanges between cities.

One of the things that I discussed with the Mayor is how both cities can learn from each other on strategies around clean energy, because one of the issues that ties China and America together is how, with an expanding population and a concern for climate change, that we're able to reduce our carbon footprint. And obviously in the United States and many developed countries, per capita, per individual, they are already using much more energy than each individual here in China. But as China grows and expands, it's going to be using more energy as well. So both countries have a great interest in finding new strategies.

We talked about mass transit and the excellent rail lines that are being developed in Shanghai. I think we can learn in Chicago and the United States some of the fine work that's being done on high-speed rail.

In the United States, I think we are learning how to develop buildings that use much less energy, that are much more energy-efficient. And I know that with Shanghai, as I traveled and I saw all the cranes and all the new buildings that are going up, it's very important for us to start incorporating these new technologies so that each building is energy-efficient when it comes to lighting, when it comes to heating. And so it's a terrific opportunity I think for us to learn from each other.

I know this is going to be a major focus of the Shanghai World Expo, is the issue of clean energy, as I learned from the Mayor. And so I would love to attend. I'm not sure yet what my schedule is going to be, but I'm very pleased that we're going to have an excellent U.S. pavilion at the Expo, and I understand that we expect as many as 70 million visitors here. So it's going to be very crowded and it's going to be very exciting.

Chicago has had two world expos in its history, and both of those expos ended up being tremendous boosts for the city. So I'm sure the same thing will happen here in Shanghai.

Thank you.

Why don't we get one of the questions from the Internet? And introduce yourself, in case --

Question: First shall I say it in Chinese, and then the English, okay?

President Obama: Yes.

Question: I want to pose a question from the Internet. I want to thank you, Mr. President, for visiting China in your first year in office, and exchange views with us in China. I want to know what are you bringing to China, your visit to China this time, and what will you bring back to the United States?

President Obama: The main purpose of my trip is to deepen my understanding of China and its vision for the future. I have had several meetings now with President Hu. We participated together in the G20 that was dealing with the economic financial crisis. We have had consultations about a wide range of issues. But I think it's very important for the United States to continually deepen its understanding of China, just as it's important for China to continually deepen its understanding of the United States.

In terms of what I'd like to get out of this meeting, or this visit, in addition to having the wonderful opportunity to see the Forbidden City and the Great Wall, and to meet with all of you -- these are all highlights -- but in addition to that, the discussions that I intend to have with President Hu speak to the point that Ambassador Huntsman made earlier, which is there are very few global challenges that can be solved unless the United States and China agree.

So let me give you a specific example, and that is the issue we were just discussing of climate change. The United States and China are the world's two largest emitters of greenhouse gases, of carbon that is causing the planet to warm. Now, the United States, as a highly developed country, as I said before, per capita, consumes much more energy and emits much more greenhouse gases for each individual than does China. On the other hand, China is growing at a much faster pace and it has a much larger population. So unless both of our countries are willing to take critical steps in dealing with this issue, we will not be able to resolve it.

There's going to be a Copenhagen conference in December in which world leaders are trying to find a recipe so that we can all make commitments that are differentiated so each country would not have the same obligations -- obviously China, which has much more poverty, should not have to do exactly the same thing as the United States -- but all of us should have these certain obligations in terms of what our plan will be to reduce these greenhouse gases.

So that's an example of what I hope to get out of this meeting -- a meeting of the minds between myself and President Hu about how together the United States and China can show leadership. Because I will tell you, other countries around the world will be waiting for us. They will watch to see what we do. And if they say, ah, you know, the United States and China, they're not serious about this, then they won't be serious either. That is the burden of leadership that both of our countries now carry. And my hope is, is that the more discussion and dialogue that we have, the more we are able to show this leadership to the world on these many critical issues. Okay?

All right, it's a -- I think it must be a boy's turn now. Right? So I'll call on this young man right here.

Question: [As translated.] Mr. President, good afternoon. I'm from Tongji University. I want to cite a saying from Confucius: "It is always good to have a friend coming from afar." In Confucius books, there is a great saying which says that harmony is good, but also we uphold differences. China advocates a harmonious world. We know that the United States develops a culture that features diversity. I want to know, what will your government do to build a diversified world with different cultures? What would you do to respect the different cultures and histories of other countries? And what kinds of cooperation we can conduct in the future?

President Obama: This is an excellent point. The United States, one of our strengths is that we are a very diverse culture. We have people coming from all around the world. And so there's no one definition of what an American looks like. In my own family, I have a father who was from Kenya; I have a mother who was from Kansas, in the Midwest of the United States; my sister is half-Indonesian; she's married to a Chinese person from Canada. So when you see family gatherings in the Obama household, it looks like the United Nations.

And that is a great strength of the United States, because it means that we learn from different cultures and different foods and different ideas, and that has made us a much more dynamic society.

Now, what is also true is that each country in this interconnected world has its own culture and its own history and its own traditions. And I think it's very important for the United States not to assume that what is good for us is automatically good for somebody else. And we have to have some modesty about our attitudes towards other countries.

I have to say, though, as I said in my opening remarks, that we do believe that there are certain fundamental principles that are common to all people, regardless of culture. So, for example, in the United Nations we are very active in trying to make sure that children all around the world are treated with certain basic rights -- that if children are being exploited, if there's forced labor for children, that despite the fact that that may have taken place in the past in many different countries, including the United States, that all countries of the world now should have developed to the point where we are treating children better than we did in the past. That's a universal value.

I believe, for example, the same thing holds true when it comes to the treatment of women. I had a very interesting discussion with the Mayor of Shanghai during lunch right before I came, and he informed me that in many professions now here in China, there are actually more women enrolled in college than there are men, and that they are doing very well. I think that is an excellent indicator of progress, because it turns out that if you look at development around the world, one of the best indicators of whether or not a country does well is how well it educates its girls and how it treats its women. And countries that are tapping into the talents and the energy of women and giving them educations typically do better economically than countries that don't.

So, now, obviously difficult cultures may have different attitudes about the relationship between men and women, but I think it is the view of the United States that it is important for us to affirm the rights of women all around the world. And if we see certain societies in which women are oppressed, or they are not getting opportunities, or there is violence towards women, we will speak out.

Now, there may be some people who disagree with us, and we can have a dialogue about that. But we think it's important, nevertheless, to be true to our ideals and our values. And we -- and when we do so, though, we will always do so with the humility and understanding that we are not perfect and that we still have much progress to make. If you talk to women in America, they will tell you that there are still men who have a lot of old-fashioned ideas about the role of women in society. And so we don't claim that we have solved all these problems, but we do think that it's important for us to speak out on behalf of these universal ideals and these universal values.

Okay? All right. We're going to take a question from the Internet.

Question: Hello, Mr. President. It's a great honor to be here and meet you in person.

President Obama: Thank you.

Question: I will be reading a question selected on the Internet to you, and this question is from somebody from Taiwan. In his question, he said: I come from Taiwan. Now I am doing business on the mainland. And due to improved cross-straits relations in recent years, my business in China is doing quite well. So when I heard the news that some people in America would like to propose -- continue selling arms and weapons to Taiwan, I begin to get pretty worried. I worry that this may make our cross-straits relations suffer. So I would like to know if, Mr. President, are you supportive of improved cross-straits relations? And although this question is from a businessman, actually, it's a question of keen concern to all of us young Chinese students, so we'd really like to know your position on this question. Thank you.

President Obama: Thank you. Well, I have been clear in the past that my administration fully supports a one-China policy, as reflected in the three joint communiquÃ©s that date back several decades, in terms of our relations with Taiwan as well as our relations with the People's Republic of China. We don't want to change that policy and that approach.

I am very pleased with the reduction of tensions and the improvement in cross-straits relations, and it is my deep desire and hope that we will continue to see great improvement between Taiwan and the rest of -- and the People's Republic in resolving many of these issues.

One of the things that I think that the United States, in terms of its foreign policy and its policy with respect to China, is always seeking is ways that through dialogue and negotiations, problems can be solved. We always think that's the better course. And I think that economic ties and commercial ties that are taking place in this region are helping to lower a lot of the tensions that date back before you were born or even before I was born.

Now, there are some people who still look towards the past when it comes to these issues, as opposed to looking towards the future. I prefer to look towards the future. And as I said, I think the commercial ties that are taking place -- there's something about when people think that they can do business and make money that makes them think very clearly and not worry as much about ideology. And I think that that's starting to happen in this region, and we are very supportive of that process. Okay?

Let's see, it's a girl's turn now, right? Yes, right there. Yes. Hold on, let's get -- whoops, I'm sorry, they took the mic back here. I'll call on you next.

Go ahead, and then I'll go up here later. Go ahead.

Question: Thank you. President Obama: I'll call on you later. But I'll on her first and then I'll call on you afterwards.

Go ahead. Question: Okay, thank you. Mr. President, I'm a student from Shanghai Jiao Tong University. I have a question concerning the Nobel Prize for Peace. In your opinion, what's the main reason that you were honored the Nobel Prize for Peace? And will it give you more responsibility and pressure to -- more pressure and the responsibility to promote world peace? And will it bring you -- will it influence your ideas while dealing with the international affairs? Thank you very much.

President Obama: Thank you. That was an excellent question. I have to say that nobody was more surprised than me about winning the Nobel Prize for Peace. Obviously it's a great honor. I don't believe necessarily that it's an honor I deserve, given the extraordinary history of people who have won the prize. All I can do is to, with great humility, accept the fact that I think the committee was inspired by the American people and the possibilities of changing not only America but also America's approach to the world. And so in some ways I think they gave me the prize but I was more just a symbol of the shift in our approach to world affairs that we are trying to promote.

In terms of the burden that I feel, I am extraordinarily honored to be put in the position of President. And as my wife always reminds me when I complain that I'm working too hard, she says, you volunteered for this job. And so you -- there's a saying -- I don't know if there's a similar saying in China -- we have a saying: "You made your bed, now you have to sleep in it." And it basically means you have to be careful what you ask for because you might get it.

I think that all of us have obligations for trying to promote peace in the world. It's not always easy to do. There are still a lot of conflicts in the world that are -- date back for centuries. If you look at the Middle East, there are wars and conflict that are rooted in arguments going back a thousand years. In many parts of the world -- let's say, in the continent of Africa -- there are ethnic and tribal conflicts that are very hard to resolve.

And obviously, right now, as President of the United States, part of my job is to serve as Commander-in-Chief, and my first priority is to protect the American people. And because of the attacks on 9/11 and the terrorism that has been taking place around the world where innocent people are being killed, it is my obligation to make sure that we root out these terrorist organizations, and that we cooperate with other countries in terms of dealing with this kind of violence.

Nevertheless, although I don't think that we can ever completely eliminate violence between nations or between peoples, I think that we can definitely reduce the violence between peoples -- through dialogue, through the exchange of ideas, through greater understanding between peoples and between cultures.

And particularly now when just one individual can detonate a bomb that causes so much destruction, it is more important than ever that we pursue these strategies for peace. Technology is a powerful instrument for good, but it has also given the possibility for just a few people to cause enormous damage. And that's why I'm hopeful that in my meetings with President Hu and on an ongoing basis, both the United States and China can work together to try to reduce conflicts that are taking place.

We have to do so, though, also keeping in mind that when we use our military, because we're such big and strong countries, that we have to be self-reflective about what we do; that we have to examine our own motives and our own interests to make sure that we are not simply using our military forces because nobody can stop us. That's a burden that great countries, great powers, have, is to act responsibly in the community of nations. And my hope is, is that the United States and China together can help to create an international norms that reduce conflict around the world.

Okay. All right? Jon -- I'm going to call on my Ambassador because I think he has a question that was generated through the Web site of our embassy. This was selected, though, by I think one of the members of our U.S. press corps so that --

Ambassador Huntsman: That's right. And not surprisingly, "in a country with 350 million Internet users and 60 million bloggers, do you know of the firewall?" And second, "should we be able to use Twitter freely" -- is the question.

President Obama: Well, first of all, let me say that I have never used Twitter. I noticed that young people -- they're very busy with all these electronics. My thumbs are too clumsy to type in things on the phone. But I am a big believer in technology and I'm a big believer in openness when it comes to the flow of information. I think that the more freely information flows, the stronger the society becomes, because then citizens of countries around the world can hold their own governments accountable. They can begin to think for themselves. That generates new ideas. It encourages creativity.

And so I've always been a strong supporter of open Internet use. I'm a big supporter of non-censorship. This is part of the tradition of the United States that I discussed before, and I recognize that different countries have different traditions. I can tell you that in the United States, the fact that we have free Internet -- or unrestricted Internet access is a source of strength, and I think should be encouraged.

Now, I should tell you, I should be honest, as President of the United States, there are times where I wish information didn't flow so freely because then I wouldn't have to listen to people criticizing me all the time. I think people naturally are -- when they're in positions of power sometimes thinks, oh, how could that person say that about me, or that's irresponsible, or -- but the truth is that because in the United States information is free, and I have a lot of critics in the United States who can say all kinds of things about me, I actually think that that makes our democracy stronger and it makes me a better leader because it forces me to hear opinions that I don't want to hear. It forces me to examine what I'm doing on a day-to-day basis to see, am I really doing the very best that I could be doing for the people of the United States.

And I think the Internet has become an even more powerful tool for that kind of citizen participation. In fact, one of the reasons that I won the presidency was because we were able to mobilize young people like yourself to get involved through the Internet. Initially, nobody thought we could win because we didn't have necessarily the most wealthy supporters; we didn't have the most powerful political brokers. But through the Internet, people became excited about our campaign and they started to organize and meet and set up campaign activities and events and rallies. And it really ended up creating the kind of bottom-up movement that allowed us to do very well.

Now, that's not just true in -- for government and politics. It's also true for business. You think about a company like Google that only 20 years ago was -- less than 20 years ago was the idea of a couple of people not much older than you. It was a science project. And suddenly because of the Internet, they were able to create an industry that has revolutionized commerce all around the world. So if it had not been for the freedom and the openness that the Internet allows, Google wouldn't exist.

So I'm a big supporter of not restricting Internet use, Internet access, other information technologies like Twitter. The more open we are, the more we can communicate. And it also helps to draw the world together.

Think about -- when I think about my daughters, Malia and Sasha -- one is 11, one is 8 -- from their room, they can get on the Internet and they can travel to Shanghai. They can go anyplace in the world and they can learn about anything they want to learn about. And that's just an enormous power that they have. And that helps, I think, promote the kind of understanding that we talked about.

Now, as I said before, there's always a downside to technology. It also means that terrorists are able to organize on the Internet in ways that they might not have been able to do before. Extremists can mobilize. And so there's some price that you pay for openness, there's no denying that. But I think that the good outweighs the bad so much that it's better to maintain that openness. And that's part of why I'm so glad that the Internet was part of this forum. Okay?

I'm going to take two more questions. And the next one is from a gentleman, I think. Right here, yes. Here's the microphone.

Question: First, I would like to say that it is a great honor for me to stand here to ask you the questions. I think I am so lucky and just appreciate that your speech is so clear that I really do not need such kind of headset.

And here comes my question. My name is [inaudible] from Fudan University School of Management. And I would like to ask you the question -- is that now that someone has asked you something about the Nobel Peace Prize, but I will not ask you in the same aspect. I want to ask you in the other aspect that since it is very hard for you to get such kind of an honorable prize, and I wonder and we all wonder that -- how you struggled to get it. And what's your university/college education that brings you to get such kind of prizes? We are very curious about it and we would like to invite you to share with us your campus education experiences so as to go on the road of success.

President Obama: Well, first of all, let me tell you that I don't know if there's a curriculum or course of study that leads you to win the Nobel Peace Prize. So I can't guarantee that. But I think the recipe for success is the one that you are already following. Obviously all of you are working very hard, you're studying very hard. You're curious. You're willing to think about new ideas and think for yourself. You know, the people who I meet now that I find most inspiring who are successful I think are people who are not only willing to work very hard but are constantly trying to improve themselves and to think in new ways, and not just accept the conventional wisdom.

Obviously there are many different paths to success, and some of you are going to be going into government service; some of you might want to be teachers or professors; some of you might want to be businesspeople. But I think that whatever field you go into, if you're constantly trying to improve and never satisfied with not having done your best, and constantly asking new questions -- "Are there things that I could be doing differently? Are there new approaches to problems that nobody has thought of before, whether it's in science or technology or in the arts? -- those are usually the people who I think are able to rise about the rest.

The one last piece of advice, though, that I would have that has been useful for me is the people who I admire the most and are most successful, they're not just thinking only about themselves but they're also thinking about something larger than themselves. So they want to make a contribution to society. They want to make a contribution to their country, their nation, their city. They are interested in having an impact beyond their own immediate lives.

I think so many of us, we get caught up with wanting to make money for ourselves and have a nice car and have a nice house and -- all those things are important, but the people who really make their mark on the world is because they have a bigger ambition. They say, how can I help feed hungry people? Or, how can I help to teach children who don't have an education? Or, how can I bring about peaceful resolution of conflicts? Those are the people I think who end up making such a big difference in the world. And I'm sure that young people like you are going to be able to make that kind of difference as long as you keep working the way you've been working.

All right? All right, this is going to be the last question, unfortunately. We've run out of time so quickly. Our last Internet question, because I want to make sure that we got all three of our fine students here.

Question: Mr. President, it's a great honor for the last question. And I'm a college student from Fudan University, and today I'm also the representative of China's Youth [inaudible.] And this question I think is from Beijing: Paid great attention to your Afghanistan policies, and he would like to know whether terrorism is still the greatest security concern for the United States? And how do you assess the military actions in Afghanistan, or whether it will turn into another Iraqi war? Thank you very much.

President Obama: I think that's an excellent question. Well, first of all, I do continue to believe that the greatest threat to United States' security are the terrorist networks like al Qaeda. And the reason is, is because even though they are small in number, what they have shown is, is that they have no conscience when it comes to the destruction of innocent civilians. And because of technology today, if an organization like that got a weapon of mass destruction on its hands -- a nuclear or a chemical or a biological weapon -- and they used it in a city, whether it's in Shanghai or New York, just a few individuals could potentially kill tens of thousands of people, maybe hundreds of thousands. So it really does pose an extraordinary threat.

Now, the reason we originally went into Afghanistan was because al Qaeda was in Afghanistan, being hosted by the Taliban. They have now moved over the border of Afghanistan and they are in Pakistan now, but they continue to have networks with other extremist organizations in that region. And I do believe that it is important for us to stabilize Afghanistan so that the people of Afghanistan can protect themselves, but they can also be a partner in reducing the power of these extremist networks.

Now, obviously it is a very difficult thing -- one of the hardest things about my job is ordering young men and women into the battlefield. I often have to meet with the mothers and fathers of the fallen, those who do not come home. And it is a great weight on me. It gives me a heavy heart.

Fortunately, our Armed Services is -- the young men and women who participate, they believe so strongly in their service to their country that they are willing to go. And I think that it is possible -- working in a broader coalition with our allies in NATO and others that are contributing like Australia -- to help train the Afghans so that they have a functioning government, that they have their own security forces, and then slowly we can begin to pull our troops out because there's no longer that vacuum that existed after the Taliban left.

But it's a difficult task. It's not easy. And ultimately I think in trying to defeat these terrorist extremists, it's important to understand it's not just a military exercise. We also have to think about what motivates young people to become terrorists, why would they become suicide bombers. And although there are obviously a lot of different reasons, including I think the perversion of religion, in thinking that somehow these kinds of violent acts are appropriate, part of what's happened in places like Pakistan and Afghanistan is these young people have no education, they have no opportunities, and so they see no way for them to move forward in life, and that leads them into thinking that this is their only option.

And so part of what we want to do in Afghanistan is to find ways that we can train teachers and create schools and improve agriculture so that people have a greater sense of hope. That won't change the ideas of a Osama bin Laden who are very ideologically fixed on trying to strike at the West, but it will change the pool of young people who they can recruit from. And that is at least as important, if not more important over time, as whatever military actions that we can take. Okay?

All right, I have had a wonderful time. I am so grateful to all of you. First of all, let me say I'm very impressed with all of your English. Clearly you've been studying very hard. And having a chance to meet with all of you I think has given me great hope for the future of U.S.-China relations.

I hope that many of you have the opportunity to come and travel and visit the United States. You will be welcome. I think you will find that the American people feel very warmly towards the people of China. And I am very confident that, with young people like yourselves and the young people that I know in the United States, that our two great countries will continue to prosper and help to bring about a more peaceful and secure world.

So thank you very much everybody.

Thank you.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Speech at West Point on Troop Increase in Afghanistan

Thank you. Please be seated. Good evening.

To the United States Corps of Cadets, to the men and women of our armed services, and to my fellow Americans: I want to speak to you tonight about our effort in Afghanistan -- the nature of our commitment there, the scope of our interests, and the strategy that my Administration will pursue to bring this war to a successful conclusion. It's an extraordinary honor for me to do so here at West Point, where so many men and women have prepared to stand up for our security, and to represent what is finest about our country.

To address these important issues, it's important to recall why America and our allies were compelled to fight a war in Afghanistan in the first place. We did not ask for this fight. On September 11th, 2001, 19 men hijacked four airplanes and used them to murder nearly 3,000 people. They struck at our military and economic nerve centers. They took the lives of innocent men, women, and children without regard to their faith or race or station. Were it not for the heroic actions of passengers on board one of these flights, they could have also struck at one of the great symbols of our democracy in Washington, and killed many more.

As we know, these men belonged to al Qaeda -- a group of extremists who have distorted and defiled Islam, one of the world's great religions, to justify the slaughter of innocents. Al Qaeda's base of operations was in Afghanistan, where they were harbored by the Taliban -- a ruthless, repressive, and radical movement that seized control of that country after it was ravaged by years of Soviet occupation and civil war, and after the attention of America and our friends had turned elsewhere.

Just days after 9/11, Congress authorized the use of force against al Qaeda and those who harbored them -- an authorization that continues to this day. The vote in the Senate was 98 to 0. The vote in the House was 420 to 1. For the first time in its history, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization invoked Article 5 -- the commitment that says an attack on one member nation is an attack on all. And the United Nations Security Council endorsed the use of all necessary steps to respond to the 9/11 attacks. America, our allies, and the world were acting as one to destroy al Qaeda's terrorist network, and to protect our common security.

Under the banner of this domestic unity and international legitimacy -- and only after the Taliban refused to turn over Osama bin Laden -- we sent our troops into Afghanistan. Within a matter of months, al Qaeda was scattered and many of its operatives were killed. The Taliban was driven from power and pushed back on its heels. A place that had known decades of fear now had reason to hope. At a conference convened by the UN, a provisional government was established under President Hamid Karzai. And an International Security Assistance Force was established to help bring a lasting peace to a war-torn country.

Then, in early 2003, the decision was made to wage a second war in Iraq. The wrenching debate over the Iraq War is well-known and need not be repeated here. It's enough to say that for the next six years, the Iraq War drew the dominant share of our troops, our resources, our diplomacy, and our national attention -- and that the decision to go into Iraq caused substantial rifts between America and much of the world.

Today, after extraordinary costs, we are bringing the Iraq war to an responsible end. We will remove our combat brigades from Iraq by the end of next summer, and all of our troops by the end of 2011. That we are doing so is a testament to the character of the men and women in uniform. Thanks to their courage, grit, and perseverance, we have given Iraqis a chance to shape their future, and we are successfully leaving Iraq to its people.

But while we have achieved hard-earned milestones in Iraq, the situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated. After escaping across the border into Pakistan in 2001 and 2002, al Qaeda's leadership established a safe-haven there. Although a legitimate government was elected by the Afghan people, it's been hampered by corruption, the drug trade, an under-developed economy, and insufficient security forces. Over the last several years, the Taliban has maintained common cause with al Qaeda, as they both seek an overthrow of the Afghan government. Gradually, the Taliban has begun to control additional swaths of territory in Afghanistan, while engaging in increasingly brazen and devastating attacks of terrorism against the Pakistani people.

Now throughout this period, our troop levels in Afghanistan remained a fraction of what they were in Iraq. When I took office, we had just over 32,000 Americans serving in Afghanistan, compared to 160,000 in Iraq at the peak of the war. Commanders in Afghanistan repeatedly asked for support to deal with the reemergence of the Taliban, but these reinforcements did not arrive. And that's why, shortly after taking office, I approved a long-standing request for more troops. After consultations with our allies, I then announced a strategy recognizing the fundamental connection between our war effort in Afghanistan and the extremist safe-havens in Pakistan. I set a goal that was narrowly defined as disrupting, dismantling, and defeating al Qaeda and its extremist allies, and pledged to better coordinate our military and civilian effort.

Since then, we have made progress on some important objectives. High-ranking al Qaeda and Taliban leaders have been killed, and we've stepped up the pressure on al Qaeda world-wide. In Pakistan, that nation's Army has gone on its largest offensive in years. In Afghanistan, we and our allies prevented the Taliban from stopping a presidential election, and although it was marred by fraud, that election produced a government that is consistent with Afghanistan's laws and Constitution.

Yet huge challenges remain. Afghanistan is not lost, but for several years it has moved backwards. There's no imminent threat of the government being overthrown, but the Taliban has gained momentum. Al Qaeda has not reemerged in Afghanistan in the same numbers as before 9/11, but they retain their safe-havens along the border. And our forces lack the full support they need to effectively train and partner with Afghan security forces and better secure the population. Our new Commander in Afghanistan, General McChrystal, has reported that the security situation is more serious than he anticipated. In short, the status quo is not sustainable.

As cadets, you volunteered for service during this time of danger. Some of you fought in Afghanistan. Some of you will deploy there. As your Commander-in-Chief, I owe you a mission that is clearly defined and worthy of your service. And that's why, after the Afghan voting was completed, I insisted on a thorough review of our strategy. Now let me be clear: There has never been an option before me that called for troop deployments before 2010. So there has been no delay or denial of resources necessary for the conduct of the war during this review period. Instead, the review has allowed me ask the hard questions, and to explore all of the different options along with my national security team, our military and civilian leadership in Afghanistan, and our key partners. Now given the stakes involved, I owed the American people, and our troops, no less.

This review is now complete. And as Commander-in-Chief, I have determined that it is in our vital national interest to send an additional 30,000 U.S. troops to Afghanistan. After 18 months, our troops will begin to come home. These are the resources that we need to seize the initiative, while building the Afghan capacity that can allow for a responsible transition of our forces out of Afghanistan.

I do not make this decision lightly. I opposed the war in Iraq precisely because I believe that we must exercise restraint in the use of military force, and always consider the long-term consequences of our actions. We have been at war now for eight years, at enormous cost in lives and resources. Years of debate over Iraq and terrorism have left our unity on national security issues in tatters and created a highly polarized and partisan backdrop for this effort. And having just experienced the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, the American people are understandably focused on rebuilding our economy and putting people to work here at home.

And most of all, I know that this decision asks even more of you -- a military that, along with your families, has already borne the heaviest of all burdens. As President, I have signed a letter of condolence to the family of each American who gives their life in these wars. I have read the letters from the parents and spouses of those who deployed. I've visited our courageous wounded warriors at Walter Reed. I've travelled to Dover to meet the flag-draped caskets of 18 Americans returning home to their final resting place.1 I see firsthand the terrible wages of war. If I did not think that the security of the United States and the safety of the American people were at stake in Afghanistan, I would gladly order every single one of our troops home tomorrow.

So no, I do not make this decision lightly. I make this decision because I am convinced that our security is at stake in Afghanistan and Pakistan. This is the epicenter of violent extremism practiced by al Qaeda. It is from here that we were attacked on 9/11, and it is from here that new attacks are being plotted as I speak. This is no idle danger, no hypothetical threat. In the last few months alone, we have apprehended extremists within our borders who were sent here from the border region of Afghanistan and Pakistan to commit new acts of terror. And this danger will only grow if the region slides backwards, and al Qaeda can operate with impunity. We must keep the pressure on al Qaeda, and to do that we must increase the stability and capacity of our partners in the region.

Of course this burden is not ours alone to bear. This is not just America's war. Since 9/11, al Qaeda's safe-havens have been the source of attacks against London and Amman and Bali. The people and governments of both Afghanistan and Pakistan are endangered. And the stakes are even higher within a nuclear-armed Pakistan, because we know that al Qaeda and other extremists seek nuclear weapons, and we have every reason to believe that they would use them.

These facts compel us to act along with our friends and allies. Our overarching goal remains the same: to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and to prevent its capacity to threaten America and our allies in the future.

To meet that goal, we will pursue the following objectives within Afghanistan. We must deny al Qaeda a safe-haven. We must reverse the Taliban's momentum and deny it the ability to overthrow the government. And we must strengthen the capacity of Afghanistan's security forces and government, so that they can take lead responsibility for Afghanistan's future.

We will meet these objectives in three ways. First, we will pursue a military strategy that will break the Taliban's momentum and increase Afghanistan's capacity over the next 18 months.

The 30,000 additional troops that I'm announcing tonight will deploy in the first part of 2010 -- the fastest possible pace -- so that they can target the insurgency and secure key population centers. They'll increase our ability to train competent Afghan security forces, and to partner with them so that more Afghans can get into the fight. And they will help create the conditions for the United States to transfer responsibility to the Afghans.

Because this is an international effort, I've asked that our commitment be joined by contributions from our allies. Some have already provided additional troops, and we're confident that there will be further contributions in the days and weeks ahead. Our friends have fought and bled and died alongside us in Afghanistan. And now we must come together to end this war successfully. For what's at stake is not simply a test of NATO's credibility; what's at stake is the security of our allies, and the common security of the world.

Now taken together, these additional American and international troops will allow us to accelerate handing over responsibility to Afghan forces, and allow us to begin the transfer of our forces out of Afghanistan in July of 2011. Just as we have done in Iraq, we will execute this transition responsibly, taking into account conditions on the ground. We'll continue to advise and assist Afghanistan's security forces to ensure that they can succeed over the long haul. But it will be clear to the Afghan government -- and more importantly, to the Afghan people -- that they will ultimately be responsible for their own country.

Second, we will work with our partners, the United Nations, and the Afghan people to pursue a more effective civilian strategy, so that the government can take advantage of improved security.

This effort must be based on performance. The days of providing a blank check are over. President Karzai's inauguration speech sent the right message about moving in a new direction. And going forward, we will be clear about what we expect from those who receive our assistance. We'll support Afghan Ministries, governors, and local leaders that combat corruption and deliver for the people. We expect those who are ineffective or corrupt to be held accountable. And we will also focus our assistance in areas, such as agriculture, that can make an immediate impact in the lives of the Afghan people.

The people of Afghanistan have endured violence for decades. They've been confronted with occupation by the Soviet Union, and then by foreign al Qaeda fighters who used Afghan land for their own purposes. So tonight, I want the Afghan people to understand: America seeks an end to this era of war and suffering. We have no interest in occupying your country. We will support efforts by the Afghan government to open the door to those Taliban who abandon violence and respect the human rights of their fellow citizens. And we will seek a partnership with Afghanistan grounded in mutual respect -- to isolate those who destroy, to strengthen those who build, to hasten the day when our troops will leave, and to forge a lasting friendship in which America is your partner, and never your patron.

Third, we will act with the full recognition that our success in Afghanistan is inextricably linked to our partnership with Pakistan.

We're in Afghanistan to prevent a cancer from once again spreading through that country. But this same cancer has also taken root in the border region of Pakistan. And that's why we need a strategy that works on both sides of the border.

In the past, there have been those in Pakistan who have argued that the struggle against extremism is not their fight, and that Pakistan is better off doing little or seeking accommodation with those who use violence. But in recent years, as innocents have been killed from Karachi to Islamabad, it has become clear that it is the Pakistani people who are the most endangered by extremism. Public opinion has turned. The Pakistani Army has waged an offensive in Swat and South Waziristan. And there is no doubt that the United States and Pakistan share a common enemy.

In the past, we too often defined our relationship with Pakistan narrowly. And those days are over. Moving forward, we are committed to a partnership with Pakistan that is built on a foundation of mutual interests, mutual respect, and mutual trust. We will strengthen Pakistan's capacity to target those groups that threaten our countries, and have made it clear that we cannot tolerate a safe-haven for terrorists whose location is known, and whose intentions are clear. America is also providing substantial resources to support Pakistan's democracy and development. We are the largest international supporter for those Pakistanis displaced by the fighting. And going forward, the Pakistani people must know: America will remain a strong supporter of Pakistan's security and prosperity long after the guns have fallen silent, so that the great potential of its people can be unleashed.

These are the three core elements of our strategy: a military effort to create the conditions for a transition; a civilian surge that reinforces positive action; and an effective partnership with Pakistan.

I recognize that there are a range of concerns about our approach. So let me briefly address a few of the prominent arguments that I have heard, and which I take very seriously.

First, there are those who suggest that Afghanistan is another Vietnam. They argue that it cannot be stabilized, and we're better off cutting our losses and rapidly withdrawing. I believe this argument depends upon a false reading of history. Unlike Vietnam, we are joined by a broad coalition of 43 nations that recognizes the legitimacy of our action. Unlike Vietnam, we are not facing a broad-based popular insurgency. And most importantly, unlike Vietnam, the American people were viciously attacked from Afghanistan, and remain a target for those same extremists who are plotting along its border. To abandon this area now, and to rely only on efforts against al Qaeda from a distance, would significantly hamper our ability to keep the pressure on al Qaeda, and create an unacceptable risk of additional attacks on our homeland and our allies.

Second, there are those who acknowledge that we can't leave Afghanistan in its current state, but suggest that we go forward with the troops that we already have. But this would simply maintain a status quo in which we muddle through, and permit a slow deterioration of conditions there. It would ultimately prove more costly and prolong our stay in Afghanistan, because we would never be able to generate the conditions needed to train Afghan security forces and give them the space to take over.

Finally, there are those who oppose identifying a timeframe for our transition to Afghan responsibility. Indeed, some call for a more dramatic and open-ended escalation of our war effort -- one that would commit us to a nation building project of up to a decade. I reject this course because it sets goals that are beyond what can be achieved at a reasonable cost, and what we need to achieve to secure our interests. Furthermore, the absence of a timeframe for transition would deny us any sense of urgency in working with the Afghan government. It must be clear that Afghans will have to take responsibility for their security, and that America has no interest in fighting an endless war in Afghanistan.

As President, I refuse to set goals that go beyond our responsibility, our means, or our interests. And I must weigh all of the challenges that our nation faces. I don't have the luxury of committing to just one. Indeed, I'm mindful of the words of President Eisenhower, who -- in discussing our national security -- said, "Each proposal must be weighed in the light of a broader consideration: the need to maintain balance in and among national programs."

Over the past several years, we have lost that balance. We've failed to appreciate the connection between our national security and our economy. In the wake of an economic crisis, too many of our neighbors and friends are out of work and struggle to pay the bills. Too many Americans are worried about the future facing our children. Meanwhile, competition within the global economy has grown more fierce. So we can't simply afford to ignore the price of these wars.

All told, by the time I took office the cost of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan approached a trillion dollars. Going forward, I am committed to addressing these costs openly and honestly. Our new approach in Afghanistan is likely to cost us roughly 30 billion dollars for the military this year, and I'll work closely with Congress to address these costs as we work to bring down our deficit.

But as we end the war in Iraq and transition to Afghan responsibility, we must rebuild our strength here at home. Our prosperity provides a foundation for our power. It pays for our military. It underwrites our diplomacy. It taps the potential of our people, and allows investment in new industry. And it will allow us to compete in this century as successfully as we did in the last. That's why our troop commitment in Afghanistan cannot be open-ended -- because the nation that I am most interested in building is our own.

Now let me be clear: None of this will be easy. The struggle against violent extremism will not be finished quickly, and it extends well beyond Afghanistan and Pakistan. It will be an enduring test of our free society and our leadership in the world. And unlike the great power conflicts and clear lines of division that defined the 20th century, our effort will involve disorderly regions, failed states, diffuse enemies.

So as a result, America will have to show our strength in the way that we end wars and prevent conflict -- not just how we wage wars. We'll have to be nimble and precise in our use of military power. Where al Qaeda and its allies attempt to establish a foothold -- whether in Somalia or Yemen or elsewhere -- they must be confronted by growing pressure and strong partnerships.

And we can't count on military might alone. We have to invest in our homeland security, because we can't capture or kill every violent extremist abroad. We have to improve and better coordinate our intelligence, so that we stay one step ahead of shadowy networks.

We will have to take away the tools of mass destruction. And that's why I've made it a central pillar of my foreign policy to secure loose nuclear materials from terrorists, to stop the spread of nuclear weapons, and to pursue the goal of a world without them, because every nation must understand that true security will never come from an endless race for ever-more destructive weapons. True security will come for those who reject them.

We will have to use diplomacy, because no one nation can meet the challenges of an interconnected world acting alone. I've spent this year renewing our alliances and forging new partnerships. And we have forged a new beginning between America and the Muslim World -- one that recognizes our mutual interest in breaking a cycle of conflict, and that promises a future in which those who kill innocents are isolated by those who stand up for peace and prosperity and human dignity.

And finally, we must draw on the strength of our values. For the challenges that we face may have changed, but the things that we believe in must not. And that's why we must promote our values by living them at home -- which is why I have prohibited torture and will close the prison at Guantanamo Bay. And we must make it clear to every man, woman, and child around the world who lives under the dark cloud of tyranny that America will speak out on behalf of their human rights, and tend to the light of freedom, and justice, and opportunity, and respect for the dignity of all peoples. That is who we are. That is the source, the moral source of America's authority.

Since the days of Franklin Roosevelt, and the service and sacrifice of our grandparents and great grandparents, our country has borne a special burden in global affairs. We have spilled American blood in many countries on multiple continents. We have spent our revenue to help others rebuild from rubble and develop their own economies. We have joined with others to develop an architecture of institutions from the United Nations to NATO to the World Bank that provide for the common security and prosperity of human beings.

We have not always been thanked for these efforts, and we have at times made mistakes. But more than any other nation, the United States of America has underwritten global security for over six decades -- a time that, for all its problems, has seen walls come down, and markets open, and billions lifted from poverty, unparalleled scientific progress, and advancing frontiers of human liberty.

For unlike the great powers of old, we have not sought world domination. Our union was founded in resistance to oppression. We do not seek to occupy other nations. We will not claim another nation's resources or target other peoples because their faith or ethnicity is different from ours. What we have fought for, and what we continue to fight for, is a better future for our children and grandchildren, and we believe that their lives will be better if others [sic] peoples' children and grandchildren can live in freedom and access opportunity.

As a country, we're not as young and perhaps not as innocent as we were when Roosevelt was President. Yet we are still heirs to a noble struggle for freedom. And now we must summon all of our might and moral suasion to meet the challenges of a new age.

In the end, our security and leadership does not come solely from the strength of our arms. It derives from our people: from the workers and businesses who will rebuild our economy; from the entrepreneurs and researchers who will pioneer new industries; from the teachers that will educate our children, and the service of those who work in our communities at home; from the diplomats and Peace Corps volunteers who spread hope abroad; and from the men and women in uniform who are part of an unbroken line of sacrifice that has made government of the people, by the people, and for the people a reality on this Earth.2

This vast and diverse citizenry will not always agree on every issue -- nor should we. But I also know that we, as a country, cannot sustain our leadership nor navigate the momentous challenges of our time if we allow ourselves to be split asunder by the same rancor and cynicism and partisanship that has in recent times poisoned our national discourse.

It's easy to forget that when this war began, we were united -- bound together by the fresh memory of a horrific attack, and by the determination to defend our homeland and the values we hold dear. I refuse to accept the notion that we cannot summon that unity again. I believe -- I believe with every fiber of my being that we, as Americans, can still come together behind a common purpose. For our values are not simply words written into parchment. They are a creed that calls us together, and that has carried us through the darkest of storms as one nation, as one people.

America, we are passing through a time of great trial. And the message that we send in the midst of these storms must be clear: that our cause is just, our resolve unwavering. We will go forward with the confidence that right makes might, and with the commitment to forge an America that is safer, a world that is more secure, and a future that represents not the deepest of fears but the highest of hopes.

Thank you. God Bless you. And God Bless the United States of America.

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# Kennedy Center Honorees Reception Speech

President Obama: Thank you. On behalf of Michelle and myself, welcome to the White House.

Little Child: Thank you.

President Obama: Thank you. This a season of joy, tradition and celebration.

Little Child:

Yea!

President Obama: Yes! And today, it is our great joy to continue a White House holiday tradition -- a celebration of performers who have transformed the arts in America, our extraordinary Kennedy Center Honorees.

We are joined by Speaker Nancy Pelosi -- members of Congress and members of the Kennedy family. I see sprinkled through the crowd some pretty fancy company, as well -- you've got the Queen of Soul. You've got Martin Scorsese -- he knows a little bit about film-making. And my spectacular First Lady is here, as well.

I especially want to thank the man who created these Honors more than three decades ago and who has produced them ever since -- and whom I was proud to name as co-chair of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities -- George Stevens, Jr. George.

And I want to also thank Stephen Schwarzman and the Kennedy Center trustees. As well as president Michael Kaiser and all those who sustain President Kennedy's vision of a "great stage" celebrating "the best coming from this country and abroad."

These performers are indeed the best. They are also living reminders of a simple truth -- and I'm going to steal a line from Michelle here -- the arts are not somehow apart from our national life, the arts are at the heart of our national life.

In times of war and sacrifice, the arts -- and these artists -- remind us to sing and to laugh and to live. In times of plenty, they challenge our conscience and implore us to remember the least among us. In moments of division or doubt, they compel us to see the common values that we share; the ideals to which we aspire, even if we sometimes fall short. In days of hardship, they renew our hope that brighter days are still ahead.

So let's never forget that art strengthens America. And that's why we're making sure that America strengthens its arts. It's why we're reenergizing the National Endowment of the Arts. That's why we're helping to sustain jobs in arts communities across the country. It's why we're supporting arts education in our schools, and why Michelle and I have hosted students here at the White House to experience the best of American poetry and music.

And it's why we're honored to celebrate these five remarkable performers, who for decades have helped to sustain and strengthen the American spirit.

You can't understand America without understanding jazz. And you can't understand jazz, without understanding Dave Brubeck. His mother was a classical pianist with high hopes for her son. And by the time he was four, he was playing himself. But by the time he was a teenager, he was tearing up local honky-tonks. Even his mother had to admit: "There is some hope for David after all."

And perhaps it was World War II -- his service in Patton's Army -- that changed his sound, forcing him, as he said, to work the war out of his system by playing some "pretty vicious piano." Whatever it was, his sound -- the distinctive harmonies and improvisations of the Dave Brubeck Quartet -- would change jazz forever, prompting Time magazine to put him on the cover as the leader of a new jazz age.

Having brought jazz into the mainstream, he then transformed it, with innovative new rhythms on albums like Time Out -- the first jazz album to ever sell more than a million copies and still one of the best-selling jazz albums of all time.

Dave Brubeck has never stopped reaching new audiences: Performing for Presidents from Johnson to Reagan; composing orchestral tributes to Martin Luther King and Pope John Paul II; and even in his 80s, dazzling jazz festivals across America.

And I know personally how powerful his performances can be. I mentioned this to Dave backstage. In the few weeks that I spent with my father as a child -- he came to visit me for about a month when I was young -- one of the things he did was to take me to my first jazz concert, in Honolulu, Hawaii, in 1971, and it was a Dave Brubeck concert. And I've been a jazz fan ever since. The world that he opened up for a 10-year-old boy was spectacular.

And, Dave, for the joy that you've given millions of jazz lovers like me, for your six decades of revolutionary rhythms, you are rightly honored -- especially today, on your 89th birthday.

He was born Melvin Kaminsky --

Mel Brooks: He never understood 4/4 time

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President Obama: He's still messing it up, Mel. Mel, I'm trying to say something nice about you, now. Please don't upstage me.

As you can tell, he was born to entertain. Or, as Mel Brooks explains it: "Look at Jewish history -- unrelieved lamenting would be intolerable. So every 10 Jews, God designed one to be crazy and amuse the others." According to Mel, "By the time I was five I knew I was that one."

And by the time he was nine, this boy from Brooklyn had seen his first musical and dreamed of becoming "the King of Broadway." But World War II meant service in the Army -- or, as he put it, "the European Theater of Operations" with "lots of operations" and "very little theater." Returning home, he found success cranking out quips for Sid Ceasar -- or as Mel described his reaction to success -- "panic, hysteria, insomnia…and years of psychoanalysis."

That's right, we're reading back all your golden moments here, Mel.

Unfortunately, many of the punch lines that have defined Mel Brooks' success cannot be repeated here. I was telling him that I went to see Blazing Saddles -- when I was 10. And he pointed out that I think, according to the ratings, I should not have been allowed in the theater. That's true. I think I had a fake ID. But the statute of limitations has passed.

Suffice it to say, in his satires and parodies, no cow is sacred, no genre is safe. He mocked the musical -- and Hitler -- in The Producers, the western in Blazing Saddles, and the horror film in Young Frankenstein. But behind all the insanity and absurdity, there's been a method to Mel's madness. He's described his work as "unearthing the truth that is all around us." And by illuminating uncomfortable truths -- about racism and sexism and anti-Semitism -- he's been called "our jester, asking us to see ourselves as we really are, determined that we laugh ourselves sane."

For this, he is one of the few people ever to receive an Emmy and a Grammy and an Oscar and a Tony. Writer, director, actor, producer, composer…for his success -- and for his psychoanalysis -- we honor Mel Brooks.

Reflecting on the challenge of finding one's voice, Grace Bumbry once said: "God has already planted that in your throat. It's your job to free it up, to allow that beautiful thing to shine through."

True to her name, Grace allowed her voice to shine through and touch all those within its range. Around her family's piano in St. Louis; on the talent show where, as a teenager, she moved the host to tears; and then, after being turned away from one music school because of the color of her skin -- her triumphant international debut at the Paris Opera, when she was just 23 years old.

With a pitch and presence like no other, she became a global sensation, moving audiences at the great opera houses of the world. And performing here at the White House, it was said that she moved Jacqueline Kennedy to lean over and gently sing along the words to the President.

Defying every expectation, Grace Bumbry then made the transition from mezzo to soprano. And over the decades that followed, she displayed a range like few others -- sometimes the middle ranges as a mezzo; sometimes the highs of a soprano; sometimes both in the same performance. Grace not only triumphed in different techniques, she transformed them.

And though she gave her final operatic performance in 1997, she appears in recitals to this day. After nearly 50 years, she remains the definition of a diva in the classical sense: a divine voice worthy of the heavens. And tonight -- 32 years after she performed at the first Kennedy Center Honors for her mentor Marian Anderson -- we honor Grace Bumbry.

Growing up in New York City's Little Italy, Bobby De Niro always knew what he wanted to be. Coming home from the movies, he'd act out the parts. At age 10, in his school play, he made a rather unlikely debut in The Wizard of Oz as the Cowardly Lion.

He has said: "my joy as an actor is to live different lives." And in more than 60 films spanning more than 40 years, Robert De Niro has lived some of the most iconic and intense characters ever portrayed on film. A dying baseball player in Bang The Drum Slowly. A young Vito Corleone in The Godfather Part II. A deranged Taxi Driver. A troubled veteran in The Deer Hunter. A brutal boxer in Raging Bull. A vengeful ex-con in Cape Fear. Let's hope that Martin Scorsese was kidding when he said that Robert is "full of something that he wanted to express." Don't worry, we did a vet on him before he came in tonight.

But alongside his Oscar-winning emotional audacity there's his versatility, from a coma patient in Awakenings, to an ever-possessive father in Meet The Parents. There's his legendary method -- not simply portraying characters, but becoming them, emotionally and physically. And there is his love for his city -- whether it's directing films like A Bronx Tale, or founding the film center and festival that has energized the arts in New York City.

It is perhaps the great irony of his life -- one of America's greatest cinematic actors is a man, famously, of few words off the screen -- and I can attest to this. So I'll simply say, thank you, Robert De Niro.

Finally, we honor the quiet kid from Jersey -- who grew up to become the rock 'n' roll laureate of a generation. For in the life of our country only a handful of people have tapped the full power of music to tell the real American story -- with honesty; from the heart; and one of those people is Bruce Springsteen.

He has said: "I've always believed that people listen to your music not to find out about you, but to find out about themselves." And for more than three decades, in his songs -- of dreams and despair, of struggle and hope -- hardworking folks have seen themselves.

They've seen their great state of New Jersey. And they've seen their America -- in songs that become anthems. Restless kids who were "Born to Run." The struggles of workers in "My Hometown." The sacrifices of vets who were "Born in the U.S.A." Love and loss in "Streets of Philadelphia." A resilient nation in "The Rising." And, this year, a country "Working on a Dream."

It's no wonder that his tours are not so much concerts, but communions. There's a place for everybody -- the sense that no matter who you are or what you do, everyone deserves their shot at the American Dream; everybody deserves a little bit of dignity; everybody deserves to be heard.

I've seen it myself. Bruce was a great fan -- a great friend over the last year, and when I watched him on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial when he rocked the National Mall before my inauguration, I thought it captured as well as anything the spirit of what America should be about. On a day like that, and today, I remember: I'm the President, but he's The Boss.

And Bruce continues to inspire, along with his "house-rocking, earth-shaking" E Street Band. At 60 years old, he's still filling stadiums, still whipping fans into a frenzy, still surfing the crowd, still jumping off pianos, and still reaching new fans, and still being nominated for Grammys. It's been a long road from that stage at Stone Pony in Asbury Park to this stage today, but this much we know -- after more than 30 years and 120 million albums sold, Bruce Springsteen is still one "cool rockin' Daddy."

Dave Brubeck. Mel Brooks. Grace Bumbry. Robert De Niro. Bruce Springsteen. Their stories are their own. But the part that they play in the larger American story -- that's what we honor here tonight. What they say is that with respect for the past, we can keep strong the traditions and values that enrich us all; that with confidence in the present, and in ourselves, we can overcome whatever comes our way; and that with faith in the future, America's greatest "Glory Days" are still to come.

So thank you to all of our honorees. Thank you all very much for the joy and the beauty that you've contributed to our lives. We are very grateful. Thank you.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Speech on Job Creation and Economic Growth at the Brookings Institution

Thank you so much, Strobe, for your extraordinary leadership here at Brookings, and thanks to all of you in attendance.

Almost exactly one year ago, on a frigid winter's day, I met with my new economic team at the headquarters of my presidential transition offices in Chicago. And over the course of four hours, my advisors presented an analysis of where the economy at that time stood, accompanied by a chilling set of charts and graphs, predicting where we might end up. It was an unforgettable series of presentations.

Christy Romer -- who's here today -- tapped to head the Council of Economic Advisers, as well as Larry Summers, who I'd chosen to head the National Economic Council, described an imminent downturn comparable in its severity to almost nothing since the 1930s. Tim Geithner, my incoming Treasury Secretary, reported that the financial system, shaken by the subprime crisis, had halted almost all lending, which in turn threatened to pull the broader economy in a downward spiral. Peter Orszag, my incoming Budget Director, closed out the proceedings with an entirely dismal report on the fiscal health of the country, with growing deficits and debt stretching to the horizon. Having concluded that it was too late for me to request a recount -- I tasked my team with mapping out a plan to tackle the crisis on all fronts.

It wasn't long after that meeting, as we shaped this economic plan, that we began to see some of these forecasts materialize. Over the previous year, it was obvious that folks were facing hard times. As I traveled across the country during the long campaign, I would meet men and women bearing the brunt of not only a deepening recession, but also years -- even decades -- of growing strains on middle class families. But now the country was experiencing something far worse. Our gross domestic product -- the sum total of all that our economy produces -- fell at the fastest rate in a quarter century. Five trillion dollars of Americans' household wealth evaporated in just 12 weeks as stocks, pensions, and home values plummeted. We were losing an average of 700,000 jobs each month, equivalent to the population of the state of Vermont. That was true in December, January, February, March. The fear among economists across the political spectrum that was -- was that we were rapidly plummeting towards a second Great Depression.

So, in the weeks and months that followed, we undertook a series of difficult steps to prevent that outcome. And we were forced to take those steps largely without the help of an opposition party, which, unfortunately, after having presided over the decision-making that had led to the crisis, decided to hand it over to others to solve.

We acted to get lending flowing again so businesses could get loans to buy equipment, and ordinary Americans could get financing to buy homes and cars, to go to college, and to start or run businesses. We enacted measures to stem the tide of foreclosures in our housing market, helping responsible homeowners stay in their homes and helping to stop the broader decline in home values which was eating away at what tends to be a family's largest asset.

To achieve this, and to prevent economic collapse, we were forced to extend assistance to some of the very banks and financial institutions whose actions had helped precipitate the turmoil. We also took steps to prevent the rapid dissolution of the American auto industry -- which faced a crisis partly of its own making -- to prevent the loss of hundreds of thousands of jobs during an already fragile, shaky time. These were not decisions that were popular or satisfying; these were decisions that were necessary.

Now, even as we worked to address the crises in our banking sector, in our housing market, and in our auto industry, we also began attacking our economic crisis on a broader front. Less than one month after taking office we enacted the most sweeping economic recovery package in history: the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

The Recovery Act was divided into three parts. One-third went for tax relief for small businesses and 95 percent of working families. Another third was for emergency relief to help folks who've borne the brunt of this recession. We extended or increased unemployment benefits for more than 17 million Americans; made health insurance 65 percent cheaper for families relying on COBRA. And for state and local governments facing historic budget shortfalls as demand for services went up and revenues went down, we provided assistance that has saved the jobs of hundreds of thousands of teachers and public school workers, firefighters and police officers.

The last third of the Recovery Act is for investments to put Americans to work doing the work that America needs done: doubling our capacity in renewable energy like wind and solar; computerizing medical records to save money and lives; providing the largest boost to medical research in history; renovating classrooms and school laboratories; and upgrading roads and railways as part of the largest investment in infrastructure since the creation of the Interstate Highway System half a century ago.

And even as the Recovery Act has created jobs and spurred growth, we have not let up in our efforts to take every responsible action to get the economy growing and America working.

This fall, I signed into law more than $30 billion in tax cuts for struggling businesses, extended an effective tax credit for homebuyers, and provided additional unemployment insurance for one million Americans. And the Treasury is continuing to adapt our financial stability plan, helping to facilitate the flow of small credit to small businesses and families. In addition, we're working to break down barriers and open overseas markets so our companies can better compete globally, creating jobs in America by exporting our products around the world.

Now, partly as a result of these and other steps, we are in a very different place today than we were one year ago. We may forget, but we're in a very different place. We can safely say that we are no longer facing the potential collapse of our financial system and we've avoided the depression many feared. Our economy is growing for the first time in a year, and the swing from contraction to expansion since the beginning of the year is the largest in nearly three decades.

Finally, we're no longer seeing the severe deterioration in the job market that we once were. In fact we learned on Friday that the unemployment rate fell slightly last month. This is welcome news, and news made possible in part by the up to 1.6 million jobs that the Recovery Act has already created and saved according to the Congressional Budget Office.

But I'm here today because our work is far from done. For even though we've reduced the deluge of job losses to a relative trickle, we are not yet creating jobs at a pace to help all those families who've been swept up in the flood. There are more than 7 million fewer Americans with jobs today than when this recession began. That's a staggering figure, and one that reflects not only the depths of the hole from which we must ascend, but also a continuing human tragedy.

It was mentioned that I was in Allentown, Pennsylvania, this past weekend, and went to a job center where people were engaged in job search. And it ran the spectrum -- blacks, whites, Hispanics, young people who were just starting their careers, individuals 50, 60 years old, looking for a job. And they were putting a brave face on it, confident that eventually things would work out, but you could also see the sense of anxiety, the fear that perhaps this time it was different. Sometimes it's hard to break out of the bubble here in Washington and remind ourselves that behind these statistics are people's lives, their capacity to do right by their families. It speaks to an urgent need to accelerate job growth in the short term while laying a new foundation for lasting economic growth.

My economic team has been considering a full range of additional ideas to help accelerate the pace of private sector hiring. We held a jobs forum at the White House that brought together small business owners, CEOs, union members, economists, folks from non-profits, and state and local officials to talk about job creation. And I've asked people to lead forums in their own communities -- sending the results to me -- so we are hearing as many voices as possible as we refine our proposals. We've already heard a number of good ideas, and I know we'll learn of many more.

So today, I want to outline some of the broader steps that I believe should be at the heart of our effort to accelerate job growth -- those areas that will generate the greatest number of jobs while generating the greatest value for our economy.

First, we're proposing a series of steps to help small businesses grow and hire new staff. Over the past 15 years, small businesses have created roughly 65 percent of all new jobs in America. These are companies formed around kitchen tables in family meetings, formed when an entrepreneur takes a chance on a dream, formed when a worker decides it's time she became her own boss. These are also companies that drive innovation, producing 13 times more patents per employee than large companies. And it's worth remembering, every once in a while a small business becomes a big business -- and changes the world.

That's why it's so important that we help small business struggling to stay open, or struggling to open in the first place, during these difficult times. Building on the tax cuts in the Recovery Act, we're proposing a complete elimination of capital gains taxes on small business investment along with an extension of write-offs to encourage small businesses to expand in the coming year. And I believe it's worthwhile to create a tax incentive to encourage small businesses to add and keep employees, and I'm going to work with Congress to pass one.

Now, these steps will help, but we also have to address the continuing struggle of small businesses to get loans that they need to start up and grow. To that end, we're proposing to waive fees and increase the guarantees for SBA-backed loans. And I'm asking my Treasury Secretary to continue mobilizing the remaining TARP funds to facilitate lending to small businesses.

Second, we're proposing a boost in investment in the nation's infrastructure beyond what was included in the Recovery Act, to continue modernizing our transportation and communications networks. These are needed public works that engage private sector companies, spurring hiring all across the country.

Already, more than 10,000 of these projects have been funded through the Recovery Act. And by design, Recovery Act work on roads, bridges, water systems, Superfund sites, broadband networks, and clean energy projects will all be ramping up in the months ahead. It was planned this way for two reasons: so the impact would be felt over a two-year period; and, more importantly, because we wanted to do this right.

The potential for abuse in a program of this magnitude, while operating at such a fast pace, was enormous. So I asked Vice President Biden and others to make sure to the extent humanly possible that the investments were sound, the projects worthy, and the execution efficient. What this means is that we're going to see even more work -- and workers -- on recovery projects in the next six months than we saw in the last six months.

Even so, there are many more worthy projects than there were dollars to fund them. I recognize that by their nature these projects often take time, and will therefore create jobs over time. But the need for jobs will also last beyond next year and the benefits of these investments will last years beyond that. So adding to this initiative to rebuild America's infrastructure is the right thing to do.

Third, I'm calling on Congress to consider a new program to provide incentives for consumers who retrofit their homes to become more energy-efficient, which we know creates jobs, saves money for families, and reduces the pollution that threatens our environment. And I'm proposing that we expand select Recovery Act initiatives to promote energy efficiency and clean energy jobs which have been proven to be particularly popular and effective.

It's a positive sign that many of these programs drew so many applicants for funding that a lot of strong proposals -- proposals that will leverage private capital and create jobs quickly -- did not make the cut. With additional resources, in areas like advanced manufacturing of wind turbines and solar panels, for instance, we can help turn good ideas into good private sector jobs.

Finally, as we are moving forward in these areas, we should also extend the relief in the Recovery Act, including emergency assistance to seniors, unemployment insurance benefits, COBRA, and relief to states and localities to prevent layoffs. This will help folks weathering these storms, while boosting consumer spending and promoting job growth.

Of course, there's only so much government can do. Job creation will ultimately depend on the real job creators: businesses across America. We were encouraged today to hear from the Business Roundtable that their survey showed greater confidence and greater potential investment coming out of the business community.

Government can help lay the groundwork on which the private sector can better generate jobs, growth, and innovation. After all, small business tax relief is not a substitute for ingenuity and industriousness by our entrepreneurs -- but it can help those with good ideas to grow and expand. Incentives to promote energy efficiency and clean energy manufacturing don't automatically create jobs or lower carbon emissions -- but these steps provide a framework in which companies can compete and innovate to create those jobs and reduce energy consumption. And while modernizing the physical and virtual networks that connect us will create private-sector jobs, they'll do so while making it possible for companies to more easily and effectively move their products across this country and around the world, and that will create more jobs.

And given the challenges of accelerating the pace of hiring in the private sector, these targeted initiatives are right and they are needed. But with a fiscal crisis to match our economic crisis, we also must be prudent about how we fund it. So to help support these efforts, we are going to wind down the Troubled Asset Relief Program -- or TARP -- the fund created to stabilize the financial system so banks would lend again.

I don't think I have to tell you there has rarely been a less loved or more necessary emergency program than TARP, which -- as galling as the assistance to banks may have been -- indisputably helped prevent a collapse of the entire financial system. Launched hastily -- understandably, but hastily -- under the last administration, the TARP program was flawed, and we have worked hard to correct those flaws and manage it properly. And today, TARP has served its original purpose and at much lower cost than we expected.

In fact, because of our stewardship of this program, and the transparency and accountability we put in place, TARP is expected to cost the taxpayers at least $200 billion less than what was anticipated just this past summer. And the assistance to banks, once thought to cost taxpayers untold billions, is on track to actually reap billions in profits for the taxpaying public. So this gives us a chance to pay down the deficit faster than we thought possible and to shift funds that would have gone to help the banks on Wall Street to help create jobs on Main Street.

Small business, infrastructure, clean energy -- these are areas in which we can put Americans to work while putting our nation on a sturdier economic footing. That foundation for sustained economic growth -- that must be our continuing focus and our ultimate goal.

I've said this before. Even before this particular crisis, much of our growth for a decade or more had been fueled by unsustainable consumer debt and reckless financial speculation, while we ignored the fundamental challenges that hold the key to our economic prosperity. We cannot simply go back to the way things used to be. We can't go back to an economy that yielded cycle after cycle of speculative booms and painful busts. We can't continue to accept an education system in which our students trail their peers in other countries, and a health care system in which exploding costs put our businesses at a competitive disadvantage. And we cannot continue to ignore the clean energy challenge or cede global leadership in the emerging industries of the 21st century. And that's why, even as we strive to meet the crisis of the moment, we have insisted on laying a new foundation for the future.

Because an educated workforce is essential to a 21st century global economy, we've launched a competitive Race to the Top fund through the Recovery Act to reform our schools and raise achievement, especially in math and science. And we've made college more affordable, proposed a historic set of reforms and investments in community college, and set a goal of once again leading the world in producing college graduates by the year 2020.

Because even the best-trained worker in the world can't compete if our businesses are saddled with rapidly increasing health care costs, we are fighting to do what we have discussed in this country for generations -- finally reforming our nation's broken health insurance system and relieving this unsustainable burden.

Because our economic future depends on a financial system that encourages sound investments, honest dealings, and long-term growth, we've proposed the most ambitious financial reforms since the Great Depression. We'll set and enforce clear rules of the road, close loopholes in oversight, charge a new agency with protecting consumers and address the dangerous, systemic risks that brought us to the brink of disaster. These reforms are moving through Congress, we're working to keep those reforms strong, and I'm looking forward to signing them into law.

And because our economic future depends on our leadership in the industries of the future, we are investing in basic applied research, and working to create the incentives to build a new clean energy economy. For we know the nation that leads in clean energy will be the nation that leads the world. I want America to be that nation. I want America's prosperity to be powered by what we invent and pioneer -- not just what we borrow and what we consume. And I know that we can and will be that nation if we are willing to do what it takes to get there.

Now, there are those who claim we have to choose between paying down our deficits on the one hand, and investing in job creation and economic growth on the other. This is a false choice. Ensuring that economic growth and job creation are strong and sustained is critical to ensuring that we are increasing revenues and decreasing spending on things like unemployment insurance so that our deficits will start coming down. At the same time, instilling confidence in our commitment to being fiscally prudent gives the private sector the confidence to make long-term investments in our people and in America.

So one of the central goals of this administration is restoring fiscal responsibility. Even as we have had to spend our way out of this recession in the near term, we've begun to make the hard choices necessary to get our country on a more stable fiscal footing in the long run. So let me just be clear here. Despite what some have claimed, the cost of the Recovery Act is only a very small part of our current budget imbalance. In reality, the deficit had been building dramatically over the previous eight years. We have a structural gap between the money going out and the money coming in.

Folks passed tax cuts and expansive entitlement programs without paying for any of it -- even as health care costs kept rising, year after year. As a result, the deficit had reached $1.3 trillion when we walked into the White House. And I'd note: These budget-busting tax cuts and spending programs were approved by many of the same people who are now waxing political about fiscal responsibility, while opposing our efforts to reduce deficits by getting health care costs under control. It's a sight to see.

The fact is we have refused to go along with business as usual; we are taking responsibility for every dollar we spend. We've done what some said was impossible: preventing wasteful spending on outdated weapons systems that even the Pentagon said it didn't want. We've combed the budget, cutting waste and excess wherever we could. I'm still committed to halving the deficit we inherited by the end of my first term -- cutting it in half. And I made clear from day one that I would not sign a health insurance reform bill if it raised the deficit by one dime -- and neither the House, nor the Senate bill does. We've begun not only changing policies in Washington, we've also begun to change the culture in Washington.

In the end, the economic crisis of the past year was not just the result of weaknesses in our economy. It was also the result of weaknesses in our political system, because for decades, too many in Washington put off the hard decisions. For decades, we've watched as efforts to solve tough problems have fallen prey to the bitterness of partisanship, to prosaic concerns of politics, to ever-quickening news cycles, to endless campaigns focused on scoring points instead of meeting our common challenges.

We've seen the consequences of this failure of responsibility. The American people have paid a heavy price. And the question we'll have to answer now is if we're going to learn from our past, or if -- even in the aftermath of disaster -- we're going to repeat those same mistakes. As the alarm bells fade, the din of Washington rises, as the forces of the status quo marshal their resources, we can be sure that answering this question will be a fight to the finish. But I have every hope and expectation that we can rise to this moment, that we can transcend the failures of the past, that we can once again take responsibility for our future.

Every night I read letters and e-mails sent to me from people across America -- ordinary folks, people who share their hopes and their hardships, their faith in this country, their frustration with what's happened in this economy. I hear from small business owners worried about making payroll, keeping their doors open. I hear from mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, who've seen one or two or more family members out of work. The toughest letters are in children's handwriting -- kids write to me, my dad just lost a job; my grandma is sick, she can't afford health insurance -- kids who can't just be kids because they're worried about mom having her hours cut or dad losing a job, or a family without health insurance.

These folks aren't looking for a handout, they're not looking for a bailout -- just like those people I visited in Allentown -- all they're looking for is a chance to make their own way, to work, to succeed using their talents and skills. And they're looking for folks in Washington to have a seriousness of purpose that matches the reality of their struggle.

Everywhere I've gone, every stop I've made, there are people like this, men and women who have faced misfortune, but who stand ready to build a better future: students ready to learn, workers eager to work, scientists on the brink of discovery, entrepreneurs seeking the chance to open a small business. Everywhere I go, there are once-shuttered factories just waiting to whir back to life in burgeoning industries. There is a nation ready to meet the challenges of this new age and to lead the world in this new century. And as we look back on the progress of the past year, and look forward to the work ahead, I have every confidence that we will do exactly that.

These have been a tough two years. And there will no doubt be difficult months ahead. But the storms of the past are receding. The skies are brightening. And the horizon is beckoning once more.

Thank you very much.

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# Speech at the UN Copenhagen Climate Change Conference

Good morning. It is an honor for me to join this distinguished group of leaders from nations around the world. We come here in Copenhagen because climate change poses a grave and growing danger to our people. All of you would not be here unless you -- like me -- were convinced that this danger is real. This is not fiction, it is science. Unchecked, climate change will pose unacceptable risks to our security, our economies, and our planet. This much we know.

The question, then, before us is no longer the nature of the challenge. The question is our capacity to meet it. For while the reality of climate change is not in doubt, I have to be honest, as the world watches us today, I think our ability to take collective action is in doubt right now, and it hangs in the balance.

I believe we can act boldly, and decisively, in the face of a common threat. That's why I come here today -- not to talk, but to act.

Now, as the world's largest economy and as the world's second largest emitter, America bears our responsibility to address climate change, and we intend to meet that responsibility. That's why we've renewed our leadership within international climate change negotiations. That's why we've worked with other nations to phase out fossil fuel subsidies. That's why we've taken bold action at home -- by making historic investments in renewable energy; by putting our people to work increasing efficiency in our homes and buildings; and by pursuing comprehensive legislation to transform to a clean energy economy.

These mitigation actions are ambitious, and we are taking them not simply to meet global responsibilities. We are convinced, as some of you may be convinced, that changing the way we produce and use energy is essential to America's economic future -- that it will create millions of new jobs, power new industries, keep us competitive, and spark new innovation. We're convinced, for our own self-interest, that the way we use energy, changing it to a more efficient fashion, is essential to our national security, because it helps to reduce our dependence on foreign oil, and helps us deal with some of the dangers posed by climate change.

So I want this plenary session to understand, America is going to continue on this course of action to mitigate our emissions and to move towards a clean energy economy, no matter what happens here in Copenhagen. We think it is good for us, as well as good for the world. But we also believe that we will all be stronger, all be safer, all be more secure if we act together. That's why it is in our mutual interest to achieve a global accord in which we agree to certain steps, and to hold each other accountable to certain commitments.

After months of talk, after two weeks of negotiations, after innumerable side meetings, bilateral meetings, endless hours of discussion among negotiators, I believe that the pieces of that accord should now be clear.

First, all major economies must put forward decisive national actions that will reduce their emissions, and begin to turn the corner on climate change. I'm pleased that many of us have already done so. Almost all the major economies have put forward legitimate targets, significant targets, ambitious targets. And I'm confident that America will fulfill the commitments that we have made: cutting our emissions in the range of 17 percent by 2020, and by more than 80 percent by 2050 in line with final legislation.

Second, we must have a mechanism to review whether we are keeping our commitments, and exchange this information in a transparent manner. These measures need not be intrusive, or infringe upon sovereignty. They must, however, ensure that an accord is credible, and that we're living up to our obligations. Without such accountability, any agreement would be empty words on a page.

I don't know how you have an international agreement where we all are not sharing information and ensuring that we are meeting our commitments. That doesn't make sense. It would be a hollow victory.

Number three, we must have financing that helps developing countries adapt, particularly the least developed and most vulnerable countries to climate change. America will be a part of fast-start funding that will ramp up to $10 billion by 2012. And yesterday, Secretary Hillary Clinton, my Secretary of State, made it clear that we will engage in a global effort to mobilize $100 billion in financing by 2020, if -- and only if -- it is part of a broader accord that I have just described.

Mitigation. Transparency. Financing. It's a clear formula -- one that embraces the principle of common but differentiated responses and respective capabilities. And it adds up to a significant accord -- one that takes us farther than we have ever gone before as an international community.

I just want to say to this plenary session that we are running short on time. And at this point, the question is whether we will move forward together or split apart, whether we prefer posturing to action. I'm sure that many consider this an imperfect framework that I just described. No country will get everything that it wants. There are those developing countries that want aid with no strings attached, and no obligations with respect to transparency. They think that the most advanced nations should pay a higher price. I understand that. There are those advanced nations who think that developing countries either cannot absorb this assistance, or that will not be held accountable effectively, and that the world's fastest-growing emitters should bear a greater share of the burden.

We know the fault lines because we've been imprisoned by them for years. These international discussions have essentially taken place now for almost two decades, and we have very little to show for it other than an increased acceleration of the climate change phenomenon. The time for talk is over. This is the bottom line: We can embrace this accord, take a substantial step forward, continue to refine it and build upon its foundation. We can do that, and everyone who is in this room will be part of a historic endeavor -- one that makes life better for our children and our grandchildren.

Or we can choose delay, falling back into the same divisions that have stood in the way of action for years. And we will be back having the same stale arguments month after month, year after year, perhaps decade after decade, all while the danger of climate change grows until it is irreversible.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is no time to waste. America has made our choice. We have charted our course. We have made our commitments. We will do what we say. Now I believe it's the time for the nations and the people of the world to come together behind a common purpose.

We are ready to get this done today -- but there has to be movement on all sides to recognize that it is better for us to act than to talk; it’s better for us to choose action over inaction; the future over the past -- and with courage and faith, I believe that we can meet our responsibility to our people, and the future of our planet.

Thank you very much.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# First Press Statement

Good morning, everybody. I want to take just a few minutes to update the American people on the attempted terrorist attack that occurred on Christmas Day and the steps we're taking to ensure the safety and security of the country.

The investigation's ongoing. And I spoke again this morning with Attorney General Eric Holder, the secretary of homeland security, Janet Napolitano, and my counterterrorism and homeland security adviser, John Brennan. I asked them to keep -- continue monitoring the situation to keep the American people and members of Congress informed.

Now, here's what we know so far: On Christmas Day, Northwest Airlines Flight 253 was en route from Amsterdam, Netherlands, to Detroit. As the plane made its final approach to Detroit Metropolitan Airport, a passenger allegedly tried to ignite an explosive device on his body, setting off a fire. Thanks to the quick and heroic actions of passengers and crew, the suspect was immediately subdued, the fire was put out, and the plane landed safely. The suspect is now in custody and has been charged with attempting to destroy an aircraft. And a full investigation has been launched into this attempted act of terrorism, and we will not rest until we find all who were involved and hold them accountable.

Now, this was a serious reminder of the dangers that we face and the nature of those who threaten our homeland. Had the suspect succeeded in bringing down that plane, it could have killed nearly 300 passengers and crew, innocent civilians preparing to celebrate the holidays with their families and friends. The American people should be assured that we are doing everything in our power to keep you and your family safe and secure during this busy holiday season.

Since I was first notified of this incident, I've ordered the following actions to be taken to protect the American people and to secure air travel.

First, I directed that we take immediate steps to ensure the safety of the traveling public. We made sure that all flights still in the air were secure and could land safely. We immediately enhanced screening and security procedures for all flights, domestic and international. We added federal air marshals to flights entering and leaving the United States. And we're working closely in this country, federal, state and local law enforcement, with our international partners.

Second, I've ordered two important reviews1,2, because it's absolutely critical that we learn from this incident and take the necessary measures to prevent future acts of terrorism.

The first review involves our watch list system, which our government has had in place for many years to identify known and suspected terrorists so that we can prevent their entry into the United States. Apparently the suspect in the Christmas incident was in this system, but not on a watch list, such as the so-called no-fly list. So I have ordered a thorough review, not only of how information related to the subject was handled, but of the overall watch list system and how it can be strengthened.

The second review will examine all screening policies, technologies, and procedures related to air travel. We need to determine just how the suspect was able to bring dangerous explosives aboard an aircraft and what additional steps we can take to thwart future attacks.

Third, I've directed my national security team to keep up the pressure on those who would attack our country. We do not yet have all the answers about this latest attempt, but those who would slaughter innocent men, women, and children must know that the United States will more -- do more than simply strengthen our defenses. We will continue to use every element of our national power to disrupt, to dismantle, and defeat the violent extremists who threaten us, whether they are from Afghanistan or Pakistan, Yemen or Somalia, or anywhere where they are plotting attacks against the U.S. homeland.

Finally, the American people should remain vigilant, but also be confident. Those plotting against us seek not only to undermine our security, but also the open society and the values that we cherish as Americans. This incident, like several that have preceded it, demonstrates that an alert and courageous citizenry are far more resilient than an isolated extremist.

As a nation, we will do everything in our power to protect our country. As Americans, we will never give in to fear or division. We will be guided by our hopes, our unity, and our deeply held values.

That's who we are as Americans.

That's what our brave men and women in uniform are standing up for as they spend the holidays in harm's way.

And we will continue to do everything that we can to keep America safe in the new year and beyond.

Before I leave, let me also briefly address the events that have taken place over the last few days in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The United States joins with the international community in strongly condemning the violent and unjust suppression of innocent Iranian citizens, which has apparently resulted in detentions, injuries, and even death.

For months, the Iranian people have sought nothing more than to exercise their universal rights. Each time they have done so, they have been met with the iron fist of brutality, even on solemn occasions and holy days. And each time that has happened, the world has watched with deep admiration for the courage and the conviction of the Iranian people who are part of Iran's great and enduring civilization.

What's taking place within Iran is not about the United States or any other country. It's about the Iranian people and their aspirations for justice and a better life for themselves. And the decision of Iran's leaders to govern through fear and tyranny will not succeed in making those aspirations go away.

As I said in Oslo, it's telling when governments fear the aspirations [of] their own people more than the power of any other nation.

Along with all free nations, the United States stands with those who seek their universal rights. We call upon the Iranian government to abide by the international obligations that it has to respect the rights of its own people.

We call for the immediate release of all who have been unjustly detained within Iran.

We will continue to bear witness to the extraordinary events that are taking place there. And I'm confident that history will be on the side of those who seek justice.

Thank you very much, everybody. And happy New Year.

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# Second Press Statement on the Attempted Christmas Day Terrorist Bombing Attack in Detroit

Good morning. Yesterday I updated the American people on the immediate steps we took -- the increased screening and security of air travel -- to keep our country safe in the wake of the attempted terrorist attack on Christmas Day. And I announced two reviews -- a review of our terrorist watch list system and a review of our air travel screening, so we can find out what went wrong, fix it and prevent future attacks.

Those reviews began on Sunday and are now underway. Earlier today I issued the former [sic] guidelines for those reviews and directed that preliminary findings be provided to the White House by this Thursday. It's essential that we diagnose the problems quickly and deal with them immediately.

Now, the more comprehensive, formal reviews and recommendations for improvement will be completed in the coming weeks, and I'm committed to working with Congress and our intelligence, law enforcement and homeland security communities to take all necessary steps to protect the country.

I wanted to speak to the American people again today because some of this preliminary information that has surfaced in the last 24 hours raises some serious concerns. It's been widely reported that the father of the suspect in the Christmas incident warned U.S. officials in Africa about his son's extremist views. It now appears that weeks ago this information was passed to a component of our intelligence community, but was not effectively distributed so as to get the suspect's name on a no-fly list.

There appears to be other deficiencies as well. Even without this one report there were bits of information available within the intelligence community that could have and should have been pieced together. We've achieved much since 9/11 in terms of collecting information that relates to terrorists and potential terrorist attacks. But it's becoming clear that the system that has been in place for years now is not sufficiently up to date to take full advantage of the information we collect and the knowledge we have.

Had this critical information been shared it could have been compiled with other intelligence and a fuller, clearer picture of the suspect would have emerged. The warning signs would have triggered red flags and the suspect would have never been allowed to board that plane for America.

The professionalism of the men and women in our intelligence, counterterrorism and law enforcement and homeland security communities is extraordinary. They are some of the most hardworking, most dedicated Americans that I've ever met. In pursuit of our security here at home they risk their lives, day in and day out, in this country and around the world.

Few Americans see their work, but all Americans are safer because of their successes. They have targeted and taken out violent extremists, they have disrupted plots and saved countless American lives; they are making real and daily progress in our mission to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al Qaeda and other extremist networks around the world. And for this every American owes them a profound and lasting debt of gratitude.

Moreover, as Secretary Napolitano has said, once the suspect attempted to take down Flight 253 -- after his attempt it's clear that passengers and crew, our homeland security systems and our aviation security took all appropriate actions. But what's also clear is this: When our government has information on a known extremist and that information is not shared and acted upon as it should have been, so that this extremist boards a plane with dangerous explosives that could cost nearly 300 lives, a systemic failure has occurred. And I consider that totally unacceptable.

The reviews I've ordered will surely tell us more. But what already is apparent is that there was a mix of human and systemic failures that contributed to this potential catastrophic breach of security. We need to learn from this episode and act quickly to fix the flaws in our system, because our security is at stake and lives are at stake.

I fully understand that even when every person charged with ensuring our security does what they are trained to do, even when every system works exactly as intended there is still no one hundred percent guarantee of success. Yet, this should only compel us to work even harder, to be even more innovative and relentless in our efforts.

As President I will do everything in my power to support the men and women in intelligence, law enforcement and homeland security to make sure they've got the tools and resources they need to keep America safe. But it's also my job to ensure that our intelligence, law enforcement and homeland security systems and the people in them are working effectively and held accountable. I intend to fulfill that responsibility and insist on accountability at every level.

That's the spirit guiding our reviews into the attempted attack on Christmas Day. That's the spirit that will guide all our efforts in the days and years ahead.

Thank you very much.

# Statement on National Security Review Following Christmas Terrorist Attempt

I just concluded a meeting with members of my national security team, including those from our intelligence, homeland security and law enforcement agencies involved in the security reviews that I ordered after the failed attack on Christmas Day. I called these leaders to the White House because we face a challenge of the utmost urgency. As we saw on Christmas, al Qaeda and its extremist allies will stop at nothing in their efforts to kill Americans. And we are determined not only to thwart those plans, but to disrupt, dismantle and defeat their networks once and for all.

Indeed, over the past year, we've taken the fight to al Qaeda and its allies wherever they plot and train, be it in Afghanistan and Pakistan, in Yemen and Somalia, or in other countries around the world.

Here at home, our intelligence, homeland security and law enforcement agencies have worked together with considerable success: gathering intelligence, stitching it together, and making arrests -- from Denver to Texas, from Illinois to New York -- disrupting plots and saving American lives. And these successes have not come without a price, as we saw last week in the loss of our courageous CIA officers in Afghanistan. But when a suspected terrorist is able to board a plane with explosives on Christmas Day the system has failed in a potentially disastrous way. And it's my responsibility to find out why, and to correct that failure so that we can prevent such attacks in the future.

And that's why, shortly after the attempted bombing over Detroit, I ordered two reviews. I directed Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano to review aviation screening, technology and procedures. She briefed me on her initial findings today, and I'm pleased that this review is drawing on the best science and technology, including the expertise of Secretary of Energy Steven Chu and his department.

I also directed my counterterrorism and homeland security advisor John Brennan to lead a thorough review into our terrorist watch-listing system so we can fix what went wrong. As we discussed today, this ongoing review continues to reveal more about the human and systemic failures that almost cost nearly 300 lives. We will make a summary of this preliminary report public within the next few days, but let me share some of what we know so far.

As I described over the weekend, elements of our intelligence community knew that Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab had traveled to Yemen and joined up with extremists there. It now turns out that our intelligence community knew of other red flags -- that al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula sought to strike not only American targets in Yemen, but the United States itself. And we had information that this group was working with an individual who was known -- who we now know was in fact the individual involved in the Christmas attack.

The bottom line is this: The U.S. government had sufficient information to have uncovered this plot and potentially disrupt the Christmas Day attack. But our intelligence community failed to connect those dots, which would have placed the suspect on the "no fly" list. In other words, this was not a failure to collect intelligence; it was a failure to integrate and understand the intelligence that we already had. The information was there. Agencies and analysts who needed it had access to it. And our professionals were trained to look for it and to bring it all together.

Now, I will accept that intelligence, by its nature, is imperfect, but it is increasingly clear that intelligence was not fully analyzed or fully leveraged. That's not acceptable, and I will not tolerate it. Time and again, we've learned that quickly piecing together information and taking swift action is critical to staying one step ahead of a nimble adversary.

So we have to do better -- and we will do better. And we have to do it quickly. American lives are on the line. So I made it clear today to my team: I want our initial reviews completed this week. I want specific recommendations for corrective actions to fix what went wrong. I want those reforms implemented immediately, so that this doesn't happen again and so we can prevent future attacks. And I know that every member of my team that I met with today understands the urgency of getting this right. And I appreciate that each of them took responsibility for the shortfalls within their own agencies.

Immediately after the attack, I ordered concrete steps to protect the American people: new screening and security for all flights, domestic and international; more explosive detection teams at airports; more air marshals on flights; and deepening cooperation with international partners.

In recent days, we've taken additional steps to improve security. Counterterrorism officials have reviewed and updated our terrorist watch list system, including adding more individuals to the "no fly" list. And while our review has found that our watch-listing system is not broken, the failure to add Abdulmutallab to the "no fly" list shows that this system needs to be strengthened.

The State Department is now requiring embassies and consulates to include current visa information in their warning on individuals with terrorist or suspected terrorist connections. As of yesterday, the Transportation Security Administration, or TSA, is requiring enhanced screening for passengers flying into the United States from, or flying through, nations on our list of state sponsors of terrorism, or other countries of interest. And in the days ahead, I will announce further steps to disrupt attacks, including better integration of information and enhanced passenger screening for air travel.

Finally, some have suggested that the events on Christmas Day should cause us to revisit the decision to close the prison at Guantanamo Bay. So let me be clear. It was always our intent to transfer detainees to other countries only under conditions that provide assurances that our security is being protected.

With respect to Yemen in particular, there's an ongoing security situation which we have been confronting for some time, along with our Yemeni partner. Given the unsettled situation, I've spoken to the Attorney General and we've agreed that we will not be transferring additional detainees back to Yemen at this time.

But make no mistake: We will close Guantanamo prison, which has damaged our national security interests and become a tremendous recruiting tool for al Qaeda. In fact, that was an explicit rationale for the formation of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. And, as I've always said, we will do so -- we will close the prison in a manner that keeps the American people safe and secure.

Our reviews -- and the steps that we've taken and will continue to take -- go to the heart of the kind of intelligence and homeland security we need in the 21st century. Just as al Qaeda and its allies are constantly evolving and adapting their efforts to strike us, we have to constantly adapt and evolve to defeat them, because as we saw on Christmas, the margin for error is slim and the consequences of failure can be catastrophic.

As these violent extremists pursue new havens, we intend to target al Qaeda wherever they take root, forging new partnerships to deny them sanctuary, as we are doing currently with the government in Yemen. As our adversaries seek new recruits, we'll constantly review and rapidly update our intelligence and our institutions. As they refine our tactics, we'll enhance our defenses, including smarter screening and security at airports, and investing in the technologies that might have detected the kind of explosives used on Christmas. In short, we need our intelligence, homeland security and law enforcement systems -- and the people in them -- to be accountable and to work as intended: collecting, sharing, integrating, analyzing, and acting on intelligence as quickly and effectively as possible to save innocent lives -- not just most of the time, but all the time. That's what the American people deserve.

As President, that's exactly what I will demand.

Thank you very much.

# Strengthening Intelligence and Aviation Security Address

Good afternoon, everybody. The immediate reviews

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that I ordered after the failed Christmas terrorist attack are now complete. I was just briefed on the findings and recommendations for reform, and I believe it's important that the American people understand the new steps that we're taking to prevent attacks and keep our country safe.

This afternoon, my Counterterrorism and Homeland Security Advisor, John Brennan, will discuss his review into our terrorist watchlist system -- how our government failed to connect the dots in a way that would have prevented a known terrorist from boarding a plane for America, and the steps we're going to take to prevent that from happening again.

Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano will discuss her review of aviation screening, technology and procedures -- how that terrorist boarded a plane with explosives that could have killed nearly 300 innocent people, and how we'll strengthen aviation security going forward.

So today I want to just briefly summarize their conclusions and the steps that I've ordered to address them.

In our ever-changing world, America's first line of defense is timely, accurate intelligence that is shared, integrated, analyzed, and acted upon quickly and effectively. That's what the intelligence reforms after the 9/11 attacks largely achieved. That's what our intelligence community does every day. But, unfortunately, that's not what happened in the lead-up to Christmas Day. It's now clear that shortcomings occurred in three broad and compounding ways.

First, although our intelligence community had learned a great deal about the al Qaeda affiliate in Yemen -- called al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula -- that we knew that they sought to strike the United States and that they were recruiting operatives to do so -- the intelligence community did not aggressively follow up on and prioritize particular streams of intelligence related to a possible attack against the homeland.

Second, this contributed to a larger failure of analysis -- a failure to connect the dots of intelligence that existed across our intelligence community and which, together, could have revealed that Abdulmutallab was planning an attack.

Third, this, in turn, fed into shortcomings in the watch-listing system which resulted in this person not being placed on the "no fly" list, thereby allowing him to board that plane in Amsterdam for Detroit.

In sum, the U.S. government had the information -- scattered throughout the system -- to potentially uncover this plot and disrupt the attack. Rather than a failure to collect or share intelligence, this was a failure to connect and understand the intelligence that we already had.

That's why we took swift action in the immediate days following Christmas, including reviewing and updating the terrorist watchlist system and adding more individuals to the "no fly" list, and directing our embassies and consulates to include current visa information in their warnings of individuals with terrorist or suspected terrorist ties.

Today, I'm directing a series of additional corrective steps across multiple agencies. Broadly speaking, they fall into four areas.

First, I'm directing that our intelligence community immediately begin assigning specific responsibility for investigating all leads on high-priority threats so that these leads are pursued and acted upon aggressively -- not just most of the time, but all of the time. We must follow the leads that we get. And we must pursue them until plots are disrupted. And that mean assigning clear lines of responsibility.

Second, I'm directing that intelligence reports, especially those involving potential threats to the United States, be distributed more rapidly and more widely. We can't sit on information that could protect the American people.

Third, I'm directing that we strengthen the analytical process, how our analysis -- how our analysts process and integrate the intelligence that they receive. My Director of National Intelligence, Denny Blair, will take the lead in improving our day-to-day efforts. My Intelligence Advisory Board will examine the longer-term challenge of sifting through vast universes of intelligence and data in our Information Age.

And finally, I'm ordering an immediate effort to strengthen the criteria used to add individuals to our terrorist watchlists, especially the "no fly" list. We must do better in keeping dangerous people off airplanes, while still facilitating air travel.

So taken together, these reforms will improve the intelligence community's ability to collect, share, integrate, analyze, and act on intelligence swiftly and effectively. In short, they will help our intelligence community do its job even better and protect American lives.

But even the best intelligence can't identify in advance every individual who would do us harm. So we need the security -- at our airports, ports, and borders, and through our partnerships with other nations -- to prevent terrorists from entering America.

At the Amsterdam airport, Abdulmutallab was subjected to the same screening as other passengers. He was required to show his documents -- including a valid U.S. visa. His carry-on bag was X-rayed. He passed through a metal detector. But a metal detector can't detect the kind of explosives that were sewn into his clothes.

As Secretary Napolitano will explain, the screening technologies that might have detected these explosives are in use at the Amsterdam airport, but not at the specific checkpoints that he passed through. Indeed, most airports in the world -- and in the United States -- do not yet have these technologies. Now, there's no silver bullet to securing the thousands of flights into America each day, domestic and international. It will require significant investments in many areas. And that's why, even before the Christmas attack, we increased investments in homeland security and aviation security. This includes an additional one billion dollars in new systems and technologies that we need to protect our airports -- more baggage screening, more passenger screening and more advanced explosive detection capabilities, including those that can improve our ability to detect the kind of explosive used on Christmas. These are major investments and they'll make our skies safer and more secure.

As I announced this week, we've taken a whole range of steps to improve aviation screening and security since Christmas, including new rules for how we handle visas within the government and enhanced screening for passengers flying from, or through, certain countries.

And today, I'm directing that the Department of Homeland Security take additional steps, including: strengthening our international partnerships to improve aviation screening and security around the world; greater use of the advanced explosive detection technologies that we already have, including imaging technology; and working aggressively, in cooperation with the Department of Energy and our National Labs, to develop and deploy the next generation of screening technologies.

Now, there is, of course, no foolproof solution. As we develop new screening technologies and procedures, our adversaries will seek new ways to evade them, as was shown by the Christmas attack. In the never-ending race to protect our country, we have to stay one step ahead of a nimble adversary. That's what these steps are designed to do. And we will continue to work with Congress to ensure that our intelligence, homeland security, and law enforcement communities have the resources they need to keep the American people safe.

I ordered these two immediate reviews so that we could take immediate action to secure our country. But in the weeks and months ahead, we will continue a sustained and intensive effort of analysis and assessment, so that we leave no stone unturned in seeking better ways to protect the American people. I have repeatedly made it clear -- in public with the American people, and in private with my national security team -- that I will hold my staff, our agencies and the people in them accountable when they fail to perform their responsibilities at the highest levels.

Now, at this stage in the review process it appears that this incident was not the fault of a single individual or organization, but rather a systemic failure across organizations and agencies. That's why, in addition to the corrective efforts that I've ordered, I've directed agency heads to establish internal accountability reviews, and directed my national security staff to monitor their efforts. We will measure progress. And John Brennan will report back to me within 30 days and on a regular basis after that. All of these agencies -- and their leaders -- are responsible for implementing these reforms. And all will be held accountable if they don't.

Moreover, I am less interested in passing out blame than I am in learning from and correcting these mistakes to make us safer. For ultimately, the buck stops with me. As President, I have a solemn responsibility to protect our nation and our people. And when the system fails, it is my responsibility.

Over the past two weeks, we've been reminded again of the challenge we face in protecting our country against a foe that is bent on our destruction. And while passions and politics can often obscure the hard work before us, let's be clear about what this moment demands. We are at war. We are at war against al Qaeda, a far-reaching network of violence and hatred that attacked us on 9/11, that killed nearly 3,000 innocent people, and that is plotting to strike us again. And we will do whatever it takes to defeat them.

And we've made progress. Al Qaeda's leadership is hunkered down. We have worked closely with partners, including Yemen, to inflict major blows against al Qaeda leaders. And we have disrupted plots at home and abroad, and saved American lives.

And we know that the vast majority of Muslims reject al Qaeda. But it is clear that al Qaeda increasingly seeks to recruit individuals without known terrorist affiliations not just in the Middle East, but in Africa and other places, to do their bidding. That's why I've directed my national security team to develop a strategy that addresses the unique challenges posed by lone recruits. And that's why we must communicate clearly to Muslims around the world that al Qaeda offers nothing except a bankrupt vision of misery and death –- including the murder of fellow Muslims –- while the United States stands with those who seek justice and progress.

To advance that progress, we've sought new beginnings with Muslim communities around the world, one in which we engage on the basis of mutual interest and mutual respect, and work together to fulfill the aspirations that all people share -- to get an education, to work with dignity, to live in peace and security. That's what America believes in. That's the vision that is far more powerful than the hatred of these violent extremists.

Here at home, we will strengthen our defenses, but we will not succumb to a siege mentality that sacrifices the open society and liberties and values that we cherish as Americans, because great and proud nations don't hunker down and hide behind walls of suspicion and mistrust. That is exactly what our adversaries want, and so long as I am President, we will never hand them that victory. We will define the character of our country, not some band of small men intent on killing innocent men, women and children.

And in this cause, every one of us -- every American, every elected official -- can do our part. Instead of giving into cynicism and division, let's move forward with the confidence and optimism and unity that defines us as a people. For now is not a time for partisanship, it's a time for citizenship -- a time to come together and work together with the seriousness of purpose that our national security demands.

That's what it means to be strong in the face of violent extremism. That's how we will prevail in this fight. And that's how we will protect our country and pass it -- safer and stronger -- to the next generation.

Thanks very much.

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# Speech Proposing Financial Crisis Responsibility Fee

Thank you, everybody, for being here.

As we all know, our country has endured the deepest recession we've faced in generations. And much of the turmoil was caused by irresponsibility on the part of banks and financial institutions. Firms took reckless risks in pursuit of short-term profits and soaring bonuses, triggering a financial crisis that nearly pulled the economy into a second Great Depression.

It was little more than a year ago that we stood on that precipice. Several of the world's largest financial institutions had already failed. Credit markets froze and banks refused to lend. Trillions of dollars in household savings evaporated as stocks, pensions, and home values plummeted. And we were losing hundreds of thousands of jobs each month. It was at this time that many large financial firms -- those left standing -- teetered on the brink of collapse, overwhelmed by the consequences of their irresponsible decisions.

Now, even though these firms were largely facing a crisis of their own making, their failure could have led to an even greater calamity for the country. So the Federal Reserve and other agencies took emergency measures to prevent that outcome. And the previous Administration started a program -- the Troubled Asset Relief Program, or TARP -- to provide these financial institutions with funds to survive the turmoil that they had helped unleash. It was a distasteful but necessary thing to do.

Now, we've worked over the last year to manage this program effectively, to hold firms accountable, and to recoup as much tax money as possible. Many originally feared that most of the 700 billion dollars in TARP money would be lost. But because of the management of this program by Secretary Geithner and my economic team, we've now recovered the majority of the funds provided to banks.

As far as I'm concerned, however, that's not good enough. My commitment is to the taxpayer. My commitment is to recover every single dime the American people are owed. And my determination to achieve this goal is only heightened when I see reports of massive profits and obscene bonuses at some of the very firms who owe their continued existence to the American people -- folks who have not been made whole, and who continue to face real hardship in this recession.

We want our money back. And we're going to get it.

And that's why I'm proposing a "Financial Crisis Responsibility Fee" to be imposed on major financial firms until the American people are fully compensated for the extraordinary assistance they provided to Wall Street. If these companies are in good enough shape to afford massive bonuses, they are surely in good enough shape to afford paying back every penny to taxpayers.

Now, our estimate is that the TARP program will end up costing taxpayers around 117 billion dollars -- obviously a lot less than the 700 billion that people had feared, but still a lot of money. The fee will be in place for 10 years, or as long as it takes to raise the full amount necessary to cover all taxpayer losses. This will not be a cost borne by community banks or small financial firms. Only the largest firms with more than 50 billion dollars in assets will be affected. And the size of the fee each bank owes will be based on its size and exposure to debt, so that we are recovering tax dollars while promoting reform of the banking practices that contributed to this crisis.

Now, the fact is these financial institutions are essential to our economy. They provide capital and credit to families purchasing homes, students attending college, businesses seeking to start up or expand. And that's why the rescue program was as necessary as it was unfortunate. And that is why, through this fee and broader reforms that we seek, our goal is not to punish Wall Street firms, but rather to prevent the abuse and excess that nearly caused the collapse of many of these firms and the financial system itself.

We cannot go back to "business as usual." And when we see reports of firms once again engaging in risky bets to reap quick rewards, when we see a return to compensation practices that seem not to reflect what the country has been through, all that looks like business as usual to me. The financial industry has even launched a massive lobbying campaign, locking arms with the opposition Party, to stand in the way of reforms to prevent another crisis. That, too, unfortunately, is business as usual. And we're already hearing a hue and cry from Wall Street suggesting that this proposed fee is not only unwelcome but unfair -- that by some twisted logic it is more appropriate for the American people to bear the costs of the bailout, rather than the industry that benefited from it, even though these executives are out there giving themselves huge bonuses.

What I'd say to these executives is this: Instead of sending a phalanx of lobbyists to fight this proposal, or employing an army of lawyers and accountants to help evade the fee, I suggest you might want to consider simply meeting your responsibilities. And I'd urge you to cover the costs of the rescue not by sticking it to your shareholders or your customers or fellow citizens with the bill, but by rolling back bonuses for top earners and executives. And more broadly, I am continuing to call on these firms to put greater effort into helping families stay in their homes, to provide small businesses with needed loans, and to embrace -- rather than fight -- serious financial reform.

Ultimately, it is by taking responsibility -- on Wall Street, here in Washington, all the way to Main Street -- that we're going to move past this period of turmoil. That's how we're going to avoid the cycles of boom and bust that have caused so much havoc. That's how we're going to promote vibrant markets that reward innovation and entrepreneurship and hard work. That's how we're going to create sustained growth without the looming threat of another costly crisis. That's not only in the best interests of the economy as a whole; it's actually in the interest of these large banks.

So, I'm going to be working closely with Congress on this proposal.

And on behalf of the American people, I look forward to signing it into law.

Thank you very much.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Martin Luther King, Jr. Remembrance Speech

Good morning. Praise be to God. Let me begin by thanking the entire Vermont Avenue Baptist Church family for welcoming our family here today. It feels like a family. Thank you for making us feel that way. To Pastor Wheeler, first lady Wheeler, thank you so much for welcoming us here today. Congratulations on Jordan Denice -- aka Cornelia.

Michelle and I have been blessed with a new nephew this year as well -- Austin Lucas Robinson. So maybe at the appropriate time we can make introductions. Now, if Jordan's father is like me, then that will be in about 30 years. That is a great blessing.

Michelle and Malia and Sasha and I are thrilled to be here today. And I know that sometimes you have to go through a little fuss to have me as a guest speaker. So let me apologize in advance for all the fuss.

We gather here, on a Sabbath, during a time of profound difficulty for our nation and for our world. In such a time, it soothes the soul to seek out the Divine in a spirit of prayer; to seek solace among a community of believers. But we are not here just to ask the Lord for His blessing. We aren't here just to interpret His Scripture. We're also here to call on the memory of one of His noble servants, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Now, it's fitting that we do so here, within the four walls of Vermont Avenue Baptist Church -- here, in a church that rose like the phoenix from the ashes of the civil war; here in a church formed by freed slaves, whose founding pastor had worn the union blue; here in a church from whose pews congregants set out for marches and from whom choir anthems of freedom were heard; from whose sanctuary King himself would sermonize from time to time.

One of those times was Thursday, December 6, 1956. Pastor, you said you were a little older than me, so were you around at that point? You were three years old -- okay. I wasn’t born yet. On Thursday, December 6, 1956. And before Dr. King had pointed us to the mountaintop, before he told us about his dream in front of the Lincoln Memorial, King came here, as a 27-year-old preacher, to speak on what he called "The Challenge of a New Age." "The Challenge of a New Age." It was a period of triumph, but also uncertainty, for Dr. King and his followers -- because just weeks earlier, the Supreme Court had ordered the desegregation of Montgomery's buses, a hard-wrought, hard-fought victory that would put an end to the 381-day historic boycott down in Montgomery, Alabama.

And yet, as Dr. King rose to take that pulpit, the future still seemed daunting. It wasn't clear what would come next for the movement that Dr. King led. It wasn't clear how we were going to reach the Promised Land. Because segregation was still rife; lynchings still a fact. Yes, the Supreme Court had ruled not only on the Montgomery buses, but also on Brown v. Board of Education. And yet that ruling was defied throughout the South -- by schools and by states; they ignored it with impunity. And here in the nation's capital, the federal government had yet to fully align itself with the laws on its books and the ideals of its founding.

So it's not hard for us, then, to imagine that moment. We can imagine folks coming to this church, happy about the boycott being over. We can also imagine them, though, coming here concerned about their future, sometimes second-guessing strategy, maybe fighting off some creeping doubts, perhaps despairing about whether the movement in which they had placed so many of their hopes -- a movement in which they believed so deeply -- could actually deliver on its promise.

So here we are, more than half a century later, once again facing the challenges of a new age. Here we are, once more marching toward an unknown future, what I call the Joshua generation to their Moses generation -- the great inheritors of progress paid for with sweat and blood, and sometimes life itself.

We've inherited the progress of unjust laws that are now overturned. We take for granted the progress of a ballot being available to anybody who wants to take the time to actually vote. We enjoy the fruits of prejudice and bigotry being lifted -- slowly, sometimes in fits and starts, but irrevocably -- from human hearts. It's that progress that made it possible for me to be here today; for the good people of this country to elect an African American the 44th President of the United States of America.

Reverend Wheeler mentioned the inauguration, last year's election. You know, on the heels of that victory over a year ago, there were some who suggested that somehow we had entered into a post-racial America, all those problems would be solved. There were those who argued that because I had spoke of a need for unity in this country that our nation was somehow entering into a period of post-partisanship. That didn’t work out so well. There was a hope shared by many that life would be better from the moment that I swore that oath.

Of course, as we meet here today, one year later, we know the promise of that moment has not yet been fully fulfilled. Because of an era of greed and irresponsibility that sowed the seeds of its own demise, because of persistent economic troubles unaddressed through the generations, because of a banking crisis that brought the financial system to the brink of catastrophe, we are being tested -- in our own lives and as a nation -- as few have been tested before.

Unemployment is at its highest level in more than a quarter of a century. Nowhere is it higher than the African American community. Poverty is on the rise. Home ownership is slipping. Beyond our shores, our sons and daughters are fighting two wars. Closer to home, our Haitian brothers and sisters are in desperate need. Bruised, battered, many people are legitimately feeling doubt, even despair, about the future. Like those who came to this church on that Thursday in 1956, folks are wondering, where do we go from here?

I understand those feelings. I understand the frustration and sometimes anger that so many folks feel as they struggle to stay afloat. I get letters from folks around the country every day; I read 10 a night out of the 40,000 that we receive. And there are stories of hardship and desperation, in some cases, pleading for help: I need a job. I'm about to lose my home. I don't have health care -- it's about to cause my family to be bankrupt. Sometimes you get letters from children: My mama or my daddy have lost their jobs, is there something you can do to help? Ten letters like that a day we read.

So, yes, we're passing through a hard winter. It's the hardest in some time. But let's always remember that, as a people, the American people, we've weathered some hard winters before. This country was founded during some harsh winters. The fishermen, the laborers, the craftsmen who made camp at Valley Forge -- they weathered a hard winter. The slaves and the freedmen who rode an underground railroad, seeking the light of justice under the cover of night -- they weathered a hard winter. The seamstress whose feet were tired, the pastor whose voice echoes through the ages -- they weathered some hard winters. It was for them, as it is for us, difficult, in the dead of winter, to sometimes see spring coming. They, too, sometimes felt their hopes deflate. And yet, each season, the frost melts, the cold recedes, the sun reappears. So it was for earlier generations and so it will be for us.

What we need to do is to just ask what lessons we can learn from those earlier generations about how they sustained themselves during those hard winters, how they persevered and prevailed. Let us in this Joshua generation learn how that Moses generation overcame.

Let me offer a few thoughts on this. First and foremost, they did so by remaining firm in their resolve. Despite being threatened by sniper fire or planted bombs, by shoving and punching and spitting and angry stares, they adhered to that sweet spirit of resistance, the principles of nonviolence that had accounted for their success.

Second, they understood that as much as our government and our political parties had betrayed them in the past -- as much as our nation itself had betrayed its own ideals -- government, if aligned with the interests of its people, can be -- and must be -- a force for good. So they stayed on the Justice Department. They went into the courts. They pressured Congress, they pressured their President. They didn’t give up on this country. They didn’t give up on government. They didn’t somehow say government was the problem; they said, we're going to change government, we're going to make it better. Imperfect as it was, they continued to believe in the promise of democracy; in America's constant ability to remake itself, to perfect this union.

Third, our predecessors were never so consumed with theoretical debates that they couldn't see progress when it came. Sometimes I get a little frustrated when folks just don't want to see that even if we don't get everything, we're getting something. King understood that the desegregation of the Armed Forces didn’t end the civil rights movement, because black and white soldiers still couldn't sit together at the same lunch counter when they came home. But he still insisted on the rightness of desegregating the Armed Forces. That was a good first step -- even as he called for more. He didn’t suggest that somehow by the signing of the Civil Rights that somehow all discrimination would end. But he also didn’t think that we shouldn’t sign the Civil Rights Act because it hasn’t solved every problem. Let's take a victory, he said, and then keep on marching. Forward steps, large and small, were recognized for what they were -- which was progress.

Fourth, at the core of King's success was an appeal to conscience that touched hearts and opened minds, a commitment to universal ideals -- of freedom, of justice, of equality -- that spoke to all people, not just some people. For King understood that without broad support, any movement for civil rights could not be sustained. That's why he marched with the white auto worker in Detroit. That's why he linked arm with the Mexican farm worker in California, and united people of all colors in the noble quest for freedom.

Of course, King overcame in other ways as well. He remained strategically focused on gaining ground -- his eyes on the prize constantly -- understanding that change would not be easy, understand that change wouldn't come overnight, understanding that there would be setbacks and false starts along the way, but understanding, as he said in 1956, that "we can walk and never get weary, because we know there is a great camp meeting in the promised land of freedom and justice."

And it's because the Moses generation overcame that the trials we face today are very different from the ones that tested us in previous generations. Even after the worst recession in generations, life in America is not even close to being as brutal as it was back then for so many. That's the legacy of Dr. King and his movement. That's our inheritance. Having said that, let there be no doubt the challenges of our new age are serious in their own right, and we must face them as squarely as they faced the challenges they saw.

I know it's been a hard road we've traveled this year to rescue the economy, but the economy is growing again. The job losses have finally slowed, and around the country, there's signs that businesses and families are beginning to rebound. We are making progress.

I know it's been a hard road that we've traveled to reach this point on health reform. I promise you I know. But under the legislation I will sign into law, insurance companies won't be able to drop you when you get sick, and more than 30 million people -- our fellow Americans will finally have insurance. More than 30 million men and women and children, mothers and fathers, won't be worried about what might happen to them if they get sick. This will be a victory not for Democrats; this will be a victory for dignity and decency, for our common humanity. This will be a victory for the United States of America.

Let's work to change the political system, as imperfect as it is. I know people can feel down about the way things are going sometimes here in Washington. I know it's tempting to give up on the political process. But we've put in place tougher rules on lobbying and ethics and transparency -- tougher rules than any administration in history. It's not enough, but it's progress. Progress is possible. Don't give up on voting. Don't give up on advocacy. Don't give up on activism. There are too many needs to be met, too much work to be done. Like Dr. King said, "We must accept finite disappointment but never lose infinite hope."

Let us broaden our coalition, building a confederation not of liberals or conservatives, not of red states or blue states, but of all Americans who are hurting today, and searching for a better tomorrow. The urgency of the hour demands that we make common cause with all of America's workers -- white, black, brown -- all of whom are being hammered by this recession, all of whom are yearning for that spring to come. It demands that we reach out to those who've been left out in the cold even when the economy is good, even when we're not in recession -- the youth in the inner cities, the youth here in Washington, D.C., people in rural communities who haven't seen prosperity reach them for a very long time. It demands that we fight discrimination, whatever form it may come. That means we fight discrimination against gays and lesbians, and we make common cause to reform our immigration system.

And finally, we have to recognize, as Dr. King did, that progress can't just come from without -- it also has to come from within. And over the past year, for example, we've made meaningful improvements in the field of education. I've got a terrific Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan. He's been working hard with states and working hard with the D.C. school district, and we've insisted on reform, and we've insisted on accountability. We we're putting in more money and we've provided more Pell Grants and more tuition tax credits and simpler financial aid forms. We've done all that, but parents still need to parent. Kids still need to own up to their responsibilities. We still have to set high expectations for our young people. Folks can't simply look to government for all the answers without also looking inside themselves, inside their own homes, for some of the answers.

Progress will only come if we're willing to promote that ethic of hard work, a sense of responsibility, in our own lives. I'm not talking, by the way, just to the African American community. Sometimes when I say these things people assme, well, he's just talking to black people about working hard. No, no, no, no. I'm talking to the American community. Because somewhere along the way, we, as a nation, began to lose touch with some of our core values. You know what I'm talking about. We became enraptured with the false prophets who prophesized an easy path to success, paved with credit cards and home equity loans and get-rich-quick schemes, and the most important thing was to be a celebrity; it doesn’t matter what you do, as long as you get on TV. That's everybody.

We forgot what made the bus boycott a success; what made the civil rights movement a success; what made the United States of America a success -- that, in this country, there's no substitute for hard work, no substitute for a job well done, no substitute for being responsible stewards of God's blessings.

What we're called to do, then, is rebuild America from its foundation on up. To reinvest in the essentials that we've neglected for too long -- like health care, like education, like a better energy policy, like basic infrastructure, like scientific research. Our generation is called to buckle down and get back to basics.

We must do so not only for ourselves, but also for our children, and their children. For Jordan and for Austin. That's a sacrifice that falls on us to make. It's a much smaller sacrifice than the Moses generation had to make, but it's still a sacrifice.

Yes, it's hard to transition to a clean energy economy. Sometimes it may be inconvenient, but it's a sacrifice that we have to make. It's hard to be fiscally responsible when we have all these human needs, and we're inheriting enormous deficits and debt, but that's a sacrifice that we're going to have to make. You know, it's easy, after a hard day's work, to just put your kid in front of the TV set -- you're tired, don't want to fuss with them -- instead of reading to them, but that's a sacrifice we must joyfully accept.

Sometimes it's hard to be a good father and good mother. Sometimes it's hard to be a good neighbor, or a good citizen, to give up time in service of others, to give something of ourselves to a cause that's greater than ourselves -- as Michelle and I are urging folks to do tomorrow to honor and celebrate Dr. King. But these are sacrifices that we are called to make. These are sacrifices that our faith calls us to make. Our faith in the future. Our faith in America. Our faith in God.

And on his sermon all those years ago, Dr. King quoted a poet's verse:

Truth forever on the scaffoldWrong forever on the throne…And behind the dim unknown stands GodWithin the shadows keeping watch above his own.

Even as Dr. King stood in this church, a victory in the past and uncertainty in the future, he trusted God. He trusted that God would make a way. A way for prayers to be answered. A way for our union to be perfected. A way for the arc of the moral universe, no matter how long, to slowly bend towards truth and bend towards freedom, to bend towards justice. He had faith that God would make a way out of no way.

You know, folks ask me sometimes why I look so calm. They say, all this stuff coming at you, how come you just seem calm? And I have a confession to make here. There are times where I'm not so calm. Reggie Love knows. My wife knows. There are times when progress seems too slow. There are times when the words that are spoken about me hurt. There are times when the barbs sting. There are times when it feels like all these efforts are for naught, and change is so painfully slow in coming, and I have to confront my own doubts.

But let me tell you -- during those times it's faith that keeps me calm. It's faith that gives me peace. The same faith that leads a single mother to work two jobs to put a roof over her head when she has doubts. The same faith that keeps an unemployed father to keep on submitting job applications even after he's been rejected a hundred times. The same faith that says to a teacher even if the first nine children she's teaching she can't reach, that that 10th one she's going to be able to reach. The same faith that breaks the silence of an earthquake's wake with the sound of prayers and hymns sung by a Haitian community. A faith in things not seen, in better days ahead, in Him who holds the future in the hollow of His hand. A faith that lets us mount up on wings like eagles; lets us run and not be weary; lets us walk and not faint.

So let us hold fast to that faith, as Joshua held fast to the faith of his fathers, and together, we shall overcome the challenges of a new age. Together, we shall seize the promise of this moment. Together, we shall make a way through winter, and we're going to welcome the spring. Through God all things are possible.

May the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King continue to inspire us and ennoble our world and all who inhabit it. And may God bless the United States of America.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Town Hall Address at Lorain County Community College

Hello, everybody! Hello, Ohio! Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you. Everybody, please relax. We're going to be here for a little bit. Everybody take a seat -- if you have a seat. It is great to see you -- can everybody please give Jody a big round of applause for the introduction.

Everybody is a special guest, but we've got a few that I just want to mention. First of all, obviously you've got one of the finest governors in the country in Ted Strickland. Please give him a round of applause. My former colleague when he was in the Senate -- nobody fights harder for working people than Sherrod Brown. Give him a big round of applause.

We've got a dynamo pair of members of the House of Representatives, who are so committed to their districts and committed to this state -- Betty Sutton and Marcy Kaptur. I have been having just a wonderful time here in town, and your mayor has just been a really nice person. He and I shared a burger over at Smitty's. Give Bill Grace a big round of applause.

And somebody who I'm hugely impressed with because I'm just so impressed with this institution, and his leadership obviously has been critical to it -- Dr. Ray Church, your school president here at Lorain County Community College.

Well, listen, it is great to be here in Elyria. Thank you so much for the great hospitality, the wonderful reception. Look, it's just nice being out of Washington, let me say. I mean, there are some nice people in Washington, but it can drive you crazy. Am I wrong, Sherrod?

For two years, I had the privilege of traveling across this country, and I had a chance to talk to people like you, and go to diners and sit in barbershops, and hear directly about the challenges that all of you are facing in your lives, and the opportunities that you're taking advantage of, and all the things that we face together as a nation. And the single hardest thing -- people ask me this all the time -- the single hardest thing about being President is that it's harder for me to do that nowadays. It's harder to get out of the bubble.

I mean, don't get me wrong, the White House is a wonderful place to work. You live above the store, which means I've got a very short commute. I'm having -- I see my daughters before they go to school and I see them at night for dinner, even if I have to go back down to the office. And that makes everything so much better. But the truth is, this job is a little confining, and that is frustrating. I can't just go to the barbershop or sit in a diner. I can't always visit people directly.

This is part of the reason why I've taken to the practice of reading 10 letters, out of the 40,000 that I get, every night just so that I can stay in touch and hear from you. But nothing beats a day where I can make an escape, I break out. And so I appreciate the chance to come here and spend a day.

Before I came here I visited the EMC Precision Machining plant. I saw the great clean energy job training program here at Lorain County Community College. And I'm obviously thrilled to be able to spend some time with you.

Audience: We love you!

Obama: I love you back. Thank you.

Now, look, let's be honest. These are difficult and unsettling times. They're difficult times here in Elyria; they're tough in Ohio; they're tough all across the country. I walked into office a year ago in the middle of a raging economic storm that was wreaking devastation on your town and communities everywhere. We had to take some very difficult steps to deal with that mess, to stave off an even greater economic catastrophe. We had to stabilize the financial system, which, given the role of the big banks in creating this mess, was a pretty tough pill to swallow.

I knew it would be unpopular -- and rightly so. But I also knew that we had to do it because if they went down, your local banks would have gone down. And if the financial system went down, it would have taken the entire economy and millions more families and businesses with it. We would have looked -- we would have been looking at a second Great Depression.

So in my first months in office, we also had to save two of the big three automakers from a liquidation bankruptcy, complete collapse. Some people weren't happy about that, either. I understand that. They felt like if you're in a business, you make a bad decision, you ought to reap the consequences, just like any business would. The problem was, if we let GM and Chrysler simply go under, hundreds of thousands of Americans would have been hurt, not just at those companies themselves, but at auto suppliers and other companies and dealers here in Michigan, up in -- here in Ohio, up in Michigan, all across this country.

So we said, if you're willing to take some tough and painful steps to make yourself more competitive, we're willing to invest in your future. And earlier this week, we heard that the auto industry planned to make almost 3 million cars and trucks here in North America in the next three months, which is up 69 percent from the first three months of last year.

We also passed a Recovery Act to pull our economy back from the brink. Now, there's been a lot of misunderstanding about this Recovery Act. Sherrod and Marcy and Betty and I were talking about this on the way over here. If you ask the average person, what was the Recovery Act, the stimulus package, they'd say, "the bank bailout." So let me just be clear here: The Recovery Act was cutting taxes for 95 percent of working families -- 15 different tax cuts for working families, seven different tax cuts for small businesses so they can start up and grow and hire. The Recovery Act was extending and increasing unemployment insurance and making COBRA available at a cheaper rate for people who had lost their jobs so they could keep their health care.

We gave aid directly to states to help them through tough times. Ted can testify the help that it provided to the Ohio budget so we wouldn't have to lay off teachers and firefighters and police officers all across this state. And we made the largest investment in infrastructure since the creation of the Interstate Highway System, putting Americans to work rebuilding our roads, bridges, waterways -- doing the work that America needs to be done.

Now, today, because we took those actions, the worst of this economic storm has passed. But families like yours and communities like this one are still reeling from the devastation it left in its wake. At one of the companies, at EMC, where I went today -- wonderful company, passed on through generations -- they have hung on with their precision manufacturing, high value added. They can do things that can't be shipped off to China because they're so attuned to their customers' needs. But they had 77 employees; now they've got 44. They want to start hiring back, but it's going to take a little time. The good news is they're starting to see orders pick up just a little bit.

But it's tough. Folks have seen jobs you thought would last forever disappear. You've seen plants close and businesses shut down. I've heard about how the city government here is starting to cut into bone, not just fat. You can't get to work or go buy groceries like you used to because of cuts in the county transit system.

And this all comes after one of the toughest decades our middle class has faced in generations. I mean, think about what's happened over the last 10 years, even before the crisis hit. This is a decade where some folks made tons of money, but so many others were just pedaling faster and faster, but they were stuck in the same place, sometimes slipping behind. The average wage, the average income over the last decade actually flat-lined; in some cases went down. That was before the crisis.

So, for many of you, even as you found your paychecks shrinking, even as after the crisis you found the value of your biggest asset, your home, falling, the cost of everything else has gone up: the cost of groceries, the cost of sending your kids to college, costs of retirement. And you've also faced the breakneck, unrelenting climb of costs for your health care needs.

Now, here's the message I want you to take away -- and we're going to have a lot of time for questions, but I want to make this absolutely clear. I did not run for President to turn away from these challenges. I didn't run to kick these challenges down the road. I ran for President to confront them -- once and for all.

I ran for this office to rebuild our economy so it works not just for the fortunate few, but for everybody who's willing to work hard in this country to create good jobs that can support a family; to get wages growing and incomes rising; to improve the quality of America's schools and lift up great community colleges like this one so that people are constantly learning, constantly retraining for the jobs of the 21st century; to make higher education affordable for the children of working families -- and, yes, to deal with the problem of runaway health insurance costs that are breaking family budgets and breaking business budgets and breaking our national budgets.

Now, since this has been in the news a little bit this week, let me say a little something about health care. I had no illusions when I took this on that this was going to be hard. Seven Presidents had tried it, seven Congresses had tried it -- and all of them had failed.

And I had a whole bunch of political advisors telling me this may not be the smartest thing to do. "You've got a lot on your plate: the biggest economic crisis since the Great Depression; two wars. You may not get a lot of cooperation. you're going to have a lot of pushback from the insurance companies and the drug companies. It's complicated. Don't do it."

Now, let me tell you why I did it. I knew that insurance premiums had more than doubled in the past decade. I knew that out-of-pocket expenses had skyrocketed. I knew that millions more people had lost their insurance, and I knew that because of that economic crisis that was only going to get worse. When you lose 7 million jobs, like we lost over the last two years, what do you think happens to those folks' health insurance? What happens when their COBRA runs out?

I took this up because I wanted to ease the burdens on all the families and small businesses that can't afford to pay outrageous rates. And I wanted to protect mothers and fathers and children by being targeted by some of the worst practices of the insurance industry that I had heard time and time again as I traveled through this country.

Now, let me dispel this notion that somehow we were focused on that, and so, as a consequence, not focused on the economy. First of all, all I think about is how we're going to create jobs in this area. All I think about is how do we get banks lending again. I've been doing that the entire year. So have folks like Sherrod and Marcy and Betty. But what I also know is, is that health care is part of the drag on our economy. It's part of the eroding security that middle-class families feel.

So here's the good news: We've gotten pretty far down the road. But I've got to admit, we had a little bit of a buzz saw this week.

Now, I also know that part of the reason is, is that this process was so long and so drawn out -- this is just what happens in Congress. I mean, it's just an ugly process. You're running headlong into special interests, and armies of lobbyists, and partisan politics that's aimed at exploiting fears instead of getting things done. And then you've got ads that are scaring the bejesus out of everybody. And the longer it take, the uglier it looks.

So I understand why people would say, boy, this is -- I'm not so sure about this -- even though they know that what they got isn't working. And I understand why, after the Massachusetts election, people in Washington were all in a tizzy, trying to figure out what this means for health reform, Republicans and Democrats; what does it mean for Obama? Is he weakened? Is he -- oh, how's he going to survive this? That's what they do.

But I want you -- I want you to understand, this is not about me. This is not about me. This is about you. This is not about me; this is about you. I didn't take this up to boost my poll numbers. You know the way to boost your poll numbers is not do anything. That's how you do it. You don't offend anybody. I'd have real high poll numbers. All of Washington would be saying, "What a genius!"

I didn't take this on to score political points. I know there are some folks who think if Obama loses, we win. But you know what? I think that I win when you win. That's how I think about it.

So if I was trying to take the path of least resistance, I would have done something a lot easier. But I'm trying to solve the problems that folks here in Ohio and across this country face every day. And I'm not going to walk away just because it's hard. We are going to keep on working to get this done -- with Democrats, I hope with Republicans -- anybody who's willing to step up. Because I'm not going to watch more people get crushed by costs or denied care they need by insurance company bureaucrats. I'm not going to have insurance companies click their heels and watch their stocks skyrocket because once again there's no control on what they do.

So long as I have some breath in me, so long as I have the privilege of serving as your President, I will not stop fighting for you. I will take my lumps, but I won't stop fighting to bring back jobs here. I won't stop fighting for an economy where hard work is rewarded. I won't stop fighting to make sure there's accountability in our financial system. I'm not going to stop fighting until we have jobs for everybody.

That's why I'm calling on Congress to pass a jobs bill to put more Americans to work building off our Recovery Act; put more Americans back to work rebuilding roads and railways; provide tax breaks to small businesses for hiring people; offer families incentives to make their homes more energy-efficient, saving them money while creating jobs.

That's why we enacted initiatives that are beginning to give rise to a clean energy economy. That's part of what's going on in this community college. If we hadn't done anything with the Recovery Act, talk to the people who are building wind turbines and solar panels. They would have told you their industry was about to collapse because credit had completely frozen. And now you're seeing all across Ohio some of the -- this state has received more funds than just about anybody in order to build on that clean energy economy -- new cutting-edge wind turbines and batteries that are going to be going into energy-efficient cars.

Almost $25 million of our investment went to a plant right here in Elyria that's helping produce the car batteries of the future. That's what we're going to keep on doing for the rest of 2010 and 2011 and 2012, until we've got this country working again.

So long as I'm President, I'll never stop fighting for policies that will help restore home values, to redeem the investment that folks have made. We've seen some of those values return in some places, in some pockets, but it's still tough out there. We're going to have to do more this year to make sure that banks are responsive to folks who are working hard, have been paying their mortgage, but have found themselves in a tough situation.

I'm not going to stop fighting to give our kids the best education possible to take the tens of billions of dollars we pay banks to act as middlemen on student loans and invest that money in students who actually need it. We don't need the middlemen -- cut them out.

I won't stop fighting to give every American a fair shake. That's why the very first bill I signed into law was the Lilly Ledbetter Act to uphold the principle of equal pay for equal work for men and women alike, especially when families need two paychecks to survive.

So long as I'm President, I won't stop fighting to protect you from the kinds of deceptive practices we've seen from some in the financial sector. That's why I signed a Credit Card Bill of Rights into law, to protect you from surprise charges and retroactive rate hikes and other unfair rules. That's why I'm fighting for a tough consumer financial protection agency to protect you against those hidden overdraft fees that can make a single ATM withdrawal cost 30 bucks. That happened to you, didn't it?

I won't stop fighting to open up government. Now, this is hard to do because we don't control every branch. But I can tell you we have put in place the toughest ethics laws and toughest transparency rules of any Administration in history. In history.

By the way, this is the first Administration since the founding of the country where all of you can find out who visits the White House. First time in history. And that's just one example of how we're trying to constantly open the process.

And so long as I'm President, I won't stop fighting to cut waste and abuse in Washington -- to eliminate what we don't need, to pay for what we do; to rein in exploding deficits that we've been accumulating not just last year but for the last 10.

And I'm going to keep on fighting for real, meaningful health insurance reform. We expanded the Children's Health Insurance Program to include four million kids -- we already did that. But we are also going to fight to hold the insurance industry accountable, to bring more stability and security to folks who are in our health care system. And, yes, I want to make sure that people who don't have health care right now can get some. It's shameful that we don't do that.

Now, these are some of the fights we've already had, and I can promise you there will be more fights ahead. I'm not going to win every round. We're having a fight right now because I want to charge Wall Street a modest fee to repay taxpayers in full for saving their skins in a time of need. We want our money back. We want our money back. And we're going to get your money back, every dime -- each and every dime.

But it's going to be a fight. You watch. I guarantee you when we start on financial regulatory reform, trying to change the rules to prevent what has caused so much heartache all across the country, there are people who are going to say, "Why is he meddling in government?" "Why is meddling in the financial industry?" "It's another example of Obama being big government."

No, I just want to have some rules in place so that when these guys make dumb decisions, you don't end up having to foot the bill. That's pretty straightforward. I don't mind having that fight.

You know, I said at the beginning how much it means to me to be able to travel this country, and how much it means for me to be here. And that is true now more than ever, because there's no doubt that it's easy to get a pretty warped view of things in Washington. But then you start talking to the guys working on those machines, creating products all across the country, you go into the diner and you meet folks who are raising their kids and working hard and trying to keep things together, and I'm reminded of the strength and the resilience and the perseverance of the American people. I'm reminded of the fundamental character of the Americans that I'm so privileged to serve.

It's that character that has borne our nation through the roughest of seas, a lot rougher than the ones we're going through right now. That's the character that will carry us through this storm to better days ahead. I am confident of that, because of you. And I'm very grateful for all of you taking the time to be here today.

Thank you. Thank you, everybody. Thank you. Thank you.

All right, this young lady right back here. Yes, you. There should be a microphone -- wait till the mic comes so everybody can hear you. Oh, I'm sorry -- that's okay, I'll call on you next. Well, one of you ask your question.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. It's an honor to be here with you today. I work here in LCCC's financial services office. I am proud to be part of finding pathways for students who attend college. I feel that a college education is a lifeline to the future of our citizens. We greatly appreciate the increase in the Pell Grant, which allowed our neediest students to access a college education. It increased buying power as college costs continue to rise. My question to you is, will your Administration support continued increases to the Pell Grant so that our neediest students have access to higher education?

President Obama: The answer is yes. I want everybody to understand, we made -- and this was the help -- with the help of the members of Congress who are here -- made an enormous investment in higher education, making sure that young people could afford to go to great institutions like this. So we significantly increased the level of each Pell Grant, and we also put more money so that we could have more Pell Grants.

Now, we want to continue to do this. I mentioned during my formal remarks the fact that a lot of banks and financial institutions are still serving as middlemen in the financial aid process, and they take out several billions dollars' worth of profits from that. It turns out that actually it can be administered in such a way where these loans go directly to the students. And if you do that, then you're saving several billion dollars that can then be put back into the system. We want to get that finalized; we want to get that done. That will be an enormous boost.

Now, one thing I have to say, though. Even as we put more money into the Student Loan Program, we are also trying to reach out to university presidents and administrators to figure out how can we reduce the inflation in higher education -- because the fact is, is that the only thing that has gone up faster in cost than health care is -- guess what. Higher education. And the problem is, if we're not thinking about ways to curve the inflation, then even if we put more money in, what that money is buying becomes less and less. And so trying to find creative ways for universities to do more with less is going to be important.

Now, in fairness to universities and colleges, part of the reason they've been having to jack up their costs is they used to get more support from the state. State budgets got into a hole, and then it became harder, and so they had to make it up on the tuition side. Nevertheless, what is also true, though, is just their general costs of operating have gone up in ways that I think we can improve. So we're going to be working on that as well.

All right? Okay, I've got to call a gentleman, then I got to go back to you because you thought that I called you and I feel bad.

All right. This gentleman right here in the tie. Yes, you look sharp.

Question: Mr. President, thank you. It's an honor to stand before you. Thank you. Earlier in your message, you mentioned our transit system. Obviously we do need help and we're in dire need to have some assistance there. But what I didn't hear in anything is your interest in our steel mill. That's a big part of our community and we desperately need help there as well. We just wondered where Washington's stance is on our steel mill. Thank you.

President Obama: Well, I was talking to your mayor about this. Obviously he's a big advocate for manufacturing in the region. I do not have all the details in terms of what's happening at the steel mill at this moment. But what we've done is we've set up an office in the White House just focused on manufacturing -- because it's my view that America's got to make things.

Now, we're not going to make -- I want to be honest. Not all the manufacturing jobs that have gone are going to come back. And if people tell you they are, that's just not true -- because a lot of that has moved to places where the wages are just much lower. And I know that some people say, well, then we should just set up tariffs so that folks can't ship them in. But these days the economy, the global economy is so interconnected that that's just not a practical solution.

The solution is to find -- and I don't Know the details of the steel mill here -- but I know that the ones that have been successful, they do what EMC is doing as well, which is you find what's the high-end market. What's the market that involves a lot of technology, specialization, highly trained workers, quick turnarounds to spec so that the customers really feel like they're getting something special and different -- that's how you compete, because that's something that a steel mill in China or in Brazil can't do. They can't compete with you being on the spot working closely with customers.

So finding ways to develop specialty steels and so forth, that's going to be the key. Our manufacturing office will be working with folks here in town to see what we can do.

All right? Thank you. All right, back to this young lady here.

Question: First I want to start by saying that I am very grateful to be here to meet you in person. I absolutely support you and back you. I feel like Rome wasn't built in a day, and I know that everybody is really impatient, but I know that with time things can be turned around. And I believe that your intentions are really honorable in that.

President Obama: I appreciate it.

Question: I am a single mother of three, and I have two quick issues that are very important to me -- one being that I have a three-year-old, who has just turned three, who got lead poisoning last year and almost died. And I called everyone, including the EPA of Ohio, and I cannot seem to get any response to this.

President Obama: Well, guess what. I guarantee you that somebody from the EPA is going to call you in about -- in about five minutes. Before you sit down, there's going to be a phone call from the EPA.

All joking aside -- and I know you have a second question, but I just want to focus on this -- lead poisoning, a lot of it from lead paint, from older homes all across the country and all across the Midwest is something that we have to be more aggressive on. This is something that I worked on when I was a U.S. senator, when I was a state senator. I'm working on it as President, and I will find out directly from them how they can help not only with your particular situation but what we're doing in this area in terms of lead abatement.

Question: Okay.

President Obama: Okay?

Question: The second thing that I wanted to address to you is the unfair labor laws that they seem to have in some of these industries as far as discrimination and different issues of that nature that don't seem to get addressed from the bigger companies. I have actually worked for Ford -- I'm a full-time student now here at LC, gratefully -- and even when I was working there and I have -- my whole family has actually come up through Ford -- and there's a lot of very unjust situations that come about, but no attorneys will deal with it, no one will talk about it, and it's always pushed under the rug. And I -- I do owe my -- what I have now to Ford because it was what was bread and butter for my family. But at the same time, it's not fair that even at this point my mother still can't retire, she has to continue to suffer.

President Obama: Well, look, let me just say generally, one of the things that my Administration has been able to do over the last year that does not cost money is just enforcing laws that are on the books a little more aggressively, making sure -- I mentioned earlier equal pay for equal work.

We are so past the point where it should be debatable that women get paid the same as men for doing the same job. And it is something that -- especially because there was a -- it was just released I think last week showing that increasingly the wives are making more than the husbands in some circumstances. And whoever is making more, you've got to have two paychecks. So this is not just a "feminist issue" -- you know, sometimes guys say, well, why do I -- why should I care about it? Well, let me tell you something. If your wife is getting paid fairly, that means your family is getting paid fairly. And I want my daughters to be treated the same way as your sons. That's something we shouldn't be arguing about anymore.

All right, gentleman right back here. Yes, it's a guy's turn. Yes, sir.

Question: I'm an inventor, and I hold U.S. patent number 7,397,731.

President Obama: Okay.

Question: And before I ask my question I'd like to make a sales pitch. If you can use my patent in your next election, I think you can raise a ton of money worldwide. You should take a look at it.

President Obama: All right, we'll take a look. All right.

Question: If you can't use it, the government could use it, and I could build a multibillion-dollar business here in Ohio.

President Obama: All right, we'll take a look at your patent. Go ahead, what's your question?

Question: Yes, okay, it has to do with international patent rights. With all this free trade and trade barriers falling, it's really hard for an individual like me with a global-scope patent to file all over the world and get patent protection everywhere, and having to go overseas to fight infringement. So if you're going to drop trade barriers, maybe you can extend my patent rights to the foreign countries.

President Obama: Well, this is a great question, and this is a huge problem. Look, our competitive advantage in the world is going to be people like this who are using their minds to create new products, new services. But that only helps us and helps you build a multibillion-dollar company if somebody can't just steal that idea and suddenly start making it in Indonesia or Malaysia or Bangladesh with very cheap workers.

And one of the problems that we have had is insufficient protection for intellectual property rights. That's true in China; it's true for everything from bootleg DVDs to very sophisticated software. And there's nothing wrong with other people using our technologies. We just want to make sure that it's licensed and you're getting paid.

So I've given instructions to my trade offices -- and we actually highlight this at the highest levels of foreign policy -- that these are issues that have to be addressed because that's part of the reciprocity of making our markets open. And so when I met with President Hu of China, this is a topic that, at dinner, I directly brought up with him. And -- But as you point out, it's got to be sustained, because a lot of times they'll say, yes, yes, yes, but then there's no enforcement on their end.

And one of the things that we're also doing is using our export arm of the U.S. government to help work with medium-sized businesses and small businesses, not just the big multinationals to protect their rights in some of these areas, because we need to boost exports.

Can I just say, we just went through a decade where we were told that it didn't matter, we'll just -- you just keep on importing, buying stuff from other countries, you just take out a home equity loan and max out your credit card, and everything is going to be okay. And it looked, for a lot of people, like, well, the economy seems to be growing -- but it was all built on a house of cards. That's what we now know. And that's why if we're going to have a successful manufacturing sector, we've got to have successful exports.

When I went and took this trip to China, and took this trip to Asia, a lot of people said, "Well, why is he going to Asia? He's traveling overseas too much. He needs to be coming back home and talking about jobs." I'm there because that's where we're going to find those jobs, is by increasing our exports to those countries, the same way they've been doing in our country. If we increased our exports -- our share of exports by just 1 percent, that would mean hundreds of thousands of jobs here in the United States. Five percent -- maybe a million jobs, well-paying jobs. So we're going to have to pry those markets open. Intellectual property is part of that process.

All right, great question.

It's a woman's turn now. You guys just put down your hands. Oh, okay, well, this young lady right in front. We've got a microphone over here. You know, I would give it to you if I could reach, but -- go ahead.

Question: I introduce myself. I'm 83 years old. I know I don't look it.

President Obama: You don't. You don't. You look great.

Question: Thank you. I'm very concerned about Social Security. I think there's a few here who are probably living on that or supplementing that. I understand that Congress has given themselves a raise but has denied us COLA for possibly the next three years. At the time of the H1N1 thing, people over 65 were not given the right to have the shot. For some reason or other this health care crisis was left on our senior backs. What can we do about this?

President Obama: Well, let me address all three of your issues, because you're raising actually three separate issues.

First is how do we make sure that Social Security is sustainable over the long term. Social Security is one of our entitlement programs that for now is stable, but will not be if we don't make some changes. Now, here's the good news. Compared to Medicare, Social Security is actually in reasonably good shape, and with some relatively small adjustments, you can have that solvent for a long time. So Social Security is going to be there. I know a lot of people are concerned about it. Social Security we can fix.

Now, in terms of the COLA, the formula -- COLA stands for Cost of Living Allowance, so it's put in place to make sure that Social Security is keeping up with inflation. Here's the problem. This past year, because of the severity of the recession, we didn't have inflation; we actually had deflation. So prices actually fell last year. As a consequence, technically, seniors were not eligible for a Cost of Living Adjustment, to have it go up because prices did not go up in the aggregate. That doesn't mean that individual folks weren't being pinched by higher heating prices or what have you, but on average prices went down.

Here's what we did. Working with these key members of Congress here, we did vote to provide a $250 one-time payment to seniors, which, when you factored it in, amounted to about 1.8 percent. So it was almost the equivalent of the COLA, even though it wasn't actually the COLA.

So we didn't forget seniors. We never forget seniors because they vote at very high rates. Not to mention you changed our diapers and things. And so we appreciate that.

The third point that you made had to do with the H1N1 virus. The reason that seniors were not prioritized was because, unlike the seasonal flu shot, H1N1 was deadliest in young people and particularly children. And because the virus came up fairly late in the time frame for preparing flu shots, we had a limited number of vaccines, and we had to decide who gets the vaccines first.

Now, by the way, let me just do a little PSA here. Anybody who has not gotten a H1N1 shot, along with their seasonal flu, I would still advise you to get it, because historically there are two waves of this. Particularly make sure your kids have gotten it, because there have been a significantly higher number of children killed under H1 -- who get H1N1 than those who just get the seasonal flu. It's still a small fraction, I don't want to make everybody afraid. But it's just -- it's a little more serious than the normal seasonal flu.

So it's not that seniors were neglected here. What happened was, according to the science, according to the CDC, it was determined that we had to go to the most vulnerable groups the quickest, and that was children, particularly those who had underlying neurological disorders or immunity disorders.

All right? We haven't forgotten about you. And you don't look 83.

Okay. This young man -- he's been standing up quite a long time. There you go.

Question: Mr. President, my name is Jordan Brown. Can you hear me?

President Obama: Yes.

Question: Okay.

President Obama: Go ahead and give him the mic. I don't want to have him fall over there.

Question: Okay. I don't have a question but I do want to know if I would like -- if I can shake your hand.

President Obama: Well, yes, yes, you'll be able to come up here. If somebody lets you through, I'll definitely give you a handshake. All right, who -- I want to make sure -- you know, there's another young man here so I'll call on him.

Question: I'm 29 years old, and I've never had a job in my life. I went to jail when I was younger. It's like hard to get a job as a felon. Is this -- any programs that hire people with felonies like something that -- because it's sad, it's like -- 29 years old, I'm 29.

President Obama: All right. Jerome --

Question: And also I wanted to -- I'm a poet and I wrote a poem for you and I've been dying to put this poem in your hand.

President Obama: Okay. Give me the poem. First of all, it's never too late. It's never too late. One of these gentlemen here will hand this poem to me. There you go. I won't read it from the stage but -- because it's --

Question: I'd appreciate it, later when you get back to the White House.

President Obama: But I will definitely think about it.

Look, I'm proud of the fact that you're bringing this up because there are people who've made mistakes, particularly when they're young, and it is in all of our interests to help them redeem themselves and then get on a straight path. Now, I don't blame employers obviously for being nervous about hiring somebody who has a record. It's natural if they've got a lot of applicants for every single job that that's a question that they'd have in their minds. On the other hand, I think one of the great things about America is we give people second chances.

And so what we've tried to do -- and I want to say, this has been a bipartisan effort -- when I was in the Senate, working with Sam Brownback; my Vice President, Joe Biden -- passing a Second Chance Act that helps to fund programs that help the reintegration of ex-felons.

It's smart for us to do. You know, sometimes people say, well, that's just coddling people. No; you reduce the recidivism rate, they pay taxes, it ends up being smart for taxpayers to do.

I don't know, Jerome, what particular programs may exist in this county, but I promise you I'll find out. And we'll see if we can get you hooked up with one of them. All right?

Okay, right here. Yes. No, no, no. Right here. Yes. Go ahead.

Question: Mr. President, I started a Great Lakes Truck Driving School in 2008 in Lorain County.

President Obama: I'm sorry, what kind of school?

Question: Great Lakes Truck Driving School.

President Obama: Cross driving school? Oh, truck driving school, I'm sorry.

Question: Great Lakes Truck Driving School. Started in 2008. Our first year we trained 287 people and we placed over 70 percent of those people into jobs. At that time there was enough money, through the Workforce Investment Board, to train those people. In the past few months we've had a number of people on a daily basis coming into our school that's unemployed, but there are no training funds for truck driver training. And I want to know why that has changed.

President Obama: Well, the Recovery Act put a huge amount of money into retraining. We are now preparing for next year's budget, and I know that we have actually allocated additional money for retraining.

I don't know specifically what's happening that would cause those dollars to dry up with respect to a truck driving school. Let me see if I can find out. I'll have one of my staff get your card, and maybe we can provide you some information.

Question: Thank you very much.

President Obama: Here's the broader point, though. The story of retraining has become so important. When I went to EMC, the precision tool-making place, there were a group of guys -- and one guy who said I should call him "Jerry the Mechanic." He shakes my hand, and he and his buddy are talking to me. I said, "How long have you been working here?" They said, "Twenty years." And I'd noticed that a lot of the equipment now is all digital and fancy, compared to the old machines on the other side of the building. I said, "Well, did you guys have to get additional training for this?" And they said, "Well, you know what happened was, we used to work in this old plant, and we got laid off. We came here to Lorain Community College and took a six-month, 12-hour-a-day course that completely retrained us, and that's what got us these new jobs, and we've been working for over a decade now at these new jobs."

Now, here's the thing. These guys were -- these guys -- first of all, they weren't plants, as far as I know -- unless the mayor is a lot slicker than I think. But these guys did point out that it was JTPA funds -- job training funds that the federal government and the state and local all work together to make sure that people have access to funds. They also said, though, during that time they were still working eight hours a day because they had found sort of lower-paying jobs just to pay the rent while they were getting retrained. I said, "Okay, so you've been working eight hours and going to class 12 hours?" "Yes." I said, "Well, when do you sleep?" "Well, in between class and taking the shift."

They did this for six months. I tell this story, one, to emphasize how important the college system is in making our workforce prepared for the 21st century. I make the point because, number two, it only works if the government is providing some help for people to finance their educations, their retraining.

But point number three is, even if you've got a great community college, you've got the financing, you've also got to want it. You've also got to want it. Think about these guys -- you work eight hours, you go to class 12 hours, you're working -- you're sleeping in between, doing that for six months. But because they were hungry and they had confidence about their ability to translate their old skills into new skills, they've had steady jobs ever since that allow them to support their families.

Now, that's the partnership between the government, the free market, businesses, individuals -- that's what we're trying to forge. And that's why I get so frustrated when we have these ideological debates in Washington where people start saying how, "Oh, Obama is just trying to perpetrate big government." What big government exactly have we been trying to perpetrate here? We're trying to fund those guys who want to go to truck driving school. We want to make sure that they've got some money to get trained for a job in the private sector.

When we passed the Recovery Act, these aren't all a bunch of government jobs. These are jobs that private contractors contract with the state or the city or the county to build roads and highways, the same way that we built the Interstate Highway System and the Intercontinental Railroad System.

I mean, I understand how people have become mistrustful of government. We don't need big government; we need smart government -- that works and interacts with the private sector to create opportunity for ordinary people. But it can't be this constant ideological argument. People need help. We need to provide them a helping hand. That's what we stand for.

All right. I've got time for only, unfortunately, one more question. I've been having a great time. But it is a man's turn here. All right. Is that you, Joe? Well, this is a ringer. I'm going to talk -- I'll talk to you separately. This is a friend of mine. People will say, ah, he called on a friend of his. I'll talk to you over to the side here.

Go ahead, this gentleman right here.

Question: Thank you for taking my question. Thank you for coming here. I'm a 52-year-old businessman from Akron, Ohio. I want to create 1,200 jobs. I spend $60,000 of my own money to do a due diligence, travel to China with a German-designed turbine, and they're producing it now in China. I have rights to North America, primarily the Great Lakes.

Two things that I'm challenged by -- I'm having a very difficult time raising money. I'm not asking for a handout. All I'm asking is loan me the money; I'll account for it, every dollar, I'll pay it back.

Secondly -- and I'm willing to risk millions -- 99 percent of my net worth. The second thing is that GE has a patent -- and I believe in patents. I listened to this gentleman back here, and I can truly appreciate what he's going through. But in this instance, GE inherited this patent from Enron, and it's created a wall so that they won't let people come in and build turbines in the United States. Now, the patent is going to expire very soon. But now they're calling it a royalty but it's really a gate to keep people out.

Is there any programs -- I've talked to Governor Strickland, I've talked to Sherrod Brown, I've talked to Lee Fisher. This company was identified by the city of Akron and Donald Plusquellic's visionary leadership down in Akron. But I want to bring this to the United States. I want to bring these jobs -- and this not about money for me. This is about creating jobs.

I can feel for that gentleman that wants to work. He should have a right to work. God bless him.

President Obama: Let me respond -- first of all --

Question: Is there any -- is there any federal programs that can help me -- I just want to borrow the money to create this factory and create these jobs.

President Obama: Well, obviously I don't know about the particular situation so I'll just speak generally to it. And if you want to get one of my team your card, then maybe they can follow up with you.

But one of the things that we've done -- or one of the things that we've seen coming out of the financial crisis is that banks are still not lending to small businesses enough. The mayor and I talked about this. The business owners that I talked to will confirm this. And if you ask why -- if you ask the banks why, they'll say, well, it's a combination of, in some cases, demand really is down; businesses don't have as many customers as they used to so revenues are down and -- so they don't want to lend. That's some cases. But in some cases what you've got is very profitable businesses that are ready to go, ready to invest, got a proven track record -- the banks feel as if regulators are looking over their shoulder and discouraging them from lending.

So what I've said to Treasury Secretary Geithner and others is we can't meddle with independent regulators -- their job is to stay apart from politics and make sure the banking system is sound -- but there should be a discussion about whether or not we have seen the pendulum swing too far, where it used to be they'd just lend anybody anything; then they lost all this money and now they won't lend people with good credit anything. That is not good for the economy.

So what we've tried to do is to fill some of these gaps in the meantime. For example, our small business lending through the SBA has actually gone up 70 percent. And we've been waiving fees, increasing guarantees, and what we're trying to do is streamline the process for SBA loans because right now there's just too much paperwork. It's typical government not having caught up with the 21st century. And you can't have a 50-pound application form. People just -- after a while, it's not worth it, in some cases. So we're trying to do all those things.

Now, with respect to patents, again, I don't know the particular situation. I will say this. It's important that we protect internationally intellectual property. It is also important though that we have a patent system that encourages innovation but doesn't just lock in big monopolies that prevent new people from bringing new products into the system.

The worst offender of this problem is actually the drug companies, because they will try to lock in their patents for as long as they can to prevent generics from coming onto the market, and that costs customers billions of dollars. And sometimes the drug company will redesign it so it's a caplet instead of a pill, and then try to get a new patent, to get another seven or nine or 10 years of coverage. That is something that we've got to change. I don't know whether that applies to your particular situation, but we have to have a patent system that doesn't prevent competition. We want a patent system that encourages innovation.

Now, I'm out of time, but I want to say one last thing. First of all, because there's been so much attention focused on this health care issue this week, I just want to emphasize not the myths but the reality of what is trying to -- that both the House and the Senate bill were trying to accomplish, because it's actually very simple. There are a bunch of provisions in it, but it's pretty simple.

Number one, for those of you who have health insurance, we are trying to get in place reforms that make sure you are getting your money's worth for the insurance that you pay for. That means, for example, that they can't impose a lifetime cap where if you really get sick and suddenly there's some fine print in there that says you're not completely covered. We're trying to make sure that there is a cap on out-of-pocket expenses so that you don't find out, when you read the fine print, that you've got to pay a huge amount that you thought you were covered for. We're trying to make sure that if you've got a preexisting condition, you can actually still get health insurance, because a lot of people have been banned from getting health insurance because of a preexisting condition.

One of the provisions -- one of the reforms we want is to make sure that your 26- or 27-year-old could, up until that age, could stay on your insurance, so that once they get out of high school and college, they can stay on their parents' insurance for a few years until they've got a more stable job.

So you've got all these insurance reforms that we're trying to get passed. Now, some people ask, well, why don't you just pass that and forget everything else? Here's the problem. Let's just take the example of preexisting conditions. We can't prohibit insurance companies from preventing people with preexisting conditions getting insurance unless everybody essentially has insurance. And the reason for that is otherwise what would happen is people would just -- just wouldn't get insurance until they were sick and then they'd go and buy insurance and they couldn't be prohibited. And that would drive everybody else's premiums up.

So a lot of these insurance reforms are connected to some other things we have to do to make sure that everybody has some access to coverage. All right?

So the second thing we've been trying to do is to make sure that we're setting up an exchange, which is just a big pool so that people who are individuals, who are self employed, who are small business owners, they can essentially join a big pool of millions of people all across the country, which means that when you go to negotiate with your insurance company you've got the purchasing power of a Ford or a GM or Wal-Mart or a Xerox or the federal employees. That's why federal employees have good insurance, and county employees and state employees have good insurance, in part is because they're part of this big pool.

And our attitude is, can we make sure that everybody is part of a big pool to drive down costs. That's the second thing we're trying to do.

Third thing we're trying to do is to try to reduce costs overall because the system -- how many of you, you go into the doctor's office, you fill out a form, you get a checkup, you go fill out another form, somebody else asks you for the form you just filled out. Then the doctor fills out a form, you got to take it to the pharmacist. The pharmacist can't read the doctor's -- this is the only industry in the country that still does that, that still operates on paper systems, that still orders all kinds of unnecessary tests.

Because a lot of times, I walk in the doctor, I just do what I'm told -- I don't know what he's doing. I don't know whether this test was necessary or whether we could have had the test that I took six months ago e-mailed to the doctor so I wouldn't have to take another test and pay for another test. Right? So there are all these methods of trying to reduce costs. And that's what we've been trying to institute.

Now, I just want to say, as I said in my opening remarks, the process has been less than pretty. When you deal with 535 members of Congress, it's going to be a somewhat ugly process -- not necessarily because any individual member of Congress is trying to do something wrong, it's just they may have different ideas, they have different interests, they've got a particular issue of a hospital in their district that they want to see if they can kind of get dealt with and this may be the best vehicle for doing it. They're looking out for their constituents a lot of times.

But when you put it all together, it starts looking like just this monstrosity. And it makes people fearful. And it makes people afraid. And they start thinking, you know what, this looks like something that is going to cost me tax dollars and I already have insurance so why should I support this.

So I just want to be clear that there are things that have to get done. This is our best chance to do it. We can't keep on putting this off. Even if you've got health insurance right now, look at what's happening with your premiums and look at the trend. It is going to gobble up more and more of your paycheck. Ask a chunk of you folks in here who have seen your employers say you've got to pick up more of your payments in terms of higher deductibles or higher copayments. Some of you, your employers just said, we can't afford health insurance at all. That's going to happen to more and more people.

You asked about Social Security. Let me talk about Medicare. Medicare will be broke in eight years if we do nothing. Right now we give -- we give about $17 billion in subsidies to insurance companies through the Medicare system -- your tax dollars. But when we tried to eliminate them, suddenly there were ads on TV -- "Oh, Obama is trying to cut Medicare." I get all these seniors writing letters: "Why are you trying to cut my Medicare benefits?" I'm not trying to cut your Medicare benefits. I'm trying to stop paying these insurance companies all this money so I can give you a more stable program.

The point is this: None of the big issues that we face in this country are simple. Everybody wants to act like they're simple. Everybody wants to say that they can be done easily. But they're complicated. They're tough. The health care system is a big, complicated system, and doing it right is hard.

Energy. If we want to be energy independent -- I'm for more oil production. I am for -- I am for new forms of energy. I'm for a safe nuclear industry. I'm not ideological about this. But we also have to acknowledge that if we're going to actually have a energy-independent economy, that we've got to make some changes. We can't just keep on doing business the same way. And that's going to be a big, complicated discussion.

We can't shy away from it, though. We can't sort of start suddenly saying to ourselves, America or Congress can't do big things; that we should only do the things that are non-controversial; we should only do the stuff that's safe. Because if that's what happens, then we're not going to meet the challenges of the 21st century. And that's not who we are. That's not how we used to operate, and that's not how I intend us to operate going forward.

We are going to take these big things on, and I'm going to do it, and you're going to do it, because you know that we want to leave a better America for our children and our grandchildren. And that doesn't mean standing still; that means marching forward.

I want to march forward with you. I want to work with you. I want to fight for you. I hope you're willing to stand by me, even during these tough times, because I believe in a brighter future for America.

Thank you, everybody. God bless you.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Honoring 65th Anniversary of Auschwitz and Birkenau Liberation

Good morning. And thank you to everyone who worked to bring us to this day, especially the International Auschwitz Council and the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.

To President Kacynski, Prime Minister Tusk, and to the people of Poland: Thank you for preserving a place of such great pain for the Polish people, but a place of remembrance and learning for the world.

Although I can’t be with you in person, I am proud that the United States is represented there today by a delegation of distinguished Americans, including Ambassador Feinstein; my wife Michelle’s chief of staff, Susan Sher; and my good friend, and the son of Holocaust survivors, Julius Genachowski.

And let me commend you for recognizing a woman who has devoted her life to preserving the lessons of the shoah for future generations -- Sara Bloomfield of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington.

But most of all, I want to thank those of you who found the strength to come back again, so many years later, despite the horror you saw here, the suffering you endured here, and the loved ones you lost here. Those of us who did not live through those dark days will never truly understand what it means to have hate literally etched into your arms. But we understand the message that you carry in your hearts.

For you know the truth that Elie Wiesel spoke when I stood with him at Buchenwald last spring. There, where his father and so many innocent souls left this earth, Elie said: "...memory has become [a] sacred duty of all people of goodwill.”

We have a sacred duty to remember the twisted thinking that led here -- how a great society of culture and science succumbed to the worst instincts of man and rationalized mass murder and one of the most barbaric acts in history.

We have a sacred duty to remember the cruelty that occurred here, as told in the simple objects that speak to us even now: the suitcases that still bear their names; the wooden clogs they wore; the round bowls from which they ate; those brick buildings from which there was no escape -- where so many Jews died with Sh’ma Israel on their lips; and the very earth at Auschwitz, which is still hallowed by their ashes -- Jews and those who tried to save them, Polish and Hungarian, French and Dutch, Roma and Russian, straight and gay, and so many others.

But even as we recall man’s capacity for evil, Auschwitz also tells another story -- of man’s capacity for good: the small acts of compassion -- the sharing of some bread that kept a child alive; the great acts of resistance that blew up the crematorium and tried to stop the slaughter; the Polish Rescuers; and those who earned their place forever in the Righteous Among the Nations.

And you: the survivors.

The perpetrators of that crime tried to annihilate the entire Jewish people. But they failed. Because 65 years ago today, when the gates flew open, you were still standing. And every day that you have lived, every child and grandchild that your families have brought into the world with love, every day the sun rises on the Jewish state of Israel -- that is the ultimate rebuke to the ignorance and hatred of this place.

So to those of you who have come back today, I say, no, you are not “former prisoners.” You are living memorials: living memorials to the loved ones you left here, and to the spirit we must strive to uphold in our time -- not simply to bear witness, but to bear a burden -- the burden of seeing our common humanity; of resisting anti-Semitism and ignorance in all its forms; of refusing to become bystanders to evil, whenever and wherever it rears its ugly face.

Let that be the true meaning of Auschwitz. Let that be the liberation we celebrate today -- a liberation of the spirit that, if embraced, can lead us all -- individuals and as nations -- to be among the righteous.

May God bless you all, and may God bless the memory of all those who rest here.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# First Presidential State of the Union Address

Madame Speaker, Vice President Biden, Members of Congress, distinguished guests, and fellow Americans:

Our Constitution declares that from time to time, the President shall give to Congress information about the state of our union. For two hundred and twenty years, our leaders [have] fulfilled this duty. They've done so during periods of prosperity and tranquility. And they've done so in the midst of war and depression -- at moments of great strife and great struggle.

It's tempting to look back on these moments and assume that our progress was inevitable -- that America was always destined to succeed. But when the Union was turned back at Bull Run and the Allies first landed at Omaha Beach, victory was very much in doubt. When the market crashed on Black Tuesday and civil rights marchers were beaten on Bloody Sunday, the future was anything but certain. These were the times that tested the courage of our convictions, and the strength of our union. And despite all our divisions and disagreements, our hesitations and our fears, America prevailed because we chose to move forward as one nation, and one people.

Again, we are tested. And again, we must answer history's call.

One year ago, I took office amid two wars, an economy rocked by a severe recession, a financial system on the verge of collapse, and a government deeply in debt. Experts from across the political spectrum warned that if we did not act, we might face a second depression. So we acted -- immediately and aggressively. And one year later, the worst of the storm has passed.

But the devastation remains. One in ten Americans still cannot find work. Many businesses have shuttered. Home values have declined. Small towns and rural communities have been hit especially hard. And for those who had already known poverty, life's become that much harder.

And this recession has also compounded the burdens that America's families have been dealing with for decades: the burden of working harder and longer for less, of being unable to save enough to retire, or help kids with college.

So I know the anxieties that are out there right now. They're not new. These struggles are the reason I ran for President. These struggles are what I've witnessed for years in places like Elkhart, Indiana; Galesburg, Illinois. I hear about them in the letters that I read each night. The toughest to read are those written by children, asking why they have to move from their home, asking or when their mom or dad will be able to go back to work.

For these Americans and so many others, change has not come fast enough. Some are frustrated; some are angry. They don't understand why it seems like bad behavior on Wall Street is rewarded but hard work on Main Street isn't; or why Washington has been unable or unwilling to solve any of our problems. They're tired of the partisanship and the shouting and the pettiness. They know we can't afford it. Not now.

So we face big and difficult challenges. And what the American people hope -- what they deserve -- is for all of us, Democrats and Republicans, to work through our differences; to overcome the numbing weight of our politics. For while the people who sent us here have different backgrounds, different stories, different beliefs, the anxieties they face are the same. The aspirations they hold are shared: a job that pays the bills; a chance to get ahead. Most of all, the ability to give their children a better life.

And you know what else they share? They share a stubborn resilience in the face of adversity. After one of the most difficult years in our history, they remain busy building cars and teaching kids, starting businesses, and going back to school. They're coaching little league and helping their neighbors. One woman wrote to me and said, "We are strained but hopeful, struggling but encouraged."

It's because of this spirit -- this great decency and great strength -- that I have never been more hopeful about America's future than I am tonight.

Despite -- Despite our hardships, our union is strong. We do not give up. We do not quit. We do not allow fear or division to break our spirit. In this new decade, it's time the American people get a government that matches their decency, that embodies their strength. And tonight -- tonight I'd like to talk about how, together, we can deliver on that promise.

It begins with our economy.

Our most urgent -- Our most urgent task upon taking office was to shore up the same banks that helped cause this crisis. It was not easy to do. And if there's one thing that has unified Democrats and Republicans -- and everybody in between -- it's that we all hated the bank bailout. I hated it -- I hated it -- I hated it. You hated it. It was about as popular as a root canal.

But when I ran for President, I promised I wouldn't just do what was popular -- I would do what was necessary. And if we had allowed the meltdown of the financial system, unemployment might be double what it is today. More businesses would certainly have closed. More homes would have surely been lost. So I supported the last Administration's efforts to create the financial rescue program. And when we took the program over, we made it more transparent and more accountable. And as a result, the markets are now stabilized, and we've recovered most of the money we spent on the banks.

Most, but not all. To recover the rest, I've proposed a fee on the biggest banks.

Now -- Now, I know Wall Street isn't keen on this idea, but if these firms can afford to hand out big bonuses again, they can afford a modest fee to pay back the taxpayers who rescued them in their time of need.

Now, as we stabilized the financial system, we also took steps to get our economy growing again, save as many jobs as possible, and help Americans who had become unemployed. That's why we extended or increased unemployment benefits for more than 18 million Americans, made health insurance 65% cheaper for families who get their coverage through COBRA, and passed 25 different tax cuts.

Now, let me repeat: We cut taxes. We cut taxes for 95% of working families. We cut taxes for small businesses. We cut taxes for first-time homebuyers. We cut taxes for parents trying to care for their children. We cut taxes for eight million Americans paying for college. (I thought I'd get some applause on that one.)

As a result -- As a result, millions of Americans had more to spend on gas, and food, and other necessities -- all of which helped businesses keep more workers. And we haven't raised income taxes by a single dime on a single person. Not a single dime.

Now, because of the steps we took, there are about two million Americans working right now who would otherwise be unemployed. 200,000 work in construction and clean energy. 300,000 are teachers and other education workers. Tens of thousands are cops, firefighters, correctional officers, first responders. And we're on track to add another one and a half million jobs to this total by the end of the year.

The plan that has made all of this possible, from the tax cuts to the jobs, is the Recovery Act. That's right: the Recovery Act, also known as the Stimulus Bill. Economists on the left and the right say this bill has helped saved jobs and avert disaster. But you don't have to take their word for it: Talk to the small business in Phoenix that will triple its workforce because of the Recovery Act. Talk to the window manufacturer in Philadelphia who said he used to be skeptical about the Recovery Act, until he had to add two more work shifts just because of the business it created. Talk to the single teacher raising two kids who was told by her principal in the last week of school that because of the Recovery Act, she wouldn't be laid off after all.

There are stories like this all across America. And after two years of recession, the economy is growing again. Retirement funds have started to gain back some of their value. Businesses are beginning to invest again, and slowly [some] are starting to hire again.

But I realize that for every success story, there are other stories -- of men and women who wake up with the anguish of not knowing where their next paycheck will come from; who send out resumes week after week and hear nothing in response. That is why jobs must be our number one focus in 2010. And that's why I'm calling for a new jobs bill tonight!

Now, the true engine of job creation in this country will always be America's businesses. (I agree. Absolutely). But government can create the conditions necessary for businesses to expand and hire more workers. We should start where most new jobs do -- in small businesses, companies that begin when -- companies that begin when an entrepreneur -- when an entrepreneur takes a chance on a dream, or a worker decides its time she became her own boss.

Through sheer grit and determination, these companies have weathered the recession and they're ready to grow. But when you talk to small business owners in places like Allentown, Pennsylvania or Elyria, Ohio, you find out that even though banks on Wall Street are lending again, they're mostly lending to bigger companies. Financing remains difficult for small business owners across the country -- even those that are making a profit.

So tonight, I'm proposing that we take 30 billion dollars of the money Wall Street banks have repaid and use it to help community banks give small businesses the credit they need to stay afloat. I'm also proposing a new small business tax credit -- one that will go to over one million small businesses who hire new workers or raise wages. While we're at it, let's also eliminate all capital gains taxes on small business investment, and provide a tax incentive for all large businesses and all small businesses to invest in new plants and equipment.

Next, we can put Americans to work today building the infrastructure of tomorrow. From -- From the first railroads to the interstate highway system, our nation has always been built to compete. There's no reason Europe or China should have the fastest trains, or the new factories that manufacture clean energy products.

Tomorrow, I'll visit Tampa, Florida, where workers will soon break ground on a new high-speed railroad funded by the Recovery Act. There are projects like that all across this country that will create jobs and help our move our nation's goods, services, and information. We should put more Americans to work building clean energy facilities, and give -- and give rebates to Americans who make their homes more energy efficient, which supports clean energy jobs. And to encourage these and other businesses to stay within our borders, it is time to finally slash the tax breaks for companies that ship our jobs overseas and give those tax breaks to companies that create jobs right here in the United States of America.

Now, the House has passed a jobs bill that includes some of these steps. As the first order of business this year, I urge the Senate to do the same -- and I know they will. They will. People are out of work. They're hurting. And they need our help. And I want a jobs bill on my desk without delay.

But -- But the truth is, these steps still won't make up for the seven million jobs that we've lost over the last two years. The only way to move to full employment is to lay a new foundation for long-term economic growth, and finally address the problems that America's families have confronted for years.

We can't afford another so-called economic "expansion" like the one from the last decade -- what some call the "lost decade" -- where jobs grew more slowly than during any prior expansion; where the income of the average American household declined while the cost of health care and tuition reached record highs; where prosperity was built on a housing bubble and financial speculation.

From the day I took office, I've been told that addressing our larger challenges is too ambitious. Such an effort would be too contentious. I've been told that our political system is too gridlocked, and that we should just put things on hold for awhile. For those who make these claims, I have one simple question: How long should we wait? How long should America put its future on hold?

You see -- You see, Washington has been telling us to wait for decades, even as the problems have grown worse. Meanwhile, China's not waiting to revamp its economy. Germany's not waiting. India's not waiting. These nations are -- they're not standing still. These nations aren't playing for second place. They're putting more emphasis on math and science. They're rebuilding their infrastructure. They're making serious investments in clean energy because they want those jobs.

Well, I do not accept second-place for the United States of America.

As hard as it may be, as uncomfortable and contentious as the debates may become, it's time to get serious about fixing the problems that are hampering our growth. Now, one place to start is serious financial reform. Look, I am not interested in punishing banks. I'm interested in protecting our economy. A strong, healthy financial market makes it possible for businesses to access credit and create new jobs. It channels the savings of families into investments that raise incomes. But that can only happen if we guard against the same recklessness that nearly brought down our entire economy.

We need to make sure consumers and middle-class families have the information they need to make financial decisions. We can't allow financial institutions, including those that take your deposits, to take risks that threaten the whole economy. Now, the House has already passed financial reform with many of these changes. And -- And the lobbyists are trying to kill it. Well, we cannot let them win this fight. And if the bill that ends up on my desk does not meet the test of real reform, I will send it back until we get it right. We've got to get it right.

Next, we need to encourage American innovation. Last year, we made the largest investment in basic research funding in history, an investment -- an investment that could lead to the world's cheapest solar cells or treatment that kills cancer cells but leaves healthy ones untouched. And no area is more ripe for such innovation than energy. You can see the results of last year's investment in clean energy in the North Carolina company that will create 1200 jobs nationwide helping to make advanced batteries, or, in the California business that will put a thousand people to work making solar panels.

But to create more of these clean energy jobs, we need more production, more efficiency, more incentives. And that means building a new generation of safe, clean nuclear power plants in this country. It means making tough decisions about opening new offshore areas for oil and gas development. It means continued investment in advanced biofuels and clean coal technologies. And yes, it means passing a comprehensive energy and climate bill with incentives that will finally make clean energy the profitable kind of energy in America.

I am grateful to the House for passing such a bill last year. And this year -- this year, I am eager to help advance the bipartisan effort in the Senate. I know there have been questions about whether we can afford such changes in a tough economy. I know that there are those who disagree with the overwhelming scientific evidence on climate change. But -- But -- Here -- Here's the thing: Even if you doubt the evidence, providing incentives for energy efficiency and clean energy are the right thing to do for our future because the nation that leads the clean energy economy will be the nation that leads the global economy. And America must be that nation.

Third, we need to export more of our goods -- because the more products we make and sell to other countries, the more jobs we support right here in America. So -- So tonight, we set a new goal: We will double our exports over the next five years, an increase that will support two million jobs in America. To help meet this goal, we're launching a National Export Initiative that will help farmers and small businesses increase their exports, and reform export controls consistent with national security.

We have to seek new markets aggressively, just as our competitors are. If America sits on the sidelines while other nations sign trade deals, we will lose the chance to create jobs on our shores. But realizing those benefits also means enforcing those agreements so our trading partners play by the rules. And that's why we'll continue to shape a Doha trade agreement that opens global markets, and why we will strengthen our trade relations in Asia and with key partners like South Korea and Panama and Colombia.

Fourth, we need to invest in the skills and education of our people.

Now, this year -- this year we've broken through the stalemate between left and right by launching a national competition to improve our schools. And the idea here is simple: instead of rewarding failure, we only reward success. Instead of funding the status quo, we only invest in reform -- reform that raises student achievement, inspires students to excel in math and science, and turns around failing schools that steal the future of too many young Americans, from rural communities to the inner city. In the 21st century, the best anti-poverty program around is a world-class education. And in this country, the success of our children cannot depend more on where they live than on their potential.

When we renew the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, we will work with Congress to expand these reforms to all 50 states. Still, in this economy, a high school diploma no longer guarantees a good job. That's why I urge the Senate to follow the House and pass a bill that will revitalize our community colleges, which are a career pathway to the children of so many working families.

To make college more affordable, this bill will finally end the unwarranted taxpayer subsidies that go to banks for student loans. Instead, let's take that money and give families a 10,000 dollar tax credit for four years of college and increase Pell Grants. And let's tell another one million students that when they graduate, they will be required to pay only 10 percent of their income on student loans, and all of their debt will be forgiven after 20 years -- and forgiven after 10 years if they choose a career in public service, because in the United States of America, no one should go broke because they chose to go to college.

And by the way, it's time for colleges and universities to get serious about cutting their own costs -- because they, too, have a responsibility to help solve this problem.

Now, the price of college tuition is just one of the burdens facing the middle-class. That's why last year I asked Vice President Biden to chair a task force on Middle-Class Families. That's why we're nearly doubling the child care tax credit, and making it easier to save for retirement by giving access to every worker a retirement account and expanding the tax credit for those who start a nest egg. That's why we're working to lift the value of a family's single largest investment -- their home. The steps we took last year to shore up the housing market have allowed millions of Americans to take out new loans and save an average of 1500 dollars on mortgage payments. This year, we will step up re-financing so that homeowners can move into more affordable mortgages. And -- And it is precisely to relieve the burden on middle-class families that we still need health insurance reform. Yes, we do.

Now, let's clear a few things up. I didn't choose to tackle this issue to get some legislative victory under my belt. And by now it should be fairly obvious that I didn't take on health care because it was good politics. I took on health care because [of] the stories I've heard from Americans with preexisting conditions whose lives depend on getting coverage; patients who've been denied coverage; families -- even those with insurance -- who are just one illness away from financial ruin.

After nearly a century of trying -- Democratic Administrations, Republican Administrations -- we are closer than ever to bringing more security to the lives of so many Americans. The approach we've taken would protect every American from the worst practices of the insurance industry. It would give small businesses and uninsured Americans a chance to choose an affordable health care plan in a competitive market. It would require every insurance plan to cover preventive care. And by the way, I want to acknowledge our First Lady, Michelle Obama, who this year is creating a national movement to tackle the epidemic of childhood obesity and make kids healthier. Thank you. She gets embarrassed.

Our approach would preserve the right of Americans who have insurance to keep their doctor and their plan. It would reduce costs and premiums for millions of families and businesses. And according to the Congressional Budget Office -- the independent organization that both parties have cited as the official scorekeeper for Congress -- our approach would bring down the deficit by as much as one trillion dollars over the next two decades.

Still, this is a complexed issue, and the longer it was debated, the more skeptical people became. I take my share of the blame for not explaining it more clearly to the American people. And I know that with all the lobbying and horse-trading, the process left most Americans wondering, "What's in it for me?" But I also know this problem is not going away. By the time I'm finished speaking tonight, more Americans will have lost their health insurance. Millions will lose it this year. Our deficit will grow. Premiums will go up. Patients will be denied the care they need. Small business owners will continue to drop coverage altogether. I will not walk away from these Americans, and neither should the people in this chamber.

So, as temperatures cool, I want everyone to take another look at the plan we've proposed. There's a reason why many doctors, nurses, and health care experts who know our system best consider this approach a vast improvement over the status quo. But if anyone from either party has a better approach that will bring down premiums, bring down the deficit, cover the uninsured, strengthen Medicare for seniors, and stop insurance company abuses, let me know. Let me know. Let me know. I'm eager to see it.

Here's what I ask Congress, though: Don't walk away from reform. Not now. Not when we are so close. Let us find a way to come together and finish the job for the American people. Let's get it done. Let's get it done.

Now, even as health care reform would reduce our deficit, it's not enough to dig us out of a massive fiscal hole in which we find ourselves. It's a challenge that makes all others that much harder to solve, and one that's been subject to a lot of political posturing. So let me start the discussion of government spending by setting the record straight.

At the beginning of the last decade, the year 2000, America had a budget surplus of over 200 billion dollars. By -- By the time I took office, we had a one-year deficit of over one trillion dollars and projected deficits of eight trillion dollars over the next decade. Most of this was the result of not paying for two wars, two tax cuts, and an expensive prescription drug program. On top of that, the effects of the recession put a three trillion dollar hole in our budget. All this was before I walked in the door.

Now -- Now -- just stating the facts. Now, if we had taken office in ordinary times, I would have liked nothing more than to start bringing down the deficit. But we took office amid a crisis. And our efforts to prevent a second depression have added another one trillion dollars to our national debt. That, too, is a fact.

I'm absolutely convinced that was the right thing to do. But families across the country are tightening their belts and making tough decisions. The federal government should do the same. So tonight, I'm proposing specific steps to pay for the trillion dollars that it took to rescue the economy last year. Starting in 2011, we are prepared to freeze government spending for three years. Spending related to our national security, Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security will not be affected. But all other discretionary government programs will. Like any cash-strapped family, we will work within a budget to invest in what we need and sacrifice what we don't. And if I have to enforce this discipline by veto, I will.

We will continue to go through the budget, line by line, page by page, to eliminate programs that we can't afford and don't work. We've already identified 20 billion dollars in savings for next year. To help working families, we'll extend our middle-class tax cuts. But at a time of record deficits, we will not continue tax cuts for oil companies, for investment fund managers, and for those making over 250,000 dollars a year. We just can't afford it.

Now, even after paying for what we spent on my watch, we'll still face the massive deficit we had when I took office. More importantly, the cost of Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security will continue to skyrocket. That's why I've called for a bipartisan fiscal commission, modeled on a proposal by Republican Judd Gregg and Democrat Kent Conrad. This can't be one of those Washington gimmicks that lets us pretend we solved a problem. The commission will have to provide a specific set of solutions by a certain deadline.

Now, yesterday the Senate blocked a bill that would have created this commission. So I'll issue an executive order that will allow us to go forward, because I refuse to pass this problem on to another generation of Americans. And when the vote comes tomorrow, the Senate should restore the pay-as-you-go law that was a big reason for why we had record surpluses in the 1990s.

Now, I know that some in my own party will argue that we can't address the deficit or freeze government spending when so many are still hurting. And I agree -- which is why this freeze won't take effect until next year -- when the economy is stronger. That's how budgeting works. But understand -- understand if we don't take meaningful steps to rein in our debt, it could damage our markets, increase the cost of borrowing, and jeopardize our recovery -- all of which would have an even worse effect on our job growth and family incomes.

From some on the right, I expect we'll hear a different argument -- that if we just make fewer investments in our people, extend tax cuts including those for the wealthier Americans, eliminate more regulations, maintain the status quo on health care, our deficits will go away. The problem is that's what we did for eight years. That's what helped us into this crisis. It's what helped lead to these deficits. We can't do it again.

Rather than fight the same tired battles that have dominated Washington for decades, it's time to try something new. Let's invest in our people without leaving them a mountain of debt. Let's meet our responsibility to the citizens who sent us here. Let's try common sense -- a novel concept.

Now, to do that we have to recognize that we face more than a deficit of dollars right now. We face a deficit of trust -- deep and corrosive doubts about how Washington works that have been growing for years. To close that credibility gap we have to take action on both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue -- to end the outsized influence of lobbyists; to do our work openly; to give our people the government they deserve.

Now, that's what I came to Washington to do. That's why, for the first time in history, my Administration posts on our White House visitors online. That's why we've excluded lobbyists from policymaking jobs, or seats on federal boards and commissions. But we can't stop there. It's time to require lobbyists to disclose each contact they make on behalf of a client with my Administration or with Congress. It's time to put strict limits on the contributions that lobbyists give to candidates for federal office.

With all due deference to separation of powers, last week the Supreme Court reversed a century of law that I believe will open the floodgates for special interests -- including foreign corporations -- to spend without limit in our elections. I don't think American elections should be bankrolled by America's most powerful interests -- or worse, by foreign entities. They should be decided by the American people. And I'd urge Democrats and Republicans to pass a bill that helps to correct some of these problems.

I'm also calling on Congress to continue down the path of earmark reform -- Democrats and Republicans, Democrats and Republicans. Look...you've trimmed some of this spending; you've embraced some meaningful change. But restoring the public trust demands more. For example, some members of Congress post some earmark requests online. Tonight, I'm calling on Congress to publish all earmark requests on a single Web site before there's a vote, so that the American people can see how their money is being spent.

Of course, none of these reforms will even happen if we don't also reform how we work with one another. Now, I'm not naÃ¯ve. I never thought that the mere fact of my election would usher in peace and harmony, and some post-partisan era. I knew that both parties have fed divisions that are deeply entrenched. And on some issues, there are simply philosophical differences that will always cause us to part ways. These disagreements, about the role of government in our lives, about our national priorities and our national security, they've been taking place for over 200 years. They're the very essence of our democracy.

But what frustrates the American people is a Washington where every day is "Election Day." We can't wage a perpetual campaign where the only goal is to see who can get the most embarrassing headlines about the other side -- a belief that if you lose, I win.1 Neither party should delay or obstruct every single bill just because they can. The confirmation of -- I'm speaking to both parties now -- the confirmation of well-qualified public servants shouldn't be held hostage to the pet projects or grudges of a few individual senators.

Washington may think that saying anything about the other side, no matter how false, no matter how malicious, is just part of the game. But it's precisely such politics that has stopped either party from helping the American people. Worse yet -- Worse yet, it's sowing further division among our citizens, further distrust in our government.

So, no, I will not give up on trying to change the tone of our politics. I know it's an election year. And after last week, it's clear that campaign fever has come even earlier than usual. But we still need to govern.

To Democrats, I would remind you that we still have the largest majority in decades, and the people expect us to solve problems, not run for the hills. And if the Republican leadership is going to insist that -- that 60 votes in the Senate are required to do any business at all in this town -- a supermajority -- then the responsibility to govern is now yours as well. Just saying no to everything may be good short-term politics, but it's not leadership. We were sent here to serve our citizens, not our ambitions. So let's show the American people that we can do it together.

This week -- This week, I'll be meet -- addressing a meeting of the House Republicans. I'd like to begin monthly meetings with both Democratic and Republican leadership. I know you can't wait.

Now, throughout our history, no issue has united this country more than our security. Sadly, some of the unity we felt after 9/11 has dissipated. Now, we can argue all we want about who's to blame for this, but I'm not interested in re-litigating the past. I know that all of us love this country. All of us are committed to its defense. So let's put aside the schoolyard taunts about who is tough. Let's reject the false choice between protecting our people and upholding our values. Let's leave behind the fear and division, and do what it takes to defend our nation and forge a more hopeful future -- for America and for the world.

That's the work we began last year. Since the day I took office, we've renewed our focus on the terrorists who threaten our nation. We've made substantial investments in our homeland security and disrupted plots that threatened to take American lives. We are filling unacceptable gaps revealed by the failed Christmas attack, with better airline security and swifter action on our intelligence. We've prohibited torture and strengthened partnerships from the Pacific to South Asia to the Arabian Peninsula. And in the last year, hundreds of al Qaeda's fighters and affiliates, including many senior leaders, have been captured or killed -- far more than in 2008.

And in Afghanistan, we're increasing our troops and training Afghan security forces so they can begin to take the lead in July of 2011, and our troops can begin to come home. We will reward good governance, work to reduce corruption, and support the rights of all Afghans -- men and women alike. We're joined by allies and partners who have increased their own commitments, and who will come together tomorrow in London to reaffirm our common purpose. There will be difficult days ahead. But I am absolutely confident we will succeed.

As we take the fight to al Qaeda, we are responsibly leaving Iraq to its people. As a candidate, I promised that I would end this war, and that is what I am doing as President. We will have all of our combat troops out of Iraq by the end of this August. We will support -- We will support the Iraqi government -- We will support the Iraqi government as they hold elections, and we will continue to partner with the Iraqi people to promote regional peace and prosperity. But make no mistake: This war is ending, and all of our troops are coming home.

Tonight, all of our men and women in uniform -- in Iraq, in Afghanistan, and around the world -- they have to know that we -- that...they have our respect, our gratitude, our full support. And just as they must have the resources they need in war, we all have a responsibility to support them when they come home. That's why we made the largest increase in investments for veterans in decades last year. That's why we're building a 21st century VA. And that's why Michelle has joined with Jill Biden to forge a national commitment to support military families.

Now, even as we prosecute two wars, we're also confronting perhaps the greatest danger to the American people -- the threat of nuclear weapons. I've embraced the vision of John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan through a strategy that reverses the spread of these weapons and seeks a world without them. To reduce our stockpiles and launchers, while ensuring our deterrent, the United States and Russia are completing negotiations on the farthest-reachings arms control treaty in nearly two decades. And at April's Nuclear Security Summit, we will bring 44 nations together here in Washington, D.C. behind a clear goal: securing all vulnerable nuclear materials around the world in four years, so that they never fall into the hands of terrorists.

Now, these diplomatic efforts have also strengthened our hand in dealing with those nations that insist on violating international agreements in pursuit of nuclear weapons. That's why North Korea now faces increased isolation and stronger sanctions -- sanctions that are being vigorously enforced. That's why the international community is more united and the Islamic Republic of Iran is more isolated. And as Iran's leaders continue to ignore their obligations, there should be no doubt: They, too, will face growing consequences. That is a promise.

That's the leadership that we are providing -- engagement that advances the common security and prosperity of all people. We're working through the G20 to sustain a lasting global recovery. We're working with Muslim communities around the world to promote science and education and innovation. We have gone from a bystander to a leader in the fight against climate change. We're helping developing countries to feed themselves, and continuing the fight against HIV/AIDS. And we are launching a new initiative that will give us the capacity to respond faster and more effectively to bioterrorism or an infectious disease -- a plan that will counter threats at home and strengthen public health abroad.

As we have for over 60 years, America takes these actions because our destiny is connected to those beyond our shores. But we also do it because it is right. That's why, as we meet here tonight, over 10,000 Americans are working with many nations to help the people of Haiti recover and rebuild. That's why we stand with the girl who yearns to go to school in Afghanistan; why we support the human rights of the women marching through the streets of Iran; why we advocate for the young man denied a job by corruption in Guinea. For America must always stand on the side of freedom and human dignity. Always.

Abroad, America's greatest source of strength has always been our ideals. The same is true at home. We find unity in our incredible diversity, drawing on the promise enshrined in our Constitution: the notion that we're all created equal; that no matter who you are or what you look like, if you abide by the law you should be protected by it; if you adhere to our common values you should be treated no different than anyone else.

We must continually renew this promise. My Administration has a Civil Rights Division that is once again prosecuting civil rights violations and employment discrimination. We finally strengthened -- We finally strengthened our laws to protect against crimes driven by hate. This year -- This year, I will work with Congress and our military to finally repeal the law that denies gay Americans the right to serve the country they love because of who they are. It's the right thing to do.

We're going to crack down on violations of equal pay laws so that women get equal pay for an equal day's work. And we should continue the work of fixing our broken immigration system -- to secure our borders and enforce our laws, and ensure that everyone who plays by the rules can contribute to our economy and enrich our nations.

In the end, it's our ideals, our values that built America -- values that allowed us to forge a nation made up of immigrants from every corner of the globe; values that drive our citizens still. Every day, Americans meet their responsibilities to their families and their employers. Time and again, they lend a hand to their neighbors and give back to their country. They take pride in their labor, and are generous in spirit. These aren't Republican values or Democratic values that they're living by; business values or labor values. They're American values.

Unfortunately, too many of our citizens have lost faith that our biggest institutions -- our corporations, our media, and, yes, our government -- still reflect these same values. Each of these institutions are full of honorable men and women doing important work that helps our country prosper. But each time a CEO rewards himself for failure, or a banker puts the rest of us at risk for his own selfish gain, people's doubts grow. Each time lobbyists game the system or politicians tear each other down instead of lifting this country up, we lose faith. The more that TV pundits reduce serious debates to silly arguments, big issues into sound bites, our citizens turn away.

No wonder there's so much cynicism out there. No wonder there's so much disappointment.

I campaigned on the promise of change -- "Change we can believe in" -- the slogan went. And right now, I know there are many Americans who aren't sure if they still believe we can change -- or that I can deliver it. But remember this -- I never suggested that change would be easy, or that I could do it alone. Democracy in a nation of 300 million people can be noisy and messy and complicated. And when you try to do big things and make big changes, it stirs passions and controversy. That's just how it is.

Those of us in public office can respond to this reality by playing it safe and avoid telling hard truths and pointing fingers. We can do what's necessary to keep our poll numbers high, and get through the next election instead of doing what's best for the next generation.

But I also know this: If people had made that decision 50 years ago, or 100 years ago, or 200 years ago, we wouldn't be here tonight. The only reason we are here is because generations of Americans were unafraid to do what was hard; to do what was needed even when success was uncertain; to do what it took to keep the dream of this nation alive for their children and their grandchildren.

Our Administration has had some political setbacks this year, and some of them were deserved. But I wake up every day knowing that they are nothing compared to the setbacks that families all across this country have faced this year. And what keeps me going, what keeps me fighting, is that despite all these setbacks, that spirit of determination and optimism, that fundamental decency that has always been at the core of the American people -- that lives on.

It lives on in the struggling small business owner who wrote to me of his company: "None of us," he said, "…are willing to consider, even slightly, that we might fail."

It lives on in the woman who said that even though she and her neighbors have felt the pain of recession, "We are strong. We are resilient. We are American."

It lives on in the 8-year-old boy in Louisiana, who just sent me his allowance and asked if I would give it to the people of Haiti.

And it lives on in all the Americans who've dropped everything to go someplace they've never been and pull people they've never known from the rubble, prompting chants of "U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A!" when another life was saved.

The spirit that has sustained this nation for more than two centuries lives on in you, its people.

We have finished a difficult year. We have come through a difficult decade. But a new year has come. A new decade stretches before us. We don't quit. I don't quit. Let's seize this moment -- to start anew, to carry the dream forward, and to strengthen our union once more.

Thank you. God bless you. And God bless the United States of America.

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# Open Forum at GOP House Issues Conference

Thank you, John, for the gracious introduction. To Mike and Eric, thank you for hosting me. Thank you to all of you for receiving me. It is wonderful to be here. I want to also acknowledge Mark Strand, president of the Congressional Institute. To all the family members who are here and who have to put up with us for an elective office each and every day, thank you, because I know that's tough.

I very much am appreciative of not only the tone of your introduction, John, but also the invitation that you extended to me. You know what they say, "Keep your friends close, but visit the Republican Caucus every few months."

Part of the reason I accepted your invitation to come here was because I wanted to speak with all of you, and not just to all of you. So I'm looking forward to taking your questions and having a real conversation in a few moments. And I hope that the conversation we begin here doesn't end here; that we can continue our dialogue in the days ahead. It's important to me that we do so. It's important to you, I think, that we do so. But most importantly, it's important to the American people that we do so.

I've said this before, but I'm a big believer not just in the value of a loyal opposition, but in its necessity. Having differences of opinion, having a real debate about matters of domestic policy and national security -- and that's not something that's only good for our country, it's absolutely essential. It's only through the process of disagreement and debate that bad ideas get tossed out and good ideas get refined and made better. And that kind of vigorous back and forth -- that imperfect but well-founded process, messy as it often is -- is at the heart of our democracy. That's what makes us the greatest nation in the world.

So, yes, I want you to challenge my ideas, and I guarantee you that after reading this I may challenge a few of yours. I want you to stand up for your beliefs, and knowing this caucus, I have no doubt that you will. I want us to have a constructive debate. The only thing I don't want -- and here I am listening to the American people, and I think they don't want either -- is for Washington to continue being so Washington-like. I know folks, when we're in town there, spend a lot of time reading the polls and looking at focus groups and interpreting which party has the upper hand in November and in 2012 and so on and so on and so on. That's their obsession.

And I'm not a pundit. I'm just a President, so take it for what it's worth. But I don't believe that the American people want us to focus on our job security. They want us to focus on their job security. I don't think they want more gridlock. I don't think they want more partisanship. I don't think they want more obstruction. They didn't send us to Washington to fight each other in some sort of political steel-cage match to see who comes out alive. That's not what they want. They sent us to Washington to work together, to get things done, and to solve the problems that they're grappling with every single day.

And I think your constituents would want to know that despite the fact it doesn't get a lot of attention, you and I have actually worked together on a number of occasions. There have been times where we've acted in a bipartisan fashion. And I want to thank you and your Democratic colleagues for reaching across the aisle. There has been, for example, broad support for putting in the troops necessary in Afghanistan to deny al Qaeda safe haven, to break the Taliban's momentum, and to train Afghan security forces. There's been broad support for disrupting, dismantling, and defeating al Qaeda. And I know that we're all united in our admiration of our troops.

So it may be useful for the international audience right now to understand -- and certainly for our enemies to have no doubt -- whatever divisions and differences may exist in Washington, the United States of America stands as one to defend our country.

It's that same spirit of bipartisanship that made it possible for me to sign a defense contracting reform bill that was cosponsored by Senator McCain and members of Congress here today. We've stood together on behalf of our nation's veterans. Together we passed the largest increase in the VA's budget in more than 30 years and supported essential veterans' health care reforms to provide better access and medical care for those who serve in uniform.

Some of you also joined Democrats in supporting a Credit Card Bill of Rights and in extending unemployment compensation to Americans who are out of work. Some of you joined us in stopping tobacco companies from targeting kids, expanding opportunities for young people to serve our country, and helping responsible homeowners stay in their homes.

So we have a track record of working together. It is possible. But, as John, you mentioned, on some very big things, we've seen party-line votes that, I'm just going to be honest, were disappointing. Let's start with our efforts to jumpstart the economy last winter, when we were losing 700,000 jobs a month. Our financial system teetered on the brink of collapse and the threat of a second Great Depression loomed large. I didn't understand then, and I still don't understand, why we got opposition in this caucus for almost $300 billion in badly needed tax cuts for the American people, or COBRA coverage to help Americans who've lost jobs in this recession to keep the health insurance that they desperately needed, or opposition to putting Americans to work laying broadband and rebuilding roads and bridges and breaking ground on new construction projects.

There was an interesting headline in CNN today: "Americans disapprove of stimulus, but like every policy in it." And there was a poll that showed that if you broke it down into its component parts, 80 percent approved of the tax cuts, 80 percent approved of the infrastructure, 80 percent approved of the assistance to the unemployed.

Well, that's what the Recovery Act was. And let's face it, some of you have been at the ribbon-cuttings for some of these important projects in your communities. Now, I understand some of you had some philosophical differences perhaps on the just the concept of government spending, but, as I recall, opposition was declared before we had a chance to actually meet and exchange ideas. And I saw that as a missed opportunity.

Now, I am happy to report this morning that we saw another sign that our economy is moving in the right direction. The latest GDP numbers show that our economy is growing by almost 6 percent -- that's the most since 2003. To put that in perspective, this time last year, we weren't seeing positive job growth; we were seeing the economy shrink by about 6 percent.

So you've seen a 12 percent reversal during the course of this year. This turnaround is the biggest in nearly three decades -- and it didn't happen by accident. It happened -- as economists, conservative and liberal, will attest -- because of some of the steps that we took.

And by the way, you mentioned a Web site out here, John -- if you want to look at what's going on, on the Recovery Act, you can look on recovery.gov -- a Web site, by the way, that was Eric Cantor's idea.

Now, here's the point. These are serious times, and what's required by all of us -- Democrats and Republicans -- is to do what's right for our country, even if it's not always what's best for our politics. I know it may be heresy to say this, but there are things more important than good poll numbers. And on this no one can accuse me of not living by my principles. A middle class that's back on its feet, an economy that lifts everybody up, an America that's ascendant in the world -- that's more important than winning an election. Our future shouldn't be shaped by what's best for our politics; our politics should be shaped by what's best for our future.

But no matter what's happened in the past, the important thing for all of us is to move forward together. We have some issues right in front of us on which I believe we should agree, because as successful as we've been in spurring new economic growth, everybody understands that job growth has been lagging. Some of that's predictable. Every economist will say jobs are a lagging indicator, but that's no consolation for the folks who are out there suffering right now. And since 7 million Americans have lost their jobs in this recession, we've got to do everything we can to accelerate it.

So, today, in line with what I stated at the State of the Union, I've proposed a new jobs tax credit for small business. And here's how it would work. Employers would get a tax credit of up to $5,000 for every employee they add in 2010. They'd get a tax break for increases in wages, as well. So, if you raise wages for employees making under $100,000, we'd refund part of your payroll tax for every dollar you increase those wages faster than inflation. It's a simple concept. It's easy to understand. It would cut taxes for more than 1 million small businesses.

So I hope you join me. Let's get this done. I want to eliminate the capital gains tax for small business investment, and take some of the bailout money the Wall Street banks have returned and use it to help community banks start lending to small businesses again. So join me. I am confident that we can do this together for the American people. And there's nothing in that proposal that runs contrary to the ideological predispositions of this caucus. The question is: What's going to keep us from getting this done?

I've proposed a modest fee on the nation's largest banks and financial institutions to fully recover for taxpayers' money that they provided to the financial sector when it was teetering on the brink of collapse. And it's designed to discourage them from taking reckless risks in the future. If you listen to the American people, John, they'll tell you they want their money back. Let's do this together, Republicans and Democrats.

I propose that we close tax loopholes that reward companies for shipping American jobs overseas, and instead give companies greater incentive to create jobs right here at home -- right here at home. Surely, that's something that we can do together, Republicans and Democrats.

We know that we've got a major fiscal challenge in reining in deficits that have been growing for a decade, and threaten our future. That's why I've proposed a three-year freeze in discretionary spending other than what we need for national security. That's something we should do together that's consistent with a lot of the talk both in Democratic caucuses and Republican caucuses. We can't blink when it's time to actually do the job.

At this point, we know that the budget surpluses of the '90s occurred in part because of the pay-as-you-go law, which said that, well, you should pay as you go and live within our means, just like families do every day. Twenty-four of you voted for that, and I appreciate it. And we were able to pass it in the Senate yesterday.

But the idea of a bipartisan fiscal commission to confront the deficits in the long term died in the Senate the other day. So I'm going to establish such a commission by executive order and I hope that you participate, fully and genuinely, in that effort, because if we're going to actually deal with our deficit and debt, everybody here knows that we're going to have to do it together, Republican and Democrat. No single party is going to make the tough choices involved on its own. It's going to require all of us doing what's right for the American people.

And as I said in the State of the Union speech, there's not just a deficit of dollars in Washington, there is a deficit of trust. So I hope you'll support my proposal to make all congressional earmarks public before they come to a vote. And let's require lobbyists who exercise such influence to publicly disclose all their contacts on behalf of their clients, whether they are contacts with my administration or contacts with Congress. Let's do the people's business in the bright light of day, together, Republicans and Democrats.

I know how bitter and contentious the issue of health insurance reform has become. And I will eagerly look at the ideas and better solutions on the health care front. If anyone here truly believes our health insurance system is working well for people, I respect your right to say so, but I just don't agree. And neither would millions of Americans with preexisting conditions who can't get coverage today or find out that they lose their insurance just as they're getting seriously ill. That's exactly when you need insurance. And for too many people, they're not getting it. I don't think a system is working when small businesses are gouged and 15,000 Americans are losing coverage every single day; when premiums have doubled and out-of-pocket costs have exploded and they're poised to do so again.

I mean, to be fair, the status quo is working for the insurance industry, but it's not working for the American people. It's not working for our federal budget. It needs to change.

This is a big problem, and all of us are called on to solve it. And that's why, from the start, I sought out and supported ideas from Republicans. I even talked about an issue that has been a holy grail for a lot of you, which was tort reform, and said that I'd be willing to work together as part of a comprehensive package to deal with it. I just didn't get a lot of nibbles.

Creating a high-risk pool for uninsured folks with preexisting conditions, that wasn't my idea, it was Senator McCain's. And I supported it, and it got incorporated into our approach. Allowing insurance companies to sell coverage across state lines to add choice and competition and bring down costs for businesses and consumers -- that's an idea that some of you I suspect included in this better solutions; that's an idea that was incorporated into our package. And I support it, provided that we do it hand in hand with broader reforms that protect benefits and protect patients and protect the American people.

A number of you have suggested creating pools where self-employed and small businesses could buy insurance. That was a good idea. I embraced it. Some of you supported efforts to provide insurance to children and let kids remain covered on their parents' insurance until they're 25 or 26. I supported that. That's part of our package. I supported a number of other ideas, from incentivizing wellness to creating an affordable catastrophic insurance option for young people that came from Republicans like Mike Enzi and Olympia Snowe in the Senate, and I'm sure from some of you as well. So when you say I ought to be willing to accept Republican ideas on health care, let's be clear: I have.

Bipartisanship -- not for its own sake but to solve problems -- that's what our constituents, the American people, need from us right now. All of us then have a choice to make. We have to choose whether we're going to be politicians first or partners for progress; whether we're going to put success at the polls ahead of the lasting success we can achieve together for America. Just think about it for a while. We don't have to put it up for a vote today.

Let me close by saying this. I was not elected by Democrats or Republicans, but by the American people. That's especially true because the fastest growing group of Americans are independents. That should tell us both something. I'm ready and eager to work with anyone who is willing to proceed in a spirit of goodwill. But understand, if we can't break free from partisan gridlock, if we can't move past a politics of "no," if resistance supplants constructive debate, I still have to meet my responsibilities as President. I've got to act for the greater good –- because that, too, is a commitment that I have made. And that's -- that, too, is what the American people sent me to Washington to do.

So I am optimistic. I know many of you individually. And the irony, I think, of our political climate right now is that, compared to other countries, the differences between the two major parties on most issues is not as big as it's represented. But we've gotten caught up in the political game in a way that's just not healthy. It's dividing our country in ways that are preventing us from meeting the challenges of the 21st century. I'm hopeful that the conversation we have today can help reverse that.

So thank you very much. Thank you, John. Now I'd like to open it up for questions.

Congressman Pence: The President has agreed to take questions and members would be encouraged to raise your hand while you remain in your seat. The chair will take the prerogative to make the first remarks. Mr. President, welcome back to the House Republican Conference.

President Obama: Thank you.

Congressman Pence: [Off microphone.] We are pleased to have you return. [Inaudible] a year ago -- House Republicans said then we would make you two promises. Number one, that most of the people in this room and their families would pray for you and your beautiful family just about every day for the next four years. And I want to assure you we're keeping that promise.

President Obama: I appreciate that.

Congressman Pence: [off microphone] Number two, our pledge to you, Mr. President, was that door is always open. And we hope the [inaudible] of our invitation that we [inaudible].

Mr. President, several of us in this conference yesterday on the way into Baltimore stopped by the Salvation Army homeless facility here in Baltimore. I met a little boy, an African American boy, in the 8th grade, named David Carter, Jr. When he heard that I would be seeing you today his eyes lit up like I had never seen. And I told him that if he wrote you a letter I'd give it to you, and I have.

But I had a conversation with little David, Jr. and David, Sr. His family has been struggling with the economy.

[On microphone.] His dad said words to me, Mr. President, that I'll never forget. About my age and he said -- he said, Congressman, it's not like it was when we were coming up. He said, there's just no jobs.

Now, last year about the time you met with us, unemployment was 7.5 percent in this country. Your administration, and your party in Congress, told us that we'd have to borrow more than $700 billion to pay for a so-called stimulus bill. It was a piecemeal list of projects and boutique tax cuts, all of which was -- we were told -- had to be passed or unemployment would go to 8 percent, as your administration said. Well, unemployment is 10 percent now, as you well know, Mr. President; here in Baltimore it's considerably higher.

Now, Republicans offered a stimulus bill at the same time. It cost half as much as the Democratic proposal in Congress, and using your economic analyst models, it would have created twice the jobs at half the cost. It essentially was across-the-board tax relief, Mr. President.

Now we know you've come to Baltimore today and you've raised this tax credit, which was last promoted by President Jimmy Carter. But the first question I would pose to you, very respectfully, Mr. President, is would you be willing to consider embracing -- in the name of little David Carter, Jr. and his dad, in the name of every struggling family in this country -- the kind of across-the-board tax relief that Republicans have advocated, that President Kennedy advocated, that President Reagan advocated and that has always been the means of stimulating broad-based economic growth?

President Obama: Well, there was a lot packed into that question. First of all, let me say I already promised that I'll be writing back to that young man and his family, and I appreciate you passing on the letter.

Member: Thank you.

President Obama: But let's talk about just the jobs environment generally. You're absolutely right that when I was sworn in the hope was that unemployment would remain around 8 [percent], or in the 8 percent range. That was just based on the estimates made by both conservative and liberal economists, because at that point not all the data had trickled in.

We had lost 650,000 jobs in December. I'm assuming you're not faulting my policies for that. We had lost, it turns out, 700,000 jobs in January, the month I was sworn in. I'm assuming it wasn't my administration's policies that accounted for that. We lost another 650,000 jobs the subsequent month, before any of my policies had gone into effect. So I'm assuming that wasn't as a consequence of our policies; that doesn't reflect the failure of the Recovery Act. The point being that what ended up happening was that the job losses from this recession proved to be much more severe -- in the first quarter of last year going into the second quarter of last year -- than anybody anticipated.

So I mean, I think we can score political points on the basis of the fact that we underestimated how severe the job losses were going to be. But those job losses took place before any stimulus, whether it was the ones that you guys have proposed or the ones that we proposed, could have ever taken into effect. Now, that's just the fact, Mike, and I don't think anybody would dispute that. You could not find an economist who would dispute that.

Now, at the same time, as I mentioned, most economists -- Republican and Democrat, liberal and conservative -- would say that had it not been for the stimulus package that we passed, things would be much worse. Now, they didn't fill a 7 million hole in the number of people who were unemployed. They probably account for about 2 million, which means we still have 5 million folks in there that we've still got to deal with. That's a lot of people.

The package that we put together at the beginning of the year, the truth is, should have reflected -- and I believe reflected what most of you would say are common sense things. This notion that this was a radical package is just not true. A third of them were tax cuts, and they weren't -- when you say they were "boutique" tax cuts, Mike, 95 percent of working Americans got tax cuts, small businesses got tax cuts, large businesses got help in terms of their depreciation schedules. I mean, it was a pretty conventional list of tax cuts. A third of it was stabilizing state budgets.

There is not a single person in here who, had it not been for what was in the stimulus package, wouldn't be going home to more teachers laid off, more firefighters laid off, more cops laid off. A big chunk of it was unemployment insurance and COBRA, just making sure that people had some floor beneath them, and, by the way, making sure that there was enough money in their pockets that businesses had some customers.

You take those two things out, that accounts for the majority of the stimulus package. Are there people in this room who think that was a bad idea? A portion of it was dealing with the AMT, the alternative minimum tax -- not a proposal of mine; that's not a consequence of my policies that we have a tax system where we keep on putting off a potential tax hike that is embedded in the budget that we have to fix each year. That cost about $70 billion.

And then the last portion of it was infrastructure which, as I said, a lot of you have gone to appear at ribbon-cuttings for the same projects that you voted against.

Now, I say all this not to re-litigate the past, but it's simply to state that the component parts of the Recovery Act are consistent with what many of you say are important things to do -- rebuilding our infrastructure, tax cuts for families and businesses, and making sure that we were providing states and individuals some support when the roof was caving in.

And the notion that I would somehow resist doing something that cost half as much but would produce twice as many jobs -- why would I resist that? I wouldn't. I mean, that's my point, is that -- I am not an ideologue. I'm not. It doesn't make sense if somebody could tell me you could do this cheaper and get increased results that I wouldn't say, great. The problem is, I couldn't find credible economists who would back up the claims that you just made.

Now, we can -- here's what I know going forward, though. I mean, we're talking -- we were talking about the past. We can talk about this going forward. I have looked at every idea out there in terms of accelerating job growth to match the economic growth that's already taken place. The jobs credit that I'm discussing right now is one that a lot of people think would be the most cost-effective way for encouraging people to pick up their hiring.

There may be other ideas that you guys have; I am happy to look at them and I'm happy to embrace them. I suspect I will embrace some of them. Some of them I've already embraced.

But the question I think we're going to have to ask ourselves is, as we move forward, are we going to be examining each of these issues based on what's good for the country, what the evidence tells us, or are we going to be trying to position ourselves so that come November we're able to say, "The other party, it's their fault." If we take the latter approach then we're probably not going to get much agreement. If we take the former, I suspect there's going to be a lot of overlap. All right?

Congressman Pence: Mr. President, will you consider supporting across-the-board tax relief, as President Kennedy did?

President Obama: Here's what I'm going to do, Mike. What I'm going to do is I'm going to take a look at what you guys are proposing. And the reason I say this, before you say, "Okay," I think is important to know -- what you may consider across-the-board tax cuts could be, for example, greater tax cuts for people who are making a billion dollars. I may not agree to a tax cut for Warren Buffet. You may be calling for an across-the-board tax cut for the banking industry right now. I may not agree to that.

So I think that we've got to look at what specific proposals you're putting forward, and -- this is the last point I'll make -- if you're calling for just across-the-board tax cuts, and then on the other hand saying that we're somehow going to balance our budget, I'm going to want to take a look at your math and see how that works, because the issue of deficit and debt is another area where there has been a tendency for some inconsistent statements. How's that? All right?

Congressman Ryan: Thank you. Mr. President, first off, thanks for agreeing to accept our invitation here. It is a real pleasure and honor to have you with us here today.

President Obama: Good to see you. Is this your crew right here, by the way?

Congressman Ryan: It is. This is my daughter Liza, my son Charlie and Sam, and this is my wife Janna. President Obama: Hey, guys.

Congressman Ryan: Say hi, everybody. I serve as a ranking member of the budget committee, so I'm going to talk a little budget if you don't mind. The spending bills that you've signed into law, the domestic discretionary spending has been increased by 84 percent. You now want to freeze spending at this elevated beginning next year. This means that total spending in your budget would grow at 3/100ths of 1 percent less than otherwise. I would simply submit that we could do more and start now.

You've also said that you want to take a scalpel to the budget and go through it line by line. We want to give you that scalpel. I have a proposal with my home state senator, Russ Feingold, bipartisan proposal, to create a constitutional version of the line-item veto. Problem is, we can't even get a vote on the proposal.

So my question is, why not start freezing spending now, and would you support a line-item veto in helping us get a vote on it in the House?

President Obama: Let me respond to the two specific questions, but I want to just push back a little bit on the underlying premise about us increasing spending by 84 percent.

Now, look, I talked to Peter Orszag right before I came here, because I suspected I'd be hearing this -- I'd be hearing this argument. The fact of the matter is, is that most of the increases in this year's budget, this past year's budget, were not as a consequence of policies that we initiated but instead were built in as a consequence of the automatic stabilizers that kick in because of this enormous recession.

So the increase in the budget for this past year was actually predicted before I was even sworn into office and had initiated any policies. Whoever was in there, Paul -- and I don't think you'll dispute that -- whoever was in there would have seen those same increases because of, on the one hand, huge drops in revenue, but at the same time people were hurting and needed help. And a lot of these things happened automatically.

Now, the reason that I'm not proposing the discretionary freeze take into effect this year -- we prepared a budget for 2010, it's now going forward -- is, again, I am just listening to the consensus among people who know the economy best. And what they will say is that if you either increase taxes or significantly lowered spending when the economy remains somewhat fragile, that that would have a destimulative effect and potentially you'd see a lot of folks losing business, more folks potentially losing jobs. That would be a mistake when the economy has not fully taken off. That's why I've proposed to do it for the next fiscal year. So that's point number two.

With respect to the line-item veto, I actually -- I think there's not a President out there that wouldn't love to have it. And I think that this is an area where we can have a serious conversation. I know it is a bipartisan proposal by you and Russ Feingold. I don't like being held up with big bills that have stuff in them that are wasteful but I've got to sign because it's a defense authorization bill and I've got to make sure that our troops are getting the funding that they need.

I will tell you, I would love for Congress itself to show discipline on both sides of the aisle. I think one thing that you have to acknowledge, Paul, because you study this stuff and take it pretty seriously, that the earmarks problem is not unique to one party and you end up getting a lot of pushback when you start going after specific projects of any one of you in your districts, because wasteful spending is usually spent somehow outside of your district. Have you noticed that? The spending in your district tends to seem pretty sensible.

So I would love to see more restraint within Congress. I'd like to work on the earmarks reforms that I mentioned in terms of putting earmarks online, because I think sunshine is the best disinfectant. But I am willing to have a serious conversation on the line-item veto issue.

Congressman Ryan: I'd like to walk you through that, because we have a version we think is constitutional.

President Obama: Let me take a look at it.

Congressman Ryan: I would simply say that automatic stabilizer spending is mandatory spending. The discretionary spending, the bills that Congress signs that you sign into law, that has increased 84 percent.

President Obama: We'll have a longer debate on the budget numbers, all right?

Congressman Pence: Shelley Moore Capito, West Virginia.

Congresswoman Capito: Thank you, Mr. President, for joining us here today. As you said in the State of the Union address on Wednesday, jobs and the economy are number one. And I think everyone in this room, certainly I, agree with you on that.

I represent the state of West Virginia. We're resource-rich. We have a lot of coal and a lot of natural gas. But our -- my miners and the folks who are working and those who are unemployed are very concerned about some of your policies in these areas: cap and trade, an aggressive EPA, and the looming prospect of higher taxes. In our minds, these are job-killing policies. So I'm asking you if you would be willing to re-look at some of these policies, with a high unemployment and the unsure economy that we have now, to assure West Virginians that you're listening.

President Obama: Look, I listen all the time, including to your governor, who's somebody who I enjoyed working with a lot before the campaign and now that I'm President. And I know that West Virginia struggles with unemployment, and I know how important coal is to West Virginia and a lot of the natural resources there. That's part of the reason why I've said that we need a comprehensive energy policy that sets us up for a long-term future.

For example, nobody has been a bigger promoter of clean coal technology than I am. Testament to that, I ended up being in a whole bunch of advertisements that you guys saw all the time about investing in ways for us to burn coal more cleanly.

I've said that I'm a promoter of nuclear energy, something that I think over the last three decades has been subject to a lot of partisan wrangling and ideological wrangling. I don't think it makes sense. I think that that has to be part of our energy mix. I've said that I am supportive -- and I said this two nights ago at the State of the Union -- that I am in favor of increased production.

So if you look at the ideas that this caucus has, again with respect to energy, I'm for a lot of what you said you are for.

The one thing that I've also said, though, and here we have a serious disagreement and my hope is we can work through these disagreements -- there's going to be an effort on the Senate side to do so on a bipartisan basis -- is that we have to plan for the future.

And the future is that clean energy -- cleaner forms of energy are going to be increasingly important, because even if folks are still skeptical in some cases about climate change in our politics and in Congress, the world is not skeptical about it. If we're going to be after some of these big markets, they're going to be looking to see, is the United States the one that's developing clean coal technology? Is the United States developing our natural gas resources in the most effective way? Is the United States the one that is going to lead in electric cars? Because if we're not leading, those other countries are going to be leading.

So what I want to do is work with West Virginia to figure out how we can seize that future. But to do that, that means there's going to have to be some transition. We can't operate the coal industry in the United States as if we're still in the 1920s or the 1930s or the 1950s. We've got to be thinking what does that industry look like in the next hundred years. And it's going to be different. And that means there's going to be some transition. And that's where I think a well-thought-through policy of incentivizing the new while recognizing that there's going to be a transition process -- and we're not just suddenly putting the old out of business right away -- that has to be something that both Republicans and Democrats should be able to embrace.

Congressman Pence: Jason Chaffetz, Utah.

Congressman Chafetz: Thank you, Mr. President. It's truly an honor.

President Obama: Great to be here.

Congressman Chafetz: And I appreciate you being here.

I'm one of 22 House freshmen. We didn't create this mess, but we are here to help clean it up. You talked a lot about this deficit of trust. There's some things that have happened that I would appreciate your perspective on, because I can look you in the eye and tell you we have not been obstructionists. Democrats have the House and Senate and the presidency. And when you stood up before the American people multiple times and said you would broadcast the health care debates on C-SPAN, you didn't. And I was disappointed, and I think a lot of Americans were disappointed.

You said you weren't going to allow lobbyists in the senior-most positions within your administration, and yet you did. I applauded you when you said it -- and disappointed when you didn't.

You said you'd go line by line through the health care debate -- or through the health care bill. And there were six of us, including Dr. Phil Roe, who sent you a letter and said, "We would like to take you up on the offer; we'd like to come." We never heard a letter, we never got a call. We were never involved in any of those discussions.

And when you said in the House of Representatives that you were going to tackle earmarks -- in fact, you didn't want to have any earmarks in any of your bills -- I jumped up out of my seat and applauded you. But it didn't happen.

More importantly, I want to talk about moving forward, but if we could address --

President Obama: Well, how about --

Congressman Chafetz: -- I would certainly appreciate it.

President Obama: That was a long list, so -- let me respond.

Look, the truth of the matter is that if you look at the health care process -- just over the course of the year -- overwhelmingly the majority of it actually was on C-SPAN, because it was taking place in congressional hearings in which you guys were participating. I mean, how many committees were there that helped to shape this bill? Countless hearings took place.

Now, I kicked it off, by the way, with a meeting with many of you, including your key leadership. What is true, there's no doubt about it, is that once it got through the committee process and there were now a series of meetings taking place all over the Capitol trying to figure out how to get the thing together -- that was a messy process. And I take responsibility for not having structured it in a way where it was all taking place in one place that could be filmed. How to do that logistically would not have been as easy as it sounds, because you're shuttling back and forth between the House, the Senate, different offices, et cetera, different legislators. But I think it's a legitimate criticism. So on that one, I take responsibility.

With respect to earmarks, we didn't have earmarks in the Recovery Act. We didn't get a lot of credit for it, but there were no earmarks in that. I was confronted at the beginning of my term with an omnibus package that did have a lot of earmarks from Republicans and Democrats, and a lot of people in this chamber. And the question was whether I was going to have a big budget fight, at a time when I was still trying to figure out whether or not the financial system was melting down and we had to make a whole bunch of emergency decisions about the economy. So what I said was let's keep them to a minimum, but I couldn't excise them all.

Now, the challenge I guess I would have for you as a freshman, is what are you doing inside your caucus to make sure that I'm not the only guy who is responsible for this stuff, so that we're working together, because this is going to be a process?

When we talk about earmarks, I think all of us are willing to acknowledge that some of them are perfectly defensible, good projects; it's just they haven't gone through the regular appropriations process in the full light of day. So one place to start is to make sure that they are at least transparent, that everybody knows what's there before we move forward.

In terms of lobbyists, I can stand here unequivocally and say that there has not been an administration who was tougher on making sure that lobbyists weren't participating in the administration than any administration that's come before us.

Now, what we did was, if there were lobbyists who were on boards and commissions that were carryovers and their term hadn't been completed, we didn't kick them off. We simply said that moving forward any time a new slot opens, they're being replaced.

So we've actually been very consistent in making sure that we are eliminating the impact of lobbyists, day in, day out, on how this administration operates. There have been a handful of waivers where somebody is highly skilled -- for example, a doctor who ran Tobacco-Free Kids technically is a registered lobbyist; on the other end, has more experience than anybody in figuring out how kids don't get hooked on cigarettes.

So there have been a couple of instances like that, but generally we've been very consistent on that front.

Congressman Pence: Marsha Blackburn, Tennessee.

Congresswoman Blackburn: Thank you, Mr. President, and thank you for acknowledging that we have ideas on health care because, indeed, we do have ideas, we have plans, we have over 50 bills, we have lots of amendments that would bring health care ideas to the forefront. We would -- we've got plans to lower cost, to change purchasing models, address medical liability, insurance accountability, chronic and preexisting conditions, and access to affordable care for those with those conditions, insurance portability, expanded access -- but not doing it with creating more government, more bureaucracy, and more cost for the American taxpayer.

And we look forward to sharing those ideas with you. We want to work with you on health reform and making certain that we do it in an affordable, cost-effective way that is going to reduce bureaucracy, reduce government interference, and reduce costs to individuals and to taxpayers. And if those good ideas aren't making it to you, maybe it's the House Democrat leadership that is an impediment instead of a conduit.

But we're concerned also that there are some lessons learned from public option health care plans that maybe are not being heeded. And certainly in my state of Tennessee, we were the test case for public option health care in 1994, and our Democrat government has even cautioned that maybe our experiences there would provide some lessons learned that should be heeded, and would provide guidance for us to go forward. And as you said, what we should be doing is tossing old ideas out, bad ideas out, and moving forward in refining good ideas. And certainly we would welcome that opportunity.

So my question to you is, when will we look forward to starting anew and sitting down with you to put all of these ideas on the table, to look at these lessons learned, to benefit from that experience, and to produce a product that is going to reduce government interference, reduce cost, and be fair to the American taxpayer?

President Obama: Actually, I've gotten many of your ideas. I've taken a look at them, even before I was handed this. Some of the ideas we have embraced in our package. Some of them are embraced with caveats. So let me give you an example.

I think one of the proposals that has been focused on by the Republicans as a way to reduce costs is allowing insurance companies to sell across state lines. We actually include that as part of our approach. But the caveat is, we've got to do so with some minimum standards, because otherwise what happens is that you could have insurance companies circumvent a whole bunch of state regulations about basic benefits or what have you, making sure that a woman is able to get mammograms as part of preventive care, for example. Part of what could happen is insurance companies could go into states and cherry-pick and just get those who are healthiest and leave behind those who are least healthy, which would raise everybody's premiums who weren't healthy, right?

So it's not that many of these ideas aren't workable, but we have to refine them to make sure that they don't just end up worsening the situation for folks rather than making it better.

Now, what I said at the State of the Union is what I still believe: If you can show me -- and if I get confirmation from health care experts, people who know the system and how it works, including doctors and nurses -- ways of reducing people's premiums; covering those who do not have insurance; making it more affordable for small businesses; having insurance reforms that ensure people have insurance even when they've got preexisting conditions, that their coverage is not dropped just because they're sick, that young people right out of college or as they're entering in the workforce can still get health insurance -- if those component parts are things that you care about and want to do, I'm game. And I've got -- and I've got a lot of these ideas.

The last thing I will say, though -- let me say this about health care and the health care debate, because I think it also bears on a whole lot of other issues. If you look at the package that we've presented -- and there's some stray cats and dogs that got in there that we were eliminating, we were in the process of eliminating. For example, we said from the start that it was going to be important for us to be consistent in saying to people if you can have your -- if you want to keep the health insurance you got, you can keep it, that you're not going to have anybody getting in between you and your doctor in your decision making. And I think that some of the provisions that got snuck in might have violated that pledge.

And so we were in the process of scrubbing this and making sure that it's tight. But at its core, if you look at the basic proposal that we've put forward: it has an exchange so that businesses and the self-employed can buy into a pool and can get bargaining power the same way big companies do; the insurance reforms that I've already discussed, making sure that there's choice and competition for those who don't have health insurance. The component parts of this thing are pretty similar to what Howard Baker, Bob Dole, and Tom Daschle proposed at the beginning of this debate last year.

Now, you may not agree with Bob Dole and Howard Baker, and, certainly you don't agree with Tom Daschle on much, but that's not a radical bunch. But if you were to listen to the debate and, frankly, how some of you went after this bill, you'd think that this thing was some Bolshevik plot. No, I mean, that's how you guys -- that's how you guys presented it.

And so I'm thinking to myself, well, how is it that a plan that is pretty centrist -- no, look, I mean, I'm just saying, I know you guys disagree, but if you look at the facts of this bill, most independent observers would say this is actually what many Republicans -- is similar to what many Republicans proposed to Bill Clinton when he was doing his debate on health care.

So all I'm saying is, we've got to close the gap a little bit between the rhetoric and the reality. I'm not suggesting that we're going to agree on everything, whether it's on health care or energy or what have you, but if the way these issues are being presented by the Republicans is that this is some wild-eyed plot to impose huge government in every aspect of our lives, what happens is you guys then don't have a lot of room to negotiate with me.

I mean, the fact of the matter is, is that many of you, if you voted with the administration on something, are politically vulnerable in your own base, in your own party. You've given yourselves very little room to work in a bipartisan fashion because what you've been telling your constituents is, this guy is doing all kinds of crazy stuff that's going to destroy America.

And I would just say that we have to think about tone. It's not just on your side, by the way -- it's on our side, as well. This is part of what's happened in our politics, where we demonize the other side so much that when it comes to actually getting things done, it becomes tough to do.

Mike [Pence].

Congressman Pence: Dr. Tom Price from Georgia, and then we'll have one more after that if your time permits, Mr. President.

President Obama: You know, I'm having fun.

Congressman Pence: Okay.

President Obama: This is great.

Congressman Pence: So are we.

Congressman Price: Mr. President, thank you. I want to stick on the general topic of health care, but ask a very specific question. You have repeatedly said, most recently at the State of the Union, that Republicans have offered no ideas and no solutions. In spite of the fact --

President Obama: I don't think I said that. What I said was, within the context of health care -- I remember that speech pretty well, it was only two days ago -- I said I welcome ideas that you might provide. I didn't say that you haven't provided ideas. I said I welcome those ideas that you'll provide.

Congressman Price: Mr. President, multiple times, from your administration, there have come statements that Republicans have no ideas and no solutions. In spite of the fact that we've offered, as demonstrated today, positive solutions to all of the challenges we face, including energy and the economy and health care, specifically in the area of health care -- this bill, H.R.3400, that has more co-sponsors than any health care bill in the House, is a bill that would provide health coverage for all Americans; would correct the significant insurance challenges of affordability and preexisting; would solve the lawsuit abuse issue, which isn't addressed significantly in the other proposals that went through the House and the Senate; would write into law that medical decisions are made between patients and families and doctors; and does all of that without raising taxes by a penny.

But my specific question is, what should we tell our constituents who know that Republicans have offered positive solutions to the challenges that Americans face and yet continue to hear out of the administration that we've offered nothing?

President Obama: Tom, look, I have to say that on the -- let's just take the health care debate. And it's probably not constructive for us to try to debate a particular bill -- this isn't the venue to do it. But if you say, "We can offer coverage for all Americans, and it won't cost a penny," that's just not true. You can't structure a bill where suddenly 30 million people have coverage, and it costs nothing. If --

Congressman Price: Mr. President, can I -- and I understand that we're not interested in debating this bill, but what should we tell our constituents who know that we've offered these solutions and yet hear from the administration that we have offered nothing.

President Obama: Let me -- I'm using this as a specific example, so let me answer your question. You asked a question; I want to answer it.

It's not enough if you say, for example, that we've offered a health care plan and I look up -- this is just under the section that you've just provided me, or the book that you just provided me -- summary of GOP health care reform bill: The GOP plan will lower health care premiums for American families and small businesses, addressing America's number-one priority for health reform. I mean, that's an idea that we all embrace. But specifically it's got to work. I mean, there's got to be a mechanism in these plans that I can go to an independent health care expert and say, is this something that will actually work, or is it boilerplate?

If I'm told, for example, that the solution to dealing with health care costs is tort reform, something that I've said I am willing to work with you on, but the CBO or other experts say to me, at best, this could reduce health care costs relative to where they're growing by a couple of percentage points, or save $5 billion a year, that's what we can score it at, and it will not bend the cost curve long term or reduce premiums significantly -- then you can't make the claim that that's the only thing that we have to do. If we're going to do multi-state insurance so that people can go across state lines, I've got to be able to go to an independent health care expert, Republican or Democrat, who can tell me that this won't result in cherry-picking of the healthiest going to some and the least healthy being worse off.

So I am absolutely committed to working with you on these issues, but it can't just be political assertions that aren't substantiated when it comes to the actual details of policy. Because otherwise, we're going to be selling the American people a bill of goods. I mean, the easiest thing for me to do on the health care debate would have been to tell people that what you're going to get is guaranteed health insurance, lower your costs, all the insurance reforms; we're going to lower the costs of Medicare and Medicaid and it won't cost anybody anything. That's great politics, it's just not true.

So there's got to be some test of realism in any of these proposals, mine included. I've got to hold myself accountable, and guaranteed the American people will hold themselves -- will hold me accountable if what I'm selling doesn't actually deliver.

Congressman Price: Mr. President, a point of clarification, what's in the Better Solutions book are all the legislative proposals that were offered --

President Obama: I understand that. I've actually read your bills.

Congressman Price: -- throughout 2009.

President Obama: I understand.

Congressman Price: And so, rest assured the summary document you received is backed up by precisely the kind of detailed legislation that Speaker Pelosi and your administration have been busy ignoring for 12 months.

President Obama: Well, Mike -- well, hold on, hold on a second. No, no, no, no. Hold on a second, guys.

You know, Mike, I've read your legislation. I mean, I take a look at this stuff -- and the good ideas we take. But here's -- here's the thing -- here's the thing that I guess all of us have to be mindful of, it can't be all or nothing, one way or the other. And what I mean by that is this: If we put together a stimulus package in which a third of it are tax cuts that normally you guys would support, and support for states and the unemployed, and helping people stay on COBRA that your governors certainly would support -- Democrat or a Republican; and then you've got some infrastructure, and maybe there's some things in there that you don’t like in terms of infrastructure, or you think the bill should have been $500 billion instead of $700 billion or there's this provision or that provision that you don't like. If there's uniform opposition because the Republican caucus doesn't get 100 percent or 80 percent of what you want, then it's going to be hard to get a deal done. That's because that's not how democracy works.

So my hope would be that we can look at some of these component parts of what we're doing and maybe we break some of them up on different policy issues. So if the good congressman from Utah has a particular issue on lobbying reform that he wants to work with us on, we may not able to agree on a comprehensive package on everything but there may be some component parts that we can work on.

You may not support our overall jobs package, but if you look at the tax credit that we're proposing for small businesses right now, it is consistent with a lot of what you guys have said in the past. And just the fact that it's my administration that's proposing it shouldn't prevent you from supporting it. That's my point.

Congressman Pence: Thank you, Mr. President. Peter Roskam from the great state of Illinois.

President Obama: Oh, Peter is an old friend of mine.

Congressman Roskam: Hey, Mr. President.

President Obama: Peter and I have had many debates.

Congressman Roskam: Well, this won't be one. Mr. President, I heard echoes today of the state senator that I served with in Springfield and there was an attribute and a characteristic that you had that I think served you well there. You took on some very controversial subjects -- death penalty reform -- you and I --

President Obama: Sure. We worked on it together.

Congressman Roskam: -- negotiated on. You took on ethics reform. You took on some big things. One of the keys was you rolled your sleeves up, you worked with the other party, and ultimately you were able to make the deal. Now, here's an observation.

Over the past year, in my view, that attribute hasn't been in full bloom. And by that I mean, you've gotten this subtext of House Republicans that sincerely want to come and be a part of this national conversation toward solutions, but they've really been stiff-armed by Speaker Pelosi. Now, I know you're not in charge of that chamber, but there really is this dynamic of, frankly, being shut out. When John Boehner and Eric Cantor presented last February to you some substantive job creation, our stimulus alternative, the attack machine began to marginalize Eric -- and we can all look at the articles -- as "Mr. No," and there was this pretty dark story, ultimately, that wasn't productive and wasn't within this sort of framework that you're articulating today.

So here's the question. Moving forward, I think all of us want to hit the reset button on 2009. How do we move forward? And on the job creation piece in particular, you mentioned Colombia, you mentioned Panama, you mentioned South Korea. Are you willing to work with us, for example, to make sure those FTAs get called, that's no-cost job creation? And ultimately, as you're interacting with world leaders, that's got to put more arrows in your quiver, and that's a very, very powerful tool for us. But the obstacle is, frankly, the politics within the Democratic caucus?

President Obama: Well, first of all, Peter and I did work together effectively on a whole host of issues. One of our former colleagues is right now running for governor, on the Republican side, in Illinois. In the Republican primary, of course, they're running ads of him saying nice things about me. Poor guy.

Although that's one of the points that I made earlier. I mean, we've got to be careful about what we say about each other sometimes, because it boxes us in in ways that makes it difficult for us to work together, because our constituents start believing us. They don't know sometimes this is just politics what you guys -- or folks on my side do sometimes.

So just a tone of civility instead of slash and burn would be helpful. The problem we have sometimes is a media that responds only to slash-and-burn-style politics. You don't get a lot of credit if I say, "You know, I think Paul Ryan is a pretty sincere guy and has a beautiful family." Nobody is going to run that in the newspapers.

Question: [Inaudible]

President Obama: And by the way, in case he's going to get a Republican challenge, I didn't mean it. Don't want to hurt you, man.

But on the specifics, I think both sides can take some blame for a sour climate on Capitol Hill. What I can do maybe to help is to try to bring Republican and Democratic leadership together on a more regular basis with me. That's, I think, a failure on my part, is to try to foster better communications even if there's disagreement. And I will try to see if we can do more of that this year. That's on the sort of the general issue.

On the specific issue of trade, you're right, there are conflicts within and fissures within the Democratic Party. I suspect there are probably going to be some fissures within the Republican Party, as well. I mean, you know, if you went to some of your constituencies, they'd be pretty suspicious about it, new trade agreements, because the suspicion is somehow they're all one way.

So part of what we've been trying to do is to make sure that we're getting the enforcement side of this tight, make sure that if we've got a trade agreement with China or other countries, that they are abiding with it -- they're not stealing our intellectual property or making sure that their non-tariff barriers are lowered even as ours are opened up. And my hope is, is that we can move forward with some of these trade agreements having built some confidence -- not just among particular constituency groups, but among the American people -- that trade is going to be reciprocal; that it's not just going to be a one-way street.

You are absolutely right though, Peter, when you say, for example, South Korea is a great ally of ours. I mean, when I visited there, there is no country that is more committed to friendship on a whole range of fronts than South Korea. What is also true is that the European Union is about to sign a trade agreement with South Korea, which means right at the moment when they start opening up their markets, the Europeans might get in there before we do.

So we've got to make sure that we seize these opportunities. I will be talking more about trade this year. It's going to have to be trade that combines opening their markets with an enforcement mechanism, as well as just opening up our markets. I think that's something that all of us would agree on. Let's see if we can execute it over the next several years. All right, is that it?

Congressman Pence: Jeb Hensarling, Texas. And that will be it, Mr. President.

President Obama: Jim [sic] is going to wrap things up?

Congressman Pence: Yes, sir.

President Obama: All right.

Congressman Hensarling: Jeb, Mr. President.

President Obama: How are you?

Congressman Hensarling: I'm doing well. Mr. President, a year ago I had an opportunity to speak to you about the national debt. And something that you and I have in common is we both have small children.

President Obama: Absolutely.

Congressman Hensarling: And I left that conversation really feeling your sincere commitment to ensuring that our children, our nation's children, do not inherit an unconscionable debt. We know that under current law, that government -- the cost of government is due to grow from 20 percent of our economy to 40 percent of our economy, right about the time our children are leaving college and getting that first job.

Mr. President, shortly after that conversation a year ago, the Republicans proposed a budget that ensured that government did not grow beyond the historical standard of 20 percent of GDP. It was a budget that actually froze immediately non-defense discretionary spending. It spent $5 trillion less than ultimately what was enacted into law, and unfortunately, I believe that budget was ignored. And since that budget was ignored, what were the old annual deficits under Republicans have now become the monthly deficits under Democrats. The national debt has increased 30 percent.

Now, Mr. President, I know you believe -- and I understand the argument, and I respect the view that the spending is necessary due to the recession; many of us believe, frankly, it's part of the problem, not part of the solution. But I understand and I respect your view. But this is what I don't understand, Mr. President. After that discussion, your administration proposed a budget that would triple the national debt over the next 10 years -- surely you don't believe 10 years from now we will still be mired in this recession -- and propose new entitlement spending and move the cost of government to almost 24.5 percent of the economy.

Now, very soon, Mr. President, you're due to submit a new budget. And my question is --

President Obama: Jeb, I know there's a question in there somewhere, because you're making a whole bunch of assertions, half of which I disagree with, and I'm having to sit here listening to them. At some point I know you're going to let me answer. All right.

Congressman Hensarling: That's the question. You are soon to submit a new budget, Mr. President. Will that new budget, like your old budget, triple the national debt and continue to take us down the path of increasing the cost of government to almost 25 percent of our economy? That's the question, Mr. President.

President Obama: Jeb, with all due respect, I've just got to take this last question as an example of how it's very hard to have the kind of bipartisan work that we're going to do, because the whole question was structured as a talking point for running a campaign.

Now, look, let's talk about the budget once again, because I'll go through it with you line by line. The fact of the matter is, is that when we came into office, the deficit was $1.3 trillion -- $1.3 [trillion.] So when you say that suddenly I've got a monthly budget that is higher than the -- a monthly deficit that's higher than the annual deficit left by the Republicans, that's factually just not true, and you know it's not true.

And what is true is that we came in already with a $1.3 trillion deficit before I had passed any law. What is true is we came in with $8 trillion worth of debt over the next decade -- had nothing to do with anything that we had done. It had to do with the fact that in 2000 when there was a budget surplus of $200 billion, you had a Republican administration and a Republican Congress, and we had two tax cuts that weren't paid for.

You had a prescription drug plan -- the biggest entitlement plan, by the way, in several decades -- that was passed without it being paid for. You had two wars that were done through supplementals. And then you had $3 trillion projected because of the lost revenue of this recession. That's $8 trillion.

Now, we increased it by a trillion dollars because of the spending that we had to make on the stimulus. I am happy to have any independent fact-checker out there take a look at your presentation versus mine in terms of the accuracy of what I just said.

Now, going forward, here's the deal. I think, Paul, for example, head of the budget committee, has looked at the budget and has made a serious proposal. I've read it. I can tell you what's in it. And there are some ideas in there that I would agree with, but there are some ideas that we should have a healthy debate about because I don't agree with them.

The major driver of our long-term liabilities, everybody here knows, is Medicare and Medicaid and our health care spending. Nothing comes close. Social Security we could probably fix the same way Tip O'Neill and Ronald Reagan sat down together and they could figure something out. That is manageable. Medicare and Medicaid -- massive problem down the road. That's where -- that's going to be what our children have to worry about.

Now, Paul's approach -- and I want to be careful not simplifying this, because I know you've got a lot of detail in your plan -- but if I understand it correctly, would say we're going to provide vouchers of some sort for current Medicare recipients at the current level --

Congressman Ryan: No.

President Obama: No?

Congressman Ryan: People 55 and above --

President Obama: Fifty-five and -- well, no, I understand. I mean, there's a grandfathering in, but just for future beneficiaries, right? That's why I said I didn't want to -- I want to make sure that I'm not being unfair to your proposal, but I just want to point out that I've read it. And the basic idea would be that at some point we hold Medicare cost per recipient constant as a way of making sure that that doesn't go way out of whack, and I'm sure there are some details that --

Congressman Ryan: We drew it as a blend of inflation and health inflation, the point of our plan is -- because Medicare, as you know, is a $38 trillion unfunded liability -- it has to be reform for younger generations because it won't exist because it's going bankrupt. And the premise of our idea is, look, why not give people the same kind of health care plan we here have in Congress? That's the kind of reform we're proposing for Medicare.

President Obama: No, I understand. Right, right. Well, look, as I said before, this is an entirely legitimate proposal. The problem is twofold: One is that depending on how it's structured, if recipients are suddenly getting a plan that has their reimbursement rates going like this, but health care costs are still going up like that, then over time the way we're saving money is essentially by capping what they're getting relative to their costs.

Now, I just want to point out -- and this brings me to the second problem -- when we made a very modest proposal as part of our package, our health care reform package, to eliminate the subsidies going to insurance companies for Medicare Advantage, we were attacked across the board, by many on your aisle, for slashing Medicare. You remember? We're going to start cutting benefits for seniors. That was the story that was perpetrated out there -- scared the dickens out of a lot of seniors.

No, no, but here's my point. If the main question is going to be what do we do about Medicare costs, any proposal that Paul makes will be painted, factually, from the perspective of those who disagree with it, as cutting benefits over the long term. Paul, I don't think you disagree with that, that there is a political vulnerability to doing anything that tinkers with Medicare. And that's probably the biggest savings that are obtained through Paul's plan.

And I raise that not because we shouldn't have a series discussion about it. I raise that because we're not going to be able to do anything about any of these entitlements if what we do is characterized, whatever proposals are put out there, as, well, you know, that's -- the other party is being irresponsible; the other party is trying to hurt our senior citizens; that the other party is doing X, Y, Z.

That's why I say if we're going to frame these debates in ways that allow us to solve them, then we can't start off by figuring out, A, who's to blame; B, how can we make the American people afraid of the other side. And unfortunately, that's how our politics works right now. And that's how a lot of our discussion works. That's how we start off -- every time somebody speaks in Congress, the first thing they do, they stand up and all the talking points -- I see Frank Luntz up here sitting in the front. He's already polled it, and he said, you know, the way you're really going to -- I've done a focus group and the way we're going to really box in Obama on this one or make Pelosi look bad on that one -- I know, I like Frank, we've had conversations between Frank and I. But that's how we operate. It's all tactics, and it's not solving problems.

And so the question is, at what point can we have a serious conversation about Medicare and its long-term liability, or a serious question about -- a serious conversation about Social Security, or a serious conversation about budget and debt in which we're not simply trying to position ourselves politically. That's what I'm committed to doing. We won't agree all the time in getting it done, but I'm committed to doing it.

Congressman Pence: Take one more?

President Obama: You know, I've already gone over time. But I'll be happy to take your question, Congressman, offline. You can give me a call. All right, thank you, everybody. God bless you. God bless the United States of America. Thank you, everybody.

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# Speech on 2010 Budget Sent to Congress

Good morning, everybody. This morning, I sent a budget to Congress for the coming year. It's a budget that reflects the serious challenges facing the country. We're at war. Our economy has lost 7 million jobs over the last two years. And our government is deeply in debt after what can only be described as a decade of profligacy.

The fact is, 10 years ago, we had a budget surplus of more than $200 billion, with projected surpluses stretching out toward the horizon. Yet over the course of the past 10 years, the previous administration and previous Congresses created an expensive new drug program, passed massive tax cuts for the wealthy, and funded two wars without paying for any of it -- all of which was compounded by recession and by rising health care costs. As a result, when I first walked through the door, the deficit stood at $1.3 trillion, with projected deficits of $8 trillion over the next decade.

If we had taken office during ordinary times, we would have started bringing down these deficits immediately. But one year ago, our country was in crisis: We were losing nearly 700,000 jobs each month, the economy was in a free fall, and the financial system was near collapse. Many feared another Great Depression. So we initiated a rescue, and that rescue was not without significant cost; it added to the deficit as well.

One year later, because of the steps we've taken, we're in a very different place. But we can't simply move beyond this crisis; we have to address the irresponsibility that led to it. And that includes the failure to rein in spending, as well a reliance on borrowing -- from Wall Street to Washington to Main Street -- to fuel our growth. That's what we have to change. We have to do what families across America are doing: Save where we can so that we can afford what we need.

Now, I think it's very important to understand: We won't be able to bring down this deficit overnight, given that the recovery is still taking hold and families across the country still need help. We will continue, for example, to do what it takes to create jobs. That's reflected in my budget; it's essential. The budget includes new tax cuts for people who invest in small businesses, tax credits for small businesses that hire new workers, investments that will create jobs repairing roads and bridges, and tax breaks for retrofitting homes to save energy.

We also continue to lay a new foundation for lasting growth, which is essential as well. Just as it would be a terrible mistake to borrow against our children's future to pay our way today, it would be equally wrong to neglect their future by failing to invest in areas that will determine our economic success in this new century.

That's why we build on the largest investment in clean energy in history, as well as increase investment in scientific research, so that we are fostering the industries and jobs of the future right here in America.

That's why I've proposed a more than 6 percent increase in funding for the Education Department. And this funding is tied to reforms that raise student achievement, inspire students to excel in math and science, and turn around failing schools which consign too many young people to a lesser future -- because in the 21st century there is no better anti-poverty program than a world-class education.

And that's why we eliminate a wasteful subsidy to banks that lend to college students, and use that money to revitalize community colleges and make college more affordable. This will help us reach the goal I've set for America: By 2020 we will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world.

These are the investments we must make to create jobs and opportunity now and in the future. And in a departure from the way business had been done in Washington, we actually show how we pay for these investments while putting our country on a more fiscally sustainable path.

I've proposed a freeze in government spending for three years. This won't apply to the benefits folks get through Social Security, Medicaid, or Medicare. And it won't apply to our national security -- including benefits for veterans. But it will apply to all other discretionary government programs. And we're not simply photocopying last year's budget; freezing spending does not mean we won't cut what doesn't work to pay for what does.

We have gone through every department's spending line by line, item by item, looking for inefficiency, duplication, and programs that have outlived their usefulness. That's how we freeze discretionary spending. Last year, we found $17 billion in cuts. This year, we've already found $20 billion.

Now, some of these cuts are just common sense. For example, we cut $115 million from a program that pays states to clean up mines that have already been cleaned up. We're also cutting a Forest Service economic development program that strayed so far from any mission that it funded a music festival. And we're saving $20 million by stopping the refurbishment of a Department of Energy science center that the Department of Energy does not want to refurbish.

Other cuts, though, are more painful, because the goals of the underlying programs are worthy. We eliminate one program that provides grants to do environmental clean up of abandoned buildings. That's a mission I support, but there are other sources of private and public funds to achieve it. We also eliminated a $120 million program that allows folks to get their Earned Income Tax Credit in advance. I am a big supporter of the Earned Income Tax Credit. The problem is 80 percent of people who got this advance didn't comply with one or more of the program's requirements.

So I'm willing to reduce waste in programs I care about, and I'm asking members of Congress to do the same. I'm asking Republicans and Democrats alike to take a fresh look at programs they've supported in the past to see what's working and what's not, and trim back accordingly. Like any business, we're also looking for ways to get more bang for our buck, by promoting innovation and cutting red tape. For example, we consolidate 38 separate education programs into 11. And last fall, we launched the "SAVE Awards" to solicit ideas from federal employees about how make government more efficient and more effective. I'm proud to say that a number of these ideas -- like allowing Social Security appointments to be made online -- made it into our budget.

I also want to note even though the Department of Defense is exempt from the budget freeze, it's not exempt from budget common sense. It's not exempt from looking for savings. We save money by eliminating unnecessary defense programs that do nothing to keep us safe. One example is the $2.5 billion that we're spending to build C-17 transport aircraft. Four years ago, the Defense Department decided to cease production because it had acquired the number requested -- 180. Yet every year since, Congress had provided unrequested money for more C-17s that the Pentagon doesn't want or need. It's waste, pure and simple.

And there are other steps we're taking to rein in deficits. I've proposed a fee on big banks to pay back taxpayers for the bailout. We're reforming the way contracts are awarded, to save taxpayers billions of dollars. And while we extend middle-class tax cuts in this budget, we will not continue costly tax cuts for oil companies, investment fund managers, and those making over $250,000 a year. We just can't afford it.

Finally, changing spending-as-usual depends on changing politics-as-usual. And that's why I've proposed a bipartisan fiscal commission: a panel of Democrats and Republicans who would hammer out concrete deficit reduction proposals over the medium and long term, but would come up with those answers by a certain deadline. I should point out, by the way, that is an idea that had strong bipartisan support, was originally introduced by Senators Gregg on the Republican side and Conrad on the Democratic side; had a lot of Republican cosponsors to the idea. I hope that, despite the fact that it got voted down in the Senate, that both the Republican Leader Mitch McConnell and the Republican Leader in the House John Boehner go ahead and fully embrace what has been a bipartisan idea to get our arms around this budget.

That's also why we're restoring pay-as-you-go: a simple rule that says Congress can't spend a dime without cutting a dime elsewhere. This rule helped lead to the budget surpluses of the 1990s, and it's one of the most important steps we can take to restore fiscal discipline in Washington.

You can read more about the budget at budget.gov -- very easy to remember -- budget.gov. But the bottom line is this: We simply cannot continue to spend as if deficits don't have consequences; as if waste doesn't matter; as if the hard-earned tax dollars of the American people can be treated like Monopoly money; as if we can ignore this challenge for another generation. We can't.

In order to meet this challenge, I welcome any idea, from Democrats and Republicans. What I will not welcome -- what I reject -- is the same old grandstanding when the cameras are on, and the same irresponsible budget policies when the cameras are off. It's time to hold Washington to the same standards families and businesses hold themselves. It's time to save what we can, spend what we must, and live within our means once again.

Thanks very much.

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# Address at the 58th National Prayer Breakfast

Thank you. Thank you very much. Please be seated.

Thank you so much. Heads of state, Cabinet members, my outstanding Vice President, members of Congress, religious leaders, distinguished guests, Admiral Mullen -- it's good to see all of you. Let me begin by acknowledging the co-chairs of this breakfast, Senators Isakson and Klobuchar, who embody the sense of fellowship at the heart of this gathering. They're two of my favorite senators. Let me also acknowledge the director of my faith-based office, Joshua DuBois, who is here. Where's Joshua? He's out there somewhere. He's doing great work.

I want to commend Secretary Hillary Clinton on her outstanding remarks, and her outstanding leadership at the State Department. She's doing good every day. I'm especially pleased to see my dear friend, Prime Minister Zapatero, and I want him to relay America's greetings to the people of Spain. And Johnny, you are right, I'm deeply blessed, and I thank God every day for being married to Michelle Obama.

I'm privileged to join you once again, as my predecessors have for over half a century. Like them, I come here to speak about the ways my faith informs who I am -- as a President, and as a person. But I'm also here for the same reason that all of you are, for we all share a recognition -- one as old as time -- that a willingness to believe, an openness to grace, a commitment to prayer can bring sustenance to our lives.

There is, of course, a need for prayer even in times of joy and peace and prosperity. Perhaps especially in such times prayer is needed -- to guard against pride and to guard against complacency. But rightly or wrongly, most of us are inclined to seek out the divine not in the moment when the Lord makes His face shine upon us, but in moments when God's grace can seem farthest away.

Last month, God's grace, God's mercy, seemed far away from our neighbors in Haiti. And yet I believe that grace was not absent in the midst of tragedy. It was heard in prayers and hymns that broke the silence of an earthquake's wake. It was witnessed among parishioners of churches that stood no more, a roadside congregation, holding bibles in their laps. It was felt in the presence of relief workers and medics; translators; servicemen and women, bringing water and food and aid to the injured.

One such translator was an American of Haitian descent, representative of the extraordinary work that our men and women in uniform do all around the world -- Navy Corpsman Christian [sic] Brossard. And lying on a gurney aboard the USNS Comfort, a woman asked Christopher: "Where do you come from? What country? After my operation," she said, "I will pray for that country." And in Creole, Corpsman Brossard responded, "Etazini." The United States of America.

God's grace, and the compassion and decency of the American people is expressed through the men and women like Corpsman Brossard. It's expressed through the efforts of our Armed Forces, through the efforts of our entire government, through similar efforts from Spain and other countries around the world. It's also, as Secretary Clinton said, expressed through multiple faith-based efforts. By evangelicals at World Relief. By the American Jewish World Service. By Hindu temples, and mainline Protestants, Catholic Relief Services, African American churches, the United Sikhs. By Americans of every faith, and no faith, uniting around a common purpose, a higher purpose.

It's inspiring. This is what we do, as Americans, in times of trouble. We unite, recognizing that such crises call on all of us to act, recognizing that there but for the grace of God go I, recognizing that life's most sacred responsibility -- one affirmed, as Hillary said, by all of the world's great religions -- is to sacrifice something of ourselves for a person in need.

Sadly, though, that spirit is too often absent when tackling the long-term, but no less profound issues facing our country and the world. Too often, that spirit is missing without the spectacular tragedy, the 9/11 or the Katrina, the earthquake or the tsunami, that can shake us out of complacency. We become numb to the day-to-day crises, the slow-moving tragedies of children without food and men without shelter and families without health care. We become absorbed with our abstract arguments, our ideological disputes, our contests for power. And in this Tower of Babel, we lose the sound of God's voice.

Now, for those of us here in Washington, let's acknowledge that democracy has always been messy. Let's not be overly nostalgic. Divisions are hardly new in this country. Arguments about the proper role of government, the relationship between liberty and equality, our obligations to our fellow citizens -- these things have been with us since our founding. And I'm profoundly mindful that a loyal opposition, a vigorous back and forth, a skepticism of power, all of that is what makes our democracy work.

And we've seen actually some improvement in some circumstances. We haven't seen any canings on the floor of the Senate any time recently. So we shouldn't over-romanticize the past. But there is a sense that something is different now; that something is broken; that those of us in Washington are not serving the people as well as we should. At times, it seems like we're unable to listen to one another; to have at once a serious and civil debate. And this erosion of civility in the public square sows division and distrust among our citizens. It poisons the well of public opinion. It leaves each side little room to negotiate with the other. It makes politics an all-or-nothing sport, where one side is either always right or always wrong when, in reality, neither side has a monopoly on truth. And then we lose sight of the children without food and the men without shelter and the families without health care.

Empowered by faith, consistently, prayerfully, we need to find our way back to civility. That begins with stepping out of our comfort zones in an effort to bridge divisions. We see that in many conservative pastors who are helping lead the way to fix our broken immigration system. It's not what would be expected from them, and yet they recognize, in those immigrant families, the face of God. We see that in the evangelical leaders who are rallying their congregations to protect our planet. We see it in the increasing recognition among progressives that government can't solve all of our problems, and that talking about values like responsible fatherhood and healthy marriage are integral to any anti-poverty agenda. Stretching out of our dogmas, our prescribed roles along the political spectrum, that can help us regain a sense of civility.

Civility also requires relearning how to disagree without being disagreeable; understanding, as President [Kennedy] said, that "civility is not a sign of weakness." Now, I am the first to confess I am not always right. Michelle will testify to that. But surely you can question my policies without questioning my faith, or, for that matter, my citizenship.

Challenging each other's ideas can renew our democracy. But when we challenge each other's motives, it becomes harder to see what we hold in common. We forget that we share at some deep level the same dreams -- even when we don't share the same plans on how to fulfill them.

We may disagree about the best way to reform our health care system, but surely we can agree that no one ought to go broke when they get sick in the richest nation on Earth. We can take different approaches to ending inequality, but surely we can agree on the need to lift our children out of ignorance; to lift our neighbors from poverty. We may disagree about gay marriage, but surely we can agree that it is unconscionable to target gays and lesbians for who they are -- whether it's here in the United States or, as Hillary mentioned, more extremely in odious laws that are being proposed most recently in Uganda.

Surely we can agree to find common ground when possible, parting ways when necessary. But in doing so, let us be guided by our faith, and by prayer. For while prayer can buck us up when we are down, keep us calm in a storm; while prayer can stiffen our spines to surmount an obstacle -- and I assure you I'm praying a lot these days -- prayer can also do something else. It can touch our hearts with humility. It can fill us with a spirit of brotherhood. It can remind us that each of us are children of a awesome and loving God.

Through faith, but not through faith alone, we can unite people to serve the common good. And that's why my Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships has been working so hard since I announced it here last year. We've slashed red tape and built effective partnerships on a range of uses, from promoting fatherhood here at home to spearheading interfaith cooperation abroad. And through that office we've turned the faith-based initiative around to find common ground among people of all beliefs, allowing them to make an impact in a way that's civil and respectful of difference and focused on what matters most.

It is this spirit of civility that we are called to take up when we leave here today. That's what I'm praying for. I know in difficult times like these -- when people are frustrated, when pundits start shouting and politicians start calling each other names -- it can seem like a return to civility is not possible, like the very idea is a relic of some bygone era. The word itself seems quaint -- civility.

But let us remember those who came before; those who believed in the brotherhood of man even when such a faith was tested. Remember Dr. Martin Luther King. Not long after an explosion ripped through his front porch, his wife and infant daughter inside, he rose to that pulpit in Montgomery and said, "Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend."

In the eyes of those who denied his humanity, he saw the face of God.

Remember Abraham Lincoln. On the eve of the Civil War, with states seceding and forces gathering, with a nation divided half slave and half free, he rose to deliver his first Inaugural and said, "We are not enemies, but friends…Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection."

Even in the eyes of confederate soldiers, he saw the face of God.

Remember William Wilberforce, whose Christian faith led him to seek slavery's abolition in Britain; he was vilified, derided, attacked; but he called for "lessening prejudices [and] conciliating good-will, and thereby making way for the less obstructed progress of truth."

In the eyes of those who sought to silence a nation's conscience, he saw the face of God.

Yes, there are crimes of conscience that call us to action. Yes, there are causes that move our hearts and offenses that stir our souls. But progress doesn't come when we demonize opponents. It's not born in righteous spite. Progress comes when we open our hearts, when we extend our hands, when we recognize our common humanity. Progress comes when we look into the eyes of another and see the face of God. That we might do so -- that we will do so all the time, not just some of the time -- is my fervent prayer for our nation and the world.

Thank you, God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.

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# Unannounced Press Briefing - Q&A on Jobs and Health Care Reform

Hello, everybody. I am glad to see that all of you braved the weather to be here. A little while ago I had a meeting with the Democratic and Republican congressional leaders, and it went very well. In fact, I understand that McConnell and Reid are out doing snow angels on the South Lawn together. Can you picture that, Chuck? Not really?

The meeting did go well, and I appreciate them making the trek. We had a good and frank conversation and it's one that I hope we can continue on a more regular basis.

We all understand that there are legitimate and genuine differences between the parties, but despite the political posturing that often paralyzes this town, there are many issues upon which we can and should agree. That's what the American people are demanding of us. I think they're tired of every day being Election Day in Washington. And at this critical time in our country, the people sent us here expect a seriousness of purpose that transcends petty politics.

That's why I'm going to continue to seek the best ideas from either party as we work to tackle the pressing challenges ahead. I am confident, for example, that when one in 10 of our fellow citizens can't work, we should be able to come together and help business create more jobs. We ought to be able to agree on providing small businesses with additional tax credits and much needed lines of credit. We ought to agree on investments in crumbling roads and bridges, and we should agree on tax breaks for making homes more energy-efficient -- all of which will put more Americans to work. Many of the job proposals that I've laid out have passed the House and are soon going to be debated in the Senate. We spent a lot of time in this meeting discussing a jobs package and how we could move forward on that. And if there are additional ideas, I will consider them as well. What I won't consider is doing nothing in the face of a lot of hardship across the country.

We also talked about restoring fiscal responsibility. There are few matters on which there is as much vigorous bipartisan agreement, at least in public, but unfortunately there's also a lot of partisan wrangling behind closed doors. This is what we know for sure: For us to solve this extraordinary problem that is so many years in the making, it's going to take the cooperation of both parties. It's not going to happen in any other way.

I'm pleased that Congress supported my request to restore the pay-as-you-go rule, which was instrumental in turning deficits into surpluses during the 1990s. I've also called for a bipartisan fiscal commission. Unfortunately this measure, which originally had received the support of a bipartisan majority of the Senate and was cosponsored by Senators Conrad and Gregg, Democrats and Republicans, was blocked there. So I'm going to be creating this commission by executive order. And during our meeting I asked the leadership of both parties to join in this serious effort to address our long-term deficits, because when the politics is put aside, the reality of our fiscal challenge is not subject to interpretation. Math is not partisan. There ought to be a debate about how to close our deficits. What we can't accept is business as usual, and we can't afford grandstanding at the expense of actually getting something done.

During our meeting we also touched briefly on how we can move forward on health reform. I've already announced that in two weeks I'll be holding a meeting with people from both parties, and as I told the congressional leadership, I'm looking forward to a constructive debate with plans that need to be measured against this test. Does it bring down costs for all Americans as well as for the federal government, which spends a huge amount on health care? Does it provide adequate protection against abuses by the insurance industry? Does it make coverage affordable and available to the tens of millions of working Americans who don't have it right now? And does it help us get on a path of fiscal sustainability?

We also talked about why this is so urgent. Just this week, there was a report that Anthem Blue Cross, which is the largest insurer in the largest state, California, is planning on raising premiums for many individual policyholders by as much as 39 percent. If we don't act, this is just a preview of coming attractions. Premiums will continue to rise for folks with insurance; millions more will lose their coverage altogether; our deficits will continue to grow larger. And we have an obligation -- both parties -- to tackle this issue in a serious way.

Now, bipartisanship depends on a willingness among both Democrats and Republicans to put aside matters of party for the good of the country. I won't hesitate to embrace a good idea from my friends in the minority party, but I also won't hesitate to condemn what I consider to be obstinacy that's rooted not in substantive disagreements but in political expedience. We talked about this as well, particularly when it comes to the confirmation process. I respect the Senate's role to advise and consent, but for months, qualified, non- controversial nominees for critical positions in government, often positions related to our national security, have been held up despite having overwhelming support. My nominee for one important job, the head of General Services Administration, which helps run the government, was denied a vote for nine months. When she finally got a vote on her nomination, she was confirmed 96 to nothing. That's not advise and consent; that's delay and obstruct.

One senator, as you all are aware, had put a hold on every single nominee that we had put forward due to a dispute over a couple of earmarks in his state. In our meeting, I asked the congressional leadership to put a stop to these holds in which nominees for critical jobs are denied a vote for months. Surely we can set aside partisanship and do what's traditionally been done to confirm these nominations. If the Senate does not act -- and I made this very clear -- if the Senate does not act to confirm these nominees, I will consider making several recess appointments during the upcoming recess, because we can't afford to allow politics to stand in the way of a well-functioning government.

My hope is that this will be the first of a series of meetings that I have with leadership of both parties in Congress. We've got to get past the tired debates that have plagued our politics and left behind nothing but soaring debt and mounting challenges, greater hardships among the American people, and extraordinary frustrations among the American people. Those frustrations are what led me to run for President, and as long as I'm here in Washington, I intend to try to make this government work on their behalf.

So, you know, I'm going to take a couple of questions, guys.

Major.

Question: After meeting with you, John Boehner came out and told us, "The House can't pass the health care bill it once passed; the Senate can't pass the health care bill it once passed. Why would we have a conversation about legislation that can't pass?" As a part of that, he said you and your White House and congressional Democrats should start over entirely from scratch on health care reform. How do you respond? Are you willing to do that?

President Obama: Well, here's how I responded to John in the meeting, and I've said this publicly before. There are some core goals that have to be met. We've got to control costs, both for families and businesses, but also for our government. Everybody out there who talks about deficits has to acknowledge that the single biggest driver of our deficits is health care spending. We cannot deal with our deficits and debt long term unless we get a handle on that. So that has to be part of a package.

Number two, we've got to deal with insurance abuses that affect millions of Americans who've got health insurance. And number three, we've got to make health insurance more available to folks in the individual market, as I just mentioned, in California, who are suddenly seeing their premiums go up 39 percent. That applies to the majority of small businesses, as well as sole proprietors. They are struggling.

So I've got these goals. Now, we have a package, as we work through the differences between the House and the Senate, and we'll put it up on a Web site for all to see over a long period of time, that meets those criteria, meets those goals. But when I was in Baltimore talking to the House Republicans, they indicated, we can accomplish some of these goals at no cost. And I said, great, let me see it. And I have no interest in doing something that's more expensive and harder to accomplish if somebody else has an easier way to do it.

So I'm going to be starting from scratch in the sense that I will be open to any ideas that help promote these goals. What I will not do, what I don't think makes sense and I don't think the American people want to see, would be another year of partisan wrangling around these issues; another six months or eight months or nine months worth of hearings in every single committee in the House and the Senate in which there's a lot of posturing. Let's get the relevant parties together; let's put the best ideas on the table. My hope is that we can find enough overlap that we can say this is the right way to move forward, even if I don't get every single thing that I want.

But here's the point that I made to John Boehner and Mitch McConnell: Bipartisanship can't be that I agree to all the things that they believe in or want, and they agree to none of the things I believe in and want, and that's the price of bipartisanship, right? But that's sometimes the way it gets presented. Mitch McConnell said something very nice in the meeting about how he supports our goals on nuclear energy and clean coal technology and more drilling to increase oil production. Well, of course he likes that; that's part of the Republican agenda for energy, which I accept. And I'm willing to move off some of the preferences of my party in order to meet them halfway. But there's got to be some give from their side as well. That's true on health care; that's true on energy; that's true on financial reform. That's what I'm hoping gets accomplished at the summit.

Question: Do you agree the House and Senate bill can't pass anymore?

President Obama: What I agree with is that the public has soured on the process that they saw over the last year. I think that actually contaminates how they view the substance of the bills. I think it is important for all of these issues to be aired so that people have confidence if we're moving forward on such a significant part of the economy as health care, that there is complete transparency and all of these issues have been adequately vetted and adequately debated.

And this gives an opportunity not just for Democrats to say here's what we think we should do, but it also gives Republicans a showcase before the entire country to say here's our plan; here's why we think this will work. And one of the things that John Boehner and Mitch McConnell both said is they didn't think that the status quo was acceptable, and that's, right there, promising. That indicates that if all sides agree that we can't just continue with business as usual then maybe we can actually get something done.

Question: Mr. President, one of the reasons Anthem said -- Anthem Blue Cross says that it's raising its premiums is because so many people are dropping out of individual coverage because the economy is so bad and that leaves the people in the pool who are people who need medical care driving up costs. One of the reasons why businesses are not expanding right now, in addition to some of the credit issues you've talked about, at least according to business leaders, is they say there's an uncertainty of what they need to plan for because of the energy bill, because of health care. That's what they say. I'm not saying it's true or not, but that's what they say. What do you say when you hear that?

President Obama: Well, I think that the biggest uncertainty has been we just went through the worst recession since the Great Depression and people weren't sure whether the financial system was going to melt down and whether we were going to tip into a endless recession. So let's be clear about the sources of uncertainty in terms of business investment over the last several years: A huge contraction, trillions of dollars of losses in people's 401(k)s; people have a lot of debt coming out of the previous decade that they still haven't worked out; the housing market losing a whole bunch of value.

So the good news is that where we were contracting by 6 percent the economy is now growing by 6 percent. The CEOs I talked to are saying they are now making investments, and I anticipate that they're going to start hiring at a more rapid clip. What I've also heard is them saying that we would like to feel like Washington is working and able to get some things done. There are two ways of interpreting the issue of uncertainty. One way would be to say, well, you know what, we'll just go back to what we were doing before on, let's say, the financial markets. We won't have the regulations that we need; we won't make any changes in terms of "too big to fail." That will provide certainty -- until the next financial crisis.

That's not the kind of certainty I think that the financial markets need. The kind of certainty they need is for us to go ahead and agree on a bipartisan effort to put some rules of the road in place so that consumers are protected in the financial markets; so that we don't have banks that are too big to fail; that we have ways of winding them down and protecting the overall system without taxpayer bailouts. That requires legislation. The sooner we can get that done, the better.

The same would be true when it comes to health care. A lot of CEOs I hear from will say, boy, we'd like you to get health care settled one way or another, but they will acknowledge that when they open up their latest invoice for their premiums and they find out that those premiums have gone up 20 percent or 25 percent, that's the kind of uncertainty that also tamps down business investment.

So I guess my answer would be this: The sooner the business community has a sense that we've got our act together here in Washington and can move forward on big, serious issues in a substantive way without a lot of posturing and partisan wrangling, I think the better off the entire country is going to be. I absolutely agree on that.

What I think is important is not to buy into this notion that is perpetrated by some of the business interests that got a stake in this who are fighting financial reform, for example, to say, boy, we'd be doing fine if we just didn't try to regulate the banks. That I think would be a mistake.

Question: Just to play devil's advocate on that -- a small business, let's say, not somebody who's going to be affected by the regulatory reform, small business -- you have proposed, you would acknowledge, a bold agenda. And a small business might wonder, I don't know how the energy bill is going to affect me, I don't know how the health care reform bill is going to affect me -- I'd better hold off on hiring.

President Obama: The small businesses I talk to -- and I've been talking to a lot of them as I've been traveling around the country over the last several months -- their biggest problem is right now they can't get credit out of their banks so they're uncertain about that. And they're still uncertain about orders -- do they just have enough customers to justify them doing more.

It's looking better at this point. But that's not the rationale for people saying, I'm not hiring. Let me put it this way. Most small businesses right now, if they've got enough customers to make a profit and they can get the bank loans required to boost their payroll, boost their inventory, and sell to those customers, they will do so. Okay?

Let's see, let's get a print guy here. David.

Question: You heard McConnell talk about nuclear power, offshore drilling, free trade -- that's a lot of Republican stuff. Is your party going to go for that if you decide to support that --

President Obama: You know, I think that on energy there should be a bipartisan agreement that we have to take a both/and approach rather than an either/or approach. What do I mean by that? I am very firm in my conviction that the country that leads the way in clean energy -- solar, wind, biodiesel, geothermal -- that country is going to win the race in the 21st century global economy. So we have to move in that direction.

What is also true is that given our energy needs in order to continue economic growth, produce jobs, make sure our businesses are competitive around the world, that we're going to need some of the old, traditional energy sources as we're developing these new ones and ramping them up. So we can't overnight convert to an all-solar or an all-wind economy. That just can't happen. We're going to have needs in these traditional sources.

And so the question then is, are we going to be able to put together a package that includes safe, secure nuclear power; that includes new technologies so that we can use coal -- which we have in abundance and is very cheap, but often is adding to our greenhouse gases -- can we find sequestration technologies that clean that up; can we identify opportunities to increase our oil and natural gas production in a way that is environmentally sustainable? And that should be part of a package with our development of clean energy.

And my hope is that my Republican friends, but also Democrats, say to themselves, let's be practical and let's do both. Let's not just do one or the other; let's do both. Over time I think the transition is going to be more and more clean energy and over time fossil fuels become less prominent in our overall energy mix. But we've got to do both.

Question: How confident are you there will be that kind of consensus for that double-edged approach?

President Obama: I am just a eternal optimist -- and so -- it's the right thing to do. And all I can do is just to keep on making the argument about what's right for the country and assume that over time people, regardless of party, regardless of their particular political positions, are going to gravitate towards the truth. Okay?

I'm going to take two more. Let's see --

Question: How about the back?

President Obama: Well, I just want to make sure that I was getting a balance here, so -- go ahead, Chuck.

Question: Awwww --

President Obama: Why is everybody moaning about Todd?

Question: He's too good. His questions are too precise.

Question: Iran -- we got the news today that they're doing more of these -- trying to enhance this uranium even more. Obviously Secretary Gates today in Paris was quoted as saying basically the dialogue seems to be over and now the question is sanctions. Where are we on sanctions? How close is this? I know you had sort of an end-of-the-year deadline when you stood up there with Sarkozy and Brown. It's now February. How quickly is this moving along?

President Obama: Well, it's moving along fairly quickly. I think that we have bent over backwards to say to the Islamic Republic of Iran that we are willing to have a constructive conversation about how they can align themselves with international norms and rules and reenter as full members of the international community.

The most obvious attempt was when we gave them an offer that said we are going to provide the conversion of some of the low-enriched uranium that they already have into the isotopes that they need for their medical research and for hospitals that would serve up to a million Iranian citizens. They rejected it -- although one of the difficulties in dealing with Iran over the last several months is it's not always clear who's speaking on behalf of the government, and we get a lot of different, mixed signals. But what's clear is, is that they have not said yes to an agreement that Russia, China, Germany, France, Great Britain and the United States all said was a good deal, and that the director of the IAEA said was the right thing to do and that Iran should accept.

That indicates to us that, despite their posturing that their nuclear power is only for civilian use, that they in fact continue to pursue a course that would lead to weaponization. And that is not acceptable to the international community, not just to the United States. So what we've said from the start was we're moving on dual tracks. If you want to accept the kinds of agreements with the international community that lead you down a path of being a member of good standing, then we welcome you. If not --

Question: Haven't they responded, though? I mean, by deciding to do what they did, with these --

Well, I'm getting to that.

Question: Okay.

President Obama: And if not, then the next step is sanctions. They have made their choice so far, although the door is still open. And what we are going to be working on over the next several weeks is developing a significant regime of sanctions that will indicate to them how isolated they are from the international community as a whole.

Question: What do you mean by “regime of sanctions”?

President Obama: Well, meaning that there's going to be a --

Question: Some will be U.N. and some will be --

President Obama: We are going to be looking at a variety of ways in which countries indicate to Iran that their approach is unacceptable. And the U.N. will be one aspect of that broader effort.

Question: China will be there? You're confident?

President Obama: Well, the -- we are confident right now that the international community is unified around Iran's misbehavior in this area. How China operates at the Security Council as we pursue sanctions is something that we're going to have to see. One thing I'm pleased about is to see how forward-leaning the Russians have been on this issue. I think they clearly have seen that Iran hasn't been serious about solving what is a solvable dispute between Iran and the international community.

All right? I'm going to make this the last question. And I'll take somebody from the back -- yes.

Question: Me?

President Obama: Yes.

Question: Thanks for doing this. It's been a while. On health care, the Republicans are asking whether the February 25th session will include economists and public interest groups and people supporting your side, or will it just be the members of Congress? And on Anthem Blue Cross, do you have the authority to go in and tell a private company they can't charge that -- how will you stop them?

President Obama: Well, I don't have the authority as I understand it -- I can't simply issue an executive order lowering everybody's rates. If I could I would have done that already and saved myself a lot of grief on Capitol Hill. That's why reform is so important. That's why the status quo is unacceptable.

But there is no shortcut in dealing with this issue. I know the American people get frustrated in debating something like health care because you get a whole bunch of different claims being made by different groups and different interests. It is a big, complicated, tough issue. But what is also true is that without some action on the part of Congress, it is very unlikely that we see any improvement over the current trajectory. And the current trajectory is premiums keep on going up 10, 15, 20, 30 percent. The current trajectory is more and more people are losing health care.

I don't know if people noted, because during the health care debate everybody was saying the President is trying to take over -- a government takeover of health care. I don't know if anybody noticed that for the first time this year you saw more people getting health care from government than you did from the private sector -- not because of anything we did, but because more and more people are losing their health care from their employers. It's becoming unaffordable. That's what we're trying to prevent.

We want people to be able to get health care from their employers. But we also understand that you've got to fix the system so that people are able to get it at affordable rates and small businesses can afford to give their employees insurance at an affordable rate. And that's not happening right now.

To your question about the 25th, my hope is that this doesn't end up being political theater, as I think some of you have phrased it. I want a substantive discussion. We haven't refined exactly how the agenda is going to go that day. We want to talk with both the Democratic and Republican leaders to find out what they think would be most useful. I do want to make sure that there's some people like the Congressional Budget Office, for example, that are considered non-partisan, who can answer questions.

In this whole health care debate I'm reminded of the story that was told about Senator Moynihan, who was I guess in an argument with one of his colleagues, and his colleague was losing the argument so he got a little flustered and said to Senator Moynihan, "Well, I'm entitled to my own opinion." And Senator Moynihan said, "Well, you're entitled to your own opinion, but you're not entitled to your own facts." I think that's the key to a successful dialogue on the 25th or on health care.

Let's establish some common facts. Let's establish what the issues are, what the problems are, and let's test out in front of the American people what ideas work and what ideas don't. And if we can establish that factual accuracy about how different approaches would work, then I think we can make some progress. And it may be that some of the facts that come up are ones that make my party a little bit uncomfortable. So if it's established that by working seriously on medical malpractice and tort reform that we can reduce some of those costs, I've said from the beginning of this debate I'd be willing to work on that. On the other hand, if I'm told that that is only a fraction of the problem and that is not the biggest driver of health care costs, then I'm also going to insist, okay, let's look at that as one aspect of it, but what else are we willing to do?

And this is where it gets back to the point I was making earlier. Bipartisanship cannot mean simply that Democrats give up everything that they believe in, find the handful of things that Republicans have been advocating for and we do those things, and then we have bipartisanship. That's not how it works in any other realm of life. That's certainly not how it works in my marriage with Michelle, although I usually do give in most of the time. But the -- there's got to be some give and take, and that's what I'm hoping can be accomplished. And I'm confident that's what the American people are looking for.

So, all right?

Question: Jobs question?

President Obama: Okay, since there wasn't a jobs question --

Question: Well, I just --

President Obama: I'll make this the last one, jobs question.

Question: At the stakeout, the Republicans were saying, well, the jobs package we've seen, it's not really ready yet, we're a little worried about the cost. Are you satisfied that there is something that can be quickly moved through Congress on jobs?

President Obama: Well, my understanding is -- first of all, the House has moved forward a jobs package that has some good elements in it. My understanding is, is that there is bipartisan talks taking place as we speak on the Senate side about some elements of a package.

I think there are some things that a lot of people agree on. Just to give you an example, the idea of eliminating capital gains for small businesses -- something we can all agree on. I talked about it at the State of the Union address. My hope would be that we would all agree on a mechanism to get community banks who are lending to small businesses more capital, because that is something that I keep on hearing is one of the biggest problems that small businesses have out there.

So I think that it's realistic for us to get a package moving quickly that may not include all the things I think need to be done, and it may be that that first package builds some trust and confidence that Democrats and Republicans on Capitol Hill can work together and then we move on to the next aspect of the package and so forth. It may take a series of incremental steps, but the one thing I'm absolutely clear about is, is that we've got an economy that's growing right now, a huge boost in productivity -- that's the good news. The bad news is, is that companies still haven't taken that final step in actually putting people on their payroll full-time.

We're seeing an increase in temporary workers, but they haven't yet taken on that full-time worker. And so providing some additional impetus to them, right as the economy is moving in a positive direction, I think can end up yielding some good results.

All right? Thank you, guys. That was pretty good, thanks.

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# Henderson Town Hall

President Obama: Hello, Henderson! Thank you! Thank you so much, everybody. Everybody, have a seat, have a seat. I am thrilled to be here.

Audience Member: We love you, Mr. President!

President Obama: I love you back.

We've got some special guests here -- everybody is a special guest, but I just want to acknowledge a few folks here. Secretary of State Ross Miller in the house. Two outstanding members of Congress -- Representative Shelley Berkley -- and your own Dina Titus.

Senate Majority Leader Steven Horsford. We've got State Assembly Majority Leader John Oceguera. Clark County Commissioner Chairman Rory Reid. Henderson Mayor Andy Hafen. Former Governor Bob Miller.

We've got -- first, can everybody give a huge round of applause for Tina Long for the great introduction of Harry Reid? Green Valley High School principal Jeff Horn. Obviously not exam time yet. Get's a standing "O."

The Green Valley High School Marching Band that played at my inauguration -- give them a big round of applause. They played "Viva Las Vegas." At the reviewing stand -- they did.

And finally, he may have already been acknowledged -- I want to give a special acknowledgment to Greg Koehler, North Las Vegas Fire Department, who just returned from 14 days in Haiti giving medical assistance to orphans. Thank you. We're proud of you. Thank you.

Now, it's good to be back in Nevada -- good to be back in Vegas. Good to be back in Henderson.And good to be with my good friend, your great senator, Harry Reid.

I understand Henderson is where Harry went to school as a boy and fought in the ring as an amateur boxer. Now, looking at Harry, you wouldn't say that -- I mean, let's face it -- but I can personally attest that Harry Reid is one of the toughest people I know. He does not give up. He knows what he cares about. He knows what he believes in and he's willing to fight for it. And sometimes he takes his licks, but he gets back up. Harry Reid has never stopped fighting -- he hasn’t stopped fighting for Henderson; he hasn’t stopped fighting for Nevada; he has not stopped fighting for the United States of America and middle-class families all across this country that need a fair shake.

I'm looking forward to hearing what's on your minds and trying to answer a few questions. But before I do, let me say a few words about the situation that folks are facing right now.

Harry is not one for sugarcoating things -- I don't know if you noticed that. He's kind of a blunt guy. Neither am I. These are tough times. When President Kennedy was here, he called Henderson a "city of destiny" because he saw its potential as Las Vegas grew. But for too long, I know many of you have felt like your destiny has been slipping beyond your control.

You don't need me to tell you that. All of you in some way have felt this recession. You felt it in the tourism and hospitality industry. You felt it in the construction industry. The unemployment rate here is 13 percent, which is the second highest in the nation. Foreclosures are also among the highest. Home values have fallen by more than almost anyplace else. And this is after a decade when, for most middle-class families, incomes actually shrank and wages flat-lined, and the only thing rising faster was medical costs and the cost of education.

So I know it's tough out there. Harry Reid knows it's tough out there. That's why we asked you to send us to Washington. We didn't run for the fancy title or a big desk or a comfy chair. We didn't run because it was fun to get your name in the newspapers -- most of the time, it's not. We didn't run so a bunch of folks on cable TV could chatter about you. And we didn't run to kick our problems down the road. We ran to solve problems that folks like you are facing every single day. That's why we ran for office. That's why Harry wanted to be Majority Leader, and that's why I wanted to be President of the United States -- to help you.

When my Administration took office, our immediate mission was clear. We needed to stop the great recession from turning into a great depression. And economists of every stripe were warning that was a real possibility. And that meant that we had to make some decisions swiftly, boldly, and not always popular, but decisions that were necessary. It wasn't a time for satisfying the politics of the moment, it wasn't time for just playing to the cameras -- it was time for doing what was right.

That's why we helped stabilize our financial system -- not because we felt any compassion for big banks, but because not doing so would have endangered the savings and dreams of millions more Americans.

And by the way, I was committed to ensuring that if taxpayers were going to provide temporary assistance to keep our financial system afloat, then it actually had to be temporary. And I was determined to get back every single dime, and we are well on our way to doing that -- getting back every single dime from those banks.

In fact, one battle we're having right now is we think the largest banks should be assessed a fee so that taxpayers are held harmless for the assistance that you've been giving. As you might imagine, the banks are not enthusiastic about that. And it won't surprise you to learn that they've got a few friends in Congress who are willing to go along, but you know Harry Reid is not one of those folks who are willing to go along. We're going to get your money back because Harry Reid is going to make sure you get your money back.

We helped shore up the American auto industry. That wasn't popular. I understood why. Folks felt like these companies should reap the consequences of bad management decisions in the past, just like any other company would. But if we had let GM and Chrysler go under, it would have been hundreds of thousands of hardworking Americans who paid the price -- not just folks at those companies themselves, but at suppliers and dealers all across the country.

So we told them, if you're willing to take the tough and painful steps you make -- that are needed for you to become more competitive, then we're willing to invest in your future. And as a result, auto production in the United States of America is up 69 percent from the first three months of 2009. GM's CEO recently said that the company would repay $6.7 billion in loans from taxpayers -- with interest -- by June of this year.

Now, one of the things you need to know is that the steps we've taken to shore up the banks and the autos, they have nothing to do with the Recovery Act. Those were separate. We had to do those as emergency measures. And I just want to point this out -- Harry Reid, he's got his pollsters; I've got my pollsters. We knew that this wasn't going to be popular. But we did it because it was the right thing to do.

So it's also why we passed the Recovery Act. Now, a lot of people think that the stimulus package, the Recovery Act -- if you listen on television, you'd think, well, that's all about giving banks money. That has nothing to do with the banks. The other week, I saw a poll that said Americans, they don't like the Recovery Act -- they just like all the individual parts of the Recovery Act.

And the reason is, they think the Recovery Act is for banks and auto companies. When you ask folks about what was actually in the Recovery Act, they think it's full of good ideas -- like tax cuts, like infrastructure investment, like unemployment relief. That's what the Recovery Act was. It was tax cuts for small business owners and 95 percent of you. You may not have noticed -- 95 percent of you got a tax cut -- because of Harry Reid and because of the Recovery Act. One million people in the state of Nevada.

We expanded unemployment insurance at a time when it was absolutely vital for people as they were trying to stay afloat. More than a quarter-million of your members -- of your neighbors. It was jobs for construction workers and jobs for cops and firemen, jobs for almost 2,000 education professionals right here in Nevada.

I haven't talked to the principal, but I guarantee you, we would have seen some very difficult decisions having to be made about maintaining teachers right here at Green Valley, if it hadn't been for the help that Harry Reid provided last year. You would have seen some very tough choices.

All of this -- from the tax cuts to the unemployment insurance to the jobs -- that was only possible because of Harry's leadership. And as a result, our economy is growing again. Almost two million Americans who would otherwise be employed [sic] are working right now -- because of what Harry Reid did. We're no longer staring into an economic abyss -- because of what Harry Reid helped to do.

Now, he and I both know that's little comfort to the seven million Americans who lost their job in this recession. It's little comfort to homeowners who are facing foreclosure or steep declines in their home values, or to students who are having to delay their college plans because they can't afford it, or older folks who are postponing retirement.

That's why I'm not going to rest. That's not -- why we're not done. That's why Harry Reid isn't going to rest until all of America is working again, until the dream of home ownership is secure once again, and until our economy is benefiting not just Wall Street but benefiting hardworking Nevada families, benefiting the middle class, benefiting Americans all across this great country of ours. That's what we are aiming to do.

Now, I've said before that the way I measure our economy's strength -- the way you measure it -- is by whether jobs and wages and incomes are growing. But the other way we measure is by whether families have a roof over their heads and whether folks are living out that American Dream of owning a home. That dream has been jeopardized in this recession for a lot of people, especially right here in Nevada.

Now, part of it was -- I've got to be blunt here, I got to be honest -- part of it was because too many lenders were focused on making a quick buck instead of acting responsibly. And, if we're honest, too many borrowers acted irresponsibly at certain points, taking on mortgages that they knew they couldn't afford. And what happened was the regulators in Washington and legislators too often turned a blind eye to the excesses and the failures on Wall Street that fed a housing bubble. And now that that bubble has burst, it's left devastation that we're still grappling with today.

Now, government has a responsibility to help deal with this problem. Government can't solve this problem alone. We got to be honest about that. Government alone can't solve this problem. And it shouldn't. But government can make a difference. It can't stop every foreclosure, and tax dollars shouldn't be used to reward the very irresponsible lenders and borrowers who helped bring about the housing crisis. But what we can do is help families who've done everything right stay in their homes whenever possible. What we can do is stabilize the housing market so that home values can begin rising again.

And that's why we're buying up vacant homes and converting them into affordable housing -- creating jobs, stemming our housing crisis, growing the local economy. That's why last year, we put a tax credit worth thousands of dollars into the pocket of 1.4 million Americans to help them buy their first home -- first-time homebuyers credit. That's why we're offering over one million struggling homeowners lower monthly payments through our loan modification initiative.

And that's why today, thanks to the leadership of Harry Reid, I'm announcing a $1.5 billion fund for housing finance agencies in the states that are hardest hit by this housing crisis -- and that means here in Nevada. Right here in Nevada.

So this fund is going to help out-of-work homeowners avoid preventable foreclosures, and it will help homeowners who owe more than their homes are worth find a way to pay their mortgages that works for both the borrowers and the lenders alike, and will help folks who've taken out a second mortgage modify their loans. So, yes, we need to strengthen our housing market. And we need to focus on job creation and getting our economy moving again. But one last thing I want to be clear about -- we can do all those things, dealing with sort of the emergency crisis, and still fall behind in the 21st century, in this global economy, unless we recommit ourselves to solving some of the long-term problems that have been with us for years.

We've got to recognize, just like earlier generations, that our future is what we make of it, and unless we give everything we've got to securing America's success in the 21st century, our children aren’t going to have the same opportunities.

Now, I've traveled a lot over the last year, all over the world, and I've got to tell you, countries like China -- they're competing to win. And there's nothing wrong with that. We want China to succeed. They've got a lot of poverty, much more poverty than we have here, and it's good for their stability if they're doing well. But I don't know about you -- I don't intend to cede the 21st century to anybody else. America is not a nation that follows -- America leads. That's what I intend for us to do once again. America leads.

So what does it mean to lead? It means countries that out-educate us today are going to out-compete us tomorrow. And that means America has to lead in education. That's why we're working with educators to transform our schools, and make college more affordable, and prepare our kids for science and engineering and technical degrees -- because those are going to be the jobs of the future.

And because the future belongs to countries that create the jobs of tomorrow, we've got to lead in energy. That's why we're investing in companies right here in Nevada and across this nation that produce solar power and wind power and the smart, energy-efficient electric grids -- the investments that are giving rise to a clean energy economy. It's vital that we do that.

Our nation can't lead, we can't prosper, if we've got a broken-down health care system that works better for the insurance companies than it does for ordinary Americans. And we can't squander the opportunity to reform our health care system to make it work for everybody.

That's why this coming week I'm going to be meeting, and Harry is going to be meeting, with members of both parties and both chambers -- we're going to move forward the Democratic proposal; we hope the Republicans have one, too. And we'll sit down and let's hammer it out, go -- we'll go section by section.

Because America can't solve our economic problems unless we tackle some of these structural problems. And America can't lead -- we can't succeed unless we're also getting a handle on our debt. We've got to confront this fiscal crisis that has been brewing for years. That's why we're cutting what we don't need to pay for what we do. That's why I signed a law that says Americans should pay as we go and live within our means. That's why yesterday I announced a bipartisan fiscal commission that will help us meet our fiscal challenges once and for all.

Fiscal responsibility. Clean energy. A world-class education. A health care system that works. An economy that lifts up all our citizens. That's how America can lead. That's how the future will be won -- with all of us coming together to win it -- Democrats and Republicans alike. And independents.

With all the petty partisanship and game-playing in Washington, I know that sometimes you guys can feel pretty frustrated.

Audience: Yesss!

President Obama: I know it can be easy to despair about whether we, as a nation, can come together anymore. But for those who wonder if America can unite, just come to Henderson. You think about it. This is a town that was founded during World War II to supply metal for planes, for guns, for the arsenal of democracy that freed the world from tyranny. This is a town -- it wasn’t built by liberals or conservatives; it was built by Americans, by patriots who rallied around a common purpose in an hour of need. And I'm certain that if we can reclaim in this country the spirit of unity that built Henderson, Nevada, all those years ago, then we can build cities of destiny across this country. And the future will belong to the United States of America.

Thank you. God bless you. God bless the United States of America. Thank you. Thank you.

All right, everybody sit down. This is the -- Here's where I'm on the hot seat, so I've got to take off my jacket. Answer some questions. Everybody sit down. All right.

Some of you have been to town halls before, so this is pretty straightforward. We've got people in the audience with mics, and just raise your hand -- we're going to go girl, boy, girl, boy -- make sure it's fair. And I'm going to try to take as many questions as I can in the time remaining. And when you -- before you answer [sic] your question, if you can introduce yourself so that we know who you are. And try to make your question relatively brief so that we can get in as many as possible. All right?

As I said, we're going to go girl, boy, girl, boy. Young lady right there, yes.

Question: Thank you, President Obama. In Nevada --

President Obama: What's your name?

Question: Oh, my name is Florence Jamison. [phonetic]

President Obama: Okay. How are you, Florence?

Question: I'm terrific.

President Obama: Great.

Question: In Nevada we have the second highest number of medically uninsured, about 325,000 uninsured. More than five working adults are colleagues who are dying each week because of no access to health care. I am the founder of Volunteers in Medicine, Southern Nevada -- a free clinic which has been set up to help our sick and dying. There are hundreds of caring Nevadans that have rallied like a corps of angels to come and provide free health care for their struggling neighbors -- housekeepers, operators, receptionists, eligibility workers, social workers, nurses, doctors.

In your health reform bill you have a provision to protect the federally funded subsidized community clinics. It is not clear if they're going to cover the free clinics where volunteers throughout the community have rallied to give support to their struggling neighbors in their great time of need. Can you help us with that?

President Obama: Well, thank you, first of all, for the great work that you guys are doing. So we appreciate that. But if you're like a lot of free clinics across the country, I know you're getting overwhelmed, because the need is so great.

The bill that Harry and I have been working on would provide assistance to a whole range of community-based efforts -- preventive care, wellness care -- which is absolutely vital not only for the people who are receiving services at clinics like yours, but also for reducing the costs of health care overall, because the more that people have access to preventive care, the less likely they are to go to the emergency room when things are already out of hand.

Now, let me just speak more broadly about health care, because we're going to have a meeting with the Republicans, as I said, next week. I've got to admit that this has been an issue that I was warned I shouldn't take on. No, no, I mean, seriously. When I first came in -- and Harry was part of some of these conversations -- there were a lot of political advisors who said, look, health care is just too hard, it's just too complicated. Everybody says in theory that they want to reform the health care system, but because it's complicated, once you start putting a bill together you get all kinds of criticism; the insurance lobby will spend millions of dollars on advertising and TV, scaring the heck out of everybody; your poll numbers will go down, and you're not going to get a lot of cooperation from the other side.

I mean, that was the warning. Plus, because the economy is bad, a lot of people are already feeling kind of anxious, and so they're thinking, gosh, we had to do all that stuff to fix the financial system, we had to do this stuff to fix the autos, we had this big recovery package, the deficits are going up -- partly because tax revenues is not coming in and we're having to spend more on unemployment insurance and things like that -- this is probably not the time to be too ambitious.

So I want to explain to everybody why I decided to take it on. First of all, I decided to take it on because I get a letter -- or two, or five -- every day from people who have lost their job and suddenly they don't have health insurance, somebody in their family gets sick, and they lose their house. They were solid middle-class folks until they lost their job, and, lo and behold, they discovered they couldn't get coverage because something had happened to them before. Maybe a woman had had breast cancer, and it was okay as long as she had her employer-based health care. But once she tried -- once she lost her job and tried to get health care, couldn't get it.

I've looked too many parents in the eye who say, our children have these chronic diseases and we found out that our insurance only covered us up to a certain amount and then they hit a cap, and afterwards we had to hold bake sales and our neighbors had to raise money just to make sure that our kids would live. Too many stories like that. So that was the main reason that I said we had to take it on.

But the second reason was because even if you've got health insurance, what's happened to your premiums lately? Look, if this is a representative sample, I'm assuming that 85 percent of you have health care -- maybe 90 percent -- let's say 85 percent of you have health care. Some of you are getting it through your jobs; some of you are still buying it individually, or you're a small business owner and you're purchasing it. No matter what your situation, I guarantee you your costs have gone up at least double digits over the last year. They have doubled over the last decade. And they're going to more than double over the next decade if we don't do anything. So even if you're lucky enough to have health care, it is digging deeper and deeper into your pocket.

They just had -- some of you saw the news -- for people who don't have insurance through a big employer, the individual market, in California one of the biggest insurance providers, Anthem Blue Cross, just announced that they were going to raise rates on these folks by up to 39 percent -- up to 39 percent.

That's the future. That's the future, Henderson. That's going to be one of the main things that helps to bankrupt local school districts, because all these teachers, all these employees, those health care costs go up. Universities -- those young people who are about to go to college, part of the reason your tuition is going up is because every employee at the university, their health care costs are going up. And that gets passed on to you.

And, finally, the third reason that we had to take this on is because the deficit and the debt that you hear everybody getting in a tizzy about -- properly so -- the vast majority of our long-term debt is driven by Medicare and Medicaid. It's driven by our rising health care costs. Nothing comes close. You could eliminate every earmark, you could eliminate foreign aid, you could eliminate all that stuff -- it would amount to about 5 percent of the budget. Most of it is health care costs.

And as the population gets older, they use more health care; that drives it up even faster. And pretty soon, pretty soon the entire federal budget is going to be gobbled up by these rising health care costs. And you're already seeing it at the state level here in Nevada, right? What's happening with Medicaid? The governor is starting to talk about having to cut all kinds of aspects of Medicaid because of the cost.

So here's my point. We can't wait to reform the health care system. It is vital for our economy. It is vital for our economy to change how health care works in this country. It's vital.

Now, having said all that, the people who were giving me advice at the beginning of the year were right -- health care has been knocking me around pretty good. It's been knocking Harry around pretty good. And Harry has shown extraordinary courage because he said, you know what, Barack, we are going to get this done. I know it's costing me politically but it's important, it's the right thing to do. That's what he's been saying consistently, and I'm proud of him for it.

So let me -- just very quickly, let me describe what it is that we have proposed -- and I'm waiting to see what the Republicans propose in turn -- because there's been a lot of misinformation here. What we have said is this: If you have health insurance, we are going to pass a series of health reforms so that the insurance companies have to treat you fairly -- it's very straightforward -- that they can't prevent you from getting health insurance because of a preexisting condition; that they can't put a lifetime cap so in the fine print it turns out that you're not fully covered. So there are a whole series of insurance reforms -- that's number one.

Number two, we've got a whole series of cost controls. So what we're saying is, for example, that every insurer, they've got to spend the vast majority of your premiums on actual care, as opposed to profits and overhead. We're saying that we've got to get out some of the waste and abuse, including subsidies to insurance companies in the Medicare system that run in the tens of billions of dollars every year. That's not a good use of your taxpayer dollars. And we're working to improve wellness and prevention, as I said before, so that people aren't going to the emergency room for care.

Now, the third thing, and the thing that's most controversial, sadly, is what we're also saying is we've got to make sure that everybody can have access to coverage. And the way we do that is we set up something called an exchange, where essentially individuals and small businesses who aren't getting a good deal because they don't have the same negotiating power as the big companies when it comes to the insurance market, they can pool just like members of Congress and federal employees do in their health care plan -- they can pool so that now they've got the purchasing power of a million people behind them and they can get a better deal. That can lower their costs. And we'll give subsidies for working families who can't afford it even with lower premium costs.

Now, so I want everybody to pay attention next Thursday when we have this health care summit. You may not want to watch all six or eight hours of it, you got things to do. But pay attention to what this debate is about, because there's been so much talk about death panels and adding to the deficit, and this and that and the other. Pay attention, because this is -- what we're proposing has nothing to do with a government takeover of a health care. Most of you would have the exact same health care that you've got right now, but you'd be more protected and more secure. And if you don't have health care, you'd have a chance of getting health care.

And, by the way, it would actually save us money in the long term, because all those wasteful dollars that we're spending right now, the experts estimate we'd actually save a trillion dollars by passing it.

Now, I think it's the right thing to do. The Republicans say -- the Republicans say that they've got a better way of doing it. So I want them to put it on the table -- because as I told them -- as I told them a while back, look, I mean, I'm not a -- I'm not an unreasonable guy. If you show me that you can do the things we just talked about -- protect people from insurance problems, make sure that the costs are controlled, and people who don't have health insurance are covered -- and you can do it cheaper than me, then why wouldn’t I do that? I'll just grab your idea and say, great, and take all the credit. I'd be happy to do it.

So show me what you got. But don't let the American people go another year, another 10 years, another 20 years without health insurance reform in this country.

Okay, it's a gentleman's turn. It's a man's turn. This guy over here. This guy with a beard.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Ben Burris [phonetic], from Jonesboro, Arkansas.

President Obama: What are you doing all the way here in Vegas?

Question: Everybody comes to Vegas.

President Obama: That's what I'm talking about. There you go. Everybody comes to Vegas. Yes. Now, here's my only question, Ben. Have you spent some money here in Vegas?

Question: Oh, yes, sir.

President Obama: He says "Yes, sir."

Question: Yes, sir.

President Obama: He's spending some money here in Vegas. All right. That's good. We like to see that. All right, what's your question?

Question: Well, sir, I'm reasonably familiar with the current and proposed legislature as it applies to dentistry and oral health. And my question is, what's your vision for how dentistry will fit into your larger framework for health care reform?

President Obama: Are you a dentist yourself?

Question: Yes, sir. So if somebody has a heart attack, you better still call 9-1-1. Just a dentist.

President Obama: Now, it is interesting that you raised this. It turns out -- this is serous -- that dental hygiene is actually very important for keeping your heart healthy. It turns out that heart disease can be triggered when you've got gum disease. So everybody floss. That's my first -- am I right? You got to floss.

It is my hope that we can include dental care in the various proposals that we're putting forward. Dental and vision care are very important. Now, I'll tell you that some folks will say we can't afford it. Some states in their Medicaid program cover dental; some states don't.

At minimum -- at minimum, I think it's very important that we've got dental care for our kids. Because what happens is, is that if we can keep our children's teeth healthy, then usually that means they've got healthy teeth as adults. And if not, oftentimes that actually distracts them and prevents them from learning, because both dental and eye care -- a lot of kids end up being distracted. They can't read the blackboard, they've got a cavity that's been untreated. It's a huge problem.

So I would like to see dental care covered. I will tell you that some folks are going to say we can't afford it. At minimum, I'd like to see that our children have the care that they need.

Question: Can I say one more thing, sir? I think most of us in dentistry think that health care is the primary need here in terms of that, and children as well. So we think that if you can take care of health care first and let dentistry -- do that kind of thing -- it's more important to take care of the health care first. Thank you, sir.

President Obama: There you go. All right, I appreciate that. Thank you. Okay, it's a young lady's turn. It's so hard to choose. Okay, I'll call on this young lady back here, right over here. Yes, you. All right, we got to get the young man with the mic over to you.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Thank God for this opportunity. I realize that insurance and medical care has been a major issue. This is my problem. I worked for United Airlines for nearly 30 years. I was severely injured during flight. I have a workman comp's case that have fallen on deaf ear. The conflict in this city with the lawyers and the doctors and this whole problem has drove my life really to almost not having a life at all.

I don't know where else to turn. I don't know who else to talk to about the problem. I've written you letters. I've written letters to many of the senators here in Las Vegas. I've talked to the doctors. I've done everything I know how to do. But I am a widow with a special needs child. I have lived in the house that I live in for 19 years. My house is in foreclosure. I have disability insurance. I have Social Security disability. That disability tells me, your insurance is not accepted here. I can't get the medical help that I need to get better.

President Obama: What's your --

Question: I'd love to be a flight attendant for you on that U.S. One. I'm trained on that U.S. One.

President Obama: Well, look, in terms of your specific issue, come see Harry Reid and Harry Reid will see if he can help you out here. All right? Workman's comp is generally a state issue as opposed to a federal issue. But Harry, he's got a few connections here in Nevada, so I suspect that he can help out.

But, look, to the larger point, there are a lot more people who are actually going on disability right now partly because job opportunities have shrunk. And that's why it’s so important for us to really focus on jobs.

Now, if you were listening to the Republicans, you'd think that last year we weren't paying any attention to jobs, that we were just kind of -- I don't know what we were doing, Harry. I guess we were just sort of sitting around. The truth is, is that everything we did last year was designed around how do we break the back of the recession and move the economic recovery forward in order to promote job growth.

You can't have job growth if the economy is contracting by 6 percent, because businesses look and they say nobody is spending money, we got no customers, we can't hire. So the first thing we had to do was to make sure that companies were starting to make a profit again, and the economy was growing. We are now in that position, because of the work that Harry did and a lot of -- and these two outstanding members of Congress did, Congresswoman Berkley and Titus. The economy is now growing again.

But here is the challenge that we've got. The challenge we have is that after they've laid off 8 million people, now they're growing with fewer people. So they're making profits, but they haven't started hiring yet. Our challenge is how do we get businesses to start hiring again?

Now, some of the jobs, I'll be honest with you, are probably not going to come back. And the reason is because people have installed new technologies, or they've set up new system where they can do more with fewer workers. That's why it's so important for us to invest in new industries and new technologies.

I'll give you an example. We were talking about autos before. Do you know that before the Recovery Act was passed, the United States was producing about 2 percent of the advanced batteries that are used in these clean cars, these electric cars? We were producing 2 percent of the batteries -- less than 2 percent. What we did as part of the Recovery Act was invest in developing plants for battery production here in the United States. And do you know that in 18 months, we will have the capacity to produce 20 percent of the advanced batteries around the world? And by 2015, we'll have the capacity to produce 40 percent of the batteries around the world. We've created an entire new industry -- an entire new industry has been created here in the United States that can produce jobs.

So we've got to constantly look for those opportunities in solar and in wind, and in other hi-tech areas, because that's going to be the future. The more people have work available to them -- there is just a virtuous cycle that happens. When people go to work, they feel good; their health is better; their kids do better in school -- right? Business -- they've got money to spend, they come to Vegas, right? Tourism industry starts taking off.

So we're going to be putting -- Harry and I are working now on a jobs package for this year that's designed not -- it's no longer designed to grow the economy. Now it's designed to give incentives to businesses who are now making a profit to start hiring again, and to help small businesses get loans. Because a lot of small businesses are still having trouble getting loans from banks, even if they see an opportunity for business growth, and we want to make sure that they've got access to capital.

All right, it's a guy's turn. I'm going to call on this guy, even though he's got a Cubs jacket on. Everybody knows I'm a White Sox fan, but I'm going to call -- just to show that I'm unbiased, I'm calling on a Cubs guy.

Question: You're not a Cub hater.

President Obama: I'm not a Cub hater, that's right.

Question: Okay, before I ask my question, I want to say something. I'm enrolled in a Medicare Advantage plan. I understand that my benefits will be cut with health reform. I'm all for it.

President Obama: Well, how about that? Let me -- let me -- before you ask your actual question, let me just make this point. We're not actually eliminating Medicare Advantage. What Medicare Advantage is, is basically the previous administration had this idea, instead of traditional Medicare, let's contract out to insurance companies to manage the Medicare program. And the insurance companies can then kind of package and pool providers of dental care or eye wear or what have you, and it's a one-stop shop for seniors.

Now, in theory that sounds like a pretty good idea, except as you might imagine if the insurance companies are involved that means they've got to make a profit. And what happened was they didn't bid out competitively this Medicare Advantage program. So these insurance companies were just getting a sweet deal.

All we've been saying is let's make sure that there's a competitive bidding process and that we are getting the absolute best bargain.

But I appreciate your larger concern, which is let's make sure that everybody has access to health care. And traditional Medicare, by the way, is a great deal. Everybody who is in it is pretty happy with it. But go ahead with your question.

Question: I'm going to introduce myself. My name is Norman -- I live in north Las Vegas. I'm retired. And my question is about Social Security.

President Obama: Are you a former Chicagoan?

Question: Yes, sir.

President Obama: Where are you from in Chicago?

Question: Schaumburg last.

President Obama: Fantastic. Well, the weather is a little bit better here, I got to admit.

Question: Well, we can visit snow here.

President Obama: Exactly. All right, go ahead.

Question: Well, my question is about Social Security. Now, I know there are a lot of myths out there, and I know you can dispel them. I saw an interview on "Meet The Press" with Alan Greenspan, who, as you know, was on the Social Security Commission in the '80s. And Tim Russert asked him specifically, what about the crisis in Social Security? Alan Greenspan's response was, there is no crisis in Social Security; it's a payroll tax issue. Can you comment on that?

President Obama: Yes. Here’s the situation with Social Security. It is actually true that Social Security is not in crisis the way our health care system is in crisis. I mean, when you think about the big entitlement programs, you've got Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid. These are the big programs that take up a huge portion of the federal budget. Social Security is in the best shape of any of these, because basically the cost of Social Security will just go up with ordinary inflation, whereas health care costs are going up much faster than inflation.

It is true that if we continue on the current path with Social Security, if we did nothing on Social Security, that at a certain point, in maybe 20 years or so, what would happen is that you start seeing less money coming into the payroll tax, because the population is getting older so you've got fewer workers, and more people are collecting Social Security so more money is going out, and so the trust fund starts dropping.

And if we did nothing, then somewhere around 2040 what would happen would be a lot of the young people who would start collecting Social Security around then would find that they only got 75 cents on every dollar that they thought they were going to get. Everybody with me so far? All right. So slowly we're running out of money.

But the fixes that are required for Social Security are not huge, the way they are with Medicare. Medicare, that is a real problem. If we don't get a handle on it, it will bankrupt us. With Social Security, we could make adjustments to the payroll tax. For example -- I'll just give you one example -- right now, your Social Security -- your payroll tax is capped at $109,000. So what that means is, is that -- how many people -- I don't mean to pry into your business, but how many people here make less than $109,000 every year? All right, this is a pretty rich audience -- a lot of people kept their hands down. I'm impressed.

No, look, what it means is basically for 95 percent of Americans, they pay -- every dollar you earn, you pay into the payroll tax. But think about that other 5 percent that's making more than $109,000 a year. Warren Buffett, he pays the payroll tax on the first $109,000 he makes, and then for the other $10 billion -- he doesn't pay payroll tax.

So -- yes, somebody said, "What?" Yes, that's right. That's the way it works.

So what we've said is, well, don't we -- doesn't it make sense to maybe have that payroll tax cut off at a higher level, or have people -- maybe you hold people harmless till they make $250,000 a year, but between $250,000 and a million or something, they start paying payroll tax again -- just to make sure that the fund overall is solvent.

So that would just be one example. That's not the only way of fixing it, but if you made a slight adjustment like that, then Social Security would be there well into the future and it would be fine. All right?

Okay. It's a woman's turn. Anybody -- I'm going to go back here. Nobody's got -- these folks haven't had a chance here. Hold on one second -- I'm going to let you use my mic. You'll give it back, right? Okay. Question: My name is Peggy -- and I'm a native Nevadan, grew up in Boulder City. There's a few of us here -- known this great guy, Harry, all my life. And my question, which is near and dear to my heart, and there's a few of my co-workers watching right now on television, and a few here -- is we want to know what is going to be done for tourism in Nevada, particularly airlines. I am a U.S. Airways employee who has been furloughed for 17 months. They furloughed over 500 more just on the 14th, so there's many, many of us now on the unemployment rolls. And we want to see what's going to happen to bring our jobs back to Las Vegas.

President Obama: Well, first of all, obviously tourism is directly connected to the state of the economy as a whole. If people have disposable income, then they're going to travel. And if they're going to travel and have fun, they're going to come to Las Vegas. Right? So -- but on the other hand, if times are tight, they're having trouble paying the bills, making the mortgage, et cetera, that means tourism declines.

So everything we're doing in terms of improving the economy as a whole will start improving tourism. But what is also true is that we can take some particular steps to help to encourage the tourism industry. And Harry, before we came out, was talking about a bipartisan tourism promotion/travel promotion act.

Harry -- I'm going to give the mic to Harry for a second. Harry, do you want to talk just a little bit about what would be in the act?

Senator Reid: We're going to try to take that up next week. You'll save a half a billion dollars over 10 years and create tens of thousands of jobs. We're the only country in the world, major country in the world, that doesn’t promote itself. You'll see on TV Jamaica does, New Zealand does, Australia does, South Africa does -- but not the United States. We hope within two or three months we'll be promoting ourselves.

President Obama: Good. Now, that's the kind of leadership that Harry is showing. Let me make one last point about airlines in particular. There are two things that we can really do to help improve the airline industry.

The first is on energy. Part of the reason that airlines are getting squeezed all the time is because their fuel costs are huge. That's the single biggest problem for most airlines, is fuel costs that skyrocket or are unpredictable.

And so if we've got a smart energy policy that is encouraging the use of electric cars and improving gas mileage, and making sure that we're looking at alternative fuels like biofuels that can be used for trucks, all those things will help to reduce our dependence on foreign oil and, as a consequence, will, over time, stabilize fuel prices in a way that is very helpful to the airlines.

The second thing that we need to do is we've got to upgrade our air traffic control system, which is a little creaky. And one of -- don't worry, I mean, it's safe to travel. I'm not -- I don't want anybody to think, man, creaky, that doesn’t sound good.

What it is, is that because we don't use the latest technologies, a lot of times the holding patterns for planes, how many planes can land safely at the same time, all those things are -- reduce the efficiency of -- the overall system is reduced because we're not using the best technologies available.

If we can upgrade those technologies, then we could reduce delays, we could reduce cancellations, we could reduce the amount of time that it takes when there's bad weather for planes to land. And all that would also help improve profitability in the airlines industry, which in turn would mean that they would be able to hire more workers and provide outstanding customer service. Okay?

All right. It's a gentleman's turn. This guy right here. He's a big guy, he stood up and -- he stood up, I thought, man, that's a big guy, I better call on him. Say you're big, too -- I agree. Don't worry, I'm not saying you're not big. All right, go ahead.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. My name is Dr. Herve Misoko [phonetic]. I am originally from France -- actually from Africa, moved to France, and now I'm here in America because I believe -- I still believe that America is the country of the American Dream. And I came here -- I'm a scientist, president of a renewable energy startup, and I came here because I really believe that America can become the first country for clean energy.

One of the comments I wanted to make, coming from Europe where carbon is regulated, I see firsthand -- I have a company in France also -- that regulation works. It creates job. My company has been growing 30 percent every year in France for the past two years. And I really want to see that happen here. And I think that even if you don't believe in climate change, there's like byproducts that are awesome jobs. The country is going to advance technology-wise. We're going to become once again like we were with the space industry, the most advanced technologically country in the world. And so I really want to see these regulations happen because it's going to help all of us in the clean energy business.

President Obama: Okay. Well, let me just talk about -- this is -- when the conservatives have their conventions and they yell at me and say how terrible I am -- along with health care this is the other thing that they usually point out, which is that "the President wants to create this cap and trade system and it's going to be a job killer and it's one more step in the government takeover of the American economy." So this is a good place for me to maybe just spend a little time talking about energy and climate change.

First of all, we just got five feet of snow in Washington and so everybody is like -- a lot of the people who are opponents of climate change, they say, see, look at that, there's all this snow on the ground, this doesn't mean anything. I want to just be clear that the science of climate change doesn't mean that every place is getting warmer; it means the planet as a whole is getting warmer. But what it may mean is, for example, Vancouver, which is supposed to be getting snow during the Olympics, suddenly is at 55 degrees, and Dallas suddenly is getting seven inches of snow.

The idea is, is that as the planet as a whole gets warmer, you start seeing changing weather patterns, and that creates more violent storm systems, more unpredictable weather. So any single place might end up being warmer; another place might end up being a little bit cooler; there might end up being more precipitation in the air, more monsoons, more hurricanes, more tornadoes, more drought in some places, floods in other places.

So I just -- that's one aspect of the science that I think everybody should understand. That's point number one.

Point number two: The best way for us to unleash the free market -- the best way for us to unleash the free market and capitalism and innovation and dynamism in the energy sector is for us to fully take into account all the costs that go into producing energy and using energy.

And what do I mean by that? Look, if you tell a company that there are no mileage standards on cars, then people end up making Hummers. Right? And everybody drives Hummers until finally gas gets so crazy and at a certain point people start saying maybe I should get a more fuel-efficient car.

But if you've got a fuel-efficiency standard in place that says your car needs to get 20 miles a gallon or 30 miles a gallon, suddenly all these engineers are thinking, well, how do we do that? And all these companies start coming up with new technologies that make your cars more fuel-efficient. Ultimately, you end up seeing jobs and businesses thriving in response to the regulation that's been put there.

Now, that's one way to regulate, is just to tell people you got to produce more energy-efficient cars. Another way of doing it is just to send a price signal. You say, it's going to be more expensive for you if you've got a less fuel-efficient car.

Well, that's the only idea that we're trying to talk about when it comes to these greenhouse gases that are causing global warming. If we say that, you know what, the pollution that's being sent into the atmosphere has a cost to all of us -- in terms of in some cases the air we breathe that's causing asthma, in some cases because it's causing climate change -- we just want you to take into account those costs and price energy accordingly. And that means that things like wind energy suddenly become more appealing because they don't produce those pollution -- those pollutants, and other sources of energy become less appealing because they do produce those pollutants.

The idea has been that if we put a price on these carbons, then maybe that would be a way that companies would all respond and start inventing new things that would make our planet cleaner. That's the whole idea.

Now, last point I'm going to make on this. What is true is that a lot of us depend on dirty sources of energy and a lot of us depend on really inefficient cars and buildings and et cetera. And so there's got to be a transition. We're not going to suddenly get all our energy from wind or all our energy from sun because we just don't have the technology to do it.

But what we should be doing is planning over the next 20, 30 years to move in that direction. That's what countries like China are doing. That's what countries like France are doing. That's what countries all across Europe are doing, and all across Asia are doing. We don't want to be left behind. We're the only ones who have kind of missed the boat. So we're still using 20th century technologies and everybody else is producing 21st century technologies.

Look what happened with the car. We started getting our clock cleaned when consumers decided they wanted a cleaner car and suddenly everybody was buying their cars from Japan, or now South Korea. And we want to make sure that that doesn't happen when it comes to wind turbines, it doesn't happen when it comes to solar energy, et cetera.

So the ideas that are being talked about is how do we provide more incentive for clean energy companies like yours to operate profitably, and over time how do we start shifting away from less efficient ways of using energy? That's a pretty straightforward thing to do. There's nothing radical about it.

It is true, though, that it's not going to happen overnight; it's going to take some time. And we're still going to be getting our electricity from coal; we're still going to be getting electricity from nuclear energy; we're still going to be getting electricity and power from natural gas and other traditional sources. We just want to make sure that we're also moving into the future even as we do so. And I think that we can.

All right. I think I've got time for one more question. All right, this is the last question. Last question. It's a lady's turn. All right, everybody is pointing at her. Right up there, right there. I couldn't call on anybody. You know I love everybody here.

Question: Good morning, Mr. President. My name is Terry Wright [phonetic] -- and I teach math right here at Green Valley High School.

President Obama: Excellent.

Question: And my mom is right behind you in the top row.

President Obama: Where is Mom? Mom, raise your hand.

Question: Right there.

President Obama: Oh, hey, Mom. You're a very young looking mom.

Question: Thank you. My question is this -- and I'm speaking on behalf of all of us math teachers up here -- when you were a freshman in high school specifically, did you have math homework every night? And if you did, did you do it?

President Obama: Oh, ah. The answer is yes, and sometimes. But, first of all, let me thank you for being a math teacher, because we need more math teachers. We need more science teachers. We need more teachers generally who are enthusiastic about their work and their jobs. So thanks to all the teachers here. We love teachers.

All right. Now, we are actually -- unfortunately, our students are falling behind in math and science, internationally. We used to rank at the top, and now we're sort of in the middle of the pack when it comes to math and science performance.

This is why one of the things that I've been emphasizing this year -- and this actually hasn’t been subject to a lot of controversy; this is an area where we've been able to get good cooperation between Democrats and Republicans -- is promoting math and science education, promoting technology education. The more that we are moving our young people into these areas, the better off this economy is going to be, because that means we're producing engineers, we're producing scientists, we're producing computer programmers.

So we want to make sure that we are recruiting more math teachers, we're recruiting more science teachers. We want all outstanding teachers to be getting higher pay. We want to make sure that there's constant professional development when it comes to the teaching profession, so that if you had the best way of teaching math five years ago, it might not be the best way of teaching math five years from now, and so you should be able to go back and constantly sharpen your skills.

To the students I want to say this. We're doing a lot of work on education reform. We are doing a lot to bring in new teachers, to improve classrooms, to make sure that they're all connected to the Internet, to make sure that college is more affordable. But let me just say that it won't make any difference if our students aren’t working a little bit harder.

Now, I'm not saying all of you aren’t working hard. I'm sure many of you feel like you are working very, very hard -- because Malia and Sasha always tell me how hard they're working. But I really do think that we're going to have to emphasize in the next decade that we're competing around the world, and America will continue to be number one as long as we are just as hungry as other countries.

So if our kids are spending all their time playing video games, and somebody else's kids are getting the math and science skills to invent video games -- we're not going to be number one. I mean, it's as simple as that.

So the need to turn off the TV, put the video games away, buckle down on your work, making sure that parents are checking their kids' homework and talking to their teachers -- being accountable, being responsible -- that's what's going to make sure that we continue to thrive, we continue to excel into the future.

Thank you, Henderson. I had a great time. Bye-bye.

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# Call for Congress to Vote on Health Care Reform Legislation

Thank you so much, all of you, for joining us today. And I want to thank Julie, Barbara, Roland, Stephen, Renee, and Christopher, standing behind me -- physicians, physicians assistants, and nurses who understand how important it is for us to make much needed changes in our health care system.

I want to thank all of you who are here today. I want to specially recognize two people who have been working tirelessly on that -- on this effort, my Secretary of Health and Human Services, Kathleen Sebelius -- as well as our quarterback for health reform out of the White House, Nancy-Ann DeParle.

We began our push to reform health insurance last March, in this room, with doctors and nurses who know the system best. And so it’s fitting to be joined by all of you as we bring this journey to a close.

Last Thursday, I spent seven hours at a summit where Democrats and Republicans engaged in a public and very substantive discussion about health care. This meeting capped off a debate that began with a similar summit nearly one year ago. And since then, every idea has been put on the table. Every argument has been made. Everything there is to say about health care has been said -- and just about everybody has said it. So now is the time to make a decision about how to finally reform health care so that it works, not just for the insurance companies, but for America’s families and America’s businesses.

Now, where both sides say they agree is that the status quo is not working for the American people. Health insurance is becoming more expensive by the day. Families can’t afford it. Businesses can’t afford it. The federal government can’t afford it. Smaller businesses and individuals who don’t get coverage at work are squeezed especially hard. And insurance companies freely ration health care based on who’s sick and who’s healthy; who can pay and who can’t. That's the status quo. That's the system we have right now.

Democrats and Republicans agree that this is a serious problem for America. And we agree that if we do nothing -- if we throw up our hands and walk away -- it’s a problem that will only grow worse. Nobody disputes that. More Americans will lose their family's health insurance if they switch jobs or lose their job. More small businesses will be forced to choose between health care and hiring. More insurance companies will deny people coverage who have preexisting conditions, or they'll drop people's coverage when they get sick and need it most. And the rising cost of Medicare and Medicaid will sink our government deeper and deeper and deeper into debt. On all of this we agree. So the question is, what do we do about it?

On one end of the spectrum, there are some who've suggested scrapping our system of private insurance and replacing it with a government-run health care system. And though many other countries have such a system, in America it would be neither practical nor realistic.

On the other end of the spectrum, there are those, and this includes most Republicans in Congress, who believe the answer is to loosen regulations on the insurance industry -- whether it's state consumer protections or minimum standards for the kind of insurance they can sell. The argument is, is that that will somehow lower costs. I disagree with that approach. I'm concerned that this would only give the insurance industry even freer rein to raise premiums and deny care.

So I don't believe we should give government bureaucrats or insurance company bureaucrats more control over health care in America. I believe it's time to give the American people more control over their health care and their health insurance. I don't believe we can afford to leave life-and-death decisions about health care to the discretion of insurance company executives alone. I believe that doctors and nurses and physician assistants like the ones in this room should be free to decide what's best for their patients.

Now, the proposal I put forward gives Americans more control over their health insurance and their health care by holding insurance companies more accountable. It builds on the current system where most Americans get their health insurance from their employer. If you like your plan, you can keep your plan. If you like your doctor, you can keep your doctor. I can tell you as the father of two young girls, I would not want any plan that interferes with the relationship between a family and their doctor.

Essentially, my proposal would change three things about the current health care system. First, it would end the worst practices of insurance companies. No longer would they be able to deny your coverage because of a preexisting condition. No longer would they be able to drop your coverage because you got sick. No longer would they be able to force you to pay unlimited amounts of money out of your own pocket. No longer would they be able to arbitrarily and massively raise premiums like Anthem Blue Cross recently tried to do in California -- up to 39 percent increases in one year in the individual market. Those practices would end.

Second, my proposal would give uninsured individuals and small business owners the same kind of choice of private health insurance that members of Congress get for themselves -- because if it’s good enough for members of Congress, it’s good enough for the people who pay their salaries.

The reason federal employees get a good deal on health insurance is that we all participate in an insurance market where insurance companies give better coverage and better rates, because they get more customers. It's an idea that many Republicans have embraced in the past, before politics intruded.

And my proposal says that if you still can’t afford the insurance in this new marketplace, even though it's going to provide better deals for people than they can get right now in the individual marketplace, then we'll offer you tax credits to do so -- tax credits that add up to the largest middle-class tax cut for health care in history. After all, the wealthiest among us can already buy the best insurance there is, and the least well off are able to get coverage through Medicaid. So it's the middle class that gets squeezed, and that’s who we have to help.

Now, it is absolutely true that all of this will cost some money -- about $100 billion per year. But most of this comes from the nearly $2 trillion a year that America already spends on health care -- but a lot of it is not spent wisely. A lot of that money is being wasted or spent badly. So within this plan, we’re going to make sure the dollars we spend go towards making insurance more affordable and more secure. We’re going to eliminate wasteful taxpayer subsidies that currently go to insurance and pharmaceutical companies; set a new fee on insurance companies that stand to gain a lot of money and a lot of profits as millions of Americans are able to buy insurance; and we're going to make sure that the wealthiest Americans pay their fair share on Medicare.

The bottom line is our proposal is paid for. And all the new money generated in this plan goes back to small businesses and middle-class families who can't afford health insurance. It would also lower prescription drug prices for seniors. And it would help train new doctors and nurses and physician assistants to provide care for American families.

Finally, my proposal would bring down the cost of health care for millions -- families, businesses, and the federal government. We have now incorporated most of the serious ideas from across the political spectrum about how to contain the rising cost of health care -- ideas that go after the waste and abuse in our system, especially in programs like Medicare. But we do this while protecting Medicare benefits, and extending the financial stability of the program by nearly a decade.

Our cost-cutting measures mirror most of the proposals in the current Senate bill, which reduces most people's premiums and brings down our deficit by up to a trillion dollars over the next two decades -- brings down our deficit. Those aren't my numbers; those are the savings determined by the Congressional Budget Office, which is the Washington acronym for the nonpartisan, independent referee of Congress in terms of how much stuff costs.

So that's our proposal. This is where we've ended up. It's an approach that has been debated and changed and I believe improved over the last year. It incorporates the best ideas from Democrats and Republicans -- including some of the ideas that Republicans offered during the health care summit, like funding state grants on medical malpractice reform, and curbing waste and fraud and abuse in the health care system. My proposal also gets rid of many of the provisions that had no place in health care reform -- provisions that were more about winning individual votes in Congress than improving health care for all Americans.

Now, despite all that we agree on and all the Republican ideas we've incorporated, many -- probably most -- Republicans in Congress just have a fundamental disagreement over whether we should have more or less oversight of insurance companies. And if they truly believe that less regulation would lead to higher quality, more affordable health insurance, then they should vote against the proposal I've put forward.

Now, some also believe that we should, instead of doing what I'm proposing, pursue a piecemeal approach to health insurance reform, where we tinker around the edges of this challenge for the next few years. Even those who acknowledge the problem of the uninsured say we just can't afford to help them right now -- which is why the Republican proposal only covers 3 million uninsured Americans while we cover over 31 million.

The problem with that approach is that unless everyone has access to affordable coverage, you can't prevent insurance companies from denying coverage based on preexisting conditions; you can't limit the amount families are forced to pay out of their own pockets. The insurance reforms rest on everybody having access to coverage. And you also don't do anything about the fact that taxpayers currently end up subsidizing the uninsured when they're forced to go to the emergency room for care, to the tune of about a thousand bucks per family. You can't get those savings if those people are still going to the emergency room. So the fact is, health reform only works if you take care of all of these problems at once.

Now, both during and after last week's summit, Republicans in Congress insisted that the only acceptable course on health care reform is to start over. But given these honest and substantial differences between the parties about the need to regulate the insurance industry and the need to help millions of middle-class families get insurance, I don't see how another year of negotiations would help.

Moreover, the insurance companies aren't starting over. They're continuing to raise premiums and deny coverage as we speak. For us to start over now could simply lead to delay that could last for another decade, or even more. The American people, and the U.S. economy, just can't wait that long. So, no matter which approach you favor, I believe the United States Congress owes the American people a final vote on health care reform.

We have debated this issue thoroughly, not just for the past year but for decades. Reform has already passed the House with a majority. It has already passed the Senate with a supermajority of 60 votes. And now it deserves the same kind of up or down vote that was cast on welfare reform, that was cast on the Children's Health Insurance Program, that was used for COBRA health coverage for the unemployed, and, by the way, for both Bush tax cuts -- all of which had to pass Congress with nothing more than a simple majority.

I, therefore, ask leaders in both houses of Congress to finish their work and schedule a vote in the next few weeks. From now until then, I will do everything in my power to make the case for reform. And I urge every American who wants this reform to make their voice heard as well -- every family, every business, every patient, every doctor, every nurse, every physician’s assistant. Make your voice heard.

This has been a long and wrenching debate. It has stoked great passions among the American people and their representatives. And that's because health care is a difficult issue. It is a complicated issue. If it was easy, it would have been solved long ago. As all of you know from experience, health care can literally be an issue of life or death. And as a result, it easily lends itself to demagoguery and political gamesmanship, and misrepresentation and misunderstanding.

But that’s not an excuse for those of us who were sent here to lead. That's not an excuse for us to walk away. We can’t just give up because the politics are hard. I know there’s been a fascination, bordering on obsession, in this media town about what passing health insurance reform would mean for the next election and the one after that. How will this play? What will happen with the polls? I will leave it to others to sift through the politics, because that’s not what this is about. That’s not why we’re here.

This is about what reform would mean for the mother with breast cancer whose insurance company will finally have to pay for her chemotherapy. This is about what reform would mean for the small business owner who will no longer have to choose between hiring more workers or offering coverage to the employees she has. This is about what reform would mean for middle-class families who will be able to afford health insurance for the very first time in their lives and get a regular checkup once in a while, and have some security about their children if they get sick.

This is about what reform would mean for all those men and women I’ve met over the last few years who’ve been brave enough to share their stories. When we started our push for reform last year, I talked to a young mother in Wisconsin named Laura Klitzka. She has two young children. She thought she had beaten her breast cancer but then later discovered it had spread to her bones. She and her husband were working and had insurance, but their medical bills still landed them in debt. And now she spends time worrying about that debt when all she wants to do is spend time with her children and focus on getting well.

This should not happen in the United States of America. And it doesn’t have to.

In the end, that's what this debate is about. It's about what kind of country we want to be. It's about the millions of lives that would be touched and, in some cases, saved by making private health insurance more secure and more affordable.

So at stake right now is not just our ability to solve this problem, but our ability to solve any problem. The American people want to know if it's still possible for Washington to look out for their interests and their future. They are waiting for us to act. They are waiting for us to lead. And as long as I hold this office, I intend to provide that leadership. I do not know how this plays politically, but I know it's right. And so I ask Congress to finish its work, and I look forward to signing this reform into law.

Thank you very much, everybody. Let's get it done.

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# Weekly Address: Education for a More Competitive America

Lost in the news of the week was a headline that ought to be a source of concern for every American. It said, “Many Nations Passing U.S. in Education.” Now, debates in Washington tend to be consumed with the politics of the moment: who’s up in the daily polls; whose party stands to gain in November. But what matters to you -- what matters to our country -- is not what happens in the next election, but what we do to lift up the next generation. And the fact is, there are few issues that speak more directly to our long term success as a nation than issues concerning the education we provide to our children.

Our prosperity in the 20th century was fueled by an education system that helped grow the middle class and unleash the talents of our people more fully and widely than at any time in our history. We built schools and focused on the teaching of math and science. We helped a generation of veterans go to college through the GI Bill. We led the globe in producing college graduates, and in turn we led in producing ground-breaking technologies and scientific discoveries that lifted living standards and set us apart as the world’s engine of innovation.

Of course, other nations recognize this, and are looking to gain an edge in the global marketplace by investing in better schools, supporting teachers, and committing to clear standards that will produce graduates with more skills. Our competitors understand that the nation that out-educates us today will out-compete us tomorrow. Yet, too often we have failed to make inroads in reforming and strengthening our public education system -- the debate mired in worn arguments hurled across entrenched divides.

As a result, over the last few decades, we’ve lost ground. One assessment shows American fifteen year olds no longer even near the top in math and science when compared to their peers around the world. As referenced in the news report I mentioned, we’ve now fallen behind most wealthy countries in our high school graduation rates. And while we once led the world in the proportion of college graduates we produced, today we no longer do.

Not only does that risk our leadership as a nation, it consigns millions of Americans to a lesser future. For we know that the level of education a person attains is increasingly a prerequisite for success and a predictor of the income that person will earn throughout his or her life. Beyond the economic statistics is a less tangible but no less painful reality: unless we take action -- unless we step up -- there are countless children who will never realize their full talent and potential.

I don’t accept that future for them. And I don’t accept that future for the United States of America. That’s why we’re engaged in a historic effort to redeem and improve our public schools: to raise the expectations for our students and for ourselves, to recognize and reward excellence, to improve performance in troubled schools, and to give our kids and our country the best chance to succeed in a changing world.

Under the leadership of an outstanding Education Secretary, Arne Duncan, we launched a Race to the Top, through which states compete for funding by committing to reform and raising standards, by rewarding good teaching, by supporting the development of better assessments to measure results, and by emphasizing math and science to help prepare children for college and careers.

And on Monday, my administration will send to Congress our blueprint for an updated Elementary and Secondary Education Act to overhaul No Child Left Behind. What this plan recognizes is that while the federal government can play a leading role in encouraging the reforms and high standards we need, the impetus for that change will come from states, and from local schools and school districts. So, yes, we set a high bar -- but we also provide educators the flexibility to reach it.

Under these guidelines, schools that achieve excellence or show real progress will be rewarded, and local districts will be encouraged to commit to change in schools that are clearly letting their students down. For the majority of schools that fall in between -- schools that do well but could do better -- we will encourage continuous improvement to help keep our young people on track for a bright future: prepared for the jobs of the 21st century. And because the most important factor in a child’s success is the person standing at the front of the classroom, we will better prepare teachers, support teachers, and encourage teachers to stay in the field. In short, we’ll treat the people who educate our sons and daughters like the professionals they are.

Through this plan we are setting an ambitious goal: All students should graduate from high school prepared for college and a career -- no matter who you are or where you come from. Achieving this goal will be difficult. It will take time. And it will require the skills, talents, and dedication of many: principals, teachers, parents, students. But this effort is essential for our children and for our country. And while there will always be those cynics who claim it can’t be done, at our best, we know that America has always risen to the challenges that we’ve faced. This challenge is no different.

As a nation, we are engaged in many important endeavors: improving the economy, reforming the health care system, encouraging innovation in energy and other growth industries of the 21st century. But our success in these efforts -- and our success in the future as a people -- will ultimately depend on what happens long before an entrepreneur opens his doors, or a nurse walks the rounds, or a scientist steps into her laboratory. Our future is determined each and every day, when our children enter the classroom, ready to learn and brimming with promise.

It’s that promise we must help them fulfill.

Thank you.

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# Address on Health Care at George Mason University

Hello, George Mason! How’s everybody doing today? Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Audience: Yes we can! Yes we can! Yes we can! Yes we can!

President Obama: Thank you, everybody. It’s good to be back with some real Patriots. I want to thank Dr. Alan Merten, the President of George Mason University, and his family. Dr. Shirley Travis, who’s here -- thank you. And Coach Larranaga, we were just talking a little bit about -- looking forward to picking George Mason in my bracket next year.

Audience Member: We love you!

President Obama: I love you! I don’t know if some of you remember, but I visited this university about three years ago for the first time. This was at just the dawn of my presidential campaign. It was about three weeks old, I think. We didn’t have a lot of money. We didn’t have a lot of staff. Nobody could pronounce my name. Our poll numbers were quite low. And a lot of people -- a lot of people in Washington, they didn’t think it was even worth us trying.

Audience Member: Yes we can!

President Obama: They had counted us out before we had even started, because the Washington conventional wisdom was that change was too hard. But what we had even then was a group of students here at George Mason -- who believed that if we worked hard enough and if we fought long enough, if we organized enough supporters, then we could finally bring change to that city across the river. We believed that despite all the resistance, we could make Washington work. Not for the lobbyists, not for the special interests, not for the politicians, but for the American people.

And now three years later, I stand before you, one year after the worst recession since the Great Depression, having to make a bunch of tough decisions, having had a tumultuous debate, having had a lot of folks who were skeptical that we could get anything done. And right now, we are at the point where we are going to do something historic this weekend. That’s what this health care vote is all about.

Audience: Yes we can! Yes we can! Yes we can!

President Obama: A few miles from here, Congress is in the final stages of a fateful debate about the future of health insurance in America. It’s a debate that’s raged not just for the past year but for the past century. One thing when you’re in the White House, you’ve got a lot of history books around you. And so I’ve been reading up on the history here. Teddy Roosevelt, Republican, was the first to advocate that everybody get health care in this country. Every decade since, we’ve had Presidents, Republicans and Democrats, from Harry Truman to Richard Nixon to JFK to Lyndon Johnson to -- every single President has said we need to fix this system. It’s a debate that’s not only about the cost of health care, not just about what we’re doing about folks who aren’t getting a fair shake from their insurance companies. It’s a debate about the character of our country-- about whether we can still meet the challenges of our time; whether we still have the guts and the courage to give every citizen, not just some, the chance to reach their dreams.

At the heart of this debate is the question of whether we’re going to accept a system that works better for the insurance companies than it does for the American people -- because if this vote fails, the insurance industry will continue to run amok. They will continue to deny people coverage. They will continue to deny people care. They will continue to jack up premiums 40 or 50 or 60 percent as they have in the last few weeks without any accountability whatsoever. They know this. And that’s why their lobbyists are stalking the halls of Congress as we speak, and pouring millions of dollars into negative ads. And that’s why they are doing everything they can to kill this bill.

So the only question left is this: Are we going to let the special interests win once again?

Audience: No!

President Obama: Or are we going to make this vote a victory for the American people?

Audience: Yes we can! Yes we can!

President Obama: George Mason, the time for reform is right now. Not a year from now, not five years from now, not 10 years from now, not 20 years from now -- it’s now. We have had -- we have had a year of hard debate. Every proposal has been put on the table. Every argument has been made. We have incorporated the best ideas from Democrats and from Republicans into a final proposal that builds on the system of private insurance that we currently have. The insurance industry and its supporters in Congress have tried to portray this as radical change.

Now, I just -- I just want to be clear, everybody. Listen up, because we have heard every crazy thing about this bill. You remember. First we heard this was a government takeover of health care. Then we heard that this was going to kill granny. Then we heard, well, illegal immigrants are going to be getting the main benefits of this bill. There has been -- they have thrown every argument at this legislative effort. But when it -- it turns out, at the end of the day, what we’re talking about is common-sense reform. That’s all we’re talking about.

If you like your doctor, you’re going to be able to keep your doctor. If you like your plan, keep your plan. I don’t believe we should give government or the insurance companies more control over health care in America. I think it’s time to give you, the American people, more control over your health.

And since you’ve been hearing a whole bunch of nonsense, let’s just be clear on what exactly the proposal that they’re going to vote on in a couple of days will do. It’s going to -- it’s going to change health care in three ways. Number one, we are going to end the worst practices of insurance companies. This is -- this is a patient’s bill of rights on steroids. Starting this year, thousands of uninsured Americans with preexisting conditions will be able to purchase health insurance, some for the very first time. Starting this year, insurance companies will be banned forever from denying coverage to children with preexisting conditions. Starting this year, insurance companies will be banned from dropping your coverage when you get sick. And they’ve been spending a lot of time weeding out people who are sick so they don’t have to pay benefits that people have already paid for. Those practices will end.

If this reform becomes law, all new insurance plans will be required to offer free preventive care to their customers. If you buy a new plan, there won’t be lifetime or restrictive annual limits on the amount of care you receive from your insurance companies. And by the way, to all the young people here today, starting this year if you don’t have insurance, all new plans will allow you to stay on your parents’ plan until you are 26 years old.

So you’ll have some security when you graduate. If that first job doesn’t offer coverage, you’re going to know that you’ve got coverage. Because as you start your lives and your careers, the last thing you should be worried about is whether you’re going to go broke or make your parents broke just because you get sick. All right?

So that’s the first thing this legislation does -- the toughest insurance reforms in history. And by the way, when you talk to Republicans and you say, well, are you against this? A lot of them will say, no, no, that part’s okay. All right, so let’s go to the second part.

The second thing that would change about the current system is that for the first time, small business owners and people who are being priced out of the insurance market will have the same kind of choice of private health insurance that members of Congress give to themselves.

So what this means is, is that small business owners and middle-class families, they’re going to be able to be part of what’s called a big pool of customers that can negotiate with the insurance companies. And that means they can purchase more affordable coverage in a competitive marketplace. So they’re not out there on their own just shopping. They’re part of millions of people who are shopping together. And if you still can’t afford the insurance in this new marketplace, even though it’s going to be cheaper than what you can get on your own, then we’re going to offer you tax credits to help you afford it -– tax credits that add up to the largest middle-class tax cut for health care in American history.

Now, these tax credits cost money. Helping folks who can’t afford it right now, that does cost some money. It costs about $100 billion per year. But most of the cost --

Audience Member: That’s all right.

President Obama: Well, here’s the reason it’s all right. Here’s the reason it’s all right. It wouldn’t be all right if we weren’t paying for it -- and by the way, that's what a previous Congress did with the prescription drug plan. All they did was they gave the benefits and they didn’t pay for it.

That's not what we’re doing. What we’re doing is we’re taking money that America is already spending in the health care system, but is being spent poorly, that's going to waste and fraud and unwarranted subsidies for the insurance companies, and we’re taking that money and making sure those dollars go towards making insurance more affordable.

So we’re going to eliminate wasteful taxpayer subsidies to insurance companies. We’re going to set a new fee on insurance companies that stand to gain millions of new customers. So here’s the point: This proposal is paid for. Unlike some of these previous schemes in Washington, we’re not taking out the credit card in your name, young people, and charging it to you. We’re making sure this thing is paid for. All right, so that's the second thing.

Now, the third thing that this legislation does is it brings down the cost of health care for families and businesses and the federal government. Americans who are buying comparable coverage in the individual market would end up seeing their premiums go down 14 to 20 percent. Americans who get their insurance through the workplace, cost savings could be as much as $3,000 less per employer than if we do nothing. Now, think about that. That’s $3,000 your employer doesn’t have to pay, which means maybe she can afford to give you a raise.

And by the way, if you’re curious, well, how exactly are we saving these costs? Well, part of it is, again, we’re not spending our health care money wisely. So, for example, you go to the hospital or you go to a doctor and you may take five tests, when it turns out if you just took one test, then you send an e-mail around with the test results, you wouldn’t be paying $500 per test. So we’re trying to save money across the system. And altogether, our cost-cutting measures would reduce most people’s premiums. And here’s the bonus: It brings down our deficit by more than $1 trillion over the next two decades.

So you’ve got -- you’ve got a whole bunch of opponents of this bill saying, well, we can’t afford this; we’re fiscal conservatives. These are the same guys who passed that prescription drug bill without paying for it, adding over $1 trillion to our deficit -- “Oh, we can’t afford this.” But this bill, according to the Congressional Budget Office -- which is the referee, the scorekeeper for how much things cost -- says we’ll save us $1 trillion. Not only can we afford to do this, we can’t afford not to do this.

So here’s the bottom line. That’s our proposal: toughest insurance reforms in history, one of the biggest deficit-reduction plans in history, and the opportunity to give millions of people -- some of them in your own family, some of the people who are in this auditorium today -- an opportunity for the first time in a very long time to get affordable health care. That’s it. That’s what we’re trying to do. That’s what the Congress of the United States is about to vote on this weekend.

Now, it would be nice if we were just kind of examining the substance, we were walking through the details of the plan, what it means for you. But that’s not what the cable stations like to talk about. What they like to talk about is the politics of the vote. What does this mean in November? What does it mean to the poll numbers? Is this more of an advantage for Democrats or Republicans? What’s it going to mean for Obama? Will his presidency be crippled, or will he be the comeback kid? That’s what they like to talk about. That’s what they like to talk about. I understand.

One of the things you realize is basically that a lot of reporting in Washington, it’s just like SportsCenter. It’s considered a sport, and who’s up and who’s down, and everybody’s keeping score. And you got the teams going at it. It’s Rock ‘Em Sock ‘Em Robots.

Look, let me say this, George Mason: I don’t know how this plays politically. Nobody really does. I mean, there’s been so much misinformation and so much confusion and the climate at times during the course of this year has been so toxic and people are so anxious because the economy has been going through such a tough time. I don’t know what’s going to happen with the politics on this thing. I don’t know whether my poll numbers go down, they go up. I don’t know what happens in terms of Democrats versus Republicans.

But here’s what I do know. I do know that this bill, this legislation, is going to be enormously important for America’s future. I do know the impact it will have on the millions of Americans who need our help, and the millions more who may not need help right now but a year from now or five years from now or 10 years from now, if they have some bad luck; if, heaven forbid, they get sick; if they’ve got a preexisting condition; if their child has a preexisting condition; if they lose their job; if they want to start a company -- I know the impact it will have on them.

I know what this reform will mean for people like Leslie Banks, a single mom I met in Pennsylvania. She’s trying to put her daughter through college, just like probably some of your moms and dads are trying to put you through college. And her insurance company just sent her a letter saying they plan to double her premium this year -– have it go up 100 percent. And she can’t afford it. So now she’s trying to figure out, am I going to keep my insurance or am I going to keep my daughter in college? Leslie Banks needs us to pass this reform bill.

I know what reform will mean for people like Laura Klitzka. I met Laura up in Green Bay, Wisconsin, while I was campaigning. She thought she had beaten her breast cancer. Then she discovered it had spread to her bones. And she and her insurance -- she and her husband, they were lucky enough to have insurance, but their medical bills still landed them in debt. So now she’s spending time worrying about the debt when all she wants to do is think about how she can spend time with her two kids. Laura needs us to pass this reform bill.

I know what reform will mean for people like Natoma Canfield. When her insurance company raised her rates, she had to give up her coverage, even though she had been paying thousands of dollars in premiums for years, because she had beaten cancer 11 years earlier. They kept on jacking up her rates, jacking up her rates. Finally she thought she was going to lose her home. She was scared that a sudden illness would lead to financial ruin, but she had no choice. Right now she’s lying in a hospital bed, faced with paying for such an illness, after she had to give up her health insurance. She’s praying that somehow she can afford to get well. She knows that it is time for reform.

So George Mason, when you hear people saying, well, why don't we do this more incrementally, why don't we do this a little more piecemeal, why don't we just help the folks that are easiest to help -- my answer is the time for reform is now. We have waited long enough. We have waited long enough.

And in just a few days, a century-long struggle will culminate in a historic vote. We’ve had historic votes before. We had a historic vote to put Social Security in place to make sure that our elderly did not live out their golden years in poverty. We had a historic vote in civil rights to make sure that everybody was equal under the law. As messy as this process is, as frustrating as this process is, as ugly as this process can be, when we have faced such decisions in our past, this nation, time and time again, has chosen to extend its promise to more of its people.

You know, the naysayers said that Social Security would lead to socialism. But the men and women of Congress stood fast and created that program that lifted millions out of poverty.

There were cynics that warned that Medicare would lead to a government takeover of our entire health care system, and that it didn’t have much support in the polls. But Democrats and Republicans refused to back down, and they made sure that our seniors had the health care that they needed and could have some basic peace of mind.

So previous generations, those who came before us, made the decision that our seniors and our poor, through Medicaid, should not be forced to go without health care just because they couldn’t afford it. Today it falls to this generation to decide whether we will make that same promise to hardworking middle-class families and small businesses all across America, and to young Americans like yourselves who are just starting out.

So here’s my bottom line. I know this has been a difficult journey. I know this will be a tough vote. I know that everybody is counting votes right now in Washington. But I also remember a quote I saw on a plaque in the White House the other day. It’s hanging in the same room where I demanded answers from insurance executives and just received a bunch of excuses. And it was a quote from Teddy Roosevelt, the person who first called for health care reform -- that Republican -- all those years ago. And it said, “Aggressively fighting for the right is the noblest sport the world affords.”

Now, I don’t know how passing health care will play politically -- but I know it’s right. Teddy Roosevelt knew it was right. Harry Truman knew that it was right. Ted Kennedy knew it was right. And if you believe that it’s right, then you've got to help us finish this fight. You've got to stand with me just like you did three years ago and make some phone calls and knock on some doors, talk to your parents, talk to your friends. Do not quit, do not give up, we keep on going. We are going to get this done. We are going to make history. We are going to fix health care in America with your help.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# To House Democratic Caucus on Health Care Reform Bill

Thank you! Everybody, please have a set.

To Leader Reid, to Steny Hoyer, John Larson, Xavier Becerra, Jim Clyburn, Chris Van Hollen, to an extraordinary leader and extraordinary Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, and to all the members here today, thank you very much for having me. Thanks for having me and thanks for your tireless efforts waged on behalf of health insurance reform in this country.

I have the great pleasure of having a really nice library at the White House. And I was tooling through some of the writings of some previous Presidents and I came upon this quote by Abraham Lincoln: “I am not bound to win, but I’m bound to be true. I’m not bound to succeed, but I’m bound to live up to what light I have.”

This debate has been a difficult debate. This process has been a difficult process. And this year has been a difficult year for the American people. When I was sworn in, we were in the midst of the worst recession since the Great Depression. Eight hundred thousand people per month were losing their jobs. Millions of people were losing their health insurance. And the financial system was on the verge of collapse.

And this body has taken on some of the toughest votes and some of the toughest decisions in the history of Congress. Not because you were bound to win, but because you were bound to be true. Because each and every one of you made a decision that at a moment of such urgency, it was less important to measure what the polls said than to measure what was right.

A year later, we’re in different circumstances. Because of the actions that you’ve taken, the financial system has stabilized. The stock market has stabilized. Businesses are starting to invest again. The economy, instead of contracting, is now growing again. There are signs that people are going to start hiring again. There’s still tremendous hardship all across the country, but there is a sense that we are making progress -- because of you.

But even before this crisis, each and every one of us knew that there were millions of people across America who were living their own quiet crises. Maybe because they had a child who had a preexisting condition and no matter how desperate they were, no matter what insurance company they called, they couldn’t get coverage for that child. Maybe it was somebody who had been forced into early retirement, in their 50s not yet eligible for Medicare, and they couldn’t find a job and they couldn’t find health insurance, despite the fact that they had some sort of chronic condition that had to be tended to.

Every single one of you at some point before you arrived in Congress and after you arrived in Congress have met constituents with heart-breaking stories. And you’ve looked them in the eye and you’ve said, we’re going to do something about it -- that’s why I want to go to Congress.

And now, we’re on the threshold of doing something about it. We’re a day away. After a year of debate, after every argument has been made, by just about everybody, we’re 24 hours away.

As some of you know, I’m not somebody who spends a lot of time surfing the cable channels, but I’m not completely in the bubble. I have a sense of what the coverage has been, and mostly it’s an obsession with “What will this mean for the Democratic Party? What will this mean for the President’s polls? How will this play out in November? Is this good or is this bad for the Democratic majority? What does it mean for those swing districts?”

And I noticed that there’s been a lot of friendly advice offered all across town. Mitch McConnell, John Boehner, Karl Rove -- they’re all warning you of the horrendous impact if you support this legislation. Now, it could be that they are suddenly having a change of heart and they are deeply concerned about their Democratic friends. They are giving you the best possible advice in order to assure that Nancy Pelosi remains Speaker and Harry Reid remains Leader and that all of you keep your seats. That’s a possibility.

But it may also be possible that they realize after health reform passes and I sign that legislation into law, that it’s going to be a little harder to mischaracterize what this effort has been all about.

Because this year, small businesses will start getting tax credits so that they can offer health insurance to employees who currently don’t have it. Because this year, those same parents who are worried about getting coverage for their children with preexisting conditions now are assured that insurance companies have to give them coverage -- this year.

Because this year, insurance companies won’t suddenly be able to drop your coverage when you get sick -- or impose lifetime limits or restrictive limits on the coverage that you have. Maybe they know that this year, for the first time, young people will be able to stay on their parents’ health insurance until they’re 26 years old and they’re thinking that just might be popular all across the country.

And what they also know is what won’t happen. They know that after this legislation passes and after I sign this bill, lo and behold nobody is pulling the plug on Granny. It turns out that in fact people who like their health insurance are going to be able to keep their health insurance; that there’s no government takeover. People will discover that if they like their doctor, they’ll be keeping their doctor. In fact, they’re more likely to keep their doctor because of a stronger system.

It’ll turn out that this piece of historic legislation is built on the private insurance system that we have now and runs straight down the center of American political thought. It turns out this is a bill that tracks the recommendations not just of Democrat Tom Daschle, but also Republicans Bob Dole and Howard Baker; that this is a middle-of-the-road bill that is designed to help the American people in an area of their lives where they urgently need help.

Now, there are some who wanted a single-payer government-run system. That’s not this bill. The Republicans wanted what I called the “foxes guard the henhouse approach” in which we further deregulate the insurance companies and let them run wild, the notion being somehow that that was going to lower costs for the American people. I don’t know a serious health care economist who buys that idea, but that was their concept. And we rejected that, because what we said was we want to create a system in which health care is working not for insurance companies but it’s working for the American people, it’s working for middle class families.

So what did we do? What is the essence of this legislation? Number one, this is the toughest insurance reforms in history. We are making sure that the system of private insurance works for ordinary families. A prescription -- this is a patient’s bill of rights on steroids. So many of you individually have worked on these insurance reforms -- they are in this package -- to make sure that families are getting a fair deal; that if they’re paying a premium, that they’re getting a good service in return; making sure that employers, if they are paying premiums for their employees, that their employees are getting the coverage that they expect; that insurance companies are not going to game the system with fine print and rescissions and dropping people when they need it most, but instead are going to have to abide by some basic rules of the road that exemplify a sense of fairness and good value. That’s number one.

The second thing this does is it creates a pool, a marketplace, where individuals and small businesses, who right now are having a terrible time out there getting health insurance, are going to be able to purchase health insurance as part of a big group -- just like federal employees, just like members of Congress. They are now going to be part of a pool that can negotiate for better rates, better quality, more competition.

And that’s why the Congressional Budget Office says this will lower people’s rates for comparable plans by 14 to 20 percent. That’s not my numbers -- that’s the Congressional Budget Office’s numbers. So that people will have choice and competition just like members of Congress have choice and competition.

Number three, if people still can’t afford it we’re going to provide them some tax credits -- the biggest tax cut for small businesses and working families when it comes to health care in history.

And number four, this is the biggest reduction in our deficit since the Budget Balance Act -- one of the biggest deficit reduction measures in history -- over $1.3 trillion that will help put us on the path of fiscal responsibility.

And that’s before we count all the game-changing measures that are going to assure, for example, that instead of having five tests when you go to the doctor you just get one; that the delivery system is working for patients, not just working for billings. And everybody who’s looked at it says that every single good idea to bend the cost curve and start actually reducing health care costs are in this bill.

So that’s what this effort is all about. Toughest insurance reforms in history. A marketplace so people have choice and competition who right now don’t have it and are seeing their premiums go up 20, 30, 40, 50 percent. Reductions in the cost of health care for millions of American families, including those who have health insurance. The Business Roundtable did their own study and said that this would potentially save employers $3,000 per employee on their health care because of the measures in this legislation.

And by the way, not only does it reduce the deficit -- we pay for it responsibly in ways that the other side of the aisle that talks a lot about fiscal responsibility but doesn’t seem to be able to walk the walk can’t claim when it comes to their prescription drug bill. We are actually doing it. This is paid for and will not add a dime to the deficit -- it will reduce the deficit.

Now, is this bill perfect? Of course not. Will this solve every single problem in our health care system right away? No. There are all kinds of ideas that many of you have that aren’t included in this legislation. I know that there has been discussion, for example, of how we’re going to deal with regional disparities and I know that there was a meeting with Secretary Sebelius to assure that we can continue to try to make sure that we’ve got a system that gives people the best bang for their buck.

So this is not -- there are all kinds of things that many of you would like to see that isn’t in this legislation. There are some things I’d like to see that’s not in this legislation. But is this the single most important step that we have taken on health care since Medicare? Absolutely. Is this the most important piece of domestic legislation in terms of giving a break to hardworking middle class families out there since Medicare? Absolutely. Is this a vast improvement over the status quo? Absolutely.

Now, I still know this is a tough vote, though. I know this is a tough vote. I’ve talked to many of you individually. And I have to say that if you honestly believe in your heart of hearts, in your conscience, that this is not an improvement over the status quo; if despite all the information that’s out there that says that without serious reform efforts like this one people’s premiums are going to double over the next five or 10 years, that folks are going to keep on getting letters from their insurance companies saying that their premium just went up 40 or 50 percent; if you think that somehow it’s okay that we have millions of hardworking Americans who can’t get health care and that it’s all right, it’s acceptable, in the wealthiest nation on Earth that there are children with chronic illnesses that can’t get the care that they need -- if you think that the system is working for ordinary Americans rather than the insurance companies, then you should vote no on this bill. If you can honestly say that, then you shouldn’t support it. You’re here to represent your constituencies and if you think your constituencies honestly wouldn’t be helped, you shouldn’t vote for this.

But if you agree that the system is not working for ordinary families, if you’ve heard the same stories that I’ve heard everywhere, all across the country, then help us fix this system. Don't do it for me. Don’t do it for Nancy Pelosi or Harry Reid. Do it for all those people out there who are struggling.

Some of you know I get 10 letters a day that I read out of the 40,000 that we receive. Started reading some of the ones that I got this morning. “Dear President Obama, my daughter, a wonderful person, lost her job. She has no health insurance. She had a blood clot in her brain. She’s now disabled, can’t get care.” “Dear President Obama, I don’t yet qualify for Medicare. COBRA is about to run out. I am desperate, don't know what to do.”

Do it for them. Do it for people who are really scared right now through no fault of their own, who’ve played by the rules, who’ve done all the right things, and have suddenly found out that because of an accident, because of an ailment, they’re about to lose their house; or they can’t provide the help to their kids that they need; or they’re a small business who up until now has always taken pride in providing care for their workers and it turns out that they just can’t afford to do it anymore and they’ve having to make a decision about do I keep providing health insurance for my workers or do I just drop their coverage or do I not hire some people because I simply can’t afford it -- it’s all being gobbled up by the insurance companies.

Don’t do it for me. Don’t do it for the Democratic Party. Do it for the American people. They’re the ones who are looking for action right now.

I know this is a tough vote. And I am actually confident -- I’ve talked to some of you individually -- that it will end up being the smart thing to do politically because I believe that good policy is good politics. I am convinced that when you go out there and you are standing tall and you are saying I believe that this is the right thing to do for my constituents and the right thing to do for America, that ultimately the truth will out.

I had a wonderful conversation with Betsy Markey. I don't know if Betsy is around here. There she is right there. Betsy is in a tough district. The biggest newspaper is somewhat conservative, as Betsy described. They weren’t real happy with health care reform. They were opposed to it. Betsy, despite the pressure, announced that she was in favor of this bill. And lo and behold, the next day that same newspaper runs an editorial saying, you know what, we’ve considered this, we’ve looked at the legislation, and we actually are pleased that Congresswoman Markey is supporting the legislation.

When I see John Boccieri stand up proud with a whole bunch of his constituencies -- in as tough a district as there is and stand up with a bunch of folks from his district with preexisting conditions and saying, you know, I don’t know what is going on Washington but I know what’s going on with these families -- I look at him with pride.

Now, I can’t guarantee that this is good politics. Every one of you know your districts better than I do. You talk to folks. You’re under enormous pressure. You’re getting robocalls. You’re getting e-mails that are tying up the communications system. I know the pressure you’re under. I get a few comments made about me. I don’t know if you’ve noticed. I’ve been in your shoes. I know what it’s like to take a tough vote.

But what did Lincoln say? “I am not bound to win, but I am bound to be true.” Two generations ago, folks who were sitting in your position, they made a decision -- we are going to make sure that seniors and the poor have health care coverage that they can count on. And they did the right thing.

And I’m sure at the time they were making that vote, they weren’t sure how the politics were either, any more than the people who made the decision to make sure that Social Security was in place knew how the politics would play out, or folks who passed the civil rights acts knew how the politics were going to play out. They were not bound to win, but they were bound to be true.

And now we’ve got middle class Americans, don’t have Medicare, don’t have Medicaid, watching the employer-based system fray along the edges or being caught in terrible situations. And the question is, are we going to be true to them?

Sometimes I think about how I got involved in politics. I didn’t think of myself as a potential politician when I get out of college. I went to work in neighborhoods, working with Catholic churches in poor neighborhoods in Chicago, trying to figure out how people could get a little bit of help. And I was skeptical about politics and politicians, just like a lot of Americans are skeptical about politics and politicians are right now. Because my working assumption was when push comes to shove, all too often folks in elected office, they’re looking for themselves and not looking out for the folks who put them there; that there are too many compromises; that the special interests have too much power; they just got too much clout; there’s too much big money washing around.

And I decided finally to get involved because I realized if I wasn’t willing to step up and be true to the things I believe in, then the system wouldn’t change. Every single one of you had that same kind of moment at the beginning of your careers. Maybe it was just listening to stories in your neighborhood about what was happening to people who’d been laid off of work. Maybe it was your own family experience, somebody got sick and didn’t have health care and you said something should change.

Something inspired you to get involved, and something inspired you to be a Democrat instead of running as a Republican. Because somewhere deep in your heart you said to yourself, I believe in an America in which we don’t just look out for ourselves, that we don’t just tell people you’re on your own, that we are proud of our individualism, we are proud of our liberty, but we also have a sense of neighborliness and a sense of community -- and we are willing to look out for one another and help people who are vulnerable and help people who are down on their luck and give them a pathway to success and give them a ladder into the middle class. That’s why you decided to run.

And now a lot of us have been here a while and everybody here has taken their lumps and their bruises. And it turns out people have had to make compromises, and you’ve been away from families for a long time and you’ve missed special events for your kids sometimes. And maybe there have been times where you asked yourself, why did I ever get involved in politics in the first place? And maybe things can’t change after all. And when you do something courageous, it turns out sometimes you may be attacked. And sometimes the very people you thought you were trying to help may be angry at you and shout at you. And you say to yourself, maybe that thing that I started with has been lost.

But you know what? Every once in a while, every once in a while a moment comes where you have a chance to vindicate all those best hopes that you had about yourself, about this country, where you have a chance to make good on those promises that you made in all those town meetings and all those constituency breakfasts and all that traveling through the district, all those people who you looked in the eye and you said, you know what, you’re right, the system is not working for you and I’m going to make it a little bit better.

And this is one of those moments. This is one of those times where you can honestly say to yourself, doggone it, this is exactly why I came here. This is why I got into politics. This is why I got into public service. This is why I’ve made those sacrifices. Because I believe so deeply in this country and I believe so deeply in this democracy and I’m willing to stand up even when it’s hard, even when it’s tough.

Every single one of you have made that promise not just to your constituents but to yourself. And this is the time to make true on that promise. We are not bound to win, but we are bound to be true. We are not bound to succeed, but we are bound to let whatever light we have shine. We have been debating health care for decades. It has now been debated for a year. It is in your hands. It is time to pass health care reform for America, and I am confident that you are going to do it tomorrow.

Thank you very much, House of Representatives. Let’s get this done.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address to the Nation on HOR Health Care Bill Passage

Good evening, everybody. Tonight, after nearly 100 years of talk and frustration, after decades of trying, and a year of sustained effort and debate, the United States Congress finally declared that America’s workers and America's families and America's small businesses deserve the security of knowing that here, in this country, neither illness nor accident should endanger the dreams they’ve worked a lifetime to achieve.

Tonight, at a time when the pundits said it was no longer possible, we rose above the weight of our politics. We pushed back on the undue influence of special interests. We didn't give in to mistrust or to cynicism or to fear. Instead, we proved that we are still a people capable of doing big things and tackling our biggest challenges. We proved that this government -- a government of the people and by the people -- still works for the people.

I want to thank every member of Congress who stood up tonight with courage and conviction to make health care reform a reality. And I know this wasn’t an easy vote for a lot of people. But it was the right vote. I want to thank Speaker Nancy Pelosi for her extraordinary leadership, and Majority Leader Steny Hoyer and Majority Whip Jim Clyburn for their commitment to getting the job done. I want to thank my outstanding Vice President, Joe Biden, and my wonderful Secretary of Health and Human Services, Kathleen Sebelius, for their fantastic work on this issue. I want to thank the many staffers in Congress, and my own incredible staff in the White House, who have worked tirelessly over the past year with Americans of all walks of life to forge a reform package finally worthy of the people we were sent here to serve.

Today’s vote answers the dreams of so many who have fought for this reform. To every unsung American who took the time to sit down and write a letter or type out an e-mail hoping your voice would be heard -- it has been heard tonight. To the untold numbers who knocked on doors and made phone calls, who organized and mobilized out of a firm conviction that change in this country comes not from the top down, but from the bottom up -- let me reaffirm that conviction: This moment is possible because of you.

Most importantly, today’s vote answers the prayers of every American who has hoped deeply for something to be done about a health care system that works for insurance companies, but not for ordinary people. For most Americans, this debate has never been about abstractions, the fight between right and left, Republican and Democrat -- it’s always been about something far more personal. It’s about every American who knows the shock of opening an envelope to see that their premiums just shot up again when times are already tough enough. It’s about every parent who knows the desperation of trying to cover a child with a chronic illness only to be told “no” again and again and again. It’s about every small business owner forced to choose between insuring employees and staying open for business. They are why we committed ourselves to this cause.

Tonight’s vote is not a victory for any one party -- it's a victory for them. It's a victory for the American people. And it's a victory for common sense.

Now, it probably goes without saying that tonight’s vote will give rise to a frenzy of instant analysis. There will be tallies of Washington winners and losers, predictions about what it means for Democrats and Republicans, for my poll numbers, for my administration. But long after the debate fades away and the prognostication fades away and the dust settles, what will remain standing is not the government-run system some feared, or the status quo that serves the interests of the insurance industry, but a health care system that incorporates ideas from both parties -- a system that works better for the American people.

If you have health insurance, this reform just gave you more control by reining in the worst excesses and abuses of the insurance industry with some of the toughest consumer protections this country has ever known -- so that you are actually getting what you pay for.

If you don’t have insurance, this reform gives you a chance to be a part of a big purchasing pool that will give you choice and competition and cheaper prices for insurance. And it includes the largest health care tax cut for working families and small businesses in history -- so that if you lose your job and you change jobs, start that new business, you’ll finally be able to purchase quality, affordable care and the security and peace of mind that comes with it.

This reform is the right thing to do for our seniors. It makes Medicare stronger and more solvent, extending its life by almost a decade. And it’s the right thing to do for our future. It will reduce our deficit by more than $100 billion over the next decade, and more than $1 trillion in the decade after that.

So this isn’t radical reform. But it is major reform. This legislation will not fix everything that ails our health care system. But it moves us decisively in the right direction. This is what change looks like.

Now as momentous as this day is, it's not the end of this journey. On Tuesday, the Senate will take up revisions to this legislation that the House has embraced, and these are revisions that have strengthened this law and removed provisions that had no place in it. Some have predicted another siege of parliamentary maneuvering in order to delay adoption of these improvements. I hope that’s not the case. It’s time to bring this debate to a close and begin the hard work of implementing this reform properly on behalf of the American people. This year, and in years to come, we have a solemn responsibility to do it right.

Nor does this day represent the end of the work that faces our country. The work of revitalizing our economy goes on. The work of promoting private sector job creation goes on. The work of putting American families’ dreams back within reach goes on. And we march on, with renewed confidence, energized by this victory on their behalf.

In the end, what this day represents is another stone firmly laid in the foundation of the American Dream. Tonight, we answered the call of history as so many generations of Americans have before us. When faced with crisis, we did not shrink from our challenge -- we overcame it. We did not avoid our responsibility -- we embraced it. We did not fear our future -- we shaped it.

Thank you, God bless you, and may God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address on Signing Health Care Reform Bill into Law

Today, after almost a century of trying --

Today, after over a year of debate --

Today, after all the votes have been tallied, health insurance reform becomes law in the United States of America -- today.

It is fitting that Congress passed this historic legislation this week. For as we mark the turning of spring, we also mark a new season in America. In a few moments, when I sign this bill, all of the overheated rhetoric over reform will finally confront the reality of reform.

And while the Senate still has a last round of improvements to make on this historic legislation -- and these are improvements I’m confident they will make swiftly -- the bill I’m signing will set in motion reforms that generations of Americans have fought for, and marched for, and hungered to see.

It will take four years to implement fully many of these reforms, because we need to implement them responsibly. We need to get this right. But a host of desperately needed reforms will take effect right away.

This year, we’ll start offering tax credits to about 4 million small businessmen and women to help them cover the cost of insurance for their employees. That happens this year.

This year, tens of thousands of uninsured Americans with preexisting conditions, the parents of children who have a preexisting condition, will finally be able to purchase the coverage they need. That happens this year.

This year, insurance companies will no longer be able to drop people’s coverage when they get sick. They won’t be able to place lifetime limits or restrictive annual limits on the amount of care they can receive.

This year, all new insurance plans will be required to offer free preventive care. And this year, young adults will be able to stay on their parents’ policies until they’re 26 years old. That happens this year.

And this year, seniors who fall in the coverage gap known as the doughnut hole will start getting some help. They’ll receive 250 dollars to help pay for prescriptions, and that will, over time, fill in the doughnut hole. And I want seniors to know, despite what some have said, these reforms will not cut your guaranteed benefits. In fact, under this law, Americans on Medicare will receive free preventive care without co-payments or deductibles. That begins this year.

Once this reform is implemented, health insurance exchanges will be created, a competitive marketplace where uninsured people and small businesses will finally be able to purchase affordable, quality insurance. They will be able to be part of a big pool and get the same good deal that members of Congress get. That’s what’s going to happen under this reform. And when this exchange is up and running, millions of people will get tax breaks to help them afford coverage, which represents the largest middle-class tax cut for health care in history. That's what this reform is about.

This legislation will also lower costs for families and for businesses and for the federal government, reducing our deficit by over one trillion dollars in the next two decades. It is paid for. It is fiscally responsible. And it will help lift a decades-long drag on our economy. That's part of what all of you together worked on and made happen.

That our generation is able to succeed in passing this reform is a testament to the persistence --- and the character -- of the American people, who championed this cause; who mobilized; who organized; who believed that people who love this country can change it.

It’s also a testament to the historic leadership -- and uncommon courage -- of the men and women of the United States Congress, who’ve taken their lumps during this difficult debate.

Audience Member: Yes, we did.

President Obama: You know, there are few tougher jobs in politics or government than leading one of our legislative chambers. In each chamber, there are men and women who come from different places and face different pressures, who reach different conclusions about the same things and feel deeply concerned about different things.

By necessity, leaders have to speak to those different concerns. It isn’t always tidy; it is almost never easy. But perhaps the greatest -- and most difficult -- challenge is to cobble together out of those differences the sense of common interest and common purpose that’s required to advance the dreams of all people -- especially in a country as large and diverse as ours.

And we are blessed by leaders in each chamber who not only do their jobs very well but who never lost sight of that larger mission. They didn’t play for the short term; they didn’t play to the polls or to politics: One of the best speakers the House of Representatives has ever had, Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

Audience: Nancy! Nancy! Nancy! Nancy!

President Obama: One of the best majority leaders the Senate has ever had, Mr. Harry Reid.

To all of the terrific committee chairs, all the members of Congress who did what was difficult, but did what was right, and passed health care reform -- not just this generation of Americans will thank you, but the next generation of Americans will thank you.

And of course, this victory was also made possible by the painstaking work of members of this administration, including our outstanding Secretary of Health and Human Services, Kathleen Sebelius -- and one of the unsung heroes of this effort, an extraordinary woman who led the reform effort from the White House, Nancy-Ann DeParle. Where’s Nancy?

Today, I’m signing this reform bill into law on behalf of my mother, who argued with insurance companies even as she battled cancer in her final days.

I’m signing it for Ryan Smith, who’s here today. He runs a small business with five employees. He’s trying to do the right thing, paying half the cost of coverage for his workers. This bill will help him afford that coverage.

I’m signing it for 11-year-old Marcelas Owens, who’s also here. Marcelas lost his mom to an illness. And she didn’t have insurance and couldn’t afford the care that she needed. So in her memory he has told her story across America so that no other children have to go through what his family has experienced.

I’m signing it for Natoma Canfield. Natoma had to give up her health coverage after her rates were jacked up by more than 40 percent. She was terrified that an illness would mean she’d lose the house that her parents built, so she gave up her insurance. Now she’s lying in a hospital bed, as we speak, faced with just such an illness, praying that she can somehow afford to get well without insurance. Natoma’s family is here today because Natoma can’t be. And her sister Connie is here. Connie, stand up.

I’m signing this bill for all the leaders who took up this cause through the generations -- from Teddy Roosevelt to Franklin Roosevelt, from Harry Truman, to Lyndon Johnson, from Bill and Hillary Clinton, to one of the deans who’s been fighting this so long, John Dingell. To Senator Ted Kennedy. And it’s fitting that Ted’s widow, Vicki, is here -- it’s fitting that Teddy’s widow, Vicki, is here; and his niece Caroline; his son Patrick, whose vote helped make this reform a reality.

I remember seeing Ted walk through that door in a summit in this room a year ago -- one of his last public appearances. And it was hard for him to make it. But he was confident that we would do the right thing.

Our presence here today is remarkable and improbable. With all the punditry, all of the lobbying, all of the game-playing that passes for governing in Washington, it’s been easy at times to doubt our ability to do such a big thing, such a complicated thing; to wonder if there are limits to what we, as a people, can still achieve. It’s easy to succumb to the sense of cynicism about what’s possible in this country.

But today, we are affirming that essential truth -- a truth every generation is called to rediscover for itself -- that we are not a nation that scales back its aspirations. We are not a nation that falls prey to doubt or mistrust. We don't fall prey to fear. We are not a nation that does what’s easy. That’s not who we are. That’s not how we got here.

We are a nation that faces its challenges and accepts its responsibilities. We are a nation that does what is hard. What is necessary. What is right. Here, in this country, we shape our own destiny. That is what we do. That is who we are. That is what makes us the United States of America.

And we have now just enshrined, as soon as I sign this bill, the core principle that everybody should have some basic security when it comes to their health care. And it is an extraordinary achievement that has happened because of all of you and all the advocates all across the country.

So, thank you. Thank you. God bless you, and may God bless the United States. Thank you. Thank you.

All right, I would now like to call up to stage some of the members of Congress who helped make this day possible, and some of the Americans who will benefit from these reforms. And we’re going to sign this bill.

This is going to take a little while. I’ve got to use every pen, so it’s going to take a really long time. I didn’t practice.

We are done.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address to the Troops in Afghanistan

How’s it going, Bagram? Well, you know, it turns out that the American people, they let me use this plane called Air Force One. And so I thought I’d come over and say hello.

Couple of people I want to thank, in addition to Sergeant Major Eric Johnson for the outstanding introduction and his great service. I want to thank Major General Mike Scaparrotti. Thank you for your great work as commanding general. I want to thank Ms. Dawn Liberi, who is the senior civilian representative of Regional Command East, for her outstanding work; and Brigadier General Steven Kwast, commander -- commander 455th Air Expeditionary Wing. Thank you all for your outstanding service. Give them a big round of applause.

Thank you for the unbelievable welcome. I know this was on a little bit of short notice.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: No worries.

THE PRESIDENT: No worries. It is great to be here at Bagram, and it’s great to see all the services. We’ve got Air Force, we’ve got Army -- we’ve got Navy -- we’ve got some Marines in the house. And we’ve got a lot of civilians here too -- who are making an outstanding contribution to this effort, and I’m honored to be joined by America’s outstanding civilian military leadership team here in Afghanistan, Ambassador Karl Eikenberry, who’s doing outstanding work, and the commander of our 43-nation coalition, General Stan McChrystal. The two of them together have paired up to do an extraordinarily difficult task, but they are doing it extraordinarily well and we are proud of them. Please give your outstanding team a big round of applause. They’ve got my full confidence and my full support.

We’re also joined by troops from some of our coalition partners, because this is not simply an American mission or even just a NATO mission. Al Qaeda and their extremist allies are a threat to the people of Afghanistan and a threat to the people of America, but they’re also a threat to people all around the world, and that’s why we’re so proud to have our coalition partners here with us. Thank you very much for the great work that you do. We salute you and we honor you for all the sacrifices you make, and you are a true friend of the United States of America. Thank you very much.

And we also salute the members of the Afghan National Army who are fighting alongside all of you. They’re risking their lives to protect their country. And as I told President Karzai today, the United States is a partner but our intent is to make sure that the Afghans have the capacity to provide for their own security. That is core to our mission, and we are proud of the work that they are doing and the continuing increased capacity that we’re seeing out of Afghan national security forces. So thank you very much for the great work you’re doing to take responsibility for security here in your own country.

And to the Afghan people, I want to say that I’m honored to be a guest in your country. Now, the Afghans have suffered for decades -- decades of war. But we are here to help Afghans forge a hard-won peace while realizing the extraordinary potential of the Afghan people, Afghanistan’s sons and daughters, from the soldiers and the police to the farmers and the young students. And we want to build a lasting partnership founded upon mutual interests and mutual respect, and I’m looking forward to returning to Afghanistan many times in the years to come.

Now, I know for most of you, you didn’t get a lot of notice that I was coming. But I want you to understand, there’s no visit that I considered more important than this visit I’m making right now, because I have no greater honor than serving as your Commander-in-Chief. And it is a privilege to look out and see the extraordinary efforts of America’s sons and daughters here in Afghanistan. So my main job here today is to say thank you on behalf of the entire American people.

You are part of the finest military in the history of the world, and we are proud of you. And so I want you to know that everybody back home is proud of you. Everybody back home is grateful. And everybody understands the sacrifices that you have made and your families have made to keep America safe and to keep America secure in this vital mission.

And I know it’s not easy. You’re far away from home. You miss your kids. You miss your spouses, your family, your friends. Some of you, this is your second or your third or your fourth tour of duty. I’ll tell you right now the same thing that I said at West Point last December. If I thought for a minute that America’s vital interests were not served, were not at stake here in Afghanistan, I would order all of you home right away.

So I want you to know, I want every American serving in Afghanistan, military and civilian, to know, whether you’re working the flight line here at Bagram or patrolling a village down in Helmand, whether you’re standing watch at a forward operating base or training our Afghan partners or working with the Afghan government, your services are absolutely necessary, absolutely essential to America’s safety and security. Those folks back home are relying on you.

We can’t forget why we’re here. We did not choose this war. This was not an act of America wanting to expand its influence; of us wanting to meddle in somebody else’s business. We were attacked viciously on 9/11. Thousands of our fellow countrymen and women were killed. And this is the region where the perpetrators of that crime, al Qaeda, still base their leadership. Plots against our homeland, plots against our allies, plots against the Afghan and Pakistani people are taking place as we speak right here. And if this region slides backwards, if the Taliban retakes this country and al Qaeda can operate with impunity, then more American lives will be at stake. The Afghan people will lose their chance at progress and prosperity. And the world will be significantly less secure.

And as long as I’m your Commander-in-Chief, I am not going to let that happen. That’s why you are here. I’ve made a promise to all of you who serve. I will never send you into harm’s way unless it’s absolutely necessary. I anguish in thinking about the sacrifices that so many of you make. That’s why I promise I will never send you out unless it is necessary.

But that’s only part of the promise, because the other part of the promise is that when it is absolutely necessary, you will be backed up by a clear mission and the right strategy to finish the job, to get the job done. And I am confident all of you are going to get the job done right here in Afghanistan. I am confident of that.

That’s why I ordered more troops and civilians here into Afghanistan shortly after taking office. That’s why we took a hard look and forged a new strategy and committed more resources in December. That’s why we pushed our friends and allies and partners to pony up more resources themselves, more commitments of aid, and additional forces and trainers.

Our broad mission is clear: We are going to disrupt and dismantle, defeat and destroy al Qaeda and its extremist allies. That is our mission. And to accomplish that goal, our objectives here in Afghanistan are also clear: We’re going to deny al Qaeda safe haven. We’re going to reverse the Taliban’s momentum. We’re going to strengthen the capacity of Afghan security forces and the Afghan government so that they can begin taking responsibility and gain confidence of the Afghan people.

And our strategy includes a military effort that takes the fight to the Taliban while creating the conditions for greater security and a transition to the Afghans; but also a civilian effort that improves the daily lives of the Afghan people, and combats corruption; and a partnership with Pakistan and its people, because we can’t uproot extremists and advance security and opportunity unless we succeed on both sides of the border. Most of you understand that.

Many of the troops that I ordered to Afghanistan have begun to arrive, and more are on the way. And we’ll continue to work with Congress to make sure that you’ve got the equipment that you need, particularly as we complete our drawdown in Iraq. We’re providing more helicopters, we’re providing more intelligence and reconnaissance capabilities, more special operations forces, more armored vehicles that can save lives.

And here in Afghanistan you’ve gone on the offensive. And the American people back home are noticing. We have seen a huge increase in support in -- stateside, because people understand the kinds of sacrifices that you guys are making, and the clarity of mission that you’re bringing to bear.

And together with our coalition and Afghan partners, our troops have pushed the Taliban out of their stronghold in Marja. We’ve changed the way we operate and interact with the Afghan people. We see Afghans reclaiming their communities, and we see new partnerships that will help them build their own future and increase their security.

And across the border, Pakistan is mounting major offensives. We’ve seen violent extremists pushed out of their sanctuaries. We’ve struck major blows against al Qaeda leadership as well as the Taliban’s. They are hunkered down. They’re worried about their own safety. It’s harder for them to move, it’s harder for them to train and to plot and to attack, and all of that makes America safer. And we are going to keep them on the run because that is what’s going to be required in order to assure that our families back home have the security that they need. That’s the work that you are doing.

So thanks to you, there’s been progress these last several months. But we know there are going to be some difficult days ahead. There’s going to be setbacks. We face a determined enemy. But we also know this: The United States of America does not quit once it starts on something. You don’t quit, the American armed services does not quit, we keep at it, we persevere, and together with our partners we will prevail. I am absolutely confident of that.

And I also want you to know that as you’re doing your duty here, we’re going to do right by you back home. We’re going to help take care of your families, and that’s why the First Lady Michelle Obama visited with military families and makes sure that their needs are met. That’s why she stays after me once she gets home, when I’m at the White House. And we’re going to make sure that we are keeping to improve your pay and your benefits, but also things like childcare and support that ensure that you’ve got a little bit of security knowing your family is being looked after back home.

And we’ll be there for your when you come home. It’s why we’re improving care for our wounded warriors, especially those with PTSD and traumatic brain injuries. We’re moving forward with the Post-9/11 GI Bill so you and your families can pursue your dreams. And we’ve made the biggest increase in the VA budget in 30 years, because we’re going to keep our sacred trust with all those who serve.

You’ve been there for us, tour after tour, year after year, at a time when too many American institutions have let us down, when too many institutions have put short-term gain in front of a commitment to duty and a commitment to what’s right. You’ve met your responsibilities, you’ve done your duty -- not just when it’s easy. That’s why you’ve inspired your fellow Americans. That’s why you inspire me. That’s why you’ve earned your place next to the very greatest of American generations.

And all of you represent the virtues and the values that America so desperately needs right now: sacrifice and selflessness, honor and decency. That’s why you’re here today. That’s what you represent.

I’ve seen your sense of purpose and your willingness to step forward and serve in a time of danger. I’ve seen it from the Marines I’ve met at Camp Lejeune to the cadets at West Point, from the midshipmen at Annapolis to the troops I’ve met in Iraq, and at bases across America and here in Afghanistan. I’ve seen your courage and your heroism and the story of a young Sergeant First Class named Jared Monti who gave his life here in Afghanistan to save his fellow soldiers and his parents. I was proud to present with our nation’s highest military declaration, the Medal of Honor. I’ve seen your tenacity -- I’ve seen your tenacity and determination in our wounded warriors in Landstuhl and Walter Reed -- Americans fighting to stand again and to walk again and to get back with -- get back with their units; incredible dedication, incredible focus, incredible pride. And I’ve been humbled by your sacrifice and the solemn homecoming of flag-draped coffins at Dover, to the headstones in Section 60 at Arlington where the fallen from this war rest in peace alongside the fellow heroes of America’s story.

So here in Afghanistan each one of you is part of an unbroken line of American service members who’ve sacrificed for over two centuries. You’re protecting your fellow citizens from danger. You’re serving alongside old allies and new friends. You’re bringing hope and opportunity to a people who have known a lot of pain and a lot of suffering.

And I know that sometimes when you’re watching TV, the politics back home may look a little messy, and people are yelling and hollering, and Democrats this and Republicans that. I want you to understand this: There’s no daylight when it comes to support of all of you. There’s no daylight when it comes to supporting our troops. That brings us together. We are all incredibly proud. We all honor what you do. And all of you show all of America what’s possible when people come together, not based on color or creed, not based on faith or station, but based on a commitment to serve together, to bleed together and to succeed together as one people, as Americans.

Make no mistake, this fight matters to us. It matters to us, it matters to our allies, it matters to the Afghan people. Al Qaeda and the violent extremists who you’re fighting against want to destroy. But all of you want to build -- and that is something essential about America. They’ve got no respect for human life. You see dignity in every human being. That’s part of what we value as Americans. They want to drive races and regions and religions apart. You want to bring people together and see the world move forward together. They offer fear, in other words, and you offer hope.

And that’s why it is so important that you know that the entire country stands behind you. That’s why you put on that uniform, because in an uncertain world, the United States of America will always stand up for the security of nations and the dignity of human beings. That’s who we are. That is what we do.

Much has happened to our country and to the world since 9/11. But I’m confident that so long as brave men and women like you -- Americans who are willing to serve selflessly half a world away on behalf of their fellow citizens and the dreams of people they’ve never met -- so long as there are folks like you, then I’m confident that our nation will endure, and hope will overcome fear. And I am confident that better days lie ahead.

So thank you very much, everybody. God bless you. God bless the United States Armed Forces. And God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address on Energy Security at Andrews Air Force Base

I've got a few introductions that I want to make very quickly before I start my remarks. First of all, I think that by the end of his tenure we're going to know that Ken Salazar is one of the finest Secretaries of Interior we've ever had. So please give him a big round of applause.

Other members of what we call our green team are here: Steven Chu, our Secretary of Energy; Martha Johnson, the Administrator of the GSA; Nancy Sutley, the CEQ Chair. We've got Carol Browner, who’s the White House Energy and Climate Change Director. Please give them a big round of applause. They put in a lot of work.

Governor Martin O’Malley is here, governor of Maryland. Ray Mabus, Secretary of the Navy, is here. Admiral Gary Roughead, Chief of Naval Operations, is here, and we appreciate his outstanding service. Thank you, Gar.

I want to thank Steven Shepro, the base commander here at Andrews, and the leadership that's present from the Air Force, the Marine Corps, and the Coast Guard.

Ken and I were colleagues in the Senate, and I appointed him because I knew that he would be a faithful and pragmatic steward of our natural resources. And as Secretary, he is changing the way that the Interior Department does business so that we’re responsibly developing traditional sources of energy and renewable sources of energy, from the wind on the high plains to the suns in the desert to the waves off our coasts. And so I'm very grateful to the work that he’s done in culminating in one of the announcements that we’re making today.

It’s also good to see so many members of our Armed Forces here today. Andrews is the home of Air Force One, and I appreciate everything that you do for me and my family. I should point out that you’ve got a 100-percent on-time departure record. You don’t charge for luggage -- so it’s a pretty good deal. And I want to thank you not only for the support that you provide me, but also for the service that you perform to keep our country safe each and every day. So I'm very grateful to all of you.

We’re here to talk about America’s energy security, an issue that’s been a priority for my administration since the day I took office. Already, we’ve made the largest investment in clean energy in our nation’s history. It’s an investment that’s expected to create or save more than 700,000 jobs across America -- jobs manufacturing advanced batteries for more efficient vehicles; upgrading the power grid so that it’s smarter and it’s stronger; doubling our nation’s capacity to generate renewable electricity from sources like the wind and the sun.

And just a few months after taking office, I also gathered the leaders of the world’s largest automakers, the heads of labor unions, environmental advocates, and public officials from California and across the country to reach a historic agreement to raise fuel economy standards in cars and trucks. And tomorrow, after decades in which we have done little to increase auto efficiency, those new standards will be finalized, which will reduce our dependence on oil while helping folks spend a little less at the pump.

So my administration is upholding its end of the deal, and we expect all parties to do the same. And I’d also point out this rule that we’re going to be announcing about increased mileage standards will save 1.8 billion -- billion barrels of oil overall -- 1.8 billion barrels of oil. And that’s like taking 58 million cars off the road for an entire year.

Today, we’re also going to go one step further. In order to save energy and taxpayer dollars, my administration -- led by Secretary Chu at Energy, as well as Administrator Johnson at GSA -- is doubling the number of hybrid vehicles in the federal fleet, even as we seek to reduce the number of cars and trucks used by our government overall. So we’re going to lead by example and practice what we preach: cutting waste, saving energy, and reducing our reliance on foreign oil.

But we have to do more. We need to make continued investments in clean coal technologies and advanced biofuels. A few weeks ago, I announced loan guarantees to break ground on America’s first new nuclear facility in three decades, a project that will create thousands of jobs. And in the short term, as we transition to cleaner energy sources, we’ve still got to make some tough decisions about opening new offshore areas for oil and gas development in ways that protect communities and protect coastlines.

This is not a decision that I’ve made lightly. It’s one that Ken and I -- as well as Carol Browner, my energy advisor, and others in my administration -- looked at closely for more than a year. But the bottom line is this: Given our energy needs, in order to sustain economic growth and produce jobs, and keep our businesses competitive, we are going to need to harness traditional sources of fuel even as we ramp up production of new sources of renewable, homegrown energy.

So today we’re announcing the expansion of offshore oil and gas exploration, but in ways that balance the need to harness domestic energy resources and the need to protect America’s natural resources. Under the leadership of Secretary Salazar, we’ll employ new technologies that reduce the impact of oil exploration. We’ll protect areas that are vital to tourism, the environment, and our national security. And we’ll be guided not by political ideology, but by scientific evidence.

That's why my administration will consider potential areas for development in the mid and south Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico, while studying and protecting sensitive areas in the Arctic. That’s why we’ll continue to support development of leased areas off the North Slope of Alaska, while protecting Alaska’s Bristol Bay.

There will be those who strongly disagree with this decision, including those who say we should not open any new areas to drilling. But what I want to emphasize is that this announcement is part of a broader strategy that will move us from an economy that runs on fossil fuels and foreign oil to one that relies more on homegrown fuels and clean energy. And the only way this transition will succeed is if it strengthens our economy in the short term and the long run. To fail to recognize this reality would be a mistake.

On the other side, there are going to be some who argue that we don’t go nearly far enough; who suggest we should open all our waters to energy exploration without any restriction or regard for the broader environmental and economic impact. And to those folks I’ve got to say this: We have less than 2 percent of the world’s oil reserves; we consume more than 20 percent of the world’s oil. And what that means is that drilling alone can’t come close to meeting our long-term energy needs. And for the sake of our planet and our energy independence, we need to begin the transition to cleaner fuels now.

So the answer is not drilling everywhere all the time. But the answer is not, also, for us to ignore the fact that we are going to need vital energy sources to maintain our economic growth and our security. Ultimately, we need to move beyond the tired debates of the left and the right, between business leaders and environmentalists, between those who would claim drilling is a cure all and those who would claim it has no place. Because this issue is just too important to allow our progress to languish while we fight the same old battles over and over again.

For decades we’ve talked about how our dependence on foreign oil threatens our economy -– yet our will to act rises and falls with the price of a barrel of oil. When gas gets expensive at the pump, suddenly everybody is an energy expert. And when it goes back down, everybody is back to their old habits.

For decades we’ve talked about the threat to future generations posed by our current system of energy –- even as we can see the mounting evidence of climate change from the Arctic Circle to the Gulf Coast. And this is particularly relevant to all of you who are serving in uniform: For decades, we’ve talked about the risks to our security created by dependence on foreign oil, but that dependence has actually grown year after year after year after year.

And while our politics has remained entrenched along these worn divides, the ground has shifted beneath our feet. Around the world, countries are seeking an edge in the global marketplace by investing in new ways of producing and saving energy. From China to Germany, these nations recognize that the nation that leads the clean energy economy will be the country that leads the global economy. And meanwhile, here at home, as politicians in Washington debate endlessly about whether to act, our own military has determined that we can no longer afford not to.

Some of the press may be wondering why we are announcing offshore drilling in a hangar at Andrews Air Force Base. Well, if there’s any doubt about the leadership that our military is showing, you just need to look at this F-18 fighter and the light-armored vehicle behind me. The Army and Marine Corps have been testing this vehicle on a mixture of biofuels. And this Navy fighter jet -- appropriately called the Green Hornet -- will be flown for the first time in just a few days, on Earth Day. If tests go as planned, it will be the first plane ever to fly faster than the speed of sound on a fuel mix that is half biomass. The Air Force is also testing jet engines using biofuels and had the first successful biofuel-powered test flight just last week. I don’t want to drum up any kind of rivalry here, but --

Now, the Pentagon isn’t seeking these alternative fuels just to protect our environment; they’re pursuing these homegrown energy sources to protect our national security. Our military leaders recognize the security imperative of increasing the use of alternative fuels, decreasing energy use, reducing our reliance on imported oil, making ourselves more energy-efficient. That’s why the Navy, led by Secretary Mabus, who’s here today, has set a goal of using 50-percent alternative fuels in all planes, vehicles, and ships in the next 10 years. That’s why the Defense Department has invested 2.7 billion dollars this year alone to improve energy efficiency.

So moving towards clean energy is about our security. It’s also about our economy. And it’s about the future of our planet. And what I hope is, is the policies that we’ve laid out -- from hybrid fleets to offshore drilling, from nuclear energy to wind energy -- underscores the seriousness with which my administration takes this challenge. It’s a challenge that requires us to break out of the old ways of thinking, to think and act anew. And it requires each of us, regardless of whether we’re in the private sector or the public sector, whether we’re in the military or in the civilian side of government, to think about how could we be doing things better, how could we be doing things smarter -- so that we are no longer tethered to the whims of what happens somewhere in the Middle East or with other major oil-producing nations.

So I’m open to proposals from my Democratic friends and my Republican friends. I think that we can break out of the broken politics of the past when it comes to our energy policy. I know that we can come together to pass comprehensive energy and climate legislation that’s going to foster new energy -- new industries, create millions of new jobs, protect our planet, and help us become more energy independent. That’s what we can do. That is what we must do. And I’m confident that is what we will do.

So thank you very much. And thanks, again, to all of you who are serving in our Armed Services. You are making an enormous contribution, and this is just one example of the leadership that you’re showing.

Thank you very much.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# START Treaty Signing Joint Presser with President Medvedev

President Obama:

Good afternoon, everyone. I am honored to be back here in the Czech Republic with President Medvedev and our Czech hosts to mark this historic completion of the New START treaty.

Let me begin by saying how happy I am to be back in the beautiful city of Prague. The Czech Republic, of course, is a close friend and ally of the United States, and I have great admiration and affection for the Czech people. Their bonds with the American people are deep and enduring, and Czechs have made great contributions to the United States over many decades -- including in my hometown of Chicago. I want to thank the President and all those involved in helping to host this extraordinary event.

I want to thank my friend and partner, Dmitry Medvedev. Without his personal efforts and strong leadership, we would not be here today. We’ve met and spoken by phone many times throughout the negotiations of this treaty, and as a consequence we’ve developed a very effective working relationship built on candor, cooperation, and mutual respect.

One year ago this week, I came here to Prague and gave a speech outlining America’s comprehensive commitment to stopping the spread of nuclear weapons and seeking the ultimate goal of a world without them. I said then -- and I will repeat now -- that this is a long-term goal, one that may not even be achieved in my lifetime. But I believed then -- as I do now -- that the pursuit of that goal will move us further beyond the Cold War, strengthen the global non-proliferation regime, and make the United States, and the world, safer and more secure. One of the steps that I called for last year was the realization of this treaty, so it’s very gratifying to be back in Prague today.

I also came to office committed to “resetting” relations between the United States and Russia, and I know that President Medvedev shared that commitment. As he said at our first meeting in London, our relationship had started to drift, making it difficult to cooperate on issues of common interest to our people. And when the United States and Russia are not able to work together on big issues, it’s not good for either of our nations, nor is it good for the world.

Together, we’ve stopped that drift, and proven the benefits of cooperation. Today is an important milestone for nuclear security and non-proliferation, and for U.S.-Russia relations. It fulfills our common objective to negotiate a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty. It includes significant reductions in the nuclear weapons that we will deploy. It cuts our delivery vehicles by roughly half. It includes a comprehensive verification regime, which allows us to further build trust. It enables both sides the flexibility to protect our security, as well as America’s unwavering commitment to the security of our European allies. And I look forward to working with the United States Senate to achieve ratification for this important treaty later this year.

Finally, this day demonstrates the determination of the United States and Russia -- the two nations that hold over 90 percent of the world’s nuclear weapons -- to pursue responsible global leadership. Together, we are keeping our commitments under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which must be the foundation for global non-proliferation.

While the New START treaty is an important first step forward, it is just one step on a longer journey. As I said last year in Prague, this treaty will set the stage for further cuts. And going forward, we hope to pursue discussions with Russia on reducing both our strategic and tactical weapons, including non-deployed weapons.

President Medvedev and I have also agreed to expand our discussions on missile defense. This will include regular exchanges of information about our threat assessments, as well as the completion of a joint assessment of emerging ballistic missiles. And as these assessments are completed, I look forward to launching a serious dialogue about Russian-American cooperation on missile defense.

But nuclear weapons are not simply an issue for the United States and Russia -- they threaten the common security of all nations. A nuclear weapon in the hands of a terrorist is a danger to people everywhere -- from Moscow to New York; from the cities of Europe to South Asia. So next week, 47 nations will come together in Washington to discuss concrete steps that can be taken to secure all vulnerable nuclear materials around the world in four years.

And the spread of nuclear weapons to more states is also an unacceptable risk to global security -- raising the specter of arms races from the Middle East to East Asia. Earlier this week, the United States formally changed our policy to make it clear that those [non]-nuclear weapons states that are in compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and their non-proliferation obligations will not be threatened by America’s nuclear arsenal. This demonstrates, once more, America’s commitment to the NPT as a cornerstone of our security strategy. Those nations that follow the rules will find greater security and opportunity. Those nations that refuse to meet their obligations will be isolated, and denied the opportunity that comes with international recognition.

That includes accountability for those that break the rules -- otherwise the NPT is just words on a page. That’s why the United States and Russia are part of a coalition of nations insisting that the Islamic Republic of Iran face consequences, because they have continually failed to meet their obligations. We are working together at the United Nations Security Council to pass strong sanctions on Iran. And we will not tolerate actions that flout the NPT, risk an arms race in a vital region, and threaten the credibility of the international community and our collective security.

While these issues are a top priority, they are only one part of the U.S.-Russia relationship. Today, I again expressed my deepest condolences for the terrible loss of Russian life in recent terrorist attacks, and we will remain steadfast partners in combating violent extremism. We also discussed the potential to expand our cooperation on behalf of economic growth, trade and investment, as well as technological innovation, and I look forward to discussing these issues further when President Medvedev visits the United States later this year, because there is much we can do on behalf of our security and prosperity if we continue to work together.

When one surveys the many challenges that we face around the world, it’s easy to grow complacent, or to abandon the notion that progress can be shared. But I want to repeat what I said last year in Prague: When nations and peoples allow themselves to be defined by their differences, the gulf between them widens. When we fail to pursue peace, then it stays forever beyond our grasp.

This majestic city of Prague is in many ways a monument to human progress. And this ceremony is a testament to the truth that old adversaries can forge new partnerships. I could not help but be struck the other day by the words of Arkady Brish, who helped build the Soviet Union’s first atom bomb. At the age of 92, having lived to see the horrors of a World War and the divisions of a Cold War, he said, “We hope humanity will reach the moment when there is no need for nuclear weapons, when there is peace and calm in the world.”

It’s easy to dismiss those voices. But doing so risks repeating the horrors of the past, while ignoring the history of human progress. The pursuit of peace and calm and cooperation among nations is the work of both leaders and peoples in the 21st century. For we must be as persistent and passionate in our pursuit of progress as any who would stand in our way.

Once again, President Medvedev, thank you for your extraordinary leadership.

[Address by Medvedev - deleted text and audio]

President Obama: ...from missiles launched from third countries. We recognize, however, that Russia has a significant interest in this issue, and what we’ve committed to doing is to engaging in a significant discussion not only bilaterally but also having discussions with our European allies and others about a framework in which we can potentially cooperate on issues of missile defense in a way that preserves U.S. national security interests, preserves Russia’s national security interests, and allows us to guard against a rogue missile from any source.

So I’m actually optimistic that having completed this treaty, which signals our strong commitment to a reduction in overall nuclear weapons, and that I believe is going to strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty regime, that sends a signal around the world that the United States and Russia are prepared to once again take leadership in moving in the direction of reducing reliance on nuclear weapons and preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, as well as nuclear materials, that we will have built the kind of trust not only between Presidents but also between governments and between peoples that allows us to move forward in a constructive way.

I’ve repeatedly said that we will not do anything that endangers or limits my ability as Commander-in-Chief to protect the American people. And we think that missile defense can be an important component of that. But we also want to make clear that the approach that we’ve taken in no way is intended to change the strategic balance between the United States and Russia. And I’m actually confident that, moving forward, as we have these discussions, it will be part of a broader set of discussions about, for example, how we can take tactical nuclear weapons out of theater, the possibilities of us making more significant cuts not only in deployed but also non-deployed missiles. There are a whole range of issues that I think that we can make significant progress on. I'm confident that this is an important first step in that direction.

[President Medvedev's Response - deleted text and audio]

Reporter's Question [in Russian and translated to English]: I have two questions. To each of the Presidents, one. The first is to Mr. Obama. Moscow and Washington, not for the first time, agree on a reduction of strategic offensive arms, but as you have mentioned, Russia and the United States are not the only countries having nuclear weapons. So how specifically can the documents achieved -- well, similar to today’s document on limitation on nuclear arms -- how soon we will see others sign this document? And will you move along this track together with Russia? And to the President of the Russian Federation, you have mentioned the fact that sometimes there’s an impression that Moscow and Washington are unable to agree on anything else but a mutual reduction of arms. So will we see any things that will counter such a statement? And what will the agreement be?

President Obama: First of all, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, the United States and Russia account for 90 percent of the world’s nuclear weapons. And given this legacy of the Cold War, it is critical for us to show significant leadership. That, I think, is what we’ve begun to do with this follow-on START treaty.

Other countries are going to have to be making a series of decisions about how they approach the issue of their nuclear weapons stockpiles. And as I’ve repeatedly said, and I'm sure Dmitry feels the same way with respect to his country, we are going to preserve our nuclear deterrent so long as other countries have nuclear weapons, and we are going to make sure that that stockpile is safe and secure and effective.

But I do believe that as we look out into the 21st century, that more and more countries will come to recognize that the most important factors in providing security and peace to their citizens will depend on their economic growth, will depend on the capacity of the international community to resolve conflicts; it will depend on having a strong conventional military that can protect our nations’ borders; and that nuclear weapons increasingly in an interdependent world will make less and less sense as the cornerstone of security policy.

But that’s going to take some time, and I think each country is going to have to make its own determinations. The key is for the United States and Russia to show leadership on this front because we are so far ahead of every nation with respect to possession of nuclear weapons.

The primary concerns that we identified in a recent Nuclear Posture Review, essentially a declaratory statement of U.S. policy with respect to nuclear weapons, said that our biggest concerns right now are actually the issues of nuclear terrorism and nuclear proliferation -- more countries obtaining nuclear weapons; those weapons being less controllable, less secure; nuclear materials floating around the globe. And that’s going to be a major topic of the discussion that we have in Washington on Monday.

The United States and Russia have a history already, a decade-long history, of locking down loose nuclear materials. I believe that our ability to move forward already on sanctions with respect to North Korea, the intense discussions that we’re having with respect to Iran, will increasingly send a signal to countries that are not abiding by their Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty obligations, that they will be isolated. All those things will go toward sending a general message that we need to move in a new direction. And I think leadership on that front is important.

Last point I'll make, I will just anticipate or coach the question about other areas of cooperation. Our respective foreign ministers -- Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Foreign Minister Lavrov -- have been heading a bilateral commission that has been working intensively on a whole range of issue. And President Medvedev and myself identified a series of key areas on the economic front, in trade relations, the potential for joint cooperation on various industries, how we can work on innovation and sparking economic growth. We've already worked together closely in the G20; I think we can build on that bilaterally.

There are issues of counterterrorism that are absolutely critical to both of us, and I just want to repeat how horrified all of America was at the recent attacks in Moscow. We recognize that that's a problem that can happen anywhere at any time, and it’s important for Russia and the United States to work closely on those issues.

And then there are people-to-people contacts and figuring out how we can make sure that there’s more interaction and exchange between our two countries on a whole range of issues within civil society.

So I'm very optimistic that we're going to continue to make progress on all of these fronts. But I think we should take pride in this particular accomplishment because it speaks not only to the security of our two nations but also the security of the world as a whole.

[President Medvedev's response - deleted text and audio]

Reporter's Question: Thank you, President Medvedev and President Obama. For President Obama first, could you elaborate on how the yearlong negotiations over the New START treaty have advanced U.S. cooperation with Russia on Iran, and give us a sense of when you will pursue, move forward in the United Nations and next week with sanctions discussions, and what those sanctions might look like? And for President Medvedev, could you address whether Russia could accept sanctions against Iran specifically dealing with its energy industry and energy sector? Thank you.

President Obama:

Discussions about sanctions on Iran have been moving forward over the last several weeks. In fact, they’ve been moving forward over the last several months. We’re going to start seeing some ramped-up negotiations taking place in New York in the coming weeks. And my expectation is that we are going to be able to secure strong, tough sanctions on Iran this spring.

Now, I think there are two ways in which these START negotiations have advanced or at least influenced Russia-U.S. discussions around Iran. The first is obviously that President Medvedev and I have been able to build up a level of trust and our teams have been able to work together in such a way that we can be frank, we can be clear, and that helped to facilitate, then, our ability, for example, to work together jointly to present to Iran reasonable options that would allow it to clearly distance itself from nuclear weapons and pursue a path of peaceful nuclear energy.

That wasn’t just an approach that was taken by the United States and Russia, but it was an approach taken by the P5-plus-1 as well as the International Atomic Energy Agency, the IAEA.

So what we’ve seen from the start is that a host of countries, but -- led by countries like the United States and Russia, have said to Iran, we are willing to work through diplomatic channels to resolve this issue. And unfortunately, Iran has consistently rebuffed our approach. And I think that Russia has been a very strong partner in saying that it has no interest in bringing down Iranian society or the Iranian government, but it does have an interest, as we all do, in making sure that each country is following its international obligations.

The second way in which I think the START treaty has influenced our discussions about Iran is it’s sent a strong signal that the United States and Iran -- or the United States and Russia are following our own obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and that our interest in Iran or North Korea or any other country following the NPT is not based on singling out any one country, but rather sends a strong signal that all of us have an obligation, each country has an obligation to follow the rules of the road internationally to ensure a more secure future for our children and our grandchildren.

And so I think the fact that we are signing this treaty, the fact that we are willing, as the two leading nuclear powers, to continually work on reducing our own arsenals, I think should indicate the fact that we are willing to be bound by our obligations, and we’re not asking any other countries to do anything different, but simply to follow the rules of the road that have been set forth and have helped to maintain at least a lack of the use of nuclear weapons over the last several decades, despite, obviously, the Cold War.

And the concern that I have in particular, a concern that I think is the most profound security threat to the United States, is that with further proliferation of nuclear weapons, with states obtaining nuclear weapons and potentially using them to blackmail other countries or potentially not securing them effectively or passing them on to terrorist organizations, that we could find ourselves in a world in which not only state actors but also potentially non-state actors are in possession of nuclear weapons, and even if they don’t use them, would then be in a position to terrorize the world community.

That’s why this issue is so important, and that’s why we are going to be pushing very hard to make sure that both smart and strong sanctions end up being in place soon to send a signal to Iran and other countries that this is an issue that the international community takes seriously.

[President Medvedev's Response - deleted text and audio]

[Reporter's Question - deleted text and audio]

[President Medvedev's Response - deleted text and audio]

President Obama: The United States Senate has the obligation of reviewing any treaty and, ultimately, ratifying it. Fortunately there is a strong history of bipartisanship when it comes to the evaluation of international treaties, particularly arms control treaties.

And so I have already engaged in consultation with the chairmen of the relevant committees in the United States Senate. We are going to broaden that consultation now that this treaty has been signed. My understanding is, is that both in Russia and the United States, it’s going to be posed on the Internet, appropriate to a 21st century treaty. And so people not only within government but also the general public will be able to review, in an open and transparent fashion, what it is that we’ve agreed to.

I think what they will discover is that this is a well-crafted treaty that meets the interests of both countries; that meets the interests of the world in the United States and Russia reducing its nuclear arsenals and setting the stage for potentially further reductions in the future.

And so I'm actually quite confident that Democrats and Republicans in the United States Senate, having reviewed this, will see that the United States has preserved its core national security interests, that it is maintaining a safe and secure and effective nuclear deterrent, but that we are beginning to once again move forward, leaving the Cold War behind, to address new challenges in new ways. And I think the START treaty represents an important first step in that direction, and I feel confident that we are going to be able to get it ratified.

All right? Thank you very much, everybody.

President Medvedev: Thank you, sir. Next time.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Justice Stevens Retirement and West Virginia Mining Tragedy

Good afternoon, everybody. I want to say a few words about the tragedy that took place this week in West Virginia, but before I do, I’d first like to comment on the news that Justice John Paul Stevens will retire from the Supreme Court at the end of its current term.

When President Ford was faced with a Supreme Court vacancy shortly after the nation was still recovering from the Watergate scandal, he wanted a nominee who was brilliant, non-ideological, pragmatic, and committed above all to justice, integrity, and the rule of law. He found that nominee in John Paul Stevens.

Justice Stevens has courageously served his country from the moment he enlisted the day before Pearl Harbor to his long and distinguished tenure on the Supreme Court. During that tenure, he has stood as an impartial guardian of the law. He has worn the judicial robe with honor and humility. He has applied the Constitution and the laws of the land with fidelity and restraint. He will soon turn 90 this month, but he leaves his position at the top of his game. His leadership will be sorely missed, and I just had an opportunity to speak with him and told him on behalf of a grateful nation, that I thanked him for his service.

As Justice Stevens expressed to me in the letter announcing his retirement, it is in the best interests of the Supreme Court to have a successor appointed and confirmed before the next term begins. And so I will move quickly to name a nominee, as I did with Justice Sotomayor.

Once again, I view the process of selecting a Supreme Court nominee as among my most serious responsibilities as President. And while we cannot replace Justice Stevens’ experience or wisdom, I will seek someone in the coming weeks with similar qualities -- an independent mind, a record of excellence and integrity, a fierce dedication to the rule of law, and a keen understanding of how the law affects the daily lives of the American people. It will also be someone who, like Justice Stevens, knows that in a democracy, powerful interests must not be allowed to drown out the voices of ordinary citizens. Much like they did with Justice Sotomayor, I hope the Senate will move quickly in the coming weeks to debate and then confirm my nominee so that the new Justice is seated in time for the fall term.

Now, let me say a few words about what has happened in West Virginia.

This has been an unimaginably difficult week for the people who live near Montcoal. Thirty-one workers were inside the Upper Big Branch mine when an explosion ripped through its walls on Monday afternoon. Two were saved. Twenty-five were lost. And for the four who remain missing, we are praying for a miracle.

I want to offer my deepest condolences to the friends and the families of the fathers and the husbands and brothers, nephews and sons who were killed in this accident. I’m also in awe of the courage and selflessness shown by the rescue teams who’ve risked their lives over and over and over this week for the chance to save another. They’ve worked around the clock, with little sleep, for the past few days, and this nation owes them a debt of gratitude.

Now, mining has a long and proud history in West Virginia. For many families and communities, it’s not just a way to make a living; it’s a way of life. And the jobs they do in these mines help bring heat and electricity to millions of Americans.

It’s a profession that’s not without risks and danger, and the workers and their families know that. But their government and their employers know that they owe it to these families to do everything possible to ensure their safety when they go to work each day.

When I was in the Senate, I supported the efforts of Senators Byrd and Rockefeller to try and improve mine safety, but it’s clear that more needs to be done. And that’s why I’ve asked my Secretary of Labor as well as the head of the Mine Safety and Health Administration to give me a preliminary report next week on what went wrong and why it went wrong so badly, so that we can take the steps necessary to prevent such accidents in the future.

Because mining is a tradition that’s often passed down through generations, it’s not uncommon to see an entire family choose this line of work. And sadly, when a tragedy like this occurs, it’s also not uncommon to lose almost an entire family all at once.

I spoke to some surviving members of one such family on Wednesday. This week, Tim Davis, and two of his nephews, Josh, age 25, and Cory, age 20, were killed in the explosion in the Upper Big Branch mine.

Rescuers have reported that Tim and his two nephews were all found together. Two other members of their families that worked in the mine were able to escape unharmed.

Before he left for the mine on Monday, Josh wrote a letter for his girlfriend and young daughter. And in it, he said, “If anything happens to me, I’ll be looking down from heaven at you all. I love you. Take care of my baby. Tell her that daddy loves her, she’s beautiful, she’s funny. Just take care of my baby girl.”

Reflecting on that letter, and the losses she endured in just one week, Josh’s mother Pam simply said, “It is just West Virginia. When something bad happens, we come together.” When something bad happens, we come together.

Through tragedy and heartache, that’s the spirit that has sustained this community, and this country, for over 200 years. And as we pray for the souls of those we’ve lost, and the safe return of those who are missing, we are also sustained by the words of the Psalm that are particularly poignant right now. Those words read: “You, O Lord, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light.”

Thank you very much.

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# Speech on Space Exploration in the 21st Century

Thank you.

I want to thank Senator Bill Nelson and NASA Administrator Charlie Bolden for their extraordinary leadership. I want to recognize Dr. Buzz Aldrin as well, who’s in the house. Four decades ago, Buzz became a legend. But in the four decades since he’s also been one of America’s leading visionaries and authorities on human space flight.

Few people -- present company excluded -- can claim the expertise of Buzz and Bill and Charlie when it comes to space exploration. I have to say that few people are as singularly unimpressed by Air Force One as those three. Sure, it’s comfortable, but it can’t even reach low Earth orbit. And that obviously is in striking contrast to the Falcon 9 rocket we just saw on the launch pad, which will be tested for the very first time in the coming weeks.

A couple of other acknowledgments I want to make. We’ve got Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee from Texas visiting us, a big supporter of the space program. My director, Office of Science and Technology Policy -- in other words my chief science advisor -- John Holdren is here. And most of all I want to acknowledge your congresswoman Suzanne Kosmas, because every time I meet with her, including the flight down here, she reminds me of how important our NASA programs are and how important this facility is. And she is fighting for every single one of you and for her district and for the jobs in her district. And you should know that you’ve got a great champion in Congresswoman Kosmas. Please give her a big round of applause.

I also want to thank everybody for participating in today’s conference. And gathered here are scientists, engineers, business leaders, public servants, and a few more astronauts as well. Last but not least, I want to thank the men and women of NASA for welcoming me to the Kennedy Space Center, and for your contributions not only to America, but to the world.

Here at the Kennedy Space Center we are surrounded by monuments and milestones of those contributions. It was from here that NASA launched the missions of Mercury and Gemini and Apollo. It was from here that Space Shuttle Discovery, piloted by Charlie Bolden, carried the Hubble Telescope into orbit, allowing us to plumb the deepest recesses of our galaxy. And I should point out, by the way, that in my private office just off the Oval, I’ve got the picture of Jupiter from the Hubble. So thank you, Charlie, for helping to decorate my office. It was from here that men and women, propelled by sheer nerve and talent, set about pushing the boundaries of humanity’s reach.

That’s the story of NASA. And it’s a story that started a little more than half a century ago, far from the Space Coast, in a remote and desolate region of what is now called Kazakhstan. Because it was from there that the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, the first artificial satellite to orbit the Earth, which was little more than a few pieces of metal with a transmitter and a battery strapped to the top of a missile. But the world was stunned. Americans were dumbfounded. The Soviets, it was perceived, had taken the lead in a race for which we were not yet fully prepared.

But we caught up very quick. President Eisenhower signed legislation to create NASA and to invest in science and math education, from grade school to graduate school. In 1961, President Kennedy boldly declared before a joint session of Congress that the United States would send a man to the Moon and return him safely to the Earth within the decade. And as a nation, we set about meeting that goal, reaping rewards that have in the decades since touched every facet of our lives. NASA was at the forefront. Many gave their careers to the effort. And some have given far more.

In the years that have followed, the space race inspired a generation of scientists and innovators, including, I’m sure, many of you. It’s contributed to immeasurable technological advances that have improved our health and well-being, from satellite navigation to water purification, from aerospace manufacturing to medical imaging. Although, I have to say, during a meeting right before I came out on stage somebody said, you know, it’s more than just Tang -- and I had to point out I actually really like Tang. I thought that was very cool.

And leading the world to space helped America achieve new heights of prosperity here on Earth, while demonstrating the power of a free and open society to harness the ingenuity of its people.

And on a personal note, I have been part of that generation so inspired by the space program. 1961 was the year of my birth -- the year that Kennedy made his announcement. And one of my earliest memories is sitting on my grandfather’s shoulders, waving a flag as astronauts arrived in Hawaii. For me, the space program has always captured an essential part of what it means to be an American -- reaching for new heights, stretching beyond what previously did not seem possible. And so, as President, I believe that space exploration is not a luxury, it’s not an afterthought in America’s quest for a brighter future -- it is an essential part of that quest.

So today, I’d like to talk about the next chapter in this story. The challenges facing our space program are different, and our imperatives for this program are different, than in decades past. We’re no longer racing against an adversary. We’re no longer competing to achieve a singular goal like reaching the Moon. In fact, what was once a global competition has long since become a global collaboration. But while the measure of our achievements has changed a great deal over the past 50 years, what we do -- or fail to do -- in seeking new frontiers is no less consequential for our future in space and here on Earth.

So let me start by being extremely clear: I am 100 percent committed to the mission of NASA and its future. Because broadening our capabilities in space will continue to serve our society in ways that we can scarcely imagine. Because exploration will once more inspire wonder in a new generation -- sparking passions and launching careers. And because, ultimately, if we fail to press forward in the pursuit of discovery, we are ceding our future and we are ceding that essential element of the American character.

I know there have been a number of questions raised about my administration’s plan for space exploration, especially in this part of Florida where so many rely on NASA as a source of income as well as a source of pride and community. And these questions come at a time of transition, as the space shuttle nears its scheduled retirement after almost 30 years of service. And understandably, this adds to the worries of folks concerned not only about their own futures but about the future of the space program to which they’ve devoted their lives.

But I also know that underlying these concerns is a deeper worry, one that precedes not only this plan but this administration. It stems from the sense that people in Washington -- driven sometimes less by vision than by politics -- have for years neglected NASA’s mission and undermined the work of the professionals who fulfill it. We’ve seen that in the NASA budget, which has risen and fallen with the political winds.

But we can also see it in other ways: in the reluctance of those who hold office to set clear, achievable objectives; to provide the resources to meet those objectives; and to justify not just these plans but the larger purpose of space exploration in the 21st century.

All that has to change. And with the strategy I’m outlining today, it will. We start by increasing NASA’s budget by $6 billion over the next five years, even -- I want people to understand the context of this. This is happening even as we have instituted a freeze on discretionary spending and sought to make cuts elsewhere in the budget.

So NASA, from the start, several months ago when I issued my budget, was one of the areas where we didn’t just maintain a freeze but we actually increased funding by $6 billion. By doing that we will ramp up robotic exploration of the solar system, including a probe of the Sun’s atmosphere; new scouting missions to Mars and other destinations; and an advanced telescope to follow Hubble, allowing us to peer deeper into the universe than ever before.

We will increase Earth-based observation to improve our understanding of our climate and our world -- science that will garner tangible benefits, helping us to protect our environment for future generations.

And we will extend the life of the International Space Station likely by more than five years, while actually using it for its intended purpose: conducting advanced research that can help improve the daily lives of people here on Earth, as well as testing and improving upon our capabilities in space. This includes technologies like more efficient life support systems that will help reduce the cost of future missions. And in order to reach the space station, we will work with a growing array of private companies competing to make getting to space easier and more affordable.

Now, I recognize that some have said it is unfeasible or unwise to work with the private sector in this way. I disagree. The truth is, NASA has always relied on private industry to help design and build the vehicles that carry astronauts to space, from the Mercury capsule that carried John Glenn into orbit nearly 50 years ago, to the space shuttle Discovery currently orbiting overhead. By buying the services of space transportation -- rather than the vehicles themselves -- we can continue to ensure rigorous safety standards are met. But we will also accelerate the pace of innovations as companies -- from young startups to established leaders -- compete to design and build and launch new means of carrying people and materials out of our atmosphere.

In addition, as part of this effort, we will build on the good work already done on the Orion crew capsule. I’ve directed Charlie Bolden to immediately begin developing a rescue vehicle using this technology, so we are not forced to rely on foreign providers if it becomes necessary to quickly bring our people home from the International Space Station. And this Orion effort will be part of the technological foundation for advanced spacecraft to be used in future deep space missions. In fact, Orion will be readied for flight right here in this room.

Next, we will invest more than $3 billion to conduct research on an advanced “heavy lift rocket” -- a vehicle to efficiently send into orbit the crew capsules, propulsion systems, and large quantities of supplies needed to reach deep space. In developing this new vehicle, we will not only look at revising or modifying older models; we want to look at new designs, new materials, new technologies that will transform not just where we can go but what we can do when we get there. And we will finalize a rocket design no later than 2015 and then begin to build it. And I want everybody to understand: That’s at least two years earlier than previously planned -- and that’s conservative, given that the previous program was behind schedule and over budget.

At the same time, after decades of neglect, we will increase investment -- right away -- in other groundbreaking technologies that will allow astronauts to reach space sooner and more often, to travel farther and faster for less cost, and to live and work in space for longer periods of time more safely. That means tackling major scientific and technological challenges. How do we shield astronauts from radiation on longer missions? How do we harness resources on distant worlds? How do we supply spacecraft with energy needed for these far-reaching journeys? These are questions that we can answer and will answer. And these are the questions whose answers no doubt will reap untold benefits right here on Earth.

So the point is what we’re looking for is not just to continue on the same path -- we want to leap into the future; we want major breakthroughs; a transformative agenda for NASA.

Now, yes, pursuing this new strategy will require that we revise the old strategy. In part, this is because the old strategy -- including the Constellation program -- was not fulfilling its promise in many ways. That’s not just my assessment; that’s also the assessment of a panel of respected non-partisan experts charged with looking at these issues closely. Now, despite this, some have had harsh words for the decisions we’ve made, including some individuals who I’ve got enormous respect and admiration for.

But what I hope is, is that everybody will take a look at what we are planning, consider the details of what we’ve laid out, and see the merits as I’ve described them. The bottom line is nobody is more committed to manned space flight, to human exploration of space than I am. But we’ve got to do it in a smart way, and we can’t just keep on doing the same old things that we’ve been doing and thinking that somehow is going to get us to where we want to go.

Some have said, for instance, that this plan gives up our leadership in space by failing to produce plans within NASA to reach low Earth orbit, instead of relying on companies and other countries. But we will actually reach space faster and more often under this new plan, in ways that will help us improve our technological capacity and lower our costs, which are both essential for the long-term sustainability of space flight. In fact, through our plan, we’ll be sending many more astronauts to space over the next decade.

There are also those who criticized our decision to end parts of Constellation as one that will hinder space exploration below [sic] low Earth orbit. But it’s precisely by investing in groundbreaking research and innovative companies that we will have the potential to rapidly transform our capabilities -- even as we build on the important work already completed, through projects like Orion, for future missions. And unlike the previous program, we are setting a course with specific and achievable milestones.

Early in the next decade, a set of crewed flights will test and prove the systems required for exploration beyond low Earth orbit. And by 2025, we expect new spacecraft designed for long journeys to allow us to begin the first-ever crewed missions beyond the Moon into deep space. So we’ll start -- we’ll start by sending astronauts to an asteroid for the first time in history. By the mid-2030s, I believe we can send humans to orbit Mars and return them safely to Earth. And a landing on Mars will follow. And I expect to be around to see it.

But I want to repeat -- I want to repeat this: Critical to deep space exploration will be the development of breakthrough propulsion systems and other advanced technologies. So I’m challenging NASA to break through these barriers. And we’ll give you the resources to break through these barriers. And I know you will, with ingenuity and intensity, because that’s what you’ve always done.

Now, I understand that some believe that we should attempt a return to the surface of the Moon first, as previously planned. But I just have to say pretty bluntly here: We’ve been there before. Buzz has been there. There’s a lot more of space to explore, and a lot more to learn when we do. So I believe it’s more important to ramp up our capabilities to reach -- and operate at -- a series of increasingly demanding targets, while advancing our technological capabilities with each step forward. And that’s what this strategy does. And that’s how we will ensure that our leadership in space is even stronger in this new century than it was in the last.

Finally, I want to say a few words about jobs. Suzanne pointed out to me that the last time I was here, I made a very clear promise that I would help in the transition into a new program to make sure that people who are already going through a tough time here in this region were helped. And despite some reports to the contrary, my plan will add more than 2,500 jobs along the Space Coast in the next two years compared to the plan under the previous administration. So I want to make that point.

We’re going to modernize the Kennedy Space Center, creating jobs as we upgrade launch facilities. And there’s potential for even more jobs as companies in Florida and across America compete to be part of a new space transportation industry. And some of those industry leaders are here today. This holds the promise of generating more than 10,000 jobs nationwide over the next few years. And many of these jobs will be created right here in Florida because this is an area primed to lead in this competition.

Now, it’s true -- there are Floridians who will see their work on the shuttle end as the program winds down. This is based on a decision that was made six years ago, not six months ago, but that doesn’t make it any less painful for families and communities affected as this decision becomes reality.

So I’m proposing -- in part because of strong lobbying by Bill and by Suzanne, as well as Charlie -- I’m proposing a $40 million initiative led by a high-level team from the White House, NASA, and other agencies to develop a plan for regional economic growth and job creation. And I expect this plan to reach my desk by August 15th. It’s an effort that will help prepare this already skilled workforce for new opportunities in the space industry and beyond.

So this is the next chapter that we can write together here at NASA. We will partner with industry. We will invest in cutting-edge research and technology. We will set far-reaching milestones and provide the resources to reach those milestones. And step by step, we will push the boundaries not only of where we can go but what we can do.

Fifty years after the creation of NASA, our goal is no longer just a destination to reach. Our goal is the capacity for people to work and learn and operate and live safely beyond the Earth for extended periods of time, ultimately in ways that are more sustainable and even indefinite. And in fulfilling this task, we will not only extend humanity’s reach in space -- we will strengthen America’s leadership here on Earth.

Now, I’ll close by saying this. I know that some Americans have asked a question that’s particularly apt on Tax Day: Why spend money on NASA at all? Why spend money solving problems in space when we don’t lack for problems to solve here on the ground? And obviously our country is still reeling from the worst economic turmoil we’ve known in generations. We have massive structural deficits that have to be closed in the coming years.

But you and I know this is a false choice. We have to fix our economy. We need to close our deficits. But for pennies on the dollar, the space program has fueled jobs and entire industries. For pennies on the dollar, the space program has improved our lives, advanced our society, strengthened our economy, and inspired generations of Americans. And I have no doubt that NASA can continue to fulfill this role. But that is why -- but I want to say clearly to those of you who work for NASA, but to the entire community that has been so supportive of the space program in this area: That is exactly why it’s so essential that we pursue a new course and that we revitalize NASA and its mission -- not just with dollars, but with clear aims and a larger purpose.

Now, little more than 40 years ago, astronauts descended the nine-rung ladder of the lunar module called Eagle, and allowed their feet to touch the dusty surface of the Earth’s only Moon. This was the culmination of a daring and perilous gambit -- of an endeavor that pushed the boundaries of our knowledge, of our technological prowess, of our very capacity as human beings to solve problems. It wasn’t just the greatest achievement in NASA’s history -- it was one of the greatest achievements in human history.

And the question for us now is whether that was the beginning of something or the end of something. I choose to believe it was only the beginning.

So thank you. God bless you. And may God bless the United States of America.

Thank you.

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# Reforming Wall Street

Thank you very much. Everybody, please have a seat. Thank you very much. Well, thank you. It is good to be back. It is good to be back in New York, it is good to be back in the Great Hall at Cooper Union.

We’ve got some special guests here that I want to acknowledge. Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney is here in the house. Governor David Paterson is here. Attorney General Andrew Cuomo. State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli is here. The Mayor of New York City, Michael Bloomberg. Dr. George Campbell, Jr., president of Cooper Union. And all the citywide elected officials who are here. Thank you very much for your attendance.

It is wonderful to be back in Cooper Union, where generations of leaders and citizens have come to defend their ideas and contest their differences. It’s also good to be back in Lower Manhattan, a few blocks from Wall Street. It really is good to be back, because Wall Street is the heart of our nation’s financial sector.

Now, since I last spoke here two years ago, our country has been through a terrible trial. More than 8 million people have lost their jobs. Countless small businesses have had to shut their doors. Trillions of dollars in savings have been lost -- forcing seniors to put off retirement, young people to postpone college, entrepreneurs to give up on the dream of starting a company. And as a nation we were forced to take unprecedented steps to rescue the financial system and the broader economy.

And as a result of the decisions we made -- some of which, let’s face it, were very unpopular -- we are seeing hopeful signs. A little more than one year ago we were losing an average of 750,000 jobs each month. Today, America is adding jobs again. One year ago the economy was shrinking rapidly. Today the economy is growing. In fact, we’ve seen the fastest turnaround in growth in nearly three decades.

But you’re here and I’m here because we’ve got more work to do. Until this progress is felt not just on Wall Street but on Main Street we cannot be satisfied. Until the millions of our neighbors who are looking for work can find a job, and wages are growing at a meaningful pace, we may be able to claim a technical recovery -- but we will not have truly recovered. And even as we seek to revive this economy, it’s also incumbent on us to rebuild it stronger than before. We don’t want an economy that has the same weaknesses that led to this crisis. And that means addressing some of the underlying problems that led to this turmoil and devastation in the first place. Now, one of the most significant contributors to this recession was a financial crisis as dire as any we’ve known in generations -- at least since the ’30s. And that crisis was born of a failure of responsibility -- from Wall Street all the way to Washington -- that brought down many of the world’s largest financial firms and nearly dragged our economy into a second Great Depression.

It was that failure of responsibility that I spoke about when I came to New York more than two years ago -- before the worst of the crisis had unfolded. It was back in 2007. And I take no satisfaction in noting that my comments then have largely been borne out by the events that followed. But I repeat what I said then because it is essential that we learn the lessons from this crisis so we don’t doom ourselves to repeat it. And make no mistake, that is exactly what will happen if we allow this moment to pass -- and that’s an outcome that is unacceptable to me and it’s unacceptable to you, the American people.

As I said on this stage two years ago, I believe in the power of the free market. I believe in a strong financial sector that helps people to raise capital and get loans and invest their savings. That’s part of what has made America what it is. But a free market was never meant to be a free license to take whatever you can get, however you can get it. That’s what happened too often in the years leading up to this crisis. Some -- and let me be clear, not all -- but some on Wall Street forgot that behind every dollar traded or leveraged there’s family looking to buy a house, or pay for an education, open a business, save for retirement. What happens on Wall Street has real consequences across the country, across our economy.

I’ve spoken before about the need to build a new foundation for economic growth in the 21st century. And given the importance of the financial sector, Wall Street reform is an absolutely essential part of that foundation. Without it, our house will continue to sit on shifting sands, and our families, businesses, and the global economy will be vulnerable to future crises. That’s why I feel so strongly that we need to enact a set of updated, commonsense rules to ensure accountability on Wall Street and to protect consumers in our financial system.

Now, here’s the good news: A comprehensive plan to achieve these reforms has already passed the House of Representatives. A Senate version is currently being debated, drawing on ideas from Democrats and Republicans. Both bills represent significant improvement on the flawed rules that we have in place today, despite the furious effort of industry lobbyists to shape this legislation to their special interests.

And for those of you in the financial sector I'm sure that some of these lobbyists work for you and they’re doing what they are being paid to do. But I’m here today specifically -- when I speak to the titans of industry here -- because I want to urge you to join us, instead of fighting us in this effort. I’m here because I believe that these reforms are, in the end, not only in the best interest of our country, but in the best interest of the financial sector. And I’m here to explain what reform will look like, and why it matters.

Now, first, the bill being considered in the Senate would create what we did not have before, and that is a way to protect the financial system and the broader economy and American taxpayers in the event that a large financial firm begins to fail. If there’s a Lehmans or an AIG, how can we respond in a way that doesn’t force taxpayers to pick up the tab or, alternatively, could bring down the whole system.

In an ordinary local bank when it approaches insolvency, we’ve got a process, an orderly process through the FDIC, that ensures that depositors are protected, maintains confidence in the banking system, and it works. Customers and taxpayers are protected and owners and management lose their equity. But we don’t have that kind of process designed to contain the failure of a Lehman Brothers or any of the largest and most interconnected financial firms in our country.

That’s why, when this crisis began, crucial decisions about what would happen to some of the world’s biggest companies -- companies employing tens of thousands of people and holding hundreds of billions of dollars in assets -- had to take place in hurried discussions in the middle of the night. And that’s why, to save the entire economy from an even worse catastrophe, we had to deploy taxpayer dollars. Now, much of that money has now been paid back and my administration has proposed a fee to be paid by large financial firms to recover all the money, every dime, because the American people should never have been put in that position in the first place.

But this is why we need a system to shut these firms down with the least amount of collateral damage to innocent people and innocent businesses. And from the start, I’ve insisted that the financial industry, not taxpayers, shoulder the costs in the event that a large financial company should falter. The goal is to make certain that taxpayers are never again on the hook because a firm is deemed “too big to fail.”

Now, there’s a legitimate debate taking place about how best to ensure taxpayers are held harmless in this process. And that’s a legitimate debate, and I encourage that debate. But what’s not legitimate is to suggest that somehow the legislation being proposed is going to encourage future taxpayer bailouts, as some have claimed. That makes for a good sound bite, but it’s not factually accurate. It is not true. In fact, the system as it stands -- the system as it stands is what led to a series of massive, costly taxpayer bailouts. And it’s only with reform that we can avoid a similar outcome in the future. In other words, a vote for reform is a vote to put a stop to taxpayer-funded bailouts. That’s the truth. End of story. And nobody should be fooled in this debate.

By the way, these changes have the added benefit of creating incentives within the industry to ensure that no one company can ever threaten to bring down the whole economy.

To that end, the bill would also enact what’s known as the Volcker Rule -- and there’s a tall guy sitting in the front row here, Paul Volcker -- who we named it after. And it does something very simple: It places some limits on the size of banks and the kinds of risks that banking institutions can take. This will not only safeguard our system against crises, this will also make our system stronger and more competitive by instilling confidence here at home and across the globe. Markets depend on that confidence. Part of what led to the turmoil of the past two years was that in the absence of clear rules and sound practices, people didn’t trust that our system was one in which it was safe to invest or lend. As we’ve seen, that harms all of us.

So by enacting these reforms, we’ll help ensure that our financial system -- and our economy -- continues to be the envy of the world. That’s the first thing, making sure that we can wind down one firm if it gets into trouble without bringing the whole system down or forcing taxpayers to fund a bailout.

Number two, reform would bring new transparency to many financial markets. As you know, part of what led to this crisis was firms like AIG and others who were making huge and risky bets, using derivatives and other complicated financial instruments, in ways that defied accountability, or even common sense. In fact, many practices were so opaque, so confusing, so complex that the people inside the firms didn’t understand them, much less those who were charged with overseeing them. They weren’t fully aware of the massive bets that were being placed. That’s what led Warren Buffett to describe derivatives that were bought and sold with little oversight as “financial weapons of mass destruction.” That’s what he called them. And that’s why reform will rein in excess and help ensure that these kinds of transactions take place in the light of day.

Now, there’s been a great deal of concern about these changes. So I want to reiterate: There is a legitimate role for these financial instruments in our economy. They can help allay risk and spur investment. And there are a lot of companies that use these instruments to that legitimate end -- they are managing exposure to fluctuating prices or currencies, fluctuating markets. For example, a business might hedge against rising oil prices by buying a financial product to secure stable fuel costs, so an airlines might have an interest in locking in a decent price. That’s how markets are supposed to work. The problem is these markets operated in the shadows of our economy, invisible to regulators, invisible to the public. So reckless practices were rampant. Risks accrued until they threatened our entire financial system.

And that’s why these reforms are designed to respect legitimate activities but prevent reckless risk taking. That’s why we want to ensure that financial products like standardized derivatives are traded out in the open, in the full view of businesses, investors, and those charged with oversight.

And I was encouraged to see a Republican senator join with Democrats this week in moving forward on this issue. That's a good sign. That's a good sign. For without action, we’ll continue to see what amounts to highly-leveraged, loosely-monitored gambling in our financial system, putting taxpayers and the economy in jeopardy. And the only people who ought to fear the kind of oversight and transparency that we're proposing are those whose conduct will fail this scrutiny.

Third, this plan would enact the strongest consumer financial protections ever. And that's absolutely necessary because this financial crisis wasn’t just the result of decisions made in the executive suites on Wall Street; it was also the result of decisions made around kitchen tables across America, by folks who took on mortgages and credit cards and auto loans. And while it’s true that many Americans took on financial obligations that they knew or should have known they could not have afforded, millions of others were, frankly, duped. They were misled by deceptive terms and conditions, buried deep in the fine print.

And while a few companies made out like bandits by exploiting their customers, our entire economy was made more vulnerable. Millions of people have now lost their homes. Tens of millions more have lost value in their homes. Just about every sector of our economy has felt the pain, whether you’re paving driveways in Arizona, or selling houses in Ohio, or you're doing home repairs in California, or you’re using your home equity to start a small business in Florida.

That’s why we need to give consumers more protection and more power in our financial system. This is not about stifling competition, stifling innovation; it’s just the opposite. With a dedicated agency setting ground rules and looking out for ordinary people in our financial system, we will empower consumers with clear and concise information when they’re making financial decisions. So instead of competing to offer confusing products, companies will compete the old-fashioned way, by offering better products. And that will mean more choices for consumers, more opportunities for businesses, and more stability in our financial system. And unless your business model depends on bilking people, there is little to fear from these new rules.

Number four, the last key component of reform. These Wall Street reforms will give shareholders new power in the financial system. They will get what we call a say on pay, a voice with respect to the salaries and bonuses awarded to top executives. And the SEC will have the authority to give shareholders more say in corporate elections, so that investors and pension holders have a stronger role in determining who manages the company in which they’ve placed their savings.

Now, Americans don’t begrudge anybody for success when that success is earned. But when we read in the past, and sometimes in the present, about enormous executive bonuses at firms -- even as they’re relying on assistance from taxpayers or they’re taking huge risks that threaten the system as a whole or their company is doing badly -- it offends our fundamental values.

Not only that, some of the salaries and bonuses that we’ve seen creates perverse incentives to take reckless risks that contributed to the crisis. It’s what helped lead to a relentless focus on a company’s next quarter, to the detriment of its next year or its next decade. And it led to a situation in which folks with the most to lose -- stock and pension holders -- had the least to say in the process. And that has to change.

Let me close by saying this. I have laid out a set of Wall Street reforms. These are reforms that would put an end to taxpayer bailouts; that would bring complex financial dealings out of the shadows; that would protect consumers; and that would give shareholders more power in the financial system. But let’s face it, we also need reform in Washington. And the debate -- the debate over these changes is a perfect example.

I mean, we have seen battalions of financial industry lobbyists descending on Capitol Hill, firms spending millions to influence the outcome of this debate. We’ve seen misleading arguments and attacks that are designed not to improve the bill but to weaken or to kill it. We’ve seen a bipartisan process buckle under the weight of these withering forces, even as we‘ve produced a proposal that by all accounts is a commonsense, reasonable, non-ideological approach to target the root problems that led to the turmoil in our financial sector and ultimately in our entire economy.

So we’ve seen business as usual in Washington, but I believe we can and must put this kind of cynical politics aside. We’ve got to put an end to it. That’s why I’m here today. That’s why I’m here today.

And to those of you who are in the financial sector, let me say this, we will not always see eye to eye. We will not always agree. But that doesn’t mean that we’ve got to choose between two extremes. We do not have to choose between markets that are unfettered by even modest protections against crisis, or markets that are stymied by onerous rules that suppress enterprise and innovation. That is a false choice. And we need no more proof than the crisis that we’ve just been through.

You see, there has always been a tension between the desire to allow markets to function without interference and the absolute necessity of rules to prevent markets from falling out of kilter. But managing that tension, one that we’ve debated since the founding of this nation, is what has allowed our country to keep up with a changing world. For in taking up this debate, in figuring out how to apply well-worn principles with each new age, we ensure that we don’t tip too far one way or the other -- that our democracy remains as dynamic and our economy remains as dynamic as it has in the past. So, yes, this debate can be contentious. It can be heated. But in the end it serves only to make our country stronger. It has allowed us to adapt and to thrive.

And I read a report recently that I think fairly illustrates this point. It’s from Time Magazine. I’m going to quote: “Through the great banking houses of Manhattan last week ran wild-eyed alarm. Big bankers stared at one another in anger and astonishment. A bill just passed… would rivet upon their institutions what they considered a monstrous system… such a system, they felt, would not only rob them of their pride of profession but would reduce all U.S. banking to its lowest level.” That appeared in Time Magazine in June of 1933. The system that caused so much consternation, so much concern was the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, also known as the FDIC, an institution that has successfully secured the deposits of generations of Americans.

In the end, our system only works -- our markets are only free -- when there are basic safeguards that prevent abuse, that check excesses, that ensure that it is more profitable to play by the rules than to game the system. And that is what the reforms we’ve been proposing are designed to achieve -- no more, no less. And because that is how we will ensure that our economy works for consumers, that it works for investors, and that it works for financial institutions -- in other words, that it works for all of us -- that’s why we’re working so hard to get this stuff passed.

This is the central lesson not only of this crisis but of our history. It’s what I said when I spoke here two years ago. Because ultimately, there is no dividing line between Main Street and Wall Street. We will rise or we will fall together as one nation. And that is why I urge all of you to join me. I urge all of you to join me, to join those who are seeking to pass these commonsense reforms. And for those of you in the financial industry, I urge you to join me not only because it is in the interest of your industry, but also because it’s in the interest of your country.

Thank you so much. God bless you, and God bless the United States of America. Thank you.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Memorial Service Address for Upper Branch Coal Miners

Thank you. Please be seated.

To all the families who loved so deeply the miners we’ve lost; to all who called them friends, worked alongside them in the mines, or knew them as neighbors, in Montcoal and Naoma, or Whitesville, in the Coal River Valley and across West Virginia -– let me begin by saying that we have been mourning with you throughout these difficult days. Our hearts have been aching with you. We keep our thoughts with the survivors who are recovering and resting at the hospital and at the homes. We're thankful for the rescue teams. But our hearts ache alongside you.

We’re here to memorialize 29 Americans: Carl Acord. Jason Atkins. Christopher Bell. Gregory Steven Brock. Kenneth Allan Chapman. Robert Clark. Charles Timothy Davis. Cory Davis. Michael Lee Elswick. William I. Griffith. Steven Harrah. Edward Dean Jones. Richard K. Lane. William Roosevelt Lynch. Nicholas Darrell McCroskey. Joe Marcum. Ronald Lee Maynor. James E. Mooney. Adam Keith Morgan. Rex L. Mullins. Joshua S. Napper. Howard D. Payne. Dillard Earl Persinger. Joel R. Price. Deward Scott. Gary Quarles. Grover Dale Skeens. Benny Willingham. And Ricky Workman.

Nothing I, or the Vice President, or the Governor, none of the speakers here today, nothing we say can fill the hole they leave in your hearts, or the absence that they leave in your lives. If any comfort can be found, it can, perhaps, be found by seeking the face of God -- who quiets our troubled minds, a God who mends our broken hearts, a God who eases our mourning souls.

Even as we mourn 29 lives lost, we also remember 29 lives lived. Up at 4:30 a.m., 5:00 in the morning at the latest, they began their day, as they worked, in darkness. In coveralls and hard-toe boots, a hardhat over their heads, they would sit quietly for their hour-long journey, five miles into a mountain, the only light the lamp on their caps, or the glow from the mantrip they rode in.

Day after day, they would burrow into the coal, the fruits of their labor, what so often we take for granted: the electricity that lights up a convention center; that lights up our church or our home, our school, our office; the energy that powers our country; the energy that powers the world.

And most days they’d emerge from the dark mine, squinting at the light. Most days, they’d emerge, sweaty and dirty and dusted from coal. Most days, they’d come home. But not that day.

These men -- these husbands, fathers, grandfathers, brothers sons, uncles, nephews -- they did not take on their job unaware of the perils. Some of them had already been injured; some of them had seen a friend get hurt. So they understood there were risks. And their families did, too. They knew their kids would say a prayer at night before they left. They knew their wives would wait for a call when their shift ended saying everything was okay. They knew their parents felt a pang of fear every time a breaking news alert came on, or the radio cut in.

But they left for the mines anyway -- some, having waited all their lives to be miners; having longed to follow in the footsteps of their fathers and their grandfathers. And yet, none of them did it for themselves alone.

All that hard work, all that hardship, all the time spent underground, it was all for the families. It was all for you. For a car in the driveway, a roof overhead. For a chance to give their kids opportunities that they would never know, and enjoy retirement with their spouses. It was all in the hopes of something better. And so these miners lived -- as they died -- in pursuit of the American Dream.

There, in the mines, for their families, they became a family themselves -- sharing birthdays, relaxing together, watching Mountaineers football or basketball together, spending days off together, hunting or fishing. They may not have always loved what they did, said a sister, but they loved doing it together. They loved doing it as a family. They loved doing it as a community.

That’s a spirit that’s reflected in a song that almost every American knows. But it’s a song most people, I think, would be surprised was actually written by a coal miner’s son about this town, Beckley, about the people of West Virginia. It’s the song, Lean on Me -- an anthem of friendship, but also an anthem of community, of coming together.

That community was revealed for all to see in the minutes, and hours, and days after the tragedy. Rescuers, risking their own safety, scouring narrow tunnels saturated with methane and carbon monoxide, hoping against hope they might find a survivor. Friends keeping porch lights on in a nightly vigil; hanging up homemade signs that read, "Pray for our miners, and their families." Neighbors consoling each other, and supporting each other and leaning on one another.

I’ve seen it, the strength of that community. In the days that followed the disaster, emails and letters poured into the White House. Postmarked from different places across the country, they often began the same way: "I am proud to be from a family of miners." "I am the son of a coal miner." "I am proud to be a coal miner’s daughter." They were always proud, and they asked me to keep our miners in my thoughts, in my prayers. Never forget, they say, miners keep America’s lights on. And then in these letters, they make a simple plea: Don’t let this happen again. Don't let this happen again.

How can we fail them? How can a nation that relies on its miners not do everything in its power to protect them? How can we let anyone in this country put their lives at risk by simply showing up to work; by simply pursuing the American Dream?

We cannot bring back the 29 men we lost. They are with the Lord now. Our task, here on Earth, is to save lives from being lost in another such tragedy; to do what must do, individually and collectively, to assure safe conditions underground -- to treat our miners like they treat each other -- like a family. Because we are all family and we are all Americans. And we have to lean on one another, and look out for one another, and love one another, and pray for one another.

There's a psalm that comes to mind today -- a psalm that comes to mind, a psalm we often turn to in times of heartache:

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

God bless our miners.

God bless their families.

God bless West Virginia.

And God bless the United States of America.

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# Eulogy for Dr. Dorothy Height

Please be seated. Let me begin by saying a word to Dr. Dorothy Height’s sister, Ms. Aldridge. To some, she was a mentor. To all, she was a friend. But to you, she was family, and my family offers yours our sympathy for your loss.

We are gathered here today to celebrate the life, and mourn the passing, of Dr. Dorothy Height. It is fitting that we do so here, in our National Cathedral of Saint Peter and Saint Paul. Here, in a place of great honor. Here, in the House of God. Surrounded by the love of family and of friends. The love in this sanctuary is a testament to a life lived righteously; a life that lifted other lives; a life that changed this country for the better over the course of nearly one century here on Earth.

Michelle and I didn’t know Dr. Height as well, or as long, as many of you. We were reminded during a previous moment in the service, when you have a nephew who’s 88 -- you’ve lived a full life.

But we did come to know her in the early days of my campaign. And we came to love her, as so many loved her. We came to love her stories. And we loved her smile. And we loved those hats -- that she wore like a crown -- regal. In the White House, she was a regular. She came by not once, not twice -- 21 times she stopped by the White House. Took part in our discussions around health care reform in her final months.

Last February, I was scheduled to see her and other civil rights leaders to discuss the pressing problems of unemployment -- Reverend Sharpton, Ben Jealous of the NAACP, Marc Morial of the National Urban League. Then we discovered that Washington was about to be blanketed by the worst blizzard in record -- two feet of snow.

So I suggested to one of my aides, we should call Dr. Height and say we're happy to reschedule the meeting. Certainly if the others come, she should not feel obliged. True to form, Dr. Height insisted on coming, despite the blizzard, never mind that she was in a wheelchair. She was not about to let just a bunch of men -- in this meeting. It was only when the car literally could not get to her driveway that she reluctantly decided to stay home. But she still sent a message -- about what needed to be done.

And I tell that story partly because it brings a smile to my face, but also because it captures the quiet, dogged, dignified persistence that all of us who loved Dr. Height came to know so well -- an attribute that we understand she learned early on.

Born in the capital of the old Confederacy, brought north by her parents as part of that great migration, Dr. Height was raised in another age, in a different America, beyond the experience of many. It’s hard to imagine, I think, life in the first decades of that last century when the elderly woman that we knew was only a girl. Jim Crow ruled the South. The Klan was on the rise -- a powerful political force. Lynching was all too often the penalty for the offense of black skin. Slaves had been freed within living memory, but too often, their children, their grandchildren remained captive, because they were denied justice and denied equality, denied opportunity, denied a chance to pursue their dreams.

The progress that followed -- progress that so many of you helped to achieve, progress that ultimately made it possible for Michelle and me to be here as President and First Lady -- that progress came slowly.

Progress came from the collective effort of multiple generations of Americans. From preachers and lawyers, and thinkers and doers, men and women like Dr. Height, who took it upon themselves -- often at great risk -- to change this country for the better. From men like W.E.B Du Bois and A. Philip Randolph; women like Mary McLeod Bethune and Betty Friedan -- they’re Americans whose names we know. They are leaders whose legacies we teach. They are giants who fill our history books. Well, Dr. Dorothy Height deserves a place in this pantheon. She, too, deserves a place in our history books. She, too, deserves a place of honor in America’s memory.

Look at her body of work. Desegregating the YWCA. Laying the groundwork for integration on Wednesdays in Mississippi. Lending pigs to poor farmers as a sustainable source of income. Strategizing with civil rights leaders, holding her own, the only woman in the room, Queen Esther to this Moses Generation -- even as she led the National Council of Negro Women with vision and energy -- with vision and energy, vision and class.

But we remember her not solely for all she did during the civil rights movement. We remember her for all she did over a lifetime, behind the scenes, to broaden the movement’s reach. To shine a light on stable families and tight-knit communities. To make us see the drive for civil rights and women’s rights not as a separate struggle, but as part of a larger movement to secure the rights of all humanity, regardless of gender, regardless of race, regardless of ethnicity.

It’s an unambiguous record of righteous work, worthy of remembrance, worthy of recognition. And yet, one of the ironies is, is that year after year, decade in, decade out, Dr. Height went about her work quietly, without fanfare, without self-promotion. She never cared about who got the credit. She didn’t need to see her picture in the papers. She understood that the movement gathered strength from the bottom up, those unheralded men and women who don't always make it into the history books but who steadily insisted on their dignity, on their manhood and womanhood. She wasn’t interested in credit. What she cared about was the cause. The cause of justice. The cause of equality. The cause of opportunity. Freedom’s cause.

And that willingness to subsume herself, that humility and that grace, is why we honor Dr. Dorothy Height. As it is written in the Gospel of Matthew: “For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” I don’t think the author of the Gospel would mind me rephrasing: “whoever humbles herself will be exalted.”

One of my favorite moments with Dr. Height -- this was just a few months ago -- we had decided to put up the Emancipation Proclamation in the Oval Office, and we invited some elders to share reflections of the movement. And she came and it was a inter-generational event, so we had young children there, as well as elders, and the elders were asked to share stories. And she talked about attending a dinner in the 1940s at the home of Dr. Benjamin Mays, then president of Morehouse College. And seated at the table that evening was a 15-year-old student, “a gifted child,” as she described him, filled with a sense of purpose, who was trying to decide whether to enter medicine, or law, or the ministry.

And many years later, after that gifted child had become a gifted preacher -- I’m sure he had been told to be on his best behavior -- after he led a bus boycott in Montgomery, and inspired a nation with his dreams, he delivered a sermon on what he called “the drum major instinct” -- a sermon that said we all have the desire to be first, we all want to be at the front of the line.

The great test of a life, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, is to harness that instinct; to redirect it towards advancing the greater good; toward changing a community and a country for the better; toward doing the Lord’s work.

I sometimes think Dr. King must have had Dorothy Height in mind when he gave that speech. For Dorothy Height met the test. Dorothy Height embodied that instinct. Dorothy Height was a drum major for justice. A drum major for equality. A drum major for freedom. A drum major for service.

And the lesson she would want us to leave with today -- a lesson she lived out each and every day -- is that we can all be first in service. We can all be drum majors for a righteous cause.

So let us live out that lesson. Let us honor her life by changing this country for the better as long as we are blessed to live.

May God bless Dr. Dorothy Height and the union that she made more perfect.

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# Commencement Address at the University of Michigan

It is great to be here in The Big House -- and so may I say, “Go Blue!” I thought I’d go for the cheap applause line to start things off.

Good afternoon, President Coleman, the Board of Trustees, to faculty, parents, family and friends of the class of 2010. Congratulations on your graduation, and thank you for allowing me the honor of being a part of it. Let me acknowledge your wonderful governor, Jennifer Granholm; your mayor, John Hieftje; and all the members of Congress who are here today.

It is a privilege to be with you on this happy occasion, and, you know, it’s nice to spend a little time outside of Washington. Now, don’t get me wrong -- Washington is a beautiful city. It’s very nice living above the store; you can’t beat the commute. It’s just sometimes all you hear in Washington is the clamor of politics. And all that noise can drown out the voices of the people who sent you there. So when I took office, I decided that each night I would read 10 letters out of the tens of thousands that are sent to us by ordinary Americans every day -- this is my modest effort to remind myself of why I ran in the first place.

Some of these letters tell stories of heartache and struggle. Some express gratitude, some express anger. I'd say a good solid third call me an idiot -- which is how I know that I’m getting a good, representative sample. Some of the letters make you think -- like the one that I received last month from a kindergarten class in Virginia.

Now, the teacher of this class instructed the students to ask me any question they wanted. So one asked, “How do you do your job?” Another asked, “Do you work a lot?” Somebody wanted to know if I wear a black jacket or if I have a beard -- so clearly they were getting me mixed up with the other tall guy from Illinois. And one of my favorites was from a kid who wanted to know if I lived next to a volcano. I'm still trying to piece the thought process on this one. Loved this letter.

But it was the last question from the last student in the letter that gave me pause. The student asked, “Are people being nice?” Are people being nice?

Well, if you turn on the news today, or yesterday, or a week ago, or a month ago -- particularly one of the cable channels -- you can see why even a kindergartener would ask this question. We’ve got politicians calling each other all sorts of unflattering names. Pundits and talking heads shout at each other. The media tends to play up every hint of conflict, because it makes for a sexier story -- which means anyone interested in getting coverage feels compelled to make their arguments as outrageous and as incendiary as possible.

Now, some of this contentiousness can be attributed to the incredibly difficult moment in which we find ourselves as a nation. The fact is, when you leave here today you will search for work in an economy that is still emerging from the worst crisis since the Great Depression. You live in a century where the speed with which jobs and industries move across the globe is forcing America to compete like never before. You will raise your children at a time when threats like terrorism and climate change aren’t confined within the borders of any one country. And as our world grows smaller and more connected, you will live and work with more people who don’t look like you or think like you or come from where you do.

I really enjoyed Alex’s remarks because that's a lot of change. And all these changes, all these challenges, inevitably cause some tension in the body politic. They make people worry about the future and sometimes they get people riled up.

But I think it’s important that we maintain some historic perspective. Since the days of our founding, American politics has never been a particularly nice business. It’s always been a little less gentile during times of great change. A newspaper of the opposing party once editorialized that if Thomas Jefferson were elected, “Murder, robbery, rape, adultery, and incest will be openly taught and practiced.” Not subtle. Opponents of Andrew Jackson often referred to his mother as a “common prostitute,” which seems a little over the top. Presidents from Teddy Roosevelt to Lyndon Johnson have been accused of promoting socialism, or worse. And we’ve had arguments between politicians that have been settled with actual duels. There was even a caning once on the floor of the United States Senate -- which I’m happy to say didn’t happen while I was there. It was a few years before.

The point is, politics has never been for the thin-skinned or the faint-of-heart, and if you enter the arena, you should expect to get roughed up. Moreover, democracy in a nation of more than 300 million people is inherently difficult. It’s always been noisy and messy, contentious, complicated. We’ve been fighting about the proper size and role of government since the day the Framers gathered in Philadelphia. We’ve battled over the meaning of individual freedom and equality since the Bill of Rights was drafted. As our economy has shifted emphasis from agriculture to industry, to information, to technology, we have argued and struggled at each and every juncture over the best way to ensure that all of our citizens have a shot at opportunity.

So before we get too depressed about the current state of our politics, let’s remember our history. The great debates of the past all stirred great passions. They all made somebody angry, and at least once led to a terrible war. What is amazing is that despite all the conflict, despite all its flaws and its frustrations, our experiment in democracy has worked better than any form of government on Earth.

On the last day of the Constitutional Convention, Benjamin Franklin was famously asked, “Well, Doctor, what have we got -- a republic or a monarchy?” And Franklin gave an answer that’s been quoted for ages: He said, “A republic, if you can keep it.” If you can keep it.

Well, for more than 200 years, we have kept it. Through revolution and civil war, our democracy has survived. Through depression and world war, it has prevailed. Through periods of great social and economic unrest, from civil rights to women’s rights, it has allowed us slowly, sometimes painfully, to move towards a more perfect union.

And so now, class of 2010, the question for your generation is this: How will you keep our democracy going? At a moment when our challenges seem so big and our politics seem so small, how will you keep our democracy alive and vibrant; how will you keep it well in this century?

I’m not here to offer some grand theory or detailed policy prescription. But let me offer a few brief reflections based on my own experiences and the experiences of our country over the last two centuries.

First of all, American democracy has thrived because we have recognized the need for a government that, while limited, can still help us adapt to a changing world. On the fourth panel of the Jefferson Memorial is a quote I remember reading to my daughters during our first visit there. It says, “I am not an advocate for frequent changes in laws and constitutions, but...with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also to keep pace with the times.”

The democracy designed by Jefferson and the other founders was never intended to solve every problem with a new law or a new program. Having thrown off the tyranny of the British Empire, the first Americans were understandably skeptical of government. And ever since we’ve held fast to the belief that government doesn’t have all the answers, and we have cherished and fiercely defended our individual freedom. That’s a strand of our nation’s DNA.

But the other strand is the belief that there are some things we can only do together, as one nation -- and that our government must keep pace with the times. When America expanded from a few colonies to an entire continent, and we needed a way to reach the Pacific, our government helped build the railroads. When we transitioned from an economy based on farms to one based on factories, and workers needed new skills and training, our nation set up a system of public high schools. When the markets crashed during the Depression and people lost their life savings, our government put in place a set of rules and safeguards to make sure that such a crisis never happened again, and then put a safety net in place to make sure that our elders would never be impoverished the way they had been. And because our markets and financial systems have evolved since then, we’re now putting in place new rules and safeguards to protect the American people.

Now, this notion -- this notion, class, hasn’t always been partisan. It was the first Republican President, Abraham Lincoln, who said the role of government is to do for the people what they cannot do better for themselves. And he’d go on to begin that first intercontinental railroad and set up the first land-grant colleges. It was another Republican, Teddy Roosevelt, who said, “the object of government is the welfare of the people.” And he’s remembered for using the power of government to break up monopolies, and establish our National Park system. Democrat Lyndon Johnson announced the Great Society during a commencement here at Michigan, but it was the Republican President before him, Dwight Eisenhower, who launched the massive government undertaking known as the Interstate Highway System.

Of course, there have always been those who’ve opposed such efforts. They argue government intervention is usually inefficient; that it restricts individual freedom and dampens individual initiative. And in certain instances, that’s been true. For many years, we had a welfare system that too often discouraged people from taking responsibility for their own upward mobility. At times, we’ve neglected the role of parents, rather than government, in cultivating a child’s education. And sometimes regulation fails, and sometimes their benefits don’t justify their costs.

But what troubles me is when I hear people say that all of government is inherently bad. One of my favorite signs during the health care debate was somebody who said, “Keep Your Government Hands Out Of My Medicare” -- which is essentially saying “Keep Government Out Of My Government-Run Health Care Plan.”

When our government is spoken of as some menacing, threatening foreign entity, it ignores the fact that in our democracy, government is us. We, the people -- We, the people, hold in our hands the power to choose our leaders and change our laws, and shape our own destiny.

Government is the police officers who are protecting our communities, and the servicemen and women who are defending us abroad. Government is the roads you drove in on and the speed limits that kept you safe. Government is what ensures that mines adhere to safety standards and that oil spills are cleaned up by the companies that caused them. Government is this extraordinary public university -- a place that’s doing lifesaving research, and catalyzing economic growth, and graduating students who will change the world around them in ways big and small.

The truth is, the debate we’ve had for decades now between more government and less government, it doesn’t really fit the times in which we live. We know that too much government can stifle competition and deprive us of choice and burden us with debt. But we’ve also clearly seen the dangers of too little government -- like when a lack of accountability on Wall Street nearly leads to the collapse of our entire economy.

So, class of 2010, what we should be asking is not whether we need “big government” or a “small government,” but how we can create a smarter and better government. Because in an era of iPods and Tivo, where we have more choices than ever before -- even though I can't really work a lot of these things -- but I have 23-year-olds who do it for me -- government shouldn’t try to dictate your lives. But it should give you the tools you need to succeed. Government shouldn’t try to guarantee results, but it should guarantee a shot at opportunity for every American who’s willing to work hard.

So -- So, yes, we can and should debate the role of government in our lives. But remember, as you are asked to meet the challenges of our time, remember that the ability for us to adapt our government to the needs of the age has helped make our democracy work since its inception.

Now, the second way to keep our democracy healthy is to maintain a basic level of civility in our public debate. These arguments we’re having over government and health care and war and taxes -- these are serious arguments. They should arouse people’s passions, and it’s important for everybody to join in the debate, with all the vigor that the maintenance of a free people requires.

But we can’t expect to solve our problems if all we do is tear each other down. You can disagree with a certain policy without demonizing the person who espouses it. You can question somebody’s views and their judgment without questioning their motives or their patriotism. Throwing around phrases like “socialists” and “Soviet-style takeover” and “fascist” and “right-wing nut” -- that may grab headlines, but it also has the effect of comparing our government, our political opponents, to authoritarian, even murderous regimes.

Now, we’ve seen this kind of politics in the past. It’s been practiced by both fringes of the ideological spectrum, by the left and the right, since our nation’s birth. But it’s starting to creep into the center of our discourse. And the problem with it is not the hurt feelings or the bruised egos of the public officials who are criticized. Remember, they signed up for it. Michelle always reminds me of that. The problem is that this kind of vilification and over-the-top rhetoric closes the door to the possibility of compromise. It undermines democratic deliberation. It prevents learning -- since, after all, why should we listen to a “fascist,” or a “socialist,” or a “right-wing nut,” or a left-wing nut”?

It makes it nearly impossible for people who have legitimate but bridgeable differences to sit down at the same table and hash things out. It robs us of a rational and serious debate, the one we need to have about the very real and very big challenges facing this nation. It coarsens our culture, and at its worst, it can send signals to the most extreme elements of our society that perhaps violence is a justifiable response.

So what do we do? As I found out after a year in the White House, changing this type of politics is not easy. And part of what civility requires is that we recall the simple lesson most of us learned from our parents: Treat others as you would like to be treated, with courtesy and respect. But civility in this age also requires something more than just asking if we can’t just all get along.

Today’s 24/7 echo-chamber amplifies the most inflammatory soundbites louder and faster than ever before. And it’s also, however, given us unprecedented choice. Whereas most Americans used to get their news from the same three networks over dinner, or a few influential papers on Sunday morning, we now have the option to get our information from any number of blogs or websites or cable news shows. And this can have both a good and bad development for democracy. For if we choose only to expose ourselves to opinions and viewpoints that are in line with our own, studies suggest that we become more polarized, more set in our ways. That will only reinforce and even deepen the political divides in this country.

But if we choose to actively seek out information that challenges our assumptions and our beliefs, perhaps we can begin to understand where the people who disagree with us are coming from.

Now, this requires us to agree on a certain set of facts to debate from. That’s why we need a vibrant and thriving news business that is separate from opinion makers and talking heads. That’s why we need an educated citizenry that values hard evidence and not just assertion. As Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan famously once said, “Everybody is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts.”

Still, if you’re somebody who only reads the editorial page of The New York Times, try glancing at the [Opinion] page of The Wall Street Journal once in a while. If you’re a fan of Glenn Beck or Rush Limbaugh, try reading a few columns on the Huffington Post website. It may make your blood boil; your mind may not be changed. But the practice of listening to opposing views is essential for effective citizenship. It is essential for our democracy.

And so, too, is the practice of engaging in different experiences with different kinds of people. I look out at this class and I realize for four years at Michigan you have been exposed to diverse thinkers and scholars, professors and students. Don’t narrow that broad intellectual exposure just because you’re leaving here. Instead, seek to expand it. If you grew up in a big city, spend some time with somebody who grew up in a rural town. If you find yourself only hanging around with people of your own race or ethnicity or religion, include people in your circle who have different backgrounds and life experiences. You’ll learn what it’s like to walk in somebody else’s shoes, and in the process, you will help to make this democracy work.

Which brings me to the last ingredient in a functioning democracy, one that's perhaps most basic -- and it’s already been mentioned -- and that is participation.

Class of 2010, I understand that one effect of today’s poisonous political climate is to push people away from participation in public life. If all you see when you turn on the TV is name-calling, if all you hear about is how special interest lobbying and partisanship prevented Washington from getting something done, you might think to yourself, “What’s the point of getting involved?”

Here’s the point. When we don’t pay close attention to the decisions made by our leaders, when we fail to educate ourselves about the major issues of the day, when we choose not to make our voices and opinions heard, that’s when democracy breaks down. That’s when power is abused. That’s when the most extreme voices in our society fill the void that we leave. That’s when powerful interests and their lobbyists are most able to buy access and influence in the corridors of power -- because none of us are there to speak up and stop them.

Participation in public life doesn’t mean that you all have to run for public office -- though we could certainly use some fresh faces in Washington. But it does mean that you should pay attention and contribute in any way that you can. Stay informed. Write letters, or make phone calls on behalf of an issue you care about. If electoral politics isn’t your thing, continue the tradition so many of you started here at Michigan and find a way to serve your community and your country -- an act that will help you stay connected to your fellow citizens and improve the lives of those around you.

It was 50 years ago that a young candidate for president came here to Michigan and delivered a speech that inspired one of the most successful service projects in American history. And as John F. Kennedy described the ideals behind what would become the Peace Corps, he issued a challenge to the students who had assembled in Ann Arbor on that October night: “on your willingness to contribute part of your life to this country,” he said, will depend the answer whether a free society can compete. I think it can,” he said.

This democracy we have is a precious thing. For all the arguments and all the doubts and all the cynicism that’s out there today, we should never forget that as Americans, we enjoy more freedoms and opportunities than citizens in any other nation on Earth. We are free to speak our mind and worship as we please. We are free to choose our leaders, and criticize them if they let us down. We have the chance to get an education, and work hard, and give our children a better life.

None of this came easy. None of this was preordained. The men and women who sat in your chairs 10 years ago and 50 years ago and 100 years ago -- they made America possible through their toil and their endurance and their imagination and their faith. Their success, and America’s success, was never a given. And there is no guarantee that the graduates who will sit in these same seats 10 years from now, or 50 years from now, or 100 years from now, will enjoy the same freedoms and opportunities that you do. You, too, will have to strive. You, too, will have to push the boundaries of what seems possible. For the truth is, our nation’s destiny has never been certain.

What is certain -- what has always been certain -- is the ability to shape that destiny. That is what makes us different. That is what sets us apart. That is what makes us Americans -- our ability at the end of the day to look past all of our differences and all of our disagreements and still forge a common future. That task is now in your hands, as is the answer to the question posed at this university half a century ago about whether a free society can still compete.

If you are willing, as past generations were willing, to contribute part of your life to the life of this country, then I, like President Kennedy, believe we can. Because I believe in you.

Congratulations on your graduation, 2010. May God bless you, and may God bless the United States of America.

Thank you.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# White House Correspondents' Dinner Address 2010

Thank you so much, Ed. And to all the other board members; to honored guests; and to the lovely First Lady. Good evening.

Ed is right, I work a lot. And so I wasn’t sure that I should actually come tonight. Biden talked me into it. He leaned over and he said, "Mr. President -- this is no ordinary dinner. This is a big [beep] meal."

It's been quite a year since I've spoken here last -- lots of ups, lots of downs -- except for my approval ratings, which have just gone down. But that's politics. It doesn’t bother me. Beside I happen to know that my approval ratings are still very high in the country of my birth.

And then just the other day, my dear friend, Hillary Clinton, pulled me aside and she gave me a pep talk. She said, despite the numbers, she said, "Don't worry, Barack, you're likeable enough." Which made me feel better.

Of course I may not have had the star power that I once had -- but in my defense, neither do all of you.

People say to me, "Mr. President, you helped revive the banking industry, you saved GM and Chrysler. What about the news business?" I have to explain, hey, I'm just the President. I'm not a miracle worker, here.

Though I am glad that the only person whose ratings fell more than mine last year is here tonight -- great to see you, Jay. I'm also glad that I'm speaking first, because we've all seen what happens when somebody takes the time slot after Leno's.

Jay Leno: Goodnight, everybody.

President Obama: By the way, all of the jokes here tonight are brought to you by our friends at Goldman Sachs. So you don't have to worry -- they make money whether you laugh or not.

We do have a number of notable guests in attendance here tonight. Obviously I'm most pleased that Michelle accompanied me. She doesn’t always go to these things. And there are few things in life that are harder to find and more important to keep than love -- well, love and a birth certificate.

The Jonas Brothers are here. They're out there somewhere. Sasha and Malia are huge fans. But, boys, don't get any ideas. I have two words for you -- predator drones. You will never see it coming. You think I'm joking.

Speaking of 'tween heartthrobs, Scott Brown is here. I admire Scott -- a rare politician in Washington with nothing to hide. Now, you should be aware that Scott Brown is not the only one with a salacious photo spread floating around. Recently David Axelrod was offered a centerfold opportunity of his own -- now, I did not know that Krispy-Kreme had a catalog. But it's true.

I saw Michael Steele backstage when we were taking pictures -- aka Notorious GOP. Michael, who knows what truly plagues America today -- taxation without representin' -- my brother. I did a similar routine last year, but it always works.

Odds are that the Salahis are here. There haven't been people that were more unwelcome at a party since Charlie Crist.

Unfortunately, John McCain couldn't make it. Recently he claimed that he had never identified himself as a maverick. And we all know what happens in Arizona when you don't have ID. Adios, amigos.

Look, I feel for John. You know, we were on the road together and obviously had a hard-fought battle, and you learn, certainly at the national level, politics isn’t easy. This year I've experienced my share of disappointments. For example, I had my heart set on the Nobel Prize -- for Physics. But, hey, you can't win 'em all.

Speaking of undeserved honors, a few weeks ago I was able to throw out the first pitch at the Nationals game. And I don't know if you saw it, but I threw it a little high and a little outside. This is how FOX News covered it: "President panders to extreme left-wing of batter box." On the other hand, MSNBC had a different take: "President pitches no-hitter." And then CNN went a different way altogether. [Video shown about volcano eruption in Iceland.] I guess that's why they're the most trusted name in news.

Now, look, I have a reputation for giving cable a hard time, so let's pick on Politico for a while. You know, people attack Politico for putting a new focus on trivial issues, political fodder, gossip sheet. That's not fair. Politico has been doing this for centuries now. Just check out these headlines -- our researchers found these: "Japan surrenders -- where's the bounce?" Then there's this one: "Lincoln saves Union, but can he save House majority?" I don't know if you can see, there's a little portion there -- "He's lost the Southern white vote." It's an astute analysis there.

And my favorite, July 3, 1776 -- "Senior Whig official: Talks break down, independence dead."

So this is nothing new. But even though the mainstream press gives me a hard time, I hear that I'm still pretty big on Twitter, Facebook -- or as Sarah Palin calls it, "the socialized media."

Of course, that's not the only thing that we've been accused of socializing this year. You might have heard we passed a health care bill and -- Is that Roger Ailes applauding out there? Some Republicans have suggested that the bill contains a few secret provisions. That's ridiculous. There aren’t a few secret provisions in the health care plan -- there are, like, hundreds.

Tonight, in the interest of transparency, I'd like to share a couple. Let's see -- this provision is called the Bay State of Denial. It reads: "This bill shall cover short-term memory loss related to the passage of Massachusetts health care reform." So, good news, Mitt, your condition is covered.

This next provision is called the Jersey Shore-Up. It reads: "The following individuals shall be excluded from the indoor tanning tax within this bill." Snooki, J-WOWW, the Situation, and House Minority Leader John Boehner.

This provision ought to put a common misperception to rest. It says right here: "If you do not like the ruling of your death panel you can appeal."

Now, look, obviously I've learned this year politics can be a tough business, but there are times where you just can't help but laugh. You know what really tickles me? Eric Massa. Apparently Massa claimed that Rahm came up to him one day in the House locker room, stark naked, started screaming obscenities at him -- to which I say, welcome to my world. I feel you. It's a tense moment.

You know, even as we enjoy each other's company tonight, we're also mindful of the incredible struggles of our fellow Americans in the Gulf Coast, both those leading the efforts to stem this crisis and those along the coast whose livelihoods are in jeopardy as a result of the spill.

Also in our thoughts and prayers tonight are the men and women in uniform who put their lives at risk each and every day for our safety and freedom. So in that spirit, I'd also like to pay a tribute to the journalists who play an extraordinary role in telling their stories.

Earlier today I gave the commencement address at Michigan, where I spoke to the graduates about what is required to keep out democracy thriving in the 21st century. And one of the points I made is that for all the changes and challenges facing your industry, this country absolutely needs a healthy, vibrant media. 'Probably needs it more than ever now.

Today's technology -- today's technology has made it possible for us to get our news and information from a growing range of sources. We can pick and choose not only our preferred type of media, but also our preferred perspective. And while that exposes us to an unprecedented array of opinions, analysis, and points of view, it also makes it that much more important that we're all operating on a common baseline of facts. It makes it that much more important that journalists out there seek only the truth.

And I don't have to tell you that. Some of you are seasoned veterans who have been on the political beat for decades; others here tonight began their careers as bloggers not long ago. But I think it's fair to say that every single reporter in this room believes deeply in the enterprise of journalism. Every one of you, even the most cynical among you, understands and cherishes the function of a free press and the preservation of our system of government and of our way of life.

And I want you to know that for all the jokes and the occasional gripes, I cherish that work, as well. In fact, tonight I wanted to present all of you with a bipartisan congressional resolution that honors all those wonderful contributions that journalists have made to our country and the world -- but, unfortunately, I couldn't break the filibuster.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you and God bless the United States of America.

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# Nomination of Elena Kagan for U.S. Supreme Court Justice

Thank you very much. Everybody, please have a seat.

Good morning, everybody. Of the many responsibilities accorded to a President by our Constitution, few are more weighty or consequential than that of appointing a Supreme Court justice -- particularly one to succeed a giant in the law like Justice John Paul Stevens.

For nearly 35 years, Justice Stevens has stood as an impartial guardian of the law, faithfully applying the core values of our founding to the cases and controversies of our time.

He has done so with restraint and respect for precedent -- understanding that a judge’s job is to interpret, not make law -- but also with fidelity to the constitutional ideal of equal justice for all. He’s brought to each case not just mastery of the letter of the law, but a keen understanding of its impact on people’s lives. And he has emerged as a consistent voice of reason, helping his colleagues find common ground on some of the most controversial and contentious issues the Court has ever faced.

While we can't presume to replace Justice Stevens’ wisdom or experience, I have selected a nominee who I believe embodies that same excellence, independence, integrity, and passion for the law -- and who can ultimately provide that same kind of leadership on the Court: our Solicitor General, and my friend, Elena Kagan.

Elena is widely regarded as one of the nation’s foremost legal minds. She’s an acclaimed legal scholar with a rich understanding of constitutional law. She is a former White House aide with a lifelong commitment to public service and a firm grasp of the nexus and boundaries between our three branches of government. She is a trailblazing leader -- the first woman to serve as Dean of Harvard Law School -- and one of the most successful and beloved deans in its history. And she is a superb Solicitor General, our nation’s chief lawyer representing the American people’s interests before the Supreme Court, the first woman in that position as well. And she has won accolades from observers across the ideological spectrum for her well-reasoned arguments and commanding presence.

But Elena is respected and admired not just for her intellect and record of achievement, but also for her temperament -- her openness to a broad array of viewpoints; her habit, to borrow a phrase from Justice Stevens, “of understanding before disagreeing”; her fair-mindedness and skill as a consensus-builder.

These traits were particularly evident during her tenure as dean. At a time when many believed that the Harvard faculty had gotten a little one-sided in its viewpoint, she sought to recruit prominent conservative scholars and spur a healthy debate on campus. And she encouraged students from all backgrounds to respectfully exchange ideas and seek common ground -- because she believes, as I do, that exposure to a broad array of perspectives is the foundation not just for a sound legal education, but of a successful life in the law.

This appreciation for diverse views may also come in handy as a die-hard Mets fan serving alongside her new colleague-to-be, Yankees fan Justice Sotomayor, who I believe has ordered a pinstriped robe for the occasion.

But while Elena had a brilliant career in academia, her passion for the law is anything but academic. She has often referred to Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, for whom she clerked, as her hero. I understand that he reciprocated by calling her “Shorty.” Nonetheless, she credits him with reminding her that, as she put it, “behind law there are stories -- stories of people’s lives as shaped by the law, stories of people’s lives as might be changed by the law…”

That understanding of law, not as an intellectual exercise or words on a page, but as it affects the lives of ordinary people, has animated every step of Elena’s career -- including her service as Solicitor General today.

During her time in this office, she’s repeatedly defended the rights of shareholders and ordinary citizens against unscrupulous corporations. Last year, in the Citizens United case, she defended bipartisan campaign finance reform against special interests seeking to spend unlimited money to influence our elections. Despite long odds of success, with most legal analysts believing the government was unlikely to prevail in this case, Elena still chose it as her very first case to argue before the Court.

I think that says a great deal not just about Elena’s tenacity, but about her commitment to serving the American people. I think it says a great deal about her commitment to protect our fundamental rights, because in a democracy, powerful interests must not be allowed to drown out the voices of ordinary citizens.

And I think it says a great deal about the path that Elena has chosen. Someone as gifted as Elena could easily have settled into a comfortable life in a corporate law practice. Instead, she chose a life of service -- service to her students, service to her country, service to the law and to all those whose lives it shapes.

And given Elena’s upbringing, it’s a choice that probably came naturally. Elena is the granddaughter of immigrants whose mother was, for 20 years, a beloved public schoolteacher -- as are her two brothers, who are here today. Her father was a housing lawyer, devoted to the rights of tenants. Both were the first in their families to attend college. And from an early age, they instilled in Elena not just the value of a good education, but the importance of using it to serve others.

As she recalled during her Solicitor General confirmation hearings, “Both my parents wanted me to succeed in my chosen profession. But more than that, both drilled into me the importance of service, character, and integrity.”

Elena has also spoken movingly about how her mother had grown up at a time when women had few opportunities to pursue their ambitions and took great joy in watching her daughter do so.

Neither she, nor Elena’s father, lived to see this day. But I think her mother would relish this moment. I think she would relish -- as I do -- the prospect of three women taking their seat on the nation’s highest Court for the first time in history. A Court that would be more inclusive, more representative, more reflective of us as a people than ever before.

And I think they would both be tremendously proud of their daughter -- a great lawyer, a great teacher, and a devoted public servant who I am confident will make an outstanding Supreme Court justice.

So I hope that the Senate will act in a bipartisan fashion, as they did in confirming Elena to be our Solicitor General last year, and that they will do so as swiftly as possible, so she can get busy and take her seat in time to fully participate in the work of the Court this fall.

With that, I would like to invite the person who I believe will be the next Supreme Court justice of the United States, Elena Kagan, to say a few words.

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# Commencement Address at the U.S. Military Academy

Good morning! It is wonderful to be back at the United States Military Academy -- the oldest continuously occupied military post in America -- as we commission the newest officers in the United States Army.

Thank you, General Hagenbeck, for your introduction, on a day that holds special meaning for you and the Dean, General Finnegan. Both of you first came to West Point in the Class of 1971 and went on to inspire soldiers under your command. You've led this Academy to a well-deserved recognition: best college in America. And today, you're both looking forward to a well-deserved retirement from the Army. General Hagenbeck and Judy, General Finnegan and Joan, we thank you for 39 years of remarkable service to the Army and to America.

To the Commandant, General Rapp, the Academy staff and faculty, most of whom are veterans, thank you for your service and for inspiring these cadets to become the "leaders of character" they are today. Let me also acknowledge the presence of General Shinseki, Secretary McHugh, the members of Congress who are with us here today, including two former soldiers this Academy knows well, Senator Jack Reed and Congressman Patrick Murphy.

To all the families here -- especially all the moms and dads -- this day is a tribute to you as well. The decision to come to West Point was made by your sons and daughters, but it was you who instilled in them a spirit of service that has led them to this hallowed place in a time of war. So on behalf of the American people, thank you for your example and thank you for your patriotism.

To the United States Corps of Cadets, and most of all, the Class of 2010 -- it is a singular honor to serve as your Commander-in-Chief. As your Superintendent indicated, under our constitutional system my power as President is wisely limited. But there are some areas where my power is absolute. And so, as your Commander-in-Chief, I hereby absolve all cadets who are on restriction for minor conduct offenses. I will leave the definition of "minor" -- to those who know better.

Class of 2010, today is your day -- a day to celebrate all that you've achieved, in the finest tradition of the soldier-scholar, and to look forward to the important service that lies ahead.

You have pushed yourself through the agony of Beast Barracks, the weeks of training in rain and mud, and, I'm told, more inspections and drills than perhaps any class before you. Along the way, I'm sure you faced a few moments when you asked yourself: "What am I doing here?" I have those moments sometimes.

You've trained for the complexities of today's missions, knowing that success will be measured not merely by performance on the battlefield, but also by your understanding of the cultures and traditions and languages in the place where you serve.

You've reached out across borders, with more international experience than any class in Academy history. You've not only attended foreign academies to forge new friendships, you've welcomed into your ranks cadets from nearly a dozen countries.

You've challenged yourself intellectually in the sciences and the humanities, in history and technology. You've achieved a standard of academic excellence that is without question, tying the record for the most post-graduate scholarships of any class in West Point history.

This includes your number one overall cadet and your valedictorian -- Liz Betterbed and Alex Rosenberg. And by the way, this is the first time in Academy history where your two top awards have been earned by female candidates.

This underscores a fact that I've seen in the faces of our troops from Baghdad to Bagram -- in the 21st century, our women in uniform play an indispensable role in our national defense. And time and again, they have proven themselves to be role models for our daughters and our sons -- as students and as soldiers and as leaders in the United States armed forces.

And the faces in this stadium show a simple truth: America's Army represents the full breadth of America's experience. You come from every corner of our country -- from privilege and from poverty, from cities and small towns. You worship all of the great religions that enrich the life of our people. You include the vast diversity of race and ethnicity that is fundamental to our nation's strength.

There is, however, one thing that sets you apart. Here in these quiet hills, you've come together to prepare for the most difficult test of our time. You signed up knowing your service would send you into harm's way, and you did so long after the first drums of war were sounded. In you we see the commitment of our country, and timeless virtues that have served our nation well.

We see your sense of duty -- including those who have earned their right shoulder patch -- their right shoulder combat patches, like the soldier who suffered a grenade wound in Iraq, yet still helped his fellow soldiers to evacuate -- your First Captain of the Corps of Cadets, Tyler Gordy.

We see your sense of honor -- in your respect for tradition, knowing that you join a Long Grey Line that stretches through the centuries; and in your reverence for each other, as when the Corps stands in silence every time a former cadet makes the ultimate sacrifice for our nation. Indeed, today we honor the 78 graduates of this Academy who have given their lives for our freedom and our security in Iraq and Afghanistan.

And we see your love of country -- a devotion to America captured in the motto you chose as a class, a motto which will guide your lives of service: "Loyal 'Til the End."

Duty. Honor. Love of country. Everything you have learned here, all that you've achieved here, has prepared you for today -- when you raise your right hand; when you take that oath; when your loved one or mentor pins those gold bars on your shoulders; when you become, at long last, commissioned officers in the United States Army.

This is the ninth consecutive commencement that has taken place at West Point with our nation at war. This time of war began in Afghanistan -- a place that may seem as far away from this peaceful bend in the Hudson River as anywhere on Earth. The war began only because our own cities and civilians were attacked by violent extremists who plotted from a distant place, and it continues only because that plotting persists to this day.

For many years, our focus was on Iraq. And year after year, our troops faced a set of challenges there that were as daunting as they were complex. A lesser Army might have seen its spirit broken. But the American military is more resilient than that. Our troops adapted, they persisted, they partnered with coalition and Iraqi counterparts, and through their competence and creativity and courage, we are poised to end our combat mission in Iraq this summer.

Even as we transition to an Iraqi lead and bring our troops home, our commitment to the Iraqi people endures. We will continue to advise and assist Iraqi security forces, who are already responsible for security in most of the country. And a strong American civilian presence will help Iraqis forge political and economic progress. This will not be a simple task, but this is what success looks like: an Iraq that provides no haven to terrorists; a democratic Iraq that is sovereign and stable and self-reliant.

And as we end the war in Iraq, though, we are pressing forward in Afghanistan. Six months ago, I came to West Point to announce a new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan. And I stand here humbled by the knowledge that many of you will soon be serving in harm's way. I assure you, you will go with the full support of a proud and grateful nation.

We face a tough fight in Afghanistan. Any insurgency that is confronted with a direct challenge will turn to new tactics. And from Marja to Kandahar, that is what the Taliban has done through assassination and indiscriminate killing and intimidation. Moreover, any country that has known decades of war will be tested in finding political solutions to its problems, and providing governance that can sustain progress and serve the needs of its people.

So this war has changed over the last nine years, but it's no less important than it was in those days after 9/11. We toppled the Taliban regime -- now we must break the momentum of a Taliban insurgency and train Afghan security forces. We have supported the election of a sovereign government -- now we must strengthen its capacities. We've brought hope to the Afghan people -- now we must see that their country does not fall prey to our common enemies. Cadets, there will be difficult days ahead. We will adapt, we will persist, and I have no doubt that together with our Afghan and international partners, we will succeed in Afghanistan.

Now even as we fight the wars in front of us, we also have to see the horizon beyond these wars -- because unlike a terrorist whose goal is to destroy, our future will be defined by what we build. We have to see that horizon, and to get there we must pursue a strategy of national renewal and global leadership. We have to build the sources of America's strength and influence, and shape a world that's more peaceful and more prosperous.

Time and again, Americans have risen to meet and to shape moments of change. This is one of those moments -- an era of economic transformation and individual empowerment; of ancient hatreds and new dangers; of emerging powers and new global challenges. And we're going to need all of you to help meet these challenges. You've answered the call. You, and all who wear America's uniform, remain the cornerstone of our national defense, the anchor of global security. And through a period when too many of our institutions have acted irresponsibly, the American military has set a standard of service and sacrifice that is as great as any in this nation's history.

Now the rest of us -- the rest of us must do our part. And to do so, we must first recognize that our strength and influence abroad begins with steps we take at home. We must educate our children to compete in an age where knowledge is capital, and the marketplace is global. We must develop clean energy that can power new industry and unbound us from foreign oil and preserve our planet. We have to pursue science and research that unlocks wonders as unforeseen to us today as the microchip and the surface of the moon were a century ago.

Simply put, American innovation must be the foundation of American power -- because at no time in human history has a nation of diminished economic vitality maintained its military and political primacy. And so that means that the civilians among us, as parents and community leaders, elected officials, business leaders, we have a role to play. We cannot leave it to those in uniform to defend this country -- we have to make sure that America is building on its strengths.

As we build these economic sources of our strength, the second thing we must do is build and integrate the capabilities that can advance our interests, and the common interests of human beings around the world. America's armed forces are adapting to changing times, but your efforts have to be complemented. We will need the renewed engagement of our diplomats, from grand capitals to dangerous outposts. We need development experts who can support Afghan agriculture and help Africans build the capacity to feed themselves. We need intelligence agencies that work seamlessly with their counterparts to unravel plots that run from the mountains of Pakistan to the streets of our cities. We need law enforcement that can strengthen judicial systems abroad, and protect us here at home. And we need first responders who can act swiftly in the event of earthquakes and storms and disease.

The burdens of this century cannot fall on our soldiers alone. It also cannot fall on American shoulders alone. Our adversaries would like to see America sap its strength by overextending our power. And in the past, we've always had the foresight to avoid acting alone. We were part of the most powerful wartime coalition in human history through World War II. We stitched together a community of free nations and institutions to endure and ultimately prevail during a Cold War.

Yes, we are clear-eyed about the shortfalls of our international system. But America has not succeeded by stepping out of the currents of cooperation -- we have succeeded by steering those currents in the direction of liberty and justice, so nations thrive by meeting their responsibilities and face consequences when they don't.

So we have to shape an international order that can meet the challenges of our generation. We will be steadfast in strengthening those old alliances that have served us so well, including those who will serve by your side in Afghanistan and around the globe. As influence extends to more countries and capitals, we also have to build new partnerships, and shape stronger international standards and institutions.

This engagement is not an end in itself. The international order we seek is one that can resolve the challenges of our times -- countering violent extremism and insurgency; stopping the spread of nuclear weapons and securing nuclear materials; combating a changing climate and sustaining global growth; helping countries feed themselves and care for their sick; preventing conflict and healing wounds. If we are successful in these tasks, that will lessen conflicts around the world. It will be supportive of our efforts by our military to secure our country.

More than anything else, though, our success will be claimed by who we are as a country. This is more important than ever, given the nature of the challenges that we face. Our campaign to disrupt, dismantle, and to defeat al Qaeda is part of an international effort that is necessary and just. But this is a different kind of war. There will be no simple moment of surrender to mark the journey's end -- no armistice, no banner headline. Though we have had more success in eliminating al Qaeda leaders in recent months than in recent years, they will continue to recruit, and plot, and exploit our open society. We see that in bombs that go off in Kabul and Karachi. We see it in attempts to blow up an airliner over Detroit or an SUV in Times Square, even as these failed attacks show that pressure on networks like al Qaeda is forcing them to rely on terrorists with less time and space to train. We see the potential duration of this struggle in al Qaeda's gross distortions of Islam, their disrespect for human life, and their attempt to prey upon fear and hatred and prejudice.

So the threat will not go away soon, but let's be clear: Al Qaeda and its affiliates are small men on the wrong side of history. They lead no nation. They lead no religion. We need not give in to fear every time a terrorist tries to scare us. We should not discard our freedoms because extremists try to exploit them. We cannot succumb to division because others try to drive us apart. We are the United States of America. We are the United States of America, and we have repaired our union, and faced down fascism, and outlasted communism. We've gone through turmoil, we've gone through Civil War, and we have come out stronger -- and we will do so once more.

And I know this to be true because I see the strength and resilience of the American people. Terrorists want to scare us. New Yorkers just go about their lives unafraid. Extremists want a war between America and Islam, but Muslims are part of our national life, including those who serve in our United States Army. Adversaries want to divide us, but we are united by our support for you -- soldiers who send a clear message that this country is both the land of the free and the home of the brave.

You know, in an age of instant access to information, a lot of cynicism in the news, it's easy to lose perspective in a flood of pictures and the swirl of political debate. Power and influence can seem to ebb and flow. Wars and grand plans can be deemed won or lost day to day, even hour to hour. As we experience the immediacy of the image of a suffering child or the boasts of a prideful dictator, it's easy to give in to the belief sometimes that human progress has stalled -- that events are beyond our control, that change is not possible.

But this nation was founded upon a different notion. We believe, "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." And that truth has bound us together, a nation populated by people from around the globe, enduring hardship and achieving greatness as one people. And that belief is as true today as it was 200 years ago. It is a belief that has been claimed by people of every race and religion in every region of the world. Can anybody doubt that this belief will be any less true -- any less powerful -- two years, two decades, or even two centuries from now?

And so a fundamental part of our strategy for our security has to be America's support for those universal rights that formed the creed of our founding. And we will promote these values above all by living them -- through our fidelity to the rule of law and our Constitution, even when it's hard; even when we're being attacked; even when we're in the midst of war.

And we will commit ourselves to forever pursuing a more perfect union. Together with our friends and allies, America will always seek a world that extends these rights so that when an individual is being silenced, we aim to be her voice. Where ideas are suppressed, we provide space for open debate. Where democratic institutions take hold, we add a wind at their back. When humanitarian disaster strikes, we extend a hand. Where human dignity is denied, America opposes poverty and is a source of opportunity. That is who we are. That is what we do.

We do so with no illusions. We understand change doesn't come quick. We understand that neither America nor any nation can dictate every outcome beyond its borders. We know that a world of mortal men and women will never be rid of oppression or evil. What we can do, what we must do, is work and reach and fight for the world that we seek -- all of us, those in uniform and those who are not.

And in preparing for today, I turned to the world -- to the words of Oliver Wendell Holmes. And reflecting on his Civil War experience, he said, and I quote, "To fight out a war you must believe in something and want something with all your might. So must you do to carry anything else to an end worth reaching." Holmes went on, "More than that, you must be willing to commit yourself to a course, perhaps a long and hard one, without being able to foresee exactly where you will come out." America does not fight for the sake of fighting. We abhor war. As one who has never experienced the field of battle -- and I say that with humility, knowing, as General MacArthur said, "The soldier above all others prays for peace" -- we fight because we must. We fight to keep our families and communities safe. We fight for the security of our allies and partners, because America believes that we will be safer when our friends are safer; that we will be stronger when the world is more just.

So cadets, a long and hard road awaits you. You go abroad because your service is fundamental to our security back home. You go abroad as representatives of the values that this country was founded upon. And when you inevitably face setbacks -- when the fighting is fierce or a village elder is fearful; when the end that you are seeking seems uncertain -- think back to West Point.

Here, in this peaceful part of the world, you have drilled and you have studied and come of age in the footsteps of great men and women -- Americans who faced times of trial, and who even in victory could not have foreseen the America they helped to build, the world they helped to shape.

George Washington was able to free a band of patriots from the rule of an empire, but he could not have foreseen his country growing to include 50 states connecting two oceans.

Grant was able to save a union and see the slaves freed, but he could not have foreseen just how much his country would extend full rights and opportunities to citizens of every color.

Eisenhower was able to see Germany surrender and a former enemy grow into an ally, but he could not have foreseen the Berlin Wall coming down without a shot being fired.

Today it is your generation that has borne a heavy burden -- soldiers, graduates of this Academy like John Meyer and Greg Ambrosia who have braved enemy fire, protected their units, carried out their missions, earned the commendation of this Army, and of a grateful nation.

From the birth of our existence, America has had a faith in the future -- a belief that where we're going is better than where we've been, even when the path ahead is uncertain. To fulfill that promise, generations of Americans have built upon the foundation of our forefathers -- finding opportunity, fighting injustice, forging a more perfect union. Our achievement would not be possible without the Long Grey Line that has sacrificed for duty, for honor, for country.

And years from now when you return here, when for you the shadows have grown longer, I have no doubt that you will have added your name to the book of history. I have no doubt that we will have prevailed in the struggles of our times. I have no doubt that your legacy will be an America that has emerged stronger, and a world that is more just, because we are Americans, and our destiny is never written for us, it is written by us, and we are ready to lead once more.

Thank you. May God bless you. And may God bless the United States of America.

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# Remarks and Press Conference on the Gulf Oil Spill Disaster

Good afternoon, everybody. Before I take your questions, I want to update the American people on the status of the BP oil spill -- a catastrophe that is causing tremendous hardship in the Gulf Coast, damaging a precious ecosystem, and one that led to the death of 11 workers who lost their lives in the initial explosion.

Yesterday, the federal government gave BP approval to move forward with a procedure known as a “top kill” to try to stop the leak. This involves plugging the well with densely packed mud to prevent any more oil from escaping. And given the complexity of this procedure and the depth of the leak, this procedure offers no guarantee of success. But we’re exploring any reasonable strategies to try and save the Gulf from a spill that may otherwise last until the relief wells are finished -- and that's a process that could take months.

The American people should know that from the moment this disaster began, the federal government has been in charge of the response effort. As far as I’m concerned, BP is responsible for this horrific disaster, and we will hold them fully accountable on behalf of the United States as well as the people and communities victimized by this tragedy. We will demand that they pay every dime they owe for the damage they’ve done and the painful losses that they’ve caused. And we will continue to take full advantage of the unique technology and expertise they have to help stop this leak.

But make no mistake: BP is operating at our direction. Every key decision and action they take must be approved by us in advance. I’ve designated Admiral Thad Allen -- who has nearly four decades of experience responding to such disasters -- as the National Incident Commander, and if he orders BP to do something to respond to this disaster, they are legally bound to do it. So, for example, when they said they would drill one relief well to stem this leak we demanded a backup and ordered them to drill two. And they are in the process of drilling two.

As we devise strategies to try and stop this leak, we’re also relying on the brightest minds and most advanced technology in the world. We’re relying on a team of scientists and engineers from our own national laboratories and from many other nations -- a team led by our Energy Secretary and Nobel Prize-winning physicist, Stephen Chu. And we’re relying on experts who’ve actually dealt with oil spills from across the globe, though none this challenging.

The federal government is also directing the effort to contain and clean up the damage from the spill -- which is now the largest effort of its kind in U.S. history. In this case, the federal, state, and local governments have the resources and expertise to play an even more direct role in the response effort. And I will be discussing this further when I make my second trip to Louisiana tomorrow. But so far we have about 20,000 people in the region who are working around the clock to contain and clean up this oil. We have activated about 1,400 members of the National Guard in four states. We have the Coast Guard on site. We have more than 1,300 vessels assisting in the containment and cleanup efforts. We’ve deployed over 3 million feet of total boom to stop the oil from coming on shore -- and today more than 100,000 feet of boom is being surged to Louisiana parishes that are facing the greatest risk from the oil.

So we’ll continue to do whatever is necessary to protect and restore the Gulf Coast. For example, Admiral Allen just announced that we’re moving forward with a section of Governor Jindal’s barrier island proposal that could help stop oil from coming ashore. It will be built in an area that is most at risk and where the work can be most quickly completed.

We’re also doing whatever it takes to help the men and women whose livelihoods have been disrupted and even destroyed by this spill -- everyone from fishermen to restaurant and hotel owners. So far the Small Business Administration has approved loans and allowed many small businesses to defer existing loan payments. At our insistence, BP is paying economic injury claims, and we’ll make sure that when all is said and done, the victims of this disaster will get the relief that they are owed. We’re not going to abandon our fellow citizens. We’ll help them recover and we will help them rebuild.

And in the meantime, I should also say that Americans can help by continuing to visit the communities and beaches of the Gulf Coast. I was talking to the governors just a couple of days ago, and they wanted me to remind everybody that except for three beaches in Louisiana, all of the Gulf’s beaches are open. They are safe and they are clean.

As we continue our response effort, we’re also moving quickly on steps to ensure that a catastrophe like this never happens again. I’ve said before that producing oil here in America is an essential part of our overall energy strategy. But all drilling must be safe.

In recent months, I’ve spoken about the dangers of too much -- I’ve heard people speaking about the dangers of too much government regulation. And I think we can all acknowledge there have been times in history when the government has overreached. But in this instance, the oil industry’s cozy and sometimes corrupt relationship with government regulators meant little or no regulation at all.

When Secretary Salazar took office, he found a Minerals and Management Service that had been plagued by corruption for years -- this was the agency charged with not only providing permits, but also enforcing laws governing oil drilling. And the corruption was underscored by a recent Inspector General’s report that covered activity which occurred prior to 2007 -- a report that can only be described as appalling. And Secretary Salazar immediately took steps to clean up that corruption. But this oil spill has made clear that more reforms are needed.

For years, there has been a scandalously close relationship between oil companies and the agency that regulates them. That’s why we’ve decided to separate the people who permit the drilling from those who regulate and ensure the safety of the drilling.

I also announced that no new permits for drilling new wells will go forward until a 30-day safety and environmental review was conducted. That review is now complete. Its initial recommendations include aggressive new operating standards and requirements for offshore energy companies, which we will put in place.

Additionally, after reading the report’s recommendations with Secretary Salazar and other members of my Administration, we’re going to be ordering the following actions: First, we will suspend the planned exploration of two locations off the coast of Alaska. Second, we will cancel the pending lease sale in the Gulf of Mexico and the proposed lease sale off the coast of Virginia. Third, we will continue the existing moratorium and suspend the issuance of new permits to drill new deepwater wells for six months. And four, we will suspend action on 33 deepwater exploratory wells currently being drilled in the Gulf of Mexico.

What’s also been made clear from this disaster is that for years the oil and gas industry has leveraged such power that they have effectively been allowed to regulate themselves. One example: Under current law, the Interior Department has only 30 days to review an exploration plan submitted by an oil company. That leaves no time for the appropriate environmental review. They result is, they are continually waived. And this is just one example of a law that was tailored by the industry to serve their needs instead of the public’s. So Congress needs to address these issues as soon as possible, and my Administration will work with them to do so.

Still, preventing such a catastrophe in the future will require further study and deeper reform. That’s why last Friday, I also signed an executive order establishing the National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling. While there are a number of ongoing investigations, including an independent review by the National Academy of Engineering, the purpose of this commission is to consider both the root causes of the disaster and offer options on what safety and environmental precautions are necessary.

If the laws on our books are inadequate to prevent such a spill, or if we did not enforce those laws, then I want to know. I want to know what worked and what didn’t work in our response to the disaster, and where oversight of the oil and gas industry broke down.

Let me make one final point. More than anything else, this economic and environmental tragedy -- and it’s a tragedy -- underscores the urgent need for this nation to develop clean, renewable sources of energy. Doing so will not only reduce threats to our environment, it will create a new, homegrown, American industry that can lead to countless new businesses and new jobs.

We’ve talked about doing this for decades, and we’ve made significant strides over the last year when it comes to investing in renewable energy and energy efficiency. The House of Representatives has already passed a bill that would finally jumpstart a permanent transition to a clean energy economy, and there is currently a plan in the Senate -- a plan that was developed with ideas from Democrats and Republicans -- that would achieve the same goal.

If nothing else, this disaster should serve as a wake-up call that it’s time to move forward on this legislation. It’s time to accelerate the competition with countries like China, who have already realized the future lies in renewable energy. And it’s time to seize that future ourselves. So I call on Democrats and Republicans in Congress, working with my Administration, to answer this challenge once and for all.

I'll close by saying this: This oil spill is an unprecedented disaster. The fact that the source of the leak is a mile under the surface, where no human being can go, has made it enormously difficult to stop. But we are relying on every resource and every idea, every expert and every bit of technology, to work to stop it. We will take ideas from anywhere, but we are going to stop it.

And I know that doesn’t lessen the enormous sense of anger and frustration felt by people on the Gulf and so many Americans. Every day I see this leak continue I am angry and frustrated as well. I realize that this entire response effort will continue to be filtered through the typical prism of politics, but that’s not what I care about right now. What I care about right now is the containment of this disaster and the health and safety and livelihoods of our neighbors in the Gulf Coast. And for as long as it takes, I intend to use the full force of the federal government to protect our fellow citizens and the place where they live. I can assure you of that.

All right. I’m going to take some questions. I’m going to start with Jennifer Loven.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. This is on, right?

President Obama: Yes.

Question: You just said that the federal government is in charge, and officials in your Administration have said this repeatedly. Yet how do you explain that we’re more than five weeks into this crisis and that BP is not always doing as you’re asking, for example with the type of dispersant that’s being used? And if I might add one more; to the many people in the Gulf who, as you said, are angry and frustrated and feel somewhat abandoned, what do you say about whether your personal involvement, your personal engagement, has been as much as it should be either privately or publicly?

President Obama:

Well, I’ll take the second question first, if you don’t mind. The day that the rig collapsed and fell to the bottom of the ocean, I had my team in the Oval Office that first day. Those who think that we were either slow on our response or lacked urgency don’t know the facts. This has been our highest priority since this crisis occurred.

Personally, I’m briefed every day and have probably had more meetings on this issue than just about any issue since we did our Afghan review. And we understood from day one the potential enormity of this crisis and acted accordingly. So when it comes to the moment this crisis occurred, moving forward, this entire White House and this entire federal government has been singularly focused on how do we stop the leak, and how do we prevent and mitigate the damage to our coastlines.

The challenge we have is that we have not seen a leak like this before, and so people are going to be frustrated until it stops. And I understand that. And if you’re living on the coast and you see this sludge coming at you, you are going to be continually upset, and from your perspective, the response is going to be continually inadequate until it actually stops. And that's entirely appropriate and understandable.

But from Thad Allen, our National Incident Coordinator, through the most junior member of the Coast Guard, or the under-under-under secretary of NOAA, or any of the agencies under my charge, they understand this is the single most important thing that we have to get right.

Now, with respect to the relationship between our government and BP, the United States government has always been in charge of making sure that the response is appropriate. BP, under the Oil Pollution Act of 1990, is considered the responsible party, which basically means they’ve got to pay for everything that's done to both stop the leak and mitigate the damage. They do so under our supervision, and any major decision that they make has to be done under the approval of Thad Allen, the National Incident Coordinator.

So this notion that somehow the federal government is sitting on the sidelines and for the three or four or five weeks we’ve just been letting BP make a whole bunch of decisions is simply not true.

What is true is that when it comes to stopping the leak down below, the federal government does not possess superior technology to BP. This is something, by the way -- going back to my involvement -- two or three days after this happened, we had a meeting down in the Situation Room in which I specifically asked Bob Gates and Mike Mullen what assets do we have that could potentially help that BP or other oil companies around the world do not have. We do not have superior technology when it comes to dealing with this particular crisis.

Now, one of the legitimate questions that I think needs to be asked is should the federal government have such capacity. And that's part of what the role of the commission is going to be, is to take a look and say, do we make sure that a consortium of oil companies pay for specifically technology to deal with this kind of incident when it happens. Should that response team that’s effective be under the direct charge of the United States government or a private entity? But for now, BP has the best technology, along with the other oil companies, when it comes to actually capping the well down there.

Now, when it comes to what’s happening on the surface, we’ve been much more involved in the in-situ burns, in the skimming. Those have been happening more or less under our direction, and we feel comfortable about many of the steps that have been taken.

There have been areas where there have been disagreements, and I'll give you two examples. Initially on this top kill, there were questions in terms of how effective it could be, but also what were the risks involved, because we’re operating at such a pressurized level, a mile underwater and in such frigid temperatures, that the reactions of various compounds and various approaches had to be calibrated very carefully. That’s when I sent Steven Chu down, the Secretary of Energy, and he brought together a team, basically a brain trust, of some of the smartest folks we have at the National Labs and in academia to essentially serve as a oversight board with BP engineers and scientists in making calculations about how much mud could you pour down, how fast, without risking potentially the whole thing blowing.

So in that situation you’ve got the federal government directly overseeing what BP is doing, and Thad Allen is giving authorization when finally we feel comfortable that the risks of attempting a top kill, for example, are sufficiently reduced that it needs to be tried.

I already mentioned a second example, which is they wanted to drill one relief well. The experience has been that when you drill one relief well, potentially you keep on missing the mark. And so it’s important to have two to maximize the speed and effectiveness of a relief well.

And right now Thad Allen is down there, because I think he -- it’s his view that some of the allocation of boom or other efforts to protect shorelines hasn’t been as nimble as it needs to be. And he said so publicly. And so he will be making sure that, in fact, the resources to protect the shorelines are there immediately.

But here’s the broad point: There has never been a point during this crisis in which this Administration, up and down up the line, in all these agencies, hasn’t, number one, understood this was my top priority -- getting this stopped and then mitigating the damage; and number two, understanding that if BP wasn’t doing what our best options were, we were fully empowered and instruct them, to tell them to do something different.

And so if you take a look at what’s transpired over the last four to five weeks, there may be areas where there have been disagreements, for example, on dispersants, and these are complicated issues. But overall, the decisions that have been made have been reflective of the best science that we’ve got, the best expert opinion that we have, and have been weighing various risks and various options to allocate our resources in such a way that we can get this fixed as quickly as possible.

Jake Tapper.

Question: Thanks, Mr. President. You say that everything that could be done is being done, but there are those in the region and those industry experts who say that’s not true. Governor Jindal obviously had this proposal for a barrier. They say that if that had been approved when they first asked for it, they would have 10 miles up already. There are fishermen down there who want to work, who want to help, haven’t been trained, haven’t been told to go do so. There are industry experts who say that they’re surprised that tankers haven’t been sent out there to vacuum, as was done in ’93 outside Saudi Arabia. And then, of course, there’s the fact that there are 17 countries that have offered to help and it’s only been accepted from two countries, Norway and Mexico. How can you say that everything that can be done is being done with all these experts and all these officials saying that’s not true?

President Obama:

Well, let me distinguish between -- if the question is, Jake, are we doing everything perfectly out there, then the answer is absolutely not. We can always do better. If the question is, are we, each time there is an idea, evaluating it and making a decision, is this the best option that we have right now, based on how quickly we can stop this leak and how much damage can we mitigate -- then the answer is yes.

So let’s take the example of Governor Jindal’s barrier islands idea. When I met with him when I was down there two weeks ago, I said I will make sure that our team immediately reviews this idea, that the Army Corps of Engineers is looking at the feasibility of it, and if they think -- if they tell me that this is the best approach to dealing with this problem, then we’re going to move quickly to execute it. If they have a disagreement with Governor Jindal’s experts as to whether this would be effective or not, whether it was going to be cost-effective, given the other things that need to be done, then we’ll sit down and try to figure that out.

And that essentially is what happened, which is why today you saw an announcement where, from the Army Corps’ perspective, there were some areas where this might work, but there are some areas where it would be counter-productive and not a good use of resources.

So the point is, on each of these points that you just mentioned, the job of our response team is to say, okay, if 17 countries have offered equipment and help, let’s evaluate what they’ve offered: How fast can it get here? Is it actually going to be redundant, or will it actually add to the overall effort -- because in some cases, more may not actually be better. And decisions have been made based on the best information available that says here’s what we need right now. It may be that a week from now or two weeks from now or a month from now the offers from some of those countries might be more effectively utilized.

Now, it’s going to be entirely possible in a operation this large that mistakes are made, judgments prove to be wrong; that people say in retrospect, you know, if we could have done that or we did that, this might have turned out differently -- although in a lot of cases it may be speculation. But the point that I was addressing from Jennifer was, does this Administration maintain a constant sense of urgency about this, and are we examining every recommendation, every idea that's out there, and making our best judgment as to whether these are the right steps to take, based on the best experts that we know of. And on that answer, the answer is yes -- or on that question, the answer is yes.

Chuck Todd.

Question: I just want to follow up on the question as it has to do with the relationship between the government and BP. It seems that you’ve made the case on the technical issues. But onshore, Admiral Allen admitted the other day in a White House briefing that they needed to be pushed harder. Senator Mary Landrieu this morning said it’s not clear who’s in charge, that the government should be in charge. Why not ask BP to simply step aside on the onshore stuff, make it an entirely government thing? Obviously BP pays for it, but why not ask them to just completely step aside on that front?

And then also, can you respond to all the Katrina comparisons that people are making about this with yourself?

President Obama:

Well, I’ll take your second question first. I’ll leave it to you guys to make those comparisons, and make judgments on it, because what I’m spending my time thinking about is how do we solve the problem. And when the problem is solved and people look back and do an assessment of all the various decisions that were made, I think people can make a historical judgment. And I’m confident that people are going to look back and say that this Administration was on top of what was an unprecedented crisis.

In terms of shoreline protection, the way this thing has been set up under the oil spill act of 1990 -- Oil Pollution Act -- is that BP has contracts with a whole bunch of contractors on file in the event that there is an oil spill, and as soon as the Deep Horizon well went down, then their job is to activate those and start paying them. So a big chunk of the 20,000 who are already down there are being paid by BP.

The Coast Guard’s job is to approve and authorize whatever BP is doing. Now, what Admiral Allen said today, and the reason he’s down there today, is that if BP’s contractors are not moving as nimbly and as effectively as they need to be, then it is already the power of the federal government to redirect those resources. I guess the point being that the Coast Guard and our military are potentially already in charge as long as we’ve got good information and we are making the right decisions.

And if there are mistakes that are being made right now, we’ve got the power to correct those decisions. We don’t have to necessarily reconfigure the setup down there. What we do have to make sure of is, is that on each and every one of the decisions that are being made about what beaches to protect, what’s going to happen with these marshes, if we build a barrier island, how is this going to have an impact on the ecology of the area over the long term -- in each of those decisions, we’ve got to get it right.

FQ [Todd]: You understand the credibility of BP seems to be so bad -- that there’s almost no trust that they’re getting --

President Obama:

I understand. And part of the purpose of this press conference is to explain to the folks down in the Gulf that ultimately it is our folks down there who are responsible. If they’re not satisfied with something that’s happening, then they need to let us know and we will immediately question BP and ask them why isn’t X, Y, Z happening. And those skimmers, those boats, that boom, the people who are out there collecting some of the oil that’s already hit shore, they can be moved and redirected at any point.

And so, understandably, people are frustrated, because, look, this is a big mess coming to shore and even if we’ve got a perfect organizational structure, spots are going to be missed, oil is going to go to places that maybe somebody thinks it could have been prevented from going. There is going to be damage that is heartbreaking to see. People’s livelihoods are going to be affected in painful ways. The best thing for us to do is to make sure that every decision about how we’re allocating the resources that we’ve got is being made based on the best expert advice that’s available.

So I’ll take one last stab at this, Chuck. The problem I don’t think is that BP is off running around doing whatever it wants and nobody is minding the store. Inevitably in something this big, there are going to be places where things fall short. But I want everybody to understand today that our teams are authorized to direct BP in the same way that they’d be authorized to direct those same teams if they were technically being paid by the federal government. In either circumstance, we’ve got the authority that we need. We just got to make sure that we’re exercising it effectively.

All right, Steve Thomma.

Question: Thank you, sir. On April 21st, Admiral Allen tells us the government started dispatching equipment rapidly to the Gulf, and you just said on day one you recognized the enormity of this situation. Yet here we are 39, 40 days later, you’re still having to rush more equipment, more boom. There are still areas of the coast unprotected. Why is it taking so long? And did you really act from day one for a worst-case scenario?

President Obama:

We did. Part of the problem you’ve got is -- let’s take the example of boom. The way the plans have been developed -- and I’m not an expert on this, but this is as it’s been explained to me -- pre-deploying boom would have been the right thing to do; making sure that there is boom right there in the region at various spots where you could anticipate, if there was a spill of this size, the boom would be right there ready to grab.

Unfortunately, that wasn’t always the case. And so this goes back to something that Jake asked earlier. When it comes to the response since the crisis happened, I am very confident that the federal government has acted consistently with a sense of urgency.

When it comes to prior to this accident happening, I think there was a lack of anticipating what the worst-case scenarios would be. And that's a problem. And part of that problem was lodged in MMS and the way that that agency was structured. That was the agency in charge of providing permitting and making decisions in terms of where drilling could take place, but also in charge of enforcing the safety provisions. And as I indicated before, the IG report, the Inspecter General’s report that came out, was scathing in terms of the problems there.

And when Ken Salazar came in, he cleaned a lot of that up. But more needed to be done, and more needs to be done, which is part of the reason why he separated out the permitting function from the functions that involve enforcing the various safety regulations.

But I think on a whole bunch of fronts, you had a complacency when it came to what happens in the worst-case scenario.

I'll give you another example, because this is something that some of you have written about -- the question of how is it that oil companies kept on getting environmental waivers in getting their permits approved. Well, it turns out that the way the process works, first of all, there is a thorough environmental review as to whether a certain portion of the Gulf should be leased or not. That’s a thorough-going environmental evaluation. Then the overall lease is broken up into segments for individual leases, and again there’s an environmental review that’s done.

But when it comes to a specific company with its exploration plan in that one particular area -- they’re going to drill right here in this spot -- Congress mandated that only 30 days could be allocated before a yes or no answer was given. That was by law. So MMS’s hands were tied. And as a consequence, what became the habit, predating my Administration, was you just automatically gave the environmental waiver, because you couldn’t complete an environmental study in 30 days.

So what you’ve got is a whole bunch of aspects to how oversight was exercised in deepwater drilling that were very problematic. And that’s why it’s so important that this commission moves forward and examines, from soup to nuts, why did this happen; how should this proceed in a safe, effective manner; what’s required when it comes to worst-case scenarios to prevent something like this from happening.

I continue to believe that oil production is important, domestic oil production is important. But I also believe we can’t do this stuff if we don’t have confidence that we can prevent crises like this from happening again. And it’s going to take some time for the experts to make those determinations. And as I said, in the meantime, I think it’s appropriate that we keep in place the moratorium that I’ve already issued.

Chip Reid.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. First of all, Elizabeth Birnbaum resigned today. Did she resign? Was she fired? Was she forced out? And if so, why? And should other heads roll as we go on here?

Secondly, with regard to the Minerals Management Service, Secretary Salazar yesterday basically blamed the Bush Administration for the cozy relationship there, and you seemed to suggest that when you spoke in the Rose Garden a few weeks ago when you said, for too long, a decade or more -- most of those years, of course, the Bush Administration -- there’s been a cozy relationship between the oil companies and the federal agency that permits them to drill. But you knew as soon as you came in, and Secretary Salazar did, about this cozy relationship, but you continued to give permits -- some of them under questionable circumstances. Is it fair to blame the Bush Administration? Don't you deserve some of that?

President Obama:

Well, let me just make the point that I made earlier, which is Salazar came in and started cleaning house, but the culture had not fully changed in MMS. And absolutely I take responsibility for that. There wasn’t sufficient urgency in terms of the pace of how those changes needed to take place.

There’s no evidence that some of the corrupt practices that had taken place earlier took place under the current Administration’s watch. But a culture in which oil companies were able to get what they wanted without sufficient oversight and regulation -- that was a real problem. Some of it was constraints of the law, as I just mentioned, but we should have busted through those constraints.

Now, with respect to Ms. Birnbaum, I found out about her resignation today. Ken Salazar has been in testimony throughout the day, so I don’t know the circumstances in which this occurred. I can tell you what I’ve said to Ken Salazar, which is that we have to make sure, if we are going forward with domestic oil production, that the federal agency charged with overseeing its safety and security is operating at the highest level. And I want people in there who are operating at the highest level and aren’t making excuses when things break down, but are intent on fixing them. And I have confidence that Ken Salazar can do that.

Question: Is his job safe?

President Obama:

Yes.

Julianna [Goldman].

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. We’re learning today that the oil has been gushing as much as five times the initial estimates. What does that tell you and the American people about the extent to which BP can be trusted on any of the information that it’s providing, whether the events leading up to the spill, any of their information?

President Obama:

Well, BP’s interests are aligned with the public interest to the extent that they want to get this well capped. It’s bad for their business. It’s bad for their bottom line. They’re going to be paying a lot of damages, and we’ll be staying on them about that. So I think it’s fair to say that they want this thing capped as badly as anybody does and they want to minimize the damage as much as they can.

I think it is a legitimate concern to question whether BP’s interests in being fully forthcoming about the extent of the damage is aligned with the public interest. I mean, their interests may be to minimize the damage, and to the extent that they have better information than anybody else, to not be fully forthcoming. So my attitude is we have to verify whatever it is they say about the damage.

This is an area, by the way, where I do think our efforts fell short. And I’m not contradicting my prior point that people were working as hard as they could and doing the best that they could on this front. But I do believe that when the initial estimates came that there were -- it was 5,000 barrels spilling into the ocean per day, that was based on satellite imagery and satellite data that would give a rough calculation. At that point, BP already had a camera down there, but wasn’t fully forthcoming in terms of what did those pictures look like. And when you set it up in time-lapse photography, experts could then make a more accurate determination. The Administration pushed them to release it, but they should have pushed them sooner. I mean, I think that it took too long for us to stand up our flow-tracking group that has now made these more accurate ranges of calculation.

Now, keep in mind that that didn’t change what our response was. As I said from the start, we understood that this could be really bad. We are hoping for the best, but preparing for the worst. And so there aren’t steps that would have taken in terms of trying to cap the well, or skimming the surface, or the in-situ burns, or preparing to make sure when this stuff hit shore that we could minimize the damage -- all those steps would have been the same even if we had information that this flow was coming out faster.

And eventually, we would have gotten better information because, by law, the federal government, if it’s going to be charging BP for the damage that it causes, is going to have to do the best possible assessment. But there was a lag of several weeks that I think shouldn’t have happened.

Helen Thomas.

Question: Mr. President, when are you going to get out of Afghanistan? Why are we continuing to kill and die there? What is the real excuse? And don't give us this Bushism, “if we don't go there, they’ll all come here.”

President Obama:

Well, Helen, the reason we originally went to Afghanistan was because that was the base from which attacks were launched that killed 3,000 people -- I’m going to get to your question, I promise. But I just want to remind people we went there because the Taliban was harboring al Qaeda, which had launched an attack that killed 3,000 Americans.

Al Qaeda escaped capture and they set up in the border regions between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Al Qaeda has affiliates that not only provide them safe harbor, but increasingly are willing to conduct their own terrorist operations initially in Afghanistan and in Pakistan, but increasingly directed against Western targets and targets of our allies as well.

So it is absolutely critical that we dismantle that network of extremists that are willing to attack us. And they are currently --

Question: -- a threat to us?

President Obama:

They absolutely are a threat to us. They’re a significant threat to us. I wouldn’t be deploying young men and women into harm’s way if I didn’t think that they were an absolute threat to us.

Now, General McChrystal’s strategy, which I think is the right one, is that we are going to clear out Taliban strongholds; we are going to strengthen the capacity of the Afghan military; and we are going to get them stood up in a way that allows us then to start drawing down our troops but continuing to provide support for Afghan in its effort to create a stable government.

It is a difficult process. At the same time, we’ve also got to work with Pakistan so that they are more effective partners in dealing with the extremists that are within their borders. And it is a big, messy process. But we are making progress in part because the young men and women under General McChrystal’s supervision, as well as our coalition partners, are making enormous sacrifices; but also on the civilian side, we’re starting to make progress in terms of building capacity that will allow us then to draw down with an effective partner.

Jackie Calmes, New York Times.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. I want to follow up on something -- exchange you had with Chip. Leaving aside the existing permits for drilling in the Gulf, before -- weeks before BP, you had called for expanded drilling. Do you now regret that decision? And why did you do so knowing what you have described today about the sort of dysfunction in the MMS?

President Obama:

I continue to believe what I said at that time, which was that domestic oil production is an important part of our overall energy mix. It has to be part of an overall energy strategy. I also believe that it is insufficient to meet the needs of our future, which is why I’ve made huge investments in clean energy, why we continue to promote solar and wind and biodiesel and a whole range of other approaches, why we’re putting so much emphasis on energy efficiency.

But we’re not going to be able to transition to these clean energy strategies right away. I mean, we’re still years off and some technological breakthroughs away from being able to operate on purely a clean energy grid. During that time, we’re going to be using oil. And to the extent that we’re using oil, it makes sense for us to develop our oil and natural gas resources here in the United States and not simply rely on imports. That’s important for our economy; that’s important for economic growth. So the overall framework, which is to say domestic oil production should be part of our overall energy mix, I think continues to be the right one. Where I was wrong was in my belief that the oil companies had their act together when it came to worst-case scenarios.

Now, that wasn’t based on just my blind acceptance of their statements. Oil drilling has been going on in the Gulf, including deepwater, for quite some time. And the record of accidents like this we hadn’t seen before. But it just takes one for us to have a wake-up call and recognize that claims that fail-safe procedures were in place, or that blowout preventers would function properly, or that valves would switch on and shut things off, that -- whether it’s because of human error, because of the technology was faulty, because when you’re operating at these depths you can’t anticipate exactly what happens -- those assumptions proved to be incorrect.

And so I’m absolutely convinced that we have to do a thorough-going scrub of that -- those safety procedures and those safety records. And we have to have confidence that even if it’s just a one-in-a-million shot, that we’ve got enough technology know-how that we can shut something like this down not in a month, not in six weeks, but in two or three or four days. And I don’t have that confidence right now.

Question: If I could follow up --

President Obama:

Sure.

Question: Do you -- are you sorry now? Do you regret that your team had not done the reforms at the Minerals Management Service that you’ve subsequently called for? And I’m also curious as to how it is that you didn’t know about Ms. Birnbaum’s resignation/firing before --

President Obama:

Well, you’re assuming it was a firing. If it was a resignation, then she would have submitted a letter to Mr. Salazar this morning, at a time when I had a whole bunch of other stuff going on.

Question: So you rule out that she was fired?

President Obama:

Come on, Jackie, I don’t know. I’m telling you the -- I found out about it this morning, so I don’t yet know the circumstances, and Ken Salazar has been in testimony on the Hill.

With respect to your first question, at MMS, Ken Salazar was in the process of making these reforms. But the point that I’m making is, is that obviously they weren’t happening fast enough. If they had been happening fast enough, this might have been caught. Now, it’s possible that it might now have been caught. I mean, we could have gone through a whole new process for environmental review; you could have had a bunch of technical folks take a look at BP’s plans, and they might have said, this is -- meets industry standards, we haven’t had an accident like this in 15 years and we should go ahead.

That’s what this commission has to discover, is -- was this a systemic breakdown? Is this something that could happen once in a million times? Is it something that could happen once in a thousand times, or once every 5,000 times? What exactly are the risks involved?

Now, let me make one broader point, though, about energy. The fact that oil companies now have to go a mile underwater and then drill another three miles below that in order to hit oil tells us something about the direction of the oil industry. Extraction is more expensive and it is going to be inherently more risky.

And so that’s part of the reason you never heard me say, “Drill, baby, drill” -- because we can’t drill our way out of the problem. It may be part of the mix as a bridge to a transition to new technologies and new energy sources, but we should be pretty modest in understanding that the easily accessible oil has already been sucked up out of the ground.

And as we are moving forward, the technology gets more complicated, the oil sources are more remote, and that means that there’s probably going to end up being more risk. And we as a society are going to have to make some very serious determinations in terms of what risks are we willing to accept. And that’s part of what the commission I think is going to have to look at.

I will tell you, though, that understanding we need to grow -- we’re going to be consuming oil for our industries and for how people live in this country, we’re going to have to start moving on this transition. And that’s why when I went to the Republican Caucus just this week, I said to them, let’s work together. You’ve got Lieberman and Kerry, who previously were working with Lindsey Graham -- even though Lindsey is not on the bill right now -- coming up with a framework that has the potential to get bipartisan support, and says, yes, we’re going to still need oil production, but you know what, we can see what’s out there on the horizon, and it’s a problem if we don't start changing how we operate.

Macarena Vidal. Not here? Oh, there you are.

Question: Mr. President, you announced -- or the White House announced two days ago that you were going to send 1,200 people to -- 1,200 members of the National Guard to the border. I want to -- if you could precise what their target is going to be, what you’re planning to achieve with that -- if you could clarify a bit more the mission that they're going to have.

And also on Arizona, after you have criticized so much the immigration law that has been approved there, would you support the boycott that some organizations are calling towards that state?

President Obama:

I’ve indicated that I don't approve of the Arizona law. I think it’s the wrong approach. I understand the frustrations of the people of Arizona and a lot of folks along the border that that border has not been entirely secured in a way that is both true to our traditions as a nation of law and as a nation of immigrants.

I’m President of the United States; I don't endorse boycotts or not endorse boycotts. That's something that the private citizens can make a decision about. What my Administration is doing is examining very closely this Arizona law and its implications for the civil rights and civil liberties for the people in Arizona, as well as the concern that you start getting a patchwork of 50 different immigration laws around the country in an area that is inherently the job of the federal government.

Now, for the federal government to do its job, everybody has got to step up. And so I’ve tried to be as clear as I could this week, and I will repeat it to everybody who’s here: We have to have a comprehensive approach to immigration reform. The time to get moving on this is now. And I am prepared to work with both parties and members of Congress to get a bill that does a good job securing our borders; holds employers accountable; makes sure that those who have come here illegally have to pay a fine, pay back taxes, learn English, and get right by the law.

We had the opportunity to do that. We’ve done -- we’ve gotten a vote of a super majority in the Senate just four years ago. There’s no reason why we shouldn’t be able to recreate that bipartisan spirit to get this problem solved.

Now, with respect to the National Guardsmen and women, I have authorized up to 1,200 National Guardspersons in a plan that was actually shaped last year. So this is not simply in response to the Arizona law. And what we find is, is that National Guardspersons can help on intelligence; dealing with both drug and human trafficking along the borders; they can relieve border guards so that the border guards then can be in charge of law enforcement in those areas. So there are a lot of functions that they can carry out that helps leverage and increase the resources available in this area.

By the way, we didn’t just send National Guard. We’ve also got a package of $500 million in additional resources, because, for example, if we are doing a better job dealing with trafficking along the border, we’ve also got to make sure that we’ve got prosecutors down there who can prosecute those cases.

But the key point I want to emphasize to you is that I don’t see these issues in isolation. We’re not going to solve the problem just solely as a consequence of sending National Guard troops down there. We’re going to solve this problem because we have created an orderly, fair, humane immigration framework in which people are able to immigrate to this country in a legal fashion; employers are held accountable for hiring legally present workers.

And I think we can craft that system if everybody is willing to step up. And I told the Republican Caucus when I met with them this week, I don’t even need you to meet me halfway; meet me a quarter of the way. I’ll bring the majority of Democrats to a smart, sensible, comprehensive immigration reform bill. But I’m going to have to have some help, given the rules of the Senate, where a simple majority is not enough.

Last question, Major [Garrett].

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Good afternoon.

President Obama:

Good afternoon.

Question: Two issues. Some in your government have said the federal government’s boot is on the neck of BP. Are you comfortable with that imagery, sir? Is your boot on the neck of BP? And can you understand, sir, why some in the Gulf who feel besieged by this oil spill consider that a meaningless, possibly ludicrous, metaphor?

Secondarily, can you tell the American public, sir, what your White House did or did not offer Congressman Sestak to not enter the Democratic senatorial primary? And how will you meet your levels of expressed transparency and ethics to convey that answer to satisfy what appear to be bipartisan calls for greater disclosure about that matter? Thank you.

President Obama:

There will be an official response shortly on the Sestak issue, which I hope will answer your questions.

Question: From you, sir?

President Obama:

You will get it from my Administration. And it will be coming out -- when I say “shortly,” I mean shortly. I don’t mean weeks or months. With respect to the first --

Question: Can you assure the public it was ethical and legal, sir?

President Obama:

I can assure the public that nothing improper took place. But, as I said, there will be a response shortly on that issue.

With respect to the metaphor that was used, I think Ken Salazar would probably be the first one to admit that he has been frustrated, angry, and occasionally emotional about this issue, like a lot of people have. I mean, there are a lot of folks out there who see what’s happening and are angry at BP, are frustrated that it hasn’t stopped. And so I’ll let Ken answer for himself. I would say that we don’t need to use language like that; what we need is actions that make sure that BP is being held accountable. And that’s what I intend to do, and I think that’s what Ken Salazar intends to do.

But, look, we’ve gone through a difficult year and a half. This is just one more bit of difficulty. And this is going to be hard not just right now, it’s going to be hard for months to come. The Gulf --

Question: This --

President Obama:

This spill. The Gulf is going to be affected in a bad way. And so my job right now is just to make sure that everybody in the Gulf understands this is what I wake up to in the morning and this is what I go to bed at night thinking about.

Question: The spill?

President Obama:

The spill. And it’s not just me, by the way. When I woke this morning and I’m shaving and Malia knocks on my bathroom door and she peeks in her head and she says, “Did you plug the hole yet, Daddy?” Because I think everybody understands that when we are fouling the Earth like this, it has concrete implications not just for this generation, but for future generations.

I grew up in Hawaii where the ocean is sacred. And when you see birds flying around with oil all over their feathers and turtles dying, that doesn’t just speak to the immediate economic consequences of this; this speaks to how are we caring for this incredible bounty that we have.

And so sometimes when I hear folks down in Louisiana expressing frustrations, I may not always think that they're comments are fair; on the other hand, I probably think to myself, these are folks who grew up fishing in these wetlands and seeing this as an integral part of who they are -- and to see that messed up in this fashion would be infuriating.

So the thing that the American people need to understand is that not a day goes by where the federal government is not constantly thinking about how do we make sure that we minimize the damage on this, we close this thing down, we review what happened to make sure that it does not happen again. And in that sense, there are analogies to what’s been happening in terms of in the financial markets and some of these other areas where big crises happen -- it forces us to do some soul searching. And I think that’s important for all of us to do.

In the meantime, my job is to get this fixed. And in case anybody wonders -- in any of your reporting, in case you were wondering who’s responsible, I take responsibility. It is my job to make sure that everything is done to shut this down. That doesn’t mean it’s going to be easy. It doesn’t mean it’s going to happen right away or the way I’d like it to happen. It doesn’t mean that we’re not going to make mistakes. But there shouldn’t be any confusion here: The federal government is fully engaged, and I’m fully engaged.

All right. Thank you very much, everybody.

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# Grande Isle Briefing on the Gulf Oil Spill Disaster

Good afternoon, everybody. I know it’s a little warm out here so want to get started. I’ve just had a meeting with these governors, members of Congress, local officials, as well as Admiral Thad Allen, the National Incident Commander in charge of response efforts to the BP oil spill. Admiral Allen gave us an update, the latest information on both the efforts to plug the well, as well as giving us an update on arrangements and coordination that's being made with respect to mitigating this damage that's been done.

He updated us on these latest efforts to stop the leak, mitigate the damage to the great beaches of the Gulf coast, and I had the chance to visit with -- Charlotte -- a beach like Port Fourchon that gives you a sense of what extraordinary efforts are being made at the local level, but also the damage that we're already starting to see as a consequence of this spill.

Now, our mission remains the same as it has since this disaster began, since the day I visited Louisiana nearly four weeks ago: We want to stop the leak; we want to contain and clean up the oil; and we want to help the people of this region return to their lives and their livelihoods as soon as possible.

And our response treats this event for what it is: It’s an assault on our shores, on our people, on the regional economy, and on communities like this one. This isn’t just a mess that we’ve got to mop up. People are watching their livelihoods wash up on the beach. Parents are worried about the implications for their children’s health. Every resident of this community has watched this nightmare threaten the dreams that they’ve worked so hard to build. And they want it made right, and they want to make it right now.

I just had a chance to listen to Mayor David Carmadelle of Grande Isle, our host here, telling us heartbreaking stories about fishermen who are trying to figure out where the next paycheck is going to come from, how are they going to pay a mortgage or a note on their boat. And he is having to dig into his pocket at this point to make sure that some of them are able to deal with the economic impact. So this is something that has to be dealt with immediately, not sometime later. And that’s everybody’s driving focus -- everybody who is standing behind me. This is our highest priority and it deserves a response that is equal to the task.

That’s why this has already been the largest cleanup effort in U.S. history. On the day this disaster began, even as we launched a search and rescue effort for workers on the drilling rig, we were already staging equipment in the event of a larger-scale spill. By the time we discovered the third breach, a week after the Deepwater Horizon platform sank, we had already stationed more than 70 vessels and hundreds of thousands of feet of protective boom on site.

Today, there are more than 20,000 people in the region working around the clock to contain and clean up this spill. We’ve activated about 1,400 members of the National Guard across four states. Nearly 1,400 vessels are aiding in the containment and cleanup effort. And we deployed more than 3 million feet of hard and sorbent boom, including an additional 100,000 just yesterday for these parishes in Louisiana that face the greatest threat.

Now, I’ve made clear to Admiral Allen and I did so again today that he should get whatever he needs to deal with this crisis. Whatever he needs, he will get.

Right now, we’re still within the window where we don’t yet know the outcome of the highly complex top kill procedure that the federal government authorized BP to use to try to stop the leak. If it is successful, it would obviously be welcome news. If it’s not, a team of some of the world’s top scientists, engineers and experts, led by our Energy Secretary and Nobel Prize-winning physicist Steven Chu, has for some time being -- has for some time been exploring any and all reasonable contingency plans.

But our response will continue with its full force regardless of the outcome of the top kill approach -- because even if the leak was stopped today it wouldn’t change the fact that these waters still contain oil from what is now the largest spill in American history. And more of it will come ashore.

To ensure that we’re fully prepared for that, and in accordance with input from folks down here, I’ve directed Secretary Napolitano and Admiral Allen to triple the manpower in places where oil has hit the shore or is within 24 hours of impact. This increase will allow us to further intensify this already historic response, contain and remove oil more quickly, and help minimize the time that any oil comes into contact with our coastline. That means deploying more boom, cleaning more beaches, performing more monitoring of wildlife and impact to this ecosystem.

We’re also going to continue to do whatever it takes to help Americans whose livelihoods have been upended by this spill. Gulf Coast residents should know that we’ve gathered all pertinent information regarding available assistance and the federal response in one place at whitehouse.gov.

We have ordered BP to pay economic injury claims, and we will make sure they deliver. And the parish presidents and governors here in Louisiana were already giving us some sense of some of the bureaucratic problems that we’re going to have to cut through, but we are going to cut through them. And for those who are in economic distress, if you’ve already filed a claim and you’re not satisfied with the resolution, then whitehouse.gov will point you in the right direction.

As I said yesterday, the Small Business Administration has stepped in to help businesses by approving loans, but also as important, allowing many to defer existing loan payments. A lot of folks are still loaded up with loans that they had from Katrina and other natural disasters down here, so they may need some additional help.

If you’re a small business owner and you weren’t aware of some of the programs that have been put in place or haven’t participated, then, again, the White House website will connect you to the resources you need. And we are making sure that all the parish presidents know, and folks like the mayor, other local officials are going to be aware of how they can get immediate help from us.

What’s more, we’ve stationed doctors and scientists across the five Gulf States to look out for people’s health and then to monitor any ill effects felt by cleanup workers and local residents. And we’ve begun setting up a system to track these efforts -- excuse me, to track these effects -- and ensure folks get the care that they need. And we’ve told BP that we expect them to pay for that, too.

As I’ve said before, BP is the responsible party for this disaster. What that means is they’re legally responsible for stopping the leak and they’re financially responsible for the enormous damage that they’ve created. And we’re going to hold them accountable, along with any other party responsible for the initial explosion and loss of life on that platform.

But as I said yesterday, and as I repeated in the meeting that we just left, I ultimately take responsibility for solving this crisis. I’m the President and the buck stops with me. So I give the people of this community and the entire Gulf my word that we’re going to hold ourselves accountable to do whatever it takes for as long as it takes to stop this catastrophe, to defend our natural resources, to repair the damage, and to keep this region on its feet. Justice will be done for those whose lives have been upended by this disaster, for the families of those whose lives have been lost -- that is a solemn pledge that I am making.

I think I can speak for anybody here, and for anybody who has been involved in the response and the cleanup effort, and for most Americans, when I say that I would gladly do whatever it takes to end this disaster today. But I want to also repeat something that I said to the group as a whole while we were meeting. This is a manmade catastrophe that’s still evolving and we face a long-term recovery and restoration effort.

America has never experienced an event like this before. And that means that as we respond to it, not every judgment we make is going to be right the first time out. Sometimes, there are going to be disagreements between experts, or between federal and state and local officials, or among state officials, or between states, about what the most effective measures will be.

Sometimes, there are going to be risks and unintended consequences associated with a particular mitigation strategy that we consider. In other words, there are going to be a lot of judgment calls involved here. There are not going to be silver bullets or a lot of perfect answers for some of the challenges that we face.

Understandably, the feelings of frustration and anger, the sense that any response is inadequate -- we expect that frustration and anger to continue until we actually solve this problem. But in the meantime, we’ve got to make sure that everybody is working in concert, that everybody is moving in the same direction. And I want everybody to know that everybody here -- at every level -- is working night and day to end this crisis. We’re considering every single idea out there, especially from folks who know these communities best.

Admiral Allen announced yesterday, for example, that, after a bunch of back-and-forth between state and federal experts, he is prepared to authorize moving forward with a portion of the idea for a barrier island that may stop some of the oil from coming ashore. We had an extensive conversation about this and -- to see whether additional steps can be taken on this barrier island idea.

And what I told the parish president, what I told the Governor, is that if there is an idea that can be shown to work, then we should move forward on it, and they deserve quick answers. But I also reminded everybody that we’ve got to make sure that whatever we do is actually going to work, particularly because we’re going to have not unlimited resources, at least not right now. For example, there’s a limited amount of boom. We’re going to try to get more boom manufactured. But that may take some time, and that means we’re going to have to make some decisions about how to deploy it effectively.

The bottom line is this: Every decision we make is based on a single criterion -- what’s going to best protect and make whole the people and the ecosystems of the Gulf.

And I want to thank everybody in this region who’s rolled up their sleeves and pitched in to help -- from the National Guard putting their experience to the task, to the local officials and every citizen who loves this area and calls it home, every American who’s traveled to the region to lend a hand. If any American is looking for ways to volunteer and help, then we’ve put links to that information on our website, as well -- that's whitehouse.gov.

And, all these governors -- Bobby Jindal, as well as Charlie Crist and Bob Riley, they want -- and I know Haley Barbour is not here but I think he agrees with this, as well -- one of the powerful ways that you can help the Gulf right now is to visit the communities and the beaches off of the coast. Except for three beaches here in Louisiana, all of the Gulf’s beaches at this moment are open, they are safe and they are clean. And so that's always a good way to help, is to come down and provide support to the communities along the coasts.

To the people of the Gulf Coast: I know that you’ve weathered your fair share of trials and tragedy. I know there have been times where you’ve wondered if you were being asked to face them alone. I am here to tell you that you’re not alone. You will not be abandoned. You will not be left behind. The cameras at some point may leave; the media may get tired of the story; but we will not. We are on your side and we will see this through. We’re going to keep at this every day until the leak has stopped, until this coastline is clean, and your communities are made whole again. That’s my promise to you. And that is a promise on behalf of a nation. It is one that we will keep.

And I will make one last point -- and I said this to every leader who is here: If something is not going right down here, then they need to talk to Thad Allen. And if they’re not getting satisfaction from Thad Allen, then they can talk to me. There’s nobody here who can’t get in touch with me directly if there is an idea, a suggestion, or a logjam that needs to be dealt with.

So we’re in this together. And it’s going to be a difficult time, and obviously the folks down here are going to be feeling the brunt of it, but we’re going to make sure that we’re doing everything we can to get this solved as quickly as possible.

And I want to again think everybody here for the extraordinary work that they’re putting in. You shouldn’t underestimate how hard these folks are working, day in, day out, on behalf of their constituencies.

So thank you very much. Thank you, everybody.

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# Address at Carnegie Mellon University on the Economy

Thank you very much.

Let me begin by thanking Dr. Jared Cohon, and the entire Carnegie Mellon community, for welcoming me once again, and for the terrific work that he and the administration, faculty and staff do here each and every day.

I also want to acknowledge your outstanding mayor -- who doesn’t look any older than the last time I saw him -- Mayor Luke Ravenstahl. There he is, right there.

It is great to be back at Carnegie Mellon, and in the beautiful city of Pittsburgh. I love visiting a good sports town. Last year, I stole Dan Rooney to serve as my ambassador to Ireland. To make it up, I invited both the Steelers and the Penguins to the White House to celebrate their championships. Seeing how the Blackhawks are headed to Philly tonight with a 2-0 lead in the Stanley Cup Finals, I'm just glad that we're on this side of the state.

I noticed a couple of people said they were rooting for the Blackhawks, which tells me something about the rivalry between Pittsburgh and Philly.

Of course, we meet here at an incredibly difficult time for America. Among other things, it’s a time when the worst environmental disaster of its kind in our nation’s history is threatening the Gulf Coast and the people who live there. Right now, stopping this oil spill and containing its damage is necessarily the top priority not just of my Administration but I think of the entire country. And we’re waging this battle every minute of every day.

But at the same time, we’re continuing our efforts to recover and rebuild from an economic disaster that has touched the lives of nearly every American. That’s what I want to talk about today -- the state of our economy, the future we must seize, and the path we chose to get there.

It has now been a little over 16 months since I took office amid one of the worst economic storms in our history. And to navigate that storm, my Administration was forced to take some dramatic and unpopular steps. These steps have succeeded in breaking the freefall. We’re again moving in the right direction.

An economy that was shrinking at an alarming rate when I became President has now been growing for three consecutive quarters. After losing an average of 750,000 jobs a month during the winter of last year, we’ve now added jobs for five of the last six months, and we expect to see strong job growth in Friday’s report. The taxpayer money it cost to shore up the financial sector and the auto industry, that's being repaid. And both GM and Chrysler are adding shifts and operating at a profit. So, despite temporary setbacks, uncertain world events, and the resulting ups and downs of the market, this economy is getting stronger by the day.

Now, that doesn’t mean this recession is by any means over for the millions of Americans who are still looking for a job or a way to pay the bills. Not by a long shot. The devastation created by the deepest downturn since the Great Depression has hit people and communities across our country very hard. And it’s not going to be a real recovery until people can feel it in their own lives.

In the immediate future, this means doing whatever is necessary to keep the recovery going and to spur job growth. But in the long term, it means recognizing that for a lot of middle-class families -- for entire communities, in some case -- a sense of economic security has been missing since long before the recession began.

Over the last decade, these families saw their income decline. They saw the cost of things like health care and college tuition reach record highs. They lived through a so-called economic “expansion” that generated slower job growth than at any prior expansion since World War II. Some people have called the last 10 years “the lost decade.”

So the anxiety that’s out there today isn’t new. The recession has certainly made it worse, but that feeling of not being in control of your own economic future -- that sense that the American Dream might slowly be slipping away -- that’s been around for some time now. And for better or for worse, our generation of Americans has been buffeted by tremendous forces of economic change. Long gone are the days when a high school diploma could guarantee a job at a local factory -- not when so many of those factories had moved overseas. Pittsburgh, a city that once was defined by the steel industry, knows this better than just about anybody. And today, the ability of jobs and entire industries to relocate where there’s skilled workers and an Internet connection has forced America to compete like never before.

From China to India to Europe, other nations have already realized this. They’re putting a greater emphasis on math and science, and demanding more from their students. Some countries are building high-speed railroads and expanding broadband access. They’re making serious investments in technology and clean energy because they want to win the competition for those jobs.

So we can’t afford to stand pat while the world races by. The United States of America did not become the most prosperous nation on Earth by sheer luck or happenstance. We got here because each time a generation of Americans has faced a changing world, we have changed with it. We have not feared our future; we have shaped it. America does not stand still; we move forward.

And that's why I’ve said that as we emerge from this recession, we can’t afford to return to the pre-crisis status quo. We can’t go back to an economy that was too dependent on bubbles and debt and financial speculation. We can’t accept economic growth that leaves the middle class owing more and making less. We have to build a new and stronger foundation for growth and prosperity -- and that’s exactly what we’ve been doing for the last 16 months.

It’s a foundation based on investments in our people and their future; investments in the skills and education we need to compete; investments in a 21st century infrastructure for America, from high-speed railroads to high-speed Internet; investments in research and technology, like clean energy, that can lead to new jobs and new exports and new industries.

This new foundation is also based on reforms that will make our economy stronger and our businesses more competitive -- reforms that will make health care cheaper, our financial system more secure, and our government less burdened with debt.

In a global economy, we can’t pursue this agenda in a vacuum. At the height of the financial crisis, the coordinated action we took with the nations of the G20 prevented a global depression and helped restore worldwide growth. And as we’ve recently witnessed in Europe, economic difficulties in one part of the world can affect everybody else. And that’s why we have to keep on working with the nations of the G20 to pursue more balanced growth. That’s why we need to coordinate financial reform with other nations so that we avoid a global race to the bottom. It’s why we need to open new markets and meet the goal of my National Export Initiative: to double our exports over the next five years. And it’s why we need to ensure that our competitors play fair and our agreements are enforced. This, too, is part of building a new foundation.

Now, some of you may have noticed that we have been building this foundation without much help from our friends in the other party. From our efforts to rescue the economy, to health insurance reform, to financial reform, most have sat on the sidelines and shouted from the bleachers. They said no to tax cuts for small businesses; no to tax credits for college tuition; no to investments in clean energy. They said no to protecting patients from insurance companies and consumers from big banks.

And some of this, of course, is just politics. Before I was even inaugurated, the congressional leaders of the other party got together and made a calculation that if I failed, they’d win. So when I went to meet with them about the need for a Recovery Act, in the midst of crisis, they announced they were against it before I even arrived at the meeting. Before we even had a health care bill, a Republican senator actually said, “If we’re able to stop Obama on this, it will be his Waterloo. It will break him.” So those weren’t very hopeful signs.

But to be fair, a good deal of the other party’s opposition to our agenda has also been rooted in their sincere and fundamental belief about the role of government. It’s a belief that government has little or no role to play in helping this nation meet our collective challenges. It’s an agenda that basically offers two answers to every problem we face: more tax breaks for the wealthy and fewer rules for corporations.

The last Administration called this recycled idea “the Ownership Society.” But what it essentially means is that everyone is on their own. No matter how hard you work, if your paycheck isn’t enough to pay for college or health care or childcare, well, you’re on your own. If misfortune causes you to lose your job or your home, you’re on your own. And if you’re a Wall Street bank or an insurance company or an oil company, you pretty much get to play by your own rules, regardless of the consequences for everybody else.

Now, I’ve never believed that government has all the answers. Government cannot and should not replace businesses as the true engine of growth and job creation. Government can’t instill good values and a sense of responsibility in our children. That's a parent’s job. Too much government can deprive us of choice and burden us with debt. Poorly designed regulations can choke off competition and the capital that businesses need to thrive.

I understand these arguments. And it’s reflected in my policies. After all, one-third of the Recovery Act we designed was made up of tax cuts for families and small businesses. And when you think back to the health care debate, despite calls for a single-payer, government-run health care plan, we passed reform that maintains our system of private health insurance.

But I also understand that throughout our nation’s history, we have balanced the threat of overreaching government against the dangers of an unfettered market. We've provided a basic safety net, because any one of us might experience hardship at some time in our lives and may need some help getting back on our feet. And we've recognized that there have been times when only government has been able to do what individuals couldn't do and corporations wouldn't do.

That's how we have railroads and highways, public schools and police forces. That's how we've made possible scientific research that has led to medical breakthroughs like the vaccine for Hepatitis B, and technological wonders like GPS. That's how we have Social Security and a minimum wage, and laws to protect the food we eat and the water we drink and the air that we breathe. That’s how we have rules to ensure that mines are safe and, yes, that oil companies pay for the spills that they cause.

Now, there have always been those who’ve said no to such protections; no to such investments. There were accusations that Social Security would lead to socialism, and that Medicare was a government takeover. There were bankers who claimed the creation of federal deposit insurance would destroy the industry. And there were automakers who argued that installing seatbelts was unnecessary and unaffordable. There were skeptics who thought that cleaning our water and our air would bankrupt our entire economy. And all of these claims proved false. All of these reforms led to greater security and greater prosperity for our people and our economy.

So what was true then is true today. As November approaches, leaders in the other party will campaign furiously on the same economic arguments they’ve been making for decades. Fortunately, we don't have to look back too many years to see how their agenda turns out. For much of the last 10 years we've tried it their way. They gave us tax cuts that weren’t paid for to millionaires who didn’t need them. They gutted regulations and put industry insiders in charge of industry oversight. They shortchanged investments in clean energy and education, in research and technology. And despite all their current moralizing about the need to curb spending, this is the same crowd who took the record $237 billion surplus that President Clinton left them and turned it into a record $1.3 trillion deficit.

So we know where those ideas lead us. And now we have a choice as a nation. We can return to the failed economic policies of the past, or we can keep building a stronger future. We can go backward, or we can keep moving forward. And I don't know about you, but I want to move forward. I think America wants to move forward.

Now, the first step in building a new foundation that allows us to move forward has been to address the costs and risks that have made our economy less competitive -- outdated regulations, crushing health care costs, and a growing debt.

To start with, we can't compete as a nation if the irresponsibility of a few folks on Wall Street can bring our entire economy to its knees. That's why we're on the verge of passing the most sweeping financial reform since the Great Depression. It’s a reform that will help prevent another AIG. It will end taxpayer-funded bank bailouts. It contains the strongest consumer protections in history -- protections that will empower Americans with the clear and concise information they need before signing up for a credit card or taking out a mortgage.

Financial reform will not guard against every instance of greed and irresponsibility on Wall Street. But it will enshrine a new principle in our financial system: From now on, instead of competing to see who can come up with the cleverest scheme to make the quickest buck, financial institutions will compete to see who can make the better product and the better service. And that's a competition that benefits Wall Street and Main Street. That’s why we need to get this legislation done. It’s why we can’t afford to go back; we have to move forward.

We also know we can’t compete in a global economy if our citizens are forced to spend more and more of their income on medical bills; if our businesses are forced to choose between health care and hiring; if state and federal budgets are weighed down with skyrocketing health care costs. That’s why we finally passed health insurance reform.

Now, let’s be clear. The costs of health care are not going to come down overnight just because legislation passed, and in an ever-changing industry like health care, we’re going to continuously need to apply more cost-cutting measures as the years go by. But once this reform is in full effect, middle-class families will pay less for their health care, and the worst practices of the insurance industry will end. People with preexisting medical conditions will no longer be excluded from coverage. People who become seriously ill will no longer be thrown off their coverage for reasons contrived by the insurance company. Taxpayers will no longer have to pay -- in the form of higher premiums -- for trips to the ER by uninsured Americans. Businesses will get help with their health care costs. In fact, small businesses are already learning they’re eligible for tax credits to cover their workers this year. And with less waste and greater efficiency in the system, this reform will do more to bring down the deficit than any step we have taken in more than a decade.

The other party has staked their claim this November on repealing these health insurance reforms instead of making them work. They want to go back. We need to move forward.

Making health care more cost-efficient is critical, because it’s also true that we cannot be competitive as a nation if we remain dragged down by our growing debt. So let me talk about debt just for a second.

By the time I took office, we had a one-year deficit of over $1 trillion and projected deficits of $8 trillion over the next decade. Most of this was the result of not paying for two major tax cuts skewed to the wealthy, and a worthy but expensive prescription drug program that wasn’t paid for. I always find it interesting that the same people who participated in these decisions are the ones who now charge our Administration with fiscal irresponsibility.

And the truth is if I had taken office in ordinary times, I would have liked nothing more than to start bringing down the deficits that they created. But we took office amid a crisis, and the effects of the recession put a $3 trillion hole in our budget before I even walked through the door. Additionally, the steps that we had to take to save the economy from depression temporarily added more to the deficit -- by about $1 trillion. Of course, if we had spiraled into a depression, our deficits and debt levels would be much worse.

Now, the economy is still fragile, so we can’t put on the brakes too quickly. We have to do what it takes to ensure a strong recovery. A growing economy will unquestionably improve our fiscal health, as will the steps we take in the short-term to put Americans back to work.

And that’s why I signed a bill that will provide tax cuts for small businesses that hire unemployed workers. That's why I’ve urged Congress to pass a small business lending fund so that small businesses can get the credit they need to create jobs and grow. That's why I believe it’s critical we extend unemployment insurance for several more months, so that Americans who’ve been laid off through no fault of their own get the support they need to provide for their families and can maintain their health insurance until they’re rehired. And we have to work with state and local governments to make sure they have the resources to prevent the likely layoffs of hundreds of thousands of public school teachers across the country over the next few months.

But as we look ahead, we can’t lose sight of the urgent need to get our fiscal house in order. There are four key components to putting our budget on a sustainable path. Maintaining economic growth is number one. Health care reform is number two. The third component is the belt-tightening steps I’ve already outlined to reduce our deficit by $1 trillion.

Starting in 2011, we will enact a three-year freeze on all discretionary spending outside of national security -- something that was never enacted in the last Administration. We will allow the tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans to expire. We’ve gone through the budget, line by line, and identified more than 120 programs for elimination. We’ve restored a simple budgeting rule that every family and business understands called pay-as-you-go. And we will charge the largest Wall Street firms a fee to repay the American people for rescuing them during the financial crisis -- a fee that will bring down the deficit by $90 billion -- a fee that will bring down the deficit by $90 billion over the next decade. By the way, that $90 billion represents about one-eighth of the amount these banks will pay out in bonuses over the same time period in time.

Now, finally, the fourth component in improving our fiscal health is the bipartisan Fiscal Commission that I’ve established that will provide a specific set of solutions by the fall to deal with our medium- and long-term deficit. And I have to warn you this will not be easy. I know that some like to make the argument that if we would just eliminate pork barrel projects and foreign aid, we could eliminate our deficit. Turns out such spending makes up just 3 percent of our deficit. You combine all foreign aid and all earmarks -- that’s 3 percent of our budget. So meeting the deficit challenge will require some very difficult decisions about the largely popular programs that make up the other 97 percent. It means we’ll have to sort through our priorities and figure out what programs that we can do without.

On this point, I strongly agree with my friends in the other party. What I don’t agree with is the notion that we should also sacrifice critical investments in our people and our future. You know, if you’re a family who’s tightening your belt, you will definitely sacrifice going out to dinner, but you’re not going to sacrifice saving for your child’s college education. It’s precisely our investments in education and innovation that will make America more competitive in the 21st century. And we can’t go back; we’ve got to move forward.

That’s why I’ve made education reform a top priority -- because countries that out-educate us today will out-compete us tomorrow. And so we want every citizen to have the skills and training they need in a global economy -- from the day that you’re born through whatever career you may choose.

Last year, we launched a national competition to improve our schools based on a simple idea: Instead of funding the status quo, we will only invest in reform -- reform that raises student achievement, that inspires students to excel in math and science, and turns around failing schools that steal the future of too many young Americans.

And to achieve my goal of ensuring America once more has the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020, we passed a law that will make college more affordable by ending the unnecessary taxpayer subsidies that go to financial institutions for student loans. That means we’re saving billions of dollars that will go directly to students, including students right here at Carnegie Mellon.

It’s a bill that will also revitalize our community colleges, which are a career pathway to the children of so many working families.

In addition to training our workers for the jobs of the future, we’re also investing in the innovation that will create those jobs here in America -- the research, the technology, the infrastructure that will secure our economic future.

Right now, as we speak, the Recovery Act is putting Americans to work building a 21st century America. There’s no reason China should have the fastest trains or that rural Pennsylvania should be without high-speed Internet access. We’ve got to make those investments. From the first railroads to the Interstate Highway System, this nation has always been built to compete. So we’re going to invest, and are investing right now, in new infrastructure -- expanding broadband, health information technology, advanced manufacturing facilities, America’s first high-speed rail network. We’re also investing in the ideas and technologies that will lead to new jobs and entire new industries.

Consider what we’ve done with clean energy. The tax credits and loan guarantees in the Recovery Act alone will lead to 720,000 clean energy jobs in America by 2012 -- 720,000. I’ll give you one example. The United States used to make less than 2 percent of the world’s advanced batteries for hybrid cars. By 2015, because of the investments that we made, we’ll have enough capacity to make up to 40 percent of these batteries.

Now, this brings me to an issue that’s on everybody’s minds right now -- namely, what kind of energy future can ensure our long-term prosperity. The catastrophe unfolding in the Gulf right now may prove to be a result of human error, or of corporations taking dangerous shortcuts to compromise safety, or a combination of both. And I’ve launched a National Commission so that the American people will have answers on exactly what happened. But we have to acknowledge that there are inherent risks to drilling four miles beneath the surface of the Earth, and these are risks -- these are risks that are bound to increase the harder oil extraction becomes. We also have to acknowledge that an America run solely on fossil fuels should not be the vision we have for our children and our grandchildren.

We consume more than 20 percent of the world’s oil, but have less than 2 percent of the world’s oil reserves. So without a major change in our energy policy, our dependence on oil means that we will continue to send billions of dollars of our hard-earned wealth to other countries every month -- including countries in dangerous and unstable regions. In other words, our continued dependence on fossil fuels will jeopardize our national security. It will smother our planet. And it will continue to put our economy and our environment at risk.

Now, I understand that we can’t end our dependence on fossil fuels overnight. That’s why I supported a careful plan of offshore oil production as one part of our overall energy strategy. But we can pursue such production only if it’s safe, and only if it’s used as a short-term solution while we transition to a clean energy economy.

And the time has come to aggressively accelerate that transition. The time has come, once and for all, for this nation to fully embrace a clean energy future. Now, that means continuing our unprecedented effort to make everything from our homes and businesses to our cars and trucks more energy-efficient. It means tapping into our natural gas reserves, and moving ahead with our plan to expand our nation’s fleet of nuclear power plants. It means rolling back billions of dollars of tax breaks to oil companies so we can prioritize investments in clean energy research and development.

But the only way the transition to clean energy will ultimately succeed is if the private sector is fully invested in this future -- if capital comes off the sidelines and the ingenuity of our entrepreneurs is unleashed. And the only way to do that is by finally putting a price on carbon pollution.

No, many businesses have already embraced this idea because it provides a level of certainty about the future. And for those that face transition costs, we can help them adjust. But if we refuse to take into account the full costs of our fossil fuel addiction -- if we don’t factor in the environmental costs and the national security costs and the true economic costs -- we will have missed our best chance to seize a clean energy future.

The House of Representatives has already passed a comprehensive energy and climate bill, and there is currently a plan in the Senate -- a plan that was developed with ideas from Democrats and Republicans -- that would achieve the same goal. And, Pittsburgh, I want you to know, the votes may not be there right now, but I intend to find them in the coming months. I will continue to make the case for a clean energy future wherever and whenever I can. I will work with anyone to get this done -- and we will get it done.

The next generation will not be held hostage to energy sources from the last century. We are not going to move backwards. We are going to move forward.

This overarching principle -- that we must invest in and embrace the innovation and technology of the future and not the past -- that applies beyond our energy policy. That’s why we’ve decided to devote more than 3 percent of our GDP to research and development -- to spur the discovery of services and products and businesses that we have yet to imagine.

We’ve proposed making the research and experimentation tax credit permanent -- a tax credit that helps businesses afford the high costs of developing new technologies and new products. Last year, we made the largest investment in basic research funding in history.

The possibilities of where this research might lead are endless. Imagine a new treatment that kills cancer cells but leaves healthy ones untouched; regenerative medicine that ends the agonizing wait for an organ transplant. Imagine a lightweight vest for soldiers and police officers that can stop armor-piercing bullets; educational software that’s as effective and engaging as a personal tutor; intelligent prosthetics that can enable a wounded veteran to play the piano again. And now imagine all the workers and small business owners and consumers who would benefit from these discoveries.

We can’t know for certain what the future will bring. We can’t guess with 100 percent accuracy what industries and innovations will next shape our world. I’m sure there were times when this city couldn’t imagine life without steel mills and heavy smog that filled these streets. And when that industry shrank and so many jobs were lost, who could have guessed that Pittsburgh would fare better than many other Rust Belt cities, and reemerge as a center for technology and green jobs, health care, and education? Who would have thought that the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center’s logo would one day adorn the U.S. Steel Tower, or that this institute -- Carnegie Mellon -- would be the region’s largest employer?

All of this came to be because as a community, you prepared and adapted and invested in a better future -- even if you weren’t always sure what that future would look like.

And that’s what America does. That’s what we’ve always done. The interests of the status quo will always have the most vocal and powerful defenders at every level of government. There will always be lobbyists for the banks or the insurance industry that doesn’t want more regulation; or the corporation that would prefer to see more tax breaks instead of more investments in infrastructure or education. And let’s face it -- a lot of us find the prospect of change scary, even when we know the status quo isn’t working for us.

But there’s no natural lobby for the clean energy company that may start a few years from now. There’s no natural lobby for the research that may lead to a lifesaving medical breakthrough. There’s no natural lobby for the student who may not be able to afford a college education, but if they got one could end up making discoveries that would transform America and the world.

It’s our job as a nation to advocate on behalf of the America that we hope for -- to make decisions that will benefit the next generation -- even if it’s not always popular; even if we can’t always see those benefits in the short-term. We make decisions like this on behalf of our own children every single day. And while it’s harder to do with an entire country as large and diverse as ours, it’s no less important.

The role of government has never been to plan every detail or dictate every outcome. At its best, government has simply knocked away barriers to opportunity and laid the foundation for a better future. Our people -- with all their drive and ingenuity -- always end up building the rest. And if we can do that again -- if we can continue building that foundation and making those hard decisions on behalf of the next generation -- I have no doubt that we will leave our children the America that we all hope for.

Thank you, everybody. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Commencement Speech at Kalamazoo Central High School

Thank you. Thank you, everybody. Please be seated. Hello, Giants. It is good -- It is good to be here, and congratulations Class of 2010. I am honored to be part of this special occasion.

Audience Member: We love you!

President Obama: And I love you back. Let me acknowledge your extraordinary governor, Jennifer Granholm. Superintendent Rice, thank you for your inspiring words. Your mayor, Bobby Hopewell, who I understand is a proud Kalamazoo graduate himself.

Thanks to Principal Washington for -- not just for the warm introduction, but for his enthusiasm and his energy and his leadership and his nice singing voice. Thank you. To all the trustees, to the alumni, to the parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins -- everybody who’s been a part of this extraordinary place.

And I want to recognize our student speakers. Cindy, who embodies the best of our traditions in this country -- arrived three or four years ago and graduates as the valedictorian -- this is what is continually replenishing the energy and the dynamism and the innovation of this country, and we could not be prouder of you. Thank you. And to Simon, I’m glad that, according to the Constitution, you can’t run till you’re 35. So I’ll be long gone by then. But it gives me great confidence to know that we’ve got such incredible young leaders who are going to be remaking the world in so many different ways.

Now, recently, an article from your local paper, the Kalamazoo Gazette -- was brought to my attention. And it ran just after this school had been chosen as one of the six finalists in our Race to the Top Commencement Challenge. And for those who aren’t aware of it, this is a contest to highlight schools that promote academic excellence, personal responsibility and that best prepare students for college and careers. And this article in the Gazette quoted a young lady named Kelsey Wilson. Where is -- Is Kelsey here? She right over there? Anyway --

Audience Member: She’s here.

President Obama: She’s over there? Hey, Kelsey. How are you?

So Kelsey was quoted as saying, “We’re the kind of school that never gets credit for what we do. And our school is amazing.” This is what Kelsey said, “Our school is amazing.”

Well, Kelsey, Class of 2010, members of the Kalamazoo community, I’m here tonight because after three rounds of competition, with more than a thousand schools, and more than 170,000 votes cast, I know -- and America knows -- what you’ve done at Kalamazoo Central. You are amazing! We know. We know. Our amazing Secretary of Education Arne Duncan knows. Folks in Washington know, folks across the country know, and hopefully after tonight, everybody knows.

Now, together as a community, you’ve embraced the motto of this school district: “Every child, every opportunity, every time.” Every time. Every child, every opportunity, every time, because you believe, like I do, that every young person, every child -- regardless of what they look like, where they come from, how much money their parents have -- every child who walks through your schoolhouse doors deserves a quality education. No exceptions.

And I’m here tonight because I think that America has a lot to learn from Kalamazoo Central about what makes for a successful school in this new century. You’ve got educators raising standards and then inspiring their students to meet them. You’ve got community members who are stepping up as tutors and mentors and coaches. You got parents who are taking an active interest in their child’s education -- attending those teacher conferences, yes, turning off the TV once in a while, making sure homework gets done.

Arne Duncan is here tonight because these are the values, these are the changes that he’s encouraging in every school in this nation. It’s the key to our future.

But the most important ingredient is you: students who raised your sights, who aimed high, who invested yourselves in your own success. It’s no accident that so many of you have received college admissions letters, Class of 2010. That didn’t happen by accident. It happened because you worked for it. As the superintendent said, you earned it.

So, Kelsey, I agree with you. What you’ve done here at Kalamazoo Central is amazing. I am proud of you. Your parents are proud of you. Your teachers, your principal -- we’re all incredibly proud.

Now, graduates, all these folks around you, I have to say, though, with the cameras and the beaming smiles -- they’ve worked hard to give you everything you need to pursue your dreams and fulfill your God-given talent. Unfortunately, you can’t take them with you when you leave here. No one is going to go follow you around making sure that you’re getting to class on time, making sure you’re doing your work. Nobody is going to be doing that for you. Going forward, that’s all on you -- responsibility for your success is squarely on your shoulders.

And the question I have for you today is this: What is each -- what are each of you going to do to meet that responsibility?

Now, right now you’re getting plenty of advice from everybody. Some of it’s helpful. And so I hate to pile on with advice. But while I’m here -- what the heck. I figure I should offer a few thoughts based on my own experiences, but also based on my hopes for all of you, and for our country, in the years ahead.

First, understand that your success in life won’t be determined just by what’s given to you, or what happens to you, but by what you do with all that’s given to you; what you do with all that happens to you; how hard you try; how far you push yourself; how high you’re willing to reach. True excellence only comes with perseverance.

This wasn’t something I really understood when I was back your age. My father, some of you know, left my family when I was two years old. I was raised by a single mom and my grandparents. And sometimes I had a tendency to goof off. As my mother put it, I had a tendency sometimes to act a bit casual about my future. Sometimes I was rebellious. Sometimes I partied a little too much. Oh, yes, yes, this is a cautionary tale. Don’t be cheering when I say that. Studied just enough to get by. I thought hard work, responsibility, that’s old-fashioned. That’s just people want to tell me what to do.

But after a few years, after I was living solely on my own and I realized that living solely for my own entertainment wasn’t so entertaining anymore, that it wasn’t particularly satisfying anymore, that I didn’t seem to be making much of a ripple in the world, I started to change my tune. I realized that by refusing to apply myself, there was nothing I could point to that I was proud of that would last.

Now, you come of an age in a popular culture that actually reinforces this approach to life. You watch TV, and basically what it says is you can be rich and successful without much effort; you just have to become a celebrity. If you can achieve some reality TV notoriety, that’s better than lasting achievement. We live in a culture that tells you there’s a quick fix for every problem and a justification for every selfish desire. And all of you were raised with cell phones and iPods, and texting and emails, and you’re able to call up a fact, or a song, or a friend with the click of a button. So you’re used to instant gratification.

But meaningful achievement, lasting success -- it doesn’t happen in an instant. It’s not about luck, it’s not about a sudden stroke of genius. It’s not usually about talent. It’s usually about daily effort, the large choices and the small choices that you make that add up over time. It’s about the skills you build, and the knowledge you accumulate, and the energy you invest in every task, no matter how trivial or menial it may seem at the time.

You’ve got an alum who plays for the Yankees, I hear. He’s supposed to be pretty good. Now, Derek Jeter wasn’t born playing shortstop for the Yankees. He got there through years of effort. And his high school baseball coach once remarked, “I’m surprised he still doesn’t have blisters and that I don’t have the blisters on my hands from hitting ground balls just for Derek.” He always wanted more: ‘How about one more turn in the batting cage? Or 25 more ground balls?’”

Thomas Edison tested more than 6,000 different materials for just one tiny part of the light bulb that he invented. Think about that -- 6,000 tests. J.K. Rowling’s first Harry Potter book was rejected 12 times before it was finally published. Mozart was a musical prodigy, but he practiced for hours each day -- accumulating thousands of hours at the piano by the time he was just six years old. I understand that your boys’ basketball team did pretty good. First state champions for the first time in 59 years. That didn’t happen by accident. They put in work. They put in effort.

So, today, you all have a rare and valuable chance to pursue your own passions, chase your own dreams without incurring a mountain of debt. What an incredible gift. So you’ve got no excuse for giving anything less than your best effort. No excuses.

That’s my second piece of advice, very simple: Don’t make excuses. Take responsibility not just for your successes; take responsibility where you fall short as well.

Now, the truth is, no matter how hard you work, you’re not going to ace every class -- well, maybe Cindy will, but -- but you’re not going to ace every class. You’re not going to succeed the first time you try something. There are going to be times when you screw up. There will be times where you hurt people you love. There will be times where you make a mistake and you stray from the values that you hold most deeply.

And when that happens, it’s the easiest thing in the world to start looking around for somebody else to blame. Your professor was too hard; your boss was a jerk; the coaches -- was playing favorites; your friend just didn’t understand. Your wife -- oh, no. I’m just messing with Michelle right there. That was all in fun.

No, but this is an easy habit to get into. You see it every day in Washington -- every day -- folks calling each other names, making all sorts of accusations on television. Everybody is always pointing a finger at somebody else. You notice that?

Now, this community could have easily gone down that road. This community could have made excuses -- well, our kids have fewer advantages, our schools have fewer resources -- how can we compete? You could have spent years pointing fingers -- blaming parents, blaming teachers, blaming the principal, blaming the superintendent, blaming the President.

But that’s -- Class of 2010, I want you to pay attention on this because that’s not what happened. Instead, this community was honest with itself about where you were falling short. You resolved to do better, push your kids harder, open their minds wider, expose them to all kinds of ideas and people and experiences.

So, graduates, I hope you’ll continue those efforts. Don’t make excuses. And I hope that wherever you go, you won’t narrow the broad intellectual and social exposure you’ve had here at Kalamazoo Central -- instead, seek to expand it. Don’t just hang out with people who look like you, or go to the same church you do, or share your political views. Broaden your circle to include people with different backgrounds and life experiences. Because that’s how you’ll end up learning what it’s like to walk in somebody else’s shoes. That’s how you’ll come to understand the challenges other people face.

And this is not just an academic exercise. It’s a way to broaden your ambit of concern and learn to see yourselves in each other.

Which brings me to my final piece of advice for today, and that’s to give back, to be part of something bigger than yourselves. Hitch your wagon to something that is bigger than yourselves.

I know that so many of you have already served your community through efforts like your Stuff the Bus food drives and groups like Activists for Action. And I commend you for that.

But I also know that many of you are the first in your family to go to college. And right about now, you may be feeling all the weight of their hopes and expectations coming down on your shoulders.

And once you start juggling those classes and activities and that campus job, and you get caught up in your own dreams and your own anxieties and dating -- you may feel like you’ve got enough on your plate just dealing with your own life. It might be easier to turn the channel when the news disturbs you, to avert your eyes when you pass that homeless man on the street, to tell yourself that other people’s problems really aren’t your responsibility.

But just think about what the consequence of that approach to life would have been if that’s how folks had acted here in this community. What if those Kalamazoo Promise donors had said to themselves, “Well, you know what, I can pay for my own kid’s education. Why should I have to pay for somebody else’s?”

Think about the consequences for our country. What if our Founding Fathers had said, “You know, colonialism is kind of oppressive, but I’m doing okay, my family’s doing all right, why should I spend my summer in Philadelphia arguing about a Constitution?”

What if those abolitionists, those civil right workers had said, “You know, slavery is wrong, segregation is wrong, but it’s kind of dangerous to get mixed up in that stuff. I don’t have time for all those meetings and marches. I think I’m going to take a pass. I hope it works out, but that’s not something I want to do.”

I want you to think for a minute about the extraordinary men and women who’ve worn our country’s uniform and have given their last full measure of devotion to keep us safe and free. What if they said -- what if they said, “I really do love this country, but why should I sacrifice so much for people I’ve never even met?” Young men and women in uniform right now making those sacrifices.

So you and I are here today because those people made a different choice. They chose to step up. They chose to serve. And I hope you will follow their example, because there is work to be done, and your country needs you. We’ve got an economy to rebuild. We’ve got children to educate. We’ve got diseases to cure. We’ve got threats to face. We’ve got an oil spill to clean up. We’ve got clean energy to discover. And it is going to be up to you to meet all of those challenges -- to build industries and make discoveries and inspire the next generation. It’s going to be up to you to heal the divide that continues to afflict our world.

Now, I’m not saying you got to do it here all at once. But as Theodore Roosevelt once put it, I’m asking you to “Do what you can, with what you’ve got, where you are.” And I can guarantee that wherever your journey takes you, there are going to be children who need mentors and senior citizens who need assistance, folks down on their luck who could use a helping hand.

And once you’ve reached out and formed those connections, you’ll find it’s a little harder to numb yourself to other people’s suffering. It’s a little harder to ignore the national debates about the issues that affect their lives and yours.

In the end, service binds us to each other -- and to our communities and our country -- in a way that nothing else can. It’s how we become more fully American.

That’s the reason those donors created the Kalamazoo Promise in the first place -- not for recognition or reward, but because of their connection to this community; because their belief in your potential; because their faith that you would use this gift not just to enrich your own lives, but the lives of others and the life of the nation.

And I’m told that soon after the Promise was established, a first grader approached the superintendent at the time and declared to her: “I’m going to college.” First grader. “I’m going to college. I don’t know what it is, but I’m going.”

We may never know those donors’ names, but we know how they helped bring this community together and how you’ve embraced their Promise not just as a gift to be appreciated, but a responsibility to be fulfilled. We know how they have helped inspire an entire generation of young people here in Kalamazoo to imagine a different future for themselves.

And graduates, today, I’m asking you to pay them back by seeking to have the same kind of impact with your own lives; by pursuing excellence in everything you do; by serving this country that you love.

I know that you can do it. After all, you are the Giants -- and with the education you’ve gotten here, there’s nothing you can’t do.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you. And God bless the United States of America. And God bless the Class of 2010.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address on UN Security Council Sanctions Against Iran

Alright. Good afternoon, everybody. Today, the United Nations Security Council voted overwhelmingly to sanction Iran for its continued failure to live up to its obligations. This resolution will put in place the toughest sanctions ever faced by the Iranian government, and it sends an unmistakable message about the international community’s commitment to stopping the spread of nuclear weapons.

For years, the Iranian government has failed to live up to its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. It has violated its commitments to the International Atomic Energy Agency. It has ignored U.N. Security Council resolutions. And while Iran’s leaders hide behind outlandish rhetoric, their actions have been deeply troubling. Indeed, when I took office just over 16 months ago, Iranian intransigence was well-established. Iran had gone from zero centrifuges spinning to several thousand, and the international community was divided about how to move forward.

Yet this day was not inevitable. We made clear from the beginning of my administration that the United States was prepared to pursue diplomatic solutions to address the concerns over Iranian nuclear programs. I extended the offer of engagement on the basis of mutual interest and mutual respect. And together with the United Kingdom, with Russia, China, and Germany, we sat down with our Iranian counterparts. We offered the opportunity of a better relationship between Iran and the international community -- one that reduced Iran’s political isolation, and increased its economic integration with the rest of the world. In short, we offered the Iranian government the prospect of a better future for its people, if -- and only if -- it lives up to its international obligations.

So there is no double standard at play here. We’ve made it clear, time and again, that we respect Iran’s right, like all countries, to access peaceful nuclear energy. That is a right embedded in the NPT -- a treaty that has to serve as the safeguard against a world in which more nations acquire the world’s most deadly weapons, and international law is treated as an empty promise. That NPT treaty was signed by all the parties involved, and it is a treaty that the United States has sought to strengthen from the day I took office, including through our own commitments to reduce America’s nuclear arsenal.

So let me repeat: We recognize Iran’s rights. But with those rights come responsibilities. And time and again, the Iranian government has failed to meet those responsibilities. Iran concealed a nuclear enrichment facility in Qom that raised serious questions about the nature of its program. Iran further violated its own obligations under U.N. Security Council resolutions to suspend uranium enrichment. Instead, they’re enriching up to 20 percent. It has failed to comply fully with IAEA’s requirements. Indeed, Iran is the only NPT signatory in the world -- the only one -- that cannot convince the IAEA that its nuclear program is intended for peaceful purposes.

That’s why the international community was compelled to impose these serious consequences. These are the most comprehensive sanctions that the Iranian government has faced. They will impose restrictions on Iran’s nuclear activities, its ballistic missile program, and, for the first time, its conventional military. They will put a new framework in place to stop Iranian smuggling, and crack down on Iranian banks and financial transactions. They target individuals, entities, and institutions -- including those associated with the Revolutionary Guard -- that have supported Iran’s nuclear program and prospered from illicit activities at the expense of the Iranian people. And we will ensure that these sanctions are vigorously enforced, just as we continue to refine and enforce our own sanctions on Iran alongside our friends and our allies.

The strong resolution that was passed today benefited from strong international support. In voting for it, we were joined by nations from Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America -- including Russia and China. And these sanctions show the united view of the international community that a nuclear arms race in the Middle East is in nobody’s interest, and that nations must be held accountable for challenging the global non-proliferation regime. The Iranian government must understand that true security will not come through the pursuit of nuclear weapons. True security will come through adherence to international law and the demonstration of its peaceful intent.

We know that the Iranian government will not change its behavior overnight, but today’s vote demonstrates the growing costs that will come with Iranian intransigence. And I want to be clear: These sanctions do not close the door on diplomacy. Iran continues to have the opportunity to take a different and better path. I would like nothing more than to reach the day when the Iranian government fulfills its international obligations -- a day when these sanctions are lifted, previous sanctions are lifted, and the Iranian people can finally fulfill the greatness of the Iranian nation.

Indeed, these sanctions are not directed at the Iranian people. As I said in Cairo, for decades the Iranian government has defined itself in opposition to my country. But faced with the opportunity to find a new way forward -- one that would benefit its own people -- the Iranian government has chosen instead to remain a prisoner of the past.

Saturday will mark one year from the day that an election captivated the attention of the world -- an event that should have been remembered for how the Iranian people participated with remarkable enthusiasm, but will instead be remembered for how the Iranian government brutally suppressed dissent and murdered the innocent, including a young woman left to die in the street.

Actions do have consequences, and today the Iranian government will face some of those consequences. Because whether it is threatening the nuclear non-proliferation regime, or the human rights of its own citizens, or the stability of its own neighbors by supporting terrorism, the Iranian government continues to demonstrate that its own unjust actions are a threat to justice everywhere.

I want and hope for the people of Iran that the government of Iran will make a different choice. It can make a different choice and pursue a course that will reaffirm the NPT as the basis of global non-proliferation and disarmament -- a course that will advance Iran’s own security and prosperity, and the peace of the wider world. Today’s sanctions are yet another signal that if the Iranian government continues to undermine the NPT and the peace that it protects, then Iran will find itself more isolated, less prosperous and less secure.

Thank you.

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# Address to Military Personnel in Pensacola, Florida

Thank you! Well, hello, Pensacola! It is great to be here. I want everybody, first of all, to give a big round of applause to Chief Elison Talabong for leading us in the pledge and singing our National Anthem -- to Lieutenant Commander Randy Ekstrom for the wonderful invocation.

I want to thank your outstanding local leaders for welcoming me here today, including Captains Chris Plummer, Mike Price and Brad Martin. Give them a big round of applause. And your great senior enlisted leaders, including Master Chief Mike Dollen, give them a big round of applause.

I want to thank all the spouses and families who are joining us here today. You hold our military families together, so we honor your service as well.

It is great to be here in Pensacola -- America’s oldest naval air station, “the cradle of naval aviation.” We’ve got Navy -- all the students of the Naval Air Technical Training Center. We’ve got Training Wing Six, maybe a few Blue Angels. We’ve got the United States Marines in the house -- maybe a few Air Force and Army, too.

Now, I don’t know how many could be here, because they’re out there on the water right now, responding to the spill -- but I want to thank all the folks at Coast Guard Station Pensacola for their outstanding work. And I know somebody who is especially proud of them, and that’s the former Commandant of the Coast Guard who postponed his retirement to answer his country’s call once more and coordinate the federal response effort to the spill -- and that’s Admiral Thad Allen. Please give him a big round of applause.

Now, I was just down at the Pensacola Beach Gulf Pier, at the Fish Sandwich Snack Bar. Now, I don’t know if any of you ever checked it out. It’s a nice spot. We were there with some of Florida’s state and local leaders to discuss the situation here. I want to acknowledge the hard work that’s being done by the governor of Florida, Charlie Crist; Florida’s Chief Financial Officer, Alex Sink; Senators Bill Nelson, George LeMieux, representatives who are here today -- we got Jeff Miller and Corrine Brown and Ted Deutch. Please give them a big round of applause.

We’ve got Escambia County Commissioner Grover Robinson and Pensacola Mayor Mike Wiggins. Thank you very much for your outstanding efforts.

I know all of you join me in thanking these leaders and their communities -- because they’re your neighbors -- for the incredible support that they give all the men and women and your families here in Pensacola. So we’re grateful to you.

But this is my fourth visit to the Gulf Coast since the start of this spill. Yesterday, I was over in Gulfport, Mississippi; Theodore, Alabama; and now Pensacola -- assessing the situation, reviewing the response, seeing what needs to be done better and faster, and talking with folks -- whether fishermen or small business people and their families -- who are seeing their lives turned upside-down by this disaster.

Here in Pensacola, the beautiful beaches are still open. The sand is white and the water is blue. So folks who are looking for a good vacation, they can still come down to Pensacola. People need to know that Pensacola is still open for business. But that doesn’t mean that people aren’t angry. That doesn’t mean that people aren’t scared. That doesn’t mean that people have concerns about the future -- we all have those concerns. And people have every right to be angry.

Those plumes of oil are off the coast. The fishing waters are closed. Tar balls have been coming ashore. And everybody is bracing for more.

So I’ll say today what I’ve been saying up and down the Coast over the last couple of days and over the last month. Yes, this is an unprecedented environmental disaster -- it’s the worst in our nation’s history. But we’re going to continue to meet it with an unprecedented federal response and recovery effort -- the largest in our nation’s history. This is an assault on our shores, and we’re going to fight back with everything we’ve got.

And that includes mobilizing the resources of the greatest military in the world. Here at Naval Air Station Pensacola, you’ve been one of the major staging areas. You’ve helped to support the response effort. And I thank you for that, and I know the people of Pensacola thank you for that. And all along the Gulf coast, our men and women in uniform -- active, Guard, and Reserve -- from across the country are stepping up and helping out.

They’re soldiers on the beaches putting out sandbags and building barriers and cleaning up the oil, and helping people process their claims for compensation from BP. They’re sailors and Marines offering their ships and their skimmers and their helicopters and miles of boom. They’re airmen overhead, flying in equipment and spraying dispersant. And, of course, there are Coast Guardsmen and women on the cutters, in the air, working around the clock.

And when I say this is the largest response of its kind in American history, I mean it. We’ve got more than 5,000 vessels on site -- skimmers, tugs, barges, dozens of aircraft. More than 27,000 personnel are on the scene, fighting this every day, putting out millions of feet of boom and cleaning the shores.

All told, we’ve authorized the deployment of 17,500 National Guardsmen to respond to this crisis. So far, only about 1,600 have been activated. That leaves a lot of Guardsmen ready to help. And if our governors call on them, I know they’ll be ready, because they’re always ready.

So I want the people of this region to know that my administration is going to do whatever it takes, for as long as it takes, to deal with this disaster. That includes the additional actions I announced yesterday to make sure that seafood from the Gulf is safe to eat. It includes steps we’ve taken to protect the safety of workers involved in the cleanup. It includes the new command structure I announced this morning to make sure states and local communities like Pensacola have the autonomy and the resources that they need to go forward.

And that includes something else -- making sure BP pays for the damages that it has caused -- because this isn’t just an environmental disaster. For many families and communities, it’s an economic disaster. Here in Pensacola and the Panhandle, tourism is everything. And when the tourists stay home, it ripples out and hits folks across these communities -- the charter boats, the hotels, the restaurants, the roadside stores, the shops, the suppliers, the dive shops. And if your inland waters are contaminated -- if the bays and bayous are contaminated -- it could be devastating, changing the way of life down here for years to come.

I’m going to speak to the nation tonight about this. But let me say to the people of Pensacola and the Gulf Coast: I am with you, my administration is with you for the long haul to make sure BP pays for the damage that it has done and to make sure that you are getting the help you need to protect this beautiful coast and to rehabilitate the damaged areas, to revitalize this region, and to make sure that nothing like this happens ever again. That is a commitment I am making to the people of Florida and people all across this Gulf.

Now, that spirit -- that spirit of resolve and determination and resilience, that’s the same spirit we see in all of you, the men and women in uniform, the spirit we’ll need to meet other challenges of our time. Obviously the news has been dominated lately by the oil spill, but our nation is at war and all of you have stepped forward. You volunteered. You took an oath. You stood tall and you said, “I will serve.”

And here at Pensacola, you’re carrying on the proud tradition of naval aviation that spans a century. Here at the Barrancas National Cemetery, our heroes from yesterday’s wars are still inspiring us. And like generations before you, you’re no strangers to sacrifice. Our prayers are with the families and friends of the crews that you lost in that training exercise two months ago. Today, we send out our thoughts and prayers to all the folks from Pensacola on the frontlines at this very moment, including Iraq and Afghanistan. They are making us incredibly proud.

And so are you. As naval aviators and naval flight officers, you’ll soon earn your “Wings of Gold.” Many of you will prove yourselves as indispensable air crews -- the mechanics, the engineers, the electricians, the maintenance crews -- people’s lives depending on what you do each and every day.

I know you’re looking ahead to your first operational tours -- to join the fleet and your squadrons. And within weeks, some of you may find yourselves serving on a carrier deck in the Arabian Sea or working a busy flight line in Afghanistan. And as you begin your careers, as you look ahead to a life of service, I want you to know -- on behalf of the American people -- that your nation thanks you, your nation appreciates you, your nation will stand with you every step of the way.

And as your Commander-in-Chief, I want you to know something: I will not hesitate to use force to protect the American people or our vital interests. But I will also never risk your lives unless it’s absolutely necessary. And if it is necessary, we are going to back you up to the hilt with the strategy and the clear mission and the equipment and the support that you need to get the job done right. That’s my promise to every one of you, every man and woman who wears America’s uniform.

That includes the right strategy in Iraq, where we’re partnering with the Iraqi people for their long-term security and prosperity. And thanks to the honor and the heroism of our troops, we are poised to end our combat mission in Iraq this summer -- on schedule.

As we end the war in Iraq, we’re pressing forward in Afghanistan. We’re working to break the momentum of the Taliban insurgency and train Afghan security forces, strengthen the capacity of the Afghan government and protect the Afghan people.

We will disrupt and dismantle and ultimately defeat al Qaeda and its terrorist affiliates. And we will support the aspirations of people around the world as they seek progress and opportunity and prosperity, because that’s what we do -- as Americans.

As you meet the missions we ask of you, we’re going to make sure you’re trained and equipped to succeed. That’s why we halted reductions in the Navy. That’s why we increased the size of the Marine Corps. That’s why we’re investing in the capabilities and technologies of tomorrow. And as we come up on the 100th anniversary of naval aviation next year, we’re committed to the next generation of aircraft. We’re going to keep you the best-trained, best-led, best-equipped military that the world has ever known.

Some of that is about technology. But the most important thing in our military is our people -- it’s all of you. And as you advance through the ranks and start families of your own, we want to be there for your loved ones, too. This is one of the defining missions of the First Lady, Michelle Obama. On Sunday, she visited the Navy-Marine Corps team and their families at Camp Pendleton. And they had a tough week, because five outstanding Marines from Pendleton gave their lives last week in Afghanistan. During her visit, Michelle had a message for their families and for all military families: America is going to keep faith with you, too.

When a loved one goes to war, that family goes to war. That’s why we’re working to improve family readiness and increase pay and benefits, working to give you more time between deployments, increasing support to help spouses and families deal with the stresses and the separation of war.

But this can’t be the work of government alone. As Michelle has been saying, 1 percent of Americans may be fighting our wars, but 100 percent of Americans need to be supporting our men and women and their families in uniform. You guys shouldn’t be carrying the entire burden. That’s why Michelle is challenging every sector of American society to support our military families -- not just now, with our nation at war, but at every stage of your lives.

So we’re improving care for our wounded warriors, especially those with post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injury. We’re funding the Post-9/11 GI Bill -- to give you and your families the chance to pursue your dreams. We’ve made a historic commitment to our veterans with one of the largest percentage increases to the VA budget in the past 30 years.

Those are concrete actions we’ve taken to meet the commitment I have to you and that the American people have to you. Because you’ve always taken care of America, America needs to take care of you. And that’s my main message here today. We’re all in this together. In our country, there isn’t a “military world” and a “civilian world.” We’re all Americans. There’s not Democrats and Republicans, when you take the long view -- we’re all Americans. We all rise and fall together. And we all need to do our part to get through the challenges we face as a people.

So, yes, we’re emerging from the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. Too many folks are still out of work here in Florida and around the country. Yes, we’re a nation at war with adversaries who will stop at nothing to strike our homeland and would kill innocent people, women and children, with no compunction. Yes, we’re now battling the worst economic -- environmental disaster in American history. Any one of these challenges alone would test our country. Confronting them all at once might overwhelm a lesser nation.

But look around you. Look at the person standing next to you. You look around and you see the strength and resilience that will carry us through.

You look at this installation and the forts that have stood watch over this bay and its people for centuries -- through the rise and fall of empires, through a terrible Civil War -- and as a nation healed itself, we became a beacon to the world. We’ve endured.

All of these men and women in uniform, all of you represent the same spirit of service and sacrifice as those who’ve gone before -- who defeated fascism, defeated tyranny, prevailed in a long Cold War over communism. And now, in our time, you’ve toppled regimes based on terror and dictatorship, and you’ve given new hope to millions of people. You’ve earned your place among the greatest of generations.

And look at the people of this city and this region -- fishermen who’ve made their lives on the water, families who’ve lived here for generations, hardworking folks who’ve had to endure more than their share -- tough economic times and hurricanes and storms that forced so many families and communities to start over from scratch. But they never gave up. They started over, and they rebuilt stronger than before.

As Americans, we don’t quit. We keep coming. None of these challenges we’re facing are going to be easy. None of them are going to be quick, but make no mistake, the United States of America has gone through tough times before and we always come out stronger. And we will do so again.

And this city and this region will recover. It will thrive again. And America’s military will prevail in the mission to keep our country safe. And our nation will endure from these trials stronger than before. That is the history of the United States of America. That is the legacy of our Armed Forces. And I promise you that we will not falter.

Past generations have passed on this precious gift to us, and future generations are depending on us. And as I look out on each and every one of your faces, I’m absolutely confident that you will meet that challenge.

God bless you and God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Oval Office Address to the Nation on BP Oil Spill Disaster

Good evening. As we speak, our nation faces a multitude of challenges. At home, our top priority is to recover and rebuild from a recession that has touched the lives of nearly every American. Abroad, our brave men and women in uniform are taking the fight to al Qaeda wherever it exists. And tonight, I’ve returned from a trip to the Gulf Coast to speak with you about the battle we’re waging against an oil spill that is assaulting our shores and our citizens.

On April 20th, an explosion ripped through BP Deepwater Horizon drilling rig, about 40 miles off the coast of Louisiana. Eleven workers lost their lives. Seventeen others were injured. And soon, nearly a mile beneath the surface of the ocean, oil began spewing into the water.

Because there has never been a leak this size at this depth, stopping it has tested the limits of human technology. That’s why just after the rig sank, I assembled a team of our nation’s best scientists and engineers to tackle this challenge -- a team led by Dr. Steven Chu, a Nobel Prize-winning physicist and our nation’s Secretary of Energy. Scientists at our national labs and experts from academia and other oil companies have also provided ideas and advice.

As a result of these efforts, we’ve directed BP to mobilize additional equipment and technology. And in the coming weeks and days, these efforts should capture up to 90 percent of the oil leaking out of the well. This is until the company finishes drilling a relief well later in the summer that’s expected to stop the leak completely.

Already, this oil spill is the worst environmental disaster America has ever faced. And unlike an earthquake or a hurricane, it’s not a single event that does its damage in a matter of minutes or days. The millions of gallons of oil that have spilled into the Gulf of Mexico are more like an epidemic, one that we will be fighting for months and even years.

But make no mistake: We will fight this spill with everything we’ve got for as long as it takes. We will make BP pay for the damage their company has caused. And we will do whatever’s necessary to help the Gulf Coast and its people recover from this tragedy.

Tonight I’d like to lay out for you what our battle plan is going forward: what we’re doing to clean up the oil, what we’re doing to help our neighbors in the Gulf, and what we’re doing to make sure that a catastrophe like this never happens again.

First, the cleanup. From the very beginning of this crisis, the federal government has been in charge of the largest environmental cleanup effort in our nation’s history -- an effort led by Admiral Thad Allen, who has almost 40 years of experience responding to disasters. We now have nearly 30,000 personnel who are working across four states to contain and clean up the oil. Thousands of ships and other vessels are responding in the Gulf. And I’ve authorized the deployment of over 17,000 National Guard members along the coast. These servicemen and women are ready to help stop the oil from coming ashore, they’re ready to help clean the beaches, train response workers, or even help with processing claims -- and I urge the governors in the affected states to activate these troops as soon as possible.

Because of our efforts, millions of gallons of oil have already been removed from the water through burning, skimming and other collection methods. Over five and a half million feet of boom has been laid across the water to block and absorb the approaching oil. We’ve approved the construction of new barrier islands in Louisiana to try to stop the oil before it reaches the shore, and we’re working with Alabama, Mississippi and Florida to implement creative approaches to their unique coastlines.

As the cleanup continues, we will offer whatever additional resources and assistance our coastal states may need. Now, a mobilization of this speed and magnitude will never be perfect, and new challenges will always arise. I saw and heard evidence of that during this trip. So if something isn’t working, we want to hear about it. If there are problems in the operation, we will fix them.

But we have to recognize that despite our best efforts, oil has already caused damage to our coastline and its wildlife. And sadly, no matter how effective our response is, there will be more oil and more damage before this siege is done. That’s why the second thing we’re focused on is the recovery and restoration of the Gulf Coast.

You know, for generations, men and women who call this region home have made their living from the water. That living is now in jeopardy. I’ve talked to shrimpers and fishermen who don’t know how they’re going to support their families this year. I’ve seen empty docks and restaurants with fewer customers -- even in areas where the beaches are not yet affected. I’ve talked to owners of shops and hotels who wonder when the tourists might start coming back. The sadness and the anger they feel is not just about the money they’ve lost. It’s about a wrenching anxiety that their way of life may be lost.

I refuse to let that happen. Tomorrow, I will meet with the chairman of BP and inform him that he is to set aside whatever resources are required to compensate the workers and business owners who have been harmed as a result of his company’s recklessness. And this fund will not be controlled by BP. In order to ensure that all legitimate claims are paid out in a fair and timely manner, the account must and will be administered by an independent third party.

Beyond compensating the people of the Gulf in the short term, it’s also clear we need a long-term plan to restore the unique beauty and bounty of this region. The oil spill represents just the latest blow to a place that’s already suffered multiple economic disasters and decades of environmental degradation that has led to disappearing wetlands and habitats. And the region still hasn’t recovered from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. That’s why we must make a commitment to the Gulf Coast that goes beyond responding to the crisis of the moment.

I make that commitment tonight. Earlier, I asked Ray Mabus, the Secretary of the Navy, who is also a former governor of Mississippi and a son of the Gulf Coast, to develop a long-term Gulf Coast Restoration Plan as soon as possible. The plan will be designed by states, local communities, tribes, fishermen, businesses, conservationists and other Gulf residents. And BP will pay for the impact this spill has had on the region.

The third part of our response plan is the steps we’re taking to ensure that a disaster like this does not happen again. A few months ago, I approved a proposal to consider new, limited offshore drilling under the assurance that it would be absolutely safe -- that the proper technology would be in place and the necessary precautions would be taken.

That obviously was not the case in the Deepwater Horizon rig, and I want to know why. The American people deserve to know why. The families I met with last week who lost their loved ones in the explosion -- these families deserve to know why. And so I’ve established a National Commission to understand the causes of this disaster and offer recommendations on what additional safety and environmental standards we need to put in place. Already, I’ve issued a six-month moratorium on deepwater drilling. I know this creates difficulty for the people who work on these rigs, but for the sake of their safety, and for the sake of the entire region, we need to know the facts before we allow deepwater drilling to continue. And while I urge the Commission to complete its work as quickly as possible, I expect them to do that work thoroughly and impartially.

One place we’ve already begun to take action is at the agency in charge of regulating drilling and issuing permits, known as the Minerals Management Service. Over the last decade, this agency has become emblematic of a failed philosophy that views all regulation with hostility -- a philosophy that says corporations should be allowed to play by their own rules and police themselves. At this agency, industry insiders were put in charge of industry oversight. Oil companies showered regulators with gifts and favors, and were essentially allowed to conduct their own safety inspections and write their own regulations.

When Ken Salazar became my Secretary of the Interior, one of his very first acts was to clean up the worst of the corruption at this agency. But it’s now clear that the problem there ran much deeper, and the pace of reform was just too slow. And so Secretary Salazar and I are bringing in new leadership at the agency -- Michael Bromwich, who was a tough federal prosecutor and Inspector General. And his charge over the next few months is to build an organization that acts as the oil industry’s watchdog -- not its partner.

So one of the lessons we’ve learned from this spill is that we need better regulations, better safety standards, and better enforcement when it comes to offshore drilling. But a larger lesson is that no matter how much we improve our regulation of the industry, drilling for oil these days entails greater risk. After all, oil is a finite resource. We consume more than 20 percent of the world’s oil, but have less than 2 percent of the world’s oil reserves. And that’s part of the reason oil companies are drilling a mile beneath the surface of the ocean -- because we’re running out of places to drill on land and in shallow water.

For decades, we have known the days of cheap and easily accessible oil were numbered. For decades, we’ve talked and talked about the need to end America’s century-long addiction to fossil fuels. And for decades, we have failed to act with the sense of urgency that this challenge requires. Time and again, the path forward has been blocked -- not only by oil industry lobbyists, but also by a lack of political courage and candor.

The consequences of our inaction are now in plain sight. Countries like China are investing in clean energy jobs and industries that should be right here in America. Each day, we send nearly $1 billion of our wealth to foreign countries for their oil. And today, as we look to the Gulf, we see an entire way of life being threatened by a menacing cloud of black crude.

We cannot consign our children to this future. The tragedy unfolding on our coast is the most painful and powerful reminder yet that the time to embrace a clean energy future is now. Now is the moment for this generation to embark on a national mission to unleash America’s innovation and seize control of our own destiny.

This is not some distant vision for America. The transition away from fossil fuels is going to take some time, but over the last year and a half, we’ve already taken unprecedented action to jumpstart the clean energy industry. As we speak, old factories are reopening to produce wind turbines, people are going back to work installing energy-efficient windows, and small businesses are making solar panels. Consumers are buying more efficient cars and trucks, and families are making their homes more energy-efficient. Scientists and researchers are discovering clean energy technologies that someday will lead to entire new industries.

Each of us has a part to play in a new future that will benefit all of us. As we recover from this recession, the transition to clean energy has the potential to grow our economy and create millions of jobs -- but only if we accelerate that transition. Only if we seize the moment. And only if we rally together and act as one nation -- workers and entrepreneurs; scientists and citizens; the public and private sectors.

When I was a candidate for this office, I laid out a set of principles that would move our country towards energy independence. Last year, the House of Representatives acted on these principles by passing a strong and comprehensive energy and climate bill -- a bill that finally makes clean energy the profitable kind of energy for America’s businesses.

Now, there are costs associated with this transition. And there are some who believe that we can’t afford those costs right now. I say we can’t afford not to change how we produce and use energy --because the long-term costs to our economy, our national security, and our environment are far greater.

So I’m happy to look at other ideas and approaches from either party -- as long they seriously tackle our addiction to fossil fuels. Some have suggested raising efficiency standards in our buildings like we did in our cars and trucks. Some believe we should set standards to ensure that more of our electricity comes from wind and solar power. Others wonder why the energy industry only spends a fraction of what the high-tech industry does on research and development -- and want to rapidly boost our investments in such research and development.

All of these approaches have merit, and deserve a fair hearing in the months ahead. But the one approach I will not accept is inaction. The one answer I will not settle for is the idea that this challenge is somehow too big and too difficult to meet. You know, the same thing was said about our ability to produce enough planes and tanks in World War II. The same thing was said about our ability to harness the science and technology to land a man safely on the surface of the moon. And yet, time and again, we have refused to settle for the paltry limits of conventional wisdom. Instead, what has defined us as a nation since our founding is the capacity to shape our destiny -- our determination to fight for the America we want for our children. Even if we’re unsure exactly what that looks like. Even if we don’t yet know precisely how we’re going to get there. We know we’ll get there.

It’s a faith in the future that sustains us as a people. It is that same faith that sustains our neighbors in the Gulf right now.

Each year, at the beginning of shrimping season, the region’s fishermen take part in a tradition that was brought to America long ago by fishing immigrants from Europe. It’s called “The Blessing of the Fleet,” and today it’s a celebration where clergy from different religions gather to say a prayer for the safety and success of the men and women who will soon head out to sea -- some for weeks at a time. The ceremony goes on in good times and in bad. It took place after Katrina, and it took place a few weeks ago -- at the beginning of the most difficult season these fishermen have ever faced.

And still, they came and they prayed. For as a priest and former fisherman once said of the tradition, “The blessing is not that God has promised to remove all obstacles and dangers. The blessing is that He is with us always,” a blessing that’s granted “even in the midst of the storm.”

The oil spill is not the last crisis America will face. This nation has known hard times before and we will surely know them again. What sees us through -- what has always seen us through -- is our strength, our resilience, and our unyielding faith that something better awaits us if we summon the courage to reach for it.

Tonight, we pray for that courage. We pray for the people of the Gulf. And we pray that a hand may guide us through the storm towards a brighter day.

Thank you, God bless you, and may God bless the United States of America.

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# Address to the American Nurses Association

Hello, everybody! All right, everybody have a seat. I got a lot to say here. First of all, I want to just thank Becky Patton for the extraordinary work that she has done on behalf of nurses, on behalf of patients, on behalf of the country. Thank you so much. We are proud of everything that she’s done. And her mom is in the house -- so, thanks, Mom. Good job. Good job with Becky.

I want to thank Marla Weston, the CEO of the American Nurses Association. And I also want to acknowledge the presence here of Dr. Mary Wakefield, who is our -- for those of you who are not familiar, she is the administrator of HRSA and our highest-ranking nurse in the administration -- and does absolutely great work.

Now, I want to tell you, it is an honor to speak to the ANA, representing more than 3 million registered nurses across the country. Part of the reason I’m here is because I promised I was going to come, and I told to Becky that I don’t break promises to nurses because you never know when I’m going to need a shot. And I don’t want them working that needle all kind of -- “I can’t find a vein.” So I’m keeping my promises.

But it’s not just out of fear. It’s also because I love nurses. I love nurses. Now, I’m not just saying that because I’m talking to a roomful of nurses. There are representatives from Illinois here in the house -- and they will testify I loved nurses before I got to Washington. And I don’t think I’m alone in that, because virtually all of us, at one time or another in our lives, have known the care and the skill that you offer. In hours of need, in moments where people are most vulnerable, most worried, nurses are there, doing difficult and lifesaving work.

And you don’t just provide clean bandages or an intravenous line. A nurse will hold your hand sometime, or offer a voice of calm, or that knowing glance that says things are going to be okay.

And when Malia was born, I remember vividly the nurses who took care of Michelle and our new baby. The doctor who delivered is actually one of our best friends, but she was there about 10 minutes. And the nurse was there the whole time tending to this new family of ours. That was a happy day. Now, there was another day when our youngest daughter, Sasha -- she was three months old -- was diagnosed with meningitis. And it was nurses who walked us through what was happening, and who, along with the doctors, helped make sure that Sasha was all right and that her father did not have a breakdown.

So, as a father, as a husband, I will forever be in debt to the women and men of your profession. And I know that millions of others feel the same way. America’s nurses are the beating heart of our medical system. You’re on the front lines -- You are on the front lines of health care in small clinics and in large hospitals, in rural towns and in big cities, all across America.

And it’s because you know our health care system so well that you’ve been such a fierce advocate for its reform. Because after all, you care for patients who end up in the emergency room, or in surgery, because they couldn’t afford the preventive care that would have made more invasive and costly treatment unnecessary. You are asked not only to take care of patients -- you’ve got to navigate a tangle of rules and forms and paperwork that drive up costs and prevent you from doing the best job possible.

You’re the ones who see the terror in a parent’s eyes when an insurance company bureaucrat has denied coverage for a child’s treatment. And you’re the ones who have to comfort people who are wracked with worry not only about getting better, but also about paying for health care because they’ve hit a cap on benefits or their insurance doesn’t cover a preexisting condition.

So nurses have seen the consequences of our decades-old failure to reform our health care system -- the rising costs, the increased uninsured, the mixed up incentives, the overburdened providers, and a complex system that has been working a lot better for insurance companies than it’s working for the American people -- or for providers.

And that's why, almost a year ago, nurses from across the country came to the White House to help make the case for reform -- for making coverage more affordable, and extending coverage to millions without it; for giving doctors and nurses more freedom to help their patients; for providing families and small businesses with more control over their health insurance; and for ending the worst and most abusive practices of the insurance industry.

And after a long and tough fight, we succeeded -- yes, we did -- in passing health care reform. Thanks to you. And that reform will make a positive difference in the lives of the American people.

Now, this fight wasn’t new for the ANA. I understand you were one of the only major health care organizations that supported the creation of Medicare from the start. And I want to recognize one of your leaders -- Jo Eleanor Elliott of Colorado, who is here today and was your president back then -- for the courage and leadership she showed. Where is she? There you are right there. Give her a big round of applause.

So you’ve been there before and you were here this time. And I want to thank the ANA for advocating for health care reform -- for ensuring that the voices of nurses and of patients were heard.

Now, already, we’re seeing the start of a profound shift as reforms begin to take effect. We’re giving ordinary consumers and small businesses more power and protection in the health care system -- and we’re knocking down barriers that stand between you and the people who you care for.

A few weeks ago, 4 million small business owners and organizations got a postcard in their mailbox from the IRS. Now, usually that's not good news. But this time it was because it told them that they could be eligible for a health care tax cut this year -- a tax cut worth potentially tens of thousands of dollars for those small businesses; a tax cut that will help millions to provide coverage to their employees. That's happening now.

In many cases, young adults without health insurance are now able to stay on their parents’ plan until they’re 26 years old. Even though insurance companies had until September to comply with this rule, we asked them to do so immediately to avoid coverage gaps for young adults, and most have agreed.

Starting this month, relief is also available to businesses for providing coverage to retirees who are not yet eligible for Medicare. And as of last week, senior citizens who fall into the doughnut hole have started receiving a $250 rebate to help them afford their medication -- and we’re going to keep on going until we close that doughnut hole completely. In the meantime, we’re strengthening Medicare by going after the billions of dollars in waste and fraud and abuse in the system. And states like Maine and Connecticut are beginning to predict budget savings as pieces of reform come online.

So we’ve begun making coverage more affordable. In addition, the new health care law has also started to end the worst insurance industry practices. You know them. For too long, we’ve been held hostage to an industry that jacks up premiums and drops coverage whenever they please. Those days are coming to an end.

So after my administration demanded that a large insurance company justify a massive premium increase on Californians, the company backed off its plan. My Secretary of Health and Human Services, Kathleen Sebelius, has urged states to investigate other rate hikes. We’ve set up a new Office of Consumer Information and Insurance Oversight. And we’ll provide grants to states running the best oversight programs to root out bad practices when it comes to premiums.

Now, as of September, the new health care law prohibits insurance companies from dropping people’s coverage when they get sick, which is critical to giving people some peace of mind. But when news reports indicated that an insurance company was dropping the coverage of women diagnosed with breast cancer, my administration called on them to end the practice immediately -- don’t wait till September. And soon after, the entire industry announced that it would comply with the new law early and stop this perverse practice of dropping people’s insurance when they fall ill and when they need coverage the most.

Some were also questioning whether insurance companies could find a loophole in the new law and continue to discriminate against children with preexisting conditions. So we called on insurance companies to step up, provide coverage to our most vulnerable Americans. And the insurance industry has agreed.

In just two weeks, Americans denied coverage because of preexisting conditions will be able to enroll in a new national insurance pool. And for states that opt to run their own pools -- using funds from the new law -- we’re urging them to begin enrolling people as soon as possible. And these pools are going to provide some short-term relief, but they're temporary. They’re going to ensure that folks who have been shut out of the market because they’ve been sick can access more affordable insurance starting right away. But what we want is these health insurance exchanges up and running in a few years, so that, at that point, this kind of discrimination will finally be banned forever. And that’s when those -- that's when the millions without coverage, including people with preexisting conditions, will have the access to the same types of insurance plans that members of Congress get. And you know those must be pretty good.

We’re also going to be putting in place a patient’s bill of rights that will tell insurance companies that they can’t put a restrictive limit on the amount of coverage you get in your lifetime, or in a given year. It will prevent insurance companies from rescinding your coverage when you get sick because of an administrative error. It will provide simple and clear information to consumers about their choices and their rights. And beyond making insurance more affordable and more secure, reform also will mean changes that make it easier for you -- the backbone of the health care system -- to do your jobs. Already, over the past year, we’ve made one of the largest investments in the nursing and health workforce in recent history. We passed landmark reforms to make college more affordable, which can help more people gain a nursing degree -- even as we provide grants and aid for more than 15,000 nurses seeking graduate degrees and other training.

And we’ve begun the transition to private and secure computerized health records, because this will not only reduce errors and costs -- I know you can’t read those doctors’ handwriting -- it will mean you can spend more time with patients and less time with paperwork. And that's why you got into the profession.

Now, there is more work to do. And that's why today my administration is announcing a number of investments to expand the primary care workforce. This includes funding to allow students training part-time to become nurse practitioners to start training full-time. We want to speed up the process where folks go from the classroom into the exam room. And we’re going to provide resources for clinics run by registered nurses and nurse practitioners.

Without these nurses, many people in cities and rural areas would have no access to care at all. Now, all of these steps are part of a larger effort to make our system work better for nurses and for doctors, and to improve the quality of care for patients. And by focusing on primary medicine, we will finally recognize the role of all talented and skilled health care providers -- including nurses.

I don’t have to tell you that nurses all too often have been given short shrift. Even amidst a nursing shortage, when there are cutbacks, you feel the squeeze in salaries or the reduction in shifts -- despite being overworked and underpaid. And, as you know, this disregard goes beyond numbers on a ledger. There have been a bunch of times, I’m sure, when the service you rendered is thought to be less consequential or valuable than that of other professions. That's what has to change.

It’s important that we not only ensure that you have the support to do your jobs -- we’re seeking to elevate and value the work that you do, because -- throughout our history, nurses have done more than provide care and comfort to those in need. Often with little power or sway on their own, nurses -- mostly women, historically -- have been a force of will and a sense of common decency, and paved the way towards better care and a more compassionate society -- from Clara Barton’s treatment of wounded soldiers at Antietam, to the advocacy of Dorothea Dix on behalf of people with mental disabilities, to the countless nurses whose names we’ll never know.

One of America’s greatest poets, Walt Whitman, also served as a nurse during the Civil War. And the experience changed him forever. Later, he would reflect on that time, on both the heartbreak and the fulfillment he found during those years. And he wrote:

I thread my way through the hospitals, The hurt and wounded I pacify with soothing hand, I sit by the restless all the dark night, Some are so young, some suffer so much, I recall the experience sweet and sad

Sweet and sad. Your jobs are tough. Your days can be stressful and exhausting and sometimes thankless. But through long shifts and late nights -- in the hectic scrum of the emergency room, or in those quiet acts of humanity -- you are saving lives, you are offering solace, you’re helping to make us a better nation. And my task as President -- our task as a people -- is to ensure that our health care system is worthy of your efforts. Our mission must be to live up to the values you uphold each and every day.

So, thank you. God bless you. And God bless the United States of America. Thank you, everybody. Thank you.

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# Father's Day Address

Hello! Hello, everybody! Thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you very much. Everybody, please have a seat. Thank you very much. Thank you. Let me just begin by making a few acknowledgements. First of all, I've got some outstanding fathers here in the first row who aren’t seeing their kids enough because I'm working them all the time -- three members of my Cabinet: Secretary of the Treasury Tim Geithner -- Attorney General Eric Holder -- and Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke are here.

In addition, we've got one of my heroes and I'm sure one of yours, somebody whose shoulders I stand on and allowed me to become President of the United States, and that's Congressman from the great state of Georgia, John Lewis, is here. A fierce advocate on behalf of the District of Columbia, Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton is here.

I want to acknowledge the Mayor of Washington, D.C., Adrian Fenty in the house. The executive director of ARC, Edmund Fleet, is here. I want to thank all the panel discussion participants who are involved in today’s events, and I want to thank Nurney Mason -- a Washington, D.C. icon. Nurney founded Mason’s Barbershop in 1961. That's the year I was born. It’s still going strong. He is here with his children and his grandchildren. Where is he? There he is right there. I could use a little trim.

One year ago this week, we kicked off a national conversation on fatherhood and personal responsibility, and members of our administration fanned out all across the country to hear from fathers and families about the challenges that they face. Secretary Arne Duncan, our Secretary of Education, held a discussion in New Hampshire about the link between fatherhood and educational achievement. Gary Locke talked to fathers in California about balancing the needs of their families with the demands of their jobs. Secretary Shinseki, of Veterans Affairs, held a town hall for military and veteran dads in North Carolina. And Attorney General Holder traveled to Georgia for a forum about fathers in our criminal justice system.

And in each of these places, each of these leaders posed a simple question: How can we as a nation -- not just the government, but businesses and community groups and concerned citizens -- how can we all come together to help fathers meet their responsibilities to our families and communities?

And we did this because we know the vital role fathers play in the lives of our children. Fathers are our first teachers and coaches -- or in my house, assistant teachers and assistant coaches -- to mom. But they’re our mentors, our role models. They show us by the example they set the kind of people they want us to become.

But we also know that what too many fathers being absent means -- too many fathers missing from too many homes, missing from too many lives. We know that when fathers abandon their responsibilities, there’s harm done to those kids. We know that children who grow up without a father are more likely to live in poverty. They're more likely to drop out of school. They're more likely to wind up in prison. They’re more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol. They’re more likely to run away from home. They’re more likely to become teenage parents themselves.

And I say all this as someone who grew up without a father in my own life. He left my family when I was two years old. And while I was lucky to have a wonderful mother and loving grandparents who poured everything they had into me and my sister, I still felt the weight of that absence. It’s something that leaves a hole in a child’s life that no government can fill.

So we can talk all we want here in Washington about issues like education and health care and crime; we can build good schools; we can put money into creating good jobs; we can do everything we can to keep our streets safe -- but government can’t keep our kids from looking for trouble on those streets. Government can’t force a kid to pick up a book or make sure that the homework gets done. Government can’t be there day in, day out, to provide discipline and guidance and the love that it takes to raise a child. That’s our job as fathers, as mothers, as guardians for our children.

The fact is, it’s easy to become a father, technically -- any guy can do that. It’s hard to live up to the lifelong responsibilities that come with fatherhood. And it’s a challenge even in good times, when our families are doing well. It’s especially difficult when times are tough, families are straining just to keep everything together.

In a time of war, many of our military families are stretched thin, with fathers doing multiple tours of duty far away from their children. In difficult economic times, a lot of fathers are worried about whether they’re going to be able to keep their job, or find a job, or whether they’ll be able to pay the bills and give their children the kinds of opportunities that if they didn’t have them themselves, at least they wished for their children. And there are a lot of men who are out of work and wrestling with the shame and frustration that comes when you feel like you can’t be the kind of provider you want to be for the people that you love.

But here’s the key message I think all of us want to send today to fathers all across the country: Our children don’t need us to be superheroes. They don’t need us to be perfect. They do need us to be present. They need us to show up and give it our best shot, no matter what else is going on in our lives. They need us to show them -- not just with words, but with deeds -- that they, those kids, are always our first priority.

Those family meals, afternoons in the park, bedtime stories; the encouragement we give, the questions we answer, the limits we set, the example we set of persistence in the face of difficulty and hardship -- those things add up over time, and they shape a child’s character, build their core, teach them to trust in life and to enter into it with confidence and with hope and with determination. And that’s something they’ll always carry with them: that love that we show not with money, or fame, or spectacular feats, but through small daily acts -- the love we show and that we earn by being present in the lives of our children.

Now, unfortunately, the way we talk about fatherhood in this country doesn’t always reinforce these truths. When we talk about issues like child care and work-family balance, we call them “women’s issues” and “mothers’ issues.” Too often when we talk about fatherhood and personal responsibility, we talk about it in political terms, in terms of left and right, conservative/liberal, instead of what’s right and what’s wrong. And when we do that, we’ve gotten off track. So I think it’s time for a new conversation around fatherhood in this country.

We can all agree that we’ve got too many mothers out there forced to do everything all by themselves. They’re doing a heroic job, often under trying circumstances. They deserve a lot of credit for that. But they shouldn’t have to do it alone. The work of raising our children is the most important job in this country, and it’s all of our responsibilities -- mothers and fathers.

Now, I can’t legislate fatherhood -- I can’t force anybody to love a child. But what we can do is send a clear message to our fathers that there is no excuse for failing to meet their obligations. What we can do is make it easier for fathers who make responsible choices and harder for those who avoid those choices. What we can do is come together and support fathers who are willing to step up and be good partners and parents and providers.

And that’s why today we’re launching the next phase of our work to promote responsible fatherhood -- a new, nationwide Fatherhood and Mentoring Initiative. This is a call to action with cities and states, with individuals and organizations across the country -- from the NFL Players Association to the National PTA, to everyday moms and dads -- we’re raising awareness about responsible fatherhood and working to re-engage absent fathers with their families.

As part of this effort, we’ve proposed a new and expanded Fatherhood, Marriage and Families Innovation Fund. And we plan to seek out and support the very best, most successful initiatives in our states and communities -- those that are offering services like job training, or parenting skills classes, domestic violence prevention -- all which help provide the kind of network of support for men, particularly those in vulnerable communities.

We’re also going to help dads who get caught up -- we want to make sure that they're caught up on child support payments and that we re-engage them in their children’s lives. We’re going to support efforts to build healthy relationships between parents as well -- because we know that children benefit not just from loving mothers and loving fathers, but from strong and loving marriages as well.

We’re also launching a new transitional jobs initiative for ex-offenders and low-income, non-custodial fathers -- because these are men who often face serious barriers to finding work and keeping work. We’ll help them develop the skills and experience they need to move into full-time, long-term employment, so they can meet their child support obligations and help provide for their families.

And under Eric Holder’s direction, our Justice Department is planning to create its first “Fathering Re-Entry Court” for ex-offender dads -- and to help replicate this program in courts across the country. The idea here is very simple: to reach fathers right as they’re leaving the criminal justice system and connect them immediately to the employment and services they need to start making their child support payments and reconnecting them with their families.

This program was inspired by leaders like Peter Spokes, who was the executive director of the National Center for Fathering -- a good friend to many in our administration, all of whom were deeply saddened by his recent passing. And we are honored to have Peter’s wife, Barbara, with us here today. Where’s Barbara? I just saw her earlier. There she is. Thank you.

So these initiatives are a good start. But ultimately, we know that the decision to be a good father -- that’s up to us, each of us, as individuals. It’s one that men across this country are making every single day -- attending those school assemblies; parent-teacher conferences; coaching soccer, Little League; scrimping and saving, and working that extra shift so that their children can go to college. And plenty of fathers -- and men who aren’t fathers as well -- are stepping up to serve as mentors and tutors and big brothers and foster parents to young people who don’t have any responsible adult in their lives.

Even when we give it our best efforts, there will still be plenty of days of struggle and heartache when we don’t quite measure up -- talking to the men here now. Even with all the good fortune and support Michelle and I have had in our lives, I’ve made plenty of mistakes as a parent. I’ve lost count of all the times when the demands of work have taken me from the duties of fatherhood. And I know I’ve missed out on moments in my daughters’ lives that I’ll never get back, and that’s a loss that’s hard to accept.

But I also know the feeling that one author described when she wrote that “to have a child…is to decide forever to have your heart go walking around outside your body.” Think about that -- to have a child is to have your heart walking around outside your body.

I’m sure a lot of fathers here know that same memory that I have, of driving home with Michelle and Malia right after she was born, going about 10 miles an hour. Your emotions swinging between unadulterated joy and sheer terror. And I made a pledge that day that I would do everything I could to give my daughter what I never had -- that if I could be anything in life, I would be a good father.

And like a lot of the men here, since that time I’ve found there’s nothing else in my life that compares to the pleasures I take in spending time with my girls. Nothing else comes close to the pride I feel in their achievement and the satisfaction I get in watching them grow into strong, confident young women.

Over the course of my life, I have been an attorney, I’ve been a professor, I’ve been a state senator, I’ve been a U.S. senator -- and I currently am serving as President of the United States. But I can say without hesitation that the most challenging, most fulfilling, most important job I will have during my time on this Earth is to be Sasha and Malia’s dad.

So you don’t need a fancy degree for that. You don’t need a lot of money for that. No matter what doubts we may feel, what difficulties we may face, we all have to remember being a father -- it’s not just an obligation and a responsibility; it is a privilege and a blessing, one that we all have to embrace as individuals and as a nation.

So, Happy Father’s Day, everybody. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

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# On Resignation of General McChrystal from Afghanistan Command

Good afternoon. Today I accepted General Stanley McChrystal's resignation as commander of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. I did so with considerable regret, but also with certainty that it is the right thing for our mission in Afghanistan, for our military, and for our country.

I'm also pleased to nominate General David Petraeus to take command in Afghanistan which will allows us to maintain the momentum and leadership that we need to succeed.

I don't make this decision based on any difference in policy with General McChrystal, as we are in full agreement about our strategy. Nor do I make this decision out of any sense of personal insult. Stan McChrystal has always shown great courtesy and carried out my orders faithfully. I've got great admiration for him and for his long record of service in uniform.

Over the last nine years, with America fighting wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, he has earned a reputation as one of our nation's finest soldiers. That reputation is founded upon his extraordinary dedication, his deep intelligence and his love of country. I've relied on his service, particularly in helping to design and lead our new strategy in Afghanistan. So all Americans should be grateful for General McChrystal's remarkable career in uniform.

But war is bigger than any one man or woman, whether a private, a general or a president. And as difficult as it is to lose General McChrystal, I believe that it is the right decision for our national security.

The conduct represented in the recently published article does not meet the standard that should be set by a commanding general. It undermines the civilian control of the military that is at the core of our democratic system. And it erodes the trust that's necessary for our team to work together to achieve our objectives in Afghanistan.

My multiple responsibilities as Commander-in-Chief led me to this decision. First, I have a responsibility to the extraordinary men and women who are fighting this war and to the democratic institutions that I've been elected to lead. I've got no greater honor than serving as commander-in-chief of our men and women in uniform.

And it is my duty to ensure that no diversion complicates the vital mission that they are carrying out. That includes adherence to a strict code of conduct. The strength and greatness of our military is rooted in the fact that this code applies equally to newly enlisted privates and to the general officer who commands them. That allows us to come together as one. That's part of the reason why America has the finest fighting force in the history of the world.

It is also true that our democracy depends upon institutions that are stronger than individuals. That includes strict adherence to the military chain of command and respect for civilian control over that chain of command. And that's why as commander-in-chief I believe this decision is necessary to hold ourselves accountable to standards that are at the core of our democracy.

Second, I have a responsibility to do whatever is necessary to succeed in Afghanistan and in our broader effort to disrupt, dismantle and defeat Al Qaida. I believe that this mission demands unity of effort across our alliance and across my national security team. And I don't think that we can sustain that unity of effort and achieve our objectives in Afghanistan without making this change. That, too, has guided my decision.

I've just told my national security team that now is the time for all of us to come together. Doing so is not an option but an obligation. I welcome debate among my team, but I won't tolerate division. All of us have personal interests. All of us have opinions. Our politics often fuels conflict. But we have to renew our sense of common purpose and meet our responsibilities to one another, and to our troops who are in harm's way and to our country.

We need to remember what this is all about. Our nation is at war. We face a very tough fight in Afghanistan. But Americans don't flinch in the face of difficult truths or difficult tasks. We persist and we persevere. We will not tolerate a safe haven for terrorists who want to destroy Afghan society from within and launch attacks against innocent men, women and children in our country and around the world.

So make no mistake, we have a clear goal. We are going to break the Taliban's momentum. We are going to build Afghan capacity. We are going to relentlessly apply pressure on Al Qaida and its leadership, strengthening the ability of both Afghanistan and Pakistan to do the same. That's the strategy that we agreed to last fall. That is the policy that we are carrying out in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In that effort, we are honored to be joined by allies and partners who have stood by us and paid the ultimate price through the loss of their young people at war. They are with us because the interests and values that we share, and because this mission is fundamental to the ability of free people to live in peace and security in the 21st century.

And General Petraeus and I were able to spend some time this morning discussing the way forward. I'm extraordinarily grateful that he has agreed to serve in this new capacity. It should be clear to everybody he does so at great personal sacrifice to himself and to his family. And he is setting an extraordinary example of service and patriotism by assuming this difficult post.

Let me say to the American people, this is a change in personnel, but it is not a change in policy. General Petraeus fully participated in our review last fall. And he both supported and helped design the strategy that we have in place.

In his current post at Central Command, he was worked closely with our forces in Afghanistan; he has worked closely with Congress; he has worked closely with the Afghan and Pakistan governments, and with all our partners in the region. He has my full confidence. And I am urging the Senate to confirm him for this new assignment as swiftly as possible.

Let me conclude by saying that it was a difficult decision to come to the conclusion that I've made today. Indeed, it saddens me to lose the service of a soldier who I've come to respect and admire. But the reasons that led me to this decision are the same principles that have supported the strength of our military and our nation since the founding. So, once again, I thank General McChrystal for his enormous contributions to the security of this nation and to the success of our mission in Afghanistan.

I look forward to working with General Petraeus and my entire national security team to succeed in our mission. And I reaffirm that America stands as one in our support for the men and women who defend it.

Thank you very much.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Thank you. Everyone please have a seat. Thank you very much. Let -- Let me thank Pastor Hybels from near my hometown in Chicago, who took time off his vacation to be here today. We are blessed to have him.

I want to thank President Neil Kerwin and our hosts here at American University; acknowledge my outstanding Secretary of Labor, Hilda Solis, and members of my administration; all the members of Congress -- Hilda deserves applause. To all the members of Congress, the elected officials, faith and law enforcement, labor, business leaders and immigration advocates who are here today -- thank you for your presence.

I want to thank American University for welcoming me to the campus once again. Some may recall that the last time I was here I was joined by a dear friend, and a giant of American politics, Senator Edward Kennedy. Teddy’s not here right now, but his legacy of civil rights and health care and worker protections is still with us.

I was a candidate for President that day, and some may recall I argued that our country had reached a tipping point; that after years in which we had deferred our most pressing problems, and too often yielded to the politics of the moment, we now faced a choice: We could squarely confront our challenges with honesty and determination, or we could consign ourselves and our children to a future less prosperous and less secure.

I believed that then and I believe it now. And that’s why, even as we’ve tackled the most severe economic crisis since the Great Depression, even as we’ve wound down the war in Iraq and refocused our efforts in Afghanistan, my administration has refused to ignore some of the fundamental challenges facing this generation.

We launched the most aggressive education reforms in decades, so that our children can gain the knowledge and skills they need to compete in a 21st century global economy.

We have finally delivered on the promise of health reform -- reform that will bring greater security to every American, and that will rein in the skyrocketing costs that threaten families, businesses and the prosperity of our nation.

We’re on the verge of reforming an outdated and ineffective set of rules governing Wall Street -- to give greater power to consumers and prevent the reckless financial speculation that led to this severe recession.

And we’re accelerating the transition to a clean energy economy by significantly raising the fuel-efficiency standards of cars and trucks, and by doubling our use of renewable energies like wind and solar power -- steps that have the potential to create whole new industries and hundreds of thousands of new jobs in America.

So, despite the forces of the status quo, despite the polarization and the frequent pettiness of our politics, we are confronting the great challenges of our times. And while this work isn’t easy, and the changes we seek won’t always happen overnight, what we’ve made clear is that this administration will not just kick the can down the road.

Immigration reform is no exception. In recent days, the issue of immigration has become once more a source of fresh contention in our country, with the passage of a controversial law in Arizona and the heated reactions we’ve seen across America. Some have rallied behind this new policy. Others have protested and launched boycotts of the state. And everywhere, people have expressed frustration with a system that seems fundamentally broken.

Of course, the tensions around immigration are not new. On the one hand, we’ve always defined ourselves as a nation of immigrants -- a nation that welcomes those willing to embrace America’s precepts. Indeed, it is this constant flow of immigrants that helped to make America what it is. The scientific breakthroughs of Albert Einstein, the inventions of Nikola Tesla, the great ventures of Andrew Carnegie’s U.S. Steel and Sergey Brin’s Google, Inc. -- all this was possible because of immigrants.

And then there are the countless names and the quiet acts that never made the history books but were no less consequential in building this country -- the generations who braved hardship and great risk to reach our shores in search of a better life for themselves and their families; the millions of people, ancestors to most of us, who believed that there was a place where they could be, at long last, free to work and worship and live their lives in peace.

So this steady stream of hardworking and talented people has made America the engine of the global economy and a beacon of hope around the world. And it’s allowed us to adapt and thrive in the face of technological and societal change. To this day, America reaps incredible economic rewards because we remain a magnet for the best and brightest from across the globe. Folks travel here in the hopes of being a part of a culture of entrepreneurship and ingenuity, and by doing so they strengthen and enrich that culture. Immigration also means we have a younger workforce -- and a faster-growing economy -- than many of our competitors. And in an increasingly interconnected world, the diversity of our country is a powerful advantage in global competition.

Just a few weeks ago, we had an event of small business owners at the White House. And one business owner was a woman named Prachee Devadas who came to this country, became a citizen, and opened up a successful technology services company. When she started, she had just one employee. Today, she employs more than a hundred people. This past April, we held a naturalization ceremony at the White House for members of our armed forces. Even though they were not yet citizens, they had enlisted. One of them was a woman named Perla Ramos -- born and raised in Mexico, came to the United States shortly after 9/11, and she eventually joined the Navy. And she said, “I take pride in our flag and the history that forged this great nation and the history we write day by day.”

These women, and men and women across this country like them, remind us that immigrants have always helped to build and defend this country -- and that being an American is not a matter of blood or birth. It’s a matter of faith. It’s a matter of fidelity to the shared values that we all hold so dear. That’s what makes us unique. That’s what makes us strong. Anybody can help us write the next great chapter in our history.

Now, we can’t forget that this process of immigration and eventual inclusion has often been painful. Each new wave of immigrants has generated fear and resentments towards newcomers, particularly in times of economic upheaval. Our founding was rooted in the notion that America was unique as a place of refuge and freedom for, in Thomas Jefferson’s words, “oppressed humanity.” But the ink on our Constitution was barely dry when, amidst conflict, Congress passed the Alien and Sedition Acts, which placed harsh restrictions of those suspected of having foreign allegiances. A century ago, immigrants from Ireland, Italy, Poland, other European countries were routinely subjected to rank discrimination and ugly stereotypes. Chinese immigrants were held in detention and deported from Angel Island in the San Francisco Bay. They didn’t even get to come in.

So the politics of who is and who is not allowed to enter this country, and on what terms, has always been contentious. And that remains true today. And it’s made worse by a failure of those of us in Washington to fix a broken immigration system.

To begin with, our borders have been porous for decades. Obviously, the problem is greatest along our Southern border, but it’s not restricted to that part of the country. In fact, because we don’t do a very good job of tracking who comes in and out of the country as visitors, large numbers avoid immigration laws simply by overstaying their visas.

The result is an estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States. The overwhelming majority of these men and women are simply seeking a better life for themselves and their children. Many settle in low-wage sectors of the economy; they work hard, they save, they stay out of trouble. But because they live in the shadows, they’re vulnerable to unscrupulous businesses who pay them less than the minimum wage or violate worker safety rules -- thereby putting companies who follow those rules, and Americans who rightly demand the minimum wage or overtime, at an unfair [dis]advantage. Crimes go unreported as victims and witnesses fear coming forward. And this makes it harder for the police to catch violent criminals and keep neighborhoods safe. And billions in tax revenue are lost each year because many undocumented workers are paid under the table.

More fundamentally, the presence of so many illegal immigrants makes a mockery of all those who are going through the process of immigrating legally. Indeed, after years of patchwork fixes and ill-conceived revisions, the legal immigration system is as broken as the borders. Backlogs and bureaucracy means the process can take years. While an applicant waits for approval, he or she is often forbidden from visiting the United States -- which means even husbands and wives may be forced to spend many years apart. High fees and the need for lawyers may exclude worthy applicants. And while we provide students from around the world visas to get engineering and computer science degrees at our top universities, our laws discourage them from using those skills to start a business or power a new industry right here in the United States. Instead of training entrepreneurs to create jobs on our shores, we train our competition.

In sum, the system is broken. And everybody knows it. Unfortunately, reform has been held hostage to political posturing and special-interest wrangling -- and to the pervasive sentiment in Washington that tackling such a thorny and emotional issue is inherently bad politics.

Just a few years ago, when I was a senator, we forged a bipartisan coalition in favor of comprehensive reform. Under the leadership of Senator Kennedy, who had been a longtime champion of immigration reform, and Senator John McCain, we worked across the aisle to help pass a bipartisan bill through the Senate. But that effort eventually came apart. And now, under the pressures of partisanship and election-year politics, many of the 11 Republican senators who voted for reform in the past have now backed away from their previous support.

Into this breach, states like Arizona have decided to take matters into their own hands. Given the levels of frustration across the country, this is understandable. But it is also ill conceived. And it’s not just that the law Arizona passed is divisive -- although it has fanned the flames of an already contentious debate. Laws like Arizona’s put huge pressures on local law enforcement to enforce rules that ultimately are unenforceable. It puts pressure on already hard-strapped state and local budgets. It makes it difficult for people here illegally to report crimes -- driving a wedge between communities and law enforcement, making our streets more dangerous and the jobs of our police officers more difficult.

And you don’t have to take my word for this. You can speak to the police chiefs and others from law enforcement here today who will tell you the same thing.

These laws also have the potential of violating the rights of innocent American citizens and legal residents, making them subject to possible stops or questioning because of what they look like or how they sound. And as other states and localities go their own ways, we face the prospect that different rules for immigration will apply in different parts of the country -- a patchwork of local immigration rules where we all know one clear national standard is needed.

Our task then is to make our national laws actually work -- to shape a system that reflects our values as a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants. And that means being honest about the problem, and getting past the false debates that divide the country rather than bring it together.

For example, there are those in the immigrants’ rights community who have argued passionately that we should simply provide those who are [here] illegally with legal status, or at least ignore the laws on the books and put an end to deportation until we have better laws. And often this argument is framed in moral terms: Why should we punish people who are just trying to earn a living?

I recognize the sense of compassion that drives this argument, but I believe such an indiscriminate approach would be both unwise and unfair. It would suggest to those thinking about coming here illegally that there will be no repercussions for such a decision. And this could lead to a surge in more illegal immigration. And it would also ignore the millions of people around the world who are waiting in line to come here legally.

Ultimately, our nation, like all nations, has the right and obligation to control its borders and set laws for residency and citizenship. And no matter how decent they are, no matter their reasons, the 11 million who broke these laws should be held accountable.

Now, if the majority of Americans are skeptical of a blanket amnesty, they are also skeptical that it is possible to round up and deport 11 million people. They know it’s not possible. Such an effort would be logistically impossible and wildly expensive. Moreover, it would tear at the very fabric of this nation -- because immigrants who are here illegally are now intricately woven into that fabric. Many have children who are American citizens. Some are children themselves, brought here by their parents at a very young age, growing up as American kids, only to discover their illegal status when they apply for college or a job. Migrant workers -- mostly here illegally -- have been the labor force of our farmers and agricultural producers for generations. So even if it was possible, a program of mass deportations would disrupt our economy and communities in ways that most Americans would find intolerable.

Now, once we get past the two poles of this debate, it becomes possible to shape a practical, common-sense approach that reflects our heritage and our values. Such an approach demands accountability from everybody -- from government, from businesses and from individuals.

Government has a threshold responsibility to secure our borders. That’s why I directed my Secretary of Homeland Security, Janet Napolitano -- a former border governor -- to improve our enforcement policy without having to wait for a new law.

Today, we have more boots on the ground near the Southwest border than at any time in our history. Let me repeat that: We have more boots on the ground on the Southwest border than at any time in our history. We doubled the personnel assigned to Border Enforcement Security Task Forces. We tripled the number of intelligence analysts along the border. For the first time, we’ve begun screening 100 percent of southbound rail shipments. And as a result, we’re seizing more illegal guns, cash and drugs than in years past. Contrary to some of the reports that you see, crime along the border is down. And statistics collected by Customs and Border Protection reflect a significant reduction in the number of people trying to cross the border illegally.

So the bottom line is this: The southern border is more secure today than at any time in the past 20 years. That doesn’t mean we don’t have more work to do. We have to do that work, but it’s important that we acknowledge the facts. Even as we are committed to doing what’s necessary to secure our borders, even without passage of the new law, there are those who argue that we should not move forward with any other elements of reform until we have fully sealed our borders. But our borders are just too vast for us to be able to solve the problem only with fences and border patrols. It won’t work. Our borders will not be secure as long as our limited resources are devoted to not only stopping gangs and potential terrorists, but also the hundreds of thousands who attempt to cross each year simply to find work. That’s why businesses must be held accountable if they break the law by deliberately hiring and exploiting undocumented workers. We’ve already begun to step up enforcement against the worst workplace offenders. And we’re implementing and improving a system to give employers a reliable way to verify that their employees are here legally. But we need to do more. We cannot continue just to look the other way as a significant portion of our economy operates outside the law. It breeds abuse and bad practices. It punishes employers who act responsibly and undercuts American workers. And ultimately, if the demand for undocumented workers falls, the incentive for people to come here illegally will decline as well.

Finally, we have to demand responsibility from people living here illegally. They must be required to admit that they broke the law. They should be required to register, pay their taxes, pay a fine, and learn English. They must get right with the law before they can get in line and earn their citizenship -- not just because it is fair, not just because it will make clear to those who might wish to come to America they must do so inside the bounds of the law, but because this is how we demonstrate that being -- what being an American means. Being a citizen of this country comes not only with rights but also with certain fundamental responsibilities. We can create a pathway for legal status that is fair, reflective of our values, and works.

Now, stopping illegal immigration must go hand in hand with reforming our creaky system of legal immigration. We’ve begun to do that, by eliminating a backlog in background checks that at one point stretched back almost a year. That’s just for the background check. People can now track the status of their immigration applications by email or text message. We’ve improved accountability and safety in the detention system. And we’ve stemmed the increases in naturalization fees. But here, too, we need to do more. We should make it easier for the best and the brightest to come to start businesses and develop products and create jobs.

Our laws should respect families following the rules -- instead of splitting them apart. We need to provide farms a legal way to hire the workers they rely on, and a path for those workers to earn legal status. And we should stop punishing innocent young people for the actions of their parents by denying them the chance to stay here and earn an education and contribute their talents to build the country where they’ve grown up. The DREAM Act would do this, and that’s why I supported this bill as a state legislator and as a U.S. senator -- and why I continue to support it as president. So these are the essential elements of comprehensive immigration reform. The question now is whether we will have the courage and the political will to pass a bill through Congress, to finally get it done. Last summer, I held a meeting with leaders of both parties, including many of the Republicans who had supported reform in the past -- and some who hadn’t. I was pleased to see a bipartisan framework proposed in the Senate by Senators Lindsey Graham and Chuck Schumer, with whom I met to discuss this issue. I’ve spoken with the Congressional Hispanic Caucus to plot the way forward and meet -- and then I met with them earlier this week.

And I’ve spoken with representatives from a growing coalition of labor unions and business groups, immigrant advocates and community organizations, law enforcement, local government -- all who recognize the importance of immigration reform. And I’ve met with leaders from America’s religious communities, like Pastor Hybels -- people of different faiths and beliefs, some liberal, some conservative, who nonetheless share a sense of urgency; who understand that fixing our broken immigration system is not only a political issue, not just an economic issue, but a moral imperative as well.

So we’ve made progress. I’m ready to move forward; the majority of Democrats are ready to move forward; and I believe the majority of Americans are ready to move forward. But the fact is, without bipartisan support, as we had just a few years ago, we cannot solve this problem. Reform that brings accountability to our immigration system cannot pass without Republican votes. That is the political and mathematical reality. The only way to reduce the risk that this effort will again falter because of politics is if members of both parties are willing to take responsibility for solving this problem once and for all.

And, yes, this is an emotional question, and one that lends itself to demagoguery. Time and again, this issue has been used to divide and inflame -- and to demonize people. And so the understandable, the natural impulse among those who run for office is to turn away and defer this question for another day, or another year, or another administration. Despite the courageous leadership in the past shown by many Democrats and some Republicans -- including, by the way, my predecessor, President Bush -- this has been the custom. That is why a broken and dangerous system that offends our most basic American values is still in place.

But I believe we can put politics aside and finally have an immigration system that’s accountable. I believe we can appeal not to people’s fears but to their hopes, to their highest ideals, because that’s who we are as Americans. It’s been inscribed on our nation’s seal since we declared our independence. “E pluribus unum.” Out of many, one. That is what has drawn the persecuted and impoverished to our shores. That’s what led the innovators and risk-takers from around the world to take a chance here in the land of opportunity. That’s what has led people to endure untold hardships to reach this place called America.

One of the largest waves of immigration in our history took place little more than a century ago. At the time, Jewish people were being driven out of Eastern Europe, often escaping to the sounds of gunfire and the light from their villages burning to the ground. The journey could take months, as families crossed rivers in the dead of night, traveled miles by foot, endured a rough and dangerous passage over the North Atlantic. Once here, many made their homes in a teeming and bustling Lower Manhattan.

It was at this time that a young woman named Emma Lazarus, whose own family fled persecution from Europe generations earlier, took up the cause of these new immigrants. Although she was a poet, she spent much of her time advocating for better health care and housing for the newcomers. And inspired by what she saw and heard, she wrote down her thoughts and donated a piece of work to help pay for the construction of a new statue -- the Statue of Liberty -- which actually was funded in part by small donations from people across America.

Years before the statue was built -- years before it would be seen by throngs of immigrants craning their necks skyward at the end of long and brutal voyage, years before it would come to symbolize everything that we cherish -- she imagined what it could mean. She imagined the sight of a giant statue at the entry point of a great nation -- but unlike the great monuments of the past, this would not signal an empire. Instead, it would signal one’s arrival to a place of opportunity and refuge and freedom.

“Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand,” she wrote,

A mighty woman with a torch…From her beacon-handGlows world-wide welcome…“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!”…“Give me your tired, and your poor,Your huddled masses yearning to be free…Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

Let us remember these words. For it falls on each generation to ensure that that lamp -- that beacon -- continues to shine as a source of hope around the world, and a source of our prosperity here at home.

Thank you. God bless you. And may God bless the United States of America. Thank you.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Eulogy Remarks at the Memorial Service for Robert Byrd

To Mona and Marjorie, and to Senator Byrd’s entire family, including those adorable great granddaughters that I had a chance to meet -- Michelle and I offer you our deepest sympathies.

To Senator Byrd’s friends, including the Speaker of the House, the Majority Leader, the Republican Leader, President Clinton, Vice President Biden, Vicki Kennedy, Nick Rahall and all the previous speakers; Senator Rockefeller for the outstanding work that you’ve done for the state of West Virginia; to his larger family -- the people of West Virginia -- I want you all to know that all America shares your loss. May we all find comfort in a verse of Scripture that reminds me of our dear friend: “The time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”

It’s interesting that you’ve heard that passage from several speakers now, because it embodies somebody who knew how to run a good and long race, and somebody who knew how to keep the faith -- with his state, with his family, with his country and his Constitution.

Years from now, when I think of the man we memorialize today, I’ll remember him as he was when I came to know him, his white hair full like a mane, his gait steadied with a cane.

Determined to make the most of every last breath, the distinguished gentleman from West Virginia could be found at his desk until the very end, doing the people’s business, delivering soul-stirring speeches, a hint of the Appalachians in his voice, stabbing the air with his finger, fiery as ever, years into his 10th decade.

He was a Senate icon. He was a Party leader. He was an elder statesman. And he was my friend. That’s how I’ll remember him.

Today we remember the path he climbed to such extraordinary peaks. Born Cornelius Calvin Sale, Jr. -- Corny, he joked, for short -- his mother lost her life in the Great Influenza Pandemic of 1918. From the aunt and uncle who raised him, amid West Virginia’s coal camps, he gained not only his Byrd name but a reverence for God Almighty, a love of learning that was nurtured at Mark Twain School. And there he met Erma, his sweetheart for over 70 years, by whose side he will now rest for eternity.

Unable to afford college, he did what he could to get by, finding work as a gas station attendant, a produce salesman, a meat-cutter, and a welder in the shipyards of Baltimore and Tampa during World War II. Returning home to West Virginia after the war, he ran for the state House of Delegates, using his fiddle case as a briefcase, the better to stand out on the stump.

Before long, he ran for Congress, serving in the House before jumping over to the Senate, where he was elected nine times, held almost every leadership role imaginable, and proved as capable of swaying others as standing alone, marking a row of milestones along the way. Longest-serving member of Congress. Nearly 19,000 votes cast. Not a single loss at the polls -- a record that speaks to the bond that he had with you, the people of his state.

Transplanted to Washington, his heart remained here, in West Virginia, in the place that shaped him, with the people he loved. His heart belonged to you. Making life better here was his only agenda. Giving you hope, he said, was his greatest achievement. Hope in the form of new jobs and industries. Hope in the form of black lung benefits and union protections. Hope through roads and research centers, schools and scholarships, health clinics and industrial parks that bear his name.

His early rival and late friend, Ted Kennedy, used to joke about campaigning in West Virginia. When his bus broke down, Ted got hold of the highway patrol, who asked where he was. And he said, “I’m on Robert Byrd highway.” And the dispatcher said, “Which one?”

It’s a life that immeasurably improved the lives of West Virginians. Of course, Robert Byrd was a deeply religious man, a Christian. And so he understood that our lives are marked by sins as well as virtues, failures as well as success, weakness as well as strength. We know there are things he said -- and things he did -- that he came to regret. I remember talking about that the first time I visited with him. He said, “There are things I regretted in my youth. You may know that.” And I said, “None of us are absent some regrets, Senator. That’s why we enjoy and seek the grace of God.”

And as I reflect on the full sweep of his 92 years, it seems to me that his life bent towards justice. Like the Constitution he tucked in his pocket, like our nation itself, Robert Byrd possessed that quintessential American quality, and that is a capacity to change, a capacity to learn, a capacity to listen, a capacity to be made more perfect.

Over his nearly six decades in our Capitol, he came to be seen as the very embodiment of the Senate, chronicling its history in four volumes that he gave to me just as he gave to President Clinton. I, too, read it. I was scared he was going to quiz me.

But as I soon discovered, his passion for the Senate’s past, his mastery of even its most arcane procedures, it wasn’t an obsession with the trivial or the obscure. It reflected a profoundly noble impulse, a recognition of a basic truth about this country that we are not a nation of men, we are a nation of laws. Our way of life rests on our democratic institutions. Precisely because we are fallible, it falls to each of us to safeguard these institutions, even when it’s inconvenient, and pass on our republic more perfect than before.

Considering the vast learning of this self-taught Senator -- his speeches sprinkled with the likes of Cicero and Shakespeare and Jefferson -- it seems fitting to close with one of his favorite passages in literature, a passage from Moby Dick:

“And there is a Catskill eagle in some souls that can alike dive down into the blackest gorges, and soar out of them again and become invisible in the sunny spaces. And even if he forever flies within the gorge, that gorge is in the mountains; so that even in his lowest swoop the mountain eagle is still higher than any other bird upon the plain, even though they soar.”

Robert Byrd was a mountain eagle, and his lowest swoop was still higher than the other birds upon the plain.

May God bless Robert C. Byrd. May he be welcomed kindly by the righteous Judge. And may his spirit soar forever like a Catskill eagle, high above the Heavens.

Thank you very much.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Signing of Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act

Thank you. Everybody, please have a seat, have a seat.

Well, good morning, everyone.

We are gathered in the heart of our nation’s capital, surrounded by memorials to leaders and citizens who served our nation in its earliest days and in its days of greatest trial. Today is such a time for America.

Over the past two years, we have faced the worst recession since the Great Depression. Eight million people lost their jobs. Tens of millions saw the value of their homes and retirement savings plummet. Countless businesses have been unable to get the loans they need and many have been forced to shut their doors. And although the economy is growing again, too many people are still feeling the pain of the downturn.

Now, while a number of factors led to such a severe recession, the primary cause was a breakdown in our financial system. It was a crisis born of a failure of responsibility from certain corners of Wall Street to the halls of power in Washington. For years, our financial sector was governed by antiquated and poorly enforced rules that allowed some to game the system and take risks that endangered the entire economy.

Unscrupulous lenders locked consumers into complex loans with hidden costs. Firms like AIG placed massive, risky bets with borrowed money. And while the rules left abuse and excess unchecked, they also left taxpayers on the hook if a big bank or financial institution ever failed.

Now, even before the crisis hit, I went to Wall Street and I called for common-sense reforms to protect consumers and our economy as a whole. And soon after taking office, I proposed a set of reforms to empower consumers and investors, to bring the shadowy deals that caused this crisis into the light of day, and to put a stop to taxpayer bailouts once and for all. Today, thanks to a lot of people in this room, those reforms will become the law of the land.

For the last year, Chairmen Barney Frank and Chris Dodd have worked day and night. Barney and Chris have worked day and night to bring about this reform. And I am profoundly grateful to them. I would be remiss if I didn't also express my appreciation to Senator Harry Reid and Speaker Nancy Pelosi for their leadership. It wouldn’t have happened without them.

Passing this bill was no easy task. To get there, we had to overcome the furious lobbying of an array of powerful interest groups and a partisan minority determined to block change. So the members who are here today, both on the stage and in the audience, they have done a great service in devoting so much time and expertise to this effort, to looking out for the public interests and not the special interests. And I also want to thank the three Republican senators who put partisanship aside, judged this bill on the merits, and voted for reform. We’re grateful to them. And the Republican House members. Good to see you, Joe.

Now, let’s put this in perspective. The fact is, the financial industry is central to our nation’s ability to grow, to prosper, to compete and to innovate. There are a lot of banks that understand and fulfill this vital role, and there are a whole lot of bankers who want to do right -- and do right -- by their customers. This reform will help foster innovation, not hamper it. It is designed to make sure that everybody follows the same set of rules, so that firms compete on price and quality, not on tricks and not on traps.

It demands accountability and responsibility from everyone. It provides certainty to everybody, from bankers to farmers to business owners to consumers. And unless your business model depends on cutting corners or bilking your customers, you’ve got nothing to fear from reform.

Now, for all those Americans who are wondering what Wall Street reform means for you, here’s what you can expect. If you’ve ever applied for a credit card, a student loan, or a mortgage, you know the feeling of signing your name to pages of barely understandable fine print. What often happens as a result is that many Americans are caught by hidden fees and penalties, or saddled with loans they can’t afford.

That’s what happened to Robin Fox, hit with a massive rate increase on her credit card balance even though she paid her bills on time. That’s what happened to Andrew Giordano, who discovered hundreds of dollars in overdraft fees on his bank statement -- fees he had no idea he might face. Both are here today. Well, with this law, unfair rate hikes, like the one that hit Robin, will end for good. And we’ll ensure that people like Andrew aren’t unwittingly caught by overdraft fees when they sign up for a checking account.

With this law, we’ll crack down on abusive practices in the mortgage industry. We’ll make sure that contracts are simpler -- putting an end to many hidden penalties and fees in complex mortgages -- so folks know what they’re signing.

With this law, students who take out college loans will be provided clear and concise information about their obligations.

And with this law, ordinary investors -- like seniors and folks saving for retirement -- will be able to receive more information about the costs and risks of mutual funds and other investment products, so that they can make better financial decisions as to what will work for them.

So, all told, these reforms represent the strongest consumer financial protections in history. In history. And these protections will be enforced by a new consumer watchdog with just one job: looking out for people -- not big banks, not lenders, not investment houses -- looking out for people as they interact with the financial system.

And that’s not just good for consumers; that’s good for the economy. Because reform will put a stop to a lot of the bad loans that fueled a debt-based bubble. And it will mean all companies will have to seek customers by offering better products, instead of more deceptive ones.

Now, beyond the consumer protections I’ve outlined, reform will also rein in the abuse and excess that nearly brought down our financial system. It will finally bring transparency to the kinds of complex and risky transactions that helped trigger the financial crisis. Shareholders will also have a greater say on the pay of CEOs and other executives, so they can reward success instead of failure.

And finally, because of this law, the American people will never again be asked to foot the bill for Wall Street’s mistakes. There will be no more tax-funded bailouts -- period. If a large financial institution should ever fail, this reform gives us the ability to wind it down without endangering the broader economy. And there will be new rules to make clear that no firm is somehow protected because it is “too big to fail,” so we don’t have another AIG.

That's what this reform will mean. Now, it doesn’t mean our work is over. For these new rules to be effective, regulators will have to be vigilant. We may need to make adjustments along the way as our financial system adapts to these new changes and changes around the globe. No law can force anybody to be responsible; it’s still incumbent on those on Wall Street to heed the lessons of this crisis in terms of how they conduct their businesses.

The fact is every American -- from Main Street to Wall Street -- has a stake in our financial system. Wall Street banks and firms invest the capital that makes it possible for start-ups to sell new products. They provide loans to businesses to expand and to hire. They back mortgages for families purchasing a new home. That’s why we’ll all stand to gain from these reforms. We all win when investors around the world have confidence in our markets. We all win when shareholders have more power and more information. We all win when consumers are protected against abuse. And we all win when folks are rewarded based on how well they perform, not how well they evade accountability.

In the end, our financial system only works -- our market is only free -- when there are clear rules and basic safeguards that prevent abuse, that check excess, that ensure that it is more profitable to play by the rules than to game the system. And that’s what these reforms are designed to achieve -- no more, no less. Because that’s how we will ensure that our economy works for consumers, that it works for investors, that it works for financial institutions -- that it works for all of us.

This is the central lesson not only of this crisis but of our history. Ultimately, there’s no dividing line between Main Street and Wall Street. We rise or fall together as one nation. So these reforms will help lift our economy and lead all of us to a stronger, more prosperous future.

And that’s why I’m so honored to sign these reforms into law, and I’m so grateful to everybody who worked so hard to make this day possible.

Thank you very much, everybody.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address at the Disabled Veterans of American Conference

It is -- Thank you. It is a great honor and -- it is true, I will be 49 this week. I have a lot more gray hair than I did last year.

It is an extraordinary honor to be here. Thank you, Commander Barrera, for your kind introduction and for your lifetime of service, in the Marines in Vietnam -- but also as a tireless advocate for your fellow disabled veterans. We are grateful to you. Thank you for everything that you've done.

I want to thank your great leadership team for welcoming me today: Chairman Ray Dempsey -- absolutely -- incoming commander Wally Tyson. National adjutant Art Wilson. Judy Hezlep of the DAV Auxiliary. And your outstanding Executive Director in Washington, Dave Gorman. And I am pleased to be joined by a decorated Vietnam veteran, wounded warrior, and a lifetime member of the DAV -- my outstanding Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Ric Shinseki.

Disabled American Veterans, I valued your advice and counsel when I was a senator, when I co-sponsored the Post-9/11 GI Bill. You were one of the first veterans organizations that I called upon when I began my presidential campaign. And as President, it's been my pleasure to welcome you to the White House -- to make sure America is serving our veterans as well as you've served us. And, most recently, to sign advanced appropriations into law so that veterans health care will never again be held hostage to the budget battles and the political games in Washington.

Now, there's another visit I won't forget. I was in the Oval Office expecting a visit from the DAV. And in comes Bobby carrying a baseball bat. Now, it's not every day that somebody gets past the Secret Service carrying a baseball bat. You may have heard about this. It turns out it was a genuine Louisville Slugger -- a thank you for going to bat for our veterans on advanced appropriations.

So I'm grateful for that symbol of our partnership, and I'm proud of the progress we've achieved together. But as one of your outstanding DAV members from Illinois just reminded me, this is a promise I made during the campaign -- it was a promise made and it was a promise kept. And I intend to keep on keeping my promises to the veterans of America.

In the life of our nation, not every generation has been summoned to defend our country in its hour of need. But every generation to answer that call has done so with honor and with courage.

Among you are members of that generation that saved the world from fascism. I was honored to stand with our World War II vets at Normandy last year for the anniversary of D-Day. And this year, as we mark -- this year, as we mark the 65th anniversary of our victory in that war, we once again salute our veterans of the Second World War.

Others among you faced a brutal foe on a cold Korean Peninsula. This year, as we mark the 60th anniversary of that conflict, I will be proud to travel to the Republic of Korea in November to pay tribute to our veterans of the Korean War.

Many of you served in the jungles of Vietnam. You also served with honor, exemplary dedication and courage, but were often shunned when you came home. That was a national disgrace and it must never happen again. And that's why we're making sure our veterans from today's wars are shown the respect and the dignity they deserve.

And whether you served in the Gulf to free a captive Kuwait or fought in the streets of Mogadishu or stopped an ethnic slaughter in the Balkans, you too are part of an unbroken line of service stretching across two centuries.

For you, coming home was the beginning of another battle -- the battle to recover. You fought to stand again and to walk again and to work again. You fought for each other and for the benefits and treatment you had earned. You became leaders in our communities, in our companies, and our country -- including a former Vietnam vet and senator, Max Cleland, who reminded us that America's disabled veterans are "strong at the broken places."

Today, your legacy of service is carried on by a new generation of Americans. Some stepped forward in a time of peace, not foreseeing years of combat. Others stepped forward in this time of war, knowing they could be sent into harm's way. For the past nine years, in Afghanistan and Iraq, they have borne the burdens of war. They, and their families, have faced the greatest test in the history of our all-volunteer force, serving tour after tour, year after year. Through their extraordinary service, they have written their own chapter in the American story. And by any measure, they have earned their place among the greatest of generations.

Now, one of those chapters is nearing an end. As a candidate for President, I pledged to bring the war in Iraq to a responsible end. Shortly after taking office, I announced our new strategy for Iraq and for a transition to full Iraqi responsibility. And I made it clear that by August 31st, 2010, America's combat mission in Iraq would end. And that is exactly what we are doing -- as promised and on schedule.

Already, we have closed or turned over to Iraq hundreds of bases. We're moving out millions of pieces of equipment in one of the largest logistics operations that we've seen in decades. By the end of this month, we'll have brought more than 90,000 of our troops home from Iraq since I took office -- more than 90,000 have come home.

Today -- even as terrorists try to derail Iraq's progress -- because of the sacrifices of our troops and their Iraqi partners, violence in Iraq continues to be near the lowest it's been in years. And next month, we will change our military mission from combat to supporting and training Iraqi security forces. In fact, in many parts of the country, Iraqis have already taken the lead for security.

As agreed to with the Iraqi government, we will maintain a transitional force until we remove all our troops from Iraq by the end of next year. And during this period, our forces will have a focused mission -- supporting and training Iraqi forces, partnering with Iraqis in counterterrorism missions, and protecting our civilian and military efforts. These are dangerous tasks. There are still those with bombs and bullets who will try to stop Iraq's progress. And the hard truth is we have not seen the end of American sacrifice in Iraq.

But make no mistake: Our commitment in Iraq is changing -- from a military effort led by our troops to a civilian effort led by our diplomats. And as we mark the end of America's combat mission in Iraq, a grateful America must pay tribute to all who served there.

Remember, our nation has had vigorous debates about the Iraq War. There are patriots who supported going to war, and patriots who opposed it. But there has never been any daylight between us when it comes to supporting the more than one million Americans in uniform who have served in Iraq -- far more than any conflict since Vietnam.

These men and women from across our country have done more than meet the challenges of this young century. Through their extraordinary courage and confidence and commitment, these troops and veterans have proven themselves as a new generation of American leaders. And while our country has sometimes been divided, they have fought together as one. While other individuals and institutions have shirked responsibility, they have welcomed responsibility. While it was easy to be daunted by overwhelming challenges, the generation that has served in Iraq has overcome every test before them.

They took to the skies and sped across deserts in the initial charge into Baghdad. And today we're joined by an infantryman who was there as part of the 101st Airborne Division -- Sergeant Nicholas Bernardi is here.

When invasion gave way to insurgency, our troops persevered, block by block, city by city, from Baghdad to Fallujah. As a driver in a transportation company, this soldier endured constant attacks but never waivered in his mission -- and we thank Sergeant Dan Knabe. Thank you, Dan.

When terrorists and militias plunged Iraq into sectarian war, our troops adapted and adjusted -- restoring order and effectively defeating al Qaeda in Iraq on the battlefield. And among those who served in those pivotal days was a scout with the 1st Cavalry Division -- Specialist Matt Seidl. Matt.

For each of these men and women there are countless others. And we honor them all: Our young enlisted troops and noncommissioned officers who are the backbone of our military; the National Guardsmen and Reservists who served in unprecedented deployments; more women tested by combat than in any war in American history. Including a Marine here today -- Sergeant Patricia Ruiz. Patricia. I teased Patricia. I said she looks like she's still in high school. But she's a Marine.

And we salute the families back home. They too have sacrificed in this war. That's why my wife, Michelle, and the Vice President's wife, Dr. Jill Biden, have made it their mission to make sure America takes care of our remarkable military families, including our veterans.

Now, this summer, tens of thousands of our troops in Iraq are coming home. Last week, Vice President Biden was at Fort Drum to help welcome back members of the legendary 10th Mountain Division. Families are being reunited at bases across the country, from Fort Bragg in North Carolina to Fort Riley in Kansas to Fort Lewis in Washington. And in this season of homecomings, every American can show their gratitude to our patriots who served in Iraq.

As we do, we are humbled by the profound sacrifice that has been rendered. Each of the veterans I have mentioned carried with them the wounds of this war. And as a nation, we will honor forever all who gave their lives -- that last true measure of devotion -- in service in Iraq -- soldiers, sailors, Airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen -- active, Guard, Reserve.

Even as we end the war in Iraq, even as we welcome home so many of our troops, others are still deployed in Afghanistan. So I want to remind everyone, it was Afghanistan where al Qaeda plotted and trained to murder 3,000 innocent people on 9/11. It is Afghanistan and the tribal regions of Pakistan where terrorists have launched other attacks against us and our allies. And if Afghanistan were to be engulfed by an even wider insurgency, al Qaeda and its terrorist affiliates would have even more space to plan their next attack. And as President of the United States, I refuse to let that happen.

The effort in Afghanistan has been long and been difficult. And that's why after years in which the situation had deteriorated, I announced a new strategy last December -- a military effort to break the Taliban's momentum and train Afghan forces so that they can take the lead for their security; and a civilian effort to promote good governance and development that improves the lives of the Afghan people; and deeper cooperation with Pakistan to root out terrorists on both sides of the border.

We will continue to face huge challenges in Afghanistan. But it's important that the American people know that we are making progress and we are focused on goals that are clear and achievable.

On the military front, nearly all the additional forces that I ordered to Afghanistan are now in place. Along with our Afghan and international partners, we are going on the offensive against the Taliban -- targeting their leaders, challenging them in regions where they had free reign, and training Afghan national security forces. Our thoughts and prayers are with all our troops risking their lives for our safety in Afghanistan.

And on the civilian front, we're insisting on greater accountability. And the Afghan government has taken concrete steps to foster development and combat corruption, and to put forward a reintegration plan that allows Afghans to lay down their arms.

In Pakistan, we've seen the government begin to take the fight to violent extremists within its borders, and major blows have been struck against al Qaeda and its leadership -- because in this region and beyond, we will tolerate no safe haven for al Qaeda and their extremist allies. We will disrupt, we will dismantle, and we will ultimately defeat al Qaeda. And we will give our troops the resources and the equipment to get the job done and keep our country safe.

At the same time, every American who has ever worn the uniform must also know this: Your country is going to take care of you when you come home. Our nation's commitment to our veterans, to you and your families, is a sacred trust. And to me and my administration, upholding that trust is a moral obligation. It's not just politics.

That's why I've charged Secretary Shinseki with building a 21st century VA. And that includes one of the largest percentage increases to the VA budget in the past 30 years. We are going to cut this deficit that we've got, and I've proposed a freeze on discretionary domestic spending. But what I have not frozen is the spending we need to keep our military strong, our country safe and our veterans secure. So we're going to keep on making historic commitments to our veterans.

For about 200,000 Vietnam vets who may have been exposed to Agent Orange and who now suffer from three chronic diseases, we're making it easier for you to get the health care and benefits you need.

For our Gulf War veterans, we've declared that nine infectious diseases are now presumed to be related to your service in Desert Storm.

For our disabled veterans, we've eliminated co-pays for those of you who are catastrophically disabled. We've kept our promise on concurrent receipt by proposing legislation that would allow severely disabled retirees to receive your military retired pay and your VA disability benefits. It's the right thing to do.

We've dramatically increased funding for veterans health care across the board, and that includes improving care for rural veterans and women veterans. For those half-million vets who had lost their eligibility -- our Priority 8 veterans -- we're restoring your access to VA health care. And since the rumors continue to fly, even though they are wrong, let me say it as clearly as I can: The historic health care reform legislation that I signed into law does not -- I repeat, does not -- change your veterans benefits. The VA health care benefits that you know and trust are safe, and that includes prosthetics for our disabled veterans.

Thanks to advanced appropriations, the delays for funding for veterans medical care are over. And just as those delays were unacceptable, so too are long delays in the claims process. So Secretary Shinseki is working overtime to create a single lifetime electronic record that our troops and veterans can keep for life.

And today -- today I can announce that for the first time ever, veterans will be able to go to the VA website, click a simple "blue button," and download or print your personal health records so you have them when you need them and can share them with your doctors outside of the VA. That's happening this fall.

We're hiring thousands of new claims processors to break the backlog once and for all. And to make sure the backlog doesn't come back, we're reforming the claims process itself with new information technologies and a paperless system.

We got an Amen over here.

As a result of the innovation competition that I announced last summer, our dedicated VA employees suggested more than 10,000 new ways to cut through the red tape and the bureaucracy. And we're already putting dozens of these innovative ideas into action. Additionally, we're enabling more veterans to check the status of their claims online and from their cell phone.

As a next step, we're opening this competition to entrepreneurs and academics so the best minds in America can help us develop the technologies to serve our vets, including those of you with multiple traumatic injuries. And we're going to keep at this until we meet our commitment to cut those backlogs, slash those wait times, and deliver your benefits sooner. This is a priority and we are going to get it done.

We're making progress in ending homelessness among our veterans. Today, on any given night, there are about 20,000 fewer veterans on the streets than there were when we took office. But we're not going to be satisfied until every veteran who has fought for America has a home in America. We will not stop.

Finally, we're keeping faith with our newest veterans returning from Afghanistan and Iraq. We're offering more of the support and counseling they need to transition back to civilian life. That includes funding the post-9/11 GI Bill, which is already helping more than 300,000 veterans and family members pursue their dream of a college education. And for veterans trying to find work in a very tough economy, we're helping with job training and placement. And I've directed the federal government to make it a priority to hire more veterans, including disabled veterans. And every business in America needs to know our vets have the training, they've got the skills, they have the dedication -- they are ready to work. And our country is stronger when we tap the incredible talents of our veterans.

For those coming home injured, we're continuing to direct unprecedented support to our wounded warriors in uniform -- more treatment centers, more case managers -- delivering the absolute best care available. For those who can, we want to help them get back to where they want to be -- with their units. And that includes service members with a disability, who still have so much to offer our military.

We're directing unprecedented resources to treating the signature wounds of today's wars -- traumatic brain injury and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. And I recently signed into law the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act. That's a long name, but let me tell you what it does. It not only improves treatment for traumatic brain injury and PTSD, it gives new support to many of the caregivers who put their own lives on hold to care for their loved one.

And as so many of you know, PTSD is a pain like no other -- the nightmares that keep coming back, the rage that strikes suddenly, the hopelessness that's led too many of our troops and veterans to take their own lives. So today, I want to say in very personal terms to anyone who is struggling -- don't suffer in silence. It's not a sign of weakness to reach out for support -- it's a sign of strength. Your country needs you. We are here for you. We are here to help you stand tall. Don't give up. Reach out.

We're making major investments in awareness, outreach, and suicide prevention -- hiring more mental health professionals, improving care and treatment. For those of you suffering from PTSD, we're making it a whole lot easier to qualify for VA benefits. From now on, if a VA doctor confirms a diagnosis of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, that is enough -- no matter what war you served in.

These are the commitments my administration has made. These are the promises we've worked to keep. This is the sacred trust we have pledged to uphold -- to you and all who serve.

I want to make special mention of a truly inspiring American, Staff Sergeant Cory Remsburg. He was at Bethesda during one of my periodic visits to see our wounded warriors. And as I walked into his room, I saw a picture on the wall -- and it was a picture of the two of us together. See, I had met Cory before, back at the D-Day anniversary in Normandy. A good looking young man, a proud Army Ranger, he had joined in a reenactment of that historic paratroop jump. Then soon after, Cory served on his 10th deployment since 9/11 -- that's right, his 10th deployment. And that's when an IED nearly took his life. The traumatic brain injury was severe. Cory was in a coma for months. It seemed possible that he would never wake up.

But then something happened. His doctors still can't explain it. His parents called it a miracle. Cory opened one of his eyes. Then a few weeks later, he moved a leg. Then he moved an arm. And there at Bethesda, we were meeting again. And Cory still couldn't speak. But he looked me in the eye. He lifted his arm and he shook my hand firmly. And when I asked how he was feeling, he held up his hand, pulled his fingers together and gave a thumbs up.

Today, Cory is at a VA hospital in Florida. And with the support of his family and VA staff, he's working hard every day to regain his strength. He's got to learn to speak all over again. He's grateful for the visits he's received from friends and supporters -- including the Disabled American Veterans.

And Cory is only 27 years old. He knows he's got a long and very hard road ahead. But he pushes on, and he's determined to get back to his fellow Rangers. And when someone at the hospital said, "Cory, you're going to walk out of here someday," he said "No, I'm going to run out of here."

So to Staff Sergeant Cory Remsburg, to the Disabled American Veterans -- I want to say to all of you, you are the very essence of America, the values that sustain us as a people, and the virtues our nation needs most right now. And the resilience that, in the face of great loss, so many of you experienced, I know you, like Cory, know what it means to pick yourselves up and keep pushing on.

And that sense of purpose that tells us to carry on, not just when it's easy, but when it's hard, even when the odds seem overwhelming -- that's what we're about. The confidence that our destiny is never written for us, it's written by us. The faith, that fundamental American faith, that there are always brighter days ahead; and that we not will not simply endure, but we will emerge from our tests and trials and tribulations stronger than before -- that is your story. That is America's story. And I'm proud to stand with you as we write the next proud chapter in the life of the country we love.

God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Religions Tolerance in America: Address at Iftar Dinner

Well, welcome to the White House. To you, to Muslim Americans across our country, and to more than one billion Muslims around the world, I extend my best wishes on this holy month. Ramadan Kareem.

I want to welcome members of the diplomatic corps; members of my administration; and members of Congress, including Rush Holt, John Conyers, and Andre Carson, who is one of two Muslim American members of Congress, along with Keith Ellison. So welcome, all of you.

Here at the White House, we have a tradition of hosting iftars that goes back several years, just as we host Christmas parties and seders and Diwali celebrations. And these events celebrate the role of faith in the lives of the American people. They remind us of the basic truth that we are all children of God, and we all draw strength and a sense of purpose from our beliefs.

These events are also an affirmation of who we are as Americans. Our Founders understood that the best way to honor the place of faith in the lives of our people was to protect their freedom to practice religion. In the Virginia Act of Establishing Religion Freedom, Thomas Jefferson wrote that “all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion.” The First Amendment of our Constitution established the freedom of religion as the law of the land. And that right has been upheld ever since.

Indeed, over the course of our history, religion has flourished within our borders precisely because Americans have had the right to worship as they choose -- including the right to believe in no religion at all. And it is a testament to the wisdom of our Founders that America remains deeply religious -- a nation where the ability of peoples of different faiths to coexist peacefully and with mutual respect for one another stands in stark contrast to the religious conflict that persists elsewhere around the globe.

Now, that's not to say that religion is without controversy. Recently, attention has been focused on the construction of mosques in certain communities -- particularly New York. Now, we must all recognize and respect the sensitivities surrounding the development of Lower Manhattan. The 9/11 attacks were a deeply traumatic event for our country. And the pain and the experience of suffering by those who lost loved ones is just unimaginable. So I understand the emotions that this issue engenders. And Ground Zero is, indeed, hallowed ground.

But let me be clear. As a citizen, and as President, I believe that Muslims have the same right to practice their religion as everyone else in this country. And that includes the right to build a place of worship and a community center on private property in Lower Manhattan, in accordance with local laws and ordinances. This is America. And our commitment to religious freedom must be unshakeable. The principle that people of all faiths are welcome in this country and that they will not be treated differently by their government is essential to who we are. The writ of the Founders must endure.

We must never forget those who we lost so tragically on 9/11, and we must always honor those who led the response to that attack -- from the firefighters who charged up smoke-filled staircases, to our troops who are serving in Afghanistan today. And let us also remember who we’re fighting against, and what we’re fighting for. Our enemies respect no religious freedom. Al Qaeda’s cause is not Islam -- it’s a gross distortion of Islam. These are not religious leaders -- they’re terrorists who murder innocent men and women and children. In fact, al Qaeda has killed more Muslims than people of any other religion -- and that list of victims includes innocent Muslims who were killed on 9/11.

So that's who we’re fighting against. And the reason that we will win this fight is not simply the strength of our arms -- it is the strength of our values. The democracy that we uphold. The freedoms that we cherish. The laws that we apply without regard to race, or religion, or wealth, or status. Our capacity to show not merely tolerance, but respect towards those who are different from us -- and that way of life, that quintessentially American creed, stands in stark contrast to the nihilism of those who attacked us on that September morning, and who continue to plot against us today.

In my inaugural address I said that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus -- and non-believers. We are shaped by every language and every culture, drawn from every end of this Earth. And that diversity can bring difficult debates. This is not unique to our time. Past eras have seen controversies about the construction of synagogues or Catholic churches. But time and again, the American people have demonstrated that we can work through these issues, and stay true to our core values, and emerge stronger for it. So it must be -- and will be -- today.

And tonight, we are reminded that Ramadan is a celebration of a faith known for great diversity. And Ramadan is a reminder that Islam has always been a part of America. The first Muslim ambassador to the United States, from Tunisia, was hosted by President Jefferson, who arranged a sunset dinner for his guest because it was Ramadan -- making it the first known iftar at the White House, more than 200 years ago.

Like so many other immigrants, generations of Muslims came to forge their future here. They became farmers and merchants, worked in mills and factories. They helped lay the railroads. They helped to build America. They founded the first Islamic center in New York City in the 1890s. They built America’s first mosque on the prairie of North Dakota. And perhaps the oldest surviving mosque in America -- still in use today -- is in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Today, our nation is strengthened by millions of Muslim Americans. They excel in every walk of life. Muslim American communities -- including mosques in all 50 states -- also serve their neighbors. Muslim Americans protect our communities as police officers and firefighters and first responders. Muslim American clerics have spoken out against terror and extremism, reaffirming that Islam teaches that one must save human life, not take it. And Muslim Americans serve with honor in our military. At next week’s iftar at the Pentagon, tribute will be paid to three soldiers who gave their lives in Iraq and now rest among the heroes of Arlington National Cemetery.

These Muslim Americans died for the security that we depend on, and the freedoms that we cherish. They are part of an unbroken line of Americans that stretches back to our founding; Americans of all faiths who have served and sacrificed to extend the promise of America to new generations, and to ensure that what is exceptional about America is protected -- our commitment to stay true to our core values, and our ability slowly but surely to perfect our union.

For in the end, we remain “one nation, under God, indivisible.” And we can only achieve “liberty and justice for all” if we live by that one rule at the heart of every great religion, including Islam -- that we do unto others as we would have them do unto us.

So thank you all for being here.

I wish you a blessed Ramadan.

And with that, let us eat.

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# Address to the Nation on the End of Operation Iraqi Freedom

Good evening. Tonight, I’d like to talk to you about the end of our combat mission in Iraq, the ongoing security challenges we face, and the need to rebuild our nation here at home.

I know this historic moment comes at a time of great uncertainty for many Americans. We’ve now been through nearly a decade of war. We’ve endured a long and painful recession. And sometimes in the midst of these storms, the future that we’re trying to build for our nation -- a future of lasting peace and long-term prosperity -- may seem beyond our reach.

But this milestone should serve as a reminder to all Americans that the future is ours to shape if we move forward with confidence and commitment. It should also serve as a message to the world that the United States of America intends to sustain and strengthen our leadership in this young century.

From this desk, seven and a half years ago, President Bush announced the beginning of military operations in Iraq. Much has changed since that night. A war to disarm a state became a fight against an insurgency. Terrorism and sectarian warfare threatened to tear Iraq apart. Thousands of Americans gave their lives; tens of thousands have been wounded. Our relations abroad were strained. Our unity at home was tested.

These are the rough waters encountered during the course of one of America’s longest wars. Yet there has been one constant amidst these shifting tides. At every turn, America’s men and women in uniform have served with courage and resolve. As Commander-in-Chief, I am incredibly proud of their service. And like all Americans, I’m awed by their sacrifice, and by the sacrifices of their families.

The Americans who have served in Iraq completed every mission they were given. They defeated a regime that had terrorized its people. Together with Iraqis and coalition partners who made huge sacrifices of their own, our troops fought block by block to help Iraq seize the chance for a better future. They shifted tactics to protect the Iraqi people, trained Iraqi Security Forces, and took out terrorist leaders. Because of our troops and civilians -- and because of the resilience of the Iraqi people -- Iraq has the opportunity to embrace a new destiny, even though many challenges remain.

So tonight, I am announcing that the American combat mission in Iraq has ended. Operation Iraqi Freedom is over, and the Iraqi people now have lead responsibility for the security of their country.

This was my pledge to the American people as a candidate for this office. Last February, I announced a plan that would bring our combat brigades out of Iraq, while redoubling our efforts to strengthen Iraq’s Security Forces and support its government and people.

That’s what we’ve done. We’ve removed nearly 100,000 U.S. troops from Iraq. We’ve closed or transferred to the Iraqis hundreds of bases. And we have moved millions of pieces of equipment out of Iraq.

This completes a transition to Iraqi responsibility for their own security. U.S. troops pulled out of Iraq’s cities last summer, and Iraqi forces have moved into the lead with considerable skill and commitment to their fellow citizens. Even as Iraq continues to suffer terrorist attacks, security incidents have been near the lowest on record since the war began. And Iraqi forces have taken the fight to al Qaeda, removing much of its leadership in Iraqi-led operations.

This year also saw Iraq hold credible elections that drew a strong turnout. A caretaker administration is in place as Iraqis form a government based on the results of that election. Tonight, I encourage Iraq’s leaders to move forward with a sense of urgency to form an inclusive government that is just, representative, and accountable to the Iraqi people. And when that government is in place, there should be no doubt: The Iraqi people will have a strong partner in the United States. Our combat mission is ending, but our commitment to Iraq’s future is not.

Going forward, a transitional force of U.S. troops will remain in Iraq with a different mission: advising and assisting Iraq’s Security Forces, supporting Iraqi troops in targeted counterterrorism missions, and protecting our civilians. Consistent with our agreement with the Iraqi government, all U.S. troops will leave by the end of next year. As our military draws down, our dedicated civilians -- diplomats, aid workers, and advisors -- are moving into the lead to support Iraq as it strengthens its government, resolves political disputes, resettles those displaced by war, and builds ties with the region and the world. That’s a message that Vice President Biden is delivering to the Iraqi people through his visit there today.

This new approach reflects our long-term partnership with Iraq -- one based upon mutual interest and mutual respect. Of course, violence will not end with our combat mission. Extremists will continue to set off bombs, attack Iraqi civilians and try to spark sectarian strife. But ultimately, these terrorists will fail to achieve their goals. Iraqis are a proud people. They have rejected sectarian war, and they have no interest in endless destruction. They understand that, in the end, only Iraqis can resolve their differences and police their streets. Only Iraqis can build a democracy within their borders. What America can do, and will do, is provide support for the Iraqi people as both a friend and a partner.

Ending this war is not only in Iraq’s interest -- it’s in our own. The United States has paid a huge price to put the future of Iraq in the hands of its people. We have sent our young men and women to make enormous sacrifices in Iraq, and spent vast resources abroad at a time of tight budgets at home. We’ve persevered because of a belief we share with the Iraqi people -- a belief that out of the ashes of war, a new beginning could be born in this cradle of civilization. Through this remarkable chapter in the history of the United States and Iraq, we have met our responsibility. Now, it’s time to turn the page.

As we do, I’m mindful that the Iraq war has been a contentious issue at home. Here, too, it’s time to turn the page. This afternoon, I spoke to former President George W. Bush. It’s well known that he and I disagreed about the war from its outset. Yet no one can doubt President Bush’s support for our troops, or his love of country and commitment to our security. As I’ve said, there were patriots who supported this war, and patriots who opposed it. And all of us are united in appreciation for our servicemen and women, and our hopes for Iraqis’ future.

The greatness of our democracy is grounded in our ability to move beyond our differences, and to learn from our experience as we confront the many challenges ahead. And no challenge is more essential to our security than our fight against al Qaeda.

Americans across the political spectrum supported the use of force against those who attacked us on 9/11. Now, as we approach our 10th year of combat in Afghanistan, there are those who are understandably asking tough questions about our mission there. But we must never lose sight of what’s at stake. As we speak, al Qaeda continues to plot against us, and its leadership remains anchored in the border regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan. We will disrupt, dismantle and defeat al Qaeda, while preventing Afghanistan from again serving as a base for terrorists. And because of our drawdown in Iraq, we are now able to apply the resources necessary to go on offense. In fact, over the last 19 months, nearly a dozen al Qaeda leaders -- and hundreds of al Qaeda’s extremist allies -- have been killed or captured around the world.

Within Afghanistan, I’ve ordered the deployment of additional troops who -- under the command of General David Petraeus -- are fighting to break the Taliban’s momentum. As with the surge in Iraq, these forces will be in place for a limited time to provide space for the Afghans to build their capacity and secure their own future. But, as was the case in Iraq, we can’t do for Afghans what they must ultimately do for themselves. That’s why we’re training Afghan Security Forces and supporting a political resolution to Afghanistan’s problems. And next August, we will begin a transition to Afghan responsibility. The pace of our troop reductions will be determined by conditions on the ground, and our support for Afghanistan will endure. But make no mistake: This transition will begin -- because open-ended war serves neither our interests nor the Afghan people’s.

Indeed, one of the lessons of our effort in Iraq is that American influence around the world is not a function of military force alone. We must use all elements of our power -- including our diplomacy, our economic strength, and the power of America’s example -- to secure our interests and stand by our allies. And we must project a vision of the future that’s based not just on our fears, but also on our hopes -- a vision that recognizes the real dangers that exist around the world, but also the limitless possibilities of our time.

Today, old adversaries are at peace, and emerging democracies are potential partners. New markets for our goods stretch from Asia to the Americas. A new push for peace in the Middle East will begin here tomorrow. Billions of young people want to move beyond the shackles of poverty and conflict. As the leader of the free world, America will do more than just defeat on the battlefield those who offer hatred and destruction -- we will also lead among those who are willing to work together to expand freedom and opportunity for all people.

Now, that effort must begin within our own borders. Throughout our history, America has been willing to bear the burden of promoting liberty and human dignity overseas, understanding its links to our own liberty and security. But we have also understood that our nation’s strength and influence abroad must be firmly anchored in our prosperity at home. And the bedrock of that prosperity must be a growing middle class.

Unfortunately, over the last decade, we’ve not done what’s necessary to shore up the foundations of our own prosperity. We spent a trillion dollars at war, often financed by borrowing from overseas. This, in turn, has short-changed investments in our own people, and contributed to record deficits. For too long, we have put off tough decisions on everything from our manufacturing base to our energy policy to education reform. As a result, too many middle-class families find themselves working harder for less, while our nation’s long-term competitiveness is put at risk.

And so at this moment, as we wind down the war in Iraq, we must tackle those challenges at home with as much energy, and grit, and sense of common purpose as our men and women in uniform who have served abroad. They have met every test that they faced. Now, it’s our turn. Now, it’s our responsibility to honor them by coming together, all of us, and working to secure the dream that so many generations have fought for -- the dream that a better life awaits anyone who is willing to work for it and reach for it.

Our most urgent task is to restore our economy, and put the millions of Americans who have lost their jobs back to work. To strengthen our middle class, we must give all our children the education they deserve, and all our workers the skills that they need to compete in a global economy. We must jumpstart industries that create jobs, and end our dependence on foreign oil. We must unleash the innovation that allows new products to roll off our assembly lines, and nurture the ideas that spring from our entrepreneurs. This will be difficult. But in the days to come, it must be our central mission as a people, and my central responsibility as President.

Part of that responsibility is making sure that we honor our commitments to those who have served our country with such valor. As long as I am President, we will maintain the finest fighting force that the world has ever known, and we will do whatever it takes to serve our veterans as well as they have served us. This is a sacred trust. That’s why we’ve already made one of the largest increases in funding for veterans in decades. We’re treating the signature wounds of today’s wars -- post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury -- while providing the health care and benefits that all of our veterans have earned. And we’re funding a Post-9/11 GI Bill that helps our veterans and their families pursue the dream of a college education. Just as the GI Bill helped those who fought World War II -- including my grandfather -- become the backbone of our middle class, so today’s servicemen and women must have the chance to apply their gifts to expand the American economy. Because part of ending a war responsibly is standing by those who have fought it.

Two weeks ago, America’s final combat brigade in Iraq -- the Army’s Fourth Stryker Brigade -- journeyed home in the pre-dawn darkness. Thousands of soldiers and hundreds of vehicles made the trip from Baghdad, the last of them passing into Kuwait in the early morning hours. Over seven years before, American troops and coalition partners had fought their way across similar highways, but this time no shots were fired. It was just a convoy of brave Americans, making their way home.

Of course, the soldiers left much behind. Some were teenagers when the war began. Many have served multiple tours of duty, far from families who bore a heroic burden of their own, enduring the absence of a husband’s embrace or a mother’s kiss. Most painfully, since the war began, 55 members of the Fourth Stryker Brigade made the ultimate sacrifice -- part of over 4,400 Americans who have given their lives in Iraq. As one staff sergeant said, “I know that to my brothers in arms who fought and died, this day would probably mean a lot.”

Those Americans gave their lives for the values that have lived in the hearts of our people for over two centuries. Along with nearly 1.5 million Americans who have served in Iraq, they fought in a faraway place for people they never knew. They stared into the darkest of human creations -- war -- and helped the Iraqi people seek the light of peace.

In an age without surrender ceremonies, we must earn victory through the success of our partners and the strength of our own nation. Every American who serves joins an unbroken line of heroes that stretches from Lexington to Gettysburg; from Iwo Jima to Inchon; from Khe Sanh to Kandahar -- Americans who have fought to see that the lives of our children are better than our own. Our troops are the steel in our ship of state. And though our nation may be travelling through rough waters, they give us confidence that our course is true, and that beyond the pre-dawn darkness, better days lie ahead.

Thank you. May God bless you. And may God bless the United States of America, and all who serve her.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# 9/11 Pentagon Memorial Address

Secretary Gates, Admiral Mullen and members of the Armed Forces, my fellow Americans; most of all, to you -- survivors who still carry the scars of tragedy and destruction; to the families who carry in your hearts the memory of the loved ones you lost here:

For our nation, this is a day of remembrance, a day of reflection, and -- with God’s grace -- a day of unity and renewal.

We gather to remember, at this sacred hour, on hallowed ground -- at places where we feel such grief and where our healing goes on. We gather here, at the Pentagon, where the names of the lost are forever etched in stone. We gather in a gentle Pennsylvania field, where a plane went down and a “tower of voices” will rise and echo through the ages. And we gather where the Twin Towers fell, a site where the work goes on so that next year, on the 10th anniversary, the waters will flow in steady tribute to the nearly 3,000 innocent lives.

On this day, it’s perhaps natural to focus on the images of that awful morning -- images that are seared into our souls. It’s tempting to dwell on the final moments of the loved ones whose lives were taken so cruelly. Yet these memorials, and your presence today, remind us to remember the fullness of their time on Earth.

They were fathers and mothers, raising their families; brothers and sisters, pursuing their dreams; sons and daughters, their whole lives before them. They were civilians and service members. Some never saw the danger coming; others saw the peril and rushed to save others -- up those stairwells, into the flames, into the cockpit.

They were white and black and brown -- men and women and some children made up of all races, many faiths. They were Americans and people from far corners of the world. And they were snatched from us senselessly and much too soon -- but they lived well, and they live on in you.

Nine years have now passed. In that time, you have shed more tears than we will ever know. And though it must seem some days as though the world has moved on to other things, I say to you today that your loved ones endure in the heart of our nation, now and forever.

Our remembrance today also requires a certain reflection. As a nation, and as individuals, we must ask ourselves how best to honor them -- those who died, those who sacrificed. How do we preserve their legacy -- not just on this day, but every day?

We need not look far for our answer. The perpetrators of this evil act didn’t simply attack America; they attacked the very idea of America itself -- all that we stand for and represent in the world. And so the highest honor we can pay those we lost, indeed our greatest weapon in this ongoing war, is to do what our adversaries fear the most -- to stay true to who we are, as Americans; to renew our sense of common purpose; to say that we define the character of our country, and we will not let the acts of some small band of murderers who slaughter the innocent and cower in caves distort who we are.

They doubted our will, but as Americans we persevere. Today, in Afghanistan and beyond, we have gone on the offensive and struck major blows against al Qaeda and its allies. We will do what is necessary to protect our country, and we honor all those who serve to keep us safe.

They may seek to strike fear in us, but they are no match for our resilience. We do not succumb to fear, nor will we squander the optimism that has always defined us as a people. On a day when others sought to destroy, we have chosen to build, with a National Day of Service and Remembrance that summons the inherent goodness of the American people.

They may seek to exploit our freedoms, but we will not sacrifice the liberties we cherish or hunker down behind walls of suspicion and mistrust. They may wish to drive us apart, but we will not give in to their hatred and prejudice. For Scripture teaches us to “get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.”

They may seek to spark conflict between different faiths, but as Americans we are not -- and never will be -- at war with Islam. It was not a religion that attacked us that September day -- it was al Qaeda, a sorry band of men which perverts religion. And just as we condemn intolerance and extremism abroad, so will we stay true to our traditions here at home as a diverse and tolerant nation. We champion the rights of every American, including the right to worship as one chooses -- as service members and civilians from many faiths do just steps from here, at the very spot where the terrorists struck this building.

Those who attacked us sought to demoralize us, divide us, to deprive us of the very unity, the very ideals, that make America America -- those qualities that have made us a beacon of freedom and hope to billions around the world. Today we declare once more we will never hand them that victory. As Americans, we will keep alive the virtues and values that make us who we are and who we must always be.

For our cause is just. Our spirit is strong. Our resolve is unwavering. Like generations before us, let us come together today and all days to affirm certain inalienable rights, to affirm life and liberty and the pursuit of happiness. On this day and the days to come, we choose to stay true to our best selves -- as one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

This is how we choose to honor the fallen -- your families, your friends, your fellow service members. This is how we will keep alive the legacy of these proud and patriotic Americans. This is how we will prevail in this great test of our time. This is how we will preserve and protect the country that we love and pass it -- safer and stronger -- to future generations.

May God bless you and your families, and may God continue to bless the United States of America.

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# 65th Session of the United Nations General Assembly Address

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General, my fellow delegates, ladies and gentlemen. It is a great honor to address this Assembly for the second time, nearly two years after my election as President of the United States.

We know this is no ordinary time for our people. Each of us comes here with our own problems and priorities. But there are also challenges that we share in common as leaders and as nations.

We meet within an institution built from the rubble of war, designed to unite the world in pursuit of peace. And we meet within a city that for centuries has welcomed people from across the globe, demonstrating that individuals of every color, faith and station can come together to pursue opportunity, build a community, and live with the blessing of human liberty.

Outside the doors of this hall, the blocks and neighborhoods of this great city tell the story of a difficult decade. Nine years ago, the destruction of the World Trade Center signaled a threat that respected no boundary of dignity or decency. Two years ago this month, a financial crisis on Wall Street devastated American families on Main Street. These separate challenges have affected people around the globe. Men and women and children have been murdered by extremists from Casablanca to London; from Jalalabad to Jakarta. The global economy suffered an enormous blow during the financial crisis, crippling markets and deferring the dreams of millions on every continent. Underneath these challenges to our security and prosperity lie deeper fears: that ancient hatreds and religious divides are once again ascendant; that a world which has grown more interconnected has somehow slipped beyond our control.

These are some of the challenges that my administration has confronted since we came into office. And today, I’d like to talk to you about what we’ve done over the last 20 months to meet these challenges; what our responsibility is to pursue peace in the Middle East; and what kind of world we are trying to build in this 21st century.

Let me begin with what we have done. I have had no greater focus as President than rescuing our economy from potential catastrophe. And in an age when prosperity is shared, we could not do this alone. So America has joined with nations around the world to spur growth, and the renewed demand that could restart job creation.

We are reforming our system of global finance, beginning with Wall Street reform here at home, so that a crisis like this never happens again. And we made the G20 the focal point for international coordination, because in a world where prosperity is more diffuse, we must broaden our circle of cooperation to include emerging economies -- economies from every corner of the globe.

There is much to show for our efforts, even as there is much work to be done. The global economy has been pulled back from the brink of a depression, and is growing once more. We have resisted protectionism, and are exploring ways to expand trade and commerce among nations. But we cannot -- and will not -- rest until these seeds of progress grow into a broader prosperity, not only for all Americans, but for peoples around the globe.

As for our common security, America is waging a more effective fight against al Qaeda, while winding down the war in Iraq. Since I took office, the United States has removed nearly 100,000 troops from Iraq. We have done so responsibly, as Iraqis have transitioned to lead responsibility for the security of their country.

We are now focused on building a lasting partnership with the Iraqi people, while keeping our commitment to remove the rest of our troops by the end of next year.

While drawing down in Iraq, we have refocused on defeating al Qaeda and denying its affiliates a safe haven. In Afghanistan, the United States and our allies are pursuing a strategy to break the Taliban’s momentum and build the capacity of Afghanistan’s government and security forces, so that a transition to Afghan responsibility can begin next July. And from South Asia to the Horn of Africa, we are moving toward a more targeted approach -- one that strengthens our partners and dismantles terrorist networks without deploying large American armies.

As we pursue the world’s most dangerous extremists, we’re also denying them the world’s most dangerous weapons, and pursuing the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons.

Earlier this year, 47 nations embraced a work-plan to secure all vulnerable nuclear materials within four years. We have joined with Russia to sign the most comprehensive arms control treaty in decades. We have reduced the role of nuclear weapons in our security strategy. And here, at the United Nations, we came together to strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

As part of our effort on non-proliferation, I offered the Islamic Republic of Iran an extended hand last year, and underscored that it has both rights and responsibilities as a member of the international community. I also said -- in this hall -- that Iran must be held accountable if it failed to meet those responsibilities. And that is what we have done.

Iran is the only party to the NPT that cannot demonstrate the peaceful intentions of its nuclear program, and those actions have consequences. Through U.N. Security Council Resolution 1929, we made it clear that international law is not an empty promise.

Now let me be clear once more: The United States and the international community seek a resolution to our differences with Iran, and the door remains open to diplomacy should Iran choose to walk through it. But the Iranian government must demonstrate a clear and credible commitment and confirm to the world the peaceful intent of its nuclear program.

As we combat the spread of deadly weapons, we’re also confronting the specter of climate change. After making historic investments in clean energy and efficiency at home, we helped forge an accord in Copenhagen that -- for the first time -- commits all major economies to reduce their emissions. We are keenly aware this is just a first step. And going forward, we will support a process in which all major economies meet our responsibilities to protect the planet while unleashing the power of clean energy to serve as an engine of growth and development.

America has also embraced unique responsibilities with come -- that come with our power. Since the rains came and the floodwaters rose in Pakistan, we have pledged our assistance, and we should all support the Pakistani people as they recover and rebuild. And when the earth shook and Haiti was devastated by loss, we joined a coalition of nations in response. Today, we honor those from the U.N. family who lost their lives in the earthquake, and commit ourselves to stand with the people of Haiti until they can stand on their own two feet.

Amidst this upheaval, we have also been persistent in our pursuit of peace. Last year, I pledged my best efforts to support the goal of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, as part of a comprehensive peace between Israel and all of its neighbors. We have travelled a winding road over the last 12 months, with few peaks and many valleys. But this month, I am pleased that we have pursued direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians in Washington, Sharm el Sheikh and Jerusalem.

Now I recognize many are pessimistic about this process. The cynics say that Israelis and Palestinians are too distrustful of each other, and too divided internally, to forge lasting peace. Rejectionists on both sides will try to disrupt the process, with bitter words and with bombs and with gunfire. Some say that the gaps between the parties are too big; the potential for talks to break down is too great; and that after decades of failure, peace is simply not possible.

I hear those voices of skepticism. But I ask you to consider the alternative. If an agreement is not reached, Palestinians will never know the pride and dignity that comes with their own state. Israelis will never know the certainty and security that comes with sovereign and stable neighbors who are committed to coexistence. The hard realities of demography will take hold. More blood will be shed. This Holy Land will remain a symbol of our differences, instead of our common humanity.

I refuse to accept that future. And we all have a choice to make. Each of us must choose the path of peace. Of course, that responsibility begins with the parties themselves, who must answer the call of history. Earlier this month at the White House, I was struck by the words of both the Israeli and Palestinian leaders. Prime Minister Netanyahu said, “I came here today to find a historic compromise that will enable both people to live in peace, security, and dignity.” And President Abbas said, “We will spare no effort and we will work diligently and tirelessly to ensure these negotiations achieve their cause.”

These words must now be followed by action and I believe that both leaders have the courage to do so. But the road that they have to travel is exceedingly difficult, which is why I call upon Israelis and Palestinians -- and the world -- to rally behind the goal that these leaders now share. We know that there will be tests along the way and that one test is fast approaching. Israel’s settlement moratorium has made a difference on the ground and improved the atmosphere for talks.

And our position on this issue is well known. We believe that the moratorium should be extended. We also believe that talks should press on until completed. Now is the time for the parties to help each other overcome this obstacle. Now is the time to build the trust -- and provide the time -- for substantial progress to be made. Now is the time for this opportunity to be seized, so that it does not slip away.

Now, peace must be made by Israelis and Palestinians, but each of us has a responsibility to do our part as well. Those of us who are friends of Israel must understand that true security for the Jewish state requires an independent Palestine -- one that allows the Palestinian people to live with dignity and opportunity. And those of us who are friends of the Palestinians must understand that the rights of the Palestinian people will be won only through peaceful means -- including genuine reconciliation with a secure Israel.

I know many in this hall count themselves as friends of the Palestinians. But these pledges of friendship must now be supported by deeds. Those who have signed on to the Arab Peace Initiative should seize this opportunity to make it real by taking tangible steps towards the normalization that it promises Israel.

And those who speak on behalf of Palestinian self-government should help the Palestinian Authority politically and financially, and in doing so help the Palestinians build the institutions of their state.

Those who long to see an independent Palestine must also stop trying to tear down Israel. After thousands of years, Jews and Arabs are not strangers in a strange land. After 60 years in the community of nations, Israel’s existence must not be a subject for debate.

Israel is a sovereign state, and the historic homeland of the Jewish people. It should be clear to all that efforts to chip away at Israel’s legitimacy will only be met by the unshakeable opposition of the United States. And efforts to threaten or kill Israelis will do nothing to help the Palestinian people. The slaughter of innocent Israelis is not resistance -- it’s injustice. And make no mistake: The courage of a man like President Abbas, who stands up for his people in front of the world under very difficult circumstances, is far greater than those who fire rockets at innocent women and children.

The conflict between Israelis and Arabs is as old as this institution. And we can come back here next year, as we have for the last 60 years, and make long speeches about it. We can read familiar lists of grievances. We can table the same resolutions. We can further empower the forces of rejectionism and hate. And we can waste more time by carrying forward an argument that will not help a single Israeli or Palestinian child achieve a better life. We can do that.

Or, we can say that this time will be different -- that this time we will not let terror, or turbulence, or posturing, or petty politics stand in the way. This time, we will think not of ourselves, but of the young girl in Gaza who wants to have no ceiling on her dreams, or the young boy in Sderot who wants to sleep without the nightmare of rocket fire.

This time, we should draw upon the teachings of tolerance that lie at the heart of three great religions that see Jerusalem’s soil as sacred. This time we should reach for what’s best within ourselves. If we do, when we come back here next year, we can have an agreement that will lead to a new member of the United Nations -- an independent, sovereign state of Palestine, living in peace with Israel.

It is our destiny to bear the burdens of the challenges that I’ve addressed -- recession and war and conflict. And there is always a sense of urgency -- even emergency -- that drives most of our foreign policies. Indeed, after millennia marked by wars, this very institution reflects the desire of human beings to create a forum to deal with emergencies that will inevitably come.

But even as we confront immediate challenges, we must also summon the foresight to look beyond them, and consider what we are trying to build over the long term? What is the world that awaits us when today’s battles are brought to an end? And that is what I would like to talk about with the remainder of my time today.

One of the first actions of this General Assembly was to adopt a Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. That Declaration begins by stating that, “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world.”

The idea is a simple one -- that freedom, justice and peace for the world must begin with freedom, justice, and peace in the lives of individual human beings. And for the United States, this is a matter of moral and pragmatic necessity. As Robert Kennedy said, “the individual man, the child of God, is the touchstone of value, and all society, groups, the state, exist for his benefit.” So we stand up for universal values because it’s the right thing to do. But we also know from experience that those who defend these values for their people have been our closest friends and allies, while those who have denied those rights -- whether terrorist groups or tyrannical governments -- have chosen to be our adversaries.

Human rights have never gone unchallenged -- not in any of our nations, and not in our world. Tyranny is still with us -- whether it manifests itself in the Taliban killing girls who try to go to school, a North Korean regime that enslaves its own people, or an armed group in Congo-Kinshasa that use rape as a weapon of war.

In times of economic unease, there can also be an anxiety about human rights. Today, as in past times of economic downturn, some put human rights aside for the promise of short term stability or the false notion that economic growth can come at the expense of freedom. We see leaders abolishing term limits. We see crackdowns on civil society. We see corruption smothering entrepreneurship and good governance. We see democratic reforms deferred indefinitely.

As I said last year, each country will pursue a path rooted in the culture of its own people. Yet experience shows us that history is on the side of liberty; that the strongest foundation for human progress lies in open economies, open societies, and open governments. To put it simply, democracy, more than any other form of government, delivers for our citizens. And I believe that truth will only grow stronger in a world where the borders between nations are blurred.

America is working to shape a world that fosters this openness, for the rot of a closed or corrupt economy must never eclipse the energy and innovation of human beings. All of us want the right to educate our children, to make a decent wage, to care for the sick, and to be carried as far as our dreams and our deeds will take us. But that depends upon economies that tap the power of our people, including the potential of women and girls. That means letting entrepreneurs start a business without paying a bribe and governments that support opportunity instead of stealing from their people. And that means rewarding hard work, instead of reckless risk-taking.

Yesterday, I put forward a new development policy that will pursue these goals, recognizing that dignity is a human right and global development is in our common interest. America will partner with nations that offer their people a path out of poverty. And together, we must unleash growth that powers by individuals and emerging markets in all parts of the globe.

There is no reason why Africa should not be an exporter of agriculture, which is why our food security initiative is empowering farmers. There is no reason why entrepreneurs shouldn’t be able to build new markets in every society, which is why I hosted a summit on entrepreneurship earlier this spring, because the obligation of government is to empower individuals, not to impede them.

The same holds true for civil society. The arc of human progress has been shaped by individuals with the freedom to assemble and by organizations outside of government that insisted upon democratic change and by free media that held the powerful accountable. We have seen that from the South Africans who stood up to apartheid, to the Poles of Solidarity, to the mothers of the disappeared who spoke out against the Dirty War, to Americans who marched for the rights of all races, including my own.

Civil society is the conscience of our communities and America will always extend our engagement abroad with citizens beyond the halls of government. And we will call out those who suppress ideas and serve as a voice for those who are voiceless. We will promote new tools of communication so people are empowered to connect with one another and, in repressive societies, to do so with security. We will support a free and open Internet, so individuals have the information to make up their own minds. And it is time to embrace and effectively monitor norms that advance the rights of civil society and guarantee its expansion within and across borders.

Open society supports open government, but it cannot substitute for it. There is no right more fundamental than the ability to choose your leaders and determine your destiny. Now, make no mistake: The ultimate success of democracy in the world won’t come because the United States dictates it; it will come because individual citizens demand a say in how they are governed.

There is no soil where this notion cannot take root, just as every democracy reflects the uniqueness of a nation. Later this fall, I will travel to Asia. And I will visit India, which peacefully threw off colonialism and established a thriving democracy of over a billion people.

I’ll continue to Indonesia, the world’s largest Muslim-majority country, which binds together thousands of islands through the glue of representative government and civil society. I’ll join the G20 meeting on the Korean Peninsula, which provides the world’s clearest contrast between a society that is dynamic and open and free, and one that is imprisoned and closed. And I will conclude my trip in Japan, an ancient culture that found peace and extraordinary development through democracy.

Each of these countries gives life to democratic principles in their own way. And even as some governments roll back reform, we also celebrate the courage of a President in Colombia who willingly stepped aside, or the promise of a new constitution in Kenya.

The common thread of progress is the principle that government is accountable to its citizens. And the diversity in this room makes clear -- no one country has all the answers, but all of us must answer to our own people.

In all parts of the world, we see the promise of innovation to make government more open and accountable. And now, we must build on that progress. And when we gather back here next year, we should bring specific commitments to promote transparency; to fight corruption; to energize civic engagement; to leverage new technologies so that we strengthen the foundations of freedom in our own countries, while living up to the ideals that can light the world.

This institution can still play an indispensable role in the advance of human rights. It’s time to welcome the efforts of U.N. Women to protect the rights of women around the globe.

It’s time for every member state to open its elections to international monitors and increase the U.N. Democracy Fund. It’s time to reinvigorate U.N. peacekeeping, so that missions have the resources necessary to succeed, and so atrocities like sexual violence are prevented and justice is enforced -- because neither dignity nor democracy can thrive without basic security.

And it’s time to make this institution more accountable as well, because the challenges of a new century demand new ways of serving our common interests.

The world that America seeks is not one we can build on our own. For human rights to reach those who suffer the boot of oppression, we need your voices to speak out. In particular, I appeal to those nations who emerged from tyranny and inspired the world in the second half of the last century -- from South Africa to South Asia; from Eastern Europe to South America. Don’t stand idly by, don’t be silent, when dissidents elsewhere are imprisoned and protesters are beaten. Recall your own history. Because part of the price of our own freedom is standing up for the freedom of others.

That belief will guide America’s leadership in this 21st century. It is a belief that has seen us through more than two centuries of trial, and it will see us through the challenges we face today -- be it war or recession; conflict or division.

So even as we have come through a difficult decade, I stand here before you confident in the future -- a future where Iraq is governed by neither tyrant nor a foreign power, and Afghanistan is freed from the turmoil of war; a future where the children of Israel and Palestine can build the peace that was not possible for their parents; a world where the promise of development reaches into the prisons of poverty and disease; a future where the cloud of recession gives way to the light of renewal and the dream of opportunity is available to all.

This future will not be easy to reach. It will not come without setbacks, nor will it be quickly claimed. But the founding of the United Nations itself is a testament to human progress. Remember, in times that were far more trying than our own, our predecessors chose the hope of unity over the ease of division and made a promise to future generations that the dignity and equality of human beings would be our common cause. It falls to us to fulfill that promise. And though we will be met by dark forces that will test our resolve, Americans have always had cause to believe that we can choose a better history; that we need only to look outside the walls around us. For through the citizens of every conceivable ancestry who make this city their own, we see living proof that opportunity can be accessed by all, that what unites us as human beings is far greater than what divides us, and that people from every part of this world can live together in peace.

Thank you very much.

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# Press Conference Following 2010 Congressional Elections

Good afternoon, everybody. Last night I had a chance to speak to the leaders of the House and the Senate and reached out to those who had both won and lost in both parties. I told John Boehner and Mitch McConnell that I look forward to working with them. And I thanked Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid for their extraordinary leadership over the last two years.

After what I'm sure was a long night for a lot of you -- and needless to say it was for me -- I can tell you that some election nights are more fun than others. Some are exhilarating; some are humbling. But every election, regardless of who wins and who loses, is a reminder that in our democracy, power rests not with those of us in elected office, but with the people we have the privilege to serve.

Over the last few months I've had the opportunity to travel around the country and meet people where they live and where they work, from backyards to factory floors. I did some talking, but mostly I did a lot of listening. And yesterday’s vote confirmed what I've heard from folks all across America: People are frustrated -- they’re deeply frustrated -- with the pace of our economic recovery and the opportunities that they hope for their children and their grandchildren. They want jobs to come back faster, they want paychecks to go further, and they want the ability to give their children the same chances and opportunities as they’ve had in life.

The men and women who sent us here don't expect Washington to solve all their problems. But they do expect Washington to work for them, not against them. They want to know that their tax dollars are being spent wisely, not wasted, and that we're not going to leave our children a legacy of debt. They want to know that their voices aren’t being drowned out by a sea of lobbyists and special interests and partisan bickering. They want business to be done here openly and honestly.

Now, I ran for this office to tackle these challenges and give voice to the concerns of everyday people. Over the last two years, we’ve made progress. But, clearly, too many Americans haven’t felt that progress yet, and they told us that yesterday. And as President, I take responsibility for that.

What yesterday also told us is that no one party will be able to dictate where we go from here, that we must find common ground in order to set -- in order to make progress on some uncommonly difficult challenges. And I told John Boehner and Mitch McConnell last night I am very eager to sit down with members of both parties and figure out how we can move forward together.

I’m not suggesting this will be easy. I won’t pretend that we will be able to bridge every difference or solve every disagreement. There’s a reason we have two parties in this country, and both Democrats and Republicans have certain beliefs and certain principles that each feels cannot be compromised. But what I think the American people are expecting, and what we owe them, is to focus on those issues that affect their jobs, their security, and their future: reducing our deficit, promoting a clean energy economy, making sure that our children are the best educated in the world, making sure that we’re making the investments in technology that will allow us to keep our competitive edge in the global economy.

Because the most important contest we face is not the contest between Democrats and Republicans. In this century, the most important competition we face is between America and our economic competitors around the world. To win that competition, and to continue our economic leadership, we’re going to need to be strong and we’re going to need to be united.

None of the challenges we face lend themselves to simple solutions or bumper-sticker slogans. Nor are the answers found in any one particular philosophy or ideology. As I’ve said before, no person, no party, has a monopoly on wisdom. And that’s why I’m eager to hear good ideas wherever they come from, whoever proposes them. And that’s why I believe it’s important to have an honest and civil debate about the choices that we face. That’s why I want to engage both Democrats and Republicans in serious conversations about where we’re going as a nation.

And with so much at stake, what the American people don’t want from us, especially here in Washington, is to spend the next two years refighting the political battles of the last two. We just had a tough election. We will have another in 2012. I’m not so naÃ¯ve as to think that everybody will put politics aside until then, but I do hope to make progress on the very serious problems facing us right now. And that’s going to require all of us, including me, to work harder at building consensus.

You know, a little over a month ago, we held a town hall meeting in Richmond, Virginia. And one of the most telling questions came from a small business owner who runs a tree care firm. He told me how hard he works and how busy he was; how he doesn’t have time to pay attention to all the back-and-forth in Washington. And he asked, is there hope for us returning to civility in our discourse, to a healthy legislative process, so as I strap on the boots again tomorrow, I know that you guys got it under control? It’s hard to have a faith in that right now, he said.

I do believe there is hope for civility. I do believe there’s hope for progress. And that’s because I believe in the resiliency of a nation that’s bounced back from much worse than what we’re going through right now -- a nation that's overcome war and depression, that has been made more perfect in our struggle for individual rights and individual freedoms.

Each time progress has come slowly and even painfully, but progress has always come -- because we’ve worked at it and because we’ve believed in it, and most of all, because we remembered that our first allegiance as citizens is not to party or region or faction, but to country -- because while we may be proud Democrats or proud Republicans, we are prouder to be Americans.

And that's something that we all need to remember right now and in the coming months. And if we do, I have no doubt that we will continue this nation’s long journey towards a better future.

So with that, let me take some questions. I’m going to start off with Ben Feller at AP.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Are you willing to concede at all that what happened last night was not just an expression of frustration about the economy, but a fundamental rejection of your agenda? And given the results, who do you think speaks to the true voice of the American people right now: you or John Boehner?

President Obama: I think that there is no doubt that people’s number-one concern is the economy. And what they were expressing great frustration about is the fact that we haven’t made enough progress on the economy. We’ve stabilized the economy. We’ve got job growth in the private sectors. But people all across America aren’t feeling that progress. They don't see it. And they understand that I’m the President of the United States, and that my core responsibility is making sure that we’ve got an economy that's growing, a middle class that feels secure, that jobs are being created. And so I think I've got to take direct responsibility for the fact that we have not made as much progress as we need to make.

Now, moving forward, I think the question is going to be can Democrats and Republicans sit down together and come up with a set of ideas that address those core concerns. I'm confident that we can.

I think that there are some areas where it’s going to be very difficult for us to agree on, but I think there are going to be a whole bunch of areas where we can agree on. I don’t think there’s anybody in America who thinks that we’ve got an energy policy that works the way it needs to; that thinks that we shouldn’t be working on energy independence. And that gives opportunities for Democrats and Republicans to come together and think about, whether it’s natural gas or energy efficiency or how we can build electric cars in this country, how do we move forward on that agenda.

I think everybody in this country thinks that we’ve got to make sure our kids are equipped in terms of their education, their science background, their math backgrounds, to compete in this new global economy. And that’s going to be an area where I think there’s potential common ground.

So on a whole range of issues, there are going to be areas where we disagree. I think the overwhelming message that I hear from the voters is that we want everybody to act responsibly in Washington. We want you to work harder to arrive at consensus. We want you to focus completely on jobs and the economy and growing it, so that we’re ensuring a better future for our children and our grandchildren.

And I think that there’s no doubt that as I reflect on the results of the election, it underscores for me that I've got to do a better job, just like everybody else in Washington does.

Question: [Inaudible.]

President Obama: Well, I think John Boehner and I and Mitch McConnell and Harry Reid and Nancy Pelosi are going to have to sit down and work together -- because I suspect that if you talk to any individual voter yesterday, they’d say, there are some things I agree with Democrats on, there are some things I agree with Republicans on. I don’t think people carry around with them a fixed ideology. I think the majority of people, they’re going about their business, going about their lives. They just want to make sure that we’re making progress. And that’s going to be my top priority over the next couple of years.

Savannah Guthrie.

Question: Just following up on what Ben just talked about, you don’t seem to be reflecting or second-guessing any of the policy decisions you’ve made, instead saying the message the voters were sending was about frustration with the economy or maybe even chalking it up to a failure on your part to communicate effectively. If you’re not reflecting on your policy agenda, is it possible voters can conclude you’re still not getting it?

President Obama: Well, Savannah, that was just the first question, so we’re going to have a few more here. I’m doing a whole lot of reflecting and I think that there are going to be areas in policy where we’re going to have to do a better job. I think that over the last two years, we have made a series of very tough decisions, but decisions that were right in terms of moving the country forward in an emergency situation where we had the risk of slipping into a second Great Depression.

But what is absolutely true is that with all that stuff coming at folks fast and furious -- a recovery package, what we had to do with respect to the banks, what we had to do with respect to the auto companies -- I think people started looking at all this and it felt as if government was getting much more intrusive into people’s lives than they were accustomed to.

Now, the reason was it was an emergency situation. But I think it’s understandable that folks said to themselves, you know, maybe this is the agenda, as opposed to a response to an emergency. And that’s something that I think everybody in the White House understood was a danger. We thought it was necessary, but I’m sympathetic to folks who looked at it and said this is looking like potential overreach.

In addition, there were a bunch of price tags that went with that. And so, even though these were emergency situations, people rightly said, gosh, we already have all this debt, we already have these big deficits; this is potentially going to compound it, and at what point are we going to get back to a situation where we’re doing what families all around the country do, which is make sure that if you spend something you know how to pay for it -- as opposed to racking up the credit card for the next generation.

And I think that the other thing that happened is that when I won election in 2008, one of the reasons I think that people were excited about the campaign was the prospect that we would change how business is done in Washington. And we were in such a hurry to get things done that we didn’t change how things got done. And I think that frustrated people.

I’m a strong believer that the earmarking process in Congress isn’t what the American people really want to see when it comes to making tough decisions about how taxpayer dollars are spent. And I, in the rush to get things done, had to sign a bunch of bills that had earmarks in them, which was contrary to what I had talked about. And I think folks look at that and they said, gosh, this feels like the same partisan squabbling, this seems like the same ways of doing business as happened before.

And so one of the things that I’ve got to take responsibility for is not having moved enough on those fronts. And I think there is an opportunity to move forward on some of those issues. My understanding is Eric Cantor today said that he wanted to see a moratorium on earmarks continuing. That’s something I think we can -- we can work on together.

Question: Would you still resist the notion that voters rejected the policy choices you made?

President Obama: Well, Savannah, I think that what I think is absolutely true is voters are not satisfied with the outcomes. If right now we had 5 percent unemployment instead of 9.6 percent unemployment, then people would have more confidence in those policy choices. The fact is, is that for most folks, proof of whether they work or not is has the economy gotten back to where it needs to be. And it hasn’t.

And so my job is to make sure that I’m looking at all ideas that are on the table. When it comes to job creation, if Republicans have good ideas for job growth that can drive down the unemployment rate, and we haven’t thought of them, we haven’t looked at them but we think they have a chance of working, we want to try some.

So on the policy front, I think the most important thing is to say that we’re not going to rule out ideas because they’re Democrat or Republican; we want to just see what works. And ultimately, I’ll be judged as President as to the bottom line, results.

Mike Emanuel.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Health care -- as you’re well aware, obviously, a lot of Republicans ran against your health care law. Some have called for repealing the law. I’m wondering, sir, if you believe that health care reform that you worked so hard on is in danger at this point, and whether there’s a threat, as a result of this election.

President Obama: Well, I know that there’s some Republican candidates who won last night who feel very strongly about it. I’m sure that this will be an issue that comes up in discussions with the Republican leadership. As I said before, though, I think we’d be misreading the election if we thought that the American people want to see us for the next two years relitigate arguments that we had over the last two years.

With respect to the health care law, generally -- and this may go to some of the questions that Savannah was raising -- you know, when I talk to a woman from New Hampshire who doesn’t have to mortgage her house because she got cancer and is seeking treatment but now is able to get health insurance, when I talk to parents who are relieved that their child with a preexisting condition can now stay on their policy until they’re 26 years old and give them time to transition to find a job that will give them health insurance, or the small businesses that are now taking advantage of the tax credits that are provided -- then I say to myself, this was the right thing to do.

Now, if the Republicans have ideas for how to improve our health care system, if they want to suggest modifications that would deliver faster and more effective reform to a health care system that has been wildly expensive for too many families and businesses and certainly for our federal government, I’m happy to consider some of those ideas.

You know, for example, I know one of the things that’s come up is that the 1099 provision in the health care bill appears to be too burdensome for small businesses. It just involves too much paperwork, too much filing. It’s probably counterproductive. It was designed to make sure that revenue was raised to help pay for some of the other provisions, but if it ends up just being so much trouble that small businesses find it difficult to manage, that's something that we should take a look at.

So there are going to be examples where I think we can tweak and make improvements on the progress that we’ve made. That's true for any significant piece of legislation.

But I don't think that if you ask the American people, should we stop trying to close the doughnut hole that will help senior citizens get prescription drugs, should we go back to a situation where people with preexisting conditions can’t get health insurance, should we allow insurance companies to drop your coverage when you get sick even though you’ve been paying premiums -- I don't think that you’d have a strong vote for people saying those are provisions I want to eliminate.

Question: According to some exit polls, sir, about one out of two voters apparently said that they would like to either see it overturned or repealed. Are you concerned that that may embolden voters who are from the other party perhaps?

President Obama: Well, it also means one out of two voters think it was the right thing to do. And obviously this is an issue that has been contentious. But as I said, I think what's going to be useful is for us to go through the issues that Republicans have issues on -- not sort of talking generally, but let’s talk specifics. Does this particular provision -- when it comes to preexisting conditions, is this something you’re for or you’re against? Helping seniors get their prescription drugs -- does that make sense or not?

And if we take that approach -- which is different from campaigning -- I mean, this is now governing -- then I think that we can continue to make some progress and find some common ground.

Chip Reid.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Republicans say more than anything else what this election was about was spending. And they say it will be when hell freezes over that they will accept anything remotely like a stimulus bill or any kind of a proposal you have out there to stimulate job growth through spending. Do you accept the fact that any kind of spending to create jobs is dead at this point? And if so, what else can government do to create jobs, which is the number one issue?

President Obama: Well, I think this is going to be an important question for Democrats and Republicans. I think the American people are absolutely concerned about spending and debt -- and deficits. And I’m going to have a deficit commission that is putting forward its ideas. It’s a bipartisan group that includes Republican and Democratic members of Congress. Hopefully they were able to arrive at some consensus on some areas where we can eliminate programs that don’t work, cut back on government spending that is inefficient, can streamline government, but isn’t cutting into the core investments that are going to make sure that we are a competitive economy that is growing and providing opportunity for years to come.

So the question I think that my Republican friends and me and Democratic leaders are going to have answer is, what are our priorities? What do we care about? And that’s going to be a tough debate, because there are some tough choices here.

We already had a big deficit that I inherited, and that has been made worse because of the recession. As we bring it down, I want to make sure that we’re not cutting into education that is going to help define whether or not we can compete around the world. I don’t think we should be cutting back on research and development, because if we can develop new technologies in areas like clean energy, that could make all the difference in terms of job creation here at home.

I think the proposal that I put forward with respect to infrastructure is one that historically we’ve had bipartisan agreement about. And we should be able to agree now that it makes no sense for China to have better rail systems than us, and Singapore having better airports than us. And we just learned that China now has the fastest supercomputer on Earth -- that used to be us. They’re making investments because they know those investments will pay off over the long term.

And so in these budget discussions, the key is to be able to distinguish between stuff that isn’t adding to our growth, isn’t an investment in our future, and those things that are absolutely necessary for us to be able to increase job growth in the future as well.

Now, the single most important thing I think we need to do economically -- and this is something that has to be done during the lame duck session -- is making sure that taxes don’t go up on middle-class families next year. And so we’ve got some work to do on that front to make sure that families not only aren't seeing a higher tax burden -- which will automatically happen if Congress doesn’t act -- but also making sure that business provisions that historically we have extended each year that, for example, provide tax breaks for companies that are investing here in the United States in research and development, that those are extended. I think it makes sense for us to extend unemployment insurance because there are still a lot of folks out there hurting.

So there are some things that we can do right now that will help sustain the recovery and advance it, even as we’re also sitting down and figuring out, okay, over the next several years what kinds of budget cuts can we make that are intelligent, that are smart, that won’t be undermining our recovery but, in fact, will be encouraging job growth.

Question: But most of those things that you just called investments they call wasteful spending and they say it’s dead on arrival. It sounds like -- without their support, you can’t get any of it through.

President Obama: Well, what is absolutely true is, is that without any Republican support on anything, then it’s going to be hard to get things done. But I’m not going to anticipate that they’re not going to support anything. I think that part of the message sent to Republicans was we want to see stronger job growth in this country. And if there are good ideas about putting people to work that traditionally have garnered Republican support and that don’t add to the deficit, then my hope is and expectation is, is that that’s something they’re willing to have a serious conversation about.

When it comes to, for example, the proposal we put forward to accelerate depreciation for business, so that if they’re building a plant or investing in new equipment next year, that they can take a complete write-off next year, get a huge tax break next year, and that would then encourage a lot of businesses to get off the sidelines -- that's not historically considered a liberal idea. That's actually an idea that business groups and Republicans I think have supported for a very long time.

So again, the question is going to be do we all come to the table with an open mind and say to ourselves, what do we think is actually going to make a difference for the American people? That's how we’re going to be judged over the next couple of years.

Peter Baker.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. After your election two years ago, when you met with Republicans you said that, in discussing what policies might go forward, that elections have consequences, and that you pointed out that you had won. I wonder what consequences you think this election should have then, in terms of your policies. Are there areas that you’re willing -- can you name today areas that you would be willing to compromise on that you might not have been willing to compromise on in the past?

President Obama: Well, I think I’ve been willing to compromise in the past and I'm going to be willing to compromise going forward on a whole range of issues. Let me give you an example -- the issue of energy that I just mentioned.

I think there are a lot of Republicans that ran against the energy bill that passed in the House last year. And so it’s doubtful that you could get the votes to pass that through the House this year or next year or the year after. But that doesn't mean there isn't agreement that we should have a better energy policy. And so let’s find those areas where we can agree.

We’ve got, I think, broad agreement that we’ve got terrific natural gas resources in this country. Are we doing everything we can to develop those? There's a lot of agreement around the need to make sure that electric cars are developed here in the United States, that we don't fall behind other countries. Are there things that we can do to encourage that? And there's already been bipartisan interest on those issues.

There's been discussion about how we can restart our nuclear industry as a means of reducing our dependence on foreign oil and reducing greenhouse gases. Is that an area where we can move forward?

We were able, over the last two years, to increase for the first time in 30 years fuel-efficiency standards on cars and trucks. We didn’t even need legislation. We just needed the cooperation of automakers and autoworkers and investors and other shareholders. And that's going to move us forward in a serious way.

So I think when it comes to something like energy, what we’re probably going to have to do is say here are some areas where there's just too much disagreement between Democrats and Republicans, we can’t get this done right now, but let’s not wait. Let’s go ahead and start making some progress on the things that we do agree on, and we can continue to have a strong and healthy debate about those areas where we don’t.

Question: Is there anything in the “Pledge to America” that you think you can support?

President Obama: You know, I’m sure there are going to be areas, particularly around, for example, reforming how Washington works, that I’ll be interested in. I think the American people want to see more transparency, more openness. As I said, in the midst of economic crisis, I think one of the things I take responsibility for is not having pushed harder on some of those issues. And I think if you take Republicans and Democrats at their word this is an area that they want to deliver on for the American people, I want to be supportive of that effort.

Jake Tapper.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. I have a policy question and a personal one. The policy question is, you talked about how the immediate goal is the Bush tax cuts and making sure that they don’t expire for those who earn under $200,000, $250,000. Republicans disagree with that strongly. They want all of the Bush tax cuts extended. Are you willing to compromise on that? Are you willing to negotiate at all, for instance, allow them to expire for everyone over $1 million? Where are you willing to budge on that?

And the second one is, President Bush when he went through a similar thing came out and he said this was a “thumpin’.” You talked about how it was humbling, or you alluded to it perhaps being humbling. And I’m wondering, when you call your friends, like Congressman Perriello or Governor Strickland, and you see 19 state legislatures go to the other side, governorships in swing states, the Democratic Party set back, what does it feel like?

President Obama: It feels bad. You know, the toughest thing over the last couple of days is seeing really terrific public servants not have the opportunity to serve anymore, at least in the short term. And you mentioned -- there are just some terrific members of Congress who took really tough votes because they thought it was the right thing, even though they knew this could cause them political problems, and even though a lot of them came from really tough swing districts or majority-Republican districts. And the amount of courage that they showed and conviction that they showed is something that I admire so much. I can’t overstate it.

And so there is a not only sadness about seeing them go, but there’s also a lot of questioning on my part in terms of could I have done something differently or done something more so that those folks would still be here.

It’s hard. And I take responsibility for it in a lot of ways.

I will tell you, they’ve been incredibly gracious when I have conversations with them. And what they’ve told me is, you know, we don’t have regrets because I feel like we were doing the right thing. And they may be just saying that to make me feel better, which, again, is a sign of their character and their class. And I hope a lot of them continue to pursue public service because I think they’re terrific public servants.

With respect to the tax cut issue, my goal is to make sure that we don’t have a huge spike in taxes for middle-class families. Not only would that be a terrible burden on families who are already going through tough times, it would be bad for our economy. It is very important that we’re not taking a whole bunch of money out of the system from people who are most likely to spend that money on goods, services, groceries, buying a new winter coat for the kids.

That’s also why I think unemployment insurance is important. Not only is it the right thing to do for folks who are still looking for work and struggling in this really tough economy, but it’s the right thing to do for the economy as a whole.

So my goal is to sit down with Speaker-elect Boehner and Mitch McConnell and Harry and Nancy sometime in the next few weeks and see where we can move forward in a way that, first of all, does no harm; that extends those tax cuts that are very important for middle-class families; also extends those provisions that are important to encourage businesses to invest, and provide businesses some certainty over the next year or two.

And how that negotiation works itself out I think is too early to say. But this is going to be one of my top priorities, and my hope is, is that given we all have an interest in growing the economy and encouraging job growth, that we’re not going to play brinksmanship but instead we’re going to act responsibly.

Question: So you’re willing to negotiate?

President Obama: Absolutely.

Laura Meckler.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. You said earlier that it was clear that Congress was rejecting the idea of a cap-and-trade program, and that you wouldn’t be able to move forward with that. Looking ahead, do you feel the same way about EPA regulating carbon emissions? Would you be open to them doing essentially the same thing through an administrative action, or is that off the table, as well?

And secondly, just to follow up on what you said about changing the way Washington works, do you think that -- you said you didn’t do enough to change the way things were handled in this city. Some of -- in order to get your health care bill passed you needed to make some of those deals. Do you wish, in retrospect, you had not made those deals even if it meant the collapse of the program?

President Obama: I think that making sure that families had security and were on a trajectory to lower health care costs was absolutely critical for this country. But you are absolutely right that when you are navigating through a House and a Senate in this kind of pretty partisan environment that it’s a ugly mess when it comes to process. And I think that is something that really affected how people viewed the outcome. That is something that I regret -- that we couldn’t have made the process more -- healthier than it ended up being. But I think the outcome was a good one.

With respect to the EPA, I think the smartest thing for us to do is to see if we can get Democrats and Republicans in a room who are serious about energy independence and are serious about keeping our air clean and our water clean and dealing with the issue of greenhouse gases -- and seeing are there ways that we can make progress in the short term and invest in technologies in the long term that start giving us the tools to reduce greenhouse gases and solve this problem.

The EPA is under a court order that says greenhouse gases are a pollutant that fall under their jurisdiction. And I think one of the things that's very important for me is not to have us ignore the science, but rather to find ways that we can solve these problems that don’t hurt the economy, that encourage the development of clean energy in this country, that, in fact, may give us opportunities to create entire new industries and create jobs that -- and that put us in a competitive posture around the world.

So I think it’s too early to say whether or not we can make some progress on that front. I think we can. Cap and trade was just one way of skinning the cat; it was not the only way. It was a means, not an end. And I’m going to be looking for other means to address this problem.

And I think EPA wants help from the legislature on this. I don’t think that the desire is to somehow be protective of their powers here. I think what they want to do is make sure that the issue is being dealt with.

Ed Henry.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. I wanted to do a personal and policy one as well. On personal, you had a lot of fun on the campaign trail by saying that the Republicans were drinking a Slurpee and sitting on the sidelines while you were trying to pull the car out of the ditch. But the point of the story was that you said if you want to go forward, you put the car in “D”; if you want to go backwards, you put it in “R.” Now that there are least 60 House districts that seem to have rejected that message, is it possible that there are a majority of Americans who think your policies are taking us in reverse? And what specific changes will you make to your approach to try to fix that and better connect with the American people?

And just on a policy front, “don’t ask, don’t tell” is something that you promised to end. And when you had 60 votes and 59 votes in the Senate -- it’s a tough issue -- you haven’t been able to do it. Do you now have to tell your liberal base that with maybe 52 or 53 votes in the Senate, you’re just not going to be able to get it done in the next two years?

President Obama: Well, let me take the second issue first. I’ve been a strong believer in the notion that if somebody is willing to serve in our military, in uniform, putting their lives on the line for our security, that they should not be prevented from doing so because of their sexual orientation. And since there’s been a lot of discussion about polls over the last 48 hours, I think it’s worth noting that the overwhelming majority of Americans feel the same way. It’s the right thing to do.

Now, as Commander-in-Chief, I’ve said that making this change needs to be done in an orderly fashion. I’ve worked with the Pentagon, worked with Secretary Gates, worked with Admiral Mullen to make sure that we are looking at this in a systemic way that maintains good order and discipline, but that we need to change this policy.

There’s going to be a review that comes out at the beginning of the month that will have surveyed attitudes and opinions within the armed forces. I will expect that Secretary of Defense Gates and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mullen will have something to say about that review. I will look at it very carefully. But that will give us time to act in -- potentially during the lame duck session to change this policy.

Keep in mind we’ve got a bunch of court cases that are out there as well. And something that would be very disruptive to good order and discipline and unit cohesion is if we’ve got this issue bouncing around in the courts, as it already has over the last several weeks, where the Pentagon and the chain of command doesn’t know at any given time what rules they’re working under. We need to provide certainty and it’s time for us to move this policy forward. And this should not be a partisan issue. This is an issue, as I said, where you’ve got a sizable portion of the American people squarely behind the notion that folks who are willing to serve on our behalf should be treated fairly and equally.

Now, in terms of how we move forward, I think that the American people understand that we’re still digging our way out of a pretty big mess. So I don’t think anybody denies they think we’re in a ditch. I just don’t think they feel like we’ve gotten all the way out of the ditch yet. And to move the analogy forward that I used in the campaign, I think what they want right now is the Democrats and the Republicans both pushing some more to get the car on level ground. And we haven’t done that.

If you think I was engaging in too much campaign rhetoric, saying the Republicans were just sitting on the side of the road, watching us get that car out of the ditch, at the very least we were pushing in opposite directions. And so --

Question: -- the idea that your policies are taking the country in reverse. You just reject that idea altogether that your policies could be going in reverse?

President Obama: Yes. And I think, look, here’s the bottom line. When I came into office, this economy was in a freefall, and the economy has stabilized. The economy is growing. We’ve seen nine months of private sector job growth. So I think it would be hard to argue that we’re going backwards. I think what you can argue is we’re stuck in neutral. We are not moving the way we need to, to make sure that folks have the jobs, have the opportunity, are seeing economic growth in their communities the way they need to. And that's going to require Democrats and Republicans to come together and look for the best ideas to move things forward.

It will not be easy, not just because Democrats and Republicans may have different priorities, as we were just discussing when it came to how we structure tax cuts, but because these issues are hard.

The Republicans throughout the campaign said they’re very concerned about debt and deficits. Well, one of the most important things we can do for debt and deficits is economic growth. So what other proposals do they have to grow the economy? If, in fact, they’re rejecting some of the proposals I’ve made, I want to hear from them what affirmative policies can make a difference in terms of encouraging job growth and promoting the economy -- because I don't think that tax cuts alone are going to be a recipe for the kind of expansion that we need.

From 2001 to 2009, we cut taxes pretty significantly, and we just didn’t see the kind of expansion that is going to be necessary in terms of driving the unemployment rate down significantly.

So I think what we’re going to need to do and what the American people want is for us to mix and match ideas, figure out those areas where we can agree on, move forward on those, disagree without being disagreeable on those areas that we can’t agree on. If we accomplish that, then there will be time for politics later, but over the next year I think we can solidify this recovery and give people a little more confidence out there.

Hans Nichols.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. I want to ask if you’re going to have John Boehner over for a Slurpee, but I actually have a serious question.

President Obama: I might serve -- they’re delicious drinks.

Question: The Slurpee Summit.

President Obama: The Slurpee Summit -- that’s good, Chuck. I like that.

Question: Since you seem to be in a reflective mood, do you think you need to hit the reset button with business? How do you plan to set that reset button with business? Would that -- would you include anything beyond your Cleveland speech, those proposals, to get them off the sidelines, get them off the cash they’re hoarding and start hiring again? Thank you.

President Obama: Yes, I think this is an important question that we’ve been asking ourselves for several months now. You’re right, as I reflect on what’s happened over the last two years, one of the things that I think has not been managed by me as well as it needed to be was finding the right balance in making sure that businesses have rules of the road and are treating customers fairly and -- whether it’s their credit cards or insurance or their mortgages -- but also making absolutely clear that the only way America succeeds is if businesses are succeeding.

The reason we’ve got a unparalleled standard of living in the history of the world is because we’ve got a free market that is dynamic and entrepreneurial, and that free market has to be nurtured and cultivated. And there’s no doubt that when you had the financial crisis on Wall Street, the bonus controversies, the battle around health care, the battle around financial reform, and then you had BP -- you just had a successive set of issues in which I think business took the message that, well, gosh, it seems like we may be always painted at the bad guy.

And so I’ve got to take responsibility in terms of making sure that I make clear to the business community as well as to the country that the most important thing we can do is to boost and encourage our business sector and make sure that they’re hiring. And so we do have specific plans in terms of how we can structure that outreach.

Now, keep in mind over the last two years, we’ve been talking to CEOs constantly. And as I plan for my trip later this week to Asia, the whole focus is on how are we going to open up markets so that American businesses can prosper, and we can sell more goods and create more jobs here in the United States. And a whole bunch of corporate executives are going to be joining us so that I can help them open up those markets and allow them to sell their products.

So there’s been a lot of strong interaction behind the scenes. But I think setting the right tone publicly is going to be important and could end up making a difference at the margins in terms of how businesses make investment decisions.

Question: But do you have new specific proposals to get them off the sidelines and start hiring?

President Obama: Well, I already discussed a couple with Chip that haven’t been acted on yet. You’re right that I made these proposals two months ago, but -- or three months ago -- but it was in the midst of a campaign season where it was doubtful that they were going to get a full hearing, just because there was so much political noise going on.

I think as we move forward, sitting down and talking to businesses, figuring out what exactly would help you make more investments that could create more jobs here in the United States, and listening hard to them -- in a context where maybe Democrats and Republicans are together so we’re receiving the same message at the same time -- and then acting on that agenda could make a big difference.

Matt Spetalnick of Reuters.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. How do you respond to those who say the election outcome, at least in part, was voters saying that they see you as out of touch with their personal economic pain? And are you willing to make any changes in your leadership style?

President Obama: There is a inherent danger in being in the White House and being in the bubble. I mean, folks didn’t have any complaints about my leadership style when I was running around Iowa for a year. And they got a pretty good look at me up close and personal, and they were able to lift the hood and kick the tires, and I think they understood that my story was theirs. I might have a funny name, I might have lived in some different places, but the values of hard work and responsibility and honesty and looking out for one another that had been instilled in them by their parents, those were the same values that I took from my mom and my grandparents.

And so the track record has been that when I’m out of this place, that's not an issue. When you’re in this place, it is hard not to seem removed. And one of the challenges that we’ve got to think about is how do I meet my responsibilities here in the White House, which require a lot of hours and a lot of work, but still have that opportunity to engage with the American people on a day-to-day basis, and know -- give them confidence that I’m listening to them.

Those letters that I read every night, some of them just break my heart. Some of them provide me encouragement and inspiration. But nobody is filming me reading those letters. And so it’s hard, I think, for people to get a sense of, well, how is he taking in all this information?

So I think there are more things that we can do to make sure that I’m getting out of here. But, I mean, I think it’s important to point out as well that a couple of great communicators, Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton, were standing at this podium two years into their presidency getting very similar questions because the economy wasn’t working the way it needed to be and there were a whole range of factors that made people concerned that maybe the party in power wasn’t listening to them. This is something that I think every President needs to go through because the responsibilities of this office are so enormous and so many people are depending on what we do, and in the rush of activity, sometimes we lose track of the ways that we connected with folks that got us here in the first place.

And that’s something that -- now, I’m not recommending for every future President that they take a shellacking like they -- like I did last night. I’m sure there are easier ways to learn these lessons. But I do think that this is a growth process and an evolution. And the relationship that I’ve had with the American people is one that built slowly, peaked at this incredible high, and then during the course of the last two years, as we’ve, together, gone through some very difficult times, has gotten rockier and tougher. And it’s going to, I’m sure, have some more ups and downs during the course of me being in this office.

But the one thing that I just want to end on is getting out of here is good for me, too, because when I travel around the country, even in the toughest of these debates -- in the midst of health care last year during the summer when there were protesters about, and when I’m meeting families who’ve lost loved ones in Afghanistan or Iraq -- I always come away from those interactions just feeling so much more optimistic about this country.

We have such good and decent people who, on a day-to-day basis, are finding all kinds of ways to live together and educate kids and grow their communities and improve their communities and create businesses and work together to create great new products and services. The American people always make me optimistic.

And that’s why, during the course of the last two years, as tough as it’s been, as many sometimes scary moments as we’ve gone through, I’ve never doubted that we’re going to emerge stronger than we were before. And I think that remains true, and I’m just going to be looking forward to playing my part in helping that journey along.

All right? Thank you very much, everybody.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# U.S.-India Business Council Summit Address

Good afternoon, everyone. Namaste. Thank you all for an extraordinarily warm welcome.

And before I get started, I just want to acknowledge some outstanding public servants, some wonderful dignitaries who are in the room. Anand Sharma, our Commerce and Industry Minister here in India. Khurshid Salman, the Minister of Corporate Affairs and Minority Affairs, who’s here. Dr. Montek Singh Ahluwalia, State Planning Commission Deputy Chairman. Gary Locke, who is the Secretary of Commerce for the United States. Terry McGraw, the chairman of the U.S.-India Business Council. Hari Bhartia, the president of the Confederation of Indian Industries. And Rajan Bharti Mittal, president of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

On behalf of my wife Michelle and myself, thank you to the people of Mumbai and the people India for the incredible hospitality you have already shown just in the few hours since I've arrived in this magnificent country.

We are especially honored to be here as you celebrate Diwali. Some of you may know this. Last year, I was honored to become the first American President to help celebrate the Festival of Lights in the White House. And I know that today, families are lighting their Diyas and giving thanks for their blessings and looking ahead to the new year. So to all of you who are observing this sacred holiday here and around the world, Happy Diwali and a Saal Mubarak.

I want to thank all the organizations that have brought us together today, as well as the business leaders, the CEOs, the government officials who have joined us here in Mumbai. I just had some incredibly productive discussions with American business leaders and Indian entrepreneurs, and today I want to speak with you about why we all benefit from the strengthening ties between our nations.

This is my first trip to India, but this will be my longest visit to another country since becoming President. And that’s because I believe that the relationship between the United States and India will be one of the defining and indispensable partnerships of the 21st century.

Our nations are the two largest democracies on Earth. We are bound by a common language and common values; shared aspirations and a shared belief that opportunity should be limited only by how hard you’re willing to work, only by how hard you are willing to try. Trade and commerce between our people has been happening for centuries -- even before we were independent nations. Indian immigrants crossed oceans to work on farms in the United States, and later generations came to practice medicine, and do cutting-edge research, and to start businesses.

American researchers, in turn, partnered with Indian scientists to launch the Green Revolution that transformed life for generations of Indians. Americans have helped build India, and India has helped to build America. Today, your country is one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. And while there are many amazing success stories and rapidly expanding markets in Asia, the sheer size and pace of India’s progress in just two decades is one of the most stunning achievements in human history.

This is a fact. Since your reform of the licensing raj and embrace of the global economy, India has lifted tens of millions of people from poverty and created one of the largest middle classes on the planet. You are now a nation of rapid growth and rising incomes and massive investments in infrastructure and energy and education. In the coming decades, you will be the world’s most populous nation, with the largest workforce and one of the largest economies in the world. Now, undoubtedly, that means that the United States and India will engage in a healthy competition for markets and jobs and industries of the future. But it also offers the prospect of expanded commercial ties that strongly benefit both countries.

The United States sees Asia -– and especially India -– as a market of the future. We don’t simply welcome your rise -– as a nation, and a people -- we ardently support it. We want to invest in it. And I’m here because I believe that in our interconnected world, increased commerce between the United States and India can be and will be a win-win proposition for both nations.

I realize that for some, this truth may not be readily apparent. I want to be honest. There are many Americans whose only experience with trade and globalization has been a shuttered factory or a job that was shipped overseas. And there still exists a caricature of India as a land of call centers and back offices that cost American jobs. That's a real perception. Here in India, I know that many still see the arrival of American companies and products as a threat to small shopkeepers and to India’s ancient and proud culture.

But these old stereotypes, these old concerns ignore today’s reality: In 2010, trade between our countries is not just a one-way street of American jobs and companies moving to India. It is a dynamic, two-way relationship that is creating jobs, growth, and higher living standards in both our countries. And that is the truth.

As we look to India today, the United States sees an opportunity to sell our exports in one of the fastest-growing markets in the world. For America, this is a jobs strategy. As we recover from this recession, we are determined to rebuild our economy on a new, stronger foundation for growth. And part of that foundation involves doing what America has always been known for: discovering and creating and building the products that are sold all over the world. That’s why I’ve set a goal of doubling America’s exports over the next five years -– because for every $1 billion in exports, thousands of jobs are supported at home.

And already, our exports to India have quadrupled in recent years -– growing much faster than our exports to many other countries. The goods we sell in this country currently support tens of thousands of manufacturing jobs across the United States -– from California and Washington to Pennsylvania and Florida. And that doesn’t even include all the American jobs supported by our other exports to India -– from agriculture to travel to educational services.

As we speak, American-made machinery is helping India improve its infrastructure, including the new airport here in Mumbai where I landed this morning. This year, there was a new sight on India’s highways -– American-made Harley-Davidson motorcycles. A growing number of American-made aircraft are taking flight in your skies. And soon, there will be more.

That’s because today, just moments before I arrived here, several landmark deals were sealed between the United States and India. Boeing, one of America’s largest companies, is on track to sell India dozens of commercial and cargo aircraft. General Electric, another American company, will sell more than a hundred advanced jet engines. And I’m pleased that two U.S. firms are finalists for a major locomotive tender. Now, these are just a few of the more than 20 deals being announced today, totaling nearly $10 billion in U.S. exports.

From medical equipment and helicopters to turbines and mining equipment, American companies stand ready to support India’s growing economy, the needs of your people, and your ability to defend this nation. And today’s deals will lead to more than 50,000 jobs in the United States -- 50,000 jobs. Everything from high-tech jobs in Southern California to manufacturing jobs in Ohio.

Now, these are major deals that are significant for both our nations. But our trade relationship is not just about what America sells India. It’s also about Indian investment in America is doing. Indian investment in America is among the fastest growing of any country. In recent years, Indian companies have invested billions of dollars in the United States -- in American machinery, manufacturing, mining, research, technology. Today, these investments support tens of thousands of American jobs.

And at the same time, hundreds of American companies -- including many small businesses -- are investing in India; not just in telecommunications, but in industries from clean energy to agriculture. This means more choices for Indian consumers and more jobs for Indians and Americans. Our relationship is also about more than the goods that we sell or the investments we make -- it’s about the innovative partnerships we forge in the name of progress. Before I came here, I had a fascinating meeting. I met with business leaders from both our countries, including some incredibly young Indian entrepreneurs. And what’s fascinating is the way that they are now partnering to take technology that has had one application and use in the United States and found entirely new uses and new businesses models here, in India.

They’re working together to make cell towers across India that can run on solar, and not diesel. They’re putting American technology into Indian electric cars. They’re trying to bring new filtration systems and clean drinking water to rural India; and they're trying to develop better drugs for diseases like malaria. These are examples of American companies doing well and Indian companies doing well.

And these partnerships remind us that by pursuing trade and commerce, we are unleashing the most powerful force the world has ever known for eradicating poverty and creating opportunity -- and that's broad-based economic growth.

Now, despite all this progress, the economic relationship between the United States and India is still one of enormous untapped potential. Of all the goods that India imports, less than 10 percent come from the United States. Of all the goods that America exports to the world, less than 2 percent go to India. Our entire trade with your country is still less than our trade with the Netherlands -– this is a country with a smaller population than the city of Mumbai. As a result, India is only our 12th largest trade partner.

I have no doubt that we can do better than that -– we can do much better. There’s no reason this nation can’t be one of our top trading partners. And that’s why we want to work together with you to remove the barriers to increased trade and investment between our nations. In the United States, we’re committed to doing our part. With India and our other G20 partners, we’ve resisted the protectionism that would have plunged the global economy even deeper into recession. Today, our country remains one of the most open economies in the world. And while I make no apologies about doing whatever it takes to encourage job creation and business investment in America, I still work to make sure our efforts don’t unfairly target companies and workers from this nation or any nation.

And to further increase our exports to places like India, we’re marshalling the full resources of the United States government to help our companies sell their goods and services in other markets. We’re increasing export financing for small and medium-sized businesses. We’re being a better advocate for our businesses. We’re increasing our trade missions. In fact, my Secretary of Commerce, Gary Locke, will be leading another trade mission to India in the next few months. And we’re reforming our export control system, so that even as we strengthen our national security, we make sure that unnecessary barriers don’t stand in the way of high-tech trade between our countries. Today, I’m pleased to announce that we will work with India to fundamentally reform our controls on exports, which will allow greater cooperation in a range of high-tech sectors and strengthen our nonproliferation efforts.

So we're taking the necessary steps to strengthen this relationship. India can also do its part. Over the past two decades, it has become much easier for companies to do business and invest here in India. It was striking talking to some of the American CEOs who are here who’ve come frequently over decades and seen the incredible progress that's been made. But I don't think it’s any secret that infrastructure, regulatory barriers and other issues of uncertainty still pose some serious challenges.

Today, India is making major investments in its infrastructure and creating greater transparency to support growth and entrepreneurship. Going forward, that commitment must be matched by a steady reduction in barriers to trade and foreign investment -– from agriculture to infrastructure, from retail to telecommunications. Because in a global economy, new growth and jobs flow to countries that lower barriers to trade and investment.

These are steps we can take together to strengthen the economic ties between our nations -– ties that hold incredible promise for our people and our future -– the promise of new jobs, new industries and new growth. Whether or not that promise is fulfilled depends on us -– on the decisions we make and the partnership we build in the coming years. We must admit it won’t always be an easy road, but as I stand here today, I can tell you that I’m absolutely confident we will meet this challenge because -- because in our two nations, I see the fundamental ingredients to success in the 21st century.

I’m confident because we both cherish the entrepreneurial spirit that empowers innovation and risk-taking, and allows them to turn a good idea into a new product or company that changes the world. And we have examples of Indian entrepreneurs and American entrepreneurs sitting right here who’ve already begun to do that.

And I’m confident because we both know that for those businesses to thrive, our nations need to invest in science and technology, in research and development, and an infrastructure for the 21st century. I’m confident because we both recognize that knowledge is the currency of the future, and that we must give our children the skills and education that success requires in a global economy.

And I’m confident because our countries are blessed with the most effective form of government the world has ever known: democracy. Even if it can be slow at times. Even if it can be messy. Even if, sometimes, the election doesn’t turn out as you’d like.

For we know that when governments are accountable to their people, their people are more likely to prosper; and that, over the long run, democracy and economic growth, freedom in the political sphere and freedom in the economic sphere go hand in hand. We believe that. What gives me the most confidence about our future is our greatest resource -– the drive and ingenuity of our people: workers and entrepreneurs- students and innovators; Indians and Americans, including the nearly 3 million Indian Americans who bind our nations together.

For despite all the sweeping changes of the last few decades –- from the reform of the licensing raj to the technological revolutions that continue to shape our global economy -– it has been people who have driven our progress. It is individual men and women like you who put their shoulder to the wheel of history and push. An American scientist who discovers an agricultural breakthrough. An Indian engineer who builds the next-generation electric car. A small business owner in Detroit who sells his product to a new company in New Delhi. And all the Mumbaikars who get up every day in this City of Dreams to forge a better life for their children –- from the boardrooms of world-class Indian companies to the shops in the winding alleys of Dharavai.

This is the spirit of optimism and determination that has driven our people since before we were nations -– the same spirit that will drive our future. And that's why I’m thrilled to be in India and with you here today. And that's why I’m confident that we can and will forge new economic partnerships and deliver the jobs and broad-based growth that our peoples so richly deserve. And I am absolutely certain that the relationship between the United States and India is going to be one of the defining partnerships of the 21st century.

Thank you very much, everybody.

Thank you.

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# Speech to a Joint Session of the Indian Parliament

Mr. Vice President, Madam Speaker, Mr. Prime Minister, members of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, and most of all, the people of India.

I thank you for the great honor of addressing the representatives of more than one billion Indians and the world’s largest democracy. I bring the greetings and friendship of the world’s oldest democracy -- the United States of America, including nearly three million proud and patriotic Indian-Americans.

Over the past three days, my wife Michelle and I have experienced the -- and dynamism of India and its people -- from the majesty of Humayun’s Tomb to the advanced technologies that are empowering farmers and women who are the backbone of Indian society; from the Diwali celebrations with schoolchildren to the innovators who are fueling India’s economic rise; from the university students who will chart India’s future, to you -- leaders who helped to bring India to this moment of extraordinary promise.

At every stop, we have been welcomed with the hospitality for which Indians have always been known. So, to you and the people of India, on behalf of me, Michelle and the American people, please accept my deepest thanks. Bahoot dhanyavad.

Now, I am not the first American President to visit India. Nor will I be the last. But I am proud to visit India so early in my presidency. It’s no coincidence that India is my first stop on a visit to Asia, or that this has been my longest visit to another country since becoming President. For in Asia and around the world, India is not simply emerging; India has emerged.

And it is my firm belief that the relationship between the United States and India -- bound by our shared interests and our shared values -- will be one of the defining partnerships of the 21st century. This is the partnership I’ve come here to build. This is the vision that our nations can realize together.

My confidence in our shared future is grounded in my respect for India’s treasured past -- a civilization that’s been shaping the world for thousands of years. Indians unlocked the intricacies of the human body and the vastness of our universe. It’s no exaggeration to say that our Information Age is rooted in Indian innovations -- including the number zero.

Of course, India not only opened our minds, she expanded our moral imaginations -- with religious texts that still summon the faithful to lives of dignity and discipline, with poets who imagined a future “where the mind is without fear and the head is held high” -- and with a man whose message of love and justice endures -- the father of your nation, Mahatma Gandhi.

For me and Michelle, this visit has, therefore, held special meaning. See, throughout my life, including my work as a young man on behalf of the urban poor, I’ve always found inspiration in the life of Gandhiji and his simple and profound lesson to be the change we seek in the world. And just as he summoned Indians to seek their destiny, he influenced champions of equality in my own country, including a young preacher named Martin Luther King. After making his pilgrimage to India a half-century ago, Dr. King called Gandhi’s philosophy of non-violent resistance “the only logical and moral approach” in the struggle for justice and progress.

So we were honored to visit the residence where Gandhi and King both stayed -- Mani Bhavan. And we were humbled to pay our respects at Raj Ghat. And I am mindful that I might not be standing before you today, as President of the United States, had it not been for Gandhi and the message he shared and inspired with America and the world.

An ancient civilization of science and innovation; a fundamental faith in human progress -- this is the sturdy foundation upon which you have built ever since that stroke of midnight when the tricolor was raised over a free and independent India. And despite the skeptics who said this country was simply too poor, or too vast, or too diverse to succeed, you surmounted overwhelming odds and became a model to the world.

Instead of slipping into starvation, you launched a Green Revolution that fed millions. Instead of becoming dependent on commodities and exports, you invested in science and technology and in your greatest resource -- the Indian people. And the world sees the results, from the supercomputers you build to the Indian flag that you put on the moon.

Instead of resisting the global economy, you became one of its engines -- reforming the licensing raj and unleashing an economic marvel that has lifted tens of millions of people from poverty and created one of the world’s largest middle classes.

Instead of succumbing to division, you have shown that the strength of India -- the very idea of India -- is its embrace of all colors, all castes, all creeds. It’s the diversity represented in this chamber today. It’s the richness of faiths celebrated by a visitor to my hometown of Chicago more than a century ago -- the renowned Swami Vivekananda. He said that, “holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character.”

And instead of being lured by the false notion that progress must come at the expense of freedom, you built the institutions upon which true democracy depends -- free and fair elections, which enable citizens to choose their own leaders without recourse to arms -- an independent judiciary and the rule of law, which allows people to address their grievances; and a thriving free press and vibrant civil society which allows every voice to be heard. This year, as India marks 60 years with a strong and democratic constitution, the lesson is clear: India has succeeded, not in spite of democracy; India has succeeded because of democracy.

Now, just as India has changed, so, too, has the relationship between our two nations. In the decades after independence, India advanced its interests as a proud leader of the nonaligned movement. Yet, too often, the United States and India found ourselves on opposite sides of a North-`South divide, estranged by a long Cold War. Those days are over.

Here in India, two successive governments led by different parties have recognized that deeper partnership with America is both natural and necessary. And in the United States, both of my predecessors -- one a Democrat, one a Republican -- worked to bring us closer, leading to increased trade and a landmark civil nuclear agreement.

So since that time, people in both our countries have asked: What’s next? How can we build on this progress and realize the full potential of our partnership? That’s what I want to address today -- the future that the United States seeks in an interconnected world, and why I believe that India is indispensable to this vision; how we can forge a truly global partnership -- not just in one or two areas, but across many; not just for our mutual benefit, but for the benefit of the world.

Of course, only Indians can determine India’s national interests and how to advance them on the world stage. But I stand before you today because I am convinced that the interests of the United States -- and the interests we share with India -- are best advanced in partnership. I believe that.

The United States seeks security -- the security of our country, our allies and partners. We seek prosperity -- a strong and growing economy in an open international economic system. We seek respect for universal values. And we seek a just and sustainable international order that promotes peace and security by meeting global challenges through stronger global cooperation.

Now, to advance these interests, I have committed the United States to comprehensive engagement with the world, based on mutual interest and mutual respect. And a central pillar of this engagement is forging deeper cooperation with 21st century centers of influence -- and that must necessarily include India.

Now, India is not the only emerging power in the world. But relationships between our countries is unique. For we are two strong democracies whose constitutions begin with the same revolutionary words -- the same revolutionary words -- “We the people.” We are two great republics dedicated to the liberty and justice and equality of all people. And we are two free market economies where people have the freedom to pursue ideas and innovation that can change the world. And that’s why I believe that India and America are indispensable partners in meeting the challenges of our time.

Since taking office, I’ve, therefore, made our relationship a priority. I was proud to welcome Prime Minister Singh for the first official state visit of my presidency. For the first time ever, our governments are working together across the whole range of common challenges that we face. Now, let me say it as clearly as I can: The United States not only welcomes India as a rising global power, we fervently support it, and we have worked to help make it a reality.

Together with our partners, we have made the G20 the premier forum for international economic cooperation, bringing more voices to the table of global economic decision-making, and that has included India. We’ve increased the role of emerging economies like India at international financial institutions. We valued India’s important role at Copenhagen, where, for the first time, all major economies committed to take action to confront climate change -- and to stand by those actions. We salute India’s long history as a leading contributor to United Nations peacekeeping missions. And we welcome India as it prepares to take its seat on the United Nations Security Council.

In short, with India assuming its rightful place in the world, we have an historic opportunity to make the relationship between our two countries a defining partnership of the century ahead. And I believe we can do so by working together in three important areas.

First, as global partners we can promote prosperity in both our countries. Together, we can create the high-tech, high-wage jobs of the future. With my visit, we are now ready to begin implementing our civil nuclear agreement. This will help meet India’s growing energy needs and create thousands of jobs in both of our countries.

We need to forge partnerships in high-tech sectors like defense and civil space. So we’ve removed Indian organizations from our so-called “entity list.” And we’ll work to remove -- and reform our controls on exports. Both of these steps will ensure that Indian companies seeking high-tech trade and technologies from America are treated the same as our very closest allies and partners.

We can pursue joint research and development to create green jobs; give India more access to cleaner, affordable energy; meet the commitments we made at Copenhagen; and show the possibilities of low-carbon growth.

And together, we can resist the protectionism that stifles growth and innovation. The United States remains -- and will continue to remain -- one of the most open economies in the world. And by opening markets and reducing barriers to foreign investment, India can realize its full economic potential as well. As G20 partners, we can make sure the global economic recovery is strong and is durable. And we can keep striving for a Doha Round that is ambitious and is balanced -- with the courage to make the compromises that are necessary so global trade works for all economies.

Together, we can strengthen agriculture. Cooperation between Indian and American researchers and scientists sparked the Green Revolution. Today, India is a leader in using technology to empower farmers, like those I met yesterday who get free updates on market and weather conditions on their cell phones. And the United States is a leader in agricultural productivity and research. Now, as farmers and rural areas face the effects of climate change and drought, we’ll work together to spark a second, more sustainable Evergreen Revolution.

Together, we’re improving Indian weather forecasting systems before the next monsoon season. We aim to help millions of Indian farmers -- farming households save water and increase productivity, improve food processing so crops don’t spoil on the way to market, and enhance climate and crop forecasting to avoid losses that cripple communities and drive up food prices.

And as part of our food security initiative, we’re going to share India’s expertise with farmers in Africa. And this is an indication of India’s rise -- that we can now export hard-earned expertise to countries that see India as a model for agricultural development. It’s another powerful example of how American and Indian partnership can address an urgent global challenge.

Because the wealth of a nation also depends on the health of its people, we’ll continue to support India’s effort against diseases like tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS, and as global partners, we’ll work to improve global health by preventing the spread of pandemic flu. And because knowledge is the currency of the 21st century, we will increase exchanges between our students, our colleges and our universities, which are among the best in the world.

As we work to advance our shared prosperity, we can partner to address a second priority -- and that is our shared security. In Mumbai, I met with the courageous families and survivors of that barbaric attack. And here in Parliament, which was itself targeted because of the democracy it represents, we honor the memory of all those who have been taken from us, including American citizens on 26/11 and Indian citizens on 9/11.

This is the bond that we share. It’s why we insist that nothing ever justifies the slaughter of innocent men, women and children. It’s why we’re working together, more closely than ever, to prevent terrorist attacks and to deepen our cooperation even further. And it’s why, as strong and resilient societies, we refuse to live in fear. We will not sacrifice the values and rule of law that defines us, and we will never waver in the defense of our people.

America’s fight against al Qaeda and its terrorist affiliates is why we persevere in Afghanistan, where major development assistance from India has improved the lives of the Afghan people. We’re making progress in our mission to break the Taliban’s momentum and to train Afghan forces so they can take the lead for their security. And while I have made it clear that American forces will begin the transition to Afghan responsibility next summer, I’ve also made it clear that America’s commitment to the Afghan people will endure. The United States will not abandon the people of Afghanistan -- or the region -- to violent extremists who threaten us all.

Our strategy to disrupt and dismantle and defeat al Qaeda and its affiliates has to succeed on both sides of the border. And that’s why we have worked with the Pakistani government to address the threat of terrorist networks in the border region. The Pakistani government increasingly recognizes that these networks are not just a threat outside of Pakistan -- they are a threat to the Pakistani people, as well. They’ve suffered greatly at the hands of violent extremists over the last several years.

And we’ll continue to insist to Pakistan's leaders that terrorist safe havens within their borders are unacceptable, and that terrorists behind the Mumbai attacks must be brought to justice. We must also recognize that all of us have an interest in both an Afghanistan and a Pakistan that is stable and prosperous and democratic -- and India has an interest in that, as well.

In pursuit of regional security, we will continue to welcome dialogue between India and Pakistan, even as we recognize that disputes between your two countries can only be resolved by the people of your two countries.

More broadly, India and the United States can partner in Asia. Today, the United States is once again playing a leadership role in Asia -- strengthening old alliances; deepening relationships, as we are doing with China; and we’re reengaging with regional organizations like ASEAN and joining the East Asia summit -- organizations in which India is also a partner. Like your neighbors in Southeast Asia, we want India not only to “look East,” we want India to “engage East” -- because it will increase the security and prosperity of all our nations.

As two global leaders, the United States and India can partner for global security -- especially as India serves on the Security Council over the next two years. Indeed, the just and sustainable international order that America seeks includes a United Nations that is efficient, effective, credible and legitimate. That is why I can say today, in the years ahead, I look forward to a reformed United Nations Security Council that includes India as a permanent member.

Now, let me suggest that with increased power comes increased responsibility. The United Nations exists to fulfill its founding ideals of preserving peace and security, promoting global cooperation, and advancing human rights. These are the responsibilities of all nations, but especially those that seek to lead in the 21st century. And so we look forward to working with India -- and other nations that aspire to Security Council membership -- to ensure that the Security Council is effective; that resolutions are implemented, that sanctions are enforced; that we strengthen the international norms which recognize the rights and responsibilities of all nations and all individuals.

This includes our responsibility to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. Since I took office, the United States has reduced the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy, and we've agreed with Russia to reduce our own arsenals. We have put preventing nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism at the top of our nuclear agenda, and we have strengthened the cornerstone of the global non-proliferation regime, which is the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Together, the United States and India can pursue our goal of securing the world’s vulnerable nuclear materials. We can make it clear that even as every nation has the right to peaceful nuclear energy, every nation must also meet its international obligations -- and that includes the Islamic Republic of Iran. And together, we can pursue a vision that Indian leaders have espoused since independence -- a world without nuclear weapons.

And this leads me to the final area where our countries can partner -- strengthening the foundations of democratic governance, not only at home but abroad.

In the United States, my administration has worked to make government more open and transparent and accountable to people. Here in India, you’re harnessing technologies to do the same, as I saw yesterday at an expo in Mumbai. Your landmark Right to Information Act is empowering citizens with the ability to get the services to which they’re entitled -- and to hold officials accountable. Voters can get information about candidates by text message. And you’re delivering education and health care services to rural communities, as I saw yesterday when I joined an e-panchayat with villagers in Rajasthan.

Now, in a new collaboration on open government, our two countries are going to share our experience, identify what works, and develop the next generation of tools to empower citizens. And in another example of how American and Indian partnership can address global challenges, we’re going to share these innovations with civil society groups and countries around the world. We’re going to show that democracy, more than any other form of government, delivers for the common man -- and woman.

Likewise, when Indians vote, the whole world watches. Thousands of political parties; hundreds of thousands of polling centers; millions of candidates and poll workers -- and 700 million voters. There’s nothing like it on the planet. There is so much that countries transitioning to democracy could learn from India’s experience, so much expertise that India can share with the world. And that, too, is what is possible when the world’s largest democracy embraces its role as a global leader.

As the world’s two largest democracies, we must never forget that the price of our own freedom is standing up for the freedom of others. Indians know this, for it is the story of your nation. Before he ever began his struggle for Indian independence, Gandhi stood up for the rights of Indians in South Africa. Just as others, including the United States, supported Indian independence, India championed the self-determination of peoples from Africa to Asia as they, too, broke free from colonialism. And along with the United States, you’ve been a leader in supporting democratic development and civil society groups around the world. And this, too, is part of India’s greatness.

Now, we all understand every country will follow its own path. No one nation has a monopoly on wisdom, and no nation should ever try to impose its values on another. But when peaceful democratic movements are suppressed -- as they have been in Burma, for example -- then the democracies of the world cannot remain silent. For it is unacceptable to gun down peaceful protestors and incarcerate political prisoners decade after decade. It is unacceptable to hold the aspirations of an entire people hostage to the greed and paranoia of bankrupt regimes. It is unacceptable to steal elections, as the regime in Burma has done again for all the world to see.

Faced with such gross violations of human rights, it is the responsibility of the international community -- especially leaders like the United States and India -- to condemn it. And if I can be frank, in international fora, India has often shied away from some of these issues. But speaking up for those who cannot do so for themselves is not interfering in the affairs of other countries. It’s not violating the rights of sovereign nations. It is staying true to our democratic principles. It is giving meaning to the human rights that we say are universal. And it sustains the progress that in Asia and around the world has helped turn dictatorships into democracies and ultimately increased our security in the world.

So promoting shared prosperity, preserving peace and security, strengthening democratic governance and human rights -- these are the responsibilities of leadership. And as global partners, this is the leadership that the United States and India can offer in the 21st century. Ultimately, though, this cannot be a relationship only between presidents and prime ministers, or in the halls of this Parliament. Ultimately, this must be a partnership between our peoples. So I want to conclude by speaking directly to the people of India who are watching today.

In your lives, you have overcome odds that might have overwhelmed a lesser country. In just decades, you have achieved progress and development that took other nations centuries. You are now assuming your rightful place as a leader among nations. Your parents and grandparents imagined this. Your children and grandchildren will look back on this. But only this generation of Indians can seize the possibilities of the moment.

As you carry on with the hard work ahead, I want every Indian citizen to know: The United States of America will not simply be cheering you on from the sidelines. We will be right there with you, shoulder to shoulder. Because we believe in the promise of India. We believe that the future is what we make it. We believe that no matter who you are or where you come from, every person can fulfill their God-given potential, just as a Dalit like Dr. Ambedkar could lift himself up and pen the words of the constitution that protects the rights of all Indians.

We believe that no matter where you live -- whether a village in Punjab or the bylanes of Chandni Chowk -- an old section of Kolkata or a new high-rise in Bangalore -- every person deserves the same chance to live in security and dignity, to get an education, to find work, to give their children a better future.

And we believe that when countries and cultures put aside old habits and attitudes that keep people apart, when we recognize our common humanity, then we can begin to fulfill these aspirations that we share. It’s a simple lesson contained in that collection of stories which has guided Indians for centuries -- the Panchtantra. And it’s the spirit of the inscription seen by all who enter this great hall: “That one is mine and the other a stranger is the concept of little minds. But to the large-hearted, the world itself is their family.”

This is the story of India; this is the story of America -- that despite their differences, people can see themselves in one another, and work together and succeed together as one proud nation. And it can be the spirit of partnership between our nations -- that even as we honor the histories which in different times kept us apart, even as we preserve what makes us unique in a globalized world, we can recognize how much we can achieve together.

And if we let this simple concept be our guide, if we pursue the vision I’ve described today -- a global partnership to meet global challenges -- then I have no doubt that future generations -- Indians and Americans -- will live in a world that is more prosperous and more secure and more just because of the bonds that our generation has forged today.

So, thank you, and Jai Hind. And long live the partnership between India and the United States.

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# Address to Students at the University of Indonesia

Selamat pagi. [Good morning.] It is wonderful to be here at the University of Indonesia. To the faculty and the staff and the students, and to Dr. Gumilar Rusliwa Somantri, thank you so much for your hospitality.

Assalamualaikum dan salam sejahtera. [Peace be upon you and may God be with you.] Thank you for this wonderful welcome. Thank you to the people of Jakarta and thank you to the people of Indonesia.

Pulang kampung nih. [Back to/in my hometown]. I am so glad that I made it back to Indonesia and that Michelle was able to join me. We had a couple of false starts this year, but I was determined to visit a country that’s meant so much to me. And unfortunately, this visit is too short, but I look forward to coming back a year from now when Indonesia hosts the East Asia Summit.

Before I go any further, I want to say that our thoughts and prayers are with all of those Indonesians who are affected by the recent tsunami and the volcanic eruptions -- particularly those who’ve lost loved ones, and those who’ve been displaced. And I want you all to know that as always, the United States stands with Indonesia in responding to natural disasters, and we are pleased to be able to help as needed. As neighbors help neighbors and families take in the displaced, I know that the strength and the resilience of the Indonesian people will pull you through once more.

Let me begin with a simple statement: Indonesia bagian dari didi saya. I first came to this country when my mother married an Indonesian named Lolo Soetoro. And as a young boy I was -- as a young boy I was coming to a different world. But the people of Indonesia quickly made me feel at home. Jakarta -- now, Jakarta looked very different in those days. The city was filled with buildings that were no more than a few stories tall. This was back in 1967, ‘68 -- most of you weren’t born yet. The Hotel Indonesia was one of the few high rises, and there was just one big department store called Sarinah. That was it. Betchaks and bemos, that’s how you got around. They outnumbered automobiles in those days. And you didn’t have all the big highways that you have today. Most of them gave way to unpaved roads and the kampongs. So we moved to Menteng Dalam, where -- hey, some folks from Menteng Dalam right here. And we lived in a small house. We had a mango tree out front. And I learned to love Indonesia while flying kites and running along the paddy fields and catching dragonflies, buying satay and baso from the street vendors. I still remember the call of the vendors. Satay! I remember that. Baso! But most of all, I remember the people -- the old men and women who welcomed us with smiles; the children who made a foreign child feel like a neighbor and a friend; and the teachers who helped me learn about this country. Because Indonesia is made up of thousands of islands, and hundreds of languages, and people from scores of regions and ethnic groups, my time here helped me appreciate the common humanity of all people. And while my stepfather, like most Indonesians, was raised a Muslim, he firmly believed that all religions were worthy of respect. And in this way -- in this way he reflected the spirit of religious tolerance that is enshrined in Indonesia’s Constitution, and that remains one of this country’s defining and inspiring characteristics. Now, I stayed here for four years -- a time that helped shape my childhood; a time that saw the birth of my wonderful sister, Maya; a time that made such an impression on my mother that she kept returning to Indonesia over the next 20 years to live and to work and to travel -- and to pursue her passion of promoting opportunity in Indonesia’s villages, especially opportunity for women and for girls. And I was so honored -- I was so honored when President Yudhoyono last night at the state dinner presented an award on behalf of my mother, recognizing the work that she did. And she would have been so proud, because my mother held Indonesia and its people very close to her heart for her entire life.

So much has changed in the four decades since I boarded a plane to move back to Hawaii. If you asked me -- or any of my schoolmates who knew me back then -- I don’t think any of us could have anticipated that one day I would come back to Jakarta as the President of the United States. And few could have anticipated the remarkable story of Indonesia over these last four decades. The Jakarta that I once knew has grown into a teeming city of nearly 10 million, with skyscrapers that dwarf the Hotel Indonesia, and thriving centers of culture and of commerce. While my Indonesian friends and I used to run in fields with water buffalo and goats -- a new generation of Indonesians is among the most wired in the world -- connected through cell phones and social networks. And while Indonesia as a young nation focused inward, a growing Indonesia now plays a key role in the Asia Pacific and in the global economy. Now, this change also extends to politics. When my stepfather was a boy, he watched his own father and older brother leave home to fight and die in the struggle for Indonesian independence. And I’m happy to be here on Heroes Day to honor the memory of so many Indonesians who have sacrificed on behalf of this great country. When I moved to Jakarta, it was 1967, and it was a time that had followed great suffering and conflict in parts of this country. And even though my stepfather had served in the Army, the violence and killing during that time of political upheaval was largely unknown to me because it was unspoken by my Indonesian family and friends. In my household, like so many others across Indonesia, the memories of that time were an invisible presence. Indonesians had their independence, but oftentimes they were afraid to speak their minds about issues. In the years since then, Indonesia has charted its own course through an extraordinary democratic transformation -- from the rule of an iron fist to the rule of the people. In recent years, the world has watched with hope and admiration as Indonesians embraced the peaceful transfer of power and the direct election of leaders. And just as your democracy is symbolized by your elected President and legislature, your democracy is sustained and fortified by its checks and balances: a dynamic civil society; political parties and unions; a vibrant media and engaged citizens who have ensured that -- in Indonesia -- there will be no turning back from democracy. But even as this land of my youth has changed in so many ways, those things that I learned to love about Indonesia -- that spirit of tolerance that is written into your Constitution; symbolized in mosques and churches and temples standing alongside each other; that spirit that’s embodied in your people -- that still lives on. Bhinneka Tunggal Ika -- unity in diversity. This is the foundation of Indonesia’s example to the world, and this is why Indonesia will play such an important part in the 21st century. So today, I return to Indonesia as a friend, but also as a President who seeks a deep and enduring partnership between our two countries. Because as vast and diverse countries; as neighbors on either side of the Pacific; and above all as democracies -- the United States and Indonesia are bound together by shared interests and shared values. Yesterday, President Yudhoyono and I announced a new Comprehensive Partnership between the United States and Indonesia. We are increasing ties between our governments in many different areas, and -- just as importantly -- we are increasing ties among our people. This is a partnership of equals, grounded in mutual interests and mutual respect. So with the rest of my time today, I’d like to talk about why the story I just told -- the story of Indonesia since the days when I lived here -- is so important to the United States and to the world. I will focus on three areas that are closely related, and fundamental to human progress -- development, democracy and religious faith. First, the friendship between the United States and Indonesia can advance our mutual interest in development. When I moved to Indonesia, it would have been hard to imagine a future in which the prosperity of families in Chicago and Jakarta would be connected. But our economies are now global, and Indonesians have experienced both the promise and the perils of globalization: from the shock of the Asian financial crisis in the ‘90s, to the millions lifted out of poverty because of increased trade and commerce. What that means -- and what we learned in the recent economic crisis -- is that we have a stake in each other’s success. America has a stake in Indonesia growing and developing, with prosperity that is broadly shared among the Indonesian people -- because a rising middle class here in Indonesia means new markets for our goods, just as America is a market for goods coming from Indonesia. So we are investing more in Indonesia, and our exports have grown by nearly 50 percent, and we are opening doors for Americans and Indonesians to do business with one another.

America has a stake in an Indonesia that plays its rightful role in shaping the global economy. Gone are the days when seven or eight countries would come together to determine the direction of global markets. That’s why the G20 is now the center of international economic cooperation, so that emerging economies like Indonesia have a greater voice and also bear greater responsibility for guiding the global economy. And through its leadership of the G20’s anti-corruption group, Indonesia should lead on the world stage and by example in embracing transparency and accountability. America has a stake in an Indonesia that pursues sustainable development, because the way we grow will determine the quality of our lives and the health of our planet. And that’s why we’re developing clean energy technologies that can power industry and preserve Indonesia’s precious natural resources -- and America welcomes your country’s strong leadership in the global effort to combat climate change. Above all, America has a stake in the success of the Indonesian people. Underneath the headlines of the day, we must build bridges between our people, because our future security and prosperity is shared. And that is exactly what we’re doing -- by increasing collaboration among our scientists and researchers, and by working together to foster entrepreneurship. And I’m especially pleased that we have committed to double the number of American and Indonesian students studying in our respective countries. We want more Indonesian students in American schools, and we want more American students to come study in this country. We want to forge new ties and greater understanding between young people in this young century. These are the issues that really matter in our daily lives. Development, after all, is not simply about growth rates and numbers on a balance sheet. It’s about whether a child can learn the skills they need to make it in a changing world. It’s about whether a good idea is allowed to grow into a business, and not suffocated by corruption. It’s about whether those forces that have transformed the Jakarta I once knew -- technology and trade and the flow of people and goods -- can translate into a better life for all Indonesians, for all human beings, a life marked by dignity and opportunity. Now, this kind of development is inseparable from the role of democracy. Today, we sometimes hear that democracy stands in the way of economic progress. This is not a new argument. Particularly in times of change and economic uncertainty, some will say that it is easier to take a shortcut to development by trading away the right of human beings for the power of the state. But that’s not what I saw on my trip to India, and that is not what I see here in Indonesia. Your achievements demonstrate that democracy and development reinforce one another. Like any democracy, you have known setbacks along the way. America is no different. Our own Constitution spoke of the effort to forge a “more perfect union,” and that is a journey that we’ve traveled ever since. We’ve endured civil war and we struggled to extend equal rights to all of our citizens. But it is precisely this effort that has allowed us to become stronger and more prosperous, while also becoming a more just and a more free society. Like other countries that emerged from colonial rule in the last century, Indonesia struggled and sacrificed for the right to determine your destiny. That is what Heroes Day is all about -- an Indonesia that belongs to Indonesians. But you also ultimately decided that freedom cannot mean replacing the strong hand of a colonizer with a strongman of your own. Of course, democracy is messy. Not everyone likes the results of every election. You go through your ups and downs. But the journey is worthwhile, and it goes beyond casting a ballot. It takes strong institutions to check the power -- the concentration of power. It takes open markets to allow individuals to thrive. It takes a free press and an independent justice system to root out abuses and excess, and to insist on accountability. It takes open society and active citizens to reject inequality and injustice. These are the forces that will propel Indonesia forward. And it will require a refusal to tolerate the corruption that stands in the way of opportunity; a commitment to transparency that gives every Indonesian a stake in their government; and a belief that the freedom of Indonesians -- that Indonesians have fought for is what holds this great nation together. That is the message of the Indonesians who have advanced this democratic story -- from those who fought in the Battle of Surabaya 55 years ago today; to the students who marched peacefully for democracy in the 1990s; to leaders who have embraced the peaceful transition of power in this young century. Because ultimately, it will be the rights of citizens that will stitch together this remarkable Nusantara that stretches from Sabang to Merauke, an insistence -- an insistence that every child born in this country should be treated equally, whether they come from Java or Aceh; from Bali or Papua. That all Indonesians have equal rights. That effort extends to the example that Indonesia is now setting abroad. Indonesia took the initiative to establish the Bali Democracy Forum, an open forum for countries to share their experiences and best practices in fostering democracy. Indonesia has also been at the forefront of pushing for more attention to human rights within ASEAN. The nations of Southeast Asia must have the right to determine their own destiny, and the United States will strongly support that right. But the people of Southeast Asia must have the right to determine their own destiny as well. And that’s why we condemned elections in Burma recently that were neither free nor fair. That is why we are supporting your vibrant civil society in working with counterparts across this region. Because there’s no reason why respect for human rights should stop at the border of any country. Hand in hand, that is what development and democracy are about -- the notion that certain values are universal. Prosperity without freedom is just another form of poverty. Because there are aspirations that human beings share -- the liberty of knowing that your leader is accountable to you, and that you won’t be locked up for disagreeing with them; the opportunity to get an education and to be able to work with dignity; the freedom to practice your faith without fear or restriction. Those are universal values that must be observed everywhere.

Now, religion is the final topic that I want to address today, and -- like democracy and development -- it is fundamental to the Indonesian story. Like the other Asian nations that I’m visiting on this trip, Indonesia is steeped in spirituality -- a place where people worship God in many different ways. Along with this rich diversity, it is also home to the world’s largest Muslim population -- a truth I came to know as a boy when I heard the call to prayer across Jakarta. Just as individuals are not defined solely by their faith, Indonesia is defined by more than its Muslim population. But we also know that relations between the United States and Muslim communities have frayed over many years. As President, I have made it a priority to begin to repair these relations. As part of that effort, I went to Cairo last June, and I called for a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world -- one that creates a path for us to move beyond our differences. I said then, and I will repeat now, that no single speech can eradicate years of mistrust. But I believed then, and I believe today, that we do have a choice. We can choose to be defined by our differences, and give in to a future of suspicion and mistrust. Or we can choose to do the hard work of forging common ground, and commit ourselves to the steady pursuit of progress. And I can promise you -- no matter what setbacks may come, the United States is committed to human progress. That is who we are. That is what we’ve done. And that is what we will do. Now, we know well the issues that have caused tensions for many years -- and these are issues that I addressed in Cairo. In the 17 months that have passed since that speech, we have made some progress, but we have much more work to do. Innocent civilians in America, in Indonesia and across the world are still targeted by violent extremism. I made clear that America is not, and never will be, at war with Islam. Instead, all of us must work together to defeat al Qaeda and its affiliates, who have no claim to be leaders of any religion -- certainly not a great, world religion like Islam. But those who want to build must not cede ground to terrorists who seek to destroy. And this is not a task for America alone. Indeed, here in Indonesia, you’ve made progress in rooting out extremists and combating such violence. In Afghanistan, we continue to work with a coalition of nations to build the capacity of the Afghan government to secure its future. Our shared interest is in building peace in a war-torn land -- a peace that provides no safe haven for violent extremists, and that provide hope for the Afghan people. Meanwhile, we’ve made progress on one of our core commitments -- our effort to end the war in Iraq. Nearly 100,000 American troops have now left Iraq under my presidency. Iraqis have taken full responsibility for their security. And we will continue to support Iraq as it forms an inclusive government, and we will bring all of our troops home. In the Middle East, we have faced false starts and setbacks, but we’ve been persistent in our pursuit of peace. Israelis and Palestinians restarted direct talks, but enormous obstacles remain. There should be no illusion that peace and security will come easy. But let there be no doubt: America will spare no effort in working for the outcome that is just, and that is in the interests of all the parties involved -- two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. That is our goal. The stakes are high in resolving all of these issues. For our world has grown smaller, and while those forces that connect us have unleashed opportunity and great wealth, they also empower those who seek to derail progress. One bomb in a marketplace can obliterate the bustle of daily commerce. One whispered rumor can obscure the truth and set off violence between communities that once lived together in peace. In an age of rapid change and colliding cultures, what we share as human beings can sometimes be lost. But I believe that the history of both America and Indonesia should give us hope. It is a story written into our national mottos. In the United States, our motto is E pluribus unum -- out of many, one. Bhinneka Tunggal Ika -- unity in diversity. We are two nations, which have traveled different paths. Yet our nations show that hundreds of millions who hold different beliefs can be united in freedom under one flag. And we are now building on that shared humanity -- through young people who will study in each other’s schools; through the entrepreneurs forging ties that can lead to greater prosperity; and through our embrace of fundamental democratic values and human aspirations. Before I came here, I visited Istiqlal mosque -- a place of worship that was still under construction when I lived in Jakarta. And I admired its soaring minaret and its imposing dome and welcoming space. But its name and history also speak to what makes Indonesia great. Istiqlal means independence, and its construction was in part a testament to the nation’s struggle for freedom. Moreover, this house of worship for many thousands of Muslims was designed by a Christian architect. Such is Indonesia’s spirit. Such is the message of Indonesia’s inclusive philosophy, Pancasila. Across an archipelago that contains some of God’s most beautiful creations, islands rising above an ocean named for peace, people choose to worship God as they please. Islam flourishes, but so do other faiths. Development is strengthened by an emerging democracy. Ancient traditions endure, even as a rising power is on the move. That is not to say that Indonesia is without imperfections. No country is. But here we can find the ability to bridge divides of race and region and religion -- by the ability to see yourself in other people. As a child of a different race who came here from a distant country, I found this spirit in the greeting that I received upon moving here: Selamat Datang. As a Christian visiting a mosque on this visit, I found it in the words of a leader who was asked about my visit and said, “Muslims are also allowed in churches. We are all God’s followers.” That spark of the divine lives within each of us. We cannot give in to doubt or cynicism or despair. The stories of Indonesia and America should make us optimistic, because it tells us that history is on the side of human progress; that unity is more powerful than division; and that the people of this world can live together in peace. May our two nations, working together, with faith and determination, share these truths with all mankind.

Sebagai penutup, saya mengucapkan kepada seluruh rakyat Indonesia: Terima kasih atas. Terima kasih. Assalamualaikum. [In conclusion, I would like say thank you to all Indonesia: Thank you for your assistance. Thank you. Peace be upon you.]

Thank you.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Awarding the Medal of Honor to Staff Sergeant Salvatore A. Giunta

Good afternoon, everybody. Please be seated. On behalf of Michelle and myself, welcome to the White House. Thank you, Chaplain Carver, for that beautiful invocation.

Of all the privileges that come with serving as President of the United States, I have none greater than serving as Commander-in-Chief of the finest military that the world has ever known. And of all the military decorations that a President and a nation can bestow, there is none higher than the Medal of Honor.

Today is particularly special. Since the end of the Vietnam War, the Medal of Honor has been awarded nine times for conspicuous gallantry in an ongoing or recent conflict. Sadly, our nation has been unable to present this decoration to the recipients themselves, because each gave his life -- his last full measure of devotion -- for our country. Indeed, as President, I have presented the Medal of Honor three times -- and each time to the families of a fallen hero.

Today, therefore, marks the first time in nearly 40 years that the recipient of the Medal of Honor for an ongoing conflict has been able to come to the White House and accept this recognition in person. It is my privilege to present our nation’s highest military decoration, the Medal of Honor, to a soldier as humble as he is heroic: Staff Sergeant Salvatore A. Giunta.

Now, I’m going to go off-script here for a second and just say I really like this guy. I think anybody -- we all just get a sense of people and who they are, and when you meet Sal and you meet his family, you are just absolutely convinced that this is what America is all about. And it just makes you proud. And so this is a joyous occasion for me -- something that I have been looking forward to.

The Medal of Honor reflects the gratitude of an entire nation. So we are also joined here today by several members of Congress, including both senators and several representatives from Staff Sergeant Giunta’s home state of Iowa. We are also joined by leaders from across my administration and the Department of Defense, including the Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates; Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen. Where’s Mike? There he is, right there. Army Secretary John McHugh; and Chief of Staff of the Army, General George Casey.

We are especially honored to be joined by Staff Sergeant Giunta’s fellow soldiers, his teammates and brothers from Battle Company, 2d of the 503d of the 173d Airborne Brigade; and several members of that rarest of fraternities that now welcomes him into its ranks -- the Medal of Honor Society. Please give them a big round of applause.

We also welcome the friends and family who made Staff Sergeant Giunta into the man that he is, including his lovely wife, Jenny; and his parents, Steven and Rosemary; as well as his siblings, who are here. It was his mother, after all, who apparently taught him as a young boy in small-town Iowa how to remove the screen from his bedroom window in case of fire. What she didn’t know was that by teaching Sal how to jump from his bedroom and sneaking off in the dead of night, she was unleashing a future paratrooper -- who would one day fight in the rugged mountains of Afghanistan 7,000 miles away.

During the first of his two tours of duty in Afghanistan, Staff Sergeant Giunta was forced early on to come to terms with the loss of comrades and friends. His team leader at the time gave him a piece of advice: “You just try -- you just got to try to do everything you can when it’s your time to do it.” You’ve just got to try to do everything you can when it’s your time to do it.

Salvatore Giunta’s time came on October 25, 2007. He was a Specialist then, just 22 years old.

Sal and his platoon were several days into a mission in the Korengal Valley -- the most dangerous valley in northeast Afghanistan. The moon was full. The light it cast was enough to travel by without using their night-vision goggles. With heavy gear on their backs, and air support overhead, they made their way single file down a rocky ridge crest, along terrain so steep that sliding was sometimes easier than walking.

They hadn’t traveled a quarter mile before the silence was shattered. It was an ambush, so close that the cracks of the guns and the whizz of the bullets were simultaneous. Tracer fire hammered the ridge at hundreds of rounds per minute -- “more,” Sal said later, “than the stars in the sky.”

The Apache gunships above saw it all, but couldn’t engage with the enemy so close to our soldiers. The next platoon heard the shooting, but were too far away to join the fight in time.

And the two lead men were hit by enemy fire and knocked down instantly. When the third was struck in the helmet and fell to the ground, Sal charged headlong into the wall of bullets to pull him to safety behind what little cover there was. As he did, Sal was hit twice -- one round slamming into his body armor, the other shattering a weapon slung across his back.

They were pinned down, and two wounded Americans still lay up ahead. So Sal and his comrades regrouped and counterattacked. They threw grenades, using the explosions as cover to run forward, shooting at the muzzle flashes still erupting from the trees. Then they did it again. And again. Throwing grenades, charging ahead. Finally, they reached one of their men. He’d been shot twice in the leg, but he had kept returning fire until his gun jammed.

As another soldier tended to his wounds, Sal sprinted ahead, at every step meeting relentless enemy fire with his own. He crested a hill alone, with no cover but the dust kicked up by the storm of bullets still biting into the ground. There, he saw a chilling sight: the silhouettes of two insurgents carrying the other wounded American away -- who happened to be one of Sal’s best friends. Sal never broke stride. He leapt forward. He took aim. He killed one of the insurgents and wounded the other, who ran off.

Sal found his friend alive, but badly wounded. Sal had saved him from the enemy -- now he had to try to save his life. Even as bullets impacted all around him, Sal grabbed his friend by the vest and dragged him to cover. For nearly half an hour, Sal worked to stop the bleeding and help his friend breathe until the MEDEVAC arrived to lift the wounded from the ridge. American gunships worked to clear the enemy from the hills. And with the battle over, First Platoon picked up their gear and resumed their march through the valley. They continued their mission.

It had been as intense and violent a firefight as any soldier will experience. By the time it was finished, every member of First Platoon had shrapnel or a bullet hole in their gear. Five were wounded. And two gave their lives: Sal’s friend, Sergeant Joshua C. Brennan, and the platoon medic, Specialist Hugo V. Mendoza.

Now, the parents of Joshua and Hugo are here today. And I know that there are no words that, even three years later, can ease the ache in your hearts or repay the debt that America owes to you. But on behalf of a grateful nation, let me express profound thanks to your sons’ service and their sacrifice. And could the parents of Joshua and Hugo please stand briefly?

Now, I already mentioned I like this guy, Sal. And as I found out myself when I first spoke with him on the phone and when we met in the Oval Office today, he is a low-key guy, a humble guy, and he doesn’t seek the limelight. And he’ll tell you that he didn’t do anything special; that he was just doing his job; that any of his brothers in the unit would do the same thing. In fact, he just lived up to what his team leader instructed him to do years before: “You do everything you can.”

Staff Sergeant Giunta, repeatedly and without hesitation, you charged forward through extreme enemy fire, embodying the warrior ethos that says, “I will never leave a fallen comrade.” Your actions disrupted a devastating ambush before it could claim more lives. Your courage prevented the capture of an American soldier and brought that soldier back to his family. You may believe that you don’t deserve this honor, but it was your fellow soldiers who recommended you for it. In fact, your commander specifically said in his recommendation that you lived up to the standards of the most decorated American soldier of World War II, Audie Murphy, who famously repelled an overwhelming enemy attack by himself for one simple reason: “They were killing my friends.”

That’s why Salvatore Giunta risked his life for his fellow soldiers -- because they would risk their lives for him. That’s what fueled his bravery -- not just the urgent impulse to have their backs, but the absolute confidence that they had his. One of them, Sal has said -- of these young men that he was with, he said, “They are just as much of me as I am.” They are just as much of me as I am.

So I would ask Sal’s team, all of Battle Company who were with him that day, to please stand and be recognized as well. Gentlemen, thank you for your service. We’re all in your debt. And I’m proud to be your Commander-in-Chief.

These are the soldiers of our Armed Forces. Highly trained. Battle-hardened. Each with specialized roles and responsibilities, but all with one thing in common -- they volunteered. In an era when it’s never been more tempting to chase personal ambition or narrow self-interest, they chose the opposite. They felt a tug; they answered a call; they said, “I’ll go.” And for the better part of a decade, they have endured tour after tour in distant and difficult places; they have protected us from danger; they have given others the opportunity to earn a better and more secure life.

They are the courageous men and women serving in Afghanistan even as we speak. They keep clear focus on their mission: to deny safe haven for terrorists who would attack our country, to break the back of the Taliban insurgency, to build the Afghans’ capacity to defend themselves. They possess the steely resolve to see their mission through. They are made of the same strong stuff as the troops in this room, and I am absolutely confident that they will continue to succeed in the missions that we give them, in Afghanistan and beyond.

After all, our brave servicemen and women and their families have done everything they’ve been asked to do. They have been everything that we have asked them to be. “If I am a hero,” Sal has said, “then every man who stands around me, every woman in the military, every person who defends this country is.” And he’s right.

This medal today is a testament to his uncommon valor, but also to the parents and the community that raised him; the military that trained him; and all the men and women who served by his side.

All of them deserve our enduring thanks and gratitude. They represent a small fraction of the American population, but they and the families who await their safe return carry far more than their fair share of our burden. They fight halfway around the globe, but they do it in hopes that our children and our grandchildren won’t have to.

They are the very best part of us. They are our friends, our family, our neighbors, our classmates, our coworkers. They are why our banner still waves, our founding principles still shine, and our country -- the United States of America -- still stands as a force for good all over the world.

So, please join me in welcoming Staff Sergeant Salvatore A. Giunta for the reading of the citation.

Military Aide: The President of the United States of America, authorized by act of Congress, March 3, 1863, has awarded, in the name of Congress, the Medal of Honor to then Specialist Salvatore A. Giunta, United States Army.

Specialist Salvatore A. Giunta distinguished himself conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity, at the risk of his life, above and beyond the call of duty, in action, with an armed enemy in the Korengal Valley, Afghanistan, on October 25, 2007.

While conducting a patrol as team leader, with Company B, 2d Battalion Airborne, 503d Infantry Regiment, Specialist Giunta and his team were navigating through harsh terrain when they were ambushed by a well-armed and well-coordinated insurgent force.

While under heavy enemy fire, Specialist Giunta immediately sprinted towards cover and engaged the enemy. Seeing that his squad leader had fallen, and believing that he had been injured, Specialist Giunta exposed himself to withering enemy fire and raced towards his squad leader, helped him to cover and administered medical aid.

While administering first aid, enemy fire struck Special Giunta’s body armor and his secondary weapon. Without regard to the ongoing fire, Specialist Giunta engaged the enemy before prepping and throwing grenades, using the explosions for cover in order to conceal his position.

Attempting to reach additional wounded fellow soldiers who were separated from the squad, Specialist Giunta and his team encountered a barrage of enemy fire that forced them to the ground. The team continued forward, and upon reaching the wounded soldiers, Specialist Giunta realized that another soldier was still separated from the element. Specialist Giunta then advanced forward on his own initiative. As he crested the top of a hill, he observed two insurgents carrying away an American soldier. He immediately engaged the enemy, killing one and wounding the other. Upon reaching the wounded soldier, he began to provide medical aid, as his squad caught up and provided security.

Specialist Giunta’s unwavering courage, selflessness and decisive leadership while under extreme enemy fire were integral to his platoon’s ability to defeat an enemy ambush and recover a fellow American soldier from the enemy.

Specialist Salvatore A. Giunta’s extraordinary heroism and selflessness above and beyond the call of duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, Company B, 2d Battalion Airborne, 503d Infantry Regiment and the United States Army.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address to Troops at Bagram Air Base

Hello, everybody! I’m sorry, Bagram, I can’t hear you. Air Assault! It -- It is great to be back. Let me first of all thank the 101st Airborne Division Band. Where’s the band? Give them a big round of applause. Thank you.

To Chief Thomas Hager and to the commander and conductor. I gather we had a couple of other bands playing, Manifest Destiny and Nuts. I don’t know about, you know -- I don’t know how they sounded. What did you think? Were they pretty good? Hooah!

It is great to be back. And I apologize for keeping you guys up late, coming on such short notice. But I wanted to make sure that I could spend a little time this holiday with the men and women of the finest fighting force that the world has ever known, and that’s all of you.

I want to thank General Petraeus, not only for the introduction and the T-shirts, but for General Petraeus’s lifetime of service. This is somebody who has helped change the way we fight wars and win wars in the 21st century. And I am very grateful that he agreed to take command of our efforts here in Afghanistan. He has been an extraordinary warrior on behalf of the American people. Thank you, David Petraeus.

I want to thank all your outstanding leaders who welcomed me here, including General John Campbell; Admiral Bill McRaven from the 455th Air Expeditionary Wing; Colonel Todd Canterbury. I want to salute your great senior enlisted leaders, including Command Sergeant Major Scott Schroeder -- hooah! -- Command Sergeant Major Chris Farris, and Command Chief Craig Adams. Hooah!

I also want to acknowledge the outstanding work that our civilians are doing each and every day, starting with Karl Eikenberry all the way through to your senior civilian representative Thomas Gibbons and all the civilians who are here. They are fighting alongside you. They are putting themselves at risk. They are away from their families. And we are very, very grateful to them as well. So give them a big round of applause.

I think we’ve got every service here tonight. We’ve got Army. We’ve got Navy. We’ve got Air Force. I think we may have a few Marines around, too. And a whole lot of folks from the 101st Airborne Division, The Screaming Eagles.

Here in Afghanistan, you are all -- Coast Guard, is that what I heard? Here in Afghanistan, all of you are part of one team, serving together, succeeding together, except maybe in next week’s Army-Navy game. As your Commander-in-Chief, I’ve got to stay neutral on that. We also have some ISAF partners here as well.

You know, when I was here in the spring, we had a coalition of 43 nations. Now we’ve got a coalition of 49 nations. And this sends a powerful message that the coalition of nations that supports Afghanistan is strong and is growing.

Now, I’m not here to give a long speech. I want to shake as many hands as I can. Hooah! But let me say that at this time of year, Americans are giving thanks for all the blessings that we have. And as we begin this holiday season, there is no place that I’d rather be than be here with you.

I know it’s not easy for all of you to be away from home, especially during the holidays. And I know it’s hard on your families. They’ve got an empty seat at the dinner table. Sometimes during the holiday season that’s when you feel the absence of somebody you love most acutely.

But here’s what I want you to know. As President of the United States, I have no greater responsibility than keeping the American people secure. I could not meet that responsibility, we could not protect the American people, we could not enjoy the blessings of our liberty without the extraordinary service that each and every one of you perform each and every day.

So on behalf of me, on behalf of Michelle, on behalf of Malia and Sasha, on behalf of more than 300 million Americans, we are here to say thank you. Hooah! We are here to say thank you for everything that you do.

Now, I also want to say thank you to your families back home so that when you talk to them you know that they know. They’re serving here with you -- in mind and spirit, if not in body.

Millions of Americans give thanks this holiday season just as generations have before when they think about our armed services. You’re part of an unbroken line of Americans who have given up your comfort, your ease, your convenience for America’s security.

It was on another cold December more than 200 years ago that a band of patriots helped to found our nation, defeat an empire -- from that icy river to the fields of Europe, from the islands in the Pacific to the hills of Korea, from the jungles of Vietnam to the deserts of Iraq, those who went before you, they also found themselves in this season of peace serving in war. They did it for the same reason that all of you do -- because the freedom and the liberty that we treasure, that’s not simply a birthright. It has to be earned by the sacrifices of generations -- generations of patriots, men and women who step forward and say, send me. I know somebody has got to do it, and I’m willing to serve. Men and women who are willing to risk all and some who gave all to keep us safe, to keep us free.

In our time, in this 21st century, when so many other institutions seem to be shirking their responsibilities, you’ve embraced your responsibilities. You’ve shown why the United States military remains the most trusted institution in America.

That’s the legacy that your generation has forged during this decade of trial in Iraq and here in Afghanistan. That’s the legacy that you’re carrying forward.

As General Petraeus mentioned, one year ago I ordered additional troops to serve in this country that was the staging ground for the 9/11 attacks. All of those troops are now in place. And thanks to your service, we are making important progress. You are protecting your country. You’re achieving your objectives. You will succeed in your mission. Hooah!

We said we were going to break the Taliban’s momentum, and that’s what you’re doing. You’re going on the offense, tired of playing defense, targeting their leaders, pushing them out of their strongholds. Today we can be proud that there are fewer areas under Taliban control and more Afghans have a chance to build a more hopeful future.

We said a year ago that we’re going to build the capacity of the Afghan people. And that’s what you’re doing, meeting our recruitment targets, training Afghan forces, partnering with those Afghans who want to build a stronger and more stable and more prosperous Afghanistan.

I don’t need to tell you this is a tough fight. I just came from the medical unit and saw our wounded warriors, pinned some Purple Hearts. I just talked to the platoon that lost six of their buddies in a senseless act of violence.

This is tough business. Progress comes slow. There are going to be difficult days ahead. Progress comes at a high price. So many of you have stood before the solemn battle cross, display of boots, a rifle, a helmet, and said good-bye to a fallen comrade.

This year alone nearly 100 members of 101st have given their last full measure of devotion. There are few days when I don’t sign a letter to a military family expressing our nation’s gratitude and grief at their profound sacrifice. And this holiday season our thoughts and prayers are with those who’ve lost a loved one -- the father and mother, the son or daughter, the brother or sister or friend who’s not coming home. And we know that their memories will never be forgotten and that their life has added to the life of our nation.

And because of the service of the men and women of the United States military, because of the progress you’re making, we look forward to a new phase next year, the beginning of a transition to Afghan responsibility.

As we do, we continue to forge a partnership with the Afghan people for the long term. And we will never let this country serve as a safe haven for terrorists who would attack the United States of America again. That will never happen. Hooah!

This part of the world is the center of a global effort where we are going to disrupt and dismantle and defeat al Qaeda and its extremist allies. And that’s why you’re here. That’s why your mission matters so much. That’s why you must succeed -- because this effort is about the safety of our communities back home and the dignity of the Afghan people who don’t want to live in tyranny.

Now, even though it is a hallmark of American democracy that we have our arguments back home, we have our debates, we have our elections, I can say without hesitation that there is no division on one thing, no hesitation on one thing -- and that is the uniform support of our men and women who are serving in the armed services. Hooah!

Everybody -- everybody is behind you. Everybody back home is behind you. Everybody, from north to south to east to west, from sea to shining sea, the American people are united in support of you and your families.

And as your Commander-in-Chief, I also want you to know that we will do whatever it takes to make sure that you have the strategy and the resources and the equipment and the leadership to get this done.

You may have noticed that during these tough budget times, I took the step of freezing pay for our federal workforce. But because of the service that you rendered, all who wear the uniform of the United States of America are exempt from that action. Hooah!

And we’re going to make -- we’re going to spare no effort to make sure that your families have the support that they deserve as well. That doesn’t just matter to me. It’s also a top priority for Michelle -- to make sure that Americans understand the sacrifices that your families are making. As she likes to say, 100 percent of Americans need to be right -- they are supporting you and your families -- 100 percent. Only 1 percent are fighting these wars, but 100 percent of us have to be behind you and your families.

Your generation, the generation of Afghanistan and Iraq, has met every mission that you’ve been given. You’ve served tour after tour. You’ve earned not just our admiration; you’ve earned your place in American history alongside those greatest generations.

And the stories of those who served in these wars are too numerous to tell. But one of my greatest privileges as President is to get to know the stories of those who earn the Medal of Honor.

Two months ago, I presented the Medal to the parents of Staff Sergeant Robert Miller, who gave his life here in Afghanistan as a member of the Green Berets. His valor, charging toward some 150 insurgents, saved the lives of nearly two dozen American and Afghan comrades.

Last month, we held another ceremony. For the first time in nearly 40 years, the recipient of the Medal of Honor for an ongoing conflict was actually able to accept it in person. His name is Staff Sergeant Salvatore Giunta. And some of you may have seen his story, but I want to tell it again tonight because of what it says not just about our armed forces, but also what it says about the country that we love.

So three years ago, Sal and his platoon were in Korengal Valley. When their patrol was ambushed, two Americans lay wounded up ahead. That’s when Sal and his men counter-attacked. Again and again and again, they were being rained down with fire. But they just kept counter-attacking because they wanted to get their two buddies.

And when he saw one of his teammates wounded and being carried away by insurgents, Sal rushed in to help his friends -- despite the bullets. Despite the danger, he kept on pressing forward. It was an incredibly intense firefight. And by the time it was finished, every single member of that platoon had shrapnel or a bullet hole in their gear. Five were wounded, and two had given their lives.

Now, Sal is a pretty humble guy. And so when he came to the White House he said, “You know, I didn’t do anything special.” He said he was just doing his job, that he didn’t do anything that his brothers wouldn’t have done for him.

“If I’m a hero,” he said, “then every man who stands around me, every woman in the military, every person who defends this country is also a hero.”

And he’s right. Each of you has your own story. Each of you is writing your own chapter in the story of America and the story of American armed forces. Each of you have some losses. Each of you have made sacrifices. You come from every conceivable background -- from big cities and small towns, from every race and faith and station. You’ve come together to serve a greater cause, one that matters to the citizens of your country back home and to strangers who live a world away.

So make no mistake, through your service, you demonstrate the content of the American character. Sal is right -- every single one of you is a hero.

Some people ask whether America’s best days lie ahead or whether our greatness stretches back behind us in the stories of those who’ve gone before. And when I look out at all of you, I know the answer to that. You give me hope. You give me inspiration. Your resolve shows that Americans will never succumb to fear. Your selfless service shows who we are, who we always will be -- united as one people and united as one nation -- for you embody and stand up for the values that make us what we are as a people.

America is not defined by our borders. We are defined by a common creed. In this holiday season, it’s worth remembering that “we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that we are endowed by our Creator by certain inalienable rights, that among these are the right to life and liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

And that’s what you’re fighting for here in Afghanistan, and that’s what you’re protecting back home. And that belief is more powerful than any adversary.

So we may face a tough enemy in Afghanistan, and we’re in a period of tough challenges back home, but we did not become the nation that we are because we do what’s easy. As Americans we’ve endured and we’ve grown stronger, and we remain the Land of the Free only because we are also Home of the Brave.

And because of you, I know that once more, we will prevail. So thank you. God bless you, and God bless the United States of America. Hooah!

Thank you, everybody, and Happy New Year. Thank you, everybody. God bless you.

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# Press Conference on Tax Cuts

President Obama: I thought it was a slow day, so I’ve --

Question: Slow news day, huh?

President Obama:

-- bring the other guy in.

Obviously, there’s a big debate going on about taxes, and about the need to grow the economy and to create jobs. And just about every day this week, I’ve been making an argument as to why the agreement that we’ve struck to provide billions of dollars in payroll tax cuts that can immediately help rejuvenate the economy, as well as tax cuts for middle-class families, unemployment insurance for folks who desperately need it, credits for college, Child Tax Credits, as well as a range of business investments credits are so important to make sure that we keep this recovery moving.

I just had a terrific meeting with the former President, President Bill Clinton. And we just happened to have this as a topic of conversation. And I thought, given the fact that he presided over as good an economy as we’ve seen in our lifetimes, that it might be useful for him to share some of his thoughts.

I’m going to let him speak very briefly. And then I’ve actually got to go over and do some -- just one more Christmas party. So he may decide he wants to take some questions, but I want to make sure that you guys hear it from him directly.

Former President Clinton: Thank you very much, Mr. President. First of all, I feel awkward being here, and now you’re going to leave me all by myself. Let me just say a couple of things. First of all, I still spend about an hour a day trying to study this economy. And I’m not running for anything, and I don’t have a political agenda. I just -- I try to figure out what to do.

I have reviewed this agreement that the President reached with Republican leaders. And I want to make full disclosure I make quite a bit of money now, so the position that the Republicans have urged will personally benefit me. And on its own, I wouldn’t support it because I don’t think that my tax cut is the most economically efficient way to get the economy going again. But I don’t want to be in the dark about the fact that I will receive the continuation of the tax rates.

However, the agreement taken as a whole is, I believe, the best bipartisan agreement we can reach to help the largest number of Americans, and to maximize the chances that the economic recovery will accelerate and create more jobs, and to minimize the chances that it will slip back, which is what has happened in other financial collapses. Like, that’s what Japan faced, and it’s something that we have to avoid in America.

Why do I say that? First of all, because clearly the extension of unemployment, which gives people a percentage of the income they were previously making, will -- that money will be spent and it will bolster the economy for the next couple of years.

Secondly, the conversion of the Make Work Pay Tax Credit, which the President passed before, which goes to -- went to 95 percent of the American people, converting that into an $120 billion one-year payroll tax relief act is, according to all the economic analyses, the single most effective tax cut you can do to support economic activity. This will actually create a fair number of jobs. I expect it to lower the unemployment rate and keep us going.

Thirdly, and one thing I haven’t seen much about in the reports, this agreement will really help America over the long term, because it continues the credits for manufacturing jobs related to energy coming in to America. And I’ll remind you, just in the last two years, there have been 30 high-powered battery factories either opened or presently being built in America, taking us from 2 to 20 percent of the world’s share of that. And we’re going to probably be at 40 percent by 2014. This is a really important thing, bringing manufacturing back to America, because it’s a huge multiplier to create new jobs.

So in my opinion, this is a good bill. And I hope that my fellow Democrats will support it. I thank the Republican leaders for agreeing to include things that were important to the President.

There is never a perfect bipartisan bill in the eyes of a partisan. And we all see this differently. But I really believe this will be a significant net-plus for the country. I also think that in general a lot of people are heaving a sigh of relief that there’s finally been some agreement on something.

But don't minimize the impact of the unemployment relief for working families, of the payroll tax relief, and of the continuation of the incentives to grow jobs, which will trigger more credit coming out of the banks.

Keep in mind, ultimately the long-term answer here is to get the $2 trillion, which banks now have in cash reserves uncommitted to loans, out there in the economy again, the $1.8 trillion in corporate treasuries not now being invested out there in the economy again. I think this is a net-plus.

And you know how I feel. I think the people that benefit most should pay most. That's always been my position -- not for class warfare reasons; for reasons of fairness in rebuilding the middle class in America. But we have the distribution of authority we have now in the Congress and what we’re going to have in January, and I think this is a much, much better agreement than would be reached were we to wait until January. And I think it will have a much more positive impact on the economy.

So for whatever it’s worth, that's what I think.

President Obama:

That’s worth a lot.

Former President Clinton: I would like to say one other thing on another subject, just to be recorded on the record. They don't need my support on this because we have some good Republican support, including the first President Bush. I think this START agreement is very important to the future of our national security.

And it is not a radical agreement. Boris Yeltsin and I agreed in principle on this same reduction, and there was no way in the wide world he could get it through the Russian Duma that existed at the time in his second term. So we didn't proceed because it couldn’t be ratified there. I’m not sure the Senate would have ratified it then, but I think they will not with enough encouragement.

But the cooperation that we will get from the Russians, and the signal that will be sent to the world on nonproliferation, when all these other things are going on which threaten to increase nuclear proliferation, is very important. One of the things you know is that when people fool with these weapons, they're expensive to build, expensive to maintain, and expensive to secure the material that goes into making the weapons.

This is something that is profoundly important. This ought to be way beyond party. They’ve worked very hard. They’ve worked out, in my opinion, the details. And I hope it will be ratified.

Question: Mr. President.

Former President Clinton: Yes.

Question: First of all, a lot of Democrats on Capitol Hill say this is a bad deal; that President Obama could have gotten more. What’s your message to them? And then if I could also just ask -- well, go ahead. You can answer --

Former President Clinton: First, my message is, I don't believe that's true because in January, they will be in the majority. And this would dramatically reduce their incentive to extend unemployment benefits, to support the conversion of the Make Work Pay tax credits President Obama enacted into this payroll tax deduction, which as I said, I read all these economic studies. Every single, unbiased, economic study says the best thing you can do if you’re going to take a tax-cut path to grow the economy is to give payroll tax relief.

I just got back from a trip to Asia with my foundation. Hong Kong, super free-market place, had a stimulus. Well, I guess we’re not supposed to use that word any more. You know what they did? They gave almost 10 percent of the people -- low-income, working people -- two months free rent in public housing. They gave some money to the seniors. But the most important thing they did was payroll tax relief for a year.

This is -- all the people who study this believe it’s the number one thing, so I don't believe they can get a better deal by waiting.

And I think the other thing that nobody is talking about, but I’m telling you it’s important, I live out there now, and I do a lot of this energy work, these tax credits have made us competitive again.

I didn't see a single story that credited Senator Reid’s election with the fact that with three weeks before the election, two new plants were announced in Nevada, which has the highest unemployment rate in the state, a thousand people making LED lights, a thousand people making wind turbines for that big wind farm in Texas, both companies owned by Chinese interests who said in no uncertain terms we’re here because you decided to compete with us for the future, and you gave us tax credits so we can pay higher labor costs because we save the transportation costs because of these credits. I don't believe there is a better deal out there.

Question: And then as a follow-up, you mentioned the Republican Congress taking office in January. What was your advice to President Obama today about how to deal with the Congress from the opposition party?

Former President Clinton: I have a general rule which is that whatever he asked me about my advice, and whatever I say should become public only if he decides to make it public. He can say whatever he wants, but --

Question: What do you think?

President Obama: Here’s what I’ll say, is I’ve been keeping the First Lady waiting for about half an hour, so I’m going to take off, but --

Former President Clinton: I don't want to make her mad, please go.

President Obama:

You’re in good hands, and Gibbs will call last question.

Former President Clinton: Yes, help me. Thank you. Yes, go ahead.

Question: Mr. President, is there anything else that can be done in your opinion to loosen up the private credit markets that have been so tight? I mean if people can’t get their hands on capital, how can they be the entrepreneurs that they want to be? And this is something that the Republicans have fought all along. What’s the next step?

Former President Clinton: First of all, let me just run through the numbers again. We’re not talking about high-risk stuff. That's what the financial regulation bill tries to stop and charges the federal regulators with -- even if the Wall Street banks get -- we all know they have to be able to have more leverage than the traditional community banks tend to want up in the Dakotas or Arkansas or anyplace else.

But let’s start with the community banks. If they loan money conservatively, they can loan $10 for every dollar they have in the bank. If they have $2 trillion uncommitted to loans, even though some of them may have a few mortgage issues unresolved, most of that mortgage debt has been off-loaded to Fannie Mae or Freddie Mac or has vanished into cyber-sphere with those securitized subprime mortgages. I don't like the securities, but they happened.

So what I believe is going on is, first of all, the business community has not come forward as aggressively -- the small business community. And this bill did preserve all those small business incentives that were enacted by the Congress in the previous two years. There are like 16 different measures that give incentives for small businesses to take loans and loan guarantees and that kind of thing.

It appears to me that the community banks, at least, are somewhat uncertain about how the financial reform bill, which I supported, applies to them and what the costs of compliance might be. You remember, the two big things that bill did was to require the federal regulators to monitor every month the big banks that caused the meltdown and to require them to set aside more capital.

And then it set up an orderly bankruptcy mechanism and banned future bailouts. It said -- that bill actually says: If this happens again, the shareholders and the executives have to eat it.

But there’s a whole lot of other things in credit cards and other matters that deal with it. I think it is really, really important just to do an aggressive, 100 percent information drench. I mean I would go so far as to do it bank by bank by bank by bank so that everybody knows exactly what they have to do, exactly what it costs and how quickly this can all be resolved.

And then I think it’s important to make sure that all these community banks and the people who might borrow from them understand where the small businesses of America are and where the manufacturers are with the various loan guarantees and credits and deductions that are available under these laws.

I still think -- you know, we too often assume that when a law passes, people know it passed, and they know what’s in it, and they know how it applies to them. That may not be true in this case because there’s been so much activity and so much debate about it that was a debate that occurred in the context of a campaign rather than in the context of, “Let me tell you how this works, come here, let’s figure out how to get you a loan.” So in my opinion, that's what needs to be done over the next two or three months.

The money is there to get this country out of this mess. Two trillion dollars in the bank is $20 trillion in loans. Now, there’s not that much guaranteed, but there’s plenty.

And I also believe the same thing with big companies. We should analyze the situation of every company that at a minimum has got a $1 billion or more in cash and ask them to be honest with us about what would it take to get you back in the investment business.

These companies clearly have a preference for reinvesting in America, or they’d have put this money somewhere else already. They have got -- it’s an amazing thing, $1.8 trillion in corporate treasuries, 6.2 percent of their capitalized value. It’s been since 1964 that they had those kind of cash balances relative to their value.

So those are the things that I think we have to do now, so I can’t answer your question, except the bankers I talked to in Arkansas, in small places that I visit around where I live in New York, they all say, we know we need to ramp up the activity. We got to get the green light about how we’re going to comply with these laws, and then we’ll go.

And you might be able to actually use your program to do it. You might be able to bring some community bankers on, bring some regulars on, work through this stuff for people. I just think they don't know yet.

Yes.

Question: Some of your fellow Democrats are saying that the President just didn't go in and fight hard enough for his core principles; that he caved in. Politically, some say that he should be a one-term President. Has he damaged not only his own political path, but has he let the party down?

Former President Clinton: I don't believe so. I think -- I just respectfully disagree about that. I think that a lot of -- look, a lot of them are hurting now. And I get it. And you know I did 133 events for them. I believe the Congress in the last two years did a far better job than the American people thought they did, at least the American people that voted in the midterms.

And I went to extraordinary efforts to try to explain what I thought had been done in the ways that I thought were most favorable to them. But we had an election. The results are what they are. The numbers will only get worse in January in terms of negotiating.

And the President -- look, if we had 5 percent growth and unemployment was dropping like a rock, maybe you could have a so-called Mexican standoff, and you could say, it will be you, not me, the voters will hold responsible for raising taxes on middle-class people if they all go down next year. That is not the circumstance we face.

The United States has suffered a severe financial collapse. These things take longer to get over than normal recessions. We must first make sure we keep getting over it. We don’t want to slip back down as Japan did.

And in order to make it happen over the long run, that’s why the question I was just asked is so good, is we have to go beyond direct investments, whether they’re stimulus projects or tax cuts, to private growth. But to get there, we have to achieve a higher level of growth that triggers a confidence. So I personally believe this is a good deal and the best he could have gotten under the circumstances. I just disagree. I understand why -- people have a right to disagree with him. But I disagree.

Yes, sir.

Question: Mr. President, you’ve made a number of very effective calls for the health care plan last year. Have you been asked to make any calls to Democratic members on the tax deal? And, secondly, there are a lot of comparisons being made between the ’94 election and the 2010 election. Do you think those are analogous? Are they similar situations?

Former President Clinton: It’s like all these things -- all of you will be under enormous pressure to develop a storyline. And there are some parallels, and some that are different. And you know, I’m -- I’ll let you do that. I’m out of politics now, except to say that I care about my country and I want to get this economy going again.

And I believe that it is necessary for these parties to work together. And I think, for example, the storyline is how well we work with the Republicans and all that. But we’ve played political kabuki for a year, had two government shutdowns. We can’t afford that now. The only reason we could do that is if the deficit was already coming down in a time when interest rates were the problem, and the economy was coming out. People just didn’t feel it yet in ’94.

We can’t afford that. We have got to pull together. And both sides are going to have to eat some things they don’t like, because we cannot afford to have the kind of impasse that we had last time over a long period of time. We don’t want to slip back into a recession. We got to keep this thing going and accelerate its pace. I think this is the best available option.

Mark.

Question: -- any calls --

Question: Mr. President --

Former President Clinton: Oh, I’m sorry, George, I have not. But in fairness, as soon as the election was over, I took my foundation trip to Asia. Then I came back -- I just got back from the West Coast, doing my annual trip out there. There are people that support the work I do and my foundation. I flew overnight to get here today. And I have to leave again tonight. If I were asked to, I would be happy to talk to anyone. But I have not been asked. But, in fairness, the President didn’t have a chance to. He asked me to come down today, because he knew I was going to -- Hillary and I were appearing before the Brookings Saban Forum on the Middle East tonight.

Yes, Mark.

Question: Mr. President, I get the feeling that you’re happier to be here commenting and giving advice than governing.

Former President Clinton: Oh, I had quite a good time governing. I am happy to be here, I suppose, when the bullets that are fired are unlikely to hit me, unless they’re just ricocheting. No, I’m glad to be here because I think the President made a good decision and because I want my country to do well. And after the ’94 election, I said the American people, in their infinite wisdom, have put us both in the same boat. So we’re going to either row or sink. And I want us to row.

Question: Can you give us a Haiti update?

Former President Clinton: What?

Question: Can you give us a Haiti update? I know you were there.

Former President Clinton: Yes. I had a long talk with the Prime Minister today. And he, first of all, has done I think a remarkable job of being a loyal prime minister, but not being involved in the political imbroglio that’s going on, except to try to keep calm.

There was a decision made by the electoral council to review the vote in its entirety and to ask some outside observers to come in who are not only credible but knowledgeable. And they will announce exactly how they propose to do that. Today was a pretty calm day. And they expect the weekend to be pretty calm.

We are going to have our commission meeting next week. We may move it to the Dominican Republic. But I think the best thing that we can do for the people of Haiti is to prove that Haitians on the commission, and the donors, are still committed to the long-term reconstruction process, whoever gets elected president.

The best thing they can do is -- everyone understands they had to carry out this election under enormously difficult circumstances. Even getting the ID cards to everybody, as you know, proved difficult, because they were in those tented areas.

But what I can say is it was calmer today. It appears they are going to try to have a recount procedure, which they hope will acquire more support from across the political spectrum. And, meanwhile, we want the commission to keep working.

The World Bank just released about $70 billion of the $90 billion in projects we approved four months ago. So that will go in. We’ll be hiring more people immediately on those projects. And we’re going to approve a lot more projects on the 14th. And that’s my focus now.

Yes.

Question: Mr. President, I have to ask, do you think your appearance here today will help sway votes where they’re needed the most right now, among House Democrats?

Former President Clinton: I have no idea.

Question: The reason I ask you that is because a lot of them are sort of antsy. And I know you never used the term back in your first term, but they’re antsy about the precedent of triangulation. They’re still smarting over that. And your appearance here today might not necessarily push them in the direction that the President wants them to be pushed.

Former President Clinton: That’s right, it may not. But I would like to -- you know, I told President Obama, and I’ll tell you, you ought to go back and read a lecture that Franklin Roosevelt gave in 1926 before he was the Vice Presidential nominee, before he came down with polio, to his old alma mater [inaudible], in which he discussed the dilemma of the progressive movement in American politics.

I have an enormous amount of respect for the Democrats in the House. And I’ve already told you I regret that so many of them lost. I think some of our best people lost. And I get where they’re coming from.

I can only tell you that my economic analysis is that given all the alternatives that I can imagine actually becoming law, this is the best economic result for America. And I think it is enormous relief for America to think that both parties might vote for something, anything that they could both agree on. And there is no way you can have a compromise without having something in the bill that you don’t like.

So I don’t know if I can influence anybody. Heck, I couldn’t -- you know, I’d go some places and the people I campaigned for won. In some places, the people I campaigned for lost. I don’t know. All I can tell you is what I think.

Question: Considering your credibility on the deficit, what do you think about concerns about the short-term deficit and the long-term deficit, and where our country is going?

Former President Clinton: I’m happy to address that because I don’t think that -- I don’t think I did a good enough job in this election season, obviously, and I’m not sure we did.

The difference between now and when I became President, when we immediately went after the deficit, is quite simple. When I became President, it was after 12 years in which the accumulative debt of the country had risen from $1 to $4 trillion. It was the first period in American history when we had ever run structural deficits of any size.

And so we were having to pay too much for money. It was costing us a lot to borrow money in the public sector, taking I think it was 14 cents of every dollar on the debt at the time. And it was crowding out the opportunity of the private sector to borrow money, and raising their cost. And that’s sparked the recession that we had in the early ‘90s.

What happened this time was totally different. This time there was a collapse of a financial system, which took interest rates to zero. Now, I know there’s a lot of alarm now. People say, oh, the interest rates went up on bond and in debt in the last couple of days. And they said, oh, is it because of the increase in the -- increasing the deficit in the short term? Is it because of the economy growing? That doesn’t bother me. We have to get out of deflation. The biggest problem we have now is deflation.

So, look, I’m a Depression-era kid. I don’t like deficits ever, really. We had four surpluses when I was President. That’s what I like. I like balanced budgets and surpluses; when you have growth.

But if I were in office now, I would have done what the President has done. You have to first put the brakes on a contracting economy. And then you have to somehow hold it together until growth resumes. When growth resumes, you have to have interest rates higher than zero.

So you should actually -- now, if they get too high, you’ll be alarmed. But you should be encouraged that interest rates are beginning to creep up again. It’s the sign of a healthy economy, and the idea that there would be competition for money.

I do believe that we’ll have to take aggressive and disciplined action to eliminate the structural deficit again. And I think it was a mistake to go back to structural deficits. I think if America were out of debt on a normal basis, and we didn’t have to borrow money from our major trading partners, we would have more economic freedom and economic security. So I want to see what comes out of this, but I expect to support some very vigorous actions to eliminate the deficit and get us back to balance.

Yes, one more. I’ve got to get out of here. Go ahead.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Beyond this pending tax deal, there are enormous issues of importance that are unfinished, from education to energy, the deficit. And this is still a very dividing country. Do you think the American people want a President to compromise with the opposing party? And is that a message that you think Democrats are going to have to accept?

Former President Clinton: Yes, but I also believe that it’s a message Republicans are going to have to accept. Keep in mind that many of the -- the really interesting thing was -- is that a lot of the hardcore conservatives think the Republicans gave too much. Read Charles Krauthammer’s column in the Post today. He’s a brilliant man, and he pointed out that they got the divisive tax cuts, but most of them were targeted to middle-class working people -- that's what the payroll tax cut is -- that the unemployment benefits were extended, which some of them did not want to do, and that the American people, by two to one, support them both.

So there are some conservatives who don't believe in the economic theory I just advanced to you; who believe that the President and Democrats got more out of this than the Republicans did. So I think that's healthy, too, because everybody has got to give a little.

Yes, I think the one thing that always happens when you have divided government is that people no longer see principled compromise as weakness. This system was set up to promote principled compromise. It is an ethical thing to do. In a democracy where no one is a dictator, we would all be at each other’s throats all the time, and we would be in a state of constant paralysis if once power is divided, there is no compromise.

Question: What’s the political fight worth having? What would you tell Democrats the political fight worth having is right now?

Former President Clinton: Well, I think it’s worth fighting against the repeal of the health care law. I would be in favor -- and I can give you four or five things off the top of my head I think should be done to improve it.

I think it’s worth a ferocious fight to avoid repeal of the student loan reform, which I believe is the best chance we’ve got to take America back to number one from number nine in the percent of adults in the world with four-year college degrees.

I think it’s worth fighting against repeal of the financial reform and the assurance it gives us that we won’t have another meltdown, and if we do, there won’t be another bailout.

I think there are a lot of fights worth having, and I presume the Republicans want to fight those, too, since they ran on that. And they’ll be able to have these differences. But this holds the promise that after the fights are over, we’ll be able to find principled compromises on those areas, as well. And to me that's worth doing.

But first, the economy first. We can’t go back into a recession. We have to keep crawling out of this mess we’re in. And this is a good first step, both on the substantive merits and on the psychological relief it gives to the American people in general, and the small business people and community bankers and others who can start doing things that will help get better in particular.

Thank you.

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# Speech at the 'Together We Thrive: Tucson and America' Memorial

Thank you. Please -- Please be seated.

To the families of those we’ve lost; to all who called them friends; to the students of this university, the public servants who are gathered here, the people of Tucson and the people of Arizona: I have come here tonight as an American who, like all Americans, kneels to pray with you today and will stand by you tomorrow.

There is nothing I can say that will fill the sudden hole torn in your hearts. But know this: The hopes of a nation are here tonight. We mourn with you for the fallen. We join you in your grief. And we add our faith to yours that Representative Gabrielle Giffords and the other living victims of this tragedy will pull through.

Scripture tells us:

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,the holy place where the Most High dwells.God is within her, she will not fall;God will help her at break of day.

1

On Saturday morning, Gabby, her staff and many of her constituents gathered outside a supermarket to exercise their right to peaceful assembly and free speech. They were fulfilling a central tenet of the democracy envisioned by our founders –- representatives of the people answering questions to their constituents, so as to carry their concerns back to our nation’s capital. Gabby called it “Congress on Your Corner” -– just an updated version of government of and by and for the people.

And that quintessentially American scene, that was the scene that was shattered by a gunman’s bullets. And the six people who lost their lives on Saturday –- they, too, represented what is best in us, what is best in America.

Judge John Roll served our legal system for nearly 40 years. A graduate of this university and a graduate of this law school -- Judge Roll was recommended for the federal bench by John McCain 20 years ago -- appointed by President George H.W. Bush and rose to become Arizona’s chief federal judge.

His colleagues described him as the hardest-working judge within the Ninth Circuit. He was on his way back from attending Mass, as he did every day, when he decided to stop by and say hi to his representative. John is survived by his loving wife, Maureen, his three sons and his five beautiful grandchildren.

George and Dorothy Morris -– “Dot” to her friends -– were high school sweethearts who got married and had two daughters. They did everything together -- traveling the open road in their RV, enjoying what their friends called a 50-year honeymoon. Saturday morning, they went by the Safeway to hear what their congresswoman had to say. When gunfire rang out, George, a former Marine, instinctively tried to shield his wife. Both were shot. Dot passed away.

A New Jersey native, Phyllis Schneck retired to Tucson to beat the snow. But in the summer, she would return East, where her world revolved around her three children, her seven grandchildren and 2-year-old great-granddaughter. A gifted quilter, she’d often work under a favorite tree, or sometimes she'd sew aprons with the logos of the Jets and the Giants -- to give out at the church where she volunteered. A Republican, she took a liking to Gabby, and wanted to get to know her better.

Dorwan and Mavy Stoddard grew up in Tucson together -– about 70 years ago. They moved apart and started their own respective families. But after both were widowed they found their way back here, to, as one of Mavy’s daughters put it, “be boyfriend and girlfriend again.”

When they weren’t out on the road in their motor home, you could find them just up the road, helping folks in need at the Mountain Avenue Church of Christ. A retired construction worker, Dorwan spent his spare time fixing up the church along with his dog, Tux. His final act of selflessness was to dive on top of his wife, sacrificing his life for hers.

Everything -- everything -- Gabe Zimmerman did, he did with passion. But his true passion was helping people. As Gabby’s outreach director, he made the cares of thousands of her constituents his own, seeing to it that seniors got the Medicare benefits that they had earned, that veterans got the medals and the care that they deserved, that government was working for ordinary folks. He died doing what he loved -– talking with people and seeing how he could help. And Gabe is survived by his parents, Ross and Emily, his brother, Ben, and his fiancÃ©e, Kelly, who he planned to marry next year.

And then there is nine-year-old Christina Taylor Green. Christina was an A student; she was a dancer; she was a gymnast; she was a swimmer. She decided that she wanted to be the first woman to play in the Major Leagues, and as the only girl on her Little League team, no one put it past her.

She showed an appreciation for life uncommon for a girl her age. She’d remind her mother, “We are so blessed. We have the best life.” And she’d pay those blessings back by participating in a charity that helped children who were less fortunate.

Our hearts are broken by their sudden passing. Our hearts are broken -– and yet, our hearts also have reason for fullness. Our hearts are full of hope and thanks for the 13 Americans who survived the shooting, including the congresswoman many of them went to see on Saturday.

I have just come from the University Medical Center, just a mile from here, where our friend Gabby courageously fights to recover even as we speak. And I want to tell you -- her husband Mark is here and he allows me to share this with you -- right after we went to visit, a few minutes after we left her room and some of her colleagues in Congress were in the room, Gabby opened her eyes for the first time. Gabby opened her eyes for the first time.

Gabby opened her eyes. Gabby opened her eyes, so I can tell you she knows we are here. She knows we love her. And she knows that we are rooting for her through what is undoubtedly going to be a difficult journey. We are there for her.

Our hearts are full of thanks for that good news, and our hearts are full of gratitude for those who saved others. We are grateful to Daniel Hernandez -- a volunteer in Gabby’s office.

And, Daniel, I’m sorry, you may deny it, but we’ve decided you are a hero because -- you ran through the chaos to minister to your boss, and tended to her wounds and helped keep her alive.

We are grateful to the men who tackled the gunman as he stopped to reload. Right over there. We are grateful for petite Patricia Maisch, who wrestled away the killer’s ammunition, and undoubtedly saved some lives. And we are grateful for the doctors and nurses and first responders who worked wonders to heal those who’d been hurt. We are grateful to them.

These men and women remind us that heroism is found not only on the fields of battle. They remind us that heroism does not require special training or physical strength. Heroism is here, in the hearts of so many of our fellow citizens, all around us, just waiting to be summoned -– as it was on Saturday morning. Their actions, their selflessness poses a challenge to each of us. It raises a question of what, beyond prayers and expressions of concern, is required of us going forward. How can we honor the fallen? How can we be true to their memory?

You see, when a tragedy like this strikes, it is part of our nature to demand explanations –- to try and pose some order on the chaos and make sense out of that which seems senseless. Already we’ve seen a national conversation commence, not only about the motivations behind these killings, but about everything from the merits of gun safety laws to the adequacy of our mental health system. And much of this process, of debating what might be done to prevent such tragedies in the future, is an essential ingredient in our exercise of self-government.

But at a time when our discourse has become so sharply polarized -– at a time when we are far too eager to lay the blame for all that ails the world at the feet of those who happen to think differently than we do -– it’s important for us to pause for a moment and make sure that we’re talking with each other in a way that heals, not in a way that wounds.

Scripture tells us that there is evil in the world, and that terrible things happen for reasons that defy human understanding. In the words of Job, “When I looked for light, then came darkness.” Bad things happen, and we have to guard against simple explanations in the aftermath.

For the truth is none of us can know exactly what triggered this vicious attack. None of us can know with any certainty what might have stopped these shots from being fired, or what thoughts lurked in the inner recesses of a violent man’s mind. Yes, we have to examine all the facts behind this tragedy. We cannot and will not be passive in the face of such violence. We should be willing to challenge old assumptions in order to lessen the prospects of such violence in the future. But what we cannot do is use this tragedy as one more occasion to turn on each other. That we cannot do. That we cannot do.

As we discuss these issues, let each of us do so with a good dose of humility. Rather than pointing fingers or assigning blame, let’s use this occasion to expand our moral imaginations, to listen to each other more carefully, to sharpen our instincts for empathy and remind ourselves of all the ways that our hopes and dreams are bound together.

After all, that’s what most of us do when we lose somebody in our family -– especially if the loss is unexpected. We’re shaken out of our routines. We’re forced to look inward. We reflect on the past: Did we spend enough time with an aging parent, we wonder. Did we express our gratitude for all the sacrifices that they made for us? Did we tell a spouse just how desperately we loved them, not just once in a while but every single day?

So sudden loss causes us to look backward -– but it also forces us to look forward; to reflect on the present and the future, on the manner in which we live our lives and nurture our relationships with those who are still with us.

We may ask ourselves if we’ve shown enough kindness and generosity and compassion to the people in our lives. Perhaps we question whether we're doing right by our children, or our community, whether our priorities are in order.

We recognize our own mortality, and we are reminded that in the fleeting time we have on this Earth, what matters is not wealth, or status, or power, or fame -– but rather, how well we have loved -- and what small part we have played in making the lives of other people better.

And that process -- that process of reflection, of making sure we align our values with our actions –- that, I believe, is what a tragedy like this requires.

For those who were harmed, those who were killed –- they are part of our family, an American family 300 million strong. We may not have known them personally, but surely we see ourselves in them. In George and Dot, in Dorwan and Mavy, we sense the abiding love we have for our own husbands, our own wives, our own life partners. Phyllis –- she’s our mom or our grandma; Gabe our brother or son. In Judge Roll, we recognize not only a man who prized his family and doing his job well, but also a man who embodied America’s fidelity to the law.

And in Gabby -- in Gabby, we see a reflection of our public-spiritedness; that desire to participate in that sometimes frustrating, sometimes contentious, but always necessary and never-ending process to form a more perfect union.

And in Christina -- in Christina we see all of our children. So curious, so trusting, so energetic, so full of magic. So deserving of our love. And so deserving of our good example.

If this tragedy prompts reflection and debate -- as it should -- let’s make sure it’s worthy of those we have lost. Let’s make sure it’s not on the usual plane of politics and point-scoring and pettiness that drifts away in the next news cycle.

The loss of these wonderful people should make every one of us strive to be better. To be better in our private lives, to be better friends and neighbors and coworkers and parents. And if, as has been discussed in recent days, their death helps usher in more civility in our public discourse, let us remember it is not because a simple lack of civility caused this tragedy -- it did not -- but rather because only a more civil and honest public discourse can help us face up to the challenges of our nation in a way that would make them proud.

We should be civil because we want to live up to the example of public servants like John Roll and Gabby Giffords, who knew first and foremost that we are all Americans, and that we can question each other’s ideas without questioning each other’s love of country and that our task, working together, is to constantly widen the circle of our concern so that we bequeath the American Dream to future generations.

They believed -- they believed, and I believe that we can be better. Those who died here, those who saved life here –- they help me believe. We may not be able to stop all evil in the world, but I know that how we treat one another, that’s entirely up to us.

And I believe that for all our imperfections, we are full of decency and goodness, and that the forces that divide us are not as strong as those that unite us.

That’s what I believe, in part because that’s what a child like Christina Taylor Green believed.

Imagine -- imagine for a moment, here was a young girl who was just becoming aware of our democracy; just beginning to understand the obligations of citizenship; just starting to glimpse the fact that some day she, too, might play a part in shaping her nation’s future. She had been elected to her student council. She saw public service as something exciting and hopeful. She was off to meet her congresswoman, someone she was sure was good and important and might be a role model. She saw all this through the eyes of a child, undimmed by the cynicism or vitriol that we adults all too often just take for granted.

I want to live up to her expectations. I want our democracy to be as good as Christina imagined it. I want America to be as good as she imagined it. All of us -– we should do everything we can to make sure this country lives up to our children’s expectations.

As has already been mentioned, Christina was given to us on September 11th, 2001, one of 50 babies born that day to be pictured in a book called “Faces of Hope.” On either side of her photo in that book were simple wishes for a child’s life. “I hope you help those in need,” read one. “I hope you know all the words to the National Anthem and sing it with your hand over your heart." "I hope" -- "I hope you jump in rain puddles.”

If there are rain puddles in Heaven, Christina is jumping in them today. And here on this Earth -- here on this Earth, we place our hands over our hearts, and we commit ourselves as Americans to forging a country that is forever worthy of her gentle, happy spirit.

May God bless and keep those we’ve lost in restful and eternal peace.

May He love and watch over the survivors.

And may He bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Second Presidential State of the Union Address

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, members of Congress, distinguished guests, and fellow Americans:

Tonight I want to begin by congratulating the men and women of the 112th Congress, as well as your new Speaker, John Boehner. And as we mark this occasion, we’re also mindful of the empty chair in this chamber, and we pray for the health of our colleague -- and our friend -– Gabby Giffords.

It’s no secret that those of us here tonight have had our differences over the last two years. The debates have been contentious; we have fought fiercely for our beliefs. And that’s a good thing. That’s what a robust democracy demands. That’s what helps set us apart as a nation.

But there’s a reason the tragedy in Tucson gave us pause. Amid all the noise and passion and rancor of our public debate, Tucson reminded us that no matter who we are or where we come from, each of us is a part of something greater -– something more consequential than party or political preference.

We are part of the American family. We believe that in a country where every race and faith and point of view can be found, we are still bound together as one people; that we share common hopes and a common creed; that the dreams of a little girl in Tucson are not so different than those of our own children, and that they all deserve the chance to be fulfilled.

That, too, is what sets us apart as a nation.

Now, by itself, this simple recognition won’t usher in a new era of cooperation. What comes of this moment is up to us. What comes of this moment will be determined not by whether we can sit together tonight, but whether we can work together tomorrow.

I believe we can. And I believe we must. That’s what the people who sent us here expect of us. With their votes, they’ve determined that governing will now be a shared responsibility between parties. New laws will only pass with support from Democrats and Republicans. We will move forward together, or not at all -– for the challenges we face are bigger than party, and bigger than politics.

At stake right now is not who wins the next election -– after all, we just had an election. At stake is whether new jobs and industries take root in this country, or somewhere else. It’s whether the hard work and industry of our people is rewarded. It’s whether we sustain the leadership that has made America not just a place on a map, but the light to the world.

We are poised for progress. Two years after the worst recession most of us have ever known, the stock market has come roaring back. Corporate profits are up. The economy is growing again.

But we have never measured progress by these yardsticks alone. We measure progress by the success of our people. By the jobs they can find and the quality of life those jobs offer. By the prospects of a small business owner who dreams of turning a good idea into a thriving enterprise. By the opportunities for a better life that we pass on to our children.

That’s the project the American people want us to work on. Together.

We did that in December. Thanks to the tax cuts we passed, Americans’ paychecks are a little bigger today. Every business can write off the full cost of new investments that they make this year. And these steps, taken by Democrats and Republicans, will grow the economy and add to the more than one million private sector jobs created last year.

But we have to do more. These steps we’ve taken over the last two years may have broken the back of this recession, but to win the future, we’ll need to take on challenges that have been decades in the making.

Many people watching tonight can probably remember a time when finding a good job meant showing up at a nearby factory or a business downtown. You didn’t always need a degree, and your competition was pretty much limited to your neighbors. If you worked hard, chances are you’d have a job for life, with a decent paycheck and good benefits and the occasional promotion. Maybe you’d even have the pride of seeing your kids work at the same company.

That world has changed. And for many, the change has been painful. I’ve seen it in the shuttered windows of once booming factories, and the vacant storefronts on once busy Main Streets. I’ve heard it in the frustrations of Americans who’ve seen their paychecks dwindle or their jobs disappear -– proud men and women who feel like the rules have been changed in the middle of the game.

They’re right. The rules have changed. In a single generation, revolutions in technology have transformed the way we live, work and do business. Steel mills that once needed 1,000 workers can now do the same work with 100. Today, just about any company can set up shop, hire workers, and sell their products wherever there’s an Internet connection.

Meanwhile, nations like China and India realized that with some changes of their own, they could compete in this new world. And so they started educating their children earlier and longer, with greater emphasis on math and science. They’re investing in research and new technologies. Just recently, China became the home to the world’s largest private solar research facility, and the world’s fastest computer.

So, yes, the world has changed. The competition for jobs is real. But this shouldn’t discourage us. It should challenge us. Remember -– for all the hits we’ve taken these last few years, for all the naysayers predicting our decline, America still has the largest, most prosperous economy in the world. No workers -- no workers are more productive than ours. No country has more successful companies, or grants more patents to inventors and entrepreneurs. We’re the home to the world’s best colleges and universities, where more students come to study than any place on Earth.

What’s more, we are the first nation to be founded for the sake of an idea -– the idea that each of us deserves the chance to shape our own destiny. That’s why centuries of pioneers and immigrants have risked everything to come here. It’s why our students don’t just memorize equations, but answer questions like “What do you think of that idea? What would you change about the world? What do you want to be when you grow up?”

The future is ours to win. But to get there, we can’t just stand still. As Robert Kennedy told us, “The future is not a gift. It is an achievement.” Sustaining the American Dream has never been about standing pat. It has required each generation to sacrifice, and struggle, and meet the demands of a new age.

And now it’s our turn. We know what it takes to compete for the jobs and industries of our time. We need to out-innovate, out-educate, and out-build the rest of the world. We have to make America the best place on Earth to do business. We need to take responsibility for our deficit and reform our government. That’s how our people will prosper. That’s how we’ll win the future. And tonight, I’d like to talk about how we get there. The first step in winning the future is encouraging American innovation. None of us can predict with certainty what the next big industry will be or where the new jobs will come from. Thirty years ago, we couldn’t know that something called the Internet would lead to an economic revolution. What we can do -- what America does better than anyone else -- is spark the creativity and imagination of our people. We’re the nation that put cars in driveways and computers in offices; the nation of Edison and the Wright brothers; of Google and Facebook. In America, innovation doesn’t just change our lives. It is how we make our living.

Our free enterprise system is what drives innovation. But because it’s not always profitable for companies to invest in basic research, throughout our history, our government has provided cutting-edge scientists and inventors with the support that they need. That’s what planted the seeds for the Internet. That’s what helped make possible things like computer chips and GPS. Just think of all the good jobs -- from manufacturing to retail -- that have come from these breakthroughs.

Half a century ago, when the Soviets beat us into space with the launch of a satellite called Sputnik, we had no idea how we would beat them to the moon. The science wasn’t even there yet. NASA didn’t exist. But after investing in better research and education, we didn’t just surpass the Soviets; we unleashed a wave of innovation that created new industries and millions of new jobs.

This is our generation’s Sputnik moment. Two years ago, I said that we needed to reach a level of research and development we haven’t seen since the height of the Space Race. And in a few weeks, I will be sending a budget to Congress that helps us meet that goal. We’ll invest in biomedical research, information technology, and especially clean energy technology -– an investment that will strengthen our security, protect our planet, and create countless new jobs for our people.

Already, we’re seeing the promise of renewable energy. Robert and Gary Allen are brothers who run a small Michigan roofing company. After September 11th, they volunteered their best roofers to help repair the Pentagon. But half of their factory went unused, and the recession hit them hard. Today, with the help of a government loan, that empty space is being used to manufacture solar shingles that are being sold all across the country. In Robert’s words, “We reinvented ourselves.”

That’s what Americans have done for over 200 years: reinvented ourselves. And to spur on more success stories like the Allen Brothers, we’ve begun to reinvent our energy policy. We’re not just handing out money. We’re issuing a challenge. We’re telling America’s scientists and engineers that if they assemble teams of the best minds in their fields, and focus on the hardest problems in clean energy, we’ll fund the Apollo projects of our time.

At the California Institute of Technology, they’re developing a way to turn sunlight and water into fuel for our cars. At Oak Ridge National Laboratory, they’re using supercomputers to get a lot more power out of our nuclear facilities. With more research and incentives, we can break our dependence on oil with biofuels, and become the first country to have a million electric vehicles on the road by 2015.

We need to get behind this innovation. And to help pay for it, I’m asking Congress to eliminate the billions in taxpayer dollars we currently give to oil companies. I don’t know if -- I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but they’re doing just fine on their own. So instead of subsidizing yesterday’s energy, let’s invest in tomorrow’s.

Now, clean energy breakthroughs will only translate into clean energy jobs if businesses know there will be a market for what they’re selling. So tonight, I challenge you to join me in setting a new goal: By 2035, 80 percent of America’s electricity will come from clean energy sources.

Some folks want wind and solar. Others want nuclear, clean coal and natural gas. To meet this goal, we will need them all -- and I urge Democrats and Republicans to work together to make it happen.

Maintaining our leadership in research and technology is crucial to America’s success. But if we want to win the future -– if we want innovation to produce jobs in America and not overseas -– then we also have to win the race to educate our kids.

Think about it. Over the next 10 years, nearly half of all new jobs will require education that goes beyond a high school education. And yet, as many as a quarter of our students aren’t even finishing high school. The quality of our math and science education lags behind many other nations. America has fallen to ninth in the proportion of young people with a college degree. And so the question is whether all of us –- as citizens, and as parents –- are willing to do what’s necessary to give every child a chance to succeed.

That responsibility begins not in our classrooms, but in our homes and communities. It’s family that first instills the love of learning in a child. Only parents can make sure the TV is turned off and homework gets done. We need to teach our kids that it’s not just the winner of the Super Bowl who deserves to be celebrated, but the winner of the science fair. We need to teach them that success is not a function of fame or PR, but of hard work and discipline.

Our schools share this responsibility. When a child walks into a classroom, it should be a place of high expectations and high performance. But too many schools don’t meet this test. That’s why instead of just pouring money into a system that’s not working, we launched a competition called Race to the Top. To all 50 states, we said, “If you show us the most innovative plans to improve teacher quality and student achievement, we’ll show you the money.”

Race to the Top is the most meaningful reform of our public schools in a generation. For less than 1 percent of what we spend on education each year, it has led over 40 states to raise their standards for teaching and learning. And these standards were developed, by the way, not by Washington, but by Republican and Democratic governors throughout the country. And Race to the Top should be the approach we follow this year as we replace No Child Left Behind with a law that’s more flexible and focused on what’s best for our kids.

You see, we know what’s possible from our children when reform isn’t just a top-down mandate, but the work of local teachers and principals, school boards and communities. Take a school like Bruce Randolph in Denver. Three years ago, it was rated one of the worst schools in Colorado -- located on turf between two rival gangs. But last May, 97 percent of the seniors received their diploma. Most will be the first in their families to go to college. And after the first year of the school’s transformation, the principal who made it possible wiped away tears when a student said, “Thank you, Ms. Waters, for showing that we are smart and we can make it.” That’s what good schools can do, and we want good schools all across the country.

Let’s also remember that after parents, the biggest impact on a child’s success comes from the man or woman at the front of the classroom. In South Korea, teachers are known as “nation builders.” Here in America, it’s time we treated the people who educate our children with the same level of respect. We want to reward good teachers and stop making excuses for bad ones. And over the next 10 years, with so many baby boomers retiring from our classrooms, we want to prepare 100,000 new teachers in the fields of science and technology and engineering and math.

In fact, to every young person listening tonight who’s contemplating their career choice: If you want to make a difference in the life of our nation; if you want to make a difference in the life of a child -- become a teacher. Your country needs you.

Of course, the education race doesn’t end with a high school diploma. To compete, higher education must be within the reach of every American. That’s why we’ve ended the unwarranted taxpayer subsidies that went to banks, and used the savings to make college affordable for millions of students. And this year, I ask Congress to go further, and make permanent our tuition tax credit –- worth $10,000 for four years of college. It’s the right thing to do.

Because people need to be able to train for new jobs and careers in today’s fast-changing economy, we’re also revitalizing America’s community colleges. Last month, I saw the promise of these schools at Forsyth Tech in North Carolina. Many of the students there used to work in the surrounding factories that have since left town. One mother of two, a woman named Kathy Proctor, had worked in the furniture industry since she was 18 years old. And she told me she’s earning her degree in biotechnology now, at 55 years old, not just because the furniture jobs are gone, but because she wants to inspire her children to pursue their dreams, too. As Kathy said, “I hope it tells them to never give up.”

If we take these steps -– if we raise expectations for every child, and give them the best possible chance at an education, from the day they are born until the last job they take –- we will reach the goal that I set two years ago: By the end of the decade, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world.

One last point about education. Today, there are hundreds of thousands of students excelling in our schools who are not American citizens. Some are the children of undocumented workers, who had nothing to do with the actions of their parents. They grew up as Americans and pledge allegiance to our flag, and yet they live every day with the threat of deportation. Others come here from abroad to study in our colleges and universities. But as soon as they obtain advanced degrees, we send them back home to compete against us. It makes no sense.

Now, I strongly believe that we should take on, once and for all, the issue of illegal immigration. And I am prepared to work with Republicans and Democrats to protect our borders, enforce our laws and address the millions of undocumented workers who are now living in the shadows. I know that debate will be difficult. I know it will take time. But tonight, let’s agree to make that effort. And let’s stop expelling talented, responsible young people who could be staffing our research labs or starting a new business, who could be further enriching this nation.

The third step in winning the future is rebuilding America. To attract new businesses to our shores, we need the fastest, most reliable ways to move people, goods, and information -- from high-speed rail to high-speed Internet.

Our infrastructure used to be the best, but our lead has slipped. South Korean homes now have greater Internet access than we do. Countries in Europe and Russia invest more in their roads and railways than we do. China is building faster trains and newer airports. Meanwhile, when our own engineers graded our nation’s infrastructure, they gave us a “D.”

We have to do better. America is the nation that built the transcontinental railroad, brought electricity to rural communities, constructed the Interstate Highway System. The jobs created by these projects didn’t just come from laying down track or pavement. They came from businesses that opened near a town’s new train station or the new off-ramp.

So over the last two years, we’ve begun rebuilding for the 21st century, a project that has meant thousands of good jobs for the hard-hit construction industry. And tonight, I’m proposing that we redouble those efforts.

We’ll put more Americans to work repairing crumbling roads and bridges. We’ll make sure this is fully paid for, attract private investment, and pick projects based [on] what’s best for the economy, not politicians.

Within 25 years, our goal is to give 80 percent of Americans access to high-speed rail. This could allow you to go places in half the time it takes to travel by car. For some trips, it will be faster than flying –- without the pat-down. As we speak, routes in California and the Midwest are already underway.

Within the next five years, we’ll make it possible for businesses to deploy the next generation of high-speed wireless coverage to 98 percent of all Americans. This isn’t just about -- this isn’t about faster Internet or fewer dropped calls. It’s about connecting every part of America to the digital age. It’s about a rural community in Iowa or Alabama where farmers and small business owners will be able to sell their products all over the world. It’s about a firefighter who can download the design of a burning building onto a handheld device; a student who can take classes with a digital textbook; or a patient who can have face-to-face video chats with her doctor.

All these investments -– in innovation, education, and infrastructure –- will make America a better place to do business and create jobs. But to help our companies compete, we also have to knock down barriers that stand in the way of their success.

For example, over the years, a parade of lobbyists has rigged the tax code to benefit particular companies and industries. Those with accountants or lawyers to work the system can end up paying no taxes at all. But all the rest are hit with one of the highest corporate tax rates in the world. It makes no sense, and it has to change.

So tonight, I’m asking Democrats and Republicans to simplify the system. Get rid of the loopholes. Level the playing field. And use the savings to lower the corporate tax rate for the first time in 25 years –- without adding to our deficit. It can be done.

To help businesses sell more products abroad, we set a goal of doubling our exports by 2014 -– because the more we export, the more jobs we create here at home. Already, our exports are up. Recently, we signed agreements with India and China that will support more than 250,000 jobs here in the United States. And last month, we finalized a trade agreement with South Korea that will support at least 70,000 American jobs. This agreement has unprecedented support from business and labor, Democrats and Republicans -- and I ask this Congress to pass it as soon as possible.

Now, before I took office, I made it clear that we would enforce our trade agreements, and that I would only sign deals that keep faith with American workers and promote American jobs. That’s what we did with Korea, and that’s what I intend to do as we pursue agreements with Panama and Colombia and continue our Asia Pacific and global trade talks.

To reduce barriers to growth and investment, I’ve ordered a review of government regulations. When we find rules that put an unnecessary burden on businesses, we will fix them. But I will not hesitate to create or enforce common-sense safeguards to protect the American people. That’s what we’ve done in this country for more than a century. It’s why our food is safe to eat, our water is safe to drink, and our air is safe to breathe. It’s why we have speed limits and child labor laws. It’s why last year, we put in place consumer protections against hidden fees and penalties by credit card companies and new rules to prevent another financial crisis. And it’s why we passed reform that finally prevents the health insurance industry from exploiting patients.

Now, I have heard rumors that a few of you still have concerns about our new health care law. So let me be the first to say that anything can be improved. If you have ideas about how to improve this law by making care better or more affordable, I am eager to work with you. We can start right now by correcting a flaw in the legislation that has placed an unnecessary bookkeeping burden on small businesses.

What I’m not willing to do -- what I’m not willing to do is go back to the days when insurance companies could deny someone coverage because of a preexisting condition.

I’m not willing to tell James Howard, a brain cancer patient from Texas, that his treatment might not be covered. I’m not willing to tell Jim Houser, a small business man from Oregon, that he has to go back to paying $5,000 more to cover his employees. As we speak, this law is making prescription drugs cheaper for seniors and giving uninsured students a chance to stay on their patients’ -- parents’ coverage.

So I say to this chamber tonight, instead of re-fighting the battles of the last two years, let’s fix what needs fixing and let’s move forward.

Now, the final critical step in winning the future is to make sure we aren’t buried under a mountain of debt.

We are living with a legacy of deficit spending that began almost a decade ago. And in the wake of the financial crisis, some of that was necessary to keep credit flowing, save jobs, and put money in people’s pockets.

But now that the worst of the recession is over, we have to confront the fact that our government spends more than it takes in. That is not sustainable. Every day, families sacrifice to live within their means. They deserve a government that does the same.

So tonight, I am proposing that starting this year, we freeze annual domestic spending for the next five years. Now, this would reduce the deficit by more than $400 billion over the next decade, and will bring discretionary spending to the lowest share of our economy since Dwight Eisenhower was President.

This freeze will require painful cuts. Already, we’ve frozen the salaries of hardworking federal employees for the next two years. I’ve proposed cuts to things I care deeply about, like community action programs. The Secretary of Defense has also agreed to cut tens of billions of dollars in spending that he and his generals believe our military can do without.

I recognize that some in this chamber have already proposed deeper cuts, and I’m willing to eliminate whatever we can honestly afford to do without. But let’s make sure that we’re not doing it on the backs of our most vulnerable citizens. And let’s make sure that what we’re cutting is really excess weight. Cutting the deficit by gutting our investments in innovation and education is like lightening an overloaded airplane by removing its engine. It may make you feel like you’re flying high at first, but it won’t take long before you feel the impact.

Now, most of the cuts and savings I’ve proposed only address annual domestic spending, which represents a little more than 12 percent of our budget. To make further progress, we have to stop pretending that cutting this kind of spending alone will be enough. It won’t.

The bipartisan fiscal commission I created last year made this crystal clear. I don’t agree with all their proposals, but they made important progress. And their conclusion is that the only way to tackle our deficit is to cut excessive spending wherever we find it –- in domestic spending, defense spending, health care spending, and spending through tax breaks and loopholes.

This means further reducing health care costs, including programs like Medicare and Medicaid, which are the single biggest contributor to our long-term deficit. The health insurance law we passed last year will slow these rising costs, which is part of the reason that nonpartisan economists have said that repealing the health care law would add a quarter of a trillion dollars to our deficit. Still, I’m willing to look at other ideas to bring down costs, including one that Republicans suggested last year -- medical malpractice reform to rein in frivolous lawsuits.

To put us on solid ground, we should also find a bipartisan solution to strengthen Social Security for future generations. We must do it without putting at risk current retirees, the most vulnerable, or people with disabilities; without slashing benefits for future generations; and without subjecting Americans’ guaranteed retirement income to the whims of the stock market.

And if we truly care about our deficit, we simply can’t afford a permanent extension of the tax cuts for the wealthiest 2 percent of Americans. Before we take money away from our schools or scholarships away from our students, we should ask millionaires to give up their tax break. It’s not a matter of punishing their success. It’s about promoting America’s success.

In fact, the best thing we could do on taxes for all Americans is to simplify the individual tax code. This will be a tough job, but members of both parties have expressed an interest in doing this, and I am prepared to join them.

So now is the time to act. Now is the time for both sides and both houses of Congress –- Democrats and Republicans -– to forge a principled compromise that gets the job done. If we make the hard choices now to rein in our deficits, we can make the investments we need to win the future.

Let me take this one step further. We shouldn’t just give our people a government that’s more affordable. We should give them a government that’s more competent and more efficient. We can’t win the future with a government of the past.

We live and do business in the Information Age, but the last major reorganization of the government happened in the age of black-and-white TV. There are 12 different agencies that deal with exports. There are at least five different agencies that deal with housing policy. Then there’s my favorite example: The Interior Department is in charge of salmon while they’re in fresh water, but the Commerce Department handles them when they’re in saltwater. I hear it gets even more complicated once they’re smoked.

Now, we’ve made great strides over the last two years in using technology and getting rid of waste. Veterans can now download their electronic medical records with a click of the mouse. We’re selling acres of federal office space that hasn’t been used in years, and we’ll cut through red tape to get rid of more. But we need to think bigger. In the coming months, my administration will develop a proposal to merge, consolidate, and reorganize the federal government in a way that best serves the goal of a more competitive America. I will submit that proposal to Congress for a vote –- and we will push to get it passed.

In the coming year, we’ll also work to rebuild people’s faith in the institution of government. Because you deserve to know exactly how and where your tax dollars are being spent, you’ll be able to go to a website and get that information for the very first time in history. Because you deserve to know when your elected officials are meeting with lobbyists, I ask Congress to do what the White House has already done -- put that information online. And because the American people deserve to know that special interests aren’t larding up legislation with pet projects, both parties in Congress should know this: If a bill comes to my desk with earmarks inside, I will veto it. I will veto it.

The 21st century government that’s open and competent. A government that lives within its means. An economy that’s driven by new skills and new ideas. Our success in this new and changing world will require reform, responsibility, and innovation. It will also require us to approach that world with a new level of engagement in our foreign affairs.

Just as jobs and businesses can now race across borders, so can new threats and new challenges. No single wall separates East and West. No one rival superpower is aligned against us.

And so we must defeat determined enemies, wherever they are, and build coalitions that cut across lines of region and race and religion. And America’s moral example must always shine for all who yearn for freedom and justice and dignity. And because we’ve begun this work, tonight we can say that American leadership has been renewed and America’s standing has been restored.

Look to Iraq, where nearly 100,000 of our brave men and women have left with their heads held high. American combat patrols have ended, violence is down, and a new government has been formed. This year, our civilians will forge a lasting partnership with the Iraqi people, while we finish the job of bringing our troops out of Iraq. America’s commitment has been kept. The Iraq war is coming to an end.

Of course, as we speak, al Qaeda and their affiliates continue to plan attacks against us. Thanks to our intelligence and law enforcement professionals, we’re disrupting plots and securing our cities and skies. And as extremists try to inspire acts of violence within our borders, we are responding with the strength of our communities, with respect for the rule of law, and with the conviction that American Muslims are a part of our American family.

We’ve also taken the fight to al Qaeda and their allies abroad. In Afghanistan, our troops have taken Taliban strongholds and trained Afghan security forces. Our purpose is clear: By preventing the Taliban from reestablishing a stranglehold over the Afghan people, we will deny al Qaeda the safe haven that served as a launching pad for 9/11.

Thanks to our heroic troops and civilians, fewer Afghans are under the control of the insurgency. There will be tough fighting ahead, and the Afghan government will need to deliver better governance. But we are strengthening the capacity of the Afghan people and building an enduring partnership with them. This year, we will work with nearly 50 countries to begin a transition to an Afghan lead. And this July, we will begin to bring our troops home.

In Pakistan, al Qaeda’s leadership is under more pressure than at any point since 2001. Their leaders and operatives are being removed from the battlefield. Their safe havens are shrinking. And we’ve sent a message from the Afghan border to the Arabian Peninsula to all parts of the globe: We will not relent, we will not waver, and we will defeat you.

American leadership can also be seen in the effort to secure the worst weapons of war. Because Republicans and Democrats approved the New START treaty, far fewer nuclear weapons and launchers will be deployed. Because we rallied the world, nuclear materials are being locked down on every continent so they never fall into the hands of terrorists.

Because of a diplomatic effort to insist that Iran meet its obligations, the Iranian government now faces tougher sanctions, tighter sanctions than ever before. And on the Korean Peninsula, we stand with our ally South Korea, and insist that North Korea keeps its commitment to abandon nuclear weapons.

This is just a part of how we’re shaping a world that favors peace and prosperity. With our European allies, we revitalized NATO and increased our cooperation on everything from counterterrorism to missile defense. We’ve reset our relationship with Russia, strengthened Asian alliances, built new partnerships with nations like India.

This March, I will travel to Brazil, Chile, and El Salvador to forge new alliances across the Americas. Around the globe, we’re standing with those who take responsibility -– helping farmers grow more food, supporting doctors who care for the sick, and combating the corruption that can rot a society and rob people of opportunity.

Recent events have shown us that what sets us apart must not just be our power -– it must also be the purpose behind it. In south Sudan -– with our assistance -– the people were finally able to vote for independence after years of war. Thousands lined up before dawn. People danced in the streets. One man who lost four of his brothers at war summed up the scene around him: “This was a battlefield for most of my life,” he said. “Now we want to be free.”

And we saw that same desire to be free in Tunisia, where the will of the people proved more powerful than the writ of a dictator. And tonight, let us be clear: The United States of America stands with the people of Tunisia, and supports the democratic aspirations of all people.

We must never forget that the things we’ve struggled for, and fought for, live in the hearts of people everywhere. And we must always remember that the Americans who have borne the greatest burden in this struggle are the men and women who serve our country.

Tonight, let us speak with one voice in reaffirming that our nation is united in support of our troops and their families. Let us serve them as well as they’ve served us -- by giving them the equipment they need, by providing them with the care and benefits that they have earned, and by enlisting our veterans in the great task of building our own nation.

Our troops come from every corner of this country -– they’re black, white, Latino, Asian, Native American. They are Christian and Hindu, Jewish and Muslim. And, yes, we know that some of them are gay. Starting this year, no American will be forbidden from serving the country they love because of who they love. And with that change, I call on all our college campuses to open their doors to our military recruiters and ROTC. It is time to leave behind the divisive battles of the past. It is time to move forward as one nation.

We should have no illusions about the work ahead of us. Reforming our schools, changing the way we use energy, reducing our deficit –- none of this will be easy. All of it will take time. And it will be harder because we will argue about everything. The costs. The details. The letter of every law.

Of course, some countries don’t have this problem. If the central government wants a railroad, they build a railroad, no matter how many homes get bulldozed. If they don’t want a bad story in the newspaper, it doesn’t get written.

And yet, as contentious and frustrating and messy as our democracy can sometimes be, I know there isn’t a person here who would trade places with any other nation on Earth.

We may have differences in policy, but we all believe in the rights enshrined in our Constitution. We may have different opinions, but we believe in the same promise that says this is a place where you can make it if you try. We may have different backgrounds, but we believe in the same dream that says this is a country where anything is possible. No matter who you are. No matter where you come from.

That dream is why I can stand here before you tonight. That dream is why a working-class kid from Scranton can sit behind me. That dream is why someone who began by sweeping the floors of his father’s Cincinnati bar can preside as Speaker of the House in the greatest nation on Earth.

That dream -– that American Dream -– is what drove the Allen Brothers to reinvent their roofing company for a new era. It’s what drove those students at Forsyth Tech to learn a new skill and work towards the future. And that dream is the story of a small business owner named Brandon Fisher.

Brandon started a company in Berlin, Pennsylvania, that specializes in a new kind of drilling technology. And one day last summer, he saw the news that halfway across the world, 33 men were trapped in a Chilean mine, and no one knew how to save them.

But Brandon thought his company could help. And so he designed a rescue that would come to be known as Plan B. His employees worked around the clock to manufacture the necessary drilling equipment. And Brandon left for Chile.

Along with others, he began drilling a 2,000-foot hole into the ground, working three- or four-hour -- three or four days at a time without any sleep. Thirty-seven days later, Plan B succeeded, and the miners were rescued. But because he didn’t want all of the attention, Brandon wasn’t there when the miners emerged. He’d already gone back home, back to work on his next project.

And later, one of his employees said of the rescue, “We proved that Center Rock is a little company, but we do big things.”

We do big things.

From the earliest days of our founding, America has been the story of ordinary people who dare to dream. That’s how we win the future.

We’re a nation that says, “I might not have a lot of money, but I have this great idea for a new company.” “I might not come from a family of college graduates, but I will be the first to get my degree.” “I might not know those people in trouble, but I think I can help them, and I need to try.” “I’m not sure how we’ll reach that better place beyond the horizon, but I know we’ll get there. I know we will.”

We do big things.

The idea of America endures. Our destiny remains our choice. And tonight, more than two centuries later, it’s because of our people that our future is hopeful, our journey goes forward, and the state of our union is strong.

Thank you. God bless you, and may God bless the United States of America.

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# Address at the 59th Prayer Breakfast

Thank you so much. To the co-chairs, Jeff and Ann; to all the members of Congress who are here, the distinguished guests who’ve traveled so far to be here this morning; to Randall for your wonderful stories and powerful prayer; to all who are here providing testimony, thank you so much for having me and Michelle here. We are blessed to be here.

I want to begin by just saying a word to Mark Kelly, who’s here. We have been praying for Mark’s wife, Gabby Giffords, for many days now. But I want Gabby and Mark and their entire family to know that we are with them for the long haul, and God is with them for the long haul.

And even as we pray for Gabby in the aftermath of a tragedy here at home, we're also mindful of the violence that we're now seeing in the Middle East, and we pray that the violence in Egypt will end and that the rights and aspirations of the Egyptian people will be realized and that a better day will dawn over Egypt and throughout the world.

For almost 60 years, going back to President Eisenhower, this gathering has been attended by our President. It’s a tradition that I'm proud to uphold not only as a fellow believer but as an elected leader whose entry into public service was actually through the church. This may come as a surprise, for as some of you know, I did not come from a particularly religious family. My father, who I barely knew -- I only met once for a month in my entire life -- was said to be a non-believer throughout his life.

My mother, whose parents were Baptist and Methodist, grew up with a certain skepticism about organized religion, and she usually only took me to church on Easter and Christmas -- sometimes. And yet my mother was also one of the most spiritual people that I ever knew. She was somebody who was instinctively guided by the Golden Rule and who nagged me constantly about the homespun values of her Kansas upbringing, values like honesty and hard work and kindness and fair play.

And it’s because of her that I came to understand the equal worth of all men and all women, and the imperatives of an ethical life and the necessity to act on your beliefs. And it’s because of her example and guidance that despite the absence of a formal religious upbringing my earliest inspirations for a life of service ended up being the faith leaders of the Civil Rights Movement.

There was, of course, Martin Luther King and the Baptist leaders, the ways in which they helped those who had been subjugated to make a way out of no way, and transform a nation through the force of love. But there were also Catholic leaders like Father Theodore Heshburg, and Jewish leaders like Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, Muslim leaders and Hindu leaders. Their call to fix what was broken in our world, a call rooted in faith, is what led me just a few years out of college to sign up as a community organizer for a group of churches on the Southside of Chicago. And it was through that experience working with pastors and laypeople trying to heal the wounds of hurting neighborhoods that I came to know Jesus Christ for myself and embrace Him as my lord and savior.

Now, that was over 20 years ago. And like all of us, my faith journey has had its twists and turns. It hasn’t always been a straight line. I have thanked God for the joys of parenthood and Michelle’s willingness to put up with me. In the wake of failures and disappointments I've questioned what God had in store for me and been reminded that God’s plans for us may not always match our own short-sighted desires.

And let me tell you, these past two years, they have deepened my faith. The presidency has a funny way of making a person feel the need to pray. Abe Lincoln said, as many of you know, “I have been driven to my knees many times by the overwhelming conviction that I had no place else to go.”

Fortunately, I'm not alone in my prayers. Pastor friends like Joel Hunter and T.D. Jakes come over to the Oval Office every once in a while to pray with me and pray for the nation. The chapel at Camp David has provided consistent respite and fellowship. The director of our Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnership’s office, Joshua DuBois -- young minister himself -- he starts my morning off with meditations from Scripture.

Most of all, I've got friends around the country -- some who I know, some who I don’t know, but I know their friends who are out there praying for me. One of them is an old friend named Kaye Wilson. In our family we call her Momma Kaye. And she happens to be Malia and Sasha’s godmother. And she has organized prayer circles for me all around the country. She started small with her own Bible study group, but once I started running for President and she heard what they were saying about me on cable, she felt the need to pray harder. By the time I was elected President, she says, “I just couldn’t keep up on my own.” “I was having to pray eight, nine times a day just for you.” So she enlisted help from around the country.

It’s also comforting to know that people are praying for you who don’t always agree with you. Tom Coburn, for example, is here. He is not only a dear friend but also a brother in Christ. We came into the Senate at the same time. Even though we are on opposite sides of a whole bunch of issues, part of what has bound us together is a shared faith, a recognition that we pray to and serve the same God. And I keep praying that God will show him the light and he will vote with me once in a while. It’s going to happen, Tom. A ray of light is going to beam down.

My Christian faith then has been a sustaining force for me over these last few years. All the more so, when Michelle and I hear our faith questioned from time to time, we are reminded that ultimately what matters is not what other people say about us but whether we're being true to our conscience and true to our God. “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.”

As I travel across the country folks often ask me what is it that I pray for. And like most of you, my prayers sometimes are general: Lord, give me the strength to meet the challenges of my office. Sometimes they’re specific: Lord, give me patience as I watch Malia go to her first dance -- where there will be boys. Lord, have that skirt get longer as she travels to that dance.

But while I petition God for a whole range of things, there are a few common themes that do recur. The first category of prayer comes out of the urgency of the Old Testament prophets and the Gospel itself. I pray for my ability to help those who are struggling. Christian tradition teaches that one day the world will be turned right side up and everything will return as it should be. But until that day, we're called to work on behalf of a God that chose justice and mercy and compassion to the most vulnerable.

We've seen a lot of hardship these past two years. Not a day passes when I don't get a letter from somebody or meet someone who’s out of work or lost their home or without health care. The story Randall told about his father -- that's a story that a whole lot of Americans have gone through over these past couple of years.

Sometimes I can't help right away. Sometimes what I can do to try to improve the economy or to curb foreclosures or to help deal with the health care system -- sometimes it seems so distant and so remote, so profoundly inadequate to the enormity of the need. And it is my faith, then, that biblical injunction to serve the least of these, that keeps me going and that keeps me from being overwhelmed. It’s faith that reminds me that despite being just one very imperfect man, I can still help whoever I can, however I can, wherever I can, for as long as I can, and that somehow God will buttress these efforts.

It also helps to know that none of us are alone in answering this call. It’s being taken up each and every day by so many of you -- back home, your churches, your temples and synagogues, your fellow congregants -- so many faith groups across this great country of ours.

I came upon a group recently called “charity: water,” a group that supports clean water projects overseas. This is a project that was started by a former nightclub promoter named Scott Harrison who grew weary of living only for himself and feeling like he wasn’t following Christ as well as he should. And because of Scott’s good work, “charity: water” has helped 1.7 million people get access to clean water. And in the next 10 years, he plans to make clean water accessible to a hundred million more. That’s the kind of promoting we need more of, and that’s the kind of faith that moves mountains. And there’s stories like that scattered across this room of people who’ve taken it upon themselves to make a difference.

Now, sometimes faith groups can do the work of caring for the least of these on their own; sometimes they need a partner, whether it’s in business or government. And that’s why my administration has taken a fresh look at the way we organize with faith groups, the way we work with faith groups through our Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

And through that office, we’re expanding the way faith groups can partner with our government. We’re helping them feed more kids who otherwise would go hungry. We’re helping fatherhood groups get dads the support they need to be there for their children. We’re working with non-profits to improve the lives of people around the world. And we’re doing it in ways that are aligned with our constitutional principles. And in this work, we intend to expand it in the days ahead, rooted in the notions of partnership and justice and the imperatives to help the poor.

Of course there are some needs that require more resources than faith groups have at their disposal. There’s only so much a church can do to help all the families in need -- all those who need help making a mortgage payment, or avoiding foreclosure, or making sure their child can go to college. There’s only so much that a nonprofit can do to help a community rebuild in the wake of disaster. There’s only so much the private sector will do to help folks who are desperately sick get the care that they need.

And that's why I continue to believe that in a caring and in a just society, government must have a role to play; that our values, our love and our charity must find expression not just in our families, not just in our places of work and our places of worship, but also in our government and in our politics.

Over the past two years, the nature of these obligations, the proper role of government has obviously been the subject of enormous controversy. And the debates have been fierce as one side’s version of compassion and community may be interpreted by the other side as an oppressive and irresponsible expansion of the state or an unacceptable restriction on individual freedom.

That's why a second recurring theme in my prayers is a prayer for humility. Now, God answered this prayer for me early on by having me marry Michelle. Because whether it’s reminding me of a chore undone, or questioning the wisdom of watching my third football game in a row on Sunday, she keeps me humble.

But in this life of politics when debates have become so bitterly polarized, and changes in the media lead so many of us just to listen to those who reinforce our existing biases, it’s useful to go back to Scripture to remind ourselves that none of has all the answers -- none of us, no matter what our political party or our station in life.

The full breadth of human knowledge is like a grain of sand in God’s hands. And there are some mysteries in this world we cannot fully comprehend. As it’s written in Job, “God’s voice thunders in marvelous ways. He does great things beyond our understandings.”

The challenge I find then is to balance this uncertainty, this humility, with the need to fight for deeply held convictions, to be open to other points of view but firm in our core principles. And I pray for this wisdom every day.

I pray that God will show me and all of us the limits of our understanding, and open our ears and our hearts to our brothers and sisters with different points of view; that such reminders of our shared hopes and our shared dreams and our shared limitations as children of God will reveal the way forward that we can travel together.

And the last recurring theme, one that binds all prayers together, is that I might walk closer with God and make that walk my first and most important task.

In our own lives it’s easy to be consumed by our daily worries and our daily concerns. And it is even easier at a time when everybody is busy, everybody is stressed, and everybody -- our culture is obsessed with wealth and power and celebrity. And often it takes a brush with hardship or tragedy to shake us out of that, to remind us of what matters most.

We see an aging parent wither under a long illness, or we lose a daughter or a husband in Afghanistan, we watch a gunman open fire in a supermarket -- and we remember how fleeting life can be. And we ask ourselves how have we treated others, whether we’ve told our family and friends how much we love them. And it’s in these moments, when we feel most intensely our mortality and our own flaws and the sins of the world, that we most desperately seek to touch the face of God.

So my prayer this morning is that we might seek His face not only in those moments, but each and every day; that every day as we go through the hustle and bustle of our lives, whether it’s in Washington or Hollywood or anywhere in between, that we might every so often rise above the here and now, and kneel before the Eternal; that we might remember, Kaye, the fact that those who wait on the Lord will soar on wings like eagles, and they will run and not be weary, and they will walk and not faint.

When I wake in the morning, I wait on the Lord, and I ask Him to give me the strength to do right by our country and its people. And when I go to bed at night I wait on the Lord, and I ask Him to forgive me my sins, and look after my family and the American people, and make me an instrument of His will.

I say these prayers hoping they will be answered, and I say these prayers knowing that I must work and must sacrifice and must serve to see them answered. But I also say these prayers knowing that the act of prayer itself is a source of strength. It’s a reminder that our time on Earth is not just about us; that when we open ourselves to the possibility that God might have a larger purpose for our lives, there’s a chance that somehow, in ways that we may never fully know, God will use us well.

May the Lord bless you and keep you, and may He bless this country that we love.

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# Address to the U.S. Chamber of Congress

Thank you very much, Tom, for the gracious introduction.

I want to make a few other acknowledgments. To Tom Bell, the Chamber Board President, thank you for helping to organize this. There are some members of my administration I want to make sure are introduced. My Chief of Staff, Bill Daley, is here. Senior advisor Valerie Jarrett, who is interfacing with many of you and has gotten terrific advice from many of you, is here as well. Secretary Ray LaHood, our Transportation Secretary. Ambassador Ron Kirk, who is working hard to get trade deals around the world. Our Small Business Administration Administrator Karen Mills. My director of the National Economic Council, Gene Sperling, is here. And I also want to make mention, Fred Hochberg, our Export-Import Bank Chairman; Elizabeth Littlefield, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation President. And I also want to acknowledge a good friend, Paul Volcker, the outgoing chair of the President's Economic Recovery Advisory Board. Thank you all for being here.

Now, Tom, it is good to be here today at the Chamber of Commerce. I'm here in the interest of being more neighborly. I strolled over from across the street, and look, maybe if we had brought over a fruitcake when I first moved in, we would have gotten off to a better start. But I'm going to make up for it.

The truth is, this isn't the first time I've been to the Chamber, or the first time that we've exchanged ideas. Over the last two years, I've sought advice from many of you as we were grappling with the worst recession most of us have ever known. It's a recession that led to some very difficult decisions. For many of you, that meant restructuring and branch closings and layoffs that I know were very painful to make. For my administration, it meant a series of emergency measures that I would not have undertaken under normal circumstances, but that were necessary to stop our economy from falling off a cliff.

Now, on some issues, like the Recovery Act, we've found common cause. On other issues, we've had some pretty strong disagreements. But I'm here today because I am convinced, as Tom mentioned in his introduction, that we can and we must work together. Whatever differences we may have, I know that all of us share a deep, abiding belief in this country, a belief in our people, a belief in the principles that have made America's economy the envy of the world.

America's success didn't happen overnight, and it didn't happen by accident. It happened because [of] the freedom that has allowed good ideas to flourish, that has allowed capitalism to thrive; it happened because of the conviction that in this country hard work should be rewarded and that opportunity should be there for anybody who's willing to reach for it. And because it happened at every juncture in our history -- not just once, not just twice, but over and over again -- we came together to remake ourselves; we came together as one nation and did what was necessary to win the future. That is why I am so confident that we will win the future again.

That's the challenge that we face today. We still have, by far, the world's largest and most vibrant economy. We have the most productive workers, the finest universities and the freest markets. The men and women in this room are living testimony that American industry is still the source of the most dynamic companies, and the most ingenious entrepreneurs.

But we also know that with the march of technology over the last few decades, the competition for jobs and businesses has grown fierce. The globalization of our economy means that businesses can now open up a shop, employ workers and produce their goods wherever an Internet connection exists. Tasks that were once done by 1,000 workers can now be done by 100 or in some cases even 10. And the truth is, as countries like China and India and Brazil grow and develop larger middle classes, it's profitable for global companies to aggressively pursue these markets and, at times, to set up facilities in these countries.

These forces are as unstoppable as they are powerful. But combined with a brutal and devastating recession, these forces have also shaken the faith of the American people -- in the institutions of business and government. They see a widening chasm of wealth and opportunity in this country, and they wonder if the American Dream is slipping away.

They wonder if the middle class, rather than expanding as it has through our lifetimes, is in the midst of an inexorable contraction. And we can't ignore these concerns. We have to renew people's faith in the promise of this country -- that this is a place where you can make it if you try. And we have to do this together: business and government; workers and CEOs; Democrats and Republicans.

We know what it will take for America to win the future. We need to out-innovate, we need to out-educate, we need to out-build our competitors. We need an economy that's based not on what we consume and borrow from other nations, but what we make and what we sell around the world. We need to make America the best place on Earth to do business.

And this is a job for all of us. As a government, we will help lay the foundation for you to grow and innovate and succeed. We will upgrade our transportation and communication networks so you can move goods and information more quickly and more cheaply. We'll invest in education so that you can hire the most skilled, talented workers in the world. And we'll work to knock down barriers that make it harder for you to compete, from the tax code to the regulatory system.

But I want to be clear: Even as we make America the best place on Earth to do business, businesses also have a responsibility to America.

I understand the challenges you face. I understand you are under incredible pressure to cut costs and keep your margins up. I understand the significance of your obligations to your shareholders and the pressures that are created by quarterly reports. I get it.

But as we work with you to make America a better place to do business, I'm hoping that all of you are thinking what you can do for America. Ask yourselves what you can do to hire more American workers, what you can do to support the American economy and invest in this nation. That's what I want to talk about today -- the responsibilities we all have -- the mutual responsibilities we have -- to secure the future that we all share.

Now, as a country, we have a responsibility to encourage American innovation. I talked about this quite a bit at my State of the Union.

Companies like yours have always driven the discovery of new products and new ideas. You do it better than anybody. But what you also know is that it's not always profitable to -- in the short-term, at least -- for you to invest in basic research. It's very expensive, and the payoffs are not always clear and they're not always localized. And that's why government has traditionally helped invest in this kind of science, planting the seeds that ultimately grew into technologies from the computer chips to the Internet.

That's why we're making investments today in the next generation of big ideas -- in biotechnology, in information technology and in clean energy technology. We're reforming our patent system so innovations can move more quickly to market. Steve Case is heading up a new partnership called Startup America to help entrepreneurs turn new ideas into new businesses and new jobs. And I've also proposed a bigger, permanent tax credit for all the research and development your companies do in this country. I believe that is a priority.

We also have a responsibility as a nation to provide our people with -- and our businesses -- with the fastest, most reliable way to move goods and information. The costs to business from outdated and inadequate infrastructure is enormous. And that's what we have right now -- outdated, inadequate infrastructure.

And any of you that have been traveling to other countries, you know it, you see it, and it affects your bottom lines. That's why I want to put more people to work rebuilding crumbling roads, rebuilding our bridges. That's why I've proposed connecting 80 percent of the country with high-speed -- to high-speed rail, and making it possible for companies to put high-speed Internet coverage in the reach of virtually all Americans.

You understand the importance of this. The fact is, the Chamber of Commerce and the AFL-CIO don't agree on a whole lot. Tom Donohue and Richard Trumka are not Facebook friends. Well, maybe -- I don't think you are anyway. I didn't check on this, but -- but they agree on the need to build a 21st-century infrastructure. And I want to thank the Chamber for pushing Congress to make more infrastructure investments, and to do so in the most cost-effective way possible: with tax dollars that leverage private capital, and with projects that are determined not by politics, but by what's best for our economy.

Third responsibility that we have as a nation is to invest in the skills and education of our young people. If we expect companies to do business and hire in America, America needs a pool of trained, talented workers that can out-compete anybody in the world. And that's why we're reforming K-12 education; that's why we're training 100,000 new math and science teachers; that's why we're making college more affordable, and revitalizing our community college system.

Recently I visited GE in Schenectady, which has partnered with a local community college. And while students train for jobs available at the nearby GE plant, they earn a paycheck and they've got their tuition covered. And as a result, young people can find work, GE can fill high-skill positions, and the entire region has become more attractive to businesses. It's a win-win for everybody, and it's something we're trying to duplicate across the country.

Now, to make room for these investments in education, in innovation, in infrastructure, government also has a responsibility to cut spending that we just can't afford. That's why I've promised to veto any bill that's larded up with earmarks. That's why I've proposed that we freeze annual domestic spending for the next five years. Understand what this means. This would reduce the deficit by more than $400 billion over the next decade, and bring this spending -- domestic discretionary spending -- down to the lowest share of our economy since Eisenhower was President. That was a long time ago.

Now, it's not going to be enough. We're going to have to do more. Because the driving force on our deficits are entitlements spending. And that's going to require both parties to work together, because those are some tough problems that we're going to have to solve. And I am eager to work with both parties and with the Chamber to take additional steps across the budget to put our nation on a sounder fiscal footing.

By stopping spending on things we don't need, we can make investments in the things that we do need, the same way families do. If they've got a fiscal problem, if they've got to tighten their belt, they don't stop paying for Johnny to go to college. They cut out things they don't need, but they still make investments in the thing that are going to make sure we win the future. And that's what we have to do as a country: make some smart choices -- tough choices, but smart ones.

Now, in addition to making government more affordable, we're also making it more effective and more consumer-friendly. We're trying to run the government a little bit more like you run your business -- with better technology and faster services. So in the coming months, my administration will develop a proposal to merge, consolidate and reorganize the federal government in a way that best serves the goal of a more competitive America. And we want to start with the 12 different agencies that deal with America's exports. If we hope to help our businesses sell more goods around the world, we should ensure we're all pulling in the same direction. And frankly, with 12 different agencies in charge, nobody is in charge. So we're going to fix that as an example of how we can make a government that's more responsive to the American people and to American businesses.

Which brings me to the final responsibility of government: breaking down some of the barriers that stand in the way of your success. As far as exports are concerned, that means seeking new opportunities and opening new markets for your goods. And I will tell you I will go anywhere anytime to be a booster for American businesses, American workers and American products. We recently signed -- and I don't charge a commission.

We recently signed export deals with India and China that will support more than 250,000 jobs here in the United States. We finalized a trade agreement with South Korea that will support at least 70,000 American jobs. And by the way, it's a deal that has unprecedented support from business and labor, Democrats and Republicans. That's the kind of deal that I will be looking for as we pursue trade agreements with Panama and Colombia, as we work to bring Russia into the international trading system. Those are going to be our top priorities because we believe Americans have the best products and the best businesses, and if we're out there selling and we're out there hustling, there's no reason why we can't do a lot better than we're doing right now when it comes to our exports.

Now, another barrier government can remove -- and I hear a lot about this from many of you -- is a burdensome corporate tax code with one of the highest rates in the world. You know how it goes: because of various loopholes and carve-outs that have built up over the years, some industries pay an average rate that is four or five times higher than others. Companies are taxed heavily for making investments with equity, yet the tax code actually pays companies to invest using leverage. As a result, you've got too many companies ending up making decisions based on what their tax director says instead of what their engineer designs or what their factories produce. And that puts our entire economy at a disadvantage. We need something smarter, something simpler, something fairer. That's why I want to lower the corporate rate and eliminate these loopholes to pay for it, so that it doesn't add a dime to our deficit. And I'm asking for your help in this fight. I think it can be done.

Which brings me to the last barriers we're trying to remove, and those are outdated and unnecessary regulations. I've ordered a government-wide review, and if there are rules on the books that are needlessly stifling job creation and economic growth, we will fix them.

Already we're dramatically cutting down on the paperwork that saddles businesses with huge administrative costs. We're improving the way FDA evaluates things like medical devices, to get innovative and lifesaving treatments to market faster. And the EPA, based on the need for further scientific analysis, delayed the greenhouse gas permitting rules for biomass.

I've also ordered agencies to find ways to make regulations more flexible for small businesses. And we've turned a tangle of fuel economy regulations and pending lawsuits into a single standard that will reduce our dependence on foreign oil, save consumers money at the pump and give car companies the certainty that they need -- all negotiated by the various stakeholders without the need for congressional legislation.

But ultimately, winning the future is not just about what the government can do for you to succeed. It's also about what you can do to help America succeed.

So we were just talking about regulations. Even as we eliminate burdensome regulations, America's businesses have a responsibility as well to recognize that there are some basic safeguards, some basic standards that are necessary to protect the American people from harm or exploitation. Not every regulation is bad. Not every regulation is burdensome on business. A lot of the regulations that are out there are things that all of us welcome in our lives.

Few of us would want to live in a society without rules that keep our air and water clean; that give consumers the confidence to do everything from investing in financial markets to buying groceries. And the fact is, when standards like these have been proposed in the past, opponents have often warned that they would be an assault on business and free enterprise. We can look at the history in this country. Early drug companies argued the bill creating the FDA would "practically destroy the sale of … remedies in the United States." That didn't happen. Auto executives predicted that having to install seatbelts would bring the downfall of their industry. It didn't happen. The President of the American Bar Association denounced child labor laws as "a communistic effort to nationalize children." That's a quote.

None of these things came to pass. In fact, companies adapt and standards often spark competition and innovation. I was traveling when I went up to Penn State to look at some clean energy hubs that have been set up. I was with Steve Chu, my Secretary of Energy. And he won a Nobel Prize in physics, so when you're in conversations with him you catch about one out of every four things he says.

But he started talking about energy efficiency and about refrigerators, and he pointed out that the government set modest targets a couple decades ago to start increasing efficiency over time. They were well thought through; they weren't radical. Companies competed to hit these markers. And they hit them every time, and then exceeded them. And as a result, a typical fridge now costs half as much and uses a quarter of the energy that it once did -- and you don't have to defrost, chipping at that stuff -- and then putting the warm water inside the freezer and all that stuff. It saves families and businesses billions of dollars.

So regulations didn't destroy the industry; it enhanced it and it made our lives better -- if they're smart, if they're well designed. And that's our goal, is to work with you to think through how do we design necessary regulations in a smart way and get rid of regulations that have outlived their usefulness, or don't work.

I also have to point out the perils of too much regulation are also matched by the dangers of too little. And we saw that in the financial crisis, where the absence of sound rules of the road, that wasn't good for business. Even if you weren't in the financial sector it wasn't good for business. And that's why, with the help of Paul Volcker, who is here today, we passed a set of common-sense reforms.

The same can be said of health insurance reform. We simply could not continue to accept a status quo that's made our entire economy less competitive, as we've paid more per person for health care than any other nation on Earth. Nobody is even close. And we couldn't accept a broken system where insurance companies could drop people because they got sick, or families went into bankruptcy because of medical bills.

I know that folks here have concerns about this law. And I understand it. If you're running a business right now and you're seeing these escalating health care costs, your instinct is if I've got even more laws on top of me, that's going to increase my costs even more. I understand that suspicion, that skepticism.

But the non-partisan congressional watchdogs at the CBO estimate that health care tax credits will be worth nearly $40 billion for small businesses over the next decade -- $40 billion, directly to small businesses who are doing the right thing by their employees.

And experts -- not just from the government, but also those commissioned by the Business Roundtable -- suggest that health insurance reform could ultimately save large employers anywhere from $2,000 to $3,000 per family -- your employees and your bottom line.

I've said in the State of the Union and I'll repeat here today: I am willing and happy to look at other ideas to improve the law, including incentives to improve patient safety and medical malpractice reforms. And I want to correct a flaw that's already placed an unnecessary bookkeeping burden on too many small businesses, and I appreciate the Chamber's help in doing that.

But we have to recognize that some common-sense regulations often will make sense for your businesses, as well as your families, as well as your neighbors, as well as your coworkers. Of course, your responsibility goes beyond recognizing the need for certain standards and safeguards. If we're fighting to reform the tax code and increase exports to help you compete, the benefits can't just translate into greater profits and bonuses for those at the top. They have to be shared by American workers, who need to know that expanding trade and opening markets will lift their standards of living as well as your bottom line.

We can't go back to the kind of economy and culture that we saw in the years leading up to the recession, where growth and gains in productivity just didn't translate into rising incomes and opportunity for the middle class. That's not something necessarily we can legislate, but it's something that all of us have to take responsibility for thinking about. How do we make sure that everybody's got a stake in trade, everybody's got a stake in increasing exports, everybody's got a stake in rising productivity? Because ordinary folks end up seeing their standards of living rise as well. That's always been the American promise. That's what JFK meant when he said, "A rising tide lifts all boats." Too many boats have been left behind, stuck in the mud.

And if we as a nation are going to invest in innovation, that innovation should lead to new jobs and manufacturing on our shores. The end result of tax breaks and investments can't simply be that new breakthroughs and technologies are discovered here in America, but then the manufacturing takes place overseas. That, too, breaks the social compact. It makes people feel as if the game is fixed and they're not benefiting from the extraordinary discoveries that take place here.

So the key to our success has never been just developing new ideas; it's also been making new products. So Intel pioneers the microchip, then puts thousands to work building them in Silicon Valley. Henry Ford perfects the assembly line, and then puts a generation to work in the factories of Detroit. That's how we built the largest middle class in the world. Those folks working in those plants, they go out and they buy a Ford. They buy a personal computer. And the economy grows for everyone. And that's how we'll create the base of knowledge and skills that propel the next inventions and the next ideas.

Right now, businesses across this country are proving that America can compete. Caterpillar is opening a new plant to build excavators in Texas that used to be shipped from Japan. In Tennessee, Whirlpool is opening their first new U.S. factory in more than a decade. Dow is building a new plant in Michigan to manufacture batteries for electric vehicles. A company called Geomagic, a software maker, decided to close down its overseas centers in China and Europe and move their R&D here to the United States. These companies are bringing jobs back to our shores. And that's good for everybody.

So if I've got one message, my message is now is the time to invest in America. Now is the time to invest in America. Today, American companies have nearly $2 trillion sitting on their balance sheets. And I know that many of you have told me that you're waiting for demand to rise before you get off the sidelines and expand, and that with millions of Americans out of work, demand has risen more slowly than any of us would like.

We're in this together, but many of your own economists and salespeople are now forecasting a healthy increase in demand. So I just want to encourage you to get in the game. As part of the bipartisan tax deal we negotiated, with the support of the Chamber, businesses can immediately expense 100 percent of their capital investments. And as all of you know, it's investments made now that will pay off as the economy rebounds. And as you hire, you know that more Americans working will mean more sales for your companies. It will mean more demand for your products and services. It will mean higher profits for your companies. We can create a virtuous circle.

And if there's a reason you don't share my confidence, if there's a reason you don't believe that this is the time to get off the sidelines -- to hire and to invest -- I want to know about it. I want to fix it. That's why I've asked Jeff Immelt of GE to lead a new council of business leaders and outside experts so that we're getting the best advice on what you're facing out there -- and we'll be holding our first meeting two weeks from now, on the 24th. So you can get your emails in early, with your ideas, with your thoughts about how we keep moving forward to create this virtuous cycle.

Together, I am confident we can win the competition for new jobs and industries. And I know you share my enthusiasm. Here's one thing I know. For all the disagreements, Tom, that we may have sometimes on issues, I know you love this country. I know you want America to succeed just as badly as I do.

So, yes, we'll have some disagreements; and, yes, we'll see things differently at times. But we're all Americans. And that spirit of patriotism, and that sense of mutual regard and common obligation, that has carried us through far harder times than the ones we've just been through.

And I'm reminded, toward the end of the 1930s, amidst the Depression, the looming prospect of war, FDR, President Roosevelt, realized he would need to form a new partnership with business if we were going to become what he would later call the "arsenal of democracy." And as you can imagine, the relationship between the President and business leaders during the course of the Depression had been rocky at times. They'd grown somewhat fractured by the New Deal.

So Roosevelt reached out to businesses, and business leaders answered the call to serve their country. After years of working at cross purposes, the result was one of the most productive collaborations between the public and private sectors in American history.

Some, like the head of GM, hadn't previously known the President, and if anything had seen him as an adversary. But he gathered his family and he explained that he was going to head up what would become the War Production Board. And he said to his family, "This country has been good to me, and I want to pay it back." I want to pay it back.

And in the years that followed, automobile factories converted to making planes and tanks. And corset factories made grenade belts. A toy company made compasses. A pinball machine maker turned out shells. 1941 would see the greatest expansion of manufacturing in the history of America. And not only did this help us win the war; it led to millions of new jobs and helped produce the great American middle class.

So we have faced hard times before. We have faced moments of tumult and moments of change. And we know what to do. We know how to succeed. We are Americans, and as we have done throughout our history, I have every confidence that once again we will rise to this occasion; that we can come together, we can adapt and we can thrive in this changing economy. And we need to look no further than the innovative companies in this room. If we can harness your potential and the potential of your people across this country, I think there's no stopping us.

So thank you, God bless you, and may God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Speech on the National Wireless Initiative

It is wonderful to be here in the Upper Peninsula with so many Yoopers. How many of you are Green Bay fans, too? I’ve been seeing too many Green Bay fans lately. It is great to be here. It is great to be at Northern Michigan University. We’ve got some wonderful guests here that I just want to mention. First of all, somebody who is as good a public servant, not just good at what he does but good at heart and works tirelessly on behalf of the entire state, your senior senator, Carl Levin, is here. Now, his partner in the Senate could not be here because she’s actually leading a Democratic caucus retreat, but she’s been fighting for manufacturing, for broadband, for a lot of things that we’re talking about here today. So I just want to acknowledge Debbie Stabenow, who deeply cares about the work that you do up here. I want to thank the great hospitality of Mayor John Kivela, who has been showing me around town. Thank you so much, Mayor Kivela. The President of Northern Michigan University, Dr. Les Wong, is here. And all of you are here. And you guys are pretty special. Absolutely. Before I begin, I just want to say that we are following today’s events in Egypt very closely. And we’ll have more to say as this plays out. But what is absolutely clear is that we are witnessing history unfold. It’s a moment of transformation that’s taking place because the people of Egypt are calling for change. And they’ve turned out in extraordinary numbers representing all ages and all walks of life, but it’s young people who’ve been at the forefront -- a new generation, your generation, who want their voices to be heard. And so going forward, we want those young people and we want all Egyptians to know America will continue to do everything that we can to support an orderly and genuine transition to democracy in Egypt. Now, as we watch what’s taking place, we’re also reminded that we live in an interconnected world. What happens across the globe has an impact on each and every one of us. And that’s why I’ve come to Marquette today -- not only because it’s beautiful, and the people are really nice -- which is true. But I’ve come here because in the 21st century, it’s not just the big cities where change is happening. It’s also in towns like this where the jobs and businesses of tomorrow will take root, and where young and talented Americans can lead. It’s towns like this where our economic future will be won. Now, in the short term, the best thing we can do to speed up economic growth is to make sure families and businesses have more money to spend, and that’s exactly what -- got a little applause there. That’s exactly why we passed those tax cuts in December. That’s what it’s doing. Because Democrats and Republicans came together, Americans’ paychecks will be a little bigger this year and businesses will be able to write off their investments and companies will grow and they’ll add workers. But we’ve got more to do. Our measure of success has to be whether every American who wants a job can find a job; whether this country is still the place where you can make it if you try. In a world that’s more connected and more competitive, other nations look at this moment as their moment, their turn to win the jobs and industries of our time. I see things differently. I see this as America’s moment to win the future, so that the 21st century is the American century just like the 20th century was. Yes we can. But to do this, we’re going to have to up our game, Marquette. We got to up our game. To attract the best jobs, the newest industries, we’re going to have to out-innovate, out-educate, out-build. We’re going to have to out-hustle the rest of the world. That means investing in cutting-edge research and technology, like the new advanced battery manufacturing industry that’s taking root right here in the state of Michigan. It means investing in the skills and training of our people, just like it’s taking place at this university. It means investing in transportation and communications networks that move goods and information as fast as possible. And to make room for these investments, we’re going to have to cut whatever spending we can do without. We’ve got a real issue with debts and deficit, and so we’ve got to live within our means. And that means that we’ve got to cut out things that aren’t adding to growth and opportunity in order to invest in those things that are. And that’s why I’ve proposed that we freeze annual domestic spending for the next five years. That will reduce the deficit by more than 400 billion dollars over the next decade. It will bring spending to the lowest share of our economy since Eisenhower was President. That’s a long time ago. Even I wasn’t born then. So government has to do what American families do every day: live within our means. But even as we do so, we can’t sacrifice our future. I’ll just give you guys an analogy. If you’re trying to cut back in your family, you might decide, we’re not going to go out to dinner so often; maybe we’ll skip the vacation; we’re not going to remodel the kitchen. But you wouldn’t stop saving for your child’s college education. You wouldn’t stop saving for your own retirement. If your boiler was broken or your roof had a leak, you’d still go ahead and make those investments. Well, the same is true with our country. We’ve got to cut out the equivalence of eating out and vacations. I know there may be some restaurant owners here -- go eat at their restaurants -- but I’m just making a general point. Even as we cut out the things we can afford to do without, we got a responsibility to invest in those areas that will have the biggest impact on our future, and those things are innovation, education and infrastructure. And that last area -- infrastructure -- is why I’ve come here today. Connecting a country of our size has never been easy. Just imagine what Americans experienced when they fanned out from 13 colonies to settle a continent. If you wanted to get from one coast to the other, it would take you months; it would cost you a small fortune. If you settled in the heartland, you were an island, with no real market to sell your goods or buy what you needed. You might have to wait until the traders came by before you stocked up. So we decided to build a railroad to span a continent -- one that would blast through mountains of granite and use thousands of miles of steel, and put to work an army of citizens and immigrants to work. It was an endeavor that would also require support of our government. It didn’t just happen on its own. As General William T. Sherman said, “Uncle Sam is the only giant I know who can grapple the subject.” So even as President Lincoln tried to hold the North and South together, he was determined to see this railroad unite East and West. And private companies joined the charge, racing one another to meet in the middle. And eventually, a telephone operator -- a telegraph operator sent out a simple message to the cheers of a waiting nation. The telegraph just said: “Done.” Done. Now, if he knew that we were still talking about it today, he might have come up with something more inspiring.

But overnight, the transcontinental railroad laid the way for a nationwide economy, not a bunch of local economies, but a nationwide economy. Suddenly, a cross-country trip was cut from months to days. The cost to move goods and mail plummeted. Cowboys drove cattle to railcars that whisked them back East. Entrepreneurs could sell anything, anywhere. After the railroad was completed, a newspaper proclaimed: “We are the youngest of peoples. But we are teaching the world to march forward.” Teaching the world to march forward.

That’s who we are. We are a nation that has always been built to compete. And that’s why, decades later, FDR set up the Rural Electrification Administration to help bring power to vast swaths of America that were still in darkness. Companies said that building lines to rural areas would be too costly. I mean, big cities already had electricity. But they said, it’s too costly to go out into remote areas. It’s too costly to come up into the Upper Peninsula. So Americans in these towns went without refrigeration or running water. If you wanted a glimpse of the larger world, your town might run a movie off a small diesel engine. It might not even last the full film. Once power lines were laid down, electricity flowed to farms across the country, transforming millions of lives. There’s a well-known story of a Texas family returning home the first night their farmhouse was hooked up, and a woman thought it was on fire. And her daughter said, “No, Mama, the lights are on.” Think about that. That wasn’t that long ago, and government was there to help make sure that everybody -- everybody, not just some -- but everybody -- not just those who folks could make an immediate profit off of -- but everybody had access to electricity. So years later, as our nation grew by leaps and bounds, we realized that a patchwork system of back roads and dirt paths couldn’t handle the biggest economy in the world. So President Eisenhower helped make it possible to build an Interstate Highway System, and that, too, transformed the nation -- as much as the railways had. And finally, we could ship goods and services to places that the railroads didn’t reach. It meant that we could live apart from where we worked. We could travel. We could see America.

Each of these achievements -- none of them just happened. We chose to do them. We chose to do big things. And every American benefited -- not just from new conveniences. Not just from the jobs created by laying down new lines or tracks or pavement. We benefited enormously from new economic growth -- from the scores of businesses that opened near each town’s new train station, or new power line, or new off-ramp. So this is a new century, and we can’t expect tomorrow’s economy to take root using yesterday’s infrastructure. We got to think about what’s the next thing, what’s the next big thing, and make sure that we’re at the forefront -- just like we were in the last century. Today, new companies are going to seek out the fastest, most reliable ways to move people, goods and information, whether they are in Shanghai or in Chicago. So if we want new jobs and businesses here in America, we’ve got to have the best transportation system and the best communication network in the world. It’s like that movie, Field of Dreams: If we build it, they will come. But we’ve got to build it. We’ve got to build it. Over the last two years, we’ve begun rebuilding for the 21st century. This is a national project that has meant thousands of jobs for the hard-hit construction industry. And I’ve now proposed redoubling these efforts. We want to put more Americans to work repairing crumbling bridges and roads. Within 25 years, our goal is to have 80 percent of Americans with access to high-speed rail, which could allow you to go to places in half the time it takes by car. Within five years, we want to make it possible for businesses to put high-speed wireless services in reach of virtually every American. And that last part, high-speed wireless, is why I chose to come to Northern Michigan University today. Now let me give you some context. Today, more than 90 percent of homes in South Korea subscribe to high-speed broadband. They just have better networks than we do. In America, the nation that created the Internet -- by the way, because of government investment; it didn’t just happen by itself magically -- because of government R&D, we created the Internet, but yet only 65 percent of households here in America can say the same. When it comes to high-speed Internet, the lights are still off in one-third of our households. One out of every three households in America don’t have that same access. For millions of Americans, the railway hasn’t showed up yet. For our families and our businesses, high-speed wireless service, that’s the next train station; it’s the next off-ramp. It’s how we’ll spark new innovation, new investment, new jobs. And you know this here in Northern Michigan. That’s why I showed up, in addition to it being pretty and people being nice. For decades now, this university has given a new laptop to every incoming student. Wi-Fi stretched across campus. But if you lived off-campus, like most students and teachers here, you were largely out of luck. Broadband was often too expensive to afford. And if you lived a bit further out of town, you were completely out of luck, because broadband providers, they often won’t build networks where it’s not profitable, just like they wouldn’t build electrical lines where it wasn’t profitable. So this university tried something new. You partnered with various companies to build a high-speed, next-generation wireless network. And you managed to install it with six people in only four days without raising tuition. Good job. Good job, Mr. President. By the way, if you give me the name of these six people -- there’s a whole bunch of stuff in Washington I’d like to see done in four days with six people. So today, this is one of America’s most connected universities, and enrollment is near the highest it’s been in 30 years. And what’s more -- and this is what makes this special -- you told nearby towns that if they allowed you to retrofit their towers with new equipment to expand your network, then their schools, their first responders, their city governments could use it too. And as a result, police officers can access crime databases in their cars. And firefighters can download blueprints on the way to a burning building. And public works officials can save money by monitoring pumps and equipment remotely. And you’ve created new online learning opportunities for K-12 students as far as 30 miles away, some of whom -- some of whom can’t always make it to school in a place that averages 200 inches of snow a year. Now, some of these students don’t appreciate the end of school [snow] days. I know Malia and Sasha get really excited about school [snow] days. Of course, in Washington things shut down when there’s an inch of snow. But this technology is giving them more opportunity. It’s good for their education, it’s good for our economy. In fact, I just came from a demonstration of online learning in action. We were with Professor Lubig and he had plugged in Negaunee High School -- and Powell Township School in Big Bay. So I felt like the guy in Star Trek. I was being beamed around -- across the Upper Peninsula here. But it was remarkable to see the possibilities for these young people who are able to, let’s say, do a chemistry experiment, and they can compare the results with kids in Boston. Or if there’s some learning tool or material they don’t have immediately accessible in their school, they can connect here to the university, and they’re able to tap into it.

It’s opening up an entire world to them. And one of the young people who I was talking to, he talked about foreign policy and what we were seeing in places like Egyptian. And he said, what’s amazing especially for us is that now we have a window to the entire world, and we can start understanding other cultures and other places in ways that we could never do without this technology. For local businesses, broadband access is helping them grow and prosper and compete in a global economy. In fact, Marquette has been rated one of the top five “eCities” in Michigan for entrepreneurship. That’s right. So here’s a great example, Getz’s Clothiers. The Getzes are here. Where are the Getzes? They’re around here somewhere. There they are right there.

This is a third-generation, family-owned, Marquette institution. They’ve occupied the same downtown store for more than a century -- but with the help of broadband, they were recently listed as one of America’s 5,000 fastest-growing companies. Now how did they pull that off? Obviously they’ve got great products, great service. But what’s also true is online sales now make up more than two-thirds of their annual revenue. Think about that. You got a downtown department store; now two-thirds of its sales are online. It can process more than 1,000 orders a day, and its workforce has more than doubled. So you’ve got a local business with a global footprint because of technology. Now, if you can do this in snowy U.P. -- we can do it all across America. In fact, many places already are. So in Wagner, South Dakota, patients can receive high-quality, lifesaving medical care from a Sioux Falls specialist who can monitor their EKG and listen to their breathing -- from 100 miles away. In Ten Sleep, Wyoming -- I love the name of that town, Ten Sleep -- it’s a town in Wyoming of 300 people. A fiber-optic network allowed a company to employ several hundred teachers who teach English to students in Asia over the Internet, 24 hours a day. You’ve all heard about outsourcing. Well, this is “insourcing” -- where overseas work is done right here in the United States of America.

So we want to multiply these stories -- we want to multiply your story -- all over the country. We want to invest in the next generation of high-speed wireless coverage for 98 percent of Americans. This isn’t just about faster Internet or being able to find a friend on Facebook. It’s about connecting every corner of America to the digital age. It’s about a rural community in Iowa or Alabama where farmers can monitor weather across the state and market across the globe. It’s about an entrepreneur on Main Street with a great idea she hopes to sell to the big city. It’s about every young person who no longer has to leave his hometown to seek new opportunity -- because opportunity is right there at his or her fingertips.

So to make this happen, we’re going to invest in research and development of emerging technologies and applications. We’re going to accelerate breakthroughs in health and education and transportation, and deploy a new nationwide, interoperable wireless network for first responders -- making sure they’ve got the funding and the frequencies that they were promised and that they need to keep us safe. It’s important. By selling private companies the rights to these airwaves, we won’t just encourage private investment and expand wireless access; we’re actually going to bring in revenues that lower our deficits.

Now, access to high-speed Internet by itself won’t make a business more successful, or a student smarter, or a citizen more informed. That takes hard work. It takes those late nights. It takes hustle. It takes that quintessentially American drive to be the best. That’s what’s the most important ingredient for our success. But we’ve always believed that we have a responsibility to guarantee all our people every tool necessary for them to meet their full potential. So if they’re willing to work hard, they can succeed. And in a 21st-century economy, that has never been more important. Every American deserves access to the world’s information. Every American deserves access to the global economy. We have promised this for 15 years. It’s time we delivered on that promise. It’s time we delivered on that promise. So connecting our people. Competing with the rest of the world. Living within our means without sacrificing what’s required to win the future. We can do all this because we’ve done it before. In 1960, at the height of his presidential campaign, JFK came to Michigan. And it was a moment similar to this one. Other nations were doing their best to try to take our place at the top. And here in Michigan, he made it clear that if we wanted to keep from being knocked off our perch, there could only be one goal for the United States. It could be summed up in one word: “first.” First.

“I do not mean first, but,” he said. “I don’t mean first, when. I don’t mean first, if. I mean first -- period.” And “The real question now,” he continued, “The real question,” he continued, “is whether we’re up to the task -- whether each and every one of us is willing to face the facts, to bear the burdens, to provide the risks, and to meet our dangers.” That was 50 years ago. But things haven’t changed in terms of what’s required to succeed. And we were up to the task then. I believe we’re up to the task today. Time and again, whether westward or skyward, with each rail and road that we’ve laid, in every community, we’ve connected with our own science and imagination, and we forged anew our faith that we can do anything. We do big things. That’s who we are. And that’s who we’re going to have to be again -- a young nation that teaches the world to march forward. That’s what you’re doing up here in U.P. That’s what you’re doing here at Northern Michigan University. That’s what we’re all going to do together in the months and years to come. Thank you. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Remarks on the Historic Revolution in Egypt

There are very few moments in our lives where we have the privilege to witness history taking place. This is one of those moments. This is one of those times. The people of Egypt have spoken, their voices have been heard, and Egypt will never be the same.

By stepping down, President Mubarak responded to the Egyptian people’s hunger for change. But this is not the end of Egypt’s transition. It’s a beginning. I’m sure there will be difficult days ahead, and many questions remain unanswered. But I am confident that the people of Egypt can find the answers, and do so peacefully, constructively, and in the spirit of unity that has defined these last few weeks. For Egyptians have made it clear that nothing less than genuine democracy will carry the day.

The military has served patriotically and responsibly as a caretaker to the state, and will now have to ensure a transition that is credible in the eyes of the Egyptian people. That means protecting the rights of Egypt’s citizens, lifting the emergency law, revising the constitution and other laws to make this change irreversible, and laying out a clear path to elections that are fair and free. Above all, this transition must bring all of Egypt’s voices to the table. For the spirit of peaceful protest and perseverance that the Egyptian people have shown can serve as a powerful wind at the back of this change.

The United States will continue to be a friend and partner to Egypt. We stand ready to provide whatever assistance is necessary -- and asked for -- to pursue a credible transition to a democracy. I’m also confident that the same ingenuity and entrepreneurial spirit that the young people of Egypt have shown in recent days can be harnessed to create new opportunity -- jobs and businesses that allow the extraordinary potential of this generation to take flight. And I know that a democratic Egypt can advance its role of responsible leadership not only in the region but around the world.

Egypt has played a pivotal role in human history for over 6,000 years. But over the last few weeks, the wheel of history turned at a blinding pace as the Egyptian people demanded their universal rights.

We saw mothers and fathers carrying their children on their shoulders to show them what true freedom might look like.

We saw a young Egyptian say, “For the first time in my life, I really count. My voice is heard. Even though I’m only one person, this is the way real democracy works.”

We saw protesters chant “Selmiyya, selmiyya” -- “We are peaceful” -- again and again.

We saw a military that would not fire bullets at the people they were sworn to protect.

And we saw doctors and nurses rushing into the streets to care for those who were wounded, volunteers checking protesters to ensure that they were unarmed.

We saw people of faith praying together and chanting – “Muslims, Christians, We are one.” And though we know that the strains between faiths still divide too many in this world and no single event will close that chasm immediately, these scenes remind us that we need not be defined by our differences. We can be defined by the common humanity that we share.

And above all, we saw a new generation emerge -- a generation that uses their own creativity and talent and technology to call for a government that represented their hopes and not their fears; a government that is responsive to their boundless aspirations. One Egyptian put it simply: Most people have discovered in the last few days…that they are worth something, and this cannot be taken away from them anymore, ever.

This is the power of human dignity, and it can never be denied. Egyptians have inspired us, and they’ve done so by putting the lie to the idea that justice is best gained through violence. For in Egypt, it was the moral force of nonviolence -- not terrorism, not mindless killing -- but nonviolence, moral force that bent the arc of history toward justice once more. And while the sights and sounds that we heard were entirely Egyptian, we can’t help but hear the echoes of history -- echoes from Germans tearing down a wall, Indonesian students taking to the streets, Gandhi leading his people down the path of justice.

As Martin Luther King said in celebrating the birth of a new nation in Ghana while trying to perfect his own, “There is something in the soul that cries out for freedom.” Those were the cries that came from Tahrir Square, and the entire world has taken note.

Today belongs to the people of Egypt, and the American people are moved by these scenes in Cairo and across Egypt because of who we are as a people and the kind of world that we want our children to grow up in.

The word Tahrir means liberation. It is a word that speaks to that something in our souls that cries out for freedom. And forevermore it will remind us of the Egyptian people -- of what they did, of the things that they stood for, and how they changed their country, and in doing so changed the world.

Thank you.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address on Libya: The Violence Must Stop

Good afternoon, everybody. Secretary Clinton and I just concluded a

meeting that focused on the ongoing situation in Libya. Over the last few days, my national security team has been working around the clock to monitor the situation there and to coordinate with our international partners about a way forward.

First, we are doing everything we can to protect American citizens. That is my highest priority. In Libya, we've urged our people to leave the country and the State Department is assisting those in need of support. Meanwhile, I think all Americans should give thanks to the heroic work that's being done by our foreign service officers and the men and women serving in our embassies and consulates around the world. They represent the very best of our country and its values.

Now, throughout this period of unrest and upheaval across the region the United States has maintained a set of core principles which guide our approach. These principles apply to the situation in Libya. As I said last week, we strongly condemn the use of violence in Libya.

The American people extend our deepest condolences to the families and loved ones of all who’ve been killed and injured. The suffering and bloodshed is outrageous and it is unacceptable. So are threats and orders to shoot peaceful protesters and further punish the people of Libya. These actions violate international norms and every standard of common decency. This violence must stop.

The United States also strongly supports the universal rights of the Libyan people. That includes the rights of peaceful assembly, free speech, and the ability of the Libyan people to determine their own destiny. These are human rights. They are not negotiable. They must be respected in every country. And they cannot be denied through violence or suppression.

In a volatile situation like this one, it is imperative that the nations and peoples of the world speak with one voice, and that has been our focus. Yesterday a unanimous U.N. Security Council sent a clear message that it condemns the violence in Libya, supports accountability for the perpetrators, and stands with the Libyan people.

This same message, by the way, has been delivered by the European Union, the Arab League, the African Union, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and many individual nations. North and south, east and west, voices are being raised together to oppose suppression and support the rights of the Libyan people.

I’ve also asked my administration to prepare the full range of options that we have to respond to this crisis. This includes those actions we may take and those we will coordinate with our allies and partners, or those that we’ll carry out through multilateral institutions.

Like all governments, the Libyan government has a responsibility to refrain from violence, to allow humanitarian assistance to reach those in need, and to respect the rights of its people. It must be held accountable for its failure to meet those responsibilities, and face the cost of continued violations of human rights.

This is not simply a concern of the United States. The entire world is watching, and we will coordinate our assistance and accountability measures with the international community. To that end, Secretary Clinton and I have asked Bill Burns, our Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, to make several stops in Europe and the region to intensify our consultations with allies and partners about the situation in Libya.

I’ve also asked Secretary Clinton to travel to Geneva on Monday, where a number of foreign ministers will convene for a session of the Human Rights Council. There she’ll hold consultations with her counterparts on events throughout the region and continue to ensure that we join with the international community to speak with one voice to the government and the people of Libya.

And even as we are focused on the urgent situation in Libya, let me just say that our efforts continue to address the events taking place elsewhere, including how the international community can most effectively support the peaceful transition to democracy in both Tunisia and in Egypt.

So let me be clear. The change that is taking place across the region is being driven by the people of the region. This change doesn’t represent the work of the United States or any foreign power. It represents the aspirations of people who are seeking a better life.

As one Libyan said, “We just want to be able to live like human beings.” We just want to be able to live like human beings. It is the most basic of aspirations that is driving this change. And throughout this time of transition, the United States will continue to stand up for freedom, stand up for justice, and stand up for the dignity of all people.

Thank you very much.

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# Address on Libya

Good afternoon, everybody.

I want to take this opportunity to update the American people about the situation in Libya. Over the last several weeks, the world has watched events unfold in Libya with hope and alarm. Last month, protesters took to the streets across the country to demand their universal rights, and a government that is accountable to them and responsive to their aspirations. But they were met with an iron fist.

Within days, whole parts of the country declared their independence from a brutal regime, and members of the government serving in Libya and abroad chose to align themselves with the forces of change. Moammar Qaddafi clearly lost the confidence of his own people and the legitimacy to lead.

Instead of respecting the rights of his own people, Qaddafi chose the path of brutal suppression. Innocent civilians were beaten, imprisoned, and in some cases killed. Peaceful protests were forcefully put down. Hospitals were attacked and patients disappeared. A campaign of intimidation and repression began.

In the face of this injustice, the United States and the international community moved swiftly. Sanctions were put in place by the United States and our allies and partners. The U.N. Security Council imposed further sanctions, an arms embargo, and the specter of international accountability for Qaddafi and those around him. Humanitarian assistance was positioned on Libya’s borders, and those displaced by the violence received our help. Ample warning was given that Qaddafi needed to stop his campaign of repression, or be held accountable. The Arab League and the European Union joined us in calling for an end to violence.

Once again, Qaddafi chose to ignore the will of his people and the international community. Instead, he launched a military campaign against his own people. And there should be no doubt about his intentions, because he himself has made them clear.

For decades, he has demonstrated a willingness to use brute force through his sponsorship of terrorism against the American people as well as others, and through the killings that he has carried out within his own borders. And just yesterday, speaking of the city of Benghazi -- a city of roughly 700,000 people -- he threatened, and I quote: “We will have no mercy and no pity” -- no mercy on his own citizens.

Now, here is why this matters to us. Left unchecked, we have every reason to believe that Qaddafi would commit atrocities against his people. Many thousands could die. A humanitarian crisis would ensue. The entire region could be destabilized, endangering many of our allies and partners. The calls of the Libyan people for help would go unanswered. The democratic values that we stand for would be overrun. Moreover, the words of the international community would be rendered hollow.

And that’s why the United States has worked with our allies and partners to shape a strong international response at the United Nations. Our focus has been clear: protecting innocent civilians within Libya, and holding the Qaddafi regime accountable.

Yesterday, in response to a call for action by the Libyan people and the Arab League, the U.N. Security Council passed a strong resolution that demands an end to the violence against citizens. It authorizes the use of force with an explicit commitment to pursue all necessary measures to stop the killing, to include the enforcement of a no-fly zone over Libya. It also strengthens our sanctions and the enforcement of an arms embargo against the Qaddafi regime.

Now, once more, Moammar Qaddafi has a choice. The resolution that passed lays out very clear conditions that must be met. The United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Arab states agree that a cease-fire must be implemented immediately. That means all attacks against civilians must stop. Qaddafi must stop his troops from advancing on Benghazi, pull them back from Ajdabiya, Misrata, and Zawiya, and establish water, electricity and gas supplies to all areas. Humanitarian assistance must be allowed to reach the people of Libya.

Let me be clear, these terms are not negotiable. These terms are not subject to negotiation. If Qaddafi does not comply with the resolution, the international community will impose consequences, and the resolution will be enforced through military action.

In this effort, the United States is prepared to act as part of an international coalition. American leadership is essential, but that does not mean acting alone -– it means shaping the conditions for the international community to act together.

That’s why I have directed Secretary Gates and our military to coordinate their planning, and tomorrow Secretary Clinton will travel to Paris for a meeting with our European allies and Arab partners about the enforcement of Resolution 1973. We will provide the unique capabilities that we can bring to bear to stop the violence against civilians, including enabling our European allies and Arab partners to effectively enforce a no fly zone. I have no doubt that the men and women of our military are capable of carrying out this mission. Once more, they have the thanks of a grateful nation and the admiration of the world.

I also want to be clear about what we will not be doing. The United States is not going to deploy ground troops into Libya. And we are not going to use force to go beyond a well-defined goal --- specifically, the protection of civilians in Libya. In the coming weeks, we will continue to help the Libyan people with humanitarian and economic assistance so that they can fulfill their aspirations peacefully.

Now, the United States did not seek this outcome. Our decisions have been driven by Qaddafi’s refusal to respect the rights of his people, and the potential for mass murder of innocent civilians. It is not an action that we will pursue alone. Indeed, our British and French allies, and members of the Arab League, have already committed to take a leadership role in the enforcement of this resolution, just as they were instrumental in pursuing it. We are coordinating closely with them. And this is precisely how the international community should work, as more nations bear both the responsibility and the cost of enforcing international law.

This is just one more chapter in the change that is unfolding across the Middle East and North Africa. From the beginning of these protests, we have made it clear that we are opposed to violence. We have made clear our support for a set of universal values, and our support for the political and economic change that the people of the region deserve. But I want to be clear: the change in the region will not and cannot be imposed by the United States or any foreign power; ultimately, it will be driven by the people of the Arab World. It is their right and their responsibility to determine their own destiny.

Let me close by saying that there is no decision I face as your Commander in Chief that I consider as carefully as the decision to ask our men and women to use military force. Particularly at a time when our military is fighting in Afghanistan and winding down our activities in Iraq, that decision is only made more difficult. But the United States of America will not stand idly by in the face of actions that undermine global peace and security. So I have taken this decision with the confidence that action is necessary, and that we will not be acting alone. Our goal is focused, our cause is just, and our coalition is strong.

Thank you very much.

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# On the Authorization of Odyssey Dawn

Good afternoon, everybody. Today I authorized the Armed Forces of the United States to begin a limited military action in Libya in support of an international effort to protect Libyan civilians. That action has now begun.

In this effort, the United States is acting with a broad coalition that is committed to enforcing United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973, which calls for the protection of the Libyan people. That coalition met in Paris today to send a unified message, and it brings together many of our European and Arab partners.

This is not an outcome that the United States or any of our partners sought. Even yesterday, the international community offered Muammar Qaddafi the opportunity to pursue an immediate cease-fire, one that stopped the violence against civilians and the advances of Qaddafi’s forces. But despite the hollow words of his government, he has ignored that opportunity. His attacks on his own people have continued. His forces have been on the move. And the danger faced by the people of Libya has grown.

I am deeply aware of the risks of any military action, no matter what limits we place on it. I want the American people to know that the use of force is not our first choice and it’s not a choice that I make lightly. But we cannot stand idly by when a tyrant tells his people that there will be no mercy, and his forces step up their assaults on cities like Benghazi and Misurata, where innocent men and women face brutality and death at the hands of their own government.

So we must be clear: Actions have consequences, and the writ of the international community must be enforced. That is the cause of this coalition.

As a part of this effort, the United States will contribute our unique capabilities at the front end of the mission to protect Libyan civilians, and enable the enforcement of a no-fly zone that will be led by our international partners. And as I said yesterday, we will not -- I repeat -- we will not deploy any U.S. troops on the ground.

As Commander-in-Chief, I have great confidence in the men and women of our military who will carry out this mission. They carry with them the respect of a grateful nation.

I'm also proud that we are acting as part of a coalition that includes close allies and partners who are prepared to meet their responsibility to protect the people of Libya and uphold the mandate of the international community.

I've acted after consulting with my national security team, and Republican and Democratic leaders of Congress. And in the coming hours and days, my administration will keep the American people fully informed. But make no mistake: Today we are part of a broad coalition. We are answering the calls of a threatened people. And we are acting in the interests of the United States and the world.

Thank you very much.

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# Speech to the People of Rio de Janeiro

President Obama: Hello, Rio de Janeiro!

Audience: Hello!

Audience Member: Many welcomes!

President Obama: Alo! Cidade! Maravilhoso! Boa tarde, todo o povo brasileiro.

Since the moment we arrived, the people of this nation have graciously shown my family the warmth and generosity of the Brazilian spirit. Obrigado. Thank you. And I want to give a special thanks to all of you for being here, because I've been told that there’s a Vasco football game coming. Botafogo -- So I know that -- I realize Brazilians don’t give up their soccer very easily.

Now, one of my earliest impressions of Brazil was a movie I saw with my mother as a very young child, a movie called Black Orpheus, that is set in the favelas of Rio during Carnival. And my mother loved that movie, with its singing and dancing against the backdrop of the beautiful green hills. And it first premiered as a play right here in Teatro Municipal. That's my understanding.

And my mother is gone now, but she would have never imagined that her son’s first trip to Brazil would be as President of the United States. She would have never imagined that. And I never imagined that this country would be even more beautiful than it was in the movie. You are, as Jorge Ben-Jor sang, “A tropical country, blessed by God, and beautiful by nature.”

I’ve seen that beauty in the cascading hillsides, in your endless miles of sand and ocean, and in the vibrant, diverse gatherings of brasileiros who have come here today.

And we have a wonderfully mixed group. We have Cariocas and Paulistas, Baianas, Mineiros. We’ve got men and women from the cities to the interior, and so many young people here who are the great future of this great nation.

Now, yesterday, I met with your wonderful new President, Dilma Rousseff, and talked about how we can strengthen the partnership between our governments. But today, I want to speak directly to the Brazilian people about how we can strengthen the friendship between our nations. I’ve come here to share some ideas because I want to speak of the values that we share, the hopes that we have in common, and the difference that we can make together.

When you think about it, the journeys of the United States of America and Brazil began in similar ways. Our lands are rich with God’s creation, home to ancient and indigenous peoples. From overseas, the Americas were discovered by men who sought a New World, and settled by pioneers who pushed westward, across vast frontiers. We became colonies claimed by distant crowns, but soon declared our independence. We then welcomed waves of immigrants to our shores, and eventually after a long struggle, we cleansed the stain of slavery from our land.

The United States was the first nation to recognize Brazil’s independence, and set up a diplomatic outpost in this country. The first head of state to visit the United States was the leader of Brazil, Dom Pedro II. In the Second World War, our brave men and women fought side-by-side for freedom. And after the war, both of our nations struggled to achieve the full blessings of liberty.

On the streets of the United States, men and women marched and bled and some died so that every citizen could enjoy the same freedoms and opportunities -- no matter what you looked like, no matter where you came from.

In Brazil, you fought against two decades of dictatorships for the same right to be heard -– the right to be free from fear, free from want. And yet, for years, democracy and development were slow to take hold, and millions suffered as a result.

But I come here today because those days have passed. Brazil today is a flourishing democracy -- a place where people are free to speak their mind and choose their leaders; where a poor kid from Pernambuco can rise from the floors of a copper factory to the highest office in Brazil.

Over the last decade, the progress made by the Brazilian people has inspired the world. More than half of this nation is now considered middle class. Millions have been lifted from poverty. For the first time, hope is returning to places where fear had long prevailed. I saw this today when I visited Cidade de Deus -- the City of God.

It isn’t just the new security efforts and social programs -- and I want to congratulate the mayor and the governor for the excellent work that they’re doing. But it’s also a change in attitudes. As one young resident said, “People have to look at favelas not with pity, but as a source of presidents and lawyers and doctors, artists, [and] people with solutions.”

With each passing day, Brazil is a country with more solutions. In the global community, you’ve gone from relying on the help of other nations, to now helping fight poverty and disease wherever they exist. You play an important role in the global institutions that protect our common security and promote our common prosperity. And you will welcome the world to your shores when the World Cup and the Olympic games come to Rio de Janeiro.

Now, you may be aware that this city was not my first choice for the Summer Olympics. But if the games could not be held in Chicago, then there’s no place I’d rather see them than right here in Rio. And I intend to come back in 2016 to watch what happens.

For so long, Brazil was a nation brimming with potential but held back by politics, both at home and abroad. For so long, you were called a country of the future, told to wait for a better day that was always just around the corner.

Meus amigos, that day has finally come. And this is a country of the future no more. The people of Brazil should know that the future has arrived. It is here now. And it’s time to seize it.

Now, our countries have not always agreed on everything. And just like many nations, we’re going to have our differences of opinion going forward. But I’m here to tell you that the American people don’t just recognize Brazil’s success -- we root for Brazil’s success. As you confront the many challenges you still face at home as well as abroad, let us stand together -- not as senior and junior partners, but as equal partners, joined in a spirit of mutual interest and mutual respect, committed to the progress that I know that we can make together. I'm confident we can do it.

Together we can advance our common prosperity. As two of the world’s largest economies, we worked side by side during the financial crisis to restore growth and confidence. And to keep our economies growing, we know what’s necessary in both of our nations. We need a skilled, educated workforce -- which is why American and Brazilian companies have pledged to help increase student exchanges between our two nations.

We need a commitment to innovation and technology -- which is why we've agreed to expand cooperation between our scientists, researchers, and engineers.

We need world-class infrastructure -- which is why American companies want to help you build and prepare this city for Olympic success.

In a global economy, the United States and Brazil should expand trade, expand investment, so that we create new jobs and new opportunities in both of our nations. And that's why we're working to break down barriers to doing business. That's why we're building closer relationships between our workers and our entrepreneurs.

Together we can also promote energy security and protect our beautiful planet. As two nations that are committed to greener economies, we know that the ultimate solution to our energy challenges lies in clean and renewable power. And that’s why half the vehicles in this country can run on biofuels, and most of your electricity comes from hydropower. That’s also why, in the United States, we’ve jumpstarted a new clean energy industry. And that’s why the United States and Brazil are creating new energy partnerships -- to share technologies, create new jobs, and leave our children a world that is cleaner and safer than we found it.

Together, our two nations can also help defend our citizens’ security. We’re working together to stop narco-trafficking that has destroyed too many lives in this hemisphere. We seek the goal of a world without nuclear weapons. We’re working together to enhance nuclear security across our hemisphere. From Africa to Haiti, we are working side by side to combat the hunger, disease, and corruption that can rot a society and rob human beings of dignity and opportunity. And as two countries that have been greatly enriched by our African heritage, it’s absolutely vital that we are working with the continent of Africa to help lift it up. That is something that we should be committed to doing together.

Today, we’re both also delivering assistance and support to the Japanese people at their greatest hour of need. The ties that bind our nations to Japan are strong. In Brazil, you are home to the largest Japanese population outside of Japan. In the United States, we forged an alliance of more than 60 years. The people of Japan are some of our closest friends, and we will pray with them, and stand with them, and rebuild with them until this crisis has passed.

In these and other efforts to promote peace and prosperity throughout the world, the United States and Brazil are partners not just because we share history, not just because we’re in the same hemisphere; not just because we share ties of commerce and culture, but also because we share certain enduring values and ideals.

We both believe in the power and promise of democracy. We believe that no other form of government is more effective at promoting growth and prosperity that reaches every human being -- not just some but all. And those who argue otherwise, those who argue that democracy stands in the way of economic progress, they must contend with the example of Brazil.

The millions in this country who have climbed from poverty into the middle class, they could not do so in a closed economy controlled by the state. You’re prospering as a free people with open markets and a government that answers to its citizens. You’re proving that the goal of social justice and social inclusion can be best achieved through freedom -– that democracy is the greatest partner of human progress.

We also believe that in nations as big and diverse as ours, shaped by generations of immigrants from every race and faith and background, democracy offers the best hope that every citizen is treated with dignity and respect, and that we can resolve our differences peacefully, that we find strength in our diversity.

We know that experience in the United States. We know how important it is to be able to work together -- even when we often disagree. I understand that our chosen form of government can be slow and messy. We understand that democracy must be constantly strengthened and perfected over time. We know that different nations take different paths to realize the promise of democracy. And we understand that no one nation should impose its will on another.

But we also know that there’s certain aspirations shared by every human being: We all seek to be free. We all seek to be heard. We all yearn to live without fear or discrimination. We all yearn to choose how we are governed. And we all want to shape our own destiny. These are not American ideals or Brazilian ideals. These are not Western ideals. These are universal rights, and we must support them everywhere.

Today, we are seeing the struggle for these rights unfold across the Middle East and North Africa. We’ve seen a revolution born out of a yearning for basic human dignity in Tunisia. We’ve seen peaceful protestors pour into Tahrir Square -- men and women, young and old, Christian and Muslim. We’ve seen the people of Libya take a courageous stand against a regime determined to brutalize its own citizens. Across the region, we’ve seen young people rise up -- a new generation demanding the right to determine their own future.

From the beginning, we have made clear that the change they seek must be driven by their own people. But for our two nations, for the United States and Brazil, two nations who have struggled over many generations to perfect our own democracies, the United States and Brazil know that the future of the Arab World will be determined by its people.

No one can say for certain how this change will end, but I do know that change is not something that we should fear. When young people insist that the currents of history are on the move, the burdens of the past can be washed away. When men and women peacefully claim their human rights, our own common humanity is enhanced. Wherever the light of freedom is lit, the world becomes a brighter place.

That is the example of Brazil. That is the example of Brazil. Brazil -- a country that shows that a dictatorship can become a thriving democracy. Brazil -- a country that shows democracy delivers both freedom and opportunity to its people. Brazil -- a country that shows how a call for change that starts in the streets can transform a city, transform a country, transform a world.

Decades ago, it was directly outside of this theater, in Cinelandia Square, where the call for change was heard in Brazil. Students and artists and political leaders of all stripes would gather with banners that said, “Down with the dictatorship. The people in power.” Their democratic aspirations would not be fulfilled until years later, but one of the young Brazilians in that generation’s movement would go on to forever change the history of this country.

A child of an immigrant, her participation in the movement led to her arrest and her imprisonment, her torture at the hands of her own government. And so she knows what it’s like to live without the most basic human rights that so many are fighting for today. But she also knows what it is to persevere. She knows what it is to overcome -- because today that woman is your nation’s president, Dilma Rousseff.

Our two nations face many challenges. On the road ahead, we will certainly encounter many obstacles. But in the end, it is our history that gives us hope for a better tomorrow. It is the knowledge that the men and women who came before us have triumphed over greater trials than these -- that we live in places where ordinary people have done extraordinary things.

It’s that sense of possibility, that sense of optimism that first drew pioneers to this New World. It’s what binds our nations together as partners in this new century. It’s why we believe, in the words of Paul Coelho, one of your most famous writers, “With the strength of our love and our will, we can change our destiny, as well as the destiny of many others.”

Muito obrigado. Thank you. And may God bless our two nations. Thank you very much.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address on Latin American to the People of Chile

Thank you. Buenas tardes. It is a wonderful honor to be here in Santiago, Chile. And I want to, first of all, thank your President, President Pinera, for his outstanding leadership and the hospitality that he’s extended not only to me but also to my wife, my daughters, and, most importantly, my mother-in-law.

To the people of Santiago, to the people of Chile, thank you so much for your wonderful welcome. And on behalf of the people of the United States, let me thank you for your friendship and the strong bonds between our people.

There are several people that I just want to acknowledge very briefly. We have the President of the Inter-American Development Bank, Luis Alberto Moreno, who is here. We also have Alicia BÃ¡rcena, who is the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Throughout our history, this land has been called “el fin de la tierra” -- the end of the world. But I’ve come here today because in the 21st century this nation is a vital part of our interconnected world. In an age when peoples are intertwined like never before, Chile shows that we need not be divided by race or religion or ethnic conflict. You’ve welcomed immigrants from every corner of the globe, even as you celebrate a proud indigenous heritage.

At a time when people around the world are reaching for their freedoms, Chile shows that, yes, it is possible to transition from dictatorship to democracy -- and to do so peacefully. Indeed, our marvelous surroundings today, just steps from where Chile lost its democracy decades ago, is a testament to Chile’s progress and its undying democratic spirit.

Despite barriers of distance and geography, you’ve integrated Chile into the global economy, trading with countries all over the world and, in this Internet age, becoming the most digitally connected country in Latin America.

And in a world of sometimes wrenching pain -- as we’re seeing today in Japan -- it is the character of this country that inspires. “Our original guiding stars,” said Pablo Neruda, “are struggle and hope.” But, he added, “there is no such thing as a lone struggle, no such thing as a lone hope.” The Chilean people have shown this time and again, including your recovery from the terrible earthquake here one year ago.

Credit for Chile’s success belongs to the Chilean people, whose courage, sacrifices and perseverance built this nation into the leader that it is. And we are very honored to be joined today by four leaders who have guided this nation through years of great progress -- Presidents Aylwin, Frei, Lagos, and of course your current President Pinera. Thank you all, to the former Presidents, for being here, as well as President Pinera.

So I could not imagine a more fitting place to discuss the new era of partnership that the United States is pursuing not only with Chile, but across the Americas. And I’m grateful that we’re joined by leaders and members of the diplomatic corps from across the region.

Within my first 100 days in office, one of my first foreign trips as President, I traveled to Trinidad and Tobago to meet with leaders from across the hemisphere at the Summit of the Americas. And there, I pledged to seek partnerships of equality and shared responsibility, based on mutual interest and mutual respect, but also on shared values.

Now, I know I’m not the first president from the United States to pledge a new spirit of partnership with our Latin American neighbors. Words are easy, and I know that there have been times where perhaps the United States took this region for granted.

Even now, I know our headlines are often dominated by events in other parts of the world. But let’s never forget: Every day, the future is being forged by the countries and peoples of Latin America. For Latin America is not the old stereotype of a region of -- in perpetual conflict or trapped in endless cycles of poverty. The world must now recognize Latin America for the dynamic and growing region that it truly is. Latin America is at peace. Civil wars have ended. Insurgencies have been pushed back. Old border disputes have been resolved. In Colombia, great sacrifices by citizens and security forces have restored a level of security not seen in decades.

And just as old conflicts have receded, so too have the ideological battles that often fueled them -- the old stale debates between state-run economies and unbridled capitalism; between the abuses of right-wing paramilitaries and left-wing insurgents; between those who believe that the United States causes all the region’s problems and those who believe that the United States ignores all the problems. Those are false choices, and they don’t reflect today’s realities.

Today, Latin America is democratic. Virtually all the people of Latin America have gone from living under dictatorships to living in democracies. Across the region, we see vibrant democracies, from Mexico to Chile to Costa Rica. We’ve seen historic peaceful transfers of power, from El Salvador to Uruguay to Paraguay. The work of perfecting our democracies, of course, is never truly done, but this is the outstanding progress that’s been made here in the Americas.

Today, Latin America is growing. Having made tough but necessary reforms, nations like Peru and Brazil are seeing impressive growth. As a result, Latin America weathered the global economic downturn better than other regions. Across the region, tens of millions of people have been lifted from extreme poverty. From Guadalajara to Santiago to Sao Paolo, a new middle class is demanding more of themselves and more of their governments.

Latin America is coming together to address shared challenges. Chile, Colombia and Mexico are sharing their expertise in security with nations in Central America. When a coup in Honduras threatened democratic progress, the nations of the hemisphere unanimously invoked the Inter-American Democratic Charter, helping to lay the foundation for the return to the rule of law. The contributions of Latin American countries have been critical in Haiti, as has Latin American diplomacy in the lead up to yesterday’s election in Haiti.

And increasingly, Latin America is contributing to global prosperity and security. As longtime contributors to United Nations peacekeeping missions, Latin American nations have helped to prevent conflicts from Africa to Asia. At the G20, nations like Mexico, Brazil, Argentina now have a greater voice in global economic decision-making. Under Mexican leadership, the world made progress at Cancun in our efforts to combat climate change. Nations like Chile have played a leading role in strengthening civil society groups around the world.

So this is the Latin America that I see today -- a region on the move, proud of its progress, and ready to assume a greater role in world affairs. And for all these reasons, I believe that Latin America is more important to the prosperity and security of the United States than ever before. With no other region does the United States have so many connections. And nowhere do we see that more than in the tens of millions of Hispanic Americans across the United States, who enrich our society, grow our economy and strengthen our nation every single day.

And I believe Latin America is only going to become more important to the United States, especially to our economy. Trade between the United States and Latin America has surged. We buy more of your products, more of your goods than any other country, and we invest more in this region than any other country.

For instance, we export more than three times as much to Latin America as we do to China. Our exports to this region -- which are growing faster than our exports to the rest of the world -- will soon support more than 2 million U.S. jobs. In other words, when Latin America is more prosperous, the United States is more prosperous.

But even more than interests, we’re bound by shared values. In each other’s journey we see reflections of our own. Colonists who broke free from empires. Pioneers who opened new frontiers. Citizens who have struggled to expand our nations’ promise to all people -- men and women, white, black and brown. We’re people of faith who must remember that all of us -- especially the most fortunate among us -- must do our part, especially for the least among us. We’re citizens who know that ensuring that democracies deliver for our people must be the work of all.

This is our common history. This is our common heritage. We are all Americans. Todos somos Americanos.

Across the Americas, parents want their children to be able to run and play and know that they’ll come home safely. Young people all desperately want an education. Fathers want the dignity that comes from work, and women want the same opportunities as their husbands. Entrepreneurs want the chance to start that new business. And people everywhere want to be treated with the respect to which every human being is entitled. These are the hopes -- simple yet profound -- that beat in the hearts of millions across the Americas.

But if we’re honest, we’ll also admit that that these dreams are still beyond the reach of too many; that progress in the Americas has not come fast enough. Not for the millions who endure the injustice of extreme poverty. Not for the children in shantytowns and the favelas who just want the same chance as everybody else. Not for the communities that are caught in the brutal grips of cartels and gangs, where the police are outgunned and too many people live in fear.

And despite this region’s democratic progress, stark inequalities endure. In political and economic power that is too often concentrated in the hands of the few, instead of serving the many. In the corruption that too often still stifles economic growth and development, innovation and entrepreneurship. And in some leaders who cling to bankrupt ideologies to justify their own power and who seek to silence their opponents because those opponents have the audacity to demand their universal rights. These, too, are realities that we must face.

Of course, we are not the first generation to face these challenges. Fifty years ago this month, President John F. Kennedy proposed an ambitious Alliance for Progress. It was, even by today’s standards, a massive investment -- billions of U.S. dollars to meet the basic needs of people across the region. Such a program was right -- it was appropriate for that era. But the realities of our time -- and the new capabilities and confidence of Latin America -- demand something different.

President Kennedy’s challenge endures -- “to build a hemisphere where all people can hope for a sustainable, suitable standard of living, and all can live out their lives in dignity and in freedom.” But half a century later, we must give meaning to this work in our own way, in a new way.

I believe that in the Americas today, there are no senior partners and there are no junior partners, there are only equal partners. Of course, equal partnerships, in turn, demands a sense of shared responsibility. We have obligations to each other. And today, the United States is working with the nations of this hemisphere to meet our responsibilities in several key areas.

First, we’re partnering to address the concerns that people across the Americas say they worry about the most -- and that's the security of their families and communities. Criminal gangs and narco-traffickers are not only a threat to the security of our citizens. They’re a threat to development, because they scare away investment that economies need to prosper. And they are a direct threat to democracy, because they fuel the corruption that rots institutions from within.

So with our partners from Colombia to Mexico and new regional initiatives in Central America and the Caribbean, we’re confronting this challenge, together, from every direction. We’ve increased our support -- the equipment, training and technologies -- that security forces, border security and police need to keep communities safe. We’re improving coordination and sharing more information so that those who traffic in drugs and in human beings have fewer places to hide. And we’re putting unprecedented pressure on cartel finances, including in the United States.

But we’ll never break the grip of the cartels and the gangs unless we also address the social and economic forces that fuel criminality. We need to reach at-risk youth before they turn to drugs and crime. So we’re joining with partners across the Americas to expand community-based policing, strengthen juvenile justice systems, and invest in crime and drug prevention programs.

As the nations of Central American develop a new regional security strategy, the United States stands ready to do our part through a new partnership that puts the focus where it should be -- on the security of citizens. And with regional and international partners, we’ll make sure our support is not just well-intentioned, but is well-coordinated and well-spent.

I’ve said before and I will repeat, as President I’ve made it clear that the United States shares and accepts our share of responsibility for drug violence. After all, the demand for drugs, including in the United States, drives this crisis. And that’s why we’ve developed a new drug control strategy that focused on reducing the demand for drugs through education and prevention and treatment. And I would point out that even during difficult fiscal times in the United States, we’ve proposed increasing our commitment to these efforts by some $10 billion this year alone.

We’re also doing more to stem the southbound flow of guns into the region. We’re screening all southbound rail cargo. We’re seizing many more guns bound for Mexico and we’re putting more gunrunners behind bars. And every gun or gunrunner that we take off the streets is one less threat to the families and communities of the Americas.

As we work to ensure the security of our citizens, we’re partnering in a second area -- and that's promoting prosperity and opportunity. I’ve been so impressed with President Pinera’s pledge to lift everyone out of extreme poverty by 2020. That's an ambitious goal and an appropriate goal. And with this trip, I’m working to expand some of the trade and investment that might help achieve this goal.

Across the region, we’re moving ahead with “open skies” agreements to bring our people and businesses closer together. We’re moving forward with our Trans-Pacific Partnership -- which includes Chile and Peru -- to create new trade opportunities in the fast-growing markets of the Asia-Pacific. And as I’ve directed, my administration has intensified our efforts to move forward on trade agreements with Panama and Colombia, consistent with our values and with our interests.

We’re also encouraging the next generation of businesses and entrepreneurs. So we’ll work with the Inter-American Development bank to increase lending. We’ve expanded credit under a new Microfinance Growth Fund for the Americas. We’re supporting reforms to tax systems, which are critical for economic growth and public investment. We’re creating new “Pathways to Prosperity” -- microcredit, entrepreneurship training -- for those who must share in economic growth, including women and members of Afro-Caribbean and indigenous communities.

And we’re coming together, as a hemisphere, to create clean energy jobs and pursue more secure and sustainable energy futures. And if anybody doubts the urgency of climate change, they look -- they should look no further than the Americas -- from the stronger storms in the Caribbean, to glacier melt in the Andes, to the loss of forests and farmland across the region.

Under the Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas that I proposed, countries have stepped forward, each providing leadership and expertise. Brazil has expertise in biofuels. Chile in geothermal. Mexico on energy efficiency. El Salvador is connecting grids in Central America to make electricity more reliable. These are exactly the kind of partnerships that we need -- neighbors joining with neighbors to unleash the progress that none of us can achieve alone.

It’s the same philosophy behind two additional initiatives that I’m announcing today, which will help our countries educate and innovate for the future. First, we’re launching a new initiative to harness the power of social media and online networks to help students, scientists, academics and entrepreneurs collaborate and develop the new ideas and products that will keep America -- the Americas competitive in a global economy.

And I’m proud to announce that the United States will work with partners in this region, including the private sector, to increase the number of U.S. students studying in Latin America to 100,000, and the number of Latin America students studying in the United States to 100,000.

Staying competitive also, of course, demands that we address immigration -- an issue that evokes great passions in the United States as well as in the Americas. As President, I’ve made it clear that immigration strengthens the United States. We are a nation of immigrants, which is why I have consistently spoken out against anti-immigrant sentiment. We’re also a nation of laws, which is why I will not waver in my determination to fix our broken immigration system. I’m committed to comprehensive reform that secures our borders, enforces our laws and addresses the millions of undocumented workers who are living in the shadows of the United States.

I believe, though, that this challenge will be with us for a very long time so long as people believe that the only way to provide for their families is to leave their families and head north.

And that’s why the United States has to continue to partner with countries that pursue the broad-based economic growth that gives people and nations a path out of poverty. And that’s what we’re seeing here in Chile. As part of our new approach to development, we’re working with partners, like Guatemala and El Salvador, who are committed to building their own capacity -- from helping farmers improve crop yields to helping health care systems to deliver better care.

Which leads me to the final area where we must continue to partner, and that’s strengthening democracy and human rights. More than 60 years ago, our nations came together in an Organization of American States and declared -- and I quote -- that “representative democracy is an indispensable condition for the stability, peace and development of the region.” A decade ago, we reaffirmed this principle, with an Inter-American Democratic Charter that stated -- and I quote -- “the people of the Americas have a right to democracy and their governments have an obligation to promote and defend it.”

Across the Americas, generations, including generations of Chileans, have struggled and sacrificed to give meaning to these words -- ordinary men and women who dared to speak their mind; activists who organized new movements; faith leaders who preached social justice; the mothers of the disappeared who demanded the truth; political prisoners who rose to become presidents; and, even now, Las Damas de Blanco, who march in quiet dignity.

The people of the Americas have shown that there is no substitute for democracy. As governments, we have then an obligation to defend what has been won. So as we mark the 10th anniversary of the Inter-American Democratic Charter this year, let’s reaffirm the principles that we know to be true.

Let’s recommit to defending democracy and human rights in our own countries by strengthening the institutions that democracy needs to flourish -- free and fair elections in which people choose their own leaders; vibrant legislatures that provide oversight; independent judiciaries that uphold the rule of law; a free press that promotes open debate; professional militaries under civilian control; strong civil societies that hold governments accountable; and governments that are transparent and responsive to their citizens. This is what makes a democracy.

And just as we defend democracy and human rights within our borders, let’s recommit to defending them across our hemisphere. I understand, every nation will follow its own path. No nation should impose its will on another. But surely we can agree that democracy is about more than majority rule, that simply holding power does not give a leader the right to suppress the rights of others, and that leaders must maintain power through consent, and not coercion. We have to speak out when we see those principles violated.

Let’s never waver in our support for the rights of people to determine their own future -- and, yes, that includes the people of Cuba. Since taking office, I’ve announced the most significant changes to my nation’s policy towards Cuba in decades. I’ve made it possible for Cuban Americans to visit and support their families in Cuba. We’re allowing Americans to send remittances that bring some economic hope for people across Cuba, as well as more independence from Cuban authorities.

Going forward, we’ll continue to seek ways to increase the independence of the Cuban people, who I believe are entitled to the same freedom and liberty as everyone else in this hemisphere. I will make this effort to try to break out of this history that’s now lasted for longer than I’ve been alive.

But Cuban authorities must take some meaningful actions to respect the basic rights of their own people -- not because the United States insists upon it, but because the people of Cuba deserve it, no less than the people of the United States or Chile or Brazil or any other country deserve it.

The lessons of Latin America, I believe, can be a guide -- a guide for people around the world who are beginning their own journeys toward democracy. There is no one model for democratic transitions. But as this region knows, successful transitions do have certain ingredients. The moral force of nonviolence. Dialogue that’s open and inclusive. The protection of basic rights, such as peaceful expression and assembly. Accountability for past wrongs. And matching political reform with economic reform, because democracy must meet the basic needs and aspirations of people.

With decades of experience, there’s so much Latin America can now share -- how to build political parties and organize free elections; how to ensure peaceful transfers of power; how to navigate the winding paths of reform and reconciliation. And when the inevitable setbacks occur, you can remind people to never lose sight of those guiding stars of which Pablo Neruda spoke -- struggle, but also hope.

Security for our citizens. Trade and development that creates jobs, prosperity and a clean energy future. Standing up for democracy and human rights. These are the partnerships that we can forge together -- here in the Americas but also around the world. And if anyone doubts whether this region has the capacity to meet these challenges, they need to only remember what happened here in Chile only a few months ago.

Their resolve and faith inspired the world -- “Los Treinta y Tres.” I don’t need to tell you the story. You know it well. But it’s worth remembering how this entire nation came together, across government, civilian and military, national and local; across the private sector, with large companies and small shopkeepers donating supplies; and across every segment of Chilean society, people came together to sustain those men down below and their families up at Camp Esperanza. It was a miraculous rescue. It was a tribute to Chilean leadership. And when, finally, Luis Urzua emerged, he spoke for an entire nation when he said, “I am proud to be Chilean.”

Yet something else happened in those two months. The people and governments of Latin America came together to stand with a neighbor in need. And with a Latin American country in the lead, the world was proud to play a supporting role -- sending workers from the United States and Canada, rescue equipment from Europe, communications gear from Asia. And as the miners were lifted to safety, for those joyous reunions, it was a truly global movement, watched and celebrated by more than a billion people.

If ever we needed a reminder of the humanity and the hopes that we share, that moment in the desert was such. When a country like Chile puts its mind to it, there’s nothing you can’t do. When countries across Latin America come together and focus on a common goal, when the United States and others in the world do our part, there’s nothing we can’t accomplish together.

And that is our vision of the Americas. This is the progress we can achieve together. This is the spirit of partnership and equality to which the United States is committed. I am confident that, working together, there is nothing we cannot achieve. Thank you very much. Muchas gracias.

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# Address to the Nation on Libya

Tonight, I’d like to update the American people on the international effort that we have led in Libya: what we’ve done, what we plan to do, and why this matters to us.

I want to begin by paying tribute to our men and women in uniform who, once again, have acted with courage, professionalism and patriotism. They have moved with incredible speed and strength. Because of them and our dedicated diplomats, a coalition has been forged and countless lives have been saved.

Meanwhile, as we speak, our troops are supporting our ally Japan, leaving Iraq to its people, stopping the Taliban’s momentum in Afghanistan, and going after al Qaeda all across the globe. As Commander-in-Chief, I’m grateful to our soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, and to their families. And I know all Americans share in that sentiment.

For generations, the United States of America has played a unique role as an anchor of global security and as an advocate for human freedom. Mindful of the risks and costs of military action, we are naturally reluctant to use force to solve the world’s many challenges. But when our interests and values are at stake, we have a responsibility to act. That’s what happened in Libya over the course of these last six weeks.

Libya sits directly between Tunisia and Egypt -- two nations that inspired the world when their people rose up to take control of their own destiny. For more than four decades, the Libyan people have been ruled by a tyrant -- Muammar Qaddafi. He has denied his people freedom, exploited their wealth, murdered opponents at home and abroad, and terrorized innocent people around the world -- including Americans who were killed by Libyan agents.

Last month, Qaddafi’s grip of fear appeared to give way to the promise of freedom. In cities and towns across the country, Libyans took to the streets to claim their basic human rights. As one Libyan said, “For the first time we finally have hope that our nightmare of 40 years will soon be over.”

Faced with this opposition, Qaddafi began attacking his people. As President, my immediate concern was the safety of our citizens, so we evacuated our embassy and all Americans who sought our assistance. Then we took a series of swift steps in a matter of days to answer Qaddafi’s aggression. We froze more than $33 billion of Qaddafi’s regime’s assets. Joining with other nations at the United Nations Security Council, we broadened our sanctions, imposed an arms embargo, and enabled Qaddafi and those around him to be held accountable for their crimes. I made it clear that Qaddafi had lost the confidence of his people and the legitimacy to lead, and I said that he needed to step down from power.

In the face of the world’s condemnation, Qaddafi chose to escalate his attacks, launching a military campaign against the Libyan people. Innocent people were targeted for killing. Hospitals and ambulances were attacked. Journalists were arrested, sexually assaulted, and killed. Supplies of food and fuel were choked off. Water for hundreds of thousands of people in Misurata was shut off. Cities and towns were shelled, mosques were destroyed, and apartment buildings reduced to rubble. Military jets and helicopter gunships were unleashed upon people who had no means to defend themselves against assaults from the air.

Confronted by this brutal repression and a looming humanitarian crisis, I ordered warships into the Mediterranean. European allies declared their willingness to commit resources to stop the killing. The Libyan opposition and the Arab League appealed to the world to save lives in Libya. And so at my direction, America led an effort with our allies at the United Nations Security Council to pass a historic resolution that authorized a no-fly zone to stop the regime’s attacks from the air, and further authorized all necessary measures to protect the Libyan people.

Ten days ago, having tried to end the violence without using force, the international community offered Qaddafi a final chance to stop his campaign of killing, or face the consequences. Rather than stand down, his forces continued their advance, bearing down on the city of Benghazi, home to nearly 700,000 men, women and children who sought their freedom from fear.

At this point, the United States and the world faced a choice. Qaddafi declared he would show “no mercy” to his own people. He compared them to rats, and threatened to go door to door to inflict punishment. In the past, we have seen him hang civilians in the streets, and kill over a thousand people in a single day. Now we saw regime forces on the outskirts of the city. We knew that if we wanted -- if we waited one more day, Benghazi, a city nearly the size of Charlotte, could suffer a massacre that would have reverberated across the region and stained the conscience of the world.

It was not in our national interest to let that happen. I refused to let that happen. And so nine days ago, after consulting the bipartisan leadership of Congress, I authorized military action to stop the killing and enforce U.N. Security Council Resolution 1973.

We struck regime forces approaching Benghazi to save that city and the people within it. We hit Qaddafi’s troops in neighboring Ajdabiya, allowing the opposition to drive them out. We hit Qaddafi’s air defenses, which paved the way for a no-fly zone. We targeted tanks and military assets that had been choking off towns and cities, and we cut off much of their source of supply. And tonight, I can report that we have stopped Qaddafi’s deadly advance.

In this effort, the United States has not acted alone. Instead, we have been joined by a strong and growing coalition. This includes our closest allies -- nations like the United Kingdom, France, Canada, Denmark, Norway, Italy, Spain, Greece, and Turkey -- all of whom have fought by our sides for decades. And it includes Arab partners like Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, who have chosen to meet their responsibilities to defend the Libyan people.

To summarize, then: In just one month, the United States has worked with our international partners to mobilize a broad coalition, secure an international mandate to protect civilians, stop an advancing army, prevent a massacre, and establish a no-fly zone with our allies and partners. To lend some perspective on how rapidly this military and diplomatic response came together, when people were being brutalized in Bosnia in the 1990s, it took the international community more than a year to intervene with air power to protect civilians. It took us 31 days.

Moreover, we’ve accomplished these objectives consistent with the pledge that I made to the American people at the outset of our military operations. I said that America’s role would be limited; that we would not put ground troops into Libya; that we would focus our unique capabilities on the front end of the operation and that we would transfer responsibility to our allies and partners. Tonight, we are fulfilling that pledge.

Our most effective alliance, NATO, has taken command of the enforcement of the arms embargo and the no-fly zone. Last night, NATO decided to take on the additional responsibility of protecting Libyan civilians. This transfer from the United States to NATO will take place on Wednesday. Going forward, the lead in enforcing the no-fly zone and protecting civilians on the ground will transition to our allies and partners, and I am fully confident that our coalition will keep the pressure on Qaddafi’s remaining forces.

In that effort, the United States will play a supporting role -- including intelligence, logistical support, search and rescue assistance, and capabilities to jam regime communications. Because of this transition to a broader, NATO-based coalition, the risk and cost of this operation -- to our military and to American taxpayers -- will be reduced significantly.

So for those who doubted our capacity to carry out this operation, I want to be clear: The United States of America has done what we said we would do.

That’s not to say that our work is complete. In addition to our NATO responsibilities, we will work with the international community to provide assistance to the people of Libya, who need food for the hungry and medical care for the wounded. We will safeguard the more than $33 billion that was frozen from the Qaddafi regime so that it’s available to rebuild Libya. After all, the money doesn’t belong to Qaddafi or to us -- it belongs to the Libyan people. And we’ll make sure they receive it.

Tomorrow, Secretary Clinton will go to London, where she will meet with the Libyan opposition and consult with more than 30 nations. These discussions will focus on what kind of political effort is necessary to pressure Qaddafi, while also supporting a transition to the future that the Libyan people deserve -- because while our military mission is narrowly focused on saving lives, we continue to pursue the broader goal of a Libya that belongs not to a dictator, but to its people.

Now, despite the success of our efforts over the past week, I know that some Americans continue to have questions about our efforts in Libya. Qaddafi has not yet stepped down from power, and until he does, Libya will remain dangerous. Moreover, even after Qaddafi does leave power, 40 years of tyranny has left Libya fractured and without strong civil institutions. The transition to a legitimate government that is responsive to the Libyan people will be a difficult task. And while the United States will do our part to help, it will be a task for the international community and -- more importantly -- a task for the Libyan people themselves.

In fact, much of the debate in Washington has put forward a false choice when it comes to Libya. On the one hand, some question why America should intervene at all -- even in limited ways -- in this distant land. They argue that there are many places in the world where innocent civilians face brutal violence at the hands of their government, and America should not be expected to police the world, particularly when we have so many pressing needs here at home.

It’s true that America cannot use our military wherever repression occurs. And given the costs and risks of intervention, we must always measure our interests against the need for action. But that cannot be an argument for never acting on behalf of what’s right. In this particular country -- Libya -- at this particular moment, we were faced with the prospect of violence on a horrific scale. We had a unique ability to stop that violence: an international mandate for action, a broad coalition prepared to join us, the support of Arab countries, and a plea for help from the Libyan people themselves. We also had the ability to stop Qaddafi’s forces in their tracks without putting American troops on the ground.

To brush aside America’s responsibility as a leader and -- more profoundly -- our responsibilities to our fellow human beings under such circumstances would have been a betrayal of who we are. Some nations may be able to turn a blind eye to atrocities in other countries. The United States of America is different. And as President, I refused to wait for the images of slaughter and mass graves before taking action.

Moreover, America has an important strategic interest in preventing Qaddafi from overrunning those who oppose him. A massacre would have driven thousands of additional refugees across Libya’s borders, putting enormous strains on the peaceful -- yet fragile -- transitions in Egypt and Tunisia. The democratic impulses that are dawning across the region would be eclipsed by the darkest form of dictatorship, as repressive leaders concluded that violence is the best strategy to cling to power. The writ of the United Nations Security Council would have been shown to be little more than empty words, crippling that institution’s future credibility to uphold global peace and security. So while I will never minimize the costs involved in military action, I am convinced that a failure to act in Libya would have carried a far greater price for America.

Now, just as there are those who have argued against intervention in Libya, there are others who have suggested that we broaden our military mission beyond the task of protecting the Libyan people, and do whatever it takes to bring down Qaddafi and usher in a new government.

Of course, there is no question that Libya -- and the world -- would be better off with Qaddafi out of power. I, along with many other world leaders, have embraced that goal, and will actively pursue it through non-military means. But broadening our military mission to include regime change would be a mistake.

The task that I assigned our forces -- to protect the Libyan people from immediate danger, and to establish a no-fly zone -- carries with it a U.N. mandate and international support. It’s also what the Libyan opposition asked us to do. If we tried to overthrow Qaddafi by force, our coalition would splinter. We would likely have to put U.S. troops on the ground to accomplish that mission, or risk killing many civilians from the air. The dangers faced by our men and women in uniform would be far greater. So would the costs and our share of the responsibility for what comes next.

To be blunt, we went down that road in Iraq. Thanks to the extraordinary sacrifices of our troops and the determination of our diplomats, we are hopeful about Iraq’s future. But regime change there took eight years, thousands of American and Iraqi lives, and nearly a trillion dollars. That is not something we can afford to repeat in Libya.

As the bulk of our military effort ratchets down, what we can do -- and will do -- is support the aspirations of the Libyan people. We have intervened to stop a massacre, and we will work with our allies and partners to maintain the safety of civilians. We will deny the regime arms, cut off its supplies of cash, assist the opposition, and work with other nations to hasten the day when Qaddafi leaves power. It may not happen overnight, as a badly weakened Qaddafi tries desperately to hang on to power. But it should be clear to those around Qaddafi, and to every Libyan, that history is not on Qaddafi’s side. With the time and space that we have provided for the Libyan people, they will be able to determine their own destiny, and that is how it should be.

Let me close by addressing what this action says about the use of America’s military power, and America’s broader leadership in the world, under my presidency.

As Commander-in-Chief, I have no greater responsibility than keeping this country safe. And no decision weighs on me more than when to deploy our men and women in uniform. I’ve made it clear that I will never hesitate to use our military swiftly, decisively, and unilaterally when necessary to defend our people, our homeland, our allies and our core interests. That's why we’re going after al Qaeda wherever they seek a foothold. That is why we continue to fight in Afghanistan, even as we have ended our combat mission in Iraq and removed more than 100,000 troops from that country.

There will be times, though, when our safety is not directly threatened, but our interests and our values are. Sometimes, the course of history poses challenges that threaten our common humanity and our common security -- responding to natural disasters, for example; or preventing genocide and keeping the peace; ensuring regional security, and maintaining the flow of commerce. These may not be America’s problems alone, but they are important to us. They’re problems worth solving. And in these circumstances, we know that the United States, as the world’s most powerful nation, will often be called upon to help.

In such cases, we should not be afraid to act -- but the burden of action should not be America’s alone. As we have in Libya, our task is instead to mobilize the international community for collective action. Because contrary to the claims of some, American leadership is not simply a matter of going it alone and bearing all of the burden ourselves. Real leadership creates the conditions and coalitions for others to step up as well; to work with allies and partners so that they bear their share of the burden and pay their share of the costs; and to see that the principles of justice and human dignity are upheld by all.

That’s the kind of leadership we’ve shown in Libya. Of course, even when we act as part of a coalition, the risks of any military action will be high. Those risks were realized when one of our planes malfunctioned over Libya. Yet when one of our airmen parachuted to the ground, in a country whose leader has so often demonized the United States -- in a region that has such a difficult history with our country -- this American did not find enemies. Instead, he was met by people who embraced him. One young Libyan who came to his aid said, “We are your friends. We are so grateful to those men who are protecting the skies.”

This voice is just one of many in a region where a new generation is refusing to be denied their rights and opportunities any longer.

Yes, this change will make the world more complicated for a time. Progress will be uneven, and change will come differently to different countries. There are places, like Egypt, where this change will inspire us and raise our hopes. And then there will be places, like Iran, where change is fiercely suppressed. The dark forces of civil conflict and sectarian war will have to be averted, and difficult political and economic concerns will have to be addressed.

The United States will not be able to dictate the pace and scope of this change. Only the people of the region can do that. But we can make a difference.

I believe that this movement of change cannot be turned back, and that we must stand alongside those who believe in the same core principles that have guided us through many storms: our opposition to violence directed at one’s own people; our support for a set of universal rights, including the freedom for people to express themselves and choose their leaders; our support for governments that are ultimately responsive to the aspirations of the people.

Born, as we are, out of a revolution by those who longed to be free, we welcome the fact that history is on the move in the Middle East and North Africa, and that young people are leading the way. Because wherever people long to be free, they will find a friend in the United States. Ultimately, it is that faith -- those ideals -- that are the true measure of American leadership.

My fellow Americans, I know that at a time of upheaval overseas -- when the news is filled with conflict and change -- it can be tempting to turn away from the world. And as I’ve said before, our strength abroad is anchored in our strength here at home. That must always be our North Star -- the ability of our people to reach their potential, to make wise choices with our resources, to enlarge the prosperity that serves as a wellspring for our power, and to live the values that we hold so dear.

But let us also remember that for generations, we have done the hard work of protecting our own people, as well as millions around the globe. We have done so because we know that our own future is safer, our own future is brighter, if more of mankind can live with the bright light of freedom and dignity.

Tonight, let us give thanks for the Americans who are serving through these trying times, and the coalition that is carrying our effort forward. And let us look to the future with confidence and hope not only for our own country, but for all those yearning for freedom around the world.

Thank you. God bless you, and may God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# American Energy Security Address at Georgetown University

It is wonderful to be back at Georgetown.

We've got a number of acknowledgements. First of all, I just want to thank President DeGioia for his outstanding leadership here, but also for his hospitality.

We also have here Secretary Steven Chu, my Energy Secretary. Where is Steven? There he is over there. Secretary Ken Salazar of the Interior Department. Secretary Tom Vilsack, our Agriculture Secretary. Ray LaHood, our Transportation Secretary. Lisa Jackson, our EPA Administrator. Nancy Sutley, who is our Council on Environmental Quality director, right here.

A couple of great members of Congress -- Congressman Jay Inslee of Washington. Where’s Jay? There he is over there. And Rush Holt of New Jersey is here. We've got -- he didn’t bring the weather with him -- but the mayor of Los Angeles, Antonio Villaraigosa, is in the house. Mayor Scott Smith of Mesa, Arizona, is here.

And most importantly, the students of Georgetown University are in the house.

I want to start with a difficult subject: The Hoyas had a tough loss, Coach. Coach is here, too, and I love Coach Thompson. I love his dad and the great tradition that they’ve had. And it turned out VCU was pretty good. I had Georgetown winning that game in my bracket, so we’re all hurting here. But that's what next year is for.

We meet here at a tumultuous time for the world. In a matter of months, we’ve seen regimes toppled. We've seen democracy take root in North Africa and in the Middle East. We’ve witnessed a terrible earthquake, a catastrophic tsunami, a nuclear emergency that has battered one of our strongest allies and closest friends in the world’s third-largest economy. We’ve led an international effort in Libya to prevent a massacre and maintain stability throughout the broader region.

And as Americans, we’re heartbroken by the lives that have been lost as a result of these events. We’re deeply moved by the thirst for freedom in so many nations, and we’re moved by the strength and the perseverance of the Japanese people. And it’s natural, I think, to feel anxious about what all of this means for us.

And one big area of concern has been the cost and security of our energy. Obviously, the situation in the Middle East implicates our energy security. The situation in Japan leads us to ask questions about our energy sources.

In an economy that relies so heavily on oil, rising prices at the pump affect everybody -- workers, farmers, truck drivers, restaurant owners, students who are lucky enough to have a car. Businesses see rising prices at the pump hurt their bottom line. Families feel the pinch when they fill up their tank. And for Americans that are already struggling to get by, a hike in gas prices really makes their lives that much harder. It hurts.

If you’re somebody who works in a relatively low-wage job and you’ve got to commute to work, it takes up a big chunk of your income. You may not be able to buy as many groceries. You may have to cut back on medicines in order to fill up the gas tank. So this is something that everybody is affected by.

Now, here’s the thing -- we have been down this road before. Remember, it was just three years ago that gas prices topped $4 a gallon. I remember because I was in the middle of a presidential campaign. Working folks certainly remember because it hit a lot of people pretty hard. And because we were at the height of political season, you had all kinds of slogans and gimmicks and outraged politicians -- they were waving their three-point plans for $2 a gallon gas. You remember that -- “drill, baby, drill” -- and we were going through all that. And none of it was really going to do anything to solve the problem. There was a lot of hue and cry, a lot of fulminating and hand-wringing, but nothing actually happened. Imagine that in Washington.

The truth is, none of these gimmicks, none of these slogans made a bit of difference. When gas prices finally did fall, it was mostly because the global recession had led to less demand for oil. Companies were producing less; the demand for petroleum went down; prices went down. Now that the economy is recovering, demand is back up. Add the turmoil in the Middle East, and it’s not surprising that oil prices are higher. And every time the price of a barrel of oil on the world market rises by $10, a gallon of gas goes up by about 25 cents.

The point is the ups and downs in gas prices historically have tended to be temporary. But when you look at the long-term trends, there are going to be more ups in gas prices than downs in gas prices. And that’s because you’ve got countries like India and China that are growing at a rapid clip, and as 2 billion more people start consuming more goods -- they want cars just like we’ve got cars; they want to use energy to make their lives a little easier just like we’ve got -- it is absolutely certain that demand will go up a lot faster than supply. It’s just a fact.

So here’s the bottom line: There are no quick fixes. Anybody who tells you otherwise isn’t telling you the truth. And we will keep on being a victim to shifts in the oil market until we finally get serious about a long-term policy for a secure, affordable energy future.

We’re going to have to think long term, which is why I came here, to talk to young people here at Georgetown, because you have more of a stake in us getting our energy policy right than just about anybody.

Now, here’s a source of concern, though. We’ve known about the dangers of our oil dependence for decades. Richard Nixon talked about freeing ourselves from dependence on foreign oil. And every President since that time has talked about freeing ourselves from dependence on foreign oil. Politicians of every stripe have promised energy independence, but that promise has so far gone unmet.

I talked about reducing America’s dependence on oil when I was running for President, and I’m proud of the historic progress that we’ve made over the last two years towards that goal, and we’ll talk about that a little bit. But I’ve got to be honest. We’ve run into the same political gridlock, the same inertia that has held us back for decades.

That has to change. That has to change. We cannot keep going from shock when gas prices go up to trance when they go back down -- we go back to doing the same things we’ve been doing until the next time there’s a price spike, and then we’re shocked again. We can’t rush to propose action when gas prices are high and then hit the snooze button when they fall again. We can’t keep on doing that.

The United States of America cannot afford to bet our long-term prosperity, our long-term security on a resource that will eventually run out, and even before it runs out will get more and more expensive to extract from the ground. We can’t afford it when the costs to our economy, our country, and our planet are so high. Not when your generation needs us to get this right. It’s time to do what we can to secure our energy future.

And today, I want to announce a new goal, one that is reasonable, one that is achievable, and one that is necessary.

When I was elected to this office, America imported 11 million barrels of oil a day. By a little more than a decade from now, we will have cut that by one-third. That is something that we can achieve. We can cut our oil dependence -- we can cut our oil dependence by a third.

I set this goal knowing that we’re still going to have to import some oil. It will remain an important part of our energy portfolio for quite some time, until we’ve gotten alternative energy strategies fully in force. And when it comes to the oil we import from other nations, obviously we’ve got to look at neighbors like Canada and Mexico that are stable and steady and reliable sources. We also have to look at other countries like Brazil. Part of the reason I went down there is to talk about energy with the Brazilians. They recently discovered significant new oil reserves, and we can share American technology and know-how with them as they develop these resources.

But our best opportunities to enhance our energy security can be found in our own backyard -- because we boast one critical, renewable resource that the rest of the world can’t match: American ingenuity. American ingenuity, American know-how.

To make ourselves more secure, to control our energy future, we’re going to have to harness all of that ingenuity. It’s a task we won’t be finished with by the end of my presidency, or even by the end of the next presidency. But if we continue the work that we’ve already begun over the last two years, we won’t just spark new jobs, industries and innovations -- we will leave your generation and future generations with a country that is safer, that is healthier, and that’s more prosperous.

So today, my administration is releasing a Blueprint for a Secure Energy Future that outlines a comprehensive national energy policy, one that we’ve been pursuing since the day I took office. And cutting our oil dependence by a third is part of that plan.

Here at Georgetown, I’d like to talk in broad strokes about how we can achieve these goals.

Now, meeting the goal of cutting our oil dependence depends largely on two things: first, finding and producing more oil at home; second, reducing our overall dependence on oil with cleaner alternative fuels and greater efficiency.

This begins by continuing to increase America’s oil supply. Even for those of you who are interested in seeing a reduction in our dependence on fossil fuels -- and I know how passionate young people are about issues like climate change -- the fact of the matter is, is that for quite some time, America is going to be still dependent on oil in making its economy work.

Now, last year, American oil production reached its highest level since 2003. And for the first time in more than a decade, oil we imported accounted for less than half of the liquid fuel we consumed. So that was a good trend. To keep reducing that reliance on imports, my administration is encouraging offshore oil exploration and production -- as long as it’s safe and responsible.

I don’t think anybody here has forgotten what happened last year, where we had to deal with the largest oil spill in [our] history. I know some of the fishermen down in the Gulf Coast haven’t forgotten it. And what we learned from that disaster helped us put in place smarter standards of safety and responsibility. For example, if you’re going to drill in deepwater, you’ve got to prove before you start drilling that you can actually contain an underwater spill. That’s just common sense. And lately, we’ve been hearing folks saying, well, the Obama administration, they put restrictions on how oil companies operate offshore. Well, yes, because we just spent all that time, energy and money trying to clean up a big mess. And I don't know about you, but I don't have amnesia. I remember these things. And I think it was important for us to make sure that we prevent something like that from happening again.

Now, today, we’re working to expedite new drilling permits for companies that meet these higher standards. Since they were put in, we’ve approved 39 new shallow-water permits; we’ve approved seven deepwater permits in recent weeks. When it comes to drilling offshore, my administration approved more than two permits last year for every new well that the industry started to drill. So any claim that my administration is responsible for gas prices because we’ve “shut down” oil production, any claim like that is simply untrue. It might make for a useful sound bite, but it doesn’t track with reality.

What is true is we’ve said if you’re going to drill offshore you’ve got to have a plan to make sure that we don’t have the kind of catastrophe that we had last year. And I don’t think that there’s anybody who should dispute that that’s the right strategy to pursue.

Moreover, we’re actually pushing the oil industry to take advantage of the opportunities that they’ve already got. Right now the industry holds tens of millions of acres of leases where they’re not producing a single drop. They’re just sitting on supplies of American energy that are ready to be tapped. That’s why part of our plan is to provide new and better incentives that promote rapid, responsible development of these resources.

We’re also exploring and assessing new frontiers for oil and gas development from Alaska to the Mid- and South Atlantic states, because producing more oil in America can help lower oil prices, can help create jobs, and can enhance our energy security, but we’ve got to do it in the right way.

Now, even if we increase domestic oil production, that is not going to be the long-term solution to our energy challenge. I give out this statistic all the time, and forgive me for repeating it again: America holds about 2 percent of the world’s proven oil reserves. What that means is, is that even if we drilled every drop of oil out of every single one of the reserves that we possess -- offshore and onshore -- it still wouldn’t be enough to meet our long-term needs. We consume about 25 percent of the world’s oil. We only have 2 percent of the reserves. Even if we doubled U.S. oil production, we’re still really short.

So the only way for America’s energy supply to be truly secure is by permanently reducing our dependence on oil. We’re going to have to find ways to boost our efficiency so we use less oil. We’ve got to discover and produce cleaner, renewable sources of energy that also produce less carbon pollution, which is threatening our climate. And we’ve got to do it quickly.

Now, in terms of new sources of energy, we have a few different options. The first is natural gas. Recent innovations have given us the opportunity to tap large reserves –- perhaps a century’s worth of reserves, a hundred years worth of reserves -– in the shale under our feet. But just as is true in terms of us extracting oil from the ground, we’ve got to make sure that we’re extracting natural gas safely, without polluting our water supply.

That’s why I’ve asked Secretary Chu, my Energy Secretary, to work with other agencies, the natural gas industry, states, and environmental experts to improve the safety of this process. And Chu is the right guy to do this. He’s got a Nobel Prize in physics. He actually deserved his Nobel Prize.

And this is the kind of thing that he likes to do for fun on the weekend. He goes into his garage and he tinkers around and figures out how to extract natural gas.

I’m going to embarrass him further. Last year, when we were trying to fill -- figure out how to close the cap, I sent Chu down to sit in the BP offices, and he essentially designed the cap that ultimately worked, and he drew up the specs for it and had BP build it, construct it. So this is somebody who knows what he’s doing. So for those of you who are studying physics, it may actually pay off someday.

But the potential for natural gas is enormous. And this is an area where there’s actually been some broad bipartisan agreement. Last year, more than 150 members of Congress from both sides of the aisle produced legislation providing incentives to use clean-burning natural gas in our vehicles instead of oil. And that's a big deal. Getting 150 members of Congress to agree on anything is a big deal. And they were even joined by T. Boone Pickens, a businessman who made his fortune on oil, but who is out there making the simple point that we can’t simply drill our way out of our energy problems.

So I ask members of Congress and all the interested parties involved to keep at it, pass a bill that helps us achieve the goal of extracting natural gas in a safe, environmentally sound way.

Now, another substitute for oil that holds tremendous promise is renewable biofuels -- not just ethanol, but biofuels made from things like switchgrass and wood chips and biomass.

If anybody doubts the potential of these fuels, consider Brazil. As I said, I was just there last week. Half of Brazil’s vehicles can run on biofuels -- half of their fleet of automobiles can run on biofuels instead of petroleum. Just last week, our Air Force -- our own Air Force -- used an advanced biofuel blend to fly a Raptor 22 -- an F-22 Raptor faster than the speed of sound. Think about that. I mean, if an F-22 Raptor can fly at the speed of -- faster than the speed of sound on biomass, then I know the old beater that you’ve got, that you’re driving around in -- can probably do so, too. There’s no reason why we can’t have our cars do the same.

In fact, the Air Force is aiming to get half of its domestic jet fuel from alternative sources by 2016. And I’m directing the Navy and the Department of Energy and Agriculture to work with the private sector to create advanced biofuels that can power not just fighter jets, but also trucks and commercial airliners.

So there’s no reason we shouldn’t be using these renewable fuels throughout America. And that’s why we’re investing in things like fueling stations and research into the next generation of biofuels. One of the biggest problems we have with alternative energy is not just producing the energy, but also distributing it. We’ve got gas stations all around the country, so whenever you need gas you know you can fill up -- it doesn’t matter where you are. Well, we’ve got to have that same kind of distribution network when it comes to our renewable energy sources so that when you are converting to a different kind of car that runs on a different kind of energy, you’re going to be able to have that same convenience. Otherwise, the market won’t work; it won’t grow.

Over the next two years, we’ll help entrepreneurs break ground for four next-generation biorefineries -- each with a capacity of more than 20 million gallons per year. And going forward, we should look for ways to reform biofuels incentives to make sure that they’re meeting today’s challenges and that they’re also saving taxpayers money.

So as we replace oil with fuels like natural gas and biofuels, we can also reduce our dependence by making cars and trucks that use less oil in the first place. Seventy percent of our petroleum consumption goes to transportation -- 70 percent. And by the way, so does the second biggest chunk of most families’ budgets goes into transportation. And that’s why one of the best ways to make our economy less dependent on oil and save folks more money is to make our transportation sector more efficient.

Now, we went through 30 years where we didn’t raise fuel efficiency standards on cars. And part of what happened in the U.S. auto industry was because oil appeared relatively cheap, the U.S. auto industry decided we’re just going to make our money on SUVs, and we’re not going to worry about fuel efficiency. Thirty years of lost time when it comes to technology that could improve the efficiency of cars.

So last year, we established a groundbreaking national fuel efficiency standard for cars and trucks. We did this last year without legislation. We just got all the parties together and we got them to agree -- automakers, autoworkers, environmental groups, industry.

So that means our cars will be getting better gas mileage, saving 1.8 billion barrels of oil over the life of the program -- 1.8 billion. Our consumers will save money from fewer trips to the pump -- $3,000 on average over time you will save because of these higher fuel efficiency standards. And our automakers will build more innovative products. Right now, there are even cars rolling off the assembly lines in Detroit with combustion engines -- I’m not talking about hybrids -- combustion engines that get more than 50 miles per gallon. So we know how to do it. We know how to make our cars more efficient.

But going forward, we’re going to continue to work with the automakers, with the autoworkers, with states, to ensure the high-quality, fuel-efficient cars and trucks of tomorrow are built right here in the United States of America. That’s going to be a top priority for us.

This summer, we’re going to propose the first-ever fuel efficiency standards for heavy-duty trucks. And this fall, we’ll announce the next round of fuel standards for cars that builds on what we’ve already done.

And by the way, the federal government is going to need to lead by example. The fleet of cars and trucks we use in the federal government is one of the largest in the country. We’ve got a lot of cars. And that’s why we’ve already doubled the number of alternative vehicles in the federal fleet. And that’s why today I am directing agencies to purchase 100 percent alternative fuel, hybrid, or electric vehicles by 2015. All of them should be alternative fuel.

Going forward, we’ll partner with private companies that want to upgrade their large fleets. And this means, by the way, that you students, as consumers or future consumers of cars, you’ve got to make sure that you are boosting demand for alternative vehicles. You’re going to have a responsibility as well, because if alternative-fuel vehicles are manufactured but you guys aren’t buying them, then folks will keep on making cars that don’t have the same fuel efficiency. So you’ve got power in this process, and the decisions you make individually in your lives will say something about how serious we are when it comes to energy independence.

We’ve also made historic investments in high-speed rail and mass transit, because part of making our transportation sector cleaner and more efficient involves offering all Americans, whether they are urban, suburban, or rural, the choice to be mobile without having to get in a car and pay for gas.

Still, there are few breakthroughs as promising for increasing fuel efficiency and reducing our dependence on oil as electric vehicles. Soon after I took office, I set a goal of having one million electric vehicles on our roads by 2015. We’ve created incentives for American companies to develop these vehicles, and for Americans who want them to buy them.

So new manufacturing plants are opening over the next few years. And a modest $2 billion investment in competitive grants for companies to develop the next generation of batteries for these cars has jumpstarted a big new American industry. Pretty soon, America will be home to 40 percent of global manufacturing capacity for these advanced batteries.

And for those of you who are wondering what that means, the thing that’s been holding back electric vehicles is the battery that stores that electricity, that energy. And the more efficient, the more lightweight we can make those batteries, the easier it is to manufacture those cars at a competitive price.

And if we can have that industry here in the United States of America, that means jobs. If those batteries are made here, the cars are made here. Those cars are made here, we’re putting Americans back to work.

Now, to make sure we stay on this goal we’re going to need to do more -- by offering more powerful incentives to consumers, and by rewarding the communities that pave the way for the adoption of these vehicles.

Now, one other thing about electric cars -- and you don't need to talk to Chu about this -- it turns out electric cars run on electricity. And so even if we reduce our oil dependency, and we’re producing all these great electric cars, we’re going to have to have a plan to change the way we generate electricity in America so that it’s cleaner and safer and healthier. We know that ushering in a clean energy economy has the potential of creating untold numbers of new jobs and new businesses right here in the United States. But we’re going to have to think about how do we produce electricity more efficiently.

Now, in addition to producing it, we actually also have to think about making sure we’re not wasting energy. I don't know how we’re doing on the Georgetown campus, Mr. President, but every institution and every household has to start thinking about how are we reducing the amount of energy that we’re using and doing it in more efficient ways.

Today, our homes and businesses consume 40 percent of the energy that we use, and it costs us billions of dollars in energy bills. Manufacturers that require large amounts of energy to make their products, they're challenged by rising energy costs. And so you can’t separate the issue of oil dependence from the issue of how we are producing generally -- more energy generally.

And that’s why we’ve proposed new programs to help Americans upgrade their homes and businesses and plants with new, energy-efficient building materials -- new lighting, new windows, new heating and cooling systems -- investments that will save consumers and business owners tens of billions of dollars a year, and free up money for investment and hiring and creating new jobs and hiring more workers and putting contractors to work as well.

The nice thing about energy efficiency is we already have the technology. We don’t have to create something new. We just have to help businesses and homeowners put in place the installation, the energy-efficient windows, the energy-efficient lighting. They’ll get their money back. You will save money on your electricity bill that pays for those improvements that you made, but a lot of people may not have the money up front, and so we’ve got to give them some incentives to do that.

And just like the fuels we use in our cars, we’re going to have to find cleaner renewable sources of electricity. Today, about two-fifths of our electricity come from clean energy sources. But we can do better than that. I think that with the right incentives in place, we can double our use of clean energy. And that’s why, in my State of the Union address back in January, I called for a new Clean Energy Standard for America: By 2035, 80 percent of our electricity needs to come from a wide range of clean energy sources -- renewables like wind and solar, efficient natural gas. And, yes, we’re going to have to examine how do we make clean coal and nuclear power work.

Now, in light of the ongoing events in Japan, I want to just take a minute to talk about nuclear power. Right now, America gets about one-fifth of our electricity from nuclear energy. And it’s important to recognize that nuclear energy doesn’t emit carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. So those of us who are concerned about climate change, we’ve got to recognize that nuclear power, if it’s safe, can make a significant contribution to the climate change question.

And I’m determined to ensure that it’s safe. So in light of what’s happened in Japan, I’ve requested a comprehensive safety review by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to make sure that all of our existing nuclear energy facilities are safe. And we’re going incorporate those conclusions and lessons from Japan in design and the building of the next generation of plants. But we can’t simply take it off the table.

My administration is leading global discussions towards a new international framework in which all countries who are operating nuclear plants are making sure that they’re not spreading dangerous nuclear materials and technology.

But more broadly, a clean energy standard can expand the scope of clean energy investments because what it does is it gives cutting-edge companies the certainty that they need to invest. Essentially what it does is it says to companies, you know what, you will have a customer if you’re producing clean energy. Utilities, they need to buy a certain amount of clean energy in their overall portfolio, and that means that innovators are willing to make those big capital investments.

And we’ve got to start now because -- think about this -- in the 1980s, America was home to more than 80 percent of the world’s wind capacity, 90 percent of the world’s solar capacity. We were the leaders in wind. We were the leaders in solar. We owned the clean energy economy in the ‘80s. Guess what. Today, China has the most wind capacity. Germany has the most solar capacity. Both invest more in clean energy than we do, even though we are a larger economy and a substantially larger user of energy. We’ve fallen behind on what is going to be the key to our future.

Other countries are now exporting technology we pioneered and they’re going after the jobs that come with it because they know that the countries that lead the 21st century clean energy economy will be the countries that lead the 21st century global economy.

I want America to be that nation. I want America to win the future.

So a clean energy standard will help drive private investment in innovation. But I want to make this point: Government funding will still be critical. Over the past two years, the historic investments my administration has made in clean and renewable energy research and technology have helped private sector companies grow and hire hundreds of thousands of new workers.

I’ve visited gleaming new solar arrays that are among the largest in the world. I've tested an electric vehicle fresh off the assembly line. I mean, I didn’t really test it -- I was able to drive like five feet before Secret Service said to stop. I’ve toured factories that used to be shuttered, where they’re now building advanced wind blades that are as long as 747s, and they’re building the towers that support them. And I’ve seen the scientists that are searching for the next big breakthrough in energy. None of this would have happened without government support.

I understand we’ve got a tight fiscal situation, so it’s fair to ask how do we pay for government’s investment in energy. And as we debate our national priorities and our budget in Congress, we’re going to have to make some tough choices. We’re going to have to cut what we don’t need to invest in what we do need.

Unfortunately, some folks want to cut critical investments in clean energy. They want to cut our research and development into new technologies. They’re shortchanging the resources necessary even to promptly issue new permits for offshore drilling. These cuts would eliminate thousands of private sector jobs; it would terminate scientists and engineers; it would end fellowships for researchers, some who may be here at Georgetown, graduate students and other talent that we desperately need to get into this area in the 21st century. That doesn’t make sense.

We’re already paying a price for our inaction. Every time we fill up at the pump, every time we lose a job or a business to countries that are investing more than we do in clean energy, when it comes to our air, our water, and the climate change that threatens the planet that you will inherit -- we’re already paying a price. These are costs that we are already bearing. And if we do nothing, the price will only go up.

So at moments like these, sacrificing these investments in research and development, in supporting clean energy technologies, that would weaken our energy economy and make us more dependent on oil. That’s not a game plan to win the future. That’s a vision to keep us mired in the past. I will not accept that outcome for the United States of America. We are not going to do that.

Let me close by speaking directly to the students here -- the next generation who are going to be writing the next great chapter in the American story. The issue of energy independence is one that America has been talking about since before your parents were your age, since before you were born. And you also happen to go to a school [in a town] that for a long time has suffered from a chronic unwillingness to come together and make tough choices. And so I forgive you for thinking that maybe there isn’t much we can do to rise to this challenge. Maybe some of you are feeling kind of cynical or skeptical about whether we’re actually going to solve this problem. But everything I have seen and experienced with your generation convinces me otherwise.

I think that precisely because you are coming of age at a time of such rapid and sometimes unsettling change, born into a world with fewer walls, educated in an era of constant information, tempered by war and economic turmoil -- because that’s the world in which you’re coming of age, I think you believe as deeply as any of our previous generations that America can change and it can change for the better.

We need that. We need you to dream big. We need you to summon that same spirit of unbridled optimism and that bold willingness to tackle tough challenges and see those challenges through that led previous generations to rise to greatness -- to save a democracy, to touch the moon, to connect the world with our own science and our own imagination.

That’s what America is capable of. That's what you have to push America to do, and it will be you that pushes it. That history of ours, of meeting challenges -- that's your birthright. You understand that there’s no problem out there that is not within our power to solve.

I don’t want to leave this challenge for future Presidents. I don’t want to leave it for my children. I don’t want to leave it for your children. So, yes, solving it will take time and it will take effort. It will require our brightest scientists, our most creative companies. It will require all of us -- Democrats, Republicans, and everybody in between -- to do our part. But with confidence in America and in ourselves and in one another, I know this is a challenge that we will solve.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Speech on Fiscal Policy at George Washington University

It is wonderful to be back at GW. I want you to know that one of the reasons that I worked so hard with Democrats and Republicans to keep the government open was so that I could show up here today. I wanted to make sure that all of you had one more excuse to skip class. You’re welcome.

I want to give a special thanks to Steven Knapp, the president of GW. I just saw him -- where is he? There he is right there.

We've got a lot of distinguished guests here -- a couple of people I want to acknowledge. First of all, my outstanding Vice President, Joe Biden, is here. Our Secretary of the Treasury, Tim Geithner, is in the house. Jack Lew, the Director of the Office of Mangement and Budget. Gene Sperling, Chair of the National Economic Council, is here. Members of our bipartisan Fiscal Commission are here, including the two outstanding chairs -- Erskine Bowles and Alan Simpson -- are here.

And we have a number of members of Congress here today. I'm grateful for all of you taking the time to attend.

What we’ve been debating here in Washington over the last few weeks will affect the lives of the students here and families all across America in potentially profound ways. This debate over budgets and deficits is about more than just numbers on a page; it’s about more than just cutting and spending. It’s about the kind of future that we want. It’s about the kind of country that we believe in. And that’s what I want to spend some time talking about today.

From our first days as a nation, we have put our faith in free markets and free enterprise as the engine of America’s wealth and prosperity. More than citizens of any other country, we are rugged individualists, a self-reliant people with a healthy skepticism of too much government.

But there’s always been another thread running through our history -– a belief that we’re all connected, and that there are some things we can only do together, as a nation. We believe, in the words of our first Republican President, Abraham Lincoln, that through government, we should do together what we cannot do as well for ourselves.

And so we’ve built a strong military to keep us secure, and public schools and universities to educate our citizens. We’ve laid down railroads and highways to facilitate travel and commerce. We’ve supported the work of scientists and researchers whose discoveries have saved lives, unleashed repeated technological revolutions, and led to countless new jobs and entire new industries. Each of us has benefitted from these investments, and we’re a more prosperous country as a result. Part of this American belief that we’re all connected also expresses itself in a conviction that each one of us deserves some basic measure of security and dignity. We recognize that no matter how responsibly we live our lives, hard times or bad luck, a crippling illness or a layoff may strike any one of us. “There but for the grace of God go I,” we say to ourselves. And so we contribute to programs like Medicare and Social Security, which guarantee us health care and a measure of basic income after a lifetime of hard work; unemployment insurance, which protects us against unexpected job loss; and Medicaid, which provides care for millions of seniors in nursing homes, poor children, those with disabilities. We’re a better country because of these commitments. I’ll go further. We would not be a great country without those commitments.

Now, for much of the last century, our nation found a way to afford these investments and priorities with the taxes paid by its citizens. As a country that values fairness, wealthier individuals have traditionally borne a greater share of this burden than the middle class or those less fortunate. Everybody pays, but the wealthier have borne a little more. This is not because we begrudge those who’ve done well -– we rightly celebrate their success. Instead, it’s a basic reflection of our belief that those who’ve benefited most from our way of life can afford to give back a little bit more. Moreover, this belief hasn’t hindered the success of those at the top of the income scale. They continue to do better and better with each passing year.

Now, at certain times -– particularly during war or recession -– our nation has had to borrow money to pay for some of our priorities. And as most families understand, a little credit card debt isn’t going to hurt if it’s temporary.

But as far back as the 1980s, America started amassing debt at more alarming levels, and our leaders began to realize that a larger challenge was on the horizon. They knew that eventually, the Baby Boom generation would retire, which meant a much bigger portion of our citizens would be relying on programs like Medicare, Social Security, and possibly Medicaid. Like parents with young children who know they have to start saving for the college years, America had to start borrowing less and saving more to prepare for the retirement of an entire generation.

To meet this challenge, our leaders came together three times during the 1990s to reduce our nation’s deficit -- three times. They forged historic agreements that required tough decisions made by the first President Bush, then made by President Clinton, by Democratic Congresses and by a Republican Congress. All three agreements asked for shared responsibility and shared sacrifice. But they largely protected the middle class; they largely protected our commitment to seniors; they protected our key investments in our future.

As a result of these bipartisan efforts, America’s finances were in great shape by the year 2000. We went from deficit to surplus. America was actually on track to becoming completely debt free, and we were prepared for the retirement of the Baby Boomers.

But after Democrats and Republicans committed to fiscal discipline during the 1990s, we lost our way in the decade that followed. We increased spending dramatically for two wars and an expensive prescription drug program -– but we didn’t pay for any of this new spending. Instead, we made the problem worse with trillions of dollars in unpaid-for tax cuts -– tax cuts that went to every millionaire and billionaire in the country; tax cuts that will force us to borrow an average of $500 billion every year over the next decade.

To give you an idea of how much damage this caused to our nation’s checkbook, consider this: In the last decade, if we had simply found a way to pay for the tax cuts and the prescription drug benefit, our deficit would currently be at low historical levels in the coming years.

But that’s not what happened. And so, by the time I took office, we once again found ourselves deeply in debt and unprepared for a Baby Boom retirement that is now starting to take place. When I took office, our projected deficit, annually, was more than $1 trillion. On top of that, we faced a terrible financial crisis and a recession that, like most recessions, led us to temporarily borrow even more.

In this case, we took a series of emergency steps that saved millions of jobs, kept credit flowing, and provided working families extra money in their pocket. It was absolutely the right thing to do, but these steps were expensive, and added to our deficits in the short term.

So that’s how our fiscal challenge was created. That’s how we got here. And now that our economic recovery is gaining strength, Democrats and Republicans must come together and restore the fiscal responsibility that served us so well in the 1990s. We have to live within our means. We have to reduce our deficit, and we have to get back on a path that will allow us to pay down our debt. And we have to do it in a way that protects the recovery, protects the investments we need to grow, create jobs, and helps us win the future.

Now, before I get into how we can achieve this goal, some of you, particularly the younger people here -- you don't qualify, Joe. Some of you might be wondering, “Why is this so important? Why does this matter to me?”

Well, here’s why. Even after our economy recovers, our government will still be on track to spend more money than it takes in throughout this decade and beyond. That means we’ll have to keep borrowing more from countries like China. That means more of your tax dollars each year will go towards paying off the interest on all the loans that we keep taking out. By the end of this decade, the interest that we owe on our debt could rise to nearly $1 trillion. Think about that. That's the interest -- just the interest payments.

Then, as the Baby Boomers start to retire in greater numbers and health care costs continue to rise, the situation will get even worse. By 2025, the amount of taxes we currently pay will only be enough to finance our health care programs -- Medicare and Medicaid -- Social Security, and the interest we owe on our debt. That’s it. Every other national priority -– education, transportation, even our national security -– will have to be paid for with borrowed money.

Now, ultimately, all this rising debt will cost us jobs and damage our economy. It will prevent us from making the investments we need to win the future. We won’t be able to afford good schools, new research, or the repair of roads -– all the things that create new jobs and businesses here in America. Businesses will be less likely to invest and open shop in a country that seems unwilling or unable to balance its books. And if our creditors start worrying that we may be unable to pay back our debts, that could drive up interest rates for everybody who borrows money -– making it harder for businesses to expand and hire, or families to take out a mortgage.

Here’s the good news: That doesn’t have to be our future. That doesn’t have to be the country that we leave our children. We can solve this problem. We came together as Democrats and Republicans to meet this challenge before; we can do it again.

But that starts by being honest about what’s causing our deficit. You see, most Americans tend to dislike government spending in the abstract, but like the stuff that it buys. Most of us, regardless of party affiliation, believe that we should have a strong military and a strong defense. Most Americans believe we should invest in education and medical research. Most Americans think we should protect commitments like Social Security and Medicare. And without even looking at a poll, my finely honed political instincts tell me that almost nobody believes they should be paying higher taxes.

So because all this spending is popular with both Republicans and Democrats alike, and because nobody wants to pay higher taxes, politicians are often eager to feed the impression that solving the problem is just a matter of eliminating waste and abuse. You’ll hear that phrase a lot. “We just need to eliminate waste and abuse.” The implication is that tackling the deficit issue won’t require tough choices. Or politicians suggest that we can somehow close our entire deficit by eliminating things like foreign aid, even though foreign aid makes up about 1 percent of our entire federal budget.

So here’s the truth. Around two-thirds of our budget -- two-thirds -- is spent on Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, and national security. Two-thirds. Programs like unemployment insurance, student loans, veterans’ benefits, and tax credits for working families take up another 20 percent. What’s left, after interest on the debt, is just 12 percent for everything else. That’s 12 percent for all of our national priorities -- education, clean energy, medical research, transportation, our national parks, food safety, keeping our air and water clean -- you name it -- all of that accounts for 12 percent of our budget.

Now, up till now, the debate here in Washington, the cuts proposed by a lot of folks in Washington, have focused exclusively on that 12 percent. But cuts to that 12 percent alone won’t solve the problem. So any serious plan to tackle our deficit will require us to put everything on the table, and take on excess spending wherever it exists in the budget.

A serious plan doesn’t require us to balance our budget overnight –- in fact, economists think that with the economy just starting to grow again, we need a phased-in approach –- but it does require tough decisions and support from our leaders in both parties now. Above all, it will require us to choose a vision of the America we want to see five years, 10 years, 20 years down the road.

Now, to their credit, one vision has been presented and championed by Republicans in the House of Representatives and embraced by several of their party’s presidential candidates. It’s a plan that aims to reduce our deficit by $4 trillion over the next 10 years, and one that addresses the challenge of Medicare and Medicaid in the years after that.

These are both worthy goals. They’re worthy goals for us to achieve. But the way this plan achieves those goals would lead to a fundamentally different America than the one we’ve known certainly in my lifetime. In fact, I think it would be fundamentally different than what we’ve known throughout our history.

A 70 percent cut in clean energy. A 25 percent cut in education. A 30 percent cut in transportation. Cuts in college Pell Grants that will grow to more than $1,000 per year. That’s the proposal. These aren’t the kind of cuts you make when you’re trying to get rid of some waste or find extra savings in the budget. These aren’t the kinds of cuts that the Fiscal Commission proposed. These are the kinds of cuts that tell us we can’t afford the America that I believe in and I think you believe in.

I believe it paints a vision of our future that is deeply pessimistic. It’s a vision that says if our roads crumble and our bridges collapse, we can’t afford to fix them. If there are bright young Americans who have the drive and the will but not the money to go to college, we can’t afford to send them.

Go to China and you’ll see businesses opening research labs and solar facilities. South Korean children are outpacing our kids in math and science. They’re scrambling to figure out how they put more money into education. Brazil is investing billions in new infrastructure and can run half their cars not on high-priced gasoline, but on biofuels. And yet, we are presented with a vision that says the American people, the United States of America -– the greatest nation on Earth -– can’t afford any of this.

It’s a vision that says America can’t afford to keep the promise we’ve made to care for our seniors. It says that 10 years from now, if you’re a 65-year-old who’s eligible for Medicare, you should have to pay nearly $6,400 more than you would today. It says instead of guaranteed health care, you will get a voucher. And if that voucher isn’t worth enough to buy the insurance that’s available in the open marketplace, well, tough luck -– you’re on your own. Put simply, it ends Medicare as we know it.

It’s a vision that says up to 50 million Americans have to lose their health insurance in order for us to reduce the deficit. Who are these 50 million Americans? Many are somebody’s grandparents -- may be one of yours -- who wouldn’t be able to afford nursing home care without Medicaid. Many are poor children. Some are middle-class families who have children with autism or Down’s syndrome. Some of these kids with disabilities are -- the disabilities are so severe that they require 24-hour care. These are the Americans we’d be telling to fend for themselves.

And worst of all, this is a vision that says even though Americans can’t afford to invest in education at current levels, or clean energy, even though we can’t afford to maintain our commitment on Medicare and Medicaid, we can somehow afford more than $1 trillion in new tax breaks for the wealthy. Think about that.

In the last decade, the average income of the bottom 90 percent of all working Americans actually declined. Meanwhile, the top 1 percent saw their income rise by an average of more than a quarter of a million dollars each. That’s who needs to pay less taxes?

They want to give people like me a $200,000 tax cut that’s paid for by asking 33 seniors each to pay $6,000 more in health costs. That’s not right. And it’s not going to happen as long as I’m President.

This vision is less about reducing the deficit than it is about changing the basic social compact in America. Ronald Reagan’s own budget director said, there’s nothing “serious” or “courageous” about this plan. There’s nothing serious about a plan that claims to reduce the deficit by spending a trillion dollars on tax cuts for millionaires and billionaires. And I don't think there’s anything courageous about asking for sacrifice from those who can least afford it and don’t have any clout on Capitol Hill. That's not a vision of the America I know.

The America I know is generous and compassionate. It’s a land of opportunity and optimism. Yes, we take responsibility for ourselves, but we also take responsibility for each other; for the country we want and the future that we share. We’re a nation that built a railroad across a continent and brought light to communities shrouded in darkness. We sent a generation to college on the GI Bill and we saved millions of seniors from poverty with Social Security and Medicare. We have led the world in scientific research and technological breakthroughs that have transformed millions of lives. That’s who we are. This is the America that I know. We don’t have to choose between a future of spiraling debt and one where we forfeit our investment in our people and our country.

To meet our fiscal challenge, we will need to make reforms. We will all need to make sacrifices. But we do not have to sacrifice the America we believe in. And as long as I’m President, we won’t.

So today, I’m proposing a more balanced approach to achieve $4 trillion in deficit reduction over 12 years. It’s an approach that borrows from the recommendations of the bipartisan Fiscal Commission that I appointed last year, and it builds on the roughly $1 trillion in deficit reduction I already proposed in my 2012 budget. It’s an approach that puts every kind of spending on the table -- but one that protects the middle class, our promise to seniors, and our investments in the future.

The first step in our approach is to keep annual domestic spending low by building on the savings that both parties agreed to last week. That step alone will save us about $750 billion over 12 years. We will make the tough cuts necessary to achieve these savings, including in programs that I care deeply about, but I will not sacrifice the core investments that we need to grow and create jobs. We will invest in medical research. We will invest in clean energy technology. We will invest in new roads and airports and broadband access. We will invest in education. We will invest in job training. We will do what we need to do to compete, and we will win the future.

The second step in our approach is to find additional savings in our defense budget. Now, as Commander-in-Chief, I have no greater responsibility than protecting our national security, and I will never accept cuts that compromise our ability to defend our homeland or America’s interests around the world. But as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Admiral Mullen, has said, the greatest long-term threat to America’s national security is America’s debt. So just as we must find more savings in domestic programs, we must do the same in defense. And we can do that while still keeping ourselves safe.

Over the last two years, Secretary Bob Gates has courageously taken on wasteful spending, saving $400 billion in current and future spending. I believe we can do that again. We need to not only eliminate waste and improve efficiency and effectiveness, but we’re going to have to conduct a fundamental review of America’s missions, capabilities, and our role in a changing world. I intend to work with Secretary Gates and the Joint Chiefs on this review, and I will make specific decisions about spending after it’s complete.

The third step in our approach is to further reduce health care spending in our budget. Now, here, the difference with the House Republican plan could not be clearer. Their plan essentially lowers the government’s health care bills by asking seniors and poor families to pay them instead. Our approach lowers the government’s health care bills by reducing the cost of health care itself.

Already, the reforms we passed in the health care law will reduce our deficit by $1 trillion. My approach would build on these reforms. We will reduce wasteful subsidies and erroneous payments. We will cut spending on prescription drugs by using Medicare’s purchasing power to drive greater efficiency and speed generic brands of medicine onto the market. We will work with governors of both parties to demand more efficiency and accountability from Medicaid.

We will change the way we pay for health care -– not by the procedure or the number of days spent in a hospital, but with new incentives for doctors and hospitals to prevent injuries and improve results. And we will slow the growth of Medicare costs by strengthening an independent commission of doctors, nurses, medical experts and consumers who will look at all the evidence and recommend the best ways to reduce unnecessary spending while protecting access to the services that seniors need.

Now, we believe the reforms we’ve proposed to strengthen Medicare and Medicaid will enable us to keep these commitments to our citizens while saving us $500 billion by 2023, and an additional $1 trillion in the decade after that. But if we’re wrong, and Medicare costs rise faster than we expect, then this approach will give the independent commission the authority to make additional savings by further improving Medicare.

But let me be absolutely clear: I will preserve these health care programs as a promise we make to each other in this society. I will not allow Medicare to become a voucher program that leaves seniors at the mercy of the insurance industry, with a shrinking benefit to pay for rising costs. I will not tell families with children who have disabilities that they have to fend for themselves. We will reform these programs, but we will not abandon the fundamental commitment this country has kept for generations.

That includes, by the way, our commitment to Social Security. While Social Security is not the cause of our deficit, it faces real long-term challenges in a country that’s growing older. As I said in the State of the Union, both parties should work together now to strengthen Social Security for future generations. But we have to do it without putting at risk current retirees, or the most vulnerable, or people with disabilities; without slashing benefits for future generations; and without subjecting Americans’ guaranteed retirement income to the whims of the stock market. And it can be done.

The fourth step in our approach is to reduce spending in the tax code, so-called tax expenditures. In December, I agreed to extend the tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans because it was the only way I could prevent a tax hike on middle-class Americans. But we cannot afford $1 trillion worth of tax cuts for every millionaire and billionaire in our society. We can’t afford it. And I refuse to renew them again.

Beyond that, the tax code is also loaded up with spending on things like itemized deductions. And while I agree with the goals of many of these deductions, from homeownership to charitable giving, we can’t ignore the fact that they provide millionaires an average tax break of $75,000 but do nothing for the typical middle-class family that doesn’t itemize. So my budget calls for limiting itemized deductions for the wealthiest 2 percent of Americans -- a reform that would reduce the deficit by $320 billion over 10 years.

But to reduce the deficit, I believe we should go further. And that’s why I’m calling on Congress to reform our individual tax code so that it is fair and simple -- so that the amount of taxes you pay isn’t determined by what kind of accountant you can afford.

I believe reform should protect the middle class, promote economic growth, and build on the fiscal commission’s model of reducing tax expenditures so that there’s enough savings to both lower rates and lower the deficit. And as I called for in the State of the Union, we should reform our corporate tax code as well, to make our businesses and our economy more competitive.

So this is my approach to reduce the deficit by $4 trillion over the next 12 years. It’s an approach that achieves about $2 trillion in spending cuts across the budget. It will lower our interest payments on the debt by $1 trillion. It calls for tax reform to cut about $1 trillion in tax expenditures -- spending in the tax code. And it achieves these goals while protecting the middle class, protecting our commitment to seniors, and protecting our investments in the future.

Now, in the coming years, if the recovery speeds up and our economy grows faster than our current projections, we can make even greater progress than I’ve pledged here. But just to hold Washington -- and to hold me --- accountable and make sure that the debt burden continues to decline, my plan includes a debt failsafe. If, by 2014, our debt is not projected to fall as a share of the economy -– if we haven’t hit our targets, if Congress has failed to act -– then my plan will require us to come together and make up the additional savings with more spending cuts and more spending reductions in the tax code. That should be an incentive for us to act boldly now, instead of kicking our problems further down the road.

So this is our vision for America -– this is my vision for America -- a vision where we live within our means while still investing in our future; where everyone makes sacrifices but no one bears all the burden; where we provide a basic measure of security for our citizens and we provide rising opportunity for our children.

There will be those who vigorously disagree with my approach. I can guarantee that as well. Some will argue we should not even consider ever -- ever -- raising taxes, even if only on the wealthiest Americans. It’s just an article of faith to them. I say that at a time when the tax burden on the wealthy is at its lowest level in half a century, the most fortunate among us can afford to pay a little more. I don’t need another tax cut. Warren Buffett doesn’t need another tax cut. Not if we have to pay for it by making seniors pay more for Medicare. Or by cutting kids from Head Start. Or by taking away college scholarships that I wouldn’t be here without and that some of you would not be here without.

And here’s the thing: I believe that most wealthy Americans would agree with me. They want to give back to their country, a country that’s done so much for them. It’s just Washington hasn’t asked them to.

Others will say that we shouldn’t even talk about cutting spending until the economy is fully recovered. These are mostly folks in my party. I’m sympathetic to this view -- which is one of the reasons I supported the payroll tax cuts we passed in December. It’s also why we have to use a scalpel and not a machete to reduce the deficit, so that we can keep making the investments that create jobs. But doing nothing on the deficit is just not an option. Our debt has grown so large that we could do real damage to the economy if we don’t begin a process now to get our fiscal house in order.

Finally, there are those who believe we shouldn’t make any reforms to Medicare, Medicaid, or Social Security, out of fear that any talk of change to these programs will immediately usher in the sort of steps that the House Republicans have proposed. And I understand those fears. But I guarantee that if we don’t make any changes at all, we won’t be able to keep our commitment to a retiring generation that will live longer and will face higher health care costs than those who came before.

Indeed, to those in my own party, I say that if we truly believe in a progressive vision of our society, we have an obligation to prove that we can afford our commitments. If we believe the government can make a difference in people’s lives, we have the obligation to prove that it works -– by making government smarter, and leaner and more effective.

Of course, there are those who simply say there’s no way we can come together at all and agree on a solution to this challenge. They’ll say the politics of this city are just too broken; the choices are just too hard; the parties are just too far apart. And after a few years on this job, I have some sympathy for this view.

But I also know that we’ve come together before and met big challenges. Ronald Reagan and Tip O’Neill came together to save Social Security for future generations. The first President Bush and a Democratic Congress came together to reduce the deficit. President Clinton and a Republican Congress battled each other ferociously, disagreed on just about everything, but they still found a way to balance the budget. And in the last few months, both parties have come together to pass historic tax relief and spending cuts.

And I know there are Republicans and Democrats in Congress who want to see a balanced approach to deficit reduction. And even those Republicans I disagree with most strongly I believe are sincere about wanting to do right by their country. We may disagree on our visions, but I truly believe they want to do the right thing.

So I believe we can, and must, come together again. This morning, I met with Democratic and Republican leaders in Congress to discuss the approach that I laid out today. And in early May, the Vice President will begin regular meetings with leaders in both parties with the aim of reaching a final agreement on a plan to reduce the deficit and get it done by the end of June.

I don’t expect the details in any final agreement to look exactly like the approach I laid out today. This a democracy; that’s not how things work. I’m eager to hear other ideas from all ends of the political spectrum. And though I’m sure the criticism of what I’ve said here today will be fierce in some quarters, and my critique of the House Republican approach has been strong, Americans deserve and will demand that we all make an effort to bridge our differences and find common ground.

This larger debate that we’re having -- this larger debate about the size and the role of government -- it has been with us since our founding days. And during moments of great challenge and change, like the one that we’re living through now, the debate gets sharper and it gets more vigorous. That’s not a bad thing. In fact, it’s a good thing. As a country that prizes both our individual freedom and our obligations to one another, this is one of the most important debates that we can have.

But no matter what we argue, no matter where we stand, we’ve always held certain beliefs as Americans. We believe that in order to preserve our own freedoms and pursue our own happiness, we can’t just think about ourselves. We have to think about the country that made these liberties possible. We have to think about our fellow citizens with whom we share a community. And we have to think about what’s required to preserve the American Dream for future generations.

This sense of responsibility -- to each other and to our country -- this isn’t a partisan feeling. It isn’t a Democratic or a Republican idea. It’s patriotism.

The other day I received a letter from a man in Florida. He started off by telling me he didn’t vote for me and he hasn’t always agreed with me. But even though he’s worried about our economy and the state of our politics -- here’s what he said -- he said, “I still believe. I believe in that great country that my grandfather told me about. I believe that somewhere lost in this quagmire of petty bickering on every news station, the ‘American Dream’ is still alive…We need to use our dollars here rebuilding, refurbishing and restoring all that our ancestors struggled to create and maintain… We as a people must do this together, no matter the color of the state one comes from or the side of the aisle one might sit on.”

“I still believe.” I still believe as well. And I know that if we can come together and uphold our responsibilities to one another and to this larger enterprise that is America, we will keep the dream of our founding alive -- in our time; and we will pass it on to our children. We will pass on to our children a country that we believe in.

Thank you. God bless you, and may God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Announces Candidacy for 2012 Presidency

I will be a candidate for reelection in 2012. And, I am going to need each and every one of you to get involved.

And I know that a lot of you who were involved in the campaign earlier, over the last two years you've probably felt some frustration. There have been times where you wanted Washington to change a lot more quickly than it has, and it keeps on slipping into those same old bad habits.

But I want everybody here to remember everything we've accomplished over the last two years, and the record of accomplishment in making a difference for ordinary people: making sure that they can get the health care that they need, making sure that they are able to find a job, or get trained for a job for the future.

All those things are happening because of you.

And so, if you've been feeling impatient -- and I understand that -- if -- if you're feeling frustrated sometimes, that shouldn't be a reason to pull back. That's a reason for us to get even more involved. Because we know if we've done this much over the last two years, imagine what we can do over the next six -- as long as we keep our focus on the future, as long as we keep working together.

I'm looking forward to reengaging with all of you.

And -- And I hope you are too.

# Address on Release of Official Certification of Birth

Now, let me just comment, first of all, on the fact that I can't get the networks to break in on all kinds of other discussions -- I was just back there listening to Chuck -- he was saying, it’s amazing that he’s not going to be talking about national security. I would not have the networks breaking in if I was talking about that, Chuck, and you know it.

As many of you have been briefed, we provided additional information today about the site of my birth. Now, this issue has been going on for two, two and a half years now. I think it started during the campaign. And I have to say that over the last two and a half years I have watched with bemusement, I've been puzzled at the degree to which this thing just kept on going. We've had every official in Hawaii, Democrat and Republican, every news outlet that has investigated this, confirm that, yes, in fact, I was born in Hawaii, August 4, 1961, in Kapiolani Hospital.

We've posted the certification that is given by the state of Hawaii on the Internet for everybody to see.

People have provided affidavits that they, in fact, have seen this birth certificate. And yet this thing just keeps on going.

Now, normally I would not comment on something like this, because obviously there’s a lot of stuff swirling in the press on at any given day and I've got other things to do. But two weeks ago, when the Republican House had put forward a budget that will have huge consequences potentially to the country, and when I gave a speech about my budget and how I felt that we needed to invest in education and infrastructure and making sure that we had a strong safety net for our seniors even as we were closing the deficit, during that entire week the dominant news story wasn’t about these huge, monumental choices that we're going to have to make as a nation. It was about my birth certificate. And that was true on most of the news outlets that were represented here.

And so I just want to make a larger point here. We've got some enormous challenges out there. There are a lot of folks out there who are still looking for work. Everybody is still suffering under high gas prices. We're going to have to make a series of very difficult decisions about how we invest in our future but also get a hold of our deficit and our debt -- how do we do that in a balanced way.

And this is going to generate huge and serious debates, important debates. And there are going to be some fierce disagreements -- and that’s good. That’s how democracy is supposed to work. And I am confident that the American people and America’s political leaders can come together in a bipartisan way and solve these problems. We always have.

But we’re not going to be able to do it if we are distracted. We’re not going to be able to do it if we spend time vilifying each other. We’re not going to be able to do it if we just make stuff up and pretend that facts are not facts. We’re not going to be able to solve our problems if we get distracted by sideshows and carnival barkers.

We live in a serious time right now and we have the potential to deal with the issues that we confront in a way that will make our kids and our grandkids and our great grandkids proud. And I have every confidence that America in the 21st century is going to be able to come out on top just like we always have. But we’re going to have to get serious to do it.

I know that there’s going to be a segment of people for which, no matter what we put out, this issue will not be put to rest. But I’m speaking to the vast majority of the American people, as well as to the press. We do not have time for this kind of silliness. We’ve got better stuff to do. I’ve got better stuff to do. We’ve got big problems to solve. And I’m confident we can solve them, but we’re going to have to focus on them -- not on this.

Thanks very much, everybody.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Remarks in Alabama on the Tornado Devastation

Well, Michelle and I want to express, first of all, our deepest condolences to not just the city of Tuscaloosa but the state of Alabama and all the other states that have been affected by this unbelievable storm. We just took a tour, and I’ve got to say I’ve never seen devastation like this. It is heartbreaking. We were just talking to some residents here who were lucky enough to escape alive, but have lost everything. They mentioned that their neighbors had lost two of their grandchildren in the process. What you’re seeing here is the consequence of just a few minutes of this extraordinarily powerful storm sweeping through this community. And as the governor was mentioning, Tuscaloosa typically gets a tornado during the season, but this is something that I don’t think anybody has seen before. In addition to keeping all the families who’ve been affected in our thoughts and prayers, obviously our biggest priority now is to help this community recover. I want to thank Mayor Maddox for his extraordinary leadership. Chief Burgess [ph] I know is having to dealing with a lot of difficulties. One of the challenges that the mayor was explaining is, is that the assets of the city -- a fire station that we passed on the way in, police resources, emergency resources -- those too have been affected. Fortunately the governor has done an extraordinary job with his team in making sure that the resources of the state are mobilized and have been brought in here. I’m very pleased that we’ve got a FEMA director in Craig Fugate who is as experienced as anybody in responding to disasters even of this magnitude. And we’ve already provided the disaster designations -- we’ve already provided the disaster designations that are required to make sure that the maximum federal help comes here as quickly as possible. Craig is working with the teams on the ground to make sure that we are seamlessly coordinating between the state, local and federal governments. And I want to just make a commitment to the communities here that we are going to do everything we can to help these communities rebuild. We can’t bring those who have been lost back. They’re alongside God at this point. We can help maybe a little bit with the families dealing with the grief of having a loved one lost. But the property damage, which is obviously extensive, that's something that we can do something about. And so we’re going to do everything we can to partner with you, Mr. Mayor, with you, governor. As the governor was pointing out, this community was hit as bad as any place, but there are communities all across Alabama and all across this region that have been affected, and we’re going to be making that same commitment to make sure that we’re doing whatever we can to make sure that people are okay. That bee likes you. Governor Bentley: It’s a wasp. President Obama: Okay, got it. There you go. Governor Bentley: No, he got him away. You didn’t get him. Mayor Maddox: Where’s the Secret Service when you need them? President Obama: Finally, let me just say this. As you walk around, we were just talking to three young people over there -- college students here at the University of Alabama who are volunteering now to help clean up. One of the young ladies there, she actually lived in this apartment; wasn’t here at the time the storm happened. What you’re struck by is people’s resilience and the way that the community has come together. And obviously that's testimony to the leadership of the governor and the mayor, but it’s also inherent as part of the American spirit. We go through hard times, but no matter how hard we may be tested, we maintain our faith and we look to each other to make sure that we’re supporting each other and helping each other. I’m sure that that spirit is going to continue until this city is all the way back. So, Mr. Mayor -- he was pointing out that there’s a lot of national media down here now, and the mayor expressed the concern that perhaps the media will move on in a day or a week or a month, and that folks will forget what’s happened here. And I want to assure him that the American people all across the country are with him and his community, and we’re going to make sure that you’re not forgotten and that we do everything we can to make sure that we rebuild. So with that, Governor, would you like to say a few words? Governor Bentley: I would. And, Mr. President, I would like to personally thank you and Mrs. Obama for coming and visiting Alabama because you know as you fly over this -- and I did yesterday -- as you fly over it from the air, it does not do it justice until you’re here on the ground. And I just want you to know how much I appreciate that. We asked for -- we’ve mobilized the state. We declared a state of emergency early on, even before the first tornadoes hit, and then we mobilized our National Guard the first day. We then asked the President for aid and we asked him to expedite that, and they have done that. And I just want you to know how much I appreciate that, Mr. President, because all these people appreciate that so much. We have eight counties across the state that have been hit by major tornadoes. This probably is the worst one, but we have others. As you go across the state, you see the same evidence of tornadoes all across the state. And so there are people that are hurting. We have now 210 confirmed deaths in Alabama. We have 1,700 injured. We have a number of people missing at the present time. We’re going to continue to work in a rescue-type mode, but we’re now more in a recovery mode. Thank you, Mr. President. If you’ll keep him off of me -- President Obama: I’m going to keep my eye on you. We’re looking out for each other. That's -- Governor Bentley: Yes, sir. Yes, sir. But I am -- let me say I am so proud of our first responders in this state. They have done an outstanding job. Our mayors, our county commissioners, our police, our firemen -- they have all just done a fantastic job. Our EMA people, they have just -- we have got a great team. They’ve all worked together. And now we have the federal government helping us. And, you know, that just shows when locals and state and federal government works together, we can get things accomplished, and that's what we’re going to do. And so, Mr. President, welcome to Alabama, but not under these circumstances. We want you to come back and maybe go to a football game over here at a later day and when things are better. But thank you for your help. President Obama: I will gladly come back. Governor Bentley: Thank you, sir. President Obama: Mr. Mayor, if you’d like to say a few words. Mayor Maddox: Mr. President, Governor, Mrs. Obama, thank you for coming today. The last 36 hours have been probably the most trying time in this community’s history. But you’re going to see a new story being written here in Tuscaloosa. And in the years to come these chapters are going to be fueled with hope and opportunity. Since this tragedy began, I’ve been using Romans 12:12 when Paul wrote under persecution, “Rejoice in our confident hope.” Well, today, Mr. President, your visit here has brought a confident hope to this community. And in the days, weeks and months to come, we’re going to be a story that you’re going to be very proud of and you can talk about across this land. Thank you again for coming today. President Obama: Well, thank you for your leadership. And two last points I want to make. First of all, we’ve got our congressional delegation here, and I am absolutely confident that they will make sure that the resources are available to help rebuild. To all the local officials who are here, I know that they’ve been personally affected, but I know that they’re going to provide the leadership in this community, working with the mayor and the governor to do what is needed. And finally, I think the mayor said something very profound as we were driving over here. He said, what's amazing is when something like this happens, folks forget all their petty differences. Politics, differences of religion or race, all that fades away when we are confronted with the awesome power of nature. And we’re reminded that all we have is each other. And so hopefully that spirit continues and grows. If nothing else comes out of this tragedy, let’s hope that that's one of the things that comes out. So thank you very much, everybody.

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# Commencement Address at Miami Dade College

Thank you, Miami Dade! Thank you. Please, everyone, be seated.

Hafeeza, thank you for that wonderful introduction. To Dr. PadrÃ³n, Dr. Vicente, to the board of trustees, the faculty, parents, family, friends, and, most important, the class of 2011, congratulations -- congratulations on reaching this day.

And thank you for allowing me the profound honor of being a part of it. And thank you for my first honorary associate degree. One of the perks of this job is that degrees come free these days. Not that it impresses anybody at home. Now Michelle just says, “Hey, Doctor, go take that dog for a walk.”

It is such a thrill to be at one of the largest, most diverse institutions of higher learning in America -- one that just this week was named one of the top community colleges in the nation. More than 170,000 students study across your eight campuses. You come from 181 countries, represented by the flags that just marched across this stage. You speak 94 languages. About 90 percent of you are minorities. And because more than 90 percent of you find a job in your field of study, it’s fitting that your motto is “Opportunity changes everything.”

As someone who’s only here because of the chances my education gave me, I couldn’t agree more. Opportunity changes everything. America will only be as strong in this new century as the opportunities that we provide you -- the opportunities that we provide to all our young people -- Latino, black, white, Asian, Native American, everybody. America will only be as strong as our pursuit of scientific research and our leadership in technology and innovation. And I believe that community colleges like this one are critical pathways to the middle class that equip students with the skills and the education necessary to compete and win in this 21st-century economy. And that’s why I’ve made community colleges a centerpiece of my education agenda, along with helping more students afford college. I couldn’t be prouder of the work we’ve done in community colleges. And your accomplishment today is vital to America reclaiming the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020. So I am proud of you. I am proud of you.

I know that for many of you reaching this day wasn’t easy.

AUDIENCE: No.

THE PRESIDENT: See? I got some amens there.

Perhaps you’re the first in your family to go to college. Some of you have had to overcome big obstacles, defeat your own doubts, prove yourself to everyone who ever believed that you couldn’t make it because of what you look like or where you came from. And, of course -- of course, for so many of you, this day represents the fulfillment of your family’s dreams when you were born. This is their achievement as well, so give it up for your parents and your grandparents, your cousins and your uncles and your aunties. This is their day, too. This is their day, too.

See, the diploma you’re about to receive stands for something more than the investment you made in yourselves. It’s the result of an investment made by generations before you; an investment in that radical yet simple idea that America is a place -- the place -- where you can make it if you try. That’s the ideal that has made this country -- that’s the idea that’s represented by that one flag that all of you cheered for; that’s what has made us a shining light to the world.

And preserving this idea -- keeping the American Dream alive from one generation to the next -- that’s never been an easy task. It’s an even greater test in times of rapid change. And all of you are graduating at a moment when change is coming faster than ever before. We’re emerging from an economic downturn like we haven’t seen since the 1930s. Massive shifts in technology have shifted profoundly what our economy looks like. Massive shifts abroad geopolitically have swift and dramatic impacts not only overseas but also here at home, from markets on Wall Street to wallets on Main Street. Just as advances in technology have the power to make our lives better, they also force us to compete with other nations like never before. Tackling big challenges like terrorism and climate change require sustained national effort, and yet too often, our politics seems as broken, as divided as ever.

So I know that for many of you it’s an intimidating time to be marching out into the world. Everything seems so unsettled. The future may seem unclear. But as you make your way in this ever changing world, you should take comfort in knowing that as a country, we’ve navigated tougher times before. We’ve sailed stormier seas. Earlier today, I spent some time in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. And some of you have seen what happened there as a consequence of the tornadoes that struck. The mayor and I visited a community where the devastation from this storm was simply heartbreaking -- entire homes and blocks just gone, wiped away. Some families lost everything. Some families lost family.

But what was striking is the way that damaged community has come together, how they’ve rallied around one another. The mayor there, young man doing wonderful work, Mayor Maddox, he put it best. He told me that when disasters like this strike, all our grievances seem to go away. All our differences don’t seem to matter. All our political disagreements seem so petty. We help each other, we support one another, as one country, as one people.

That’s the American spirit. No matter how hard we are tested, we look to our faith and our faith in one another. No matter what the challenge, we’ve always carried the American Dream forward. That’s been true throughout our history.

When bombs fell on Pearl Harbor, when an Iron Curtain fell over Europe, when the threat of nuclear war loomed just 90 miles from this city, when a brilliant September morning was darkened by terror -- in none of those instances did we falter. We endured. We carried the dream forward.

We’ve gone through periods of great economic turmoil, from an economy where most people worked on farms to one where most people worked in factories to now one fueled by information and technology. Through it all, we’ve persevered. We’ve adapted. We’ve prospered. Workers found their voice, and the right to organize for fair wages and safe working conditions. We carried forward.

When waves of Irish and Italian immigrants were derided as criminals and outcasts; when Catholics were discriminated against, or Jews had to succumb to quotas, or Muslims were blamed for society’s ills; when blacks were treated as second-class citizens and marriages like my own parents’ were illegal in much of the country -- we didn’t stop. We didn’t accept inequality. We fought. We overcame. We carried the dream forward.

We have carried this dream forward through times when our politics seemed broken. This is not the first time where it looked like politicians were going crazy. In heated debates over our founding, some warned independence would doom America to “a scene of bloody discord and desolation for ages.” That was the warning about independence. One of our greatest Presidents, Thomas Jefferson, was labeled an “infidel” and a “howling atheist” with “fangs.” Think about that. Even I haven’t gotten that one yet. Lincoln -- Lincoln, FDR, they were both vilified in their own times as tyrants, power hungry, bent on destroying democracy. And of course, this state has seen its fair share of tightly contested elections.

And we’ve made it through those moments. None of it was easy. A lot of it was messy. Sometimes there was violence. Sometimes it took years, even decades, for us to find our way through. But here’s the thing. We made it through. We made it through because in each of those moments, we made a choice.

Rather than turn inward and wall off America from the rest of the world, we’ve chosen to stand up forcefully for the ideals and the rights we believe are universal for all men and women.

Rather than settle for an America where everybody is left to fend for themselves, where we think only about our own short-term needs instead of the country that we’re leaving to our children, we have chosen to build a nation where everybody has a shot at opportunity, where everyone can succeed. We’ve chosen to invest in our people and in their future -- building public schools, sending a generation to college on the GI Bill, laying highways and railroads, building ports all across the country.

Rather than turn on each other in times of cultural upheaval, we’ve chosen to march, to organize, to sit-in, to turn out, to petition our government for women’s rights and voting rights and civil rights -- even in the face of fierce resistance -- because we are Americans; and no matter who we are or what we look like, we believe that in this country, all are equal, all are free.

Rather than give in to the voices suggesting we set our sights lower, downsize our dreams, or settle for something less, we’ve chosen again and again to make America bigger, bolder, more diverse, more generous, more hopeful.

Because throughout our history, what has distinguished us from all other nations is not just our wealth, it’s not just our power. It’s been our deep commitment to individual freedom and personal responsibility, but also our unshakeable commitment to one another -- a recognition that we share a future; that we rise or fall together; that we are part of a common enterprise that is greater, somehow, than the sum of its parts.

So, yes, class of 2011, change will be a constant in your lives. And that can be scary. That can be hard. And sometimes you’ll be tempted to turn inward; to say “What’s good enough for me is good enough.” Sometimes you’ll be tempted to turn on one another; to say “My problems are the fault of those who don’t look like me or sound like me.” Sometime you’ll be tempted to give into those voices that warn: “too hard,” “don’t try,” “no, you can’t.”

But I have faith you will reject those voices. I have faith you will reject those impulses. Your generation was born into a world with fewer walls; a world educated in an era of information, tempered by war and economic turmoil. And as our globe has grown smaller and more connected, you’ve shed the heavy weights of earlier generations. Your generation has grown up more accepting and tolerant of people for who they are, regardless of race or gender or religious belief; regardless of creed or sexual orientation. That’s how you’ve grown up. You see our diversity as a strength, not a weakness. And I believe those life experiences have fortified you, as earlier generations were fortified, to meet the tests of our time. Everything I have seen of your generation has shown me that you believe, as deeply as any previous generation, that America can always change for the better.

Class of 2011, you and your generation are now responsible for our future. I’m only going to be President a little bit longer. You are going to be leaders for many years to come. You will have to make choices to keep our dream alive for the next generation. Choices about whether we’ll stack the deck against workers and the middle class, or whether we make sure America remains a place where if you work hard you can get ahead. You’re going to have to make a choice about whether we’ll say we can’t afford to educate our young people and send them to college, or whether we continue to be a country that makes investments that are necessary to keep those young people competitive in this new century. It will be up to you to choose whether we’ll remain vulnerable to swings in oil prices or whether we invest in the clean energy that can break our dependence on oil and protect our planet. It will be your choice as to whether we break our promise to seniors and the poor and the disabled and tell them to fend for themselves, or whether we keep strengthening our social safety net and our health care system.

And it will be up to you whether we’ll turn on one another, or whether we stay true to our values of fairness and opportunity, understanding that we are a nation of immigrants -- immigrants that built this country into an economic powerhouse and a beacon of hope around the world.

I know this last issue generates some passion. I know that several young people here have recently identified themselves as undocumented. Some were brought here as young children, and discovered the truth only as adults. And they’ve put their futures on the line in hopes it will spur the rest of us to live up to our most cherished values.

I strongly believe we should fix our broken immigration system. Fix it so that it meets our 21st-century economic and security needs. And I want to work with Democrats and Republicans, yes, to protect our borders, and enforce our laws, and address the status of millions of undocumented workers. And I will keep fighting alongside many of you to make the DREAM Act the law of the land.

Like all of this country’s movements towards justice, it will be difficult and it will take time. I know some here wish that I could just bypass Congress and change the law myself. But that’s not how democracy works. See, democracy is hard. But it’s right.

Changing our laws means doing the hard work of changing minds and changing votes, one by one. And I am convinced we can change the laws, because we should all be able to agree that it makes no sense to expel talented young people from our country. They grew up as Americans. They pledge allegiance to our flag. And if they are trying to serve in our military or earn a degree, they are contributing to our future -- and we welcome those contributions.

We didn’t raise the Statue of Liberty with its back to the world; we raised it with its light to the world. Whether your ancestors came here on the Mayflower or a slave ship; whether they signed in at Ellis Island or they crossed the Rio Grande -- we are one people. We need one another. Our patriotism is not rooted in ethnicity, but in a shared belief of the enduring and permanent promise of this country.

That’s the promise redeemed by your graduation today. That’s the promise that drew so many of you to this college and your parents to this country. And that’s the promise that drew my own father here.

I didn’t know him well, my father -- and he lived a troubled life. But I know that when he was around your age, he dreamed of something more than his lot in life. He dreamed of that magical place; he dreamed of coming to study in America.

And when I was around your age, I traveled back to his home country of Kenya for the first time to learn his story. And I went to a tiny village called Alego, where his stepmother still lives in the house where he grew up, and I visited his grave. And I asked her if there was anything left for me to know him by. And she opened a trunk, and she took out a stack of letters -- and this is an elderly woman who doesn’t read or write -- but she had saved these letters, more than 30 of them, written in his hand and addressed to colleges and universities all across America.

They weren’t that different from the letters that I wrote when I was trying to get into college, or the ones that you wrote when you were hoping to come here. They were written in the simple, sometimes awkward, sometimes grammatically incorrect, unmistakably hopeful voice of somebody who is just desperate for a chance -- just desperate to live his unlikely dream.

And somebody at the University of Hawaii -- halfway around the world -- chose to give him that chance. And because that person gave a young man a chance, he met a young woman from Kansas; they had a son in the land where all things are possible.

And one of my earliest memories from growing up in Hawaii, is of sitting on my grandfather’s shoulders to see the astronauts from one of the Apollo space missions come ashore after a successful splashdown. You remember that no matter how young you are as a child. It’s one of those unforgettable moments when you first realize the miracle that is what this country is capable of. And I remember waving a little American flag on top of my grandfather’s shoulders, thinking about those astronauts, and thinking about space.

And today, on this day, more than 40 years later, I took my daughters to the Kennedy Space Center. And even though we didn’t get to see the Space Shuttle Endeavour launch, we met some of the astronauts, and we toured the Space Shuttle Atlantis. And looking at my daughters, I thought of how things come full circle. I thought of all that we’ve achieved as a nation since I was their age, a little brown boy sitting on my grandfather’s shoulders -- and I thought about all I want us to achieve by the time they have children of their own.

That’s my proof that the idea of America endures. That’s my evidence that our brave endeavor on this Earth continues. And every single day I walk into the Oval Office, and for all the days of my life, I will always remember that in no other nation on Earth could my story be possible, could your stories be possible. That is something I celebrate. That is something that drives every decision I make.

So what I ask of you, graduates, as you walk out of here today is this: Pursue success. Do not falter. When you make it, pull somebody else up. Preserve our dream. Remember your life is richer when people around you have a shot at opportunity as well. Strive to widen that circle of possibility; strive to forge that big, generous, optimistic vision of America that we inherited; strive to carry that dream forward to future generations.

Thank you. Congratulations. May God bless you. May God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# White House Correspondents' Dinner Address 2011

All right everybody, please have a seat.

My fellow Americans, Mahalo! It is wonderful to be here at the White House Correspondents’ Dinner. What a week. As some of you heard, the state of Hawaii released my official long-form birth certificate.

click to enlarge

Hopefully this puts all doubts to rest. But just in case there are any lingering questions, tonight I’m prepared to go a step further. Tonight, for the first time, I am releasing my official birth video.

Now, I warn you -- no one has seen this footage in 50 years, not even me. But let’s take a look.

Your browser does not support the video tag.

Oh, well. Back to square one. I want to make clear to the Fox News table: That was a joke. That was not my real birth video. That was a children’s cartoon. Call Disney if you don't believe me. They have the original long-form version.

Anyway, it’s good to be back with so many esteemed guests. Celebrities. Senators. Journalists. Essential government employees. Non-essential government employees. You know who you are.

I am very much looking forward to hearing Seth Meyers tonight. He’s a young, fresh face who can do no wrong in the eyes of his fans. Seth, enjoy it while it lasts.

Yes, I think it is fair to say that when it comes to my presidency, the honeymoon is over. For example, some people now suggest that I’m too professorial. And I’d like to address that head-on, by assigning all of you some reading that will help you draw your own conclusions. Others say that I'm arrogant. But I've found a really great self-help tool for this: my poll numbers.

I’ve even let down my key core constituency: movie stars. Just the other day, Matt Damon -- I love Matt Damon, love the guy -- Matt Damon said he was disappointed in my performance. Well, Matt, I just saw “The Adjustment Bureau,” so -- right back atcha, buddy.

Of course, there’s someone who I can always count on for support: my wonderful wife Michelle. We made a terrific team at the Easter Egg Roll this week. I’d give out bags of candy to the kids, and she’d snatch them right back out of their little hands. Snatched them.

And where is the National Public Radio table? You guys are still here? That's good. I couldn’t remember where we landed on that. Now, I know you were a little tense when the GOP tried to cut your funding, but personally I was looking forward to new programming like “No Things Considered” -- or “Wait, Wait…Don't Fund Me.”

Of course, the deficit is a serious issue. That's why Paul Ryan couldn’t be here tonight. His budget has no room for laughter.

Michele Bachmann is here, though, I understand, and she is thinking about running for President, which is weird because I hear she was born in Canada. Yes, Michele, this is how it starts. Just letting you know.

Tim Pawlenty? He seems all American. But have you heard his real middle name? Tim “Hosni” Pawlenty? What a shame.

My buddy, our outstanding ambassador, Jon Huntsman, is with us. Now, there’s something you might not know about Jon. He didn’t learn to speak Chinese to go there. Oh, no. He learned English to come here.

And then there’s a vicious rumor floating around that I think could really hurt Mitt Romney. I heard he passed universal health care when he was governor of Massachusetts. Someone should get to the bottom of that.

And I know just the guy to do it -- Donald Trump is here tonight! Now, I know that he’s taken some flak lately, but no one is happier, no one is prouder to put this birth certificate matter to rest than the Donald. And that’s because he can finally get back to focusing on the issues that matter –- like, did we fake the moon landing? What really happened in Roswell? And where are Biggie and Tupac?

But all kidding aside, obviously, we all know about your credentials and breadth of experience. For example -- no, seriously, just recently, in an episode of Celebrity Apprentice -- at the steakhouse, the men’s cooking team cooking did not impress the judges from Omaha Steaks. And there was a lot of blame to go around. But you, Mr. Trump, recognized that the real problem was a lack of leadership. And so ultimately, you didn’t blame Lil’ Jon or Meatloaf. You fired Gary Busey. And these are the kind of decisions that would keep me up at night. Well handled, sir. Well handled.

Say what you will about Mr. Trump, he certainly would bring some change to the White House. Let’s see what we’ve got up there.

So, yes, this has been quite a year in politics, but also in the movies. Many people, for instance, were inspired by the King’s Speech. It’s a wonderful film. Well, some of you may not know this, but there's now a sequel in the works that touches close to home. And because this is a Hollywood crowd, tonight I can offer a sneak peek. So can we show the trailer, please?

Coming to a theater near you.

Let me close on a serious note. We are having a good time, but as has been true for the last several years, we have incredible young men and women who are serving in uniform overseas in the most extraordinary of circumstances. And we are reminded of their courage and their valor.

We also need to remember our neighbors in Alabama and across the South that have been devastated by terrible storms from last week. Michelle and I were down there yesterday, and we’ve spent a lot of time with some of the folks who have been affected. The devastation is unimaginable and is heartbreaking and it’s going to be a long road back. And so we need to keep those Americans in our thoughts and in our prayers. But we also need to stand with them in the hard months and perhaps years to come.

I intend to make sure that the federal government does that. And I’ve got faith that the journalists in this room will do their part for the people who have been affected by this disaster -- by reporting on their progress, and letting the rest of America know when they will need more help. Those are stories that need telling. And that’s what all of you do best, whether it’s rushing to the site of a devastating storm in Alabama, or braving danger to cover a revolution in the Middle East.

You know, in the last months, we’ve seen journalists threatened, arrested, beaten, attacked, and in some cases even killed simply for doing their best to bring us the story, to give people a voice, and to hold leaders accountable. And through it all, we’ve seen daring men and women risk their lives for the simple idea that no one should be silenced, and everyone deserves to know the truth.

That’s what you do. At your best that's what journalism is. That’s the principle that you uphold. It is always important, but it’s especially important in times of challenge, like the moment that America and the world is facing now.

So I thank you for your service and the contributions that you make. And I want to close by recognizing not only your service, but also to remember those that have been lost as a consequence of the extraordinary reporting that they’ve done over recent weeks. They help, too, to defend our freedoms and allow democracy to flourish.

God bless you, and may God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Announces the Death of Osama Bin Laden

Good evening. Tonight, I can report to the American people and to the world that the United States has conducted an operation that killed Osama bin Laden, the leader of al Qaeda, and a terrorist who’s responsible for the murder of thousands of innocent men, women, and children.

It was nearly 10 years ago that a bright September day was darkened by the worst attack on the American people in our history. The images of 9/11 are seared into our national memory -- hijacked planes cutting through a cloudless September sky; the Twin Towers collapsing to the ground; black smoke billowing up from the Pentagon; the wreckage of Flight 93 in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, where the actions of heroic citizens saved even more heartbreak and destruction.

And yet we know that the worst images are those that were unseen to the world. The empty seat at the dinner table. Children who were forced to grow up without their mother or their father. Parents who would never know the feeling of their child’s embrace. Nearly 3,000 citizens taken from us, leaving a gaping hole in our hearts.

On September 11, 2001, in our time of grief, the American people came together. We offered our neighbors a hand, and we offered the wounded our blood. We reaffirmed our ties to each other, and our love of community and country. On that day, no matter where we came from, what God we prayed to, or what race or ethnicity we were, we were united as one American family.

We were also united in our resolve to protect our nation and to bring those who committed this vicious attack to justice. We quickly learned that the 9/11 attacks were carried out by al Qaeda -- an organization headed by Osama bin Laden, which had openly declared war on the United States and was committed to killing innocents in our country and around the globe. And so we went to war against al Qaeda to protect our citizens, our friends, and our allies.

Over the last 10 years, thanks to the tireless and heroic work of our military and our counterterrorism professionals, we’ve made great strides in that effort. We’ve disrupted terrorist attacks and strengthened our homeland defense. In Afghanistan, we removed the Taliban government, which had given bin Laden and al Qaeda safe haven and support. And around the globe, we worked with our friends and allies to capture or kill scores of al Qaeda terrorists, including several who were a part of the 9/11 plot.

Yet Osama bin Laden avoided capture and escaped across the Afghan border into Pakistan. Meanwhile, al Qaeda continued to operate from along that border and operate through its affiliates across the world. And so shortly after taking office, I directed Leon Panetta, the director of the CIA, to make the killing or capture of bin Laden the top priority of our war against al Qaeda, even as we continued our broader efforts to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat his network.

Then, last August, after years of painstaking work by our intelligence community, I was briefed on a possible lead to bin Laden. It was far from certain, and it took many months to run this thread to ground. I met repeatedly with my national security team as we developed more information about the possibility that we had located bin Laden hiding within a compound deep inside of Pakistan. And finally, last week, I determined that we had enough intelligence to take action, and authorized an operation to get Osama bin Laden and bring him to justice.

Today, at my direction, the United States launched a targeted operation against that compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan. A small team of Americans carried out the operation with extraordinary courage and capability. No Americans were harmed. They took care to avoid civilian casualties. After a firefight, they killed Osama bin Laden and took custody of his body.

For over two decades, bin Laden has been al Qaeda’s leader and symbol, and has continued to plot attacks against our country and our friends and allies. The death of bin Laden marks the most significant achievement to date in our nation’s effort to defeat al Qaeda.

Yet his death does not mark the end of our effort. There’s no doubt that al Qaeda will continue to pursue attacks against us. We must –- and we will -- remain vigilant at home and abroad.

As we do, we must also reaffirm that the United States is not –- and never will be -– at war with Islam. I’ve made clear, just as President Bush did shortly after 9/11, that our war is not against Islam. Bin Laden was not a Muslim leader; he was a mass murderer of Muslims. Indeed, al Qaeda has slaughtered scores of Muslims in many countries, including our own. So his demise should be welcomed by all who believe in peace and human dignity.

Over the years, I’ve repeatedly made clear that we would take action within Pakistan if we knew where bin Laden was. That is what we’ve done. But it’s important to note that our counterterrorism cooperation with Pakistan helped lead us to bin Laden and the compound where he was hiding. Indeed, bin Laden had declared war against Pakistan as well, and ordered attacks against the Pakistani people.

Tonight, I called President Zardari, and my team has also spoken with their Pakistani counterparts. They agree that this is a good and historic day for both of our nations. And going forward, it is essential that Pakistan continue to join us in the fight against al Qaeda and its affiliates.

The American people did not choose this fight. It came to our shores, and started with the senseless slaughter of our citizens. After nearly 10 years of service, struggle, and sacrifice, we know well the costs of war. These efforts weigh on me every time I, as Commander-in-Chief, have to sign a letter to a family that has lost a loved one, or look into the eyes of a service member who’s been gravely wounded.

So Americans understand the costs of war. Yet as a country, we will never tolerate our security being threatened, nor stand idly by when our people have been killed. We will be relentless in defense of our citizens and our friends and allies. We will be true to the values that make us who we are. And on nights like this one, we can say to those families who have lost loved ones to al Qaeda’s terror: Justice has been done.

Tonight, we give thanks to the countless intelligence and counterterrorism professionals who’ve worked tirelessly to achieve this outcome. The American people do not see their work, nor know their names. But tonight, they feel the satisfaction of their work and the result of their pursuit of justice.

We give thanks for the men who carried out this operation, for they exemplify the professionalism, patriotism, and unparalleled courage of those who serve our country. And they are part of a generation that has borne the heaviest share of the burden since that September day.

Finally, let me say to the families who lost loved ones on 9/11 that we have never forgotten your loss, nor wavered in our commitment to see that we do whatever it takes to prevent another attack on our shores.

And tonight, let us think back to the sense of unity that prevailed on 9/11. I know that it has, at times, frayed. Yet today’s achievement is a testament to the greatness of our country and the determination of the American people.

The cause of securing our country is not complete. But tonight, we are once again reminded that America can do whatever we set our mind to. That is the story of our history, whether it’s the pursuit of prosperity for our people, or the struggle for equality for all our citizens; our commitment to stand up for our values abroad, and our sacrifices to make the world a safer place.

Let us remember that we can do these things not just because of wealth or power, but because of who we are: one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Thank you.

May God bless you.

And may God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Speech to Troops at Fort Campbell

Hello, Fort Campbell! 101st Airborne Division -- Air Assault, hello!

General Colt, thank you for that great introduction -- it was great because it was brief. More importantly, thank you for the extraordinary leadership that you’ve shown here at one of the largest Army bases in America.

And let me just say, I make a lot of decisions; one of the earliest and best decisions I made was choosing one of the finest Vice Presidents in our history -- Joe Biden, right here.

Chaplain Miller, thank you for the beautiful invocation.

I want to thank General Colt for welcoming me here today, along with your great Command Sergeant Major, Wayne St. Louis. The Quartet and 101st Division Band. All these troopers behind me -- you look great. You noticed they kind of hesitated.

We got a lot of folks in the house. We’ve got military police and medical personnel. We’ve got the Green Berets of the 5th Special Forces Group. I think we’ve got a few Air Force here. Oh -- Well, we thought we did. There they go -- okay. Come on. And, of course, the legendary Screaming Eagles. And although they’re not in the audience, I want to acknowledge the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment -- the Night Stalkers -- for their extraordinary service.

Now, I’ve got to say, some of you are starting to look a little familiar -- because last December, when we were at Bagram, I was out there to thank you for your service, especially during the holidays. And we had a great rally, a big crowd -- it seemed like everybody was there from the 101st.

And since then, I know we’ve had quite a few homecomings. The Rakkasans. Destiny. Strike. Bastogne. And some of the Division Headquarters -- the Gladiators. On behalf of a grateful nation -- welcome home.

Of course, our thoughts and prayers are with General Campbell, Command Sergeant Major Schroeder, and all of the Screaming Eagles and troops that are still risking their lives in theater. And I’m so pleased that Ann Campbell and Marla Schroeder, and some of the inspiring military spouses are here. Where are they at? Right over there. We are grateful to you. God bless you. There they are. Thank you so much. This happens to be Military Spouse Appreciation Day. And we honor your service as well.

Now, I didn’t come here to make a really long speech. I know you're hearing that. It’s like, yeah, it’s hot! What I really wanted to do was come down and shake some hands. I came here for a simple reason -- to say thank you on behalf of America. This has been an historic week in the life of our nation. Thanks to the incredible skill and courage of countless individuals -- intelligence, military -- over many years, the terrorist leader who struck our nation on 9/11 will never threaten America again.

Yesterday, I traveled to New York City, and, along with some of our 9/11 families, laid a wreath at Ground Zero in memory of their loved ones. I met with the first responders -- the firefighters, the police officers, the Port Authority officers -- who lost so many of their own when they rushed into those burning towers. I promised that our nation will never forget those we lost that dark September day.

And today, here at Fort Campbell, I had the privilege of meeting the extraordinary Special Ops folks who honored that promise. It was a chance for me to say -- on behalf of all Americans and people around the world -- “Job well done.” Job well done.

They’re America’s “quiet professionals” -- because success demands secrecy. But I will say this. Like all of you, they could have chosen a life of ease. But like you, they volunteered. They chose to serve in a time of war, knowing they could be sent into harm’s way. They trained for years. They’re battle-hardened. They practiced tirelessly for this mission. And when I gave the order, they were ready.

Now, in recent days, the whole world has learned just how ready they were. These Americans deserve credit for one of the greatest intelligence military operations in our nation’s history. But so does every person who wears America’s uniform, the finest military the world has ever known. And that includes all of you men and women of 101st.

You have been on the frontlines of this fight for nearly 10 years. You were there in those early days, driving the Taliban from power, pushing al Qaeda out of its safe havens. Over time, as the insurgency grew, you went back for, in some cases, a second time, a third time, a fourth time.

When the decision was made to go into Iraq, you were there, too, making the longest air assault in history, defeating a vicious insurgency, ultimately giving Iraqis the chance to secure their democracy. And you’ve been at the forefront of our new strategy in Afghanistan.

Sending you -- more of you -- into harm’s way is the toughest decision that I’ve made as Commander-in-Chief. I don’t make it lightly. Every time I visit Walter Reed, every time I visit Bethesda, I’m reminded of the wages of war. But I made that decision because I know that this mission was vital to the security of the nation that we all love.

And I know it hasn’t been easy for you and it hasn’t, certainly, been easy for your families. Since 9/11, no base has deployed more often, and few bases have sacrificed more than you. We see it in our heroic wounded warriors, fighting every day to recover, and who deserve the absolute best care in the world. We see it in the mental and emotional toll that’s been taken -- in some cases, some good people, good soldiers who’ve taken their own lives. So we’re going to keep saying to anybody who is hurting out there, don’t give up. You’re not alone. Your country needs you. We’re here for you to keep you strong.

And most of all, we see the price of this war in the 125 soldiers from Fort Campbell who’ve made the ultimate sacrifice during this deployment to Afghanistan. And every memorial ceremony -- every “Eagle Remembrance” -- is a solemn reminder of the heavy burdens of war, but also the values of loyalty and duty and honor that have defined your lives.

So here’s what each of you must know. Because of your service, because of your sacrifices, we’re making progress in Afghanistan. In some of the toughest parts of the country, General Campbell and the 101st are taking insurgents and their leaders off the battlefield and helping Afghans reclaim their communities.

Across Afghanistan, we’ve broken the Taliban’s momentum. In key regions, we’ve seized the momentum, pushing them out of their strongholds. We’re building the capacity of Afghans, partnering with communities and police and security forces, which are growing stronger.

And most of all, we’re making progress in our major goal, our central goal in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and that is disrupting and dismantling -- and we are going to ultimately defeat al Qaeda. We have cut off their head and we will ultimately defeat them.

Even before this week’s operation, we’ve put al Qaeda’s leadership under more pressure than at any time since 9/11, on both sides of the border. So the bottom line is this: Our strategy is working, and there’s no greater evidence of that than justice finally being delivered to Osama bin Laden.

But I don’t want to fool you. This continues to be a very tough fight. You know that. But because of this progress, we’re moving into a new phase. In the coming months, we’ll start transferring responsibility for security to Afghan forces. Starting this summer, we’ll begin reducing American forces. As we transition, we’ll build a long-term partnership with the Afghan people, so that al Qaeda can never again threaten America from that country.

And, as your Commander-in-Chief, I’m confident that we’re going to succeed in this mission. The reason I’m confident is because in you I see the strength of America’s military -- and because in recent days we’ve all seen the resilience of the American spirit.

Now, this week I received a letter from a girl in New Jersey named Payton Wall. She wrote to me on Monday after the news that bin Laden had been killed, and she explained how she still remembers that September morning almost 10 years ago. She was only four years old. Her father, Glen, was trapped inside the World Trade Center. And so, in those final, frantic moments, knowing he might not make it, he called home. And Payton remembers watching her mom sobbing as she spoke to her husband and then passed the phone to Payton. And in words that were hard to hear but which she’s never forgotten, he said to her, “I love you Payton, and I will always be watching over you.”

So yesterday, Payton, her mom, and her sister, Avery, joined me at Ground Zero. And now Payton is 14. These past 10 years have been tough for her. In her letter, she said, “Ever since my father died, I lost a part of me that can never be replaced.” And she describes her childhood as a “little girl struggling to shine through all the darkness in her life.”

But every year, more and more, Payton is shining through. She’s playing a lot of sports, including lacrosse and track, just like her dad. She’s doing well in school. She’s mentoring younger students. She’s looking ahead to high school in the fall. And so, yesterday she was with us -- a strong, confident young woman -- honoring her father’s memory, even as she set her sights on the future.

And for her and for all of us, this week has been a reminder of what we’re about as a people. It’s easy to forget sometimes, especially in times of hardship, times of uncertainty. We’re coming out of the worst recession since the Great Depression; haven’t fully recovered from that. We’ve made enormous sacrifices in two wars. But the essence of America -- the values that have defined us for more than 200 years -- they don’t just endure; they are stronger than ever.

We’re still the America that does the hard things, that does the great things. We’re the nation that always dared to dream. We’re the nation that’s willing to take risks -- revolutionaries breaking free from an empire; pioneers heading West to settle new frontiers; innovators building railways and laying the highways and putting a man on the surface of the moon.

We are the nation -- and you’re the Division -- that parachuted behind enemy lines on D-Day, freeing a continent, liberating concentration camps. We’re the nation that, all those years ago, sent your Division to a high school in Arkansas so that nine black students could get an education. That was you. Because we believed that all men are created equal; that everyone deserves a chance to realize their God-given potential.

We’re the nation that has faced tough times before -- tougher times than these. But when our Union frayed, when the Depression came, when our harbor was bombed, when our country was attacked on that September day, when disaster strikes like that tornado that just ripped through this region, we do not falter. We don’t turn back. We pick ourselves up and we get on with the hard task of keeping our country strong and safe.

See, there’s nothing we can’t do together, 101st, when we remember who we are, at that is the United States of America. When we remember that, no problem is too hard and no challenge is too great.

And that is why I am so confident that, with your brave service, America’s greatest days are still to come.

God bless you.

God bless the 101st.

And God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Commencement Speech at Booker T. Washington HS

Hello, Memphis! Congratulations to the class of 2011!

Now, I will admit being President is a great job. I have a very nice plane. I have a theme song. But what I enjoy most is having a chance to come to a school like Booker T. Washington High School and share this day with its graduates. So I could not be more pleased to be here.

We've got some wonderful guests who are here as well, and I just want to make mention of them very quickly. First of all, the Governor of Tennessee, Bill Haslam, is here. Please give him a big round of applause. Three outstanding members of the Tennessee congressional delegation, all of whom care deeply about education -- Senator Bob Corker, Senator Lamar Alexander, and Congressman Steve Cohen is here. You've got one of Memphis's own, former Congressman Harold Ford, Jr. is in the house. And the Mayor of Memphis, A.C. Wharton is here. Please give him a big round of applause.

I am so proud of each and every one of you.

Student: Thank you!

President Obama: You're welcome. You made it -- and not just through high school. You made it past Principal Kiner. I've spent a little bit of time with her now, and you can tell she is not messing around. I've only been in Memphis a couple of hours, but I'm pretty sure that if she told me to do something I'd do it.

Then I had the chance to meet her mom and her daughter, Amber, a little while back, and we took a picture. It turns out Amber actually goes to another high school. She was worried that the boys would be afraid to talk to her if her mom was lurking in the hallways -- which is why my next job will be principal at Sasha and Malia's high school. And then I'll be president of their college.

Let me also say to Alexis and Vashti -- I heard that you were a little nervous about speaking today, but now I'm a little nervous speaking after you, because you both did terrific jobs. We've had some great performances by Shalonda and Tecia and Paula, and the jazz band. Give them a big round of applause.

Last but not least, I want to recognize all the people who helped you to reach this milestone: the parents, the grandparents, the aunts, the uncles, the sisters, the brothers, the friends, the neighbors -- who have loved you and stood behind you every step of the way. Congratulations, family.

And I want to acknowledge the devoted teachers and administrators at Booker T. Washington, who believed in you -- who kept the heat on you, and have never treated teaching as a job, but rather as a calling.

Every commencement is a day of celebration. I was just telling somebody backstage, I just love commencements. I get all choked up at commencements. So I can tell you already right now, I will cry at my children's commencement. I cry at other people's commencements. But this one is especially hopeful. This one is especially hopeful because some people say that schools like BTW just aren't supposed to succeed in America. You'll hear them say, "The streets are too rough in those neighborhoods." "The schools are too broken." "The kids don't stand a chance."

We are here today because every single one of you stood tall and said, "Yes, we can." Yes, we can learn. Yes, we can succeed. You decided you would not be defined by where you come from but by where you want to go, by what you want to achieve, by the dreams you hope to fulfill.

Just a couple of years ago, this was a school where only about half the students made it to graduation. For a long time, just a handful headed to college each year. But at Booker T. Washington, you changed all that.

You created special academies for ninth graders to start students off on the right track. You made it possible for kids to take AP classes and earn college credits. You even had a team take part in robotics competition so students can learn with their hands by building and creating. And you didn't just create a new curriculum, you created a new culture -- a culture that prizes hard work and discipline; a culture that shows every student here that they matter and that their teachers believe in them. As Principal Kiner says, the kids have to know that you care, before they care what you know.

And because you created this culture of caring and learning, today we're standing with a very different Booker T. Washington High School. Today, this is a place where more than four out of five students are earning a diploma; a place where 70 percent of the graduates will continue their education; where many will be the very first in their families to go to college.

Today, Booker T. Washington is a place that has proven why we can't accept excuses -- any excuses -- when it comes to education. In the United States of America, we should never accept anything less than the best that our children have to offer.

As your teacher Steve McKinney -- where's Steve at? There he is. AKA Big Mac. And I see why they call you Big Mac. As Mr. McKinney said in the local paper, "We need everyone to broaden their ideas about what is possible. We need parents, politicians, and the media to see how success is possible, how success is happening every day."

So that's why I came here today. Because if success can happen here at Booker T. Washington, it can happen anywhere in Memphis. And if it can happen in Memphis, it can happen anywhere in Tennessee. And it can happen anywhere in Tennessee, it can happen all across America.

So ever since I became President, my administration has been working hard to make sure that we build on the progress that's taking place in schools like this. We've got to encourage the kind of change that's led not by politicians, not by Washington, D.C., but by teachers and principals and parents, and entire communities; by ordinary people standing up and demanding a better future for their children.

We have more work to do so that every child can fulfill his or her God-given potential. And here in Tennessee we've been seeing great progress. Tennessee has been a leader, one of the first winners of the nationwide "Race to the Top" that we've launched to reward the kind of results you're getting here at Booker T. Washington.

And understand, this isn't just an issue for me. I'm standing here as President because of the education that I received. As Chris said, my father left my family when I was two years old. And I was raised by a single mom, and sometimes she struggled to provide for me and my sister. But my mother, my grandparents, they pushed me to excel. They refused to let me make excuses. And they kept pushing me, especially on those rare occasions where I'd slack off or get into trouble. They weren't that rare, actually. I'm sure nobody here has done anything like that.

I'm so blessed that they kept pushing; I'm so lucky that my teachers kept pushing -- because education made all the difference in my life. The same is true for Michelle. Education made such a difference in her life. Michelle's dad was a city worker, had multiple sclerosis, had to wake up every day and it took him a couple hours just to get ready for work. But he went to work every day. Her mom was a secretary, went to work every day, and kept on pushing her just like my folks pushed me.

That's what's made a difference in our lives. And it's going to make an even greater difference in your lives -- not just for your own success but for the success of the United States of America. Because we live in a new world now. Used to be that you didn't have to have an education. If you were willing to work hard, you could go to a factory somewhere and get a job. Those times are passed. Believe it or not, when you go out there looking for a job, you're not just competing against people in Nashville or Atlanta. You're competing against young people in Beijing and Mumbai. That's some tough competition. Those kids are hungry. They're working hard. And you'll need to be prepared for it.

And as a country, we need all of our young people to be ready. We can't just have some young people successful. We've got to have every young person contributing; earning those high school diplomas and then earning those college diplomas, or getting certified in a trade or profession. We can't succeed without it.

Through education, you can also better yourselves in other ways. You learn how to learn -- how to think critically and find solutions to unexpected challenges. I remember we used to ask our teachers, "Why am I going to need algebra?" Well, you may not have to solve for x to get a good job or to be a good parent. But you will need to think through tough problems. You'll need to think on your feet. You'll need to know how to gather facts and evaluate information. So, math teachers, you can tell your students that the President says they need algebra.

Education also teaches you the value of discipline -- that the greatest rewards come not from instant gratification but from sustained effort and from hard work. This is a lesson that's especially true today, in a culture that prizes flash over substance, that tells us that the goal in life is to be entertained, that says you can be famous just for being famous. You get on a reality show -- don't know what you've done -- suddenly you're famous. But that's not going to lead to lasting, sustained achievement.

And finally, with the right education, both at home and at school, you can learn how to be a better human being. For when you read a great story or you learn about an important moment in history, it helps you imagine what it would be like to walk in somebody else's shoes, to know their struggles. The success of our economy will depend on your skills, but the success of our community will depend on your ability to follow the Golden Rule -- to treat others as you would like to be treated.

We've seen how important this is even in the past few weeks, as communities here in Memphis and all across the South have come together to deal with floodwaters, and to help each other in the aftermath of terrible tornadoes.

All of these qualities -- empathy, discipline, the capacity to solve problems, the capacity to think critically -- these skills don't just change how the world sees us. They change how we see ourselves. They allow each of us to seek out new horizons and new opportunities with confidence -- with the knowledge that we're ready; that we can face obstacles and challenges and unexpected setbacks. That's the power of your education. That's the power of the diploma that you receive today.

And this is something that Booker T. Washington himself understood. Think about it. He entered this world a slave on a Southern plantation. But he would leave this world as the leader of a growing civil rights movement and the president of the world-famous Tuskegee Institute.

Booker T. Washington believed that change and equality would be won in the classroom. So he convinced folks to help him buy farmland. Once he had the land, he needed a school. So he assigned his first students to actually build the chairs and the desks and even a couple of the classrooms. You thought your teachers were tough.

Booker T. Washington ran a tight ship. He'd ride the train to Tuskegee and scare some of the new students. This is before YouTube and TMZ, so the kids didn't recognize him. He'd walk up to them and say, "Oh, you're heading to Tuskegee. I heard the work there is hard. I heard they give the students too much to do. I hear the food is terrible. You probably won't last three months." But the students would reply they weren't afraid of hard work. They were going to complete their studies no matter what Booker T. Washington threw at them. And in that way, he prepared them -- because life will throw some things at you.

The truth is, not a single one of the graduates here today has had it easy. Not a single one of you had anything handed to you on a silver platter. You had to work for it. You had to earn it. Most of all, you had to believe in yourselves.

I think of Chris's stories, and what he's faced in his life: Lost his father to violence at the age of four. Had a childhood illness that could have been debilitating. But somehow he knew in his heart that he could take a different path.

I think of all the graduates here who had to leave their homes when their apartments were torn down, but who took two buses each morning to come back to Booker T. Washington.

I think of Eron Jackon. Where is Eron? Eron has known a lot of setbacks in her young life. There was a period when she lashed out and she got into trouble and she made mistakes. And when she first came to Booker T. Washington, she struggled. Is that right? There are plenty of people out there who would have counted Eron out; a lot of people who would have thought of her as another statistic. But that's not how the teachers here at Booker T. Washington saw her. And that's not how Eron came to see herself. So she kept coming back to school, and she didn't give up and she didn't quit. And in time, she became a great student.

And she remembered what Principal Kiner told her: "You can't let the past get you down. You have to let it motivate you." And so now here Eron is, graduating. She's going to keep studying to get her barber's certificate so she can cut hair and save for college. She's working toward her dream to becoming a lawyer. She's got a bright future.

Everybody here has got a unique story like that to tell. Each of you knows what it took for you to get here. But in reaching this milestone, there is a common lesson shared by every graduate in this hall. And Chris said it himself in a recent interview: "It's not where you are or what you are. It's who you are."

Yes, you're from South Memphis. Yes, you've always been underdogs. Nobody has handed you a thing. But that also means that whatever you accomplish in your life, you will have earned it. Whatever rewards and joys you reap, you'll appreciate them that much more because they will have come through your own sweat and tears, products of your own effort and your own talents. You've shown more grit and determination in your childhoods than a lot of adults ever will. That's who you are.

So, class of 2011, the hard road does not end here. Your journey has just begun. Your diploma is not a free pass. It won't protect you against every setback or challenge or mistake. You'll make some, I promise. You're going to have to keep working hard. You're going to have to keep pushing yourselves. And you'll find yourselves sometime in situations where folks have had an easier time, they're a little bit ahead of you, and you're going to have to work harder than they are. And you may be frustrated by that.

But if you do push yourselves, if you build on what you've already accomplished here, then I couldn't be more confident about your futures. I'm hopeful and I'm excited about what all of you can achieve. And I know that armed with the skills and experience and the love that you've gained at Booker T. Washington High School, you're ready to make your mark on the world.

So thank you. Thanks for inspiring me. God bless you. God bless the United States.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# On American Diplomacy in Middle East and Northern Africa

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you. Please, have a seat. Thank you very much. I want to begin by thanking Hillary Clinton, who has traveled so much these last six months that she is approaching a new landmark -- one million frequent flyer miles. I count on Hillary every single day, and I believe that she will go down as one of the finest Secretaries of State in our nation’s history.

The State Department is a fitting venue to mark a new chapter in American diplomacy. For six months, we have witnessed an extraordinary change taking place in the Middle East and North Africa. Square by square, town by town, country by country, the people have risen up to demand their basic human rights. Two leaders have stepped aside. More may follow. And though these countries may be a great distance from our shores, we know that our own future is bound to this region by the forces of economics and security, by history and by faith.

Today, I want to talk about this change -- the forces that are driving it and how we can respond in a way that advances our values and strengthens our security.

Now, already, we’ve done much to shift our foreign policy following a decade defined by two costly conflicts. After years of war in Iraq, we’ve removed 100,000 American troops and ended our combat mission there. In Afghanistan, we’ve broken the Taliban’s momentum, and this July we will begin to bring our troops home and continue a transition to Afghan lead. And after years of war against al Qaeda and its affiliates, we have dealt al Qaeda a huge blow by killing its leader, Osama bin Laden.

Bin Laden was no martyr. He was a mass murderer who offered a message of hate -- an insistence that Muslims had to take up arms against the West, and that violence against men, women and children was the only path to change. He rejected democracy and individual rights for Muslims in favor of violent extremism; his agenda focused on what he could destroy -- not what he could build.

Bin Laden and his murderous vision won some adherents. But even before his death, al Qaeda was losing its struggle for relevance, as the overwhelming majority of people saw that the slaughter of innocents did not answer their cries for a better life. By the time we found bin Laden, al Qaeda’s agenda had come to be seen by the vast majority of the region as a dead end, and the people of the Middle East and North Africa had taken their future into their own hands.

That story of self-determination began six months ago in Tunisia. On December 17th, a young vendor named Mohammed Bouazizi was devastated when a police officer confiscated his cart. This was not unique. It’s the same kind of humiliation that takes place every day in many parts of the world -- the relentless tyranny of governments that deny their citizens dignity. Only this time, something different happened. After local officials refused to hear his complaints, this young man, who had never been particularly active in politics, went to the headquarters of the provincial government, doused himself in fuel, and lit himself on fire.

There are times in the course of history when the actions of ordinary citizens spark movements for change because they speak to a longing for freedom that has been building up for years. In America, think of the defiance of those patriots in Boston who refused to pay taxes to a King, or the dignity of Rosa Parks as she sat courageously in her seat. So it was in Tunisia, as that vendor’s act of desperation tapped into the frustration felt throughout the country. Hundreds of protesters took to the streets, then thousands. And in the face of batons and sometimes bullets, they refused to go home -- day after day, week after week -- until a dictator of more than two decades finally left power.

The story of this revolution, and the ones that followed, should not have come as a surprise. The nations of the Middle East and North Africa won their independence long ago, but in too many places their people did not. In too many countries, power has been concentrated in the hands of a few. In too many countries, a citizen like that young vendor had nowhere to turn -- no honest judiciary to hear his case; no independent media to give him voice; no credible political party to represent his views; no free and fair election where he could choose his leader.

And this lack of self-determination -- the chance to make your life what you will -- has applied to the region’s economy as well. Yes, some nations are blessed with wealth in oil and gas, and that has led to pockets of prosperity. But in a global economy based on knowledge, based on innovation, no development strategy can be based solely upon what comes out of the ground. Nor can people reach their potential when you cannot start a business without paying a bribe.

In the face of these challenges, too many leaders in the region tried to direct their people’s grievances elsewhere. The West was blamed as the source of all ills, a half-century after the end of colonialism. Antagonism toward Israel became the only acceptable outlet for political expression. Divisions of tribe, ethnicity and religious sect were manipulated as a means of holding on to power, or taking it away from somebody else.

But the events of the past six months show us that strategies of repression and strategies of diversion will not work anymore. Satellite television and the Internet provide a window into the wider world -- a world of astonishing progress in places like India and Indonesia and Brazil. Cell phones and social networks allow young people to connect and organize like never before. And so a new generation has emerged. And their voices tell us that change cannot be denied.

In Cairo, we heard the voice of the young mother who said, “It’s like I can finally breathe fresh air for the first time.”

In Sanaa, we heard the students who chanted, “The night must come to an end.”

In Benghazi, we heard the engineer who said, “Our words are free now. It’s a feeling you can’t explain.”

In Damascus, we heard the young man who said, “After the first yelling, the first shout, you feel dignity.”

Those shouts of human dignity are being heard across the region. And through the moral force of nonviolence, the people of the region have achieved more change in six months than terrorists have accomplished in decades.

Of course, change of this magnitude does not come easily. In our day and age -- a time of 24-hour news cycles and constant communication -- people expect the transformation of the region to be resolved in a matter of weeks. But it will be years before this story reaches its end. Along the way, there will be good days and there will bad days. In some places, change will be swift; in others, gradual. And as we’ve already seen, calls for change may give way, in some cases, to fierce contests for power.

The question before us is what role America will play as this story unfolds. For decades, the United States has pursued a set of core interests in the region: countering terrorism and stopping the spread of nuclear weapons; securing the free flow of commerce and safe-guarding the security of the region; standing up for Israel’s security and pursuing Arab-Israeli peace.

We will continue to do these things, with the firm belief that America’s interests are not hostile to people’s hopes; they’re essential to them. We believe that no one benefits from a nuclear arms race in the region, or al Qaeda’s brutal attacks. We believe people everywhere would see their economies crippled by a cut-off in energy supplies. As we did in the Gulf War, we will not tolerate aggression across borders, and we will keep our commitments to friends and partners.

Yet we must acknowledge that a strategy based solely upon the narrow pursuit of these interests will not fill an empty stomach or allow someone to speak their mind. Moreover, failure to speak to the broader aspirations of ordinary people will only feed the suspicion that has festered for years that the United States pursues our interests at their expense. Given that this mistrust runs both ways -- as Americans have been seared by hostage-taking and violent rhetoric and terrorist attacks that have killed thousands of our citizens -- a failure to change our approach threatens a deepening spiral of division between the United States and the Arab world.

And that’s why, two years ago in Cairo, I began to broaden our engagement based upon mutual interests and mutual respect. I believed then -- and I believe now -- that we have a stake not just in the stability of nations, but in the self-determination of individuals. The status quo is not sustainable. Societies held together by fear and repression may offer the illusion of stability for a time, but they are built upon fault lines that will eventually tear asunder.

So we face a historic opportunity. We have the chance to show that America values the dignity of the street vendor in Tunisia more than the raw power of the dictator. There must be no doubt that the United States of America welcomes change that advances self-determination and opportunity. Yes, there will be perils that accompany this moment of promise. But after decades of accepting the world as it is in the region, we have a chance to pursue the world as it should be.

Of course, as we do, we must proceed with a sense of humility. It’s not America that put people into the streets of Tunis or Cairo -- it was the people themselves who launched these movements, and it’s the people themselves that must ultimately determine their outcome.

Not every country will follow our particular form of representative democracy, and there will be times when our short-term interests don’t align perfectly with our long-term vision for the region. But we can, and we will, speak out for a set of core principles -- principles that have guided our response to the events over the past six months: The United States opposes the use of violence and repression against the people of the region.

The United States supports a set of universal rights. And these rights include free speech, the freedom of peaceful assembly, the freedom of religion, equality for men and women under the rule of law, and the right to choose your own leaders -- whether you live in Baghdad or Damascus, Sanaa or Tehran.

And we support political and economic reform in the Middle East and North Africa that can meet the legitimate aspirations of ordinary people throughout the region. Our support for these principles is not a secondary interest. Today I want to make it clear that it is a top priority that must be translated into concrete actions, and supported by all of the diplomatic, economic and strategic tools at our disposal.

Let me be specific. First, it will be the policy of the United States to promote reform across the region, and to support transitions to democracy. That effort begins in Egypt and Tunisia, where the stakes are high -- as Tunisia was at the vanguard of this democratic wave, and Egypt is both a longstanding partner and the Arab world’s largest nation. Both nations can set a strong example through free and fair elections, a vibrant civil society, accountable and effective democratic institutions, and responsible regional leadership. But our support must also extend to nations where transitions have yet to take place.

Unfortunately, in too many countries, calls for change have thus far been answered by violence. The most extreme example is Libya, where Muammar Qaddafi launched a war against his own people, promising to hunt them down like rats. As I said when the United States joined an international coalition to intervene, we cannot prevent every injustice perpetrated by a regime against its people, and we have learned from our experience in Iraq just how costly and difficult it is to try to impose regime change by force -- no matter how well-intentioned it may be.

But in Libya, we saw the prospect of imminent massacre, we had a mandate for action, and heard the Libyan people’s call for help. Had we not acted along with our NATO allies and regional coalition partners, thousands would have been killed. The message would have been clear: Keep power by killing as many people as it takes. Now, time is working against Qaddafi. He does not have control over his country. The opposition has organized a legitimate and credible Interim Council. And when Qaddafi inevitably leaves or is forced from power, decades of provocation will come to an end, and the transition to a democratic Libya can proceed.

While Libya has faced violence on the greatest scale, it’s not the only place where leaders have turned to repression to remain in power. Most recently, the Syrian regime has chosen the path of murder and the mass arrests of its citizens. The United States has condemned these actions, and working with the international community we have stepped up our sanctions on the Syrian regime -- including sanctions announced yesterday on President Assad and those around him.

The Syrian people have shown their courage in demanding a transition to democracy. President Assad now has a choice: He can lead that transition, or get out of the way. The Syrian government must stop shooting demonstrators and allow peaceful protests. It must release political prisoners and stop unjust arrests. It must allow human rights monitors to have access to cities like Dara’a; and start a serious dialogue to advance a democratic transition. Otherwise, President Assad and his regime will continue to be challenged from within and will continue to be isolated abroad.

So far, Syria has followed its Iranian ally, seeking assistance from Tehran in the tactics of suppression. And this speaks to the hypocrisy of the Iranian regime, which says it stand for the rights of protesters abroad, yet represses its own people at home. Let’s remember that the first peaceful protests in the region were in the streets of Tehran, where the government brutalized women and men, and threw innocent people into jail. We still hear the chants echo from the rooftops of Tehran. The image of a young woman dying in the streets is still seared in our memory. And we will continue to insist that the Iranian people deserve their universal rights, and a government that does not smother their aspirations.

Now, our opposition to Iran’s intolerance and Iran’s repressive measures, as well as its illicit nuclear program and its support of terror, is well known. But if America is to be credible, we must acknowledge that at times our friends in the region have not all reacted to the demands for consistent change -- with change that’s consistent with the principles that I’ve outlined today. That’s true in Yemen, where President Saleh needs to follow through on his commitment to transfer power. And that’s true today in Bahrain.

Bahrain is a longstanding partner, and we are committed to its security. We recognize that Iran has tried to take advantage of the turmoil there, and that the Bahraini government has a legitimate interest in the rule of law.

Nevertheless, we have insisted both publicly and privately that mass arrests and brute force are at odds with the universal rights of Bahrain’s citizens, and we will -- and such steps will not make legitimate calls for reform go away. The only way forward is for the government and opposition to engage in a dialogue, and you can’t have a real dialogue when parts of the peaceful opposition are in jail. The government must create the conditions for dialogue, and the opposition must participate to forge a just future for all Bahrainis.

Indeed, one of the broader lessons to be drawn from this period is that sectarian divides need not lead to conflict. In Iraq, we see the promise of a multiethnic, multi-sectarian democracy. The Iraqi people have rejected the perils of political violence in favor of a democratic process, even as they’ve taken full responsibility for their own security. Of course, like all new democracies, they will face setbacks. But Iraq is poised to play a key role in the region if it continues its peaceful progress. And as they do, we will be proud to stand with them as a steadfast partner.

So in the months ahead, America must use all our influence to encourage reform in the region. Even as we acknowledge that each country is different, we need to speak honestly about the principles that we believe in, with friend and foe alike. Our message is simple: If you take the risks that reform entails, you will have the full support of the United States.

We must also build on our efforts to broaden our engagement beyond elites, so that we reach the people who will shape the future -- particularly young people. We will continue to make good on the commitments that I made in Cairo -- to build networks of entrepreneurs and expand exchanges in education, to foster cooperation in science and technology, and combat disease. Across the region, we intend to provide assistance to civil society, including those that may not be officially sanctioned, and who speak uncomfortable truths. And we will use the technology to connect with -- and listen to -- the voices of the people.

For the fact is, real reform does not come at the ballot box alone. Through our efforts we must support those basic rights to speak your mind and access information. We will support open access to the Internet, and the right of journalists to be heard -- whether it’s a big news organization or a lone blogger. In the 21st century, information is power, the truth cannot be hidden, and the legitimacy of governments will ultimately depend on active and informed citizens.

Such open discourse is important even if what is said does not square with our worldview. Let me be clear, America respects the right of all peaceful and law-abiding voices to be heard, even if we disagree with them. And sometimes we profoundly disagree with them.

We look forward to working with all who embrace genuine and inclusive democracy. What we will oppose is an attempt by any group to restrict the rights of others, and to hold power through coercion and not consent. Because democracy depends not only on elections, but also strong and accountable institutions, and the respect for the rights of minorities.

Such tolerance is particularly important when it comes to religion. In Tahrir Square, we heard Egyptians from all walks of life chant, “Muslims, Christians, we are one.” America will work to see that this spirit prevails -- that all faiths are respected, and that bridges are built among them. In a region that was the birthplace of three world religions, intolerance can lead only to suffering and stagnation. And for this season of change to succeed, Coptic Christians must have the right to worship freely in Cairo, just as Shia must never have their mosques destroyed in Bahrain.

What is true for religious minorities is also true when it comes to the rights of women. History shows that countries are more prosperous and more peaceful when women are empowered. And that’s why we will continue to insist that universal rights apply to women as well as men -- by focusing assistance on child and maternal health; by helping women to teach, or start a business; by standing up for the right of women to have their voices heard, and to run for office. The region will never reach its full potential when more than half of its population is prevented from achieving their full potential.

Now, even as we promote political reform, even as we promote human rights in the region, our efforts can’t stop there. So the second way that we must support positive change in the region is through our efforts to advance economic development for nations that are transitioning to democracy.

After all, politics alone has not put protesters into the streets. The tipping point for so many people is the more constant concern of putting food on the table and providing for a family. Too many people in the region wake up with few expectations other than making it through the day, perhaps hoping that their luck will change. Throughout the region, many young people have a solid education, but closed economies leave them unable to find a job. Entrepreneurs are brimming with ideas, but corruption leaves them unable to profit from those ideas.

The greatest untapped resource in the Middle East and North Africa is the talent of its people. In the recent protests, we see that talent on display, as people harness technology to move the world. It’s no coincidence that one of the leaders of Tahrir Square was an executive for Google. That energy now needs to be channeled, in country after country, so that economic growth can solidify the accomplishments of the street. For just as democratic revolutions can be triggered by a lack of individual opportunity, successful democratic transitions depend upon an expansion of growth and broad-based prosperity.

So, drawing from what we’ve learned around the world, we think it’s important to focus on trade, not just aid; on investment, not just assistance. The goal must be a model in which protectionism gives way to openness, the reigns of commerce pass from the few to the many, and the economy generates jobs for the young. America’s support for democracy will therefore be based on ensuring financial stability, promoting reform, and integrating competitive markets with each other and the global economy. And we’re going to start with Tunisia and Egypt.

First, we’ve asked the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to present a plan at next week’s G8 summit for what needs to be done to stabilize and modernize the economies of Tunisia and Egypt. Together, we must help them recover from the disruptions of their democratic upheaval, and support the governments that will be elected later this year. And we are urging other countries to help Egypt and Tunisia meet its near-term financial needs.

Second, we do not want a democratic Egypt to be saddled by the debts of its past. So we will relieve a democratic Egypt of up to 1 billion dollars in debt, and work with our Egyptian partners to invest these resources to foster growth and entrepreneurship. We will help Egypt regain access to markets by guaranteeing $1 billion in borrowing that is needed to finance infrastructure and job creation. And we will help newly democratic governments recover assets that were stolen.

Third, we’re working with Congress to create Enterprise Funds to invest in Tunisia and Egypt. And these will be modeled on funds that supported the transitions in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall. OPIC will soon launch a 2 billion dollars facility to support private investment across the region. And we will work with the allies to refocus the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development so that it provides the same support for democratic transitions and economic modernization in the Middle East and North Africa as it has in Europe.

Fourth, the United States will launch a comprehensive Trade and Investment Partnership Initiative in the Middle East and North Africa. If you take out oil exports, this entire region of over 400 million people exports roughly the same amount as Switzerland. So we will work with the EU to facilitate more trade within the region, build on existing agreements to promote integration with U.S. and European markets, and open the door for those countries who adopt high standards of reform and trade liberalization to construct a regional trade arrangement. And just as EU membership served as an incentive for reform in Europe, so should the vision of a modern and prosperous economy create a powerful force for reform in the Middle East and North Africa.

Prosperity also requires tearing down walls that stand in the way of progress -- the corruption of elites who steal from their people; the red tape that stops an idea from becoming a business; the patronage that distributes wealth based on tribe or sect. We will help governments meet international obligations, and invest efforts at anti-corruption -- by working with parliamentarians who are developing reforms, and activists who use technology to increase transparency and hold government accountable. Politics and human rights; economic reform.

Let me conclude by talking about another cornerstone of our approach to the region, and that relates to the pursuit of peace.

For decades, the conflict between Israelis and Arabs has cast a shadow over the region. For Israelis, it has meant living with the fear that their children could be blown up on a bus or by rockets fired at their homes, as well as the pain of knowing that other children in the region are taught to hate them. For Palestinians, it has meant suffering the humiliation of occupation, and never living in a nation of their own. Moreover, this conflict has come with a larger cost to the Middle East, as it impedes partnerships that could bring greater security and prosperity and empowerment to ordinary people.

For over two years, my administration has worked with the parties and the international community to end this conflict, building on decades of work by previous administrations. Yet expectations have gone unmet. Israeli settlement activity continues. Palestinians have walked away from talks. The world looks at a conflict that has grinded on and on and on, and sees nothing but stalemate. Indeed, there are those who argue that with all the change and uncertainty in the region, it is simply not possible to move forward now.

I disagree. At a time when the people of the Middle East and North Africa are casting off the burdens of the past, the drive for a lasting peace that ends the conflict and resolves all claims is more urgent than ever. That’s certainly true for the two parties involved.

For the Palestinians, efforts to delegitimize Israel will end in failure. Symbolic actions to isolate Israel at the United Nations in September won’t create an independent state. Palestinian leaders will not achieve peace or prosperity if Hamas insists on a path of terror and rejection. And Palestinians will never realize their independence by denying the right of Israel to exist.

As for Israel, our friendship is rooted deeply in a shared history and shared values. Our commitment to Israel’s security is unshakeable. And we will stand against attempts to single it out for criticism in international forums. But precisely because of our friendship, it’s important that we tell the truth: The status quo is unsustainable, and Israel too must act boldly to advance a lasting peace.

The fact is, a growing number of Palestinians live west of the Jordan River. Technology will make it harder for Israel to defend itself. A region undergoing profound change will lead to populism in which millions of people -- not just one or two leaders -- must believe peace is possible. The international community is tired of an endless process that never produces an outcome. The dream of a Jewish and democratic state cannot be fulfilled with permanent occupation.

Now, ultimately, it is up to the Israelis and Palestinians to take action. No peace can be imposed upon them -- not by the United States; not by anybody else. But endless delay won’t make the problem go away. What America and the international community can do is to state frankly what everyone knows -- a lasting peace will involve two states for two peoples: Israel as a Jewish state and the homeland for the Jewish people, and the state of Palestine as the homeland for the Palestinian people, each state enjoying self-determination, mutual recognition, and peace.

So while the core issues of the conflict must be negotiated, the basis of those negotiations is clear: a viable Palestine, a secure Israel. The United States believes that negotiations should result in two states, with permanent Palestinian borders with Israel, Jordan, and Egypt, and permanent Israeli borders with Palestine. We believe the borders of Israel and Palestine should be based on the 1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps, so that secure and recognized borders are established for both states. The Palestinian people must have the right to govern themselves, and reach their full potential, in a sovereign and contiguous state.

As for security, every state has the right to self-defense, and Israel must be able to defend itself -- by itself -- against any threat. Provisions must also be robust enough to prevent a resurgence of terrorism, to stop the infiltration of weapons, and to provide effective border security. The full and phased withdrawal of Israeli military forces should be coordinated with the assumption of Palestinian security responsibility in a sovereign, non-militarized state. And the duration of this transition period must be agreed, and the effectiveness of security arrangements must be demonstrated.

These principles provide a foundation for negotiations. Palestinians should know the territorial outlines of their state; Israelis should know that their basic security concerns will be met. I’m aware that these steps alone will not resolve the conflict, because two wrenching and emotional issues will remain: the future of Jerusalem, and the fate of Palestinian refugees. But moving forward now on the basis of territory and security provides a foundation to resolve those two issues in a way that is just and fair, and that respects the rights and aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians.

Now, let me say this: Recognizing that negotiations need to begin with the issues of territory and security does not mean that it will be easy to come back to the table. In particular, the recent announcement of an agreement between Fatah and Hamas raises profound and legitimate questions for Israel: How can one negotiate with a party that has shown itself unwilling to recognize your right to exist? And in the weeks and months to come, Palestinian leaders will have to provide a credible answer to that question. Meanwhile, the United States, our Quartet partners, and the Arab states will need to continue every effort to get beyond the current impasse.

I recognize how hard this will be. Suspicion and hostility has been passed on for generations, and at times it has hardened. But I’m convinced that the majority of Israelis and Palestinians would rather look to the future than be trapped in the past. We see that spirit in the Israeli father whose son was killed by Hamas, who helped start an organization that brought together Israelis and Palestinians who had lost loved ones. That father said, “I gradually realized that the only hope for progress was to recognize the face of the conflict.” We see it in the actions of a Palestinian who lost three daughters to Israeli shells in Gaza. “I have the right to feel angry,” he said. “So many people were expecting me to hate. My answer to them is I shall not hate. Let us hope,” he said, “for tomorrow.”

That is the choice that must be made -- not simply in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but across the entire region -- a choice between hate and hope; between the shackles of the past and the promise of the future. It’s a choice that must be made by leaders and by the people, and it’s a choice that will define the future of a region that served as the cradle of civilization and a crucible of strife.

For all the challenges that lie ahead, we see many reasons to be hopeful. In Egypt, we see it in the efforts of young people who led protests. In Syria, we see it in the courage of those who brave bullets while chanting, “peaceful, peaceful.” In Benghazi, a city threatened with destruction, we see it in the courthouse square where people gather to celebrate the freedoms that they had never known. Across the region, those rights that we take for granted are being claimed with joy by those who are prying loose the grip of an iron fist.

For the American people, the scenes of upheaval in the region may be unsettling, but the forces driving it are not unfamiliar. Our own nation was founded through a rebellion against an empire. Our people fought a painful Civil War that extended freedom and dignity to those who were enslaved. And I would not be standing here today unless past generations turned to the moral force of nonviolence as a way to perfect our union -- organizing, marching, protesting peacefully together to make real those words that declared our nation: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.”

Those words must guide our response to the change that is transforming the Middle East and North Africa -- words which tell us that repression will fail, and that tyrants will fall, and that every man and woman is endowed with certain inalienable rights.

It will not be easy. There’s no straight line to progress, and hardship always accompanies a season of hope. But the United States of America was founded on the belief that people should govern themselves. And now we cannot hesitate to stand squarely on the side of those who are reaching for their rights, knowing that their success will bring about a world that is more peaceful, more stable, and more just.

Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you.

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# Address to the Intelligence Community at CIA Headquarters

Well, thank you, Leon, and thank you, Jim.

When I chose Leon Panetta as Director of the CIA, I said he was going to be a strong advocate for this agency and would strengthen your capabilities to meet the threats of our time. And when I chose Jim Clapper as Director of National Intelligence, I charged him with making sure that our intelligence community works as one integrated team. That’s exactly what these two leaders have done, along with all of you.

So, Jim and Leon, thank you for your remarkable leadership, not just in recent weeks, but during the entirety of your tenure. You have done a great job.

This is my third visit here to Langley as President, and each of these visits has marked another milestone in our mission to protect the American people and keep our country safe.

On my first visit, just months after taking office, I stood here and I said that this agency and our entire intelligence community is fundamental to America’s national security. I said that I believed that your best days were still to come and I pledged that you would have my full support to carry out your critical work.

Soon after that visit, I called Leon into the Oval Office and I directed him to make the killing or capture of Osama bin Laden the top priority in our war to defeat al Qaeda. And he came back here, and you guys, who had already been working so hard on this issue, redoubled your efforts. And that was true all across the intelligence community.

My second visit, a year later, came under more somber circumstances. We gathered to pay tribute to seven American patriots who gave their lives in this fight at a remote post in Afghanistan. As has already been mentioned, their stars now grace this memorial wall. And through our grief and our tears, we resolved that their sacrifice would be our summons to carry on their work, to complete this mission, to win this war.

Today I’ve returned just to say thank you, on behalf of all Americans and people around the world, because you carried on. You stayed focused on your mission. You honored the memory of your fallen colleagues. And in helping to locate and take down Osama bin Laden, you made it possible for us to achieve the most significant victory yet in our war to defeat al Qaeda.

I just met with some of the outstanding leaders and teams from across the community who worked so long and so hard to make that raid a success. And I’m pleased today that we’re joined by representatives from all of our intelligence agencies, and that folks are watching this live back at all of those agencies, because this truly was a team effort. That’s not always the case in Washington. But all of you work together every single day.

This is one of the few times when all these leaders and organizations have the occasion to appear together publicly. And so I thank all of you for coming -- because I think it’s so important for the American people to see all of you here today.

Part of the challenge of intelligence work is, by necessity, your work has to remain secret. I know that carries a heavy burden. You’re often the first ones to get the blame when things go wrong, and you’re always the last ones to get the credit when things go right. So when things do go right -- and they do more often than the world will ever know -- we ought to celebrate your success.

That’s why I came here. I wanted every single one of you to know, whether you work at the CIA or across the community, at every step of our effort to take out bin Laden, the work you did and the quality of the intelligence that you provided made the critical difference -- to me, to our team on those helicopters, to our nation.

After I directed that getting bin Laden be the priority, you hunkered down even more, building on years of painstaking work; pulling together, in some cases, the slenderest of intelligence streams, running those threads to ground until you found that courier and you tracked him to that compound. And when I was briefed last summer, you had built the strongest intelligence case against -- in terms of where bin Laden was since Tora Bora.

In the months that followed, including all those meetings in the Situation Room, we did what sound intelligence demands: We pushed for more collection. We pushed for more evidence. We questioned our assumptions. You strengthened your analysis. You didn’t bite your tongue and try to spin the ball, but you gave it to me straight each and every time.

And we did something really remarkable in Washington -- we kept it a secret. That’s how it should be.

Of course, when the time came to actually make the decision, we didn’t know for sure that bin Laden was there. The evidence was circumstantial and the risks, especially to the lives of our special operations forces, were huge. And I knew that the consequences of failure could be enormous. But I made the decision that I did because I had absolute confidence in the skill of our military personnel and I had confidence in you. I put my bet on you. And now the whole world knows that that faith in you was justified.

So just as impressive as what you did was how you did it. It was a tribute to your perseverance, your relentless focus and determination over many years. For the fight against al Qaeda did not begin on 9/11. Among you are veterans who’ve been pursuing these murderers for many years, even before they attacked our embassies in Africa and struck the [USS] Cole in Yemen. Among you are young men and women for whom 9/11 was a call to service. This fight has defined your generation. And on this wall are stars honoring all your colleagues and friends, more than a dozen who have given their lives in the fight against al Qaeda and its violent allies.

As the years wore on, others began to think that this terrorist might never be brought to justice. But you never quit. You never gave up. You pulled together across this agency and across the community.

No one piece of information and no one agency made this possible. You did it together -- CIA, National Security Agency, National Reconnaissance Office, the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency, everyone at ODNI and the National Counterterrorism Center. Folks across the country, civilian and military, so many of you here today.

And that’s exactly how our intelligence community is supposed to work, using every capability -- human, technical -- collecting, analyzing, sharing, integrating intelligence, and then acting on it.

That’s what made this one of the greatest intelligence successes in American history, and that’s why intelligence professionals are going to study and be inspired by your achievement for generations to come.

Now, make no mistake -- this is not over. Because we not only took out the symbol and operational leader of al Qaeda, we walked off with his files -- the largest treasure trove of intelligence ever seized from a terrorist leader. Many of you now are working around the clock; you didn’t have much time to celebrate. We’ve got to analyze and evaluate and exploit this mountain of intelligence.

So today, every terrorist in the al Qaeda network should be watching their back, because we’re going to review every video, we are going to examine every photo, we’re going to read every one of those millions of pages, we’re going to pursue every lead. We are going to go wherever it takes us. We’re going to finish the job. We are going to defeat al Qaeda.

Even as we stay focused on this mission, we need you to stay nimble and flexible to meet the full range of threats to our security, from plots against our homeland to nations seeking weapons of mass destruction to transnational threats such as cyber criminals and narco-trafficers.

So I’m going to keep relying on you -- for your intelligence, the analysis that comes across my desk every single day. And 300-plus [million] Americans are counting on you to stay a step ahead of our adversaries and to keep our country safe.

I have never been more proud or more confident in you than I am today -- not just because this extraordinary success, but because it reminds us of who we are as a people and as a nation. You reminded us that when we Americans set our mind to something, when we are focused and when we are working together, when we’re not worried about who’s getting the credit and when we stay true to our values, even if it takes years, there is nothing we cannot do.

That’s why I still believe in what I said my first visit here two years ago: Your greatest days are still to come. And if any of you doubt what this means, I wish I could have taken some of you on the trip I made to New York City, where we laid a wreath at Ground Zero, and I had a chance to meet firefighters who had lost an entire shift; police officers who had lost their comrades; a young woman, 14 years old, who had written to me because her last memory of her father was talking to him on the phone while her mother wept beside her, right before they watched the tower go down.

And she and other members of families of 9/11 victims talked about what this meant. It meant that their suffering had not been forgotten, and that the American community stands with them, that we stand with each other.

So most of you will never get headlines for the work that you do. You won’t get ticker-tape parades. But as you go about your work with incredible diligence and dedication every single day, I hope all of you understand how important it is, how grateful I am, and that you have the thanks of a grateful nation.

God bless you.

And God bless the United States of America.

Thank you.

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# Joint Remarks to the Press Following Bilateral Meeting

President Obama: Well, let me, first of all, welcome again Prime Minister Netanyahu, who I think has now been here seven times during the course of my presidency. And I want to indicate that the frequency of these meetings is an indication of the extraordinary bonds between our two countries, as is the opportunity for the Prime Minister to address Congress during his visit here. I know that’s an honor that’s reserved for those who have always shown themselves to be a great friend of the United States and is indicative of the friendship between our countries.

We just completed a prolonged and extremely useful conversation touching on a wide range of issues. We discussed, first of all, the changes that are sweeping the region and what has been happening in places like Egypt and Syria and how they affect the interests and security of the United States and Israel, as well as the opportunity for prosperity, growth and development in the Arab world.

We agreed that there is a moment of opportunity that can be seized as a consequence of the Arab Spring, but also acknowledge that there’s significant perils as well, and that it’s going to be important for the United States and Israel to consult closely as we see developments unfold.

I outlined for the Prime Minister some of the issues that I discussed in my speech yesterday -- how important it was going to be for the United States to support political reform, support human rights, support freedom of speech, religious tolerance and economic development, particularly in Egypt, as the largest Arab country, as well as Tunisia, the country that first started this revolutionary movement that’s taking place throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

We also discussed the situation in Syria, which is obviously of acute concern to Israel, given its shared border. And I gave more details to the Prime Minister about the significant steps that we are taking to try to pressure Syria and the Assad regime to reform, including the sanctions that we placed directly on President Assad.

We continue to share our deep concerns about Iran, not only the threat that it poses to Israel but also the threat that it poses to the region and the world if it were to develop a nuclear weapon. We updated our strategy to continue to apply pressure, both through sanctions and our other diplomatic work. And I reiterated my belief that it is unacceptable for Iran to possess a nuclear weapon.

We also discussed the hypocrisy of Iran suggesting that it somehow supports democratization in the Middle East when, in fact, they first showed the repressive nature of that regime when they responded to the own peaceful protests that took place inside Iran almost two years ago.

Finally, we discussed the issue of a prospective peace between Israelis and Palestinians. And I reiterated and we discussed in depth the principles that I laid out yesterday -- the belief that our ultimate goal has to be a secure Israeli state, a Jewish state, living side by side in peace and security with a contiguous, functioning and effective Palestinian state.

Obviously there are some differences between us in the precise formulations and language, and that’s going to happen between friends. But what we are in complete accord about is that a true peace can only occur if the ultimate resolution allows Israel to defend itself against threats, and that Israel’s security will remain paramount in U.S. evaluations of any prospective peace deal.

I said that yesterday in the speech, and I continue to believe it. And I think that it is possible for us to shape a deal that allows Israel to secure itself, not to be vulnerable, but also allows it to resolve what has obviously been a wrenching issue for both peoples for decades now.

I also pointed out, as I said in the speech yesterday, that it is very difficult for Israel to be expected to negotiate in a serious way with a party that refuses to acknowledge its right to exist. And so for that reason I think the Palestinians are going to have to answer some very difficult questions about this agreement that’s been made between Fatah and Hamas. Hamas has been and is an organization that has resorted to terror; that has refused to acknowledge Israel’s rights to exist. It is not a partner for a significant, realistic peace process. And so, as I said yesterday during the speech, the Palestinians are going to have to explain how they can credibly engage in serious peace negotiations in the absence of observing the Quartet principles that have been put forward previously.

So, overall, I thought this was an extremely constructive discussion. And coming out of this discussion, I once again can reaffirm that the extraordinarily close relationship between the United States and Israel is sound and will continue, and that together, hopefully we are going to be able to work to usher in a new period of peace and prosperity in a region that is going to be going through some very profound transformations in the coming weeks, months and years.

So, Mr. Prime Minister.

Prime Minister Netanyahu: Thank you, Mr. President.

President Obama: Thank you very much.

Prime Minister Netanyahu: Mr. President, first I want to thank you and the First Lady for the gracious hospitality that you’ve shown me, my wife, and our entire delegation. We have an enduring bond of friendship between our two countries, and I appreciate the opportunity to have this meeting with you after your important speech yesterday.

We share your hope and your vision for the spread of democracy in the Middle East. I appreciate the fact that you reaffirmed once again now, and in our conversation, and in actual deed the commitment to Israel’s security. We value your efforts to advance the peace process.

This is something that we want to have accomplished. Israel wants peace. I want peace. What we all want is a peace that will be genuine, that will hold, that will endure. And I think that the -- we both agree that a peace based on illusions will crash eventually on the rocks of Middle Eastern reality, and that the only peace that will endure is one that is based on reality, on unshakeable facts.

I think for there to be peace, the Palestinians will have to accept some basic realities.

The first is that while Israel is prepared to make generous compromises for peace, it cannot go back to the 1967 lines -- because these lines are indefensible; because they don’t take into account certain changes that have taken place on the ground, demographic changes that have taken place over the last 44 years.

Remember that, before 1967, Israel was all of nine miles wide. It was half the width of the Washington Beltway.

And these were not the boundaries of peace; they were the boundaries of repeated wars, because the attack on Israel was so attractive.

So we can't go back to those indefensible lines, and we're going to have to have a long-term military presence along the Jordan.

I discussed this with the President and I think that we understand that Israel has certain security requirements that will have to come into place in any deal that we make.

The second is -- echoes something the President just said, and that is that Israel cannot negotiate with a Palestinian government that is backed by Hamas. Hamas, as the President said, is a terrorist organization committed to Israel’s destruction. It’s fired thousands of rockets on our cities, on our children. It’s recently fired an anti-tank rocket at a yellow school bus, killing a 16-year-old boy. And Hamas has just attacked you, Mr. President, and the United States for ridding the world of bin Laden.

So Israel obviously cannot be asked to negotiate with a government that is backed by the Palestinian version of al Qaeda.

I think President Abbas has a simple choice. He has to decide if he negotiates or keeps his pact with Hamas, or makes peace with Israel. And I can only express what I said to you just now, that I hope he makes the choice, the right choice, in choosing peace with Israel.

The third reality is that the Palestinian refugee problem will have to be resolved in the context of a Palestinian state, but certainly not in the borders of Israel.

The Arab attack in 1948 on Israel resulted in two refugee problems -- Palestinian refugee problem and Jewish refugees, roughly the same number, who were expelled from Arab lands. Now, tiny Israel absorbed the Jewish refugees, but the vast Arab world refused to absorb the Palestinian refugees. Now, 63 years later, the Palestinians come to us and they say to Israel, accept the grandchildren, really, and the great grandchildren of these refugees, thereby wiping out Israel’s future as a Jewish state.

So it’s not going to happen.

Everybody knows it’s not going to happen.

And I think it’s time to tell the Palestinians forthrightly it’s not going to happen. The Palestinian refugee problem has to be resolved. It can be resolved, and it will be resolved if the Palestinians choose to do so in a Palestinian state. So that's a real possibility. But it’s not going to be resolved within the Jewish state.

The President and I discussed all these issues and I think we may have differences here and there, but I think there’s an overall direction that we wish to work together to pursue a real, genuine peace between Israel and its Palestinian neighbors; a peace that is defensible.

Mr. President, you're the -- you're the leader of a great people, the American people. And I'm the leader of a much smaller people, the --

President Obama: A great people.

Prime Minister Netanyahu: It’s a great people, too. It’s the ancient nation of Israel. And, you know, we've been around for almost 4,000 years. We've experienced struggle and suffering like no other people. We've gone through expulsions and pogroms and massacres and the murder of millions. But I can say that even at the dearth of -- even at the nadir of the valley of death, we never lost hope and we never lost our dream of reestablishing a sovereign state in our ancient homeland, the land of Israel.

And now it falls on my shoulders as the Prime Minister of Israel, at a time of extraordinary instability and uncertainty in the Middle East, to work with you to fashion a peace that will ensure Israel’s security and will not jeopardize its survival. I take this responsibility with pride but with great humility, because, as I told you in our conversation, we don't have a lot of margin for error. And because, Mr. President, history will not give the Jewish people another chance.

So in the coming days and weeks and months, I intend to work with you to seek a peace that will address our security concerns, seek a genuine recognition that we wish from our Palestinian neighbors to give a better future for Israel and for the entire region.

And I thank you for the opportunity to exchange our views and to work together for this common end. Thank you, Mr. President.

President Obama: Thank you.

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# Address to the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address to the British Parliament

Thank you, so much.

My Lord Chancellor, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Prime Minister, my lords, and members of the House of Commons:

I have known few greater honors than the opportunity to address the Mother of Parliaments at Westminster Hall. I am told that the last three speakers here have been the Pope, Her Majesty the Queen, and Nelson Mandela -- which is either a very high bar or the beginning of a very funny joke.

I come here today to reaffirm one of the oldest, one of the strongest alliances the world has ever known. It’s long been said that the United States and the United Kingdom share a special relationship. And since we also share an especially active press corps, that relationship is often analyzed and overanalyzed for the slightest hint of stress or strain.

Of course, all relationships have their ups and downs. Admittedly, ours got off on the wrong foot with a small scrape about tea and taxes. There may also have been some hurt feelings when the White House was set on fire during the War of 1812. But fortunately, it’s been smooth sailing ever since.

The reason for this close friendship doesn’t just have to do with our shared history, our shared heritage; our ties of language and culture; or even the strong partnership between our governments. Our relationship is special because of the values and beliefs that have united our people through the ages.

Centuries ago, when kings, emperors, and warlords reigned over much of the world, it was the English who first spelled out the rights and liberties of man in the Magna Carta. It was here, in this very hall, where the rule of law first developed, courts were established, disputes were settled, and citizens came to petition their leaders.

Over time, the people of this nation waged a long and sometimes bloody struggle to expand and secure their freedom from the crown. Propelled by the ideals of the Enlightenment, they would ultimately forge an English Bill of Rights, and invest the power to govern in an elected parliament that’s gathered here today.

What began on this island would inspire millions throughout the continent of Europe and across the world. But perhaps no one drew greater inspiration from these notions of freedom than your rabble-rousing colonists on the other side of the Atlantic. As Winston Churchill said, the

…Magna Carta, the Bill of Rights, Habeas Corpus, trial by jury, and English common law find their most famous expression in the American Declaration of Independence.

For both of our nations, living up to the ideals enshrined in these founding documents has sometimes been difficult, has always been a work in progress. The path has never been perfect. But through the struggles of slaves and immigrants, women and ethnic minorities, former colonies and persecuted religions, we have learned better than most that the longing for freedom and human dignity is not English or American or Western -- it is universal, and it beats in every heart. Perhaps that’s why there are few nations that stand firmer, speak louder, and fight harder to defend democratic values around the world than the United States and the United Kingdom.

We are the allies who landed at Omaha and Gold, who sacrificed side by side to free a continent from the march of tyranny, and help prosperity flourish from the ruins of war. And with the founding of NATO -- a British idea -- we joined a transatlantic alliance that has ensured our security for over half a century.

Together with our allies, we forged a lasting peace from a cold war. When the Iron Curtain lifted, we expanded our alliance to include the nations of Central and Eastern Europe, and built new bridges to Russia and the former states of the Soviet Union. And when there was strife in the Balkans, we worked together to keep the peace.

Today, after a difficult decade that began with war and ended in recession, our nations have arrived at a pivotal moment once more. A global economy that once stood on the brink of depression is now stable and recovering. After years of conflict, the United States has removed 100,000 troops from Iraq, the United Kingdom has removed its forces, and our combat mission there has ended. In Afghanistan, we’ve broken the Taliban’s momentum and will soon begin a transition to Afghan lead. And nearly 10 years after 9/11, we have disrupted terrorist networks and dealt al Qaeda a huge blow by killing its leader -- Osama bin Laden.

Together, we have met great challenges. But as we enter this new chapter in our shared history, profound challenges stretch before us. In a world where the prosperity of all nations is now inextricably linked, a new era of cooperation is required to ensure the growth and stability of the global economy. As new threats spread across borders and oceans, we must dismantle terrorist networks and stop the spread of nuclear weapons, confront climate change and combat famine and disease. And as a revolution races through the streets of the Middle East and North Africa, the entire world has a stake in the aspirations of a generation that longs to determine its own destiny.

These challenges come at a time when the international order has already been reshaped for a new century. Countries like China, India, and Brazil are growing by leaps and bounds. We should welcome this development, for it has lifted hundreds of millions from poverty around the globe, and created new markets and opportunities for our own nations.

And yet, as this rapid change has taken place, it’s become fashionable in some quarters to question whether the rise of these nations will accompany the decline of American and European influence around the world. Perhaps, the argument goes, these nations represent the future, and the time for our leadership has passed.

That argument is wrong. The time for our leadership is now. It was the United States and the United Kingdom and our democratic allies that shaped a world in which new nations could emerge and individuals could thrive. And even as more nations take on the responsibilities of global leadership, our alliance will remain indispensable to the goal of a century that is more peaceful, more prosperous and more just.

At a time when threats and challenges require nations to work in concert with one another, we remain the greatest catalysts for global action. In an era defined by the rapid flow of commerce and information, it is our free market tradition, our openness, fortified by our commitment to basic security for our citizens, that offers the best chance of prosperity that is both strong and shared. As millions are still denied their basic human rights because of who they are, or what they believe, or the kind of government that they live under, we are the nations most willing to stand up for the values of tolerance and self-determination that lead to peace and dignity.

Now, this doesn’t mean we can afford to stand still. The nature of our leadership will need to change with the times. As I said the first time I came to London as President, for the G20 summit, the days are gone when Roosevelt and Churchill could sit in a room and solve the world’s problems over a glass of brandy -- although I’m sure that Prime Minister Cameron would agree that some days we could both use a stiff drink. In this century, our joint leadership will require building new partnerships, adapting to new circumstances, and remaking ourselves to meet the demands of a new era.

That begins with our economic leadership.

Adam Smith’s central insight remains true today: There is no greater generator of wealth and innovation than a system of free enterprise that unleashes the full potential of individual men and women. That’s what led to the Industrial Revolution that began in the factories of Manchester. That is what led to the dawn of the Information Age that arose from the office parks of Silicon Valley. That’s why countries like China, India and Brazil are growing so rapidly -- because in fits and starts, they are moving toward market-based principles that the United States and the United Kingdom have always embraced.

In other words, we live in a global economy that is largely of our own making. And today, the competition for the best jobs and industries favors countries that are free-thinking and forward-looking; countries with the most creative and innovative and entrepreneurial citizens.

That gives nations like the United States and the United Kingdom an inherent advantage. For from Newton and Darwin to Edison and Einstein, from Alan Turing to Steve Jobs, we have led the world in our commitment to science and cutting-edge research, the discovery of new medicines and technologies. We educate our citizens and train our workers in the best colleges and universities on Earth. But to maintain this advantage in a world that’s more competitive than ever, we will have to redouble our investments in science and engineering, and renew our national commitments to educating our workforces.

We’ve also been reminded in the last few years that markets can sometimes fail. In the last century, both our nations put in place regulatory frameworks to deal with such market failures -- safeguards to protect the banking system after the Great Depression, for example; regulations that were established to prevent the pollution of our air and water during the 1970s.

But in today’s economy, such threats of market failure can no longer be contained within the borders of any one country. Market failures can go global, and go viral, and demand international responses.

A financial crisis that began on Wall Street infected nearly every continent, which is why we must keep working through forums like the G20 to put in place global rules of the road to prevent future excesses and abuse. No country can hide from the dangers of carbon pollution, which is why we must build on what was achieved at Copenhagen and Cancun to leave our children a planet that is safer and cleaner.

Moreover, even when the free market works as it should, both our countries recognize that no matter how responsibly we live in our lives, hard times or bad luck, a crippling illness or a layoff may strike any one of us. And so part of our common tradition has expressed itself in a conviction that every citizen deserves a basic measure of security -- health care if you get sick, unemployment insurance if you lose your job, a dignified retirement after a lifetime of hard work. That commitment to our citizens has also been the reason for our leadership in the world.

And now, having come through a terrible recession, our challenge is to meet these obligations while ensuring that we’re not consuming -- and hence consumed with -- a level of debt that could sap the strength and vitality of our economies. And that will require difficult choices and it will require different paths for both of our countries. But we have faced such challenges before, and have always been able to balance the need for fiscal responsibility with the responsibilities we have to one another.

And I believe we can do this again. As we do, the successes and failures of our own past can serve as an example for emerging economies -- that it’s possible to grow without polluting; that lasting prosperity comes not from what a nation consumes, but from what it produces, and from the investments it makes in its people and its infrastructure.

And just as we must lead on behalf of the prosperity of our citizens, so we must safeguard their security. Our two nations know what it is to confront evil in the world. Hitler’s armies would not have stopped their killing had we not fought them on the beaches and on the landing grounds, in the fields and on the streets. We must never forget that there was nothing inevitable about our victory in that terrible war. It was won through the courage and character of our people.

Precisely because we are willing to bear its burden, we know well the cost of war. And that is why we built an alliance that was strong enough to defend this continent while deterring our enemies. At its core, NATO is rooted in the simple concept of Article Five: that no NATO nation will have to fend on its own; that allies will stand by one another, always. And for six decades, NATO has been the most successful alliance in human history.

Today, we confront a different enemy. Terrorists have taken the lives of our citizens in New York and in London. And while al Qaeda seeks a religious war with the West, we must remember that they have killed thousands of Muslims -- men, women and children -- around the globe. Our nations are not and will never be at war with Islam. Our fight is focused on defeating al Qaeda and its extremist allies. In that effort, we will not relent, as Osama bin Laden and his followers have learned. And as we fight an enemy that respects no law of war, we will continue to hold ourselves to a higher standard -- by living up to the values, the rule of law and due process that we so ardently defend.

For almost a decade, Afghanistan has been a central front of these efforts. Throughout those years, you, the British people, have been a stalwart ally, along with so many others who fight by our side.

Together, let us pay tribute to all of our men and women who have served and sacrificed over the last several years -- for they are part of an unbroken line of heroes who have borne the heaviest burden for the freedoms that we enjoy. Because of them, we have broken the Taliban’s momentum. Because of them, we have built the capacity of Afghan security forces. And because of them, we are now preparing to turn a corner in Afghanistan by transitioning to Afghan lead. And during this transition, we will pursue a lasting peace with those who break free of al Qaeda and respect the Afghan constitution and lay down arms. And we will ensure that Afghanistan is never a safe haven for terror, but is instead a country that is strong, sovereign, and able to stand on its own two feet.

Indeed, our efforts in this young century have led us to a new concept for NATO that will give us the capabilities needed to meet new threats -- threats like terrorism and piracy, cyber attacks and ballistic missiles. But a revitalized NATO will continue to hew to that original vision of its founders, allowing us to rally collective action for the defense of our people, while building upon the broader belief of Roosevelt and Churchill that all nations have both rights and responsibilities, and all nations share a common interest in an international architecture that maintains the peace.

We also share a common interest in stopping the spread of nuclear weapons. Across the globe, nations are locking down nuclear materials so they never fall into the wrong hands -- because of our leadership. From North Korea to Iran, we’ve sent a message that those who flaunt their obligations will face consequences -- which is why America and the European Union just recently strengthened our sanctions on Iran, in large part because of the leadership of the United Kingdom and the United States. And while we hold others to account, we will meet our own obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and strive for a world without nuclear weapons.

We share a common interest in resolving conflicts that prolong human suffering and threaten to tear whole regions asunder. In Sudan, after years of war and thousands of deaths, we call on both North and South to pull back from the brink of violence and choose the path of peace. And in the Middle East, we stand united in our support for a secure Israel and a sovereign Palestine.

And we share a common interest in development that advances dignity and security. To succeed, we must cast aside the impulse to look at impoverished parts of the globe as a place for charity. Instead, we should empower the same forces that have allowed our own people to thrive: We should help the hungry to feed themselves, the doctors who care for the sick. We should support countries that confront corruption, and allow their people to innovate. And we should advance the truth that nations prosper when they allow women and girls to reach their full potential.

We do these things because we believe not simply in the rights of nations; we believe in the rights of citizens. That is the beacon that guided us through our fight against fascism and our twilight struggle against communism. And today, that idea is being put to the test in the Middle East and North Africa. In country after country, people are mobilizing to free themselves from the grip of an iron fist. And while these movements for change are just six months old, we have seen them play out before -- from Eastern Europe to the Americas, from South Africa to Southeast Asia.

History tells us that democracy is not easy. It will be years before these revolutions reach their conclusion, and there will be difficult days along the way. Power rarely gives up without a fight -- particularly in places where there are divisions of tribe and divisions of sect. We also know that populism can take dangerous turns -- from the extremism of those who would use democracy to deny minority rights, to the nationalism that left so many scars on this continent in the 20th century.

But make no mistake: What we saw, what we are seeing in Tehran, in Tunis, in Tahrir Square, is a longing for the same freedoms that we take for granted here at home. It was a rejection of the notion that people in certain parts of the world don’t want to be free, or need to have democracy imposed upon them. It was a rebuke to the worldview of al Qaeda, which smothers the rights of individuals, and would thereby subject them to perpetual poverty and violence.

Let there be no doubt: The United States and United Kingdom stand squarely on the side of those who long to be free. And now, we must show that we will back up those words with deeds. That means investing in the future of those nations that transition to democracy, starting with Tunisia and Egypt -- by deepening ties of trade and commerce; by helping them demonstrate that freedom brings prosperity. And that means standing up for universal rights -- by sanctioning those who pursue repression, strengthening civil society, supporting the rights of minorities.

We do this knowing that the West must overcome suspicion and mistrust among many in the Middle East and North Africa -- a mistrust that is rooted in a difficult past. For years, we’ve faced charges of hypocrisy from those who do not enjoy the freedoms that they hear us espouse. And so to them, we must squarely acknowledge that, yes, we have enduring interests in the region -- to fight terror, sometimes with partners who may not be perfect; to protect against disruptions of the world’s energy supply. But we must also insist that we reject as false the choice between our interests and our ideals; between stability and democracy. For our idealism is rooted in the realities of history -- that repression offers only the false promise of stability, that societies are more successful when their citizens are free, and that democracies are the closest allies we have.

It is that truth that guides our action in Libya. It would have been easy at the outset of the crackdown in Libya to say that none of this was our business -- that a nation’s sovereignty is more important than the slaughter of civilians within its borders. That argument carries weight with some. But we are different. We embrace a broader responsibility. And while we cannot stop every injustice, there are circumstances that cut through our caution -- when a leader is threatening to massacre his people, and the international community is calling for action. That’s why we stopped a massacre in Libya. And we will not relent until the people of Libya are protected and the shadow of tyranny is lifted.

We will proceed with humility, and the knowledge that we cannot dictate every outcome abroad. Ultimately, freedom must be won by the people themselves, not imposed from without. But we can and must stand with those who so struggle. Because we have always believed that the future of our children and grandchildren will be better if other people’s children and grandchildren are more prosperous and more free -- from the beaches of Normandy to the Balkans to Benghazi. That is our interests and our ideals. And if we fail to meet that responsibility, who would take our place, and what kind of world would we pass on?

Our action -- our leadership -- is essential to the cause of human dignity. And so we must act -- and lead -- with confidence in our ideals, and an abiding faith in the character of our people, who sent us all here today.

For there is one final quality that I believe makes the United States and the United Kingdom indispensable to this moment in history. And that is how we define ourselves as nations.

Unlike most countries in the world, we do not define citizenship based on race or ethnicity.

Being American or British is not about belonging to a certain group; it’s about believing in a certain set of ideals -- the rights of individuals, the rule of law. That is why we hold incredible diversity within our borders. That’s why there are people around the world right now who believe that if they come to America, if they come to New York, if they come to London, if they work hard, they can pledge allegiance to our flag and call themselves Americans; if they come to England, they can make a new life for themselves and can sing God Save The Queen just like any other citizen.

Yes, our diversity can lead to tension. And throughout our history there have been heated debates about immigration and assimilation in both of our countries. But even as these debates can be difficult, we fundamentally recognize that our patchwork heritage is an enormous strength -- that in a world which will only grow smaller and more interconnected, the example of our two nations says it is possible for people to be united by their ideals, instead of divided by their differences; that it’s possible for hearts to change and old hatreds to pass; that it’s possible for the sons and daughters of former colonies to sit here as members of this great Parliament, and for the grandson of a Kenyan who served as a cook in the British Army to stand before you as President of the United States.

That is what defines us. That is why the young men and women in the streets of Damascus and Cairo still reach for the rights our citizens enjoy, even if they sometimes differ with our policies. As two of the most powerful nations in the history of the world, we must always remember that the true source of our influence hasn’t just been the size of our economies, or the reach of our militaries, or the land that we’ve claimed. It has been the values that we must never waver in defending around the world -- the idea that all beings are endowed by our Creator with certain rights that cannot be denied.

That is what forged our bond in the fire of war -- a bond made manifest by the friendship between two of our greatest leaders. Churchill and Roosevelt had their differences. They were keen observers of each other’s blind spots and shortcomings, if not always their own, and they were hard-headed about their ability to remake the world. But what joined the fates of these two men at that particular moment in history was not simply a shared interest in victory on the battlefield. It was a shared belief in the ultimate triumph of human freedom and human dignity -- a conviction that we have a say in how this story ends.

This conviction lives on in their people today. The challenges we face are great. The work before us is hard. But we have come through a difficult decade, and whenever the tests and trials ahead may seem too big or too many, let us turn to their example, and the words that Churchill spoke on the day that Europe was freed:

In the long years to come, not only will the people of this island but…the world, wherever the bird of freedom chirps in [the] human heart, look back to what we’ve done, and they will say ‘do not despair, do not yield…march straightforward’.

With courage and purpose, with humility and with hope, with faith in the promise of tomorrow, let us march straightforward together, enduring allies in the cause of a world that is more peaceful, more prosperous, and more just.

Thank you very much.

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# Speech at Memorial for Joplin Tornado Victims

President Obama: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you! Thank you so much. Please, please be seated.

Audience Member: I love you, Obama!

President Obama: Oh, I love Joplin! I love Joplin. To --

Audience Member: We love Joplin!

President Obama: We love Joplin.

Thank you, Governor, for that powerful message, but more importantly, for being here with and for your people every step of the way.

We are grateful to you, to Reverend Gariss, Father Monaghan. I’m so glad you got in that tub. To Reverend Brown for that incredibly powerful message.

To Senator Claire McCaskill, who’s been here, and Congressman Billy Long; Mayor Woolston. To Craig Fugate. It doesn’t get a lot of attention, but he heads up FEMA, our emergency response at the federal level. He’s been going from Tuscaloosa to Joplin and everywhere in between tirelessly doing outstanding work. We’re grateful for him. Gail McGovern, the President of the National Red Cross, which has contributed mightily to the rebuilding efforts here.

Most of all, to the family and friends of all those who’ve been lost and all those who’ve been affected.

Today we gather to celebrate the lives of those we’ve lost to the storms here in Joplin and across the Midwest, to keep in our prayers those still missing, to mourn with their families, to stand together during this time of pain and trial.

And as Reverend Brown alluded to, the question that weighs on us at a time like this is: Why? Why our town? Why our home? Why my son, or husband, or wife, or sister, or friend? Why?

We do not have the capacity to answer. We can’t know when a terrible storm will strike, or where, or the severity of the devastation that it may cause. We can’t know why we’re tested with the loss of a loved one, or the loss of a home where we’ve lived a lifetime.

These things are beyond our power to control. But that does not mean we are powerless in the face of adversity. How we respond when the storm strikes is up to us. How we live in the aftermath of tragedy and heartache, that’s within our control. And it’s in these moments, through our actions, that we often see the glimpse of what makes life worth living in the first place.

In the last week, that’s what Joplin has not just taught Missouri, not just taught America, but has taught the world. I was overseas in the aftermath of the storm, and had world leaders coming up to me saying, let the people of Joplin know we are with them; we’re thinking about them; we love them.

Because the world saw how Joplin responded. A university turned itself into a makeshift hospital. Some of you used your pickup trucks as ambulances, carrying the injured -- on doors that served as stretchers. Your restaurants have rushed food to people in need. Businesses have filled trucks with donations. You’ve waited in line for hours to donate blood to people you know, but also to people you’ve never met. And in all this, you have lived the words of Scripture:

We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed....

As the governor said, you have shown the world what it means to love thy neighbor. You’ve banded together. You’ve come to each other’s aid. You’ve demonstrated a simple truth: that amid heartbreak and tragedy, no one is a stranger. Everybody is a brother. Everybody is a sister. We can all love one another.

As you move forward in the days ahead, I know that rebuilding what you’ve lost won’t be easy. I just walked through some of the neighborhoods that have been affected, and you look out at the landscape, and there have to be moments where you just say, where to begin? How to start? There are going to be moments where after the shock has worn off, you feel alone. But there’s no doubt in my mind what the people of this community can do. There’s no doubt in my mind that Joplin will rebuild. And as President, I can promise you your country will be there with you every single step of the way. We will be with you every step of the way. We’re not going anywhere. The cameras may leave. The spotlight may shift. But we will be with you every step of the way until Joplin is restored and this community is back on its feet. We’re not going anywhere.

That is not just my promise; that’s America’s promise. It’s a promise I make here in Joplin; it’s a promise I made down in Tuscaloosa, or in any of the communities that have been hit by these devastating storms over the last few weeks.

Now, there have been countless acts of kindness and selflessness in recent days. We’ve already heard the record of some of that. But perhaps none are as inspiring as what took place when the storm was bearing down on Joplin, threatening an entire community with utter destruction. And in the face of winds that showed no mercy, no regard for human life, that did not discriminate by race or faith or background, it was ordinary people, swiftly tested, who said, “I’m willing to die right now so that someone else might live.”

It was the husband who threw himself over his wife as their house came apart around them. It was the mother who shielded her young son. It was Dean Wells, a husband and father who loved to sing and whistle in his church choir. Dean was working a shift at the Home Depot, managing the electrical department, when the siren rang out. He sprang into action, moving people to safety. Over and over again, he went back for others, until a wall came down on top of him. In the end, most of the building was destroyed, but not where Dean had directed his coworkers and his customers. There was a young man named Christopher Lucas who was 26 years old. Father of two daughters; third daughter on the way. Just like any other night, Christopher was doing his job as manager on duty at Pizza Hut. And then he heard the storm coming.

It was then when this former sailor quickly ushered everybody into the walk-in freezer. The only problem was, the freezer door wouldn’t stay closed from the inside. So as the tornado bore down on this small storefront on Range Line Road, Christopher left the freezer to find a rope or a cord or anything to hold the door shut. He made it back just in time, tying a piece of bungee cord to the handle outside, wrapping the other end around his arm, holding the door closed with all his might. And Christopher held it as long as he could, until he was pulled away by the incredible force of the storm. He died saving more than a dozen people in that freezer.

You see, there are heroes all around us, all the time. They walk by us on the sidewalk, and they sit next to us in class. They pass us in the aisle wearing an orange apron. They come to our table at a restaurant and ask us what we’d like to order.

Just as we can’t know why tragedy strikes in the first place, we may never fully understand where these men and women find the courage and strength to do what they did. What we do know is that in a split-second moment where there’s little time for internal reflection or debate, the actions of these individuals were driven by love -- love for a family member, love for a friend, or just love for a fellow human being.

That’s good to know. In a world that can be cruel and selfish, it’s this knowledge -- the knowledge that we are inclined to love one another, that we’re inclined to do good, to be good -- that causes us to take heart. We see with fresh eyes what’s precious and so fragile and so important to us. We put aside our petty grievances and our minor disagreements. We see ourselves in the hopes and hardships of others. And in the stories of people like Dean and people like Christopher, we remember that each us contains reserves of resolve and compassion. There are heroes all around us, all the time.

And so, in the wake of this tragedy, let us live up to their example -- to make each day count -- to live with the sense of mutual regard -- to live with that same compassion that they demonstrated in their final hours. We are called by them to do everything we can to be worthy of the chance that we’ve been given to carry on.

I understand that at a memorial yesterday for Dean, his wife decided to play a recording of Dean whistling a song he loved -- Amazing Grace. The lyrics are a fitting tribute to what Joplin has been through.

Through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come; 'Tis Grace that brought me safe thus far and Grace will lead me home…

Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail, And mortal life shall cease, I shall possess within the veil, A life of joy and peace.

May those we’ve lost know peace, and may Grace guide the people of Joplin home.

God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.

Thank you.

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# Department of Defense Personnel Announcement

All right. Good morning. In a few moments, I’ll be joining members of our armed forces, their families, and veterans for the Memorial Day observance at Arlington. There, and across our nation, we’ll pause to honor all those who’ve given their last full measure of devotion in defense of our country. Theirs was the ultimate sacrifice, but it is one that every man and woman who wears America’s uniform is prepared to make -- so that we can live free.

The men and women of our armed forces are the best our nation has to offer, and they deserve nothing but the absolute best in return. And that includes leaders who will guide them, and support their families, with wisdom and strength and compassion. And that’s what I expect as Commander-in-Chief as we work to keep our nation secure and our military the finest in the world. I found those qualities in Leon Panetta, who I announced last month as my choice to succeed our outstanding Secretary of Defense, Bob Gates, who I thank for joining us today. And I found these qualities in the leaders who will complete our team at the Pentagon and whom I’m proud to announce today -- General Martin Dempsey as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral James Winnefeld as the Vice Chairman, and to succeed General Dempsey as Chief of Staff of the Army, General Ray Odierno.

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is the principal military advisor to me and my national security team, including the Secretary of Defense. Since taking office, I’ve been very grateful for the leadership of the current Chairman, Admiral Mike Mullen, and the Vice Chairman, General Jim “Hoss” Cartwright. These two men have served our nation with distinction for decades, and I look forward to paying tribute to their lives of service in the months ahead.

Today, I’ll simply say that, like President Bush before me, I’ve deeply valued Mike’s professional steadiness and his personal integrity. On his watch, our military forces have excelled across the whole spectrum of missions, from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan to relief efforts after the Haiti earthquake. He’s helped revitalize NATO, reset our relations with Russia, and steer our relationship with Pakistan and China. And I believe that history will also record Mike Mullen as the Chairman who said what he believed was right and declared that no one in uniform should ever have to sacrifice their integrity to serve their country.

I’ve also benefited enormously from the advice and counsel of Hoss Cartwright. Hoss is that rare combination of technical expert -- from cyber to missile defense -- and strategic thinker, whether it was updating our nuclear posture or preparing our military for 21st-century missions. I’ll always be personally grateful to Hoss for his friendship and partnership. And as he concludes four decades of service in the Marine Corps that he loves, he can do so knowing that our nation is more secure, and our military is stronger, because of his remarkable career.

And I know that Michelle joins me in saluting Deborah Mullen and Sandee Cartwright for their decades of extraordinary service, especially as champions of our inspiring military families.

With the advice and consent of the Senate, it is our hope and expectation that Leon Panetta will soon take the reigns as Secretary of Defense. General Cartwright’s term ends this summer; Admiral Mullen’s term ends this fall. I’m announcing my choice for their successors today because it’s essential that this transition be seamless and that we stay focused on the urgent national security challenges before us. And I want to thank Deputy Secretary of Defense Bill Lynn for the continuity that he’ll provide during this transition.

With nearly 40 years in uniform, Martin Dempsey is one of our nation’s most respected -- and combat-tested --generals. In Iraq, he led our soldiers against a brutal insurgency. Having trained Iraqi forces, he knows that nations must ultimately take responsibility for their own security. Having served as acting commander of Central Command, he understands that in Iraq and Afghanistan security gains and political progress must go hand in hand. And just as he challenged the Army to embrace new doctrine and tactics, I expect him to push all our forces to continue adapting and innovating to be ready for the missions of today and tomorrow.

I was proud to nominate Marty as Army Chief of Staff, and I realized he only assumed that position last month. Marty, your tenure as Chief may go down as one of the shortest in Army history. But it’s your lifetime of accomplishment that brings us here today. And I thank you for your willingness to take on this new assignment, along with your wife Deanie and your three children, all of whom have served in the Army.

Today, I want every one of our men and women in uniform to hear the words that you spoke to your soldiers on your first day as Chief, because it’s our shared message to all who serve, especially our troops in harm’s way: “We will provide whatever it takes to achieve our objectives in the current fight.”

As Vice Chairman, Admiral Sandy Winnefeld will draw on more than 30 years of distinguished service. Under his command, fighters from the aircraft carrier USS Enterprise pounded Taliban positions in the weeks after 9/11 and his carrier strike group played a critical role in air operations over Iraq. Having served as a NATO commander, Sandy is well known to our allies. Having served on the Joint Staff, he is known and trusted here at the White House.

Most recently, as head of Northern Command, Sandy’s been responsible for the defense of our homeland and support to states and communities in times of crisis, such as the recent tornadoes and the floods along the Mississippi. He’s supported our Mexican partners in their fight against the cartels and our Japanese allies in the response to their nuclear emergency. So Sandy knows that we have to be prepared for the full range of challenges. Sandy, I thank you and your wife Mary and your two sons for your continued service.

I’ve selected General Dempsey and Admiral Winnefeld because of their record -- and potential -- as individuals. But I’ve also selected them because they will make an extraordinary team -- despite their competing loyalties to Army and Navy. Between them, they bring deep experience in virtually every domain -- land, air, space, sea, cyber. Both of them have the respect and the trust of our troops on the frontlines, our friends in Congress, and allies and partners abroad. And both of them have my full confidence.

They both have something else. For the first time, the Chairman and Vice Chairman will have the experience of leading combat operations in the years since 9/11. Two moments in particular speak to this leadership. On the morning of September 11, 2001, the Enterprise was returning home from the Persian Gulf when word came of the attacks. Rather than wait for orders, Sandy took the initiative, reversed course, and put his ship and aircraft within range of Afghanistan by the next morning, setting the stage for the strikes that followed. A few years later, as Marty’s 1st Armored Division was rotating out of Iraq, he suddenly got new orders. He turned his division around, shifted to new parts of Iraq, and defeated an insurgent uprising -- a remarkable maneuver that has entered the annals of Army history.

And while I know that folks across the Army are proud to see one of their own selected as Chairman, I also know this means losing their new Chief in a time of war. And that’s why, for the next Army Chief of Staff, I’m nominating one of the Army’s most accomplished soldiers -- and one of the tallest -- General Ray Odierno. In three pivotal deployments to Iraq, he commanded the troops that captured Saddam Hussein, partnered with General Petraeus to help bring down the violence, and then transferred responsibility to Iraqi forces, allowing us to remove some 100,000 American troops and end our combat mission.

After years on the frontlines, Ray understands what the Army must do -- to prevail in today’s wars, to prepare for the future, and to preserve the readiness of the soldiers and families who are the strength of America’s families. And we’re fortunate that Ray’s dedication to our soldiers is shared by his wife Linda and their family, including their son Tony, a combat veteran and advocate for his fellow wounded warriors.

I urge our friends in the Senate to confirm these outstanding individuals as swiftly as possible. They’re innovative, flexible, focused on the future, and deeply devoted to our troops and their families. General Dempsey, Admiral Winnefeld, we have much to do -- from bringing our troops home from Iraq to beginning to reduce our forces in Afghanistan this summer and transitioning to Afghan lead; from defeating al Qaeda to protecting the Libyan people. All this, even as we make difficult budget decisions while keeping our military the finest fighting force in the world.

Above all, as Commander-in-Chief, I’ll be looking to you, and the rest of the Joint Chiefs, for what I value most in my advisors -- your honest, unvarnished advice, and the full range of options, especially when it comes to our most solemn obligation: protecting the lives of our brave men and women in uniform. We have no greater responsibility, as we are reminded today when we honor all those who sacrificed so that we can enjoy the blessings of freedom.

So, again, to Marty, Sandy, and Ray, as well as your families, thank you for your patriotic service and your readiness to lead once more. Thank you very much, everybody.

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# Afghanistan Troop Reduction Address to the Nation

Good evening. Nearly 10 years ago, America suffered the worst attack on our shores since Pearl Harbor. This mass murder was planned by Osama bin Laden and his al Qaeda network in Afghanistan, and signaled a new threat to our security –- one in which the targets were no longer soldiers on a battlefield, but innocent men, women and children going about their daily lives.

In the days that followed, our nation was united as we struck at al Qaeda and routed the Taliban in Afghanistan. Then, our focus shifted. A second war was launched in Iraq, and we spent enormous blood and treasure to support a new government there. By the time I took office, the war in Afghanistan had entered its seventh year. But al Qaeda’s leaders had escaped into Pakistan and were plotting new attacks, while the Taliban had regrouped and gone on the offensive. Without a new strategy and decisive action, our military commanders warned that we could face a resurgent al Qaeda and a Taliban taking over large parts of Afghanistan.

For this reason, in one of the most difficult decisions that I’ve made as President, I ordered an additional 30,000 American troops into Afghanistan. When I announced this surge at West Point, we set clear objectives: to refocus on al Qaeda, to reverse the Taliban’s momentum, and train Afghan security forces to defend their own country. I also made it clear that our commitment would not be open-ended, and that we would begin to draw down our forces this July.

Tonight, I can tell you that we are fulfilling that commitment. Thanks to our extraordinary men and women in uniform, our civilian personnel, and our many coalition partners, we are meeting our goals. As a result, starting next month, we will be able to remove 10,000 of our troops from Afghanistan by the end of this year, and we will bring home a total of 33,000 troops by next summer, fully recovering the surge I announced at West Point. After this initial reduction, our troops will continue coming home at a steady pace as Afghan security forces move into the lead. Our mission will change from combat to support. By 2014, this process of transition will be complete, and the Afghan people will be responsible for their own security.

We’re starting this drawdown from a position of strength. Al Qaeda is under more pressure than at any time since 9/11. Together with the Pakistanis, we have taken out more than half of al Qaeda’s leadership. And thanks to our intelligence professionals and Special Forces, we killed Osama bin Laden, the only leader that al Qaeda had ever known. This was a victory for all who have served since 9/11. One soldier summed it up well. “The message,” he said, “is we don’t forget. You will be held accountable, no matter how long it takes.”

The information that we recovered from bin Laden’s compound shows al Qaeda under enormous strain. Bin Laden expressed concern that al Qaeda had been unable to effectively replace senior terrorists that had been killed, and that al Qaeda has failed in its effort to portray America as a nation at war with Islam -– thereby draining more widespread support. Al Qaeda remains dangerous, and we must be vigilant against attacks. But we have put al Qaeda on a path to defeat, and we will not relent until the job is done.

In Afghanistan, we’ve inflicted serious losses on the Taliban and taken a number of its strongholds. Along with our surge, our allies also increased their commitments, which helped stabilize more of the country. Afghan security forces have grown by over 100,000 troops, and in some provinces and municipalities we’ve already begun to transition responsibility for security to the Afghan people. In the face of violence and intimidation, Afghans are fighting and dying for their country, establishing local police forces, opening markets and schools, creating new opportunities for women and girls, and trying to turn the page on decades of war.

Of course, huge challenges remain. This is the beginning -- but not the end –- of our effort to wind down this war. We’ll have to do the hard work of keeping the gains that we’ve made, while we draw down our forces and transition responsibility for security to the Afghan government. And next May, in Chicago, we will host a summit with our NATO allies and partners to shape the next phase of this transition.

We do know that peace cannot come to a land that has known so much war without a political settlement. So as we strengthen the Afghan government and security forces, America will join initiatives that reconcile the Afghan people, including the Taliban. Our position on these talks is clear: They must be led by the Afghan government, and those who want to be a part of a peaceful Afghanistan must break from al Qaeda, abandon violence, and abide by the Afghan constitution. But, in part because of our military effort, we have reason to believe that progress can be made.

The goal that we seek is achievable, and can be expressed simply: no safe haven from which al Qaeda or its affiliates can launch attacks against our homeland or our allies. We won't try to make Afghanistan a perfect place. We will not police its streets or patrol its mountains indefinitely. That is the responsibility of the Afghan government, which must step up its ability to protect its people, and move from an economy shaped by war to one that can sustain a lasting peace. What we can do, and will do, is build a partnership with the Afghan people that endures –- one that ensures that we will be able to continue targeting terrorists and supporting a sovereign Afghan government.

Of course, our efforts must also address terrorist safe havens in Pakistan. No country is more endangered by the presence of violent extremists, which is why we will continue to press Pakistan to expand its participation in securing a more peaceful future for this war-torn region. We'll work with the Pakistani government to root out the cancer of violent extremism, and we will insist that it keeps its commitments. For there should be no doubt that so long as I am President, the United States will never tolerate a safe haven for those who aim to kill us. They cannot elude us, nor escape the justice they deserve.

My fellow Americans, this has been a difficult decade for our country. We've learned anew the profound cost of war -- a cost that's been paid by the nearly 4,500 Americans who have given their lives in Iraq, and the over 1,500 who have done so in Afghanistan -– men and women who will not live to enjoy the freedom that they defended. Thousands more have been wounded. Some have lost limbs on the battlefield, and others still battle the demons that have followed them home.

Yet tonight, we take comfort in knowing that the tide of war is receding. Fewer of our sons and daughters are serving in harm’s way. We’ve ended our combat mission in Iraq, with 100,000 American troops already out of that country. And even as there will be dark days ahead in Afghanistan, the light of a secure peace can be seen in the distance. These long wars will come to a responsible end.

As they do, we must learn their lessons. Already this decade of war has caused many to question the nature of America’s engagement around the world. Some would have America retreat from our responsibility as an anchor of global security, and embrace an isolation that ignores the very real threats that we face. Others would have America over-extended, confronting every evil that can be found abroad.

We must chart a more centered course. Like generations before, we must embrace America’s singular role in the course of human events. But we must be as pragmatic as we are passionate; as strategic as we are resolute. When threatened, we must respond with force –- but when that force can be targeted, we need not deploy large armies overseas. When innocents are being slaughtered and global security endangered, we don’t have to choose between standing idly by or acting on our own. Instead, we must rally international action, which we’re doing in Libya, where we do not have a single soldier on the ground, but are supporting allies in protecting the Libyan people and giving them the chance to determine their own destiny.

In all that we do, we must remember that what sets America apart is not solely our power -– it is the principles upon which our union was founded. We’re a nation that brings our enemies to justice while adhering to the rule of law, and respecting the rights of all our citizens. We protect our own freedom and prosperity by extending it to others. We stand not for empire, but for self-determination. That is why we have a stake in the democratic aspirations that are now washing across the Arab world. We will support those revolutions with fidelity to our ideals, with the power of our example, and with an unwavering belief that all human beings deserve to live with freedom and dignity.

Above all, we are a nation whose strength abroad has been anchored in opportunity for our citizens here at home. Over the last decade, we have spent a trillion dollars on war, at a time of rising debt and hard economic times. Now, we must invest in America’s greatest resource –- our people. We must unleash innovation that creates new jobs and industries, while living within our means. We must rebuild our infrastructure and find new and clean sources of energy. And most of all, after a decade of passionate debate, we must recapture the common purpose that we shared at the beginning of this time of war. For our nation draws strength from our differences, and when our union is strong no hill is too steep, no horizon is beyond our reach.

America, it is time to focus on nation building here at home.

In this effort, we draw inspiration from our fellow Americans who have sacrificed so much on our behalf. To our troops, our veterans and their families, I speak for all Americans when I say that we will keep our sacred trust with you, and provide you with the care and benefits and opportunity that you deserve.

I met some of these patriotic Americans at Fort Campbell. Awhile back, I spoke to the 101st Airborne that has fought to turn the tide in Afghanistan, and to the team that took out Osama bin Laden. Standing in front of a model of bin Laden’s compound, the Navy SEAL who led that effort paid tribute to those who had been lost –- brothers and sisters in arms whose names are now written on bases where our troops stand guard overseas, and on headstones in quiet corners of our country where their memory will never be forgotten. This officer -- like so many others I’ve met on bases, in Baghdad and Bagram, and at Walter Reed and Bethesda Naval Hospital -– spoke with humility about how his unit worked together as one, depending on each other, and trusting one another, as a family might do in a time of peril.

That’s a lesson worth remembering -– that we are all a part of one American family. Though we have known disagreement and division, we are bound together by the creed that is written into our founding documents, and a conviction that the United States of America is a country that can achieve whatever it sets out to accomplish. Now, let us finish the work at hand. Let us responsibly end these wars, and reclaim the American Dream that is at the center of our story. With confidence in our cause, with faith in our fellow citizens, and with hope in our hearts, let us go about the work of extending the promise of America -– for this generation, and the next.

May God bless our troops.

And may God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address at the National Robotics Engineering Center

Thank you. Hello, Pittsburgh! It is good to be back. Thank you, Senator Casey, and Mayor Ravenstahl, County Executive Dan Onorato, State Auditor Jack Wagner, and all of you for having me back here at Carnegie Mellon. It is good to be here.

And it seems like every time I'm here I learn something. So, for those of you who are thinking about Carnegie Mellon, it's a terrific place, and you guys are doing just great work.

I just met with folks from some cutting-edge companies and saw some of their inventions here in your National Robotics Engineering Center. But that’s not the only reason I’m here. You might not know this, but one of my responsibilities as Commander-in-Chief is to keep an eye on robots. And I’m pleased to report that the robots you manufacture here seem peaceful -- at least for now.

This is a city that knows something about manufacturing. For generations of Americans, it was the ticket to a middle-class life. Here and across America's industrial heartland, millions clocked in each day at foundries and on assembly lines to make things. And the stuff we made -- steel, cars, planes -- was the stuff that made America what it is. The jobs were good. They paid enough to own a home, to raise kids, send them to college, to retire. They were jobs that told us something more important than just how much money we made, what was in our paycheck. These jobs also told us that we were meeting our responsibilities to our family and to our neighborhoods, and building our communities, and building our country.

But for better and worse, our generation has been pounded by wave after wave of profound economic change. Revolutions in technology have transformed the way we live and the way we work. Businesses and industries can relocate anywhere in the world, anywhere that there are skilled workers, anywhere that there is an Internet connection. And companies have learned to become more efficient with fewer employees. In Pittsburgh, you know this as well as anybody -- steel mills that once needed a thousand workers now do the same work with a hundred.

And while these changes have resulted in great wealth for some Americans and have drastically increased productivity, they’ve also caused major disruptions for many others. Today, a high school diploma no longer guarantees you a job. Over the past 13 years, about a third of our manufacturing jobs have vanished. And meanwhile, the typical worker’s wages have barely kept up with the rising costs of everything else. And all this was even before a financial crisis and recession that pounded the middle class even more.

Now, we’ve made some tough decisions that have turned our economy in a positive direction over the past two years. We’ve created more than 2 million new jobs in the private sector over the past 15 months alone, including almost 250,000 in manufacturing. But we still have to confront those underlying problems. They weren’t caused overnight, and we won’t solve them overnight. But we will solve them. And we’re starting to solve them right here in Pittsburgh, and right here at Carnegie Mellon.

And by the way, that’s why I ran for President. Not just to get us back to where we were -- I ran for President to get us to where we need to be. I have a larger vision for America -- one where working families feel secure, feel like they are moving forward and that they know that their dreams are within reach; an America where our businesses lead the world in new technologies like clean energy; where we work together, Democrats and Republicans, to live within our means, to cut our deficit and debt, but also to invest in what our economy needs to grow -- world-class education, cutting-edge research, and building the best transportation and communication infrastructure anywhere in the world. That’s what it’s going to take for us to win the future. And winning the future begins with getting our economy moving right now.

And that’s why we’re here. Carnegie Mellon is a great example of what it means to move forward. At its founding, no one would have imagined that a trade school for the sons and daughters of steelworkers would one day become the region’s largest -- one of the region’s largest employers and a global research university. And yet, innovations led by your professors and your students have created more than 300 companies and 9,000 jobs over the past 15 years -- companies like Carnegie Robotics.

But more important than the ideas that you’ve incubated are what those ideas have become: They’ve become products made right here in America and, in many cases, sold all over the world. And that's in our blood. That's who we are. We are inventors, and we are makers, and we are doers.

If we want a robust, growing economy, we need a robust, growing manufacturing sector. That’s why we told the auto industry two years ago that if they were willing to adapt, we’d stand by them. Today, they’re profitable, they’re creating jobs, and they’re repaying taxpayers ahead of schedule.

That's why we’ve launched a partnership to retrain workers with new skills. That’s why we’ve invested in clean energy manufacturing and new jobs building wind turbines and solar panels and advanced batteries. We have not run out of stuff to make. We’ve just got to reinvigorate our manufacturing sector so that it leads the world the way it always has -- from paper and steel and cars to new products that we haven’t even dreamed up yet. That’s how we’re going to strengthen existing industries; that's how we’re going to spark new ones. That’s how we’re going to create jobs, grow the middle class, and secure our economic leadership.

And this is why I asked my Council of Advisors on Science and Technology -- what we call PCAST -- a while back to look at the state of American manufacturing and the promise of advanced manufacturing. The concept of advanced manufacturing is not complicated. It means how do we do things better, faster, cheaper to design and manufacture superior products that allow us to compete all over the world.

And so these very smart folks, many of whom are represented here, wrote up a report which is now up on the White House website. But we didn't want to just issue a report, we wanted to actually get something done. So we’ve launched an all-hands-on-deck effort between our brightest academic minds, some of our boldest business leaders, and our most dedicated public servants from science and technology agencies, all with one big goal, and that is a renaissance of American manufacturing.

We’re calling it AMP, A-M-P -- the Advanced Manufacturing Partnership. It’s made up of some of the most advanced engineering universities, like Carnegie Mellon, Georgia Tech, Stanford, Berkeley, Michigan; some of our most innovative manufacturers, from Johnson & Johnson to Honeywell, Stryker to Allegheny Technologies. I’ve asked Susan Hockfield, the President of MIT, who is here -- there’s Susan -- and Andrew Liveris, the CEO of Dow Chemical -- to lead this partnership, and to work with my own advisors on science, technology and manufacturing.

Throughout our history, our greatest breakthroughs have often come from partnerships just like this one. American innovation has always been sparked by individual scientists and entrepreneurs, often at universities like Carnegie Mellon or Georgia Tech or Berkeley or Stanford. But a lot of companies don’t invest in early ideas because it won’t pay off right away. And that’s where government can step in. That’s how we ended up with some of the world-changing innovations that fueled our growth and prosperity and created countless jobs -- the mobile phone, the Internet, GPS, more than 150 drugs and vaccines over the last 40 years was all because we were able to, in strategic ways, bring people together and make some critical investments.

I’ll take one example. The National Science Foundation helped fund Stanford’s Digital Library Project in the 1990s. The idea was to develop a universal digital library that anybody could access. So two enterprising Ph.D. students got excited about the research that was being done at Stanford -- this is funded by NSF. So these two Ph.D. students, they moved from campus to a friend’s garage, and they launched this company called Google. And when the private sector runs with the ball, it then leads to jobs, building and selling, that is successful all over the world.

This new partnership that we’ve created will make sure tomorrow’s breakthroughs are American breakthroughs. We’re teaming up to foster the kind of collaborative R&D that resulted in those same early discoveries, and to create the kind of innovation infrastructure necessary to get ideas from the drawing board to the manufacturing floor to the market more rapidly -- all of which will make our businesses more competitive and create new, high-quality manufacturing jobs.

Now, to help businesses operate at less cost, the Energy Department will develop new manufacturing processes and materials that use half as much energy. That will free up more money for companies to hire new workers or buy new equipment.

To help businesses discover, develop, and deploy new materials twice as fast, we’re launching what we call the Materials Genome Initiative. The invention of silicon circuits and lithium-ion batteries made computers and iPods and iPads possible -- but it took years to get those technologies from the drawing board to the marketplace. We can do it faster.

To help everyone from factory workers to astronauts carry out more complicated tasks, NASA and other agencies will support research into next-generation robotics. And I just met with folks from a local company, RedZone Robotics, who make robots that explore water and sewer pipes. And I have to say, it is fascinating stuff, when you watch -- the robot is about this big. It can go through any sewer system. It’s operated remotely by the municipal worker. It’s got a camera attached so it can film everything that it’s seeing. It then transmits the data. It goes into a citywide database, and can enhance the productivity of these workers by three or fourfold, and help the city make even better decisions.

Potentially this can save cities millions in infrastructure costs. Companies also are training new workers to operate the robots, and analysts to pore through the data that’s being collected.

To help smaller manufacturers compete, federal agencies are working with private companies to make powerful, often unaffordable modeling and simulation software easier to access. And I just saw an example. A few years ago, Procter & Gamble teamed up with the researchers at Los Alamos National Labs to adapt software developed for war to figure out what’s happening with nuclear particles, and they are using these simulators to dramatically boost the performance of diapers. Yes, diapers. Folks chuckle, but those who’ve been parents -- are always on the lookout for indestructible, military-grade diapers.

But here’s what’s remarkable: Using this simulation software that was developed at Los Alamos, Procter & Gamble has saved 500 million dollars -- half a billion dollars -- as a consequence of this simulator. Now, through the new partnership that we’re setting up, Procter & Gamble is offering its powerful fluid dynamics simulator to smaller manufacturers, and it’s doing it for free.

Now, this is not just because Procter & Gamble wants to do good. It’s also they’ve got thousands of suppliers, and they're thinking to themselves, if we can apply this simulation technology to our smaller suppliers they're going to be able to make their products cheaper and better, then that, in turn, is going to save us even more money. And it has a ripple effect throughout the economy.

Starting this summer, federal agencies will partner with industries to boost manufacturing in areas critical to our national security. I just saw an example backstage. The Defense Department scientists -- we call it DARPA -- the folks who brought us stealth technology and, by the way, who brought us the Internet -- wanted to see if it was possible to design defense systems cheaper and faster. So they found a small company in Arizona called Local Motors, and they gave them a test: You have one month to design a new combat support vehicle, and you’ve got three months to build it.

Their CEO, Jay Rogers, is here today, and as an ex-Marine who lost a couple of buddies in combat, understood the importance of increasing the speed and adaptability and flexibility of our manufacturing process for vehicles that are used in theater.

So Local Motors solicited design ideas on their website, chose the best out of 162 that it received, built and brought this new vehicle here ahead of schedule. We just took a look at it. Not only could this change the way the government uses your tax dollars -- because think about it, instead of having a 10-year lead time to develop a piece of equipment with all kinds of changing specs and a moving target, if we were able to collapse the pace at which that manufacturing takes place, that could save taxpayers billions of dollars. But it also could get products out to theater faster, which could save lives more quickly, and could then be used to transfer into the private sector more rapidly, which means we could get better products and services that we can sell and export around the world. So it’s good for American companies. It’s good for American jobs. It’s good for taxpayers. And it may save some lives in places like Afghanistan for our soldiers.

So that’s what this is all about. As futuristic and, let’s face it, as cool as some of this stuff is, as much as we are planning for America’s future, this partnership is about new, cutting-edge ideas to create new jobs, spark new breakthroughs, reinvigorate American manufacturing today. Right now. Not somewhere off in the future -- right now.

It’s about making sure our workers and businesses have the skills and the tools they need to compete better, faster, and smarter than anybody else. That's what we’re about. We are America, and we don’t just keep up with changing times, we set the pace for changing times. We adapt; we innovate; we lead the way forward.

It’s worth remembering, there was a time when steel was about as advanced as manufacturing got. But when the namesake of this university, Andrew Carnegie -- an immigrant, by the way -- discovered new ways to mass-produce steel cheaply, everything changed. Just 20 years after founding his company, not only was it the largest, most profitable in the world, America had become the number one steelmaker in the world.

Now, imagine if America was first to develop and mass-produce a new treatment that kills cancer cells but leaves healthy ones untouched; or solar cells you can brush onto a house for the same cost as paint; or flexible display soldiers -- flexible displays that soldiers can wear on their arms; or a car that drives itself. Imagine how many workers and businesses and consumers would prosper from those breakthroughs.

Those things aren’t science fiction -- they’re real. They’re being developed and deployed in labs and factories and on test tracks right now. They sprang from the imagination of students and scientists and entrepreneurs like all of you. And the purpose of this partnership is to prove that the United States of America has your back, is going to be supporting you -- because that’s the kind of adventurous, pioneering spirit that we need right now.

That’s the spirit that’s given us the tools and toughness to overcome every obstacle and adapt to every circumstance. And if we remember that spirit, if we combine our creativity, our innovation, and our optimism, if we come together in common cause, as we've done so many times before, then we will thrive again. We will get to where we need to be. And we will make this century the American century just like the last one was.

Thank you very much, everybody.

God bless you.

And God bless the United States of America.

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# Presser on the Economy and the Debt Limit

I just want to say a few words about the economy before I take your questions.

There are a lot of folks out there who are still struggling with the effects of the recession. Many people are still looking for work or looking for a job that pays more. Families are wondering how they'd deal with a broken refrigerator or a busted transmission, or how they're going to finance their kids' college education, and they're also worrying about the possibility of layoffs.

The struggles of middle-class families were a big problem long before the recession hit in 2007. They weren’t created overnight, and the truth is our economic challenges are not going to be solved overnight. But there are more steps that we can take right now that would help businesses create jobs here in America.

Today, our administration is trying to take those steps, so we're reviewing government regulations so that we can fix any rules in place that are an unnecessary burden on businesses. We’re working with the private sector to get small businesses and start-ups the financing they need to grow and expand. And because of the partnership that we’ve launched with businesses and community colleges, 500,000 workers will be able to receive the right skills and training for manufacturing jobs in companies all across America -- jobs that companies are looking to fill.

In addition to the steps that my administration can take on our own, there are also things that Congress could do right now that will help create good jobs. Right now, Congress can send me a bill that would make it easier for entrepreneurs to patent a new product or idea -- because we can’t give innovators in other countries a big leg up when it comes to opening new businesses and creating new jobs. That's something Congress could do right now.

Right now, Congress could send me a bill that puts construction workers back on the job rebuilding roads and bridges -- not by having government fund and pick every project, but by providing loans to private companies and states and local governments on the basis of merit and not politics. That's pending in Congress right now.

Right now, Congress can advance a set of trade agreements that would allow American businesses to sell more of their goods and services to countries in Asia and South America -- agreements that would support tens of thousands of American jobs while helping those adversely affected by trade. That's pending before Congress right now.

And right now, we could give middle-class families the security of knowing that the tax cut I signed in December will be there for one more year.

So there are a number of steps that my administration is taking, but there are also a number of steps that Congress could be taking right now on items that historically have had bipartisan support and that would help put more Americans back to work.

Many of these ideas have been tied up in Congress for some time. But, as I said, all of them enjoy bipartisan support, and all of them would help grow the economy. So I urge Congress to act on these ideas now.

Of course, one of the most important and urgent things we can do for the economy is something that both parties are working on right now -- and that’s reducing our nation’s deficit. Over the last few weeks, the Vice President has been leading negotiations with Democrats and Republicans on this issue, and they’ve made some real progress in narrowing down the differences. As of last week, both parties had identified more than 1 trillion dollars worth of spending cuts already.

But everyone also knows that we’ll need to do more to close the deficit. We can’t get to the 4 trillion dollars in savings that we need by just cutting the 12 percent of the budget that pays for things like medical research and education funding and food inspectors and the weather service. And we can’t just do it by making seniors pay more for Medicare. So we’re going to need to look at the whole budget, as I said several months ago. And we’ve got to eliminate waste wherever we find it and make some tough decisions about worthy priorities.

And that means trimming the defense budget, while still meeting our security needs. It means we’ll have to tackle entitlements, as long as we keep faith with seniors and children with disabilities by maintaining the fundamental security that Medicare and Medicaid provide. And, yes, we’re going to have to tackle spending in the tax code.

There’s been a lot of discussion about revenues and raising taxes in recent weeks, so I want to be clear about what we’re proposing here. I spent the last two years cutting taxes for ordinary Americans, and I want to extend those middle-class tax cuts. The tax cuts I’m proposing we get rid of are tax breaks for millionaires and billionaires; tax breaks for oil companies and hedge fund managers and corporate jet owners.

It would be nice if we could keep every tax break there is, but we’ve got to make some tough choices here if we want to reduce our deficit. And if we choose to keep those tax breaks for millionaires and billionaires, if we choose to keep a tax break for corporate jet owners, if we choose to keep tax breaks for oil and gas companies that are making hundreds of billions of dollars, then that means we’ve got to cut some kids off from getting a college scholarship. That means we’ve got to stop funding certain grants for medical research. That means that food safety may be compromised. That means that Medicare has to bear a greater part of the burden. Those are the choices we have to make.

So the bottom line is this: Any agreement to reduce our deficit is going to require tough decisions and balanced solutions. And before we ask our seniors to pay more for health care, before we cut our children’s education, before we sacrifice our commitment to the research and innovation that will help create more jobs in the economy, I think it’s only fair to ask an oil company or a corporate jet owner that has done so well to give up a tax break that no other business enjoys. I don’t think that’s real radical. I think the majority of Americans agree with that.

So the good news is, because of the work that’s been done, I this we can actually bridge our differences. I think there is a conceptual framework that would allow us to make huge progress on our debt and deficit, and do so in a way that does not hurt our economy right here and right now.

And it’s not often that Washington sees both parties agree on the scale and the urgency of the challenge at hand. Nobody wants to put the creditworthiness of the United States in jeopardy. Nobody wants to see the United States default. So we’ve got to seize this moment, and we have to seize it soon. The Vice President and I will continue these negotiations with both leaders of both parties in Congress for as long as it takes, and we will reach a deal that will require our government to live within its means and give our businesses confidence and get this economy moving.

So, with that, I will take your questions. I’ve got my list here. Starting off with Ben Feller, Associated Press.

Question: Thank you very much, Mr. President. I’d like to follow up on the comments you just made as you try to reach a deal to raise the debt limit and cut the deficit. You keep saying that there needs to be this balanced approach of spending cuts and taxes. But Republicans say flatly, they won’t --

President Obama: That they don’t want a balanced approach.

Question: They don’t want any tax increases, as they put it. And the House Speaker says not only that he doesn’t support that, but that plan won’t -- will not pass the House. So my question is will you insist, ultimately, that a deal has to include those tax increases that you just laid out? Is that an absolute red line for you? And if it is, can you explain to us how that can possibly get through the Congress?

President Obama: Look, I think that what we’ve seen in negotiations here in Washington is a lot of people say a lot of things to satisfy their base or to get on cable news, but that hopefully, leaders at a certain point rise to the occasion and they do the right thing for the American people. And that’s what I expect to happen this time. Call me naÃ¯ve, but my expectation is that leaders are going to lead.

Now, I just want to be clear about what’s at stake here. The Republicans say they want to reduce the deficit. Every single observer who’s not an elected official, who’s not a politician, says we can’t reduce our deficit in the scale and scope that we need to without having a balanced approach that looks at everything.

Democrats have to accept some painful spending cuts that hurt some of our constituencies and we may not like. And we’ve shown a willingness to do that for the greater good. To say, look, there are some things that are good programs that are nice to have; we can’t afford them right now.

I, as Commander-in-Chief, have to have difficult conversations with the Pentagon saying, you know what, there’s fat here; we’re going to have to trim it out. And Bob Gates has already done a good job identifying 400 billion dollars in cuts, but we’re going to do more. And I promise you the preference of the Pentagon would not to cut any more, because they feel like they’ve already given.

So we’re going to have to look at entitlements -- and that’s always difficult politically. But I’ve been willing to say we need to see where we can reduce the cost of health care spending and Medicare and Medicaid in the out-years, not by shifting costs on to seniors, as some have proposed, but rather by actually reducing those costs. But even if we’re doing it in a smart way, that's still tough politics. But it’s the right thing to do.

So the question is, if everybody else is willing to take on their sacred cows and do tough things in order to achieve the goal of real deficit reduction, then I think it would be hard for the Republicans to stand there and say that the tax break for corporate jets is sufficiently important that we’re not willing to come to the table and get a deal done. Or, we’re so concerned about protecting oil and gas subsidies for oil companies that are making money hand over fist -- that's the reason we’re not going to come to a deal.

I don't think that's a sustainable position. And the truth of the matter is, if you talk to Republicans who are not currently in office, like Alan Simpson who co-chaired my bipartisan commission, he doesn’t think that's a sustainable position. Pete Domenici, Republican, co-chaired something with Alice Rivlin, the Democrat, says that's -- he doesn’t think that's a sustainable position. You can’t reduce the deficit to the levels that it needs to be reduced without having some revenue in the mix.

And the revenue we’re talking about isn’t coming out of the pockets of middle-class families that are struggling. It’s coming out of folks who are doing extraordinarily well and are enjoying the lowest tax rates since before I was born.

If you are a wealthy CEO or a health -- hedge fund manager in America right now, your taxes are lower than they have ever been. They’re lower than they’ve been since the 1950s. And you can afford it. You’ll still be able to ride on your corporate jet; you’re just going to have to pay a little more.

And if we -- I just want to emphasize what I said earlier. If we do not have revenues, that means there are a bunch of kids out there who are not getting college scholarships. If we do not have those revenues, then the kinds of cuts that would be required might compromise the National Weather Service. It means that we would not be funding critical medical research. It means that food inspection might be compromised. And I’ve said to some of the Republican leaders, you go talk to your constituents, the Republican constituents, and ask them are they willing to compromise their kids’ safety so that some corporate jet owner continues to get a tax break. And I’m pretty sure what the answer would be.

So we’re going to keep on having these conversations. And my belief is, is that the Republican leadership in Congress will, hopefully sooner rather than later, come to the conclusion that they need to make the right decisions for the country; that everybody else has been willing to move off their maximalist position -- they need to do the same.

Question: You think they'll ultimately give in?

President Obama: My expectation is that they’ll do the responsible thing.

Chuck Todd.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. There have been a lot of questions about the constitutionality -- constitutional interpretations of a few decisions you’ve made, so I’ll just simply ask: Do you believe the War Powers Act is constitutional? Do you believe that the debt limit is constitutional, the idea that Congress can do this? And do you believe that marriage is a civil right?

President Obama: Well, that was a hodgepodge. Chuck, we’re going to assign you to the Supreme Court, man.

I’m not a Supreme Court justice so I’m not going to -- putting my constitutional law professor hat on here. Let me focus on, initially, the issue of Libya. I want to talk about the substance of Libya because there’s been all kinds of noise about process and congressional consultation and so forth. Let’s talk about concretely what’s happened.

Muammar Qaddafi, who, prior to Osama bin Laden, was responsible for more American deaths than just about anybody on the planet, was threatening to massacre his people. And as part of an international coalition, under a U.N. mandate that is almost unprecedented, we went in and took out air defense systems so that an international coalition could provide a no-fly zone, could protect -- provide humanitarian protection to the people on the ground.

I spoke to the American people about what we would do. I said there would be no troops on the ground. I said that we would not be carrying the lion’s share of this operation, but as members of NATO, we would be supportive of it because it’s in our national security interest and also because it’s the right thing to do.

We have done exactly what I said we would do. We have not put any boots on the ground. And our allies -- who, historically, we’ve complained aren’t willing to carry enough of the load when it comes to NATO operations -- have carried a big load when it comes to these NATO operations. And as a consequence, we’ve protected thousands of people in Libya; we have not seen a single U.S. casualty; there’s no risks of additional escalation. This operation is limited in time and in scope.

So I said to the American people, here’s our narrow mission. We have carried out that narrow mission in exemplary fashion. And throughout this process we consulted with Congress. We’ve had 10 hearings on it. We’ve sent reams of information about what the operations are. I’ve had all the members of Congress over to talk about it. So a lot of this fuss is politics.

And if you look substantively at what we’ve done, we have done exactly what we said to do, under a U.N. mandate, and we have protected thousands of lives in the process. And as a consequence, a guy who was a state sponsor of terrorist operations against the United States of America is pinned down and the noose is tightening around him.

Now, when you look at the history of the War Powers resolution, it came up after the Vietnam War in which we had half-a-million soldiers there, tens of thousands of lives lost, hundreds of billions of dollars spent -- and Congress said, you know what, we don’t want something like that happening again. So if you’re going to start getting us into those kinds of commitments you’ve got to consult with Congress beforehand.

And I think that such consultation is entirely appropriate. But do I think that our actions in any way violate the War Powers resolution? The answer is no. So I don’t even have to get to the constitutional question. There may be a time in which there was a serious question as to whether or not the War Powers resolution -- act was constitutional. I don’t have to get to the question.

We have engaged in a limited operation to help a lot of people against one of the worst tyrants in the world -- somebody who nobody should want to defend -- and we should be sending a unified message to this guy that he should step down and give his people a fair chance to live their lives without fear. And this suddenly becomes the cause cÃ©lÃ¨bre for some folks in Congress? Come on.

So you had, what, a three-parter? What are the other two?

Question: There is some question about the constitutionality of the War Powers Act.

President Obama: I’m just saying I don’t have to reach it. That’s a good legal answer.

Question: [Inaudible.]

President Obama: Let me start by saying that this administration, under my direction, has consistently said we cannot discriminate as a country against people on the basis of sexual orientation. And we have done more in the two and a half years that I’ve been in here than the previous 43 Presidents to uphold that principle, whether it’s ending “don’t ask, don’t tell,” making sure that gay and lesbian partners can visit each other in hospitals, making sure that federal benefits can be provided to same-sex couples. Across the board -- hate crimes -- we have made sure that that is a central principle of this administration, because I think it’s a central principle of America.

Now, what we’ve also done is we’ve said that DOMA, the Defense of Marriage Act, is unconstitutional. And so we’ve said we cannot defend the federal government poking its nose into what states are doing and putting the thumb on the scale against same-sex couples.

What I’ve seen happen over the last several years, and what happened in New York last week I think was a good thing, because what you saw was the people of New York having a debate, talking through these issues. It was contentious; it was emotional; but, ultimately, they made a decision to recognize civil marriage. And I think that’s exactly how things should work.

And so I think it is -- I think it is important for us to work through these issues -- because each community is going to be different and each state is going to be different -- to work through them. In the meantime, we filed a -- we filed briefs before the Supreme Court that say we think that any discrimination against gays, lesbians, transgenders is subject to heightened scrutiny, and we don't think that DOMA is unconstitutional [sic]. And so I think the combination of what states are doing, what the courts are doing, the actions that we’re taking administratively, all are how the process should work.

Question: Are you at all uncomfortable that there could be different rules in different states, you know, and for somebody to make the argument that's what we saw during segregation --

President Obama: Chuck, I think what you’re seeing is a profound recognition on the part of the American people that gays and lesbians and transgender persons are our brothers, our sisters, our children, our cousins, our friends, our co-workers, and that they’ve got to be treated like every other American. And I think that principle will win out. It’s not going to be perfectly smooth, and it turns out that the President -- I’ve discovered since I’ve been in this office -- can’t dictate precisely how this process moves. But I think we’re moving in a direction of greater equality and I think that’s a good thing.

Julianna.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. I only have a two-parter.

President Obama: Thanks.

Question: Are you concerned that the current debate over debt and deficits is preventing you from taking the kind of decisive and more balanced action needed to create jobs in this country, which is the number one concern for Americans?

And also, one of the impediments to job growth that the business community repeatedly cites is the regulatory environment. So do you think that the NLRB complaint against Boeing, that this has created some of the -- is an example of the kinds of regulations that chill job growth, and also that you yourself have called “just plain dumb”?

President Obama: I think it’s important to understand that deficit reduction, debt reduction, should be part of an overall package for job growth over the long term. It’s not the only part of it, but it’s an important part of it.

President Obama: So as I mentioned at the top, I think it’s important for us to look at rebuilding our transportation infrastructure in this country. That could put people back to work right now -- construction workers back to work right now. And it would get done work that America needs to get done. We used to have the best roads, the best bridges, the best airports. We don’t anymore. And that’s not good for our long-term competitiveness.

So we could put people to work right now and make sure that we’re in a good position to win the future, as well. I think --

Question: -- spending and [inaudible.]

President Obama: I’m going to get to it. I think that it’s important for us to look at the tax code and figure out, are there ways that we can simplify it and also build on the work that we’ve already done, for example, saying to small businesses or start-up businesses, you don't have to pay capital gains when you’re in start-up mode, because we want you to get out there and start a business. That's important. Making sure that SBA is helping to get financing to small businesses, that's important.

So there are a whole range of things that we can be doing. I think these trade deals will be important -- because right now South Korea, frankly, has a better deal when it comes to our trading relationship than we do. Part of the reason I want to pass this trade deal is you see a whole bunch of Korean cars here in the United States and you don't see any American cars in Korea. So let’s rebalance that trading relationship. That's why we should get this passed.

So there are a range of things that we could be doing right now. Deficit and debt reduction should be seen as part of that overall process, because I think if businesses feel confident that we’ve got our act together here in Washington, that not only is the government not going to default but we’re also preparing for a future in which the population is getting older and we’re going to have more expenses on the Medicare side and Social Security, that businesses will feel more confident about investing here in the United States of America.

So I don't think they’re contradictory. And as I’ve said before, certainly in my job, but I think Congress, as well, they’ve got to be able to walk and chew gum at the same time. So we can focus on jobs at the same time as we’re focusing on debt and deficit reduction.

Now, one of the things that my administration has talked about is, is there, in fact, a bunch of -- a tangle of regulations out there that are preventing businesses from growing and expanding as quickly as they should. Keep in mind that the business community is always complaining about regulations. When unemployment is at 3 percent and they're making record profits, they're going to still complain about regulations because, frankly, they want to be able to do whatever they think is going to maximize their profits.

I’ve got an obligation to make sure that we’re upholding smart regulations that protect our air and protect our water and protect our food. If you’re flying on a plane, you want to make sure that there are some regulations in place to assure safety in air travel, right? So there are some core regulations that we’ve got to maintain.

But what I have done -- and this is unprecedented, by the way, no administration has done this before -- is I’ve said to each agency, don't just look at current regulations -- or don't just look at future regulations, regulations that we’re proposing, let’s go backwards and look at regulations that are already on the books, and if they don't make sense, let’s get rid of them. And we are in the process of doing that, and we’ve already identified changes that could potentially save billions of dollars for companies over the next several years.

Now, you asked specifically about one decision that was made by the National Labor Relations Board, the NLRB, and this relates to Boeing. Essentially, the NLRB made a finding that Boeing had not followed the law in making a decision to move a plant. And it’s an independent agency. It’s going before a judge. So I don't want to get into the details of the case. I don't know all the facts. That's going to be up to a judge to decide.

What I do know is this -- that as a general proposition, companies need to have the freedom to relocate. They have to follow the law, but that’s part of our system. And if they’re choosing to relocate here in the United States, that’s a good thing. And what it doesn’t make -- what I think defies common sense would be a notion that we would be shutting down a plant or laying off workers because labor and management can’t come to a sensible agreement.

So my hope is, is that even as this thing is working its way through, everybody steps back for a second and says, look, if jobs are being created here in the United States, let’s make sure that we’re encouraging that. And we can’t afford to have labor and management fighting all the time, at a time when we’re competing against Germany and China and other countries that want to sell goods all around the world. And obviously, the airplane industry is an area where we still have a huge advantage, and I want to make sure that we keep it.

Mark Lander.

Question: Thank you very much, Mr. President. Yesterday, Admiral McRaven testified before Congress that he was concerned that there wasn’t a clear procedure to be followed if a terrorist were captured alive abroad. The administration has also been clear that it doesn’t want to continue to send suspected terrorists to Guantanamo.

What message do you have for American men and women in uniform who are undertaking missions, like the very risky one to capture and kill bin Laden, about what they should do in the event that they capture someone alive? And does the lack of these clear procedures raise the risk that forces might be more inclined to kill suspected terrorists in the field, rather than capture them alive, thus depriving the U.S. of the intelligence that they could provide?

President Obama: Well, first of all, my top priority in each and every one of these situations is to make sure that we’re apprehending those who would attack the United States; that we are getting all the intelligence that we can out of these individuals, in a way that’s consistent with due process of law; and that we try them, we prosecute them, in a way that’s consistent with rule of law.

And, frankly, there are going to be different dispositions of the case depending on the situation. And there are going to be sometimes where a military commission may be appropriate. There are going to be some times where Article III courts are appropriate in terms of prosecution. And we do have a process to work through all the agencies -- Department of Defense, Department of Justice, FBI, anybody else who might be involved in these kinds of operations -- to think through on a case-by-case basis how a particular individual should be dealt with.

And I think that when it comes to our men and women in uniform who might be carrying out these missions, the instructions are not going to be based on whether or not the lawyers can sort out how we detain them or how we prosecute them. Their mission is to make sure that they apprehend the individual; they do so safely with minimum risk to American lives. And that’s always going to be the priority, is just carrying out the mission. And that message is sent consistently to our men and women in uniform anytime they start carrying out one of these missions.

But I think it’s important to understand, and the American people need to be assured that anytime we initiate a mission like this, our top priorities are making sure this person is not able to carry out attacks against the United States and that we’re able to obtain actionable intelligence from those individuals. And so that mitigates against this danger that you’re suggesting that our main goal is going to be to kill these individuals as opposed to potentially capturing them. Okay?

Mike Emanuel, FOX.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Last week when you gave your Afghanistan drawdown speech, the word “victory,” in terms of the overall war in Afghanistan, was not in your speech. So I’m wondering, sir, if you can define for the 100,000 troops you have in harm’s way in Afghanistan “victory” in the war, and for their families, as well, sir.

President Obama: Well, I didn't use “victory” in my West Point speech, either. What I said was we can be successful in our mission, which is narrowly drawn, and that is to make sure that al Qaeda cannot attack the United States of America or our allies or our interests overseas, and to make sure that we have an Afghan government that -- and an Afghan people that can provide for their own security.

We are being successful in those missions. And the reason that we’re in a position to draw down 10,000 troops this year and a total of 33,000 troops by the end of next summer is precisely because of the extraordinary work of our men and women in uniform. What they’ve been able to do is to severely cripple al Qaeda’s capacities.

Obviously bin Laden got the most attention, but even before the bin Laden operation we had decimated the middle ranks and some of the upper ranks of al Qaeda. They’re having a great deal of difficulty operating, a great deal of difficulty communicating and financing themselves, and we are going to keep the pressure on. And in part that's because of the extraordinary sacrifices that have been made by our men and women in uniform in Afghanistan.

What we’ve also been able to do is to ramp up the training of Afghan forces. So we’ve got an additional 100,000 Afghan troops, both Army and police, that have been trained as a consequence of this surge. And that is going to give the Afghans more capacity to defend themselves because it is in our national interest to make sure that you did not have a collapse of Afghanistan in which extremist elements could flood the zone once again, and over time al Qaeda might be in a position to rebuild itself.

So what I laid out was a plan in which we are going to be drawing down our troops from Afghanistan after 10 very long years and an enormous sacrifice by our troops. But we will draw them in a -- draw them down in a responsible way that will allow Afghanistan to defend itself and will give us the operational capacity to continue to put pressure on al Qaeda until that network is entirely defeated.

Question: The attack on the Intercontinental Hotel yesterday, sir? And does that concern you that Afghan forces may not be able to step up if these guys are able to attack a high-profile target in the nation’s capital?

President Obama: Well, keep in mind the drawdown hasn’t begun. So we understood that Afghanistan is a dangerous place, that the Taliban is still active, and that there are still going to be events like this on occasion. The question is, in terms of overall trend, is Afghanistan capacity increasing.

Kabul, for example, which contains a huge proportion of the Afghan population as a whole, has been largely policed by Afghan forces for quite some time. And they’ve done a reasonably good job. Kabul is much safer than it was, and Afghan forces in Kabul are much more capable than they were.

That doesn’t mean that there are not going to be events like this potentially taking place, and that will probably go on for some time. Our work is not done. But as I said in my speech, the tide of war is receding. We have shifted to a transition phase. And much like we’ve seen in Iraq, where we've drawn down our troops, the remainder of our troops will be coming out by the end of this year, but Iraq has been able to maintain a democratic government and to tamp down violence there -- we think a similar approach makes sense in Afghanistan.

But even in Iraq, you still see the occasional attack. These are still countries that are digging themselves out of a lot of war, a lot of conflict. They’re dangerous places. And so they’re not going to be perfectly safe, even if we were there. But we can improve the chances for the Afghan people to defend themselves.

Jim Sciutto.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. You’re aware that Senators Kerry and McCain have a proposal on the Senate floor to give you the leeway to continue operations in Libya for a further year. You’ve just said that this, from the beginning, has been an operation limited in time and scope. Initially you said days, not weeks. Are you prepared, are the American people prepared for this operation, with American support, to continue for a further year? And is there any other definition of success than Qaddafi being removed from power?

President Obama: Well, first of all, Jim, just a slight correction. What I told the American people was that the initial phase where Americans were in the lead would take days, perhaps weeks. And that’s exactly what happened, right? I mean, after -- around two weeks, a little less than two weeks, we had transitioned where NATO had taken full control of the operation. So promise made, promise kept.

Second, I think when you have the former Republican nominee for President, John McCain, and the former nominee for President on the Democratic side, John Kerry, coming together to support what we’re doing in Libya, that should tell the American people that this is important. And I very much appreciate their efforts in that regard.

Third, when it comes to our definitions of success, the U.N. mandate has said that we are there to make sure that you do not see a massacre directed against Libyan civilians by the Libyan regime. The Libyan regime’s capacity has been greatly reduced as a consequence of our operation. That’s already been successful. What we’ve seen both in the East and in the West is that opposition forces have been able to mobilize themselves and start getting organized, and people are starting to see the possibility of a more peaceful future on the horizon.

What is also true is, as long as Qaddafi is still presenting himself as the head of the Libyan government, and as long as he still controls large numbers of troops, the Libyan people are going to be in danger of counter-offensives and of retribution. So there is no doubt that Qaddafi stepping down from power is -- from the international community’s perspective -- going to be the primary way that we can assure that the overall mission of Libya’s people being protected is accomplished.

And I just want to point out -- I know it's something you know -- the International Criminal Court identified Qaddafi as having violated international law, having committed war crimes. What we’ve seen is reports of troops engaging in horrible acts, including potentially using rape as a weapon of war. And so when you have somebody like that in charge of large numbers of troops, I think it would be hard for us to feel confident that the Libyan people are going to be protected unless he steps down.

Now, what that means, whether there’s the possibility of Libyans arriving at some sort of political settlement, that I think is something that ultimately the Libyan people are going to have to make a decision about -- because the international community is there in service of that broader goal, of a peaceful Libya.

Question: Would you accept a political settlement with him involved as success from the American perspective?

President Obama: I would accept him stepping down so that he is not directing armed forces against the Libyan people. He needs to step down. He needs to go.

Laura Meckler.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. In these debt talks, would you accept -- would you like to see some sort of tax breaks aimed at stimulating the economy, even though that would of course add to the deficit itself?

And I’d also like to follow up on one of your earlier answers about same-sex marriage. You said that it’s a positive step that so many states, including New York, are moving towards that. Does that mean that you personally now do support same-sex marriage, putting aside what individual states decide? Is that your personal view?

President Obama: I’m not going to make news on that today. Good try, though.

And with respect to the deficit and debt talks and where we need to go, I do think it’s important, since we’re looking at how do we reduce the debt and deficit both in a 10-year window as well as beyond a 10-year window, to understand that one of the most important things we can do for debt and deficit reduction is to grow the economy.

And so if there are steps that in the short term may reduce the amount of cash in the treasury but in the long term mean that we’re growing at 3.5 percent instead of 2.5 percent, then those ideas are worth exploring.

Obviously that was what we did in December during the lame duck session, when Democrats and Republicans came together and we said, you know what, a payroll tax cut makes sense in order to boost the economy; unemployment insurance makes sense in order to boost the economy. All that stuff puts money in people’s pockets at a time when they’re still struggling to dig themselves out of this recession. And so the American people have an extra thousand dollars, on average, in their pockets because of the tax cuts that we initiated. And that has helped cushion some of the tough stuff that happened in the first six months of this year, including the effects on oil prices as a consequence of what happened in the Middle East as well as what happened in Japan.

I think that it makes perfect sense for us to take a look at can we extend the payroll tax, for example, an additional year, and other tax breaks for business investment that could make a big difference in terms of creating more jobs right now.

What we need to do is to restore business confidence and the confidence of the American people that we’re on track -- that we’re not going to get there right away, that this is a tough slog, but that we still are moving forward. And I think that it makes sense, as we’re looking at an overall package, to see, are there some things that we can do to sustain the recovery, so long as the overall package achieves our goals -- the goals that I set out, which is $4 trillion within a 10-to 12-year window, and making sure that we’re bending the costs of things like health care over the long term.

Question: I'm sorry, I know you don’t want to say anything further on the same-sex marriage issue, but what you said before really led me to believe that that’s what is in your personal mind. And I’m wondering what's the distinction you’re drawing.

President Obama: Laura, I think this has been asked and answered. I'll -- I'll just -- I'll...keep on giving you the -- the same answer until I give you a different one, all right? And that won’t be today.

Question: That's going to be -- [inaudible.]

President Obama: Yes, exactly. I thought you’d like that one.

Antonieta CÃ¡diz? There you are.

Question: Thank you very much, Mr. President. First, if you receive a mandatory E-verify bill only without legalization, are you planning to veto that deal?

And second, on Fast and Furious, members of Congress and the government of Mexico are still waiting for answers. Are you planning to replace ATF leadership? And when can we expect the results of the current investigation?

President Obama: On the second question, as you know, my attorney general has made clear that he certainly would not have ordered gun running to be able to pass through into Mexico. The investigation is still pending. I’m not going to comment on a current investigation. I’ve made very clear my views that that would not be an appropriate step by the ATF, and we got to find out how that happened. As soon as the investigation is completed, I think appropriate actions will be taken.

With respect to E-verify, we need comprehensive immigration reform. I’ve said it before. I will say it again. I will say it next week. And I’ll say it six months from now. We’ve got to have a system that makes sure that we uphold our tradition as a nation of laws and that we also uphold our tradition as a nation of immigrants. And that means tough border security, going after employers that are illegally hiring and exploiting workers, making sure that we also have a pathway for legal status for those who are living in the shadows right now.

We may not be able to get everything that I would like to see in a package, but we have to have a balanced package. E-verify can be an important enforcement tool if it’s not riddled with errors, if U.S. citizens are protected -- because what I don't want is a situation in which employers are forced to set up a system that they can’t be certain works. And we don't want to expose employers to the risk where they end up rejecting a qualified candidate for a job because the list says that that person is an illegal immigrant, and it turns out that the person isn’t an illegal immigrant. That wouldn’t be fair for the employee and would probably get the employer in trouble as well.

So I think the goal right now is to let’s continue to see if we can perfect the E-verify system. Let’s make sure that we have safeguards in place to prevent the kind of scenarios that I talked about. But let’s also not lose sight of some of the other components to immigration reform. For example, making sure that DREAM Act kids -- kids who have grown up here in the United States, think of themselves as Americans, who are not legal through no fault of their own, and who are ready to invest and give back to our country and go to school and fight in our military and start businesses here -- let’s make sure that those kids can stay.

We need to have a more balanced approach than just a verification system.

Question: Mr. President -- Mr. President, you don't have any timeline for the [inaudible]

President Obama: I don’t have an answer as to whether the investigation is completed yet, and it wouldn’t be appropriate for me to comment on the investigation if I don’t -- if it’s not yet completed.

Jessica Yellin. Congratulations, your first question here.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President.

President Obama: No pressure. You’re going to do great.

Question: Thank you. Your administration has laid out four different dates by which you’ve said that the debt ceiling must be raised or the U.S. would face potential dire consequences. Three of those dates have come and gone and we haven’t faced financial calamity. Some of your critics have argued that these are then scare tactics to force a deal. So why should the American people believe that the August 2nd deadline is the final deadline by which a deal must be raised? And would you also spell out for us what you believe will happen if the debt ceiling is not raised by that date?

President Obama: Jessica, let’s be clear. We haven’t given out four different dates. We have given out dates that are markers for us getting into trouble. It’s the equivalent of you’re driving down the street and the yellow light starts flashing. The yellow light is flashing. Now, it hasn’t been a red light yet. So what Tim Geithner has said is, technically speaking, we’re in a position now where we’re having to do a whole bunch of things to make sure that our bills are paid.

By August 2nd, we run out of tools to make sure that all our bills are paid. So that is a hard deadline. And I want everybody to understand that this is a jobs issue. This is not an abstraction. If the United States government, for the first time, cannot pay its bills, if it defaults, then the consequences for the U.S. economy will be significant and unpredictable. And that is not a good thing.

We don’t know how capital markets will react. But if capital markets suddenly decide, you know what, the U.S. government doesn’t pay its bills, so we’re going to start pulling our money out, and the U.S. Treasury has to start to raise interest rates in order to attract more money to pay off our bills, that means higher interest rates for businesses; that means higher interest rates for consumers. So all the headwinds that we’re already experiencing in terms of the recovery will get worse.

That’s not my opinion. I think that’s a consensus opinion. And that means that job growth will be further stymied, it will be further hampered, as a consequence of that decision. So that’s point number one.

Point number two, I want to address what I’ve been hearing from some quarters, which is, well, maybe this debt limit thing is not really that serious; we can just pay interest on the debt. This idea has been floating around in some Republican circles.

This is the equivalent of me saying, you know what, I will choose to pay my mortgage, but I’m not going to pay my car note. Or I’m going to pay my car note but I’m not going to pay my student loan. Now, a lot of people in really tough situations are having to make those tough decisions. But for the U.S. government to start picking and choosing like that is not going to inspire a lot of confidence.

Moreover, which bills are we going to decide to pay? These guys have said, well, maybe we just pay the interest on -- for bondholders. So are we really going to start paying interest to Chinese who hold treasuries and we’re not going to pay folks their Social Security checks? Or we’re not going to pay to veterans for their disability checks? I mean, which bills, which obligations, are we going to say we don’t have to pay?

And last point I want to make about this. These are bills that Congress ran up. The money has been spent. The obligations have been made. So this isn’t a situation -- I think the American people have to understand this -- this is not a situation where Congress is going to say, okay, we won’t -- we won’t buy this car or we won’t take this vacation. They took the vacation. They bought the car. And now they’re saying maybe we don’t have to pay, or we don’t have to pay as fast as we said we were going to, or -- that’s not how responsible families act. And we’re the greatest nation on Earth, and we can’t act that way.

So this is urgent and it needs to get settled.

Question: So is August 2nd a yellow light or a red light?

President Obama: I think people should think of -- look, I’m the President of the United States and I want to make sure that I am not engaging in scare tactics. And I’ve tried to be responsible and somewhat restrained so that folks don’t get spooked.

August 2nd is a very important date. And there’s no reason why we can’t get this done now. We know what the options are out there. This is not a technical problem any longer. This is a matter of Congress going ahead and biting the bullet and making some tough decisions. Because we know what the decisions are. We've identified what spending cuts are possible. We've identified what defense cuts are possible. We've identified what health care cuts are possible. We've identified what loopholes in the tax code can be closed that would also raise revenue. We’ve identified what the options are. And the question now is are we going to step up and get this done.

And, you know, Malia and Sasha generally finish their homework a day ahead of time. Malia is 13, Sasha is 10.

Question: Impressive.

President Obama: It is impressive. They don’t wait until the night before. They’re not pulling all-nighters. They’re 13 and 10. Congress can do the same thing. If you know you’ve got to do something, just do it.

And I’ve got to say, I’m very amused when I start hearing comments about, well, the President needs to show more leadership on this. Let me tell you something. Right after we finished dealing with the government shutdown, averting a government shutdown, I called the leaders here together. I said we’ve got to get done -- get this done. I put Vice President Biden in charge of a process -- that, by the way, has made real progress -- but these guys have met, worked through all of these issues. I met with every single caucus for an hour to an hour and a half each -- Republican senators, Democratic senators; Republican House, Democratic House. I’ve met with the leaders multiple times. At a certain point, they need to do their job.

And so, this thing, which is just not on the level, where we have meetings and discussions, and we’re working through process, and when they decide they’re not happy with the fact that at some point you’ve got to make a choice, they just all step back and say, well, you know, the President needs to get this done -- they need to do their job.

Now is the time to go ahead and make the tough choices. That’s why they’re called leaders. And I’ve already shown that I’m willing to make some decisions that are very tough and will give my base of voters further reason to give me a hard time. But it’s got to be done.

And so there’s no point in procrastinating. There’s no point in putting it off. We’ve got to get this done. And if by the end of this week, we have not seen substantial progress, then I think members of Congress need to understand we are going to start having to cancel things and stay here until we get it done.

They're in one week, they're out one week. And then they're saying, Obama has got to step in. You need to be here. I’ve been here. I’ve been doing Afghanistan and bin Laden and the Greek crisis. You stay here. Let’s get it done.

All right. I think you know my feelings about that.

Caren Bohan.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. You talked about the payroll tax holiday and possibly extending that. Are you worried, though, that by adding a discussion of short-term measures on the economy into these discussions about long-term deficit reductions that that may complicate the conversation and make it harder to pass a debt limit?

President Obama: I will -- let me put it this way. If we’ve got a good deal on debt and deficit reduction that focuses not just on the 10-year window but also the long term, we will get it done. And then we can argue about some other things -- because I think that's very important.

I will say that precisely because tough votes in Congress are often avoided, that it may make sense to also deal with something like a payroll tax cut at the same time -- because it does have budget implications and the American people need to know that we’re focused on jobs and not just on deficit reduction, even though, as I said, deficit reduction helps to serve the job agenda. I think they want to have some confidence that we’ve got a plan that’s helping right now.

But I don’t think it should be a complicating factor -- because if Mitch McConnell and John Boehner came to me and said, all right, we’re ready to make a deal, here’s a balanced approach to debt and deficit reduction, but we want to argue about payroll tax cuts later, they’re not set to expire until the end of this year -- if that was a situation that they presented, then I think we would have a serious conversation about that. I would not discount that completely.

I do think that the steps that I talked about to deal with job growth and economic growth right now are vitally important to deficit reduction. Just as deficit reduction is important to grow the economy and to create jobs -- well, creating jobs and growing the economy also helps reduce the deficit. If we just increased the growth rate by one percentage point, that would drastically bring down the long-term projections of the deficit, because people are paying more into the coffers and fewer people are drawing unemployment insurance. It makes a huge difference.

And this may be sort of a good place to wrap up. You know, every day I get letters from folks all around the country who show incredible resilience, incredible determination, but they are having a very, very tough time. They’re losing their homes. Some have lost their businesses. Some have lost work and have not been able to find jobs for months, maybe a year, maybe a year and a half. And they feel some desperation. And some folks who are working just are having a tough time paying the bills because they haven’t seen their wages or incomes go up in 10 years, and the costs of everything else have gone up.

And every day that weighs on me. Every minute of every day that weighs on me. Because I ran for President precisely to make sure that we righted this ship and we start once again creating a situation where middle-class families and people who aspire to be in the middle class, if they’re working hard, then they’re living a better life.

Now, these structural changes in our economy that have been going on for a decade -- in some cases, longer -- they’re not going to be solved overnight. But we know what to do. We know that if we are educating our kids well, then they’re going to be more competitive. We know that if we are investing in things like infrastructure, it pays off.

I was in Alcoa, in Iowa, one of our most successful companies. They took a big hit during the recession, but they still invested 90 million dollars in new equipment in a plant that makes airplane wings and parts for automobiles. And they’ve bounced back. They’ve hired back all their people and are increasing market share because they made those investments.

Well, just like a company like Alcoa, America has got to make some investments. We know that we’ve got to get control of our deficit. There are some things that aren’t going to solve all our problems but can make progress right now. And the question is whether or not Democrats and Republicans are willing to put aside the expedience of short-term politics in order to get it done.

And these folks are counting on us. They desperately want to believe that their leadership is thinking about them and not playing games. And I think that if all the leadership here in Washington has the faces and the stories of those families in mind, then we will solve this debt limit issue; we will put in place steps like a payroll tax cut and infrastructure development; we’ll continue to fund education; we’ll hold true to our commitment to our seniors.

These are solvable problems, but it does require us just getting out of the short-term and, frankly, selfish approach that sometimes politics breeds. We’ve got to think a bit long term.

Thank you very much, everybody.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address to the Nation on the Dangers of Default

Good evening. Tonight, I want to talk about the debate we’ve been having in Washington over the national debt -- a debate that directly affects the lives of all Americans.

For the last decade, we’ve spent more money than we take in. In the year 2000, the government had a budget surplus. But instead of using it to pay off our debt, the money was spent on trillions of dollars in new tax cuts, while two wars and an expensive prescription drug program were simply added to our nation’s credit card.

As a result, the deficit was on track to top $1 trillion the year I took office. To make matters worse, the recession meant that there was less money coming in, and it required us to spend even more -– on tax cuts for middle-class families to spur the economy; on unemployment insurance; on aid to states so we could prevent more teachers and firefighters and police officers from being laid off. These emergency steps also added to the deficit.

Now, every family knows that a little credit card debt is manageable. But if we stay on the current path, our growing debt could cost us jobs and do serious damage to the economy. More of our tax dollars will go toward paying off the interest on our loans. Businesses will be less likely to open up shop and hire workers in a country that can’t balance its books. Interest rates could climb for everyone who borrows money -– the homeowner with a mortgage, the student with a college loan, the corner store that wants to expand. And we won’t have enough money to make job-creating investments in things like education and infrastructure, or pay for vital programs like Medicare and Medicaid.

Because neither party is blameless for the decisions that led to this problem, both parties have a responsibility to solve it. And over the last several months, that’s what we’ve been trying to do. I won’t bore you with the details of every plan or proposal, but basically, the debate has centered around two different approaches.

The first approach says, let’s live within our means by making serious, historic cuts in government spending. Let’s cut domestic spending to the lowest level it’s been since Dwight Eisenhower was President. Let’s cut defense spending at the Pentagon by hundreds of billions of dollars. Let’s cut out waste and fraud in health care programs like Medicare -- and at the same time, let’s make modest adjustments so that Medicare is still there for future generations. Finally, let’s ask the wealthiest Americans and biggest corporations to give up some of their breaks in the tax code and special deductions.

This balanced approach asks everyone to give a little without requiring anyone to sacrifice too much. It would reduce the deficit by around $4 trillion and put us on a path to pay down our debt. And the cuts wouldn’t happen so abruptly that they’d be a drag on our economy, or prevent us from helping small businesses and middle-class families get back on their feet right now.

This approach is also bipartisan. While many in my own party aren’t happy with the painful cuts it makes, enough will be willing to accept them if the burden is fairly shared. While Republicans might like to see deeper cuts and no revenue at all, there are many in the Senate who have said, “Yes, I’m willing to put politics aside and consider this approach because I care about solving the problem.” And to his credit, this is the kind of approach the Republican Speaker of the House, John Boehner, was working on with me over the last several weeks.

The only reason this balanced approach isn’t on its way to becoming law right now is because a significant number of Republicans in Congress are insisting on a different approach -- a cuts-only approach -– an approach that doesn’t ask the wealthiest Americans or biggest corporations to contribute anything at all. And because nothing is asked of those at the top of the income scale, such an approach would close the deficit only with more severe cuts to programs we all care about –- cuts that place a greater burden on working families.

So the debate right now isn’t about whether we need to make tough choices. Democrats and Republicans agree on the amount of deficit reduction we need. The debate is about how it should be done. Most Americans, regardless of political party, don’t understand how we can ask a senior citizen to pay more for her Medicare before we ask a corporate jet owner or the oil companies to give up tax breaks that other companies don’t get. How can we ask a student to pay more for college before we ask hedge fund managers to stop paying taxes at a lower rate than their secretaries? How can we slash funding for education and clean energy before we ask people like me to give up tax breaks we don’t need and didn’t ask for?

That’s not right. It’s not fair. We all want a government that lives within its means, but there are still things we need to pay for as a country -– things like new roads and bridges; weather satellites and food inspection; services to veterans and medical research.

And keep in mind that under a balanced approach, the 98 percent of Americans who make under $250,000 would see no tax increases at all. None. In fact, I want to extend the payroll tax cut for working families. What we’re talking about under a balanced approach is asking Americans whose incomes have gone up the most over the last decade -– millionaires and billionaires -– to share in the sacrifice everyone else has to make. And I think these patriotic Americans are willing to pitch in. In fact, over the last few decades, they’ve pitched in every time we passed a bipartisan deal to reduce the deficit. The first time a deal was passed, a predecessor of mine made the case for a balanced approach by saying this:

“Would you rather reduce deficits and interest rates by raising revenue from those who are not now paying their fair share, or would you rather accept larger budget deficits, higher interest rates, and higher unemployment? And I think I know your answer.”

Those words were spoken by Ronald Reagan. But today, many Republicans in the House refuse to consider this kind of balanced approach -– an approach that was pursued not only by President Reagan, but by the first President Bush, by President Clinton, by myself, and by many Democrats and Republicans in the United States Senate. So we’re left with a stalemate.

Now, what makes today’s stalemate so dangerous is that it has been tied to something known as the debt ceiling -– a term that most people outside of Washington have probably never heard of before.

Understand –- raising the debt ceiling does not allow Congress to spend more money. It simply gives our country the ability to pay the bills that Congress has already racked up. In the past, raising the debt ceiling was routine. Since the 1950s, Congress has always passed it, and every President has signed it. President Reagan did it 18 times. George W. Bush did it seven times. And we have to do it by next Tuesday, August 2nd, or else we won’t be able to pay all of our bills.

Unfortunately, for the past several weeks, Republican House members have essentially said that the only way they’ll vote to prevent America’s first-ever default is if the rest of us agree to their deep, spending cuts-only approach.

If that happens, and we default, we would not have enough money to pay all of our bills -– bills that include monthly Social Security checks, veterans’ benefits, and the government contracts we’ve signed with thousands of businesses.

For the first time in history, our country’s AAA credit rating would be downgraded, leaving investors around the world to wonder whether the United States is still a good bet. Interest rates would skyrocket on credit cards, on mortgages and on car loans, which amounts to a huge tax hike on the American people. We would risk sparking a deep economic crisis -– this one caused almost entirely by Washington.

So defaulting on our obligations is a reckless and irresponsible outcome to this debate. And Republican leaders say that they agree we must avoid default. But the new approach that Speaker Boehner unveiled today, which would temporarily extend the debt ceiling in exchange for spending cuts, would force us to once again face the threat of default just six months from now. In other words, it doesn’t solve the problem.

First of all, a six-month extension of the debt ceiling might not be enough to avoid a credit downgrade and the higher interest rates that all Americans would have to pay as a result. We know what we have to do to reduce our deficits; there’s no point in putting the economy at risk by kicking the can further down the road.

But there’s an even greater danger to this approach. Based on what we’ve seen these past few weeks, we know what to expect six months from now. The House of Representatives will once again refuse to prevent default unless the rest of us accept their cuts-only approach. Again, they will refuse to ask the wealthiest Americans to give up their tax cuts or deductions. Again, they will demand harsh cuts to programs like Medicare. And once again, the economy will be held captive unless they get their way.

This is no way to run the greatest country on Earth. It’s a dangerous game that we’ve never played before, and we can’t afford to play it now. Not when the jobs and livelihoods of so many families are at stake. We can’t allow the American people to become collateral damage to Washington’s political warfare.

Congress now has one week left to act, and there are still paths forward. The Senate has introduced a plan to avoid default, which makes a down payment on deficit reduction and ensures that we don’t have to go through this again in six months.

I think that’s a much better approach, although serious deficit reduction would still require us to tackle the tough challenges of entitlement and tax reform. Either way, I’ve told leaders of both parties that they must come up with a fair compromise in the next few days that can pass both houses of Congress -– and a compromise that I can sign. I’m confident we can reach this compromise. Despite our disagreements, Republican leaders and I have found common ground before. And I believe that enough members of both parties will ultimately put politics aside and help us make progress.

Now, I realize that a lot of the new members of Congress and I don’t see eye-to-eye on many issues. But we were each elected by some of the same Americans for some of the same reasons. Yes, many want government to start living within its means. And many are fed up with a system in which the deck seems stacked against middle-class Americans in favor of the wealthiest few. But do you know what people are fed up with most of all?

They’re fed up with a town where compromise has become a dirty word. They work all day long, many of them scraping by, just to put food on the table. And when these Americans come home at night, bone-tired, and turn on the news, all they see is the same partisan three-ring circus here in Washington. They see leaders who can’t seem to come together and do what it takes to make life just a little bit better for ordinary Americans. They’re offended by that. And they should be.

The American people may have voted for divided government, but they didn’t vote for a dysfunctional government. So I’m asking you all to make your voice heard. If you want a balanced approach to reducing the deficit, let your member of Congress know. If you believe we can solve this problem through compromise, send that message.

America, after all, has always been a grand experiment in compromise. As a democracy made up of every race and religion, where every belief and point of view is welcomed, we have put to the test time and again the proposition at the heart of our founding: that out of many, we are one. We’ve engaged in fierce and passionate debates about the issues of the day, but from slavery to war, from civil liberties to questions of economic justice, we have tried to live by the words that Jefferson once wrote: “Every man cannot have his way in all things -- without this mutual disposition, we are disjointed individuals, but not a society.”

History is scattered with the stories of those who held fast to rigid ideologies and refused to listen to those who disagreed. But those are not the Americans we remember. We remember the Americans who put country above self, and set personal grievances aside for the greater good. We remember the Americans who held this country together during its most difficult hours; who put aside pride and party to form a more perfect union.

That’s who we remember. That’s who we need to be right now. The entire world is watching. So let’s seize this moment to show why the United States of America is still the greatest nation on Earth –- not just because we can still keep our word and meet our obligations, but because we can still come together as one nation.

Thank you, God bless you, and may God bless the United States of America.

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# Remarks on Debt Compromise Agreement

Good evening. There are still some very important votes to be taken by members of Congress, but I want to announce that the leaders of both parties, in both chambers, have reached an agreement that will reduce the deficit and avoid default -- a default that would have had a devastating effect on our economy.

The first part of this agreement will cut about $1 trillion in spending over the next 10 years -- cuts that both parties had agreed to early on in this process. The result would be the lowest level of annual domestic spending since Dwight Eisenhower was President -- but at a level that still allows us to make job-creating investments in things like education and research. We also made sure that these cuts wouldn’t happen so abruptly that they’d be a drag on a fragile economy.

Now, I've said from the beginning that the ultimate solution to our deficit problem must be balanced. Despite what some Republicans have argued, I believe that we have to ask the wealthiest Americans and biggest corporations to pay their fair share by giving up tax breaks and special deductions. Despite what some in my own party have argued, I believe that we need to make some modest adjustments to programs like Medicare to ensure that they’re still around for future generations.

That's why the second part of this agreement is so important. It establishes a bipartisan committee of Congress to report back by November with a proposal to further reduce the deficit, which will then be put before the entire Congress for an up or down vote. In this stage, everything will be on the table. To hold us all accountable for making these reforms, tough cuts that both parties would find objectionable would automatically go into effect if we don’t act. And over the next few months, I’ll continue to make a detailed case to these lawmakers about why I believe a balanced approach is necessary to finish the job.

Now, is this the deal I would have preferred? No. I believe that we could have made the tough choices required -- on entitlement reform and tax reform -- right now, rather than through a special congressional committee process. But this compromise does make a serious down payment on the deficit reduction we need, and gives each party a strong incentive to get a balanced plan done before the end of the year.

Most importantly, it will allow us to avoid default and end the crisis that Washington imposed on the rest of America. It ensures also that we will not face this same kind of crisis again in six months, or eight months, or 12 months. And it will begin to lift the cloud of debt and the cloud of uncertainty that hangs over our economy.

Now, this process has been messy; it’s taken far too long. I've been concerned about the impact that it has had on business confidence and consumer confidence and the economy as a whole over the last month. Nevertheless, ultimately, the leaders of both parties have found their way toward compromise. And I want to thank them for that.

Most of all, I want to thank the American people. It’s been your voices -- your letters, your emails, your tweets, your phone calls -- that have compelled Washington to act in the final days. And the American people's voice is a very, very powerful thing.

We’re not done yet. I want to urge members of both parties to do the right thing and support this deal with your votes over the next few days. It will allow us to avoid default. It will allow us to pay our bills. It will allow us to start reducing our deficit in a responsible way. And it will allow us to turn to the very important business of doing everything we can to create jobs, boost wages, and grow this economy faster than it's currently growing.

That’s what the American people sent us here to do, and that’s what we should be devoting all of our time to accomplishing in the months ahead.

Thank you very much, everybody.

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# Remarks on the Approved Debt Compromise

Good afternoon, everybody. Congress has now approved a compromise to reduce the deficit and avert a default that would have devastated our economy. It was a long and contentious debate. And I want to thank the American people for keeping up the pressure on their elected officials to put politics aside and work together for the good of the country.

This compromise guarantees more than $2 trillion in deficit reduction. It’s an important first step to ensuring that as a nation we live within our means. Yet it also allows us to keep making key investments in things like education and research that lead to new jobs, and assures that we’re not cutting too abruptly while the economy is still fragile.

This is, however, just the first step. This compromise requires that both parties work together on a larger plan to cut the deficit, which is important for the long-term health of our economy. And since you can’t close the deficit with just spending cuts, we’ll need a balanced approach where everything is on the table. Yes, that means making some adjustments to protect health care programs like Medicare so they’re there for future generations. It also means reforming our tax code so that the wealthiest Americans and biggest corporations pay their fair share. And it means getting rid of taxpayer subsidies to oil and gas companies, and tax loopholes that help billionaires pay a lower tax rate than teachers and nurses.

I’ve said it before; I will say it again: We can’t balance the budget on the backs of the very people who have borne the biggest brunt of this recession. We can’t make it tougher for young people to go to college, or ask seniors to pay more for health care, or ask scientists to give up on promising medical research because we couldn’t close a tax shelter for the most fortunate among us. Everyone is going to have to chip in. It’s only fair. That’s the principle I’ll be fighting for during the next phase of this process.

And in the coming months, I’ll continue also to fight for what the American people care most about: new jobs, higher wages and faster economic growth. While Washington has been absorbed in this debate about deficits, people across the country are asking what we can do to help the father looking for work. What are we going to do for the single mom who’s seen her hours cut back at the hospital? What are we going to do to make it easier for businesses to put up that “now hiring” sign?

That’s part of the reason that people are so frustrated with what’s been going on in this town. In the last few months, the economy has already had to absorb an earthquake in Japan, the economic headwinds coming from Europe, the Arab Spring and the [rise] in oil prices -- all of which have been very challenging for the recovery. But these are things we couldn’t control. Our economy didn’t need Washington to come along with a manufactured crisis to make things worse. That was in our hands. It’s pretty likely that the uncertainty surrounding the raising of the debt ceiling -- for both businesses and consumers -- has been unsettling, and just one more impediment to the full recovery that we need. And it was something that we could have avoided entirely.

So, voters may have chosen divided government, but they sure didn’t vote for dysfunctional government. They want us to solve problems. They want us to get this economy growing and adding jobs. And while deficit reduction is part of that agenda, it is not the whole agenda. Growing the economy isn’t just about cutting spending; it’s not about rolling back regulations that protect our air and our water and keep our people safe. That’s not how we’re going to get past this recession. We’re going to have to do more than that.

And that’s why, when Congress gets back from recess, I will urge them to immediately take some steps -- bipartisan, common-sense steps -- that will make a difference; that will create a climate where businesses can hire, where folks have more money in their pockets to spend, where people who are out of work can find good jobs.

We need to begin by extending tax cuts for middle-class families so that you have more money in your paychecks next year. If you’ve got more money in your paycheck, you’re more likely to spend it. And that means small businesses and medium-sized businesses and large businesses will all have more customers. That means they’ll be in a better position to hire.

And while we’re at it, we need to make sure that millions of workers who are still pounding the pavement looking for jobs to support their families are not denied needed unemployment benefits.

Through patent reform, we can cut the red tape that stops too many inventors and entrepreneurs from quickly turning new ideas into thriving businesses -- which holds our whole economy back. And I want Congress to pass a set of trade deals -- deals we’ve already negotiated -- that would help displaced workers looking for new jobs and would allow our businesses to sell more products in countries in Asia and South America, products that are stamped with the words “Made in America.”

We also need to give more opportunities to all those construction workers out there who lost their jobs when the housing boom went bust. We could put them to work right now, by giving loans to private companies that want to repair our roads and our bridges and our airports, rebuilding our infrastructure. We have workers who need jobs and a country that needs rebuilding; an infrastructure bank would help us put them together.

And while we’re on the topic of infrastructure, there’s another stalemate in Congress right now involving our aviation industry which has stalled airport construction projects all around the country and put the jobs of tens of thousands of construction workers and others at risk -– because of politics. It’s another Washington-inflicted wound on America, and Congress needs to break that impasse now –- hopefully before the Senate adjourns -– so these folks can get back to work.

So these are some things that we could be doing right now. There’s no reason for Congress not to send me those bills so I can sign them into law right away as soon as they get back from recess. Both parties share power in Washington, and both parties need to take responsibility for improving this economy. It’s not a Democratic responsibility or a Republican responsibility; it is our collective responsibility as Americans. And I’ll be discussing additional ideas in the weeks ahead to help companies hire, invest and expand.

So, we’ve seen in the past few days that Washington has the ability to focus when there’s a timer ticking down, and when there’s a looming disaster. It shouldn’t take the risk of default -– the risk of economic catastrophe -– to get folks in this town to work together and do their jobs. Because there’s already a quiet crisis going on in the lives of a lot of families, in a lot of communities, all across the country. They’re looking for work, and they have been for a while; or they’re making do with fewer hours or fewer customers; or they’re just trying to make ends meet. That ought to compel Washington to cooperate. That ought to compel Washington to compromise, and it ought to compel Washington to act. That ought to be enough to get all of us in this town to do the jobs we were sent here to do. We’ve got to do everything in our power to grow this economy and put America back to work. That’s what I intend to do, and I’m looking forward to working with Congress to make it happen.

Thanks very much, everybody.

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# Address to the American Legion Conference

Hello Legionnaires! It is wonderful to see all of you. Let me, first of all, thank Commander Foster for your introduction and for your lifetime of service to your fellow Marines, soldiers and veterans. On behalf of us all, I want to thank Jimmie and I want to thank your entire leadership team for welcoming me here today. Thank you very much.

Your National Adjutant, Dan Wheeler; your Executive Director, your voice in Washington, Peter Gaytan, who does just an extraordinary job; and the President of the American Legion Auxiliary, Carlene Ashworth -- thank you for your extraordinary service. To Rehta Foster and all the spouses, daughters and sisters of the Auxiliary, and the Sons of the American Legion -- as military families, you also serve, and we salute all of you as well.

There are some special guests here I want to acknowledge. They may have already been acknowledged, but they're great friends so I want to make sure that I point them out. First of all, the wonderful governor of Minnesota, Mark Dayton, is here. Two senators who are working on behalf of veterans every single day -- Amy Klobuchar and Al Franken. Congressman Keith Ellison -- this is his district. Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak, a great friend. To all the other members of Congress and Minnesota elected officials who are here, welcome.

It is wonderful to be back with the American Legion. Back in Illinois, my home state -- Hey! Illinois is in the house. We worked together to make sure veterans across the state were getting the benefits they had earned. When I was in the U.S. Senate, we worked together to spotlight the tragedy of homelessness among veterans -- and the need to end it.

As President, I’ve welcomed Jimmie and your leadership to the Oval Office to hear directly from you. And I have been -- I've been honored to have you by my side when I signed advance appropriations to protect veterans' health care from the budget battles in Washington, -- when I signed legislation to give new support to veterans and their caregivers, and, most recently, when I proposed new initiatives to make sure the private sector is hiring our talented veterans.

So, American Legion, I thank you for your partnership. I appreciate the opportunity to talk with you today about what we need to do to make sure America is taking care of our veterans as well as you’ve taken care of us.

And I’m grateful to be with you for another reason. A lot of our fellow citizens are still reeling from Hurricane Irene and its aftermath. Folks are surveying the damage. Some are dealing with tremendous flooding. As a government, we’re going to make sure that states and communities have the support they need so their folks can recover.

And across the nation, we’re still digging out from the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. It’s taking longer and it's been more difficult than any of us had imagined. And even though we’ve taken some steps in the right direction, we've got a lot more to do. Our economy has to grow faster. We have to create more jobs, and we have to do it faster. And most of all, we've got to break the gridlock in Washington that’s been preventing us from taking the action we need to get this country moving. That’s why, next week, I’ll be speaking to the nation about a plan to create jobs and reduce our deficit -- a plan that I want to see passed by Congress. We've got to get this done.

And here’s what else I know. We Americans have been through tough times before, much tougher than these. And we didn’t just get through them; we emerged stronger than before. Not by luck. Not by chance. But because, in hard times, Americans don’t quit. We don’t give up. We summon that spirit that says, when we come together, when we choose to move forward together, as one people, there’s nothing we can’t achieve.

And, Legionnaires, you know this story because it's the story of your lives. And in times like these, all Americans can draw strength from your example. When Hitler controlled a continent and fascism appeared unstoppable, when our harbor was bombed and our Pacific fleet crippled, there were those that declared that the United States had been reduced to a third-class power. But you, our veterans of World War II, crossed the oceans and stormed the beaches and freed the millions, liberated the camps and showed the United States of America is the greatest force for freedom that the world has ever known.

When North Korea invaded the South, pushing the allied forces into a tiny sliver of territory -- the Pusan Perimeter -- it seemed like the war could be lost. But you, our Korean War veterans, pushed back, fought on, year after bloody year. And this past Veterans Day, I went to Seoul and joined our Korean War veterans for the 60th anniversary of that war, and we marked that milestone in a free and prosperous Republic of Korea, one of our greatest allies.

When communist forces in Vietnam unleashed the Tet Offensive, it fueled the debate here at home that raged over that war. You, our Vietnam veterans, did not always receive the respect that you deserved -- which was a national shame. But let it be remembered that you won every major battle of that war. Every single one. As President, I’ve been honored to welcome our Vietnam veterans to the White House and finally present them with the medals and recognition that they had earned. It’s been a chance to convey, on behalf of the American people, those simple words with which our Vietnam veterans greet each other -- “Welcome home.”

Legionnaires, in the decades that followed, the spirit of your service was carried forth by our troops in the sands of Desert Storm and the rugged hills of the Balkans. And now, it's carried on by a new generation. Next weekend, we'll mark the 10th anniversary of those awful attacks on our nation. In the days ahead, we will honor the lives we lost and the families that loved them; the first responders who rushed to save others; and we will honor all those who have served to keep us safe these 10 difficult years, especially the men and women of our Armed Forces.

Today, as we near this solemn anniversary, it’s fitting that we salute the extraordinary decade of service rendered by the 9/11 Generation -- the more than 5 million Americans who've worn the uniform over the past 10 years. They were there, on duty, that September morning, having enlisted in a time of peace, but they instantly transitioned to a war footing. They’re the millions of recruits who have stepped forward since, seeing their nation at war and saying, “Send me.” They’re every single soldier, sailor, airman, Marine and Coast Guardsman serving today, who has volunteered to serve in a time of war, knowing that they could be sent into harm’s way.

They come from every corner of our country, big cities, small towns. They come from every background and every creed. They’re sons and daughters who carry on the family’s tradition of service, and they're new immigrants who’ve become our newest citizens. They’re our National Guardsmen and Reservists who've served in unprecedented deployments. They’re the record number of women in our military, proving themselves in combat like never before. And every day for the past 10 years, these men and women have succeeded together -- as one American team.

They're a generation of innovators, and they’ve changed the way America fights and wins at wars. Raised in the age of the Internet, they’ve harnessed new technologies on the battlefield. They’ve learned the cultures and traditions and languages of the places where they served. Trained to fight, they’ve also taken on the role of diplomats and mayors and development experts, negotiating with tribal sheikhs, working with village shuras, partnering with communities. Young captains, sergeants, lieutenants -- they've assumed responsibilities once reserved for more senior commanders, and reminding us that in an era when so many other institutions have shirked their obligations, the men and women of the United States military welcome responsibility.

In a decade of war, they've borne an extraordinary burden, with more than 2 million of our service members deploying to the warzones. Hundreds of thousands have deployed again and again, year after year. Never before has our nation asked so much of our all-volunteer force -- that one percent of Americans who wears the uniform.

We see the scope of their sacrifice in the tens of thousands who now carry the scars of war, both seen and unseen -- our remarkable wounded warriors. We see it in our extraordinary military families who serve here at home -- the military spouses who hold their families together; the millions of military children, many of whom have lived most of their young lives with our nation at war and mom or dad deployed.

Most profoundly, we see the wages of war in those patriots who never came home. They gave their all, their last full measure of devotion, in Kandahar, in the Korengal, in Helmand, in the battles for Baghdad and Fallujah and Ramadi. Now they lay at rest in quiet corners of America, but they live on in the families who loved them and in a nation that is safer because of their service. And today we pay humble tribute to the more than 6,200 Americans in uniform who have given their lives in this hard decade of war. We honor them all. We are grateful for them.

Through their service, through their sacrifice, through their astonishing record of achievement, our forces have earned their place among the greatest of generations. Toppling the Taliban in just weeks. Driving al Qaeda from the training camps where they plotted 9/11. Giving the Afghan people the opportunity to live free from terror. When the decision was made to go into Iraq, our troops raced across deserts and removed a dictator in less than a month. When insurgents, militias and terrorists plunged Iraq into chaos, our troops adapted, they endured ferocious urban combat, they reduced the violence and gave Iraqis a chance to forge their own future.

When a resurgent Taliban threatened to give al Qaeda more space to plot against us, the additional forces I ordered to Afghanistan went on the offensive -- taking the fight to the Taliban and pushing them out of their safe havens, allowing Afghans to reclaim their communities and training Afghan forces. And a few months ago, our troops achieved our greatest victory yet in the fight against those who attacked us on 9/11 -- delivering justice to Osama bin Laden in one of the greatest intelligence and military operations in American history.

Credit for these successes, credit for this progress, belongs to all who have worn the uniform in these wars. Today we're honored to be joined by some of them. And I would ask all those who served this past decade -- the members of the 9/11 Generation -- to stand and accept the thanks of a grateful nation.

Thanks to these Americans, we’re moving forward from a position of strength. Having ended our combat mission in Iraq and removed more than 100,000 troops so far, we’ll remove the rest of our troops by the end of this year and we will end that war.

Having put al Qaeda on the path to defeat, we won’t relent until the job is done. Having started to draw down our forces in Afghanistan, we’ll bring home 33,000 troops by next summer and bring home more troops in the coming years. As our mission transitions from combat to support, Afghans will take responsibility for their own security, and the longest war in American history will come to a responsible end.

For our troops and military families who've sacrificed so much, this means relief from an unrelenting decade of operations. Today, fewer of our sons and daughters are serving in harm’s way. For so many troops who’ve already done their duty, we’ve put an end to the stop loss. And our soldiers can now look forward to shorter deployments. That means more time at home between deployments, and more time training for the full range of missions that they will face.

Indeed, despite 10 years of continuous war, it must be said -- America’s military is the best that it’s ever been. We saw that most recently in the skill and precision of our brave forces who helped the Libyan people finally break free from the grip of Moammar Qaddafi. And as we meet the test that the future will surely bring, including hard fiscal choices here at home, there should be no doubt: The United States of America will keep our military the best-trained, the best-led, the best-equipped fighting force in history. It will continue to be the best.

Now, as today’s wars end, as our troops come home, we’re reminded once more of our responsibilities to all who have served. The bond between our forces and our citizens must be a sacred trust. And for me and my administration, upholding that trust is not just a matter of policy, it is not about politics; it is a moral obligation. That’s why my very first budget included the largest percentage increase to the VA budget in the past 30 years. So far, we’re on track to have increased funding for Veterans Affairs by 30 percent. And because we passed advanced appropriations, when Washington politics threatens to shut down the government, as it did last spring, the veterans' medical care that you count on was safe.

And let me say something else about VA funding that you depend on. As a nation, we’re facing some tough choices as we put our fiscal house in order. But I want to be absolutely clear: We cannot, we must not, we will not, balance the budget on the backs of our veterans. As Commander-in-Chief, I won’t allow it.

With these historic investments, we’re making dramatic improvements to veterans' health care. We’re improving VA facilities to better serve our women veterans. We’re expanding outreach and care for our rural veterans, like those that I met during my recent visit to Cannon Falls, including two proud Legionnaires -- Tom Newman of Legion Post 620 in Hugo, and Joseph Kidd, Post 164 in Stewartville. Are they here right now? They're out there somewhere. That was a good lunch, by the way.

For our Vietnam veterans, because we declared that three diseases are now presumed to be related to your exposure to Agent Orange, we’ve begun paying the disability benefits that you need. For our veterans of the Gulf War, we’re moving forward to address the nine infectious diseases that we declared are now presumed to be related to your service in Desert Storm.

At the same time, our outstanding VA Secretary, Ric Shinseki, is working every day to build a 21st century VA. Many of our Vietnam vets are already submitting their Agent Orange claims electronically. Hundreds of you, from all wars, are requesting your benefits online. Thanks to the new “blue button” on the VA website, you can now share your personal health information with your doctors outside of the VA. And we’re making progress in sharing medical records between DOD and VA. We’re not there yet. I've been pounding on this thing since I came into office. We are going to stay on it, we're going to keep at it until our troops and our veterans have a lifetime electronic medical record that you can keep for your life.

Of course, we’ve still got some work to do. We got to break the backlog of disability claims. I know that over the past year, the backlog has actually grown due to new claims from Agent Orange. But let me say this -- and I know Secretary Shinseki agrees -- when our veterans who fought for our country have to fight just to get the benefits that you’ve already earned, that’s unacceptable. So this is going to remain a key priority for us.

We’re going to keep hiring new claims processors, and we’re going to keep investing in new paperless systems and keep moving ahead with our innovation competition in which our dedicated VA employees are developing new ways to process your claims faster. We want your claims to be processed not in months, but in days. So the bottom line is this -- your claims need to be processed quickly and accurately, the first time. We’re not going to rest until we get that done. We will not rest.

The same is true for our mission to end homelessness among our veterans. Already, we’ve helped to bring tens of thousands of veterans off the streets. For the first time ever, we’ve made veterans and military families a priority -- not just at the VA, not just at DOD, but across the federal government. And that includes making sure that federal agencies are working together so that every veteran who fought for America has a home in America.

We’re working to fulfill our obligations to our 9/11 Generation veterans, especially our wounded warriors. The constant threat of IEDs has meant a new generation of service members with multiple traumatic injuries, including Traumatic Brain Injury. And thanks to advanced armor and medical technologies, our troops are surviving injuries that would have been fatal in previous wars. So we’re saving more lives, but more American veterans live with severe wounds for a lifetime. That's why we need to be for them for their lifetime.

We’re giving unprecedented support to our wounded warriors -- especially those with Traumatic Brain Injury. And thanks to the veterans and caregivers legislation I signed into law, we’ve started training caregivers so that they can receive the skills and the stipends that they need to care for their loved ones.

We’re working aggressively to address another signature wound of this war, which has led to too many fine troops and veterans to take their own lives, and that’s Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. We’re continuing to make major investments -- improving outreach and suicide prevention, hiring and training more mental health counselors, and treating more veterans than ever before.

The days when depression and PTSD were stigmatized -- those days must end. That’s why I made the decision to start sending condolence letters to the families of service members who take their lives while deployed in a combat zone. These Americans did not die because they were weak. They were warriors. They deserve our respect. Every man and woman in uniform, every veteran, needs to know that your nation will be there to help you stay strong. It’s the right thing to do.

In recent months, we’ve heard new reports of some of our veterans not getting the prompt mental health care that they desperately need. And that, too, is unacceptable. If a veteran has the courage to seek help, then we need to be doing everything in our power to deliver the lifesaving mental care that they need. So Secretary Shinseki and the VA are going to stay on this. And we'll continue to make it easier for veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress to qualify for VA benefits, regardless of the war that you served in. If you served in a combat theater and a VA doctor confirms a diagnosis of PTSD, that's enough.

Which brings me to the final area where America must meet its obligations to our veterans, and this is a place where we need each other -- and that’s the task of renewing our nation’s economic strength. After a decade of war, it’s time to focus on nation building here at home. And our veterans, especially our 9/11 veterans, have the skills and the dedication to help lead the way.

That’s why we’re funding the post-9/11 G.I. Bill, which is now helping more than 500,000 veterans and family members go to college, get their degrees, and play their part in moving America forward. It’s why, this fall, we’ll start including vocational training and apprenticeships as well, so veterans can develop the skills to succeed in today’s economy. And that’s why I’ve directed the federal government to hire more veterans, including more than 100,000 veterans in the past year and a half alone.

But in this tough economy, far too many of our veterans are still unemployed. That’s why I’ve proposed a comprehensive initiative to make sure we’re tapping the incredible talents of our veterans. And it’s got two main parts.

First, we’re going to do more to help our newest veterans find and get that private sector job. We’re going to offer -- we’re going to offer more help with career development and job searches. I’ve directed DOD and the VA to create what we’re calling a “reverse boot camp” to help our newest veterans prepare for civilian jobs and translate their exceptional military skills into industry -- into industry-accepted licenses and credentials. And today I’m calling on every state to pass legislation that makes it easier for our veterans to get the credentials and the jobs for which they are so clearly qualified. This needs to happen, and it needs to happen now.

Second, we’re encouraging the private sector to do its part. So I’ve challenged companies across America to hire or train 100,000 unemployed veterans or their spouses. And this builds on the commitments that many companies have already made as part of the Joining Forces Campaign, championed by the First Lady and the Vice President’s spouse, Dr. Jill Biden: 100,000 jobs for veterans and spouses. And to get this done, I’ve proposed a Returning Heroes Tax Credit for companies that hire unemployed veterans and a Wounded Warrior Tax Credit for companies that hire unemployed veterans with a disability.

When Congress returns from recess, this needs to be at the top of their agenda. For the sake of our veterans, for the sake of our economy, we need these veterans working and contributing and creating the new jobs and industries that will keep America competitive in the 21st century.

These are the obligations we have to each other -- our forces, our veterans, our citizens. These are the responsibilities we must fulfill. Not just when it’s easy, not just when we’re flush with cash, not just when it’s convenient, but always.

That’s a lesson we learned again this year in the life and in the passing of Frank Buckles, our last veteran from the First World War. He passed away at the age of 110. Think about it. Frank lived the American Century. An ambulance driver on the Western Front, he bore witness to the carnage of the trenches in Europe. Then during the Second World War, he survived more than three years in Japanese prisoner of war camps. Then, like so many veterans, he came home, went to school, pursued a career, started a family, lived a good life on his farm in West Virginia.

Even in his later years, after turning 100, Frank Buckles still gave back to his country. He’d go speak to schoolchildren about his extraordinary life. He’d meet and inspire other veterans. And for 80 years, he served as a proud member of the American Legion.

The day he was laid to rest, I ordered the flags be flown at half-staff at the White House, at the government buildings across the nation, at our embassies around the world. As Frank Buckles lay in honor at Arlington’s memorial chapel, hundreds passed by his flag-draped casket in quiet procession. Most were strangers who never knew him, but they knew the story of his service, and they felt compelled to offer their thanks to this American soldier.

And that afternoon, I had the privilege of going over to Arlington and spending a few moments with Frank’s daughter, Susannah, who cared for her father to the very end. And it was a chance for me to convey the gratitude of an entire nation and to pay my respects to an American who reflected the best of who we are as a people.

And, Legionnaires, it was a reminder -- not just to the family and friends of Corporal Frank Buckles, but to the veterans and families of every generation -- no matter when you serve, no matter how many years ago that you took off the uniform, no matter how long you live as a proud veteran of this country we love, America will never leave your side. America will never forget. We will always be grateful to you.

God bless you. God bless all our veterans. And God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Joint Session of Congress Speech on the Economy and Job Creation

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, members of Congress, and fellow Americans:

Tonight we meet at an urgent time for our country. We continue to face an economic crisis that has left millions of our neighbors jobless, and a political crisis that’s made things worse.

This past week, reporters have been asking, “What will this speech mean for the President? What will it mean for Congress? How will it affect their polls, and the next election?”

But the millions of Americans who are watching right now, they don’t care about politics. They have real-life concerns. Many have spent months looking for work. Others are doing their best just to scrape by -- giving up nights out with the family to save on gas or make the mortgage; postponing retirement to send a kid to college.

These men and women grew up with faith in an America where hard work and responsibility paid off. They believed in a country where everyone gets a fair shake and does their fair share -- where if you stepped up, did your job, and were loyal to your company, that loyalty would be rewarded with a decent salary and good benefits; maybe a raise once in a while. If you did the right thing, you could make it. Anybody could make it in America.

For decades now, Americans have watched that compact erode. They have seen the decks too often stacked against them. And they know that Washington has not always put their interests first.

The people of this country work hard to meet their responsibilities. The question tonight is whether we’ll meet ours. The question is whether, in the face of an ongoing national crisis, we can stop the political circus and actually do something to help the economy. The question is -- the question is whether we can restore some of the fairness and security that has defined this nation since our beginning.

Those of us here tonight can’t solve all our nation’s woes. Ultimately, our recovery will be driven not by Washington, but by our businesses and our workers. But we can help. We can make a difference. There are steps we can take right now to improve people’s lives.

I am sending this Congress a plan that you should pass right away. It’s called the American Jobs Act. There should be nothing controversial about this piece of legislation. Everything in here is the kind of proposal that’s been supported by both Democrats and Republicans -- including many who sit here tonight. And everything in this bill will be paid for. Everything.

The purpose of the American Jobs Act is simple: to put more people back to work and more money in the pockets of those who are working. It will create more jobs for construction workers, more jobs for teachers, more jobs for veterans, and more jobs for long-term unemployed. It will provide -- it will provide a tax break for companies who hire new workers, and it will cut payroll taxes in half for every working American and every small business. It will provide a jolt to an economy that has stalled, and give companies confidence that if they invest and if they hire, there will be customers for their products and services. You should pass this jobs plan right away.

Everyone here knows that small businesses are where most new jobs begin. And you know that while corporate profits have come roaring back, smaller companies haven’t. So for everyone who speaks so passionately about making life easier for “job creators,” this plan is for you.

Pass this jobs bill -- pass this jobs bill, and starting tomorrow, small businesses will get a tax cut if they hire new workers or if they raise workers’ wages. Pass this jobs bill, and all small business owners will also see their payroll taxes cut in half next year. If you have 50 employees -- if you have 50 employees making an average salary, that’s an $80,000 tax cut. And all businesses will be able to continue writing off the investments they make in 2012.

It’s not just Democrats who have supported this kind of proposal. Fifty House Republicans have proposed the same payroll tax cut that’s in this plan. You should pass it right away.

Pass this jobs bill, and we can put people to work rebuilding America. Everyone here knows we have badly decaying roads and bridges all over the country. Our highways are clogged with traffic. Our skies are the most congested in the world. It’s an outrage.

Building a world-class transportation system is part of what made us a economic superpower. And now we’re going to sit back and watch China build newer airports and faster railroads? At a time when millions of unemployed construction workers could build them right here in America?

There are private construction companies all across America just waiting to get to work. There’s a bridge that needs repair between Ohio and Kentucky that’s on one of the busiest trucking routes in North America. A public transit project in Houston that will help clear up one of the worst areas of traffic in the country. And there are schools throughout this country that desperately need renovating. How can we expect our kids to do their best in places that are literally falling apart? This is America. Every child deserves a great school -- and we can give it to them, if we act now.

The American Jobs Act will repair and modernize at least 35,000 schools. It will put people to work right now fixing roofs and windows, installing science labs and high-speed Internet in classrooms all across this country. It will rehabilitate homes and businesses in communities hit hardest by foreclosures. It will jumpstart thousands of transportation projects all across the country. And to make sure the money is properly spent, we’re building on reforms we’ve already put in place. No more earmarks. No more boondoggles. No more bridges to nowhere. We’re cutting the red tape that prevents some of these projects from getting started as quickly as possible. And we’ll set up an independent fund to attract private dollars and issue loans based on two criteria: how badly a construction project is needed and how much good it will do for the economy.

This idea came from a bill written by a Texas Republican and a Massachusetts Democrat. The idea for a big boost in construction is supported by America’s largest business organization and America’s largest labor organization. It’s the kind of proposal that’s been supported in the past by Democrats and Republicans alike. You should pass it right away.

Pass this jobs bill, and thousands of teachers in every state will go back to work. These are the men and women charged with preparing our children for a world where the competition has never been tougher. But while they’re adding teachers in places like South Korea, we’re laying them off in droves. It’s unfair to our kids. It undermines their future and ours. And it has to stop. Pass this bill, and put our teachers back in the classroom where they belong.

Pass this jobs bill, and companies will get extra tax credits if they hire America’s veterans. We ask these men and women to leave their careers, leave their families, risk their lives to fight for our country. The last thing they should have to do is fight for a job when they come home.

Pass this bill, and hundreds of thousands of disadvantaged young people will have the hope and the dignity of a summer job next year. And their parents -- their parents, low-income Americans who desperately want to work, will have more ladders out of poverty.

Pass this jobs bill, and companies will get a $4,000 tax credit if they hire anyone who has spent more than six months looking for a job. We have to do more to help the long-term unemployed in their search for work. This jobs plan builds on a program in Georgia that several Republican leaders have highlighted, where people who collect unemployment insurance participate in temporary work as a way to build their skills while they look for a permanent job. The plan also extends unemployment insurance for another year. If the millions of unemployed Americans stopped getting this insurance, and stopped using that money for basic necessities, it would be a devastating blow to this economy. Democrats and Republicans in this chamber have supported unemployment insurance plenty of times in the past. And in this time of prolonged hardship, you should pass it again -- right away.

Pass this jobs bill, and the typical working family will get a $1,500 tax cut next year. Fifteen hundred dollars that would have been taken out of your pocket will go into your pocket. This expands on the tax cut that Democrats and Republicans already passed for this year. If we allow that tax cut to expire -- if we refuse to act -- middle-class families will get hit with a tax increase at the worst possible time. We can’t let that happen. I know that some of you have sworn oaths to never raise any taxes on anyone for as long as you live. Now is not the time to carve out an exception and raise middle-class taxes, which is why you should pass this bill right away.

This is the American Jobs Act. It will lead to new jobs for construction workers, for teachers, for veterans, for first responders, young people and the long-term unemployed. It will provide tax credits to companies that hire new workers, tax relief to small business owners, and tax cuts for the middle class. And here’s the other thing I want the American people to know: The American Jobs Act will not add to the deficit. It will be paid for. And here’s how. The agreement we passed in July will cut government spending by about $1 trillion over the next 10 years. It also charges this Congress to come up with an additional $1.5 trillion in savings by Christmas. Tonight, I am asking you to increase that amount so that it covers the full cost of the American Jobs Act. And a week from Monday, I’ll be releasing a more ambitious deficit plan -- a plan that will not only cover the cost of this jobs bill, but stabilize our debt in the long run.

This approach is basically the one I’ve been advocating for months. In addition to the trillion dollars of spending cuts I’ve already signed into law, it’s a balanced plan that would reduce the deficit by making additional spending cuts, by making modest adjustments to health care programs like Medicare and Medicaid, and by reforming our tax code in a way that asks the wealthiest Americans and biggest corporations to pay their fair share. What’s more, the spending cuts wouldn’t happen so abruptly that they’d be a drag on our economy, or prevent us from helping small businesses and middle-class families get back on their feet right away.

Now, I realize there are some in my party who don’t think we should make any changes at all to Medicare and Medicaid, and I understand their concerns. But here’s the truth: Millions of Americans rely on Medicare in their retirement. And millions more will do so in the future. They pay for this benefit during their working years. They earn it. But with an aging population and rising health care costs, we are spending too fast to sustain the program. And if we don’t gradually reform the system while protecting current beneficiaries, it won’t be there when future retirees need it. We have to reform Medicare to strengthen it.

I am also -- I’m also well aware that there are many Republicans who don’t believe we should raise taxes on those who are most fortunate and can best afford it. But here is what every American knows: While most people in this country struggle to make ends meet, a few of the most affluent citizens and most profitable corporations enjoy tax breaks and loopholes that nobody else gets. Right now, Warren Buffett pays a lower tax rate than his secretary -- an outrage he has asked us to fix. We need a tax code where everyone gets a fair shake and where everybody pays their fair share. And by the way, I believe the vast majority of wealthy Americans and CEOs are willing to do just that if it helps the economy grow and gets our fiscal house in order.

I’ll also offer ideas to reform a corporate tax code that stands as a monument to special interest influence in Washington. By eliminating pages of loopholes and deductions, we can lower one of the highest corporate tax rates in the world. Our tax code should not give an advantage to companies that can afford the best-connected lobbyists. It should give an advantage to companies that invest and create jobs right here in the United States of America.

So we can reduce this deficit, pay down our debt, and pay for this jobs plan in the process. But in order to do this, we have to decide what our priorities are. We have to ask ourselves, “What’s the best way to grow the economy and create jobs?”

Should we keep tax loopholes for oil companies? Or should we use that money to give small business owners a tax credit when they hire new workers? Because we can’t afford to do both. Should we keep tax breaks for millionaires and billionaires? Or should we put teachers back to work so our kids can graduate ready for college and good jobs? Right now, we can’t afford to do both.

This isn’t political grandstanding. This isn’t class warfare. This is simple math. This is simple math. These are real choices. These are real choices that we’ve got to make. And I’m pretty sure I know what most Americans would choose. It’s not even close. And it’s time for us to do what’s right for our future.

Now, the American Jobs Act answers the urgent need to create jobs right away. But we can’t stop there. As I’ve argued since I ran for this office, we have to look beyond the immediate crisis and start building an economy that lasts into the future -- an economy that creates good, middle-class jobs that pay well and offer security. We now live in a world where technology has made it possible for companies to take their business anywhere. If we want them to start here and stay here and hire here, we have to be able to out-build and out-educate and out-innovate every other country on Earth.

And this task of making America more competitive for the long haul, that’s a job for all of us. For government and for private companies. For states and for local communities -- and for every American citizen. All of us will have to up our game. All of us will have to change the way we do business.

My administration can and will take some steps to improve our competitiveness on our own. For example, if you’re a small business owner who has a contract with the federal government, we’re going to make sure you get paid a lot faster than you do right now. We’re also planning to cut away the red tape that prevents too many rapidly growing startup companies from raising capital and going public. And to help responsible homeowners, we’re going to work with federal housing agencies to help more people refinance their mortgages at interest rates that are now near 4 percent. That’s a step -- I know you guys must be for this, because that’s a step that can put more than $2,000 a year in a family’s pocket, and give a lift to an economy still burdened by the drop in housing prices.

So, some things we can do on our own. Other steps will require congressional action. Today you passed reform that will speed up the outdated patent process, so that entrepreneurs can turn a new idea into a new business as quickly as possible. That’s the kind of action we need. Now it’s time to clear the way for a series of trade agreements that would make it easier for American companies to sell their products in Panama and Colombia and South Korea -– while also helping the workers whose jobs have been affected by global competition. If Americans can buy Kias and Hyundais, I want to see folks in South Korea driving Fords and Chevys and Chryslers. I want to see more products sold around the world stamped with the three proud words: “Made in America.” That’s what we need to get done.

And on all of our efforts to strengthen competitiveness, we need to look for ways to work side by side with America’s businesses. That’s why I’ve brought together a Jobs Council of leaders from different industries who are developing a wide range of new ideas to help companies grow and create jobs.

Already, we’ve mobilized business leaders to train 10,000 American engineers a year, by providing company internships and training. Other businesses are covering tuition for workers who learn new skills at community colleges. And we’re going to make sure the next generation of manufacturing takes root not in China or Europe, but right here, in the United States of America. If we provide the right incentives, the right support -- and if we make sure our trading partners play by the rules -- we can be the ones to build everything from fuel-efficient cars to advanced biofuels to semiconductors that we sell all around the world. That’s how America can be number one again. And that’s how America will be number one again.

Now, I realize that some of you have a different theory on how to grow the economy. Some of you sincerely believe that the only solution to our economic challenges is to simply cut most government spending and eliminate most government regulations.

Well, I agree that we can’t afford wasteful spending, and I’ll work with you, with Congress, to root it out. And I agree that there are some rules and regulations that do put an unnecessary burden on businesses at a time when they can least afford it. That’s why I ordered a review of all government regulations. So far, we’ve identified over 500 reforms, which will save billions of dollars over the next few years. We should have no more regulation than the health, safety and security of the American people require. Every rule should meet that common-sense test.

But what we can’t do -- what I will not do -- is let this economic crisis be used as an excuse to wipe out the basic protections that Americans have counted on for decades. I reject the idea that we need to ask people to choose between their jobs and their safety. I reject the argument that says for the economy to grow, we have to roll back protections that ban hidden fees by credit card companies, or rules that keep our kids from being exposed to mercury, or laws that prevent the health insurance industry from shortchanging patients. I reject the idea that we have to strip away collective bargaining rights to compete in a global economy. We shouldn’t be in a race to the bottom, where we try to offer the cheapest labor and the worst pollution standards. America should be in a race to the top. And I believe we can win that race.

In fact, this larger notion that the only thing we can do to restore prosperity is just dismantle government, refund everybody’s money, and let everyone write their own rules, and tell everyone they’re on their own -- that’s not who we are. That’s not the story of America.

Yes, we are rugged individualists. Yes, we are strong and self-reliant. And it has been the drive and initiative of our workers and entrepreneurs that has made this economy the engine and the envy of the world.

But there’s always been another thread running throughout our history -- a belief that we’re all connected, and that there are some things we can only do together, as a nation.

We all remember Abraham Lincoln as the leader who saved our Union. Founder of the Republican Party. But in the middle of a civil war, he was also a leader who looked to the future -- a Republican President who mobilized government to build the Transcontinental Railroad -- launch the National Academy of Sciences, set up the first land grant colleges. And leaders of both parties have followed the example he set.

Ask yourselves -- where would we be right now if the people who sat here before us decided not to build our highways, not to build our bridges, our dams, our airports? What would this country be like if we had chosen not to spend money on public high schools, or research universities, or community colleges? Millions of returning heroes, including my grandfather, had the opportunity to go to school because of the G.I. Bill. Where would we be if they hadn’t had that chance?

How many jobs would it have cost us if past Congresses decided not to support the basic research that led to the Internet and the computer chip? What kind of country would this be if this chamber had voted down Social Security or Medicare just because it violated some rigid idea about what government could or could not do? How many Americans would have suffered as a result?

No single individual built America on their own. We built it together. We have been, and always will be, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all; a nation with responsibilities to ourselves and with responsibilities to one another. And members of Congress, it is time for us to meet our responsibilities.

Every proposal I’ve laid out tonight is the kind that’s been supported by Democrats and Republicans in the past. Every proposal I’ve laid out tonight will be paid for. And every proposal is designed to meet the urgent needs of our people and our communities.

Now, I know there’s been a lot of skepticism about whether the politics of the moment will allow us to pass this jobs plan -- or any jobs plan. Already, we’re seeing the same old press releases and tweets flying back and forth. Already, the media has proclaimed that it’s impossible to bridge our differences. And maybe some of you have decided that those differences are so great that we can only resolve them at the ballot box.

But know this: The next election is 14 months away. And the people who sent us here -- the people who hired us to work for them -- they don’t have the luxury of waiting 14 months. Some of them are living week to week, paycheck to paycheck, even day to day. They need help, and they need it now.

I don’t pretend that this plan will solve all our problems. It should not be, nor will it be, the last plan of action we propose. What’s guided us from the start of this crisis hasn’t been the search for a silver bullet. It’s been a commitment to stay at it -- to be persistent -- to keep trying every new idea that works, and listen to every good proposal, no matter which party comes up with it.

Regardless of the arguments we’ve had in the past, regardless of the arguments we will have in the future, this plan is the right thing to do right now. You should pass it. And I intend to take that message to every corner of this country. And I ask -- I ask every American who agrees to lift your voice: Tell the people who are gathered here tonight that you want action now. Tell Washington that doing nothing is not an option. Remind us that if we act as one nation and one people, we have it within our power to meet this challenge.

President Kennedy once said, “Our problems are man-made -- therefore they can be solved by man. And man can be as big as he wants.”

These are difficult years for our country. But we are Americans. We are tougher than the times we live in, and we are bigger than our politics have been. So let’s meet the moment. Let’s get to work, and let’s show the world once again why the United States of America remains the greatest nation on Earth.

Thank you very much. God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Rose Garden Speech on Economic Growth and Debt Reduction

Good morning, everybody. Please have a seat.

A week ago today, I sent Congress the American Jobs Act. It’s a plan that will lead to new jobs for teachers, for construction workers, for veterans, and for the unemployed. It will cut taxes for every small business owner and virtually every working man and woman in America. And the proposals in this jobs bill are the kinds that have been supported by Democrats and Republicans in the past. So there shouldn’t be any reason for Congress to drag its feet. They should pass it right away. I'm ready to sign a bill. I've got the pens all ready.

Now, as I said before, Congress should pass this bill knowing that every proposal is fully paid for. The American Jobs Act will not add to our nation’s debt. And today, I’m releasing a plan that details how to pay for the jobs bill while also paying down our debt over time.

And this is important, because the health of our economy depends in part on what we do right now to create the conditions where businesses can hire and middle-class families can feel a basic measure of economic security. But in the long run, our prosperity also depends on our ability to pay down the massive debt we’ve accumulated over the past decade in a way that allows us to meet our responsibilities to each other and to the future.

During this past decade, profligate spending in Washington, tax cuts for multi-millionaires and billionaires, the cost of two wars, and the recession turned a record surplus into a yawning deficit, and that left us with a big pile of IOUs. If we don’t act, that burden will ultimately fall on our children’s shoulders. If we don’t act, the growing debt will eventually crowd out everything else, preventing us from investing in things like education, or sustaining programs like Medicare.

So Washington has to live within its means. The government has to do what families across this country have been doing for years. We have to cut what we can’t afford to pay for what really matters. We need to invest in what will promote hiring and economic growth now while still providing the confidence that will come with a plan that reduces our deficits over the long-term. These principles were at the heart of the deficit framework that I put forward in April. It was an approach to shrink the deficit as a share of the economy, but not to do so so abruptly with spending cuts that would hamper growth or prevent us from helping small businesses and middle-class families get back on their feet.

It was an approach that said we need to go through the budget line-by-line looking for waste, without shortchanging education and basic scientific research and road construction, because those things are essential to our future. And it was an approach that said we shouldn't balance the budget on the backs of the poor and the middle class; that for us to solve this problem, everybody, including the wealthiest Americans and biggest corporations, have to pay their fair share.

Now, during the debt ceiling debate, I had hoped to negotiate a compromise with the Speaker of the House that fulfilled these principles and achieved the $4 trillion in deficit reduction that leaders in both parties have agreed we need -- a grand bargain that would have strengthened our economy, instead of weakened it. Unfortunately, the Speaker walked away from a balanced package. What we agreed to instead wasn’t all that grand. But it was a start -- roughly $1 trillion in cuts to domestic spending and defense spending.

Everyone knows we have to do more, and a special joint committee of Congress is assigned to find more deficit reduction. So, today, I’m laying out a set of specific proposals to finish what we started this summer -- proposals that live up to the principles I’ve talked about from the beginning. It’s a plan that reduces our debt by more than $4 trillion, and achieves these savings in a way that is fair -- by asking everybody to do their part so that no one has to bear too much of the burden on their own.

All told, this plan cuts $2 in spending for every dollar in new revenues. In addition to the $1 trillion in spending that we’ve already cut from the budget, our plan makes additional spending cuts that need to happen if we’re to solve this problem. We reform agricultural subsidies -- subsidies that a lot of times pay large farms for crops that they don't grow. We make modest adjustments to federal retirement programs. We reduce by tens of billions of dollars the tax money that goes to Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. We also ask the largest financial firms -- companies saved by tax dollars during the financial crisis -- to repay the American people for every dime that we spent. And we save an additional $1 trillion as we end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

These savings are not only counted as part of our plan, but as part of the budget plan that nearly every Republican on the House voted for.

Finally, this plan includes structural reforms to reduce the cost of health care in programs like Medicare and Medicaid. Keep in mind we've already included a number of reforms in the health care law, which will go a long way towards controlling these costs. But we're going to have to do a little more. This plan reduces wasteful subsidies and erroneous payments while changing some incentives that often lead to excessive health care costs. It makes prescriptions more affordable through faster approval of generic drugs. We’ll work with governors to make Medicaid more efficient and more accountable. And we’ll change the way we pay for health care. Instead of just paying for procedures, providers will be paid more when they improve results -- and such steps will save money and improve care.

These changes are phased in slowly to strengthen Medicare and Medicaid over time. Because while we do need to reduce health care costs, I’m not going to allow that to be an excuse for turning Medicare into a voucher program that leaves seniors at the mercy of the insurance industry. And I'm not going to stand for balancing the budget by denying or reducing health care for poor children or those with disabilities. So we will reform Medicare and Medicaid, but we will not abandon the fundamental commitment that this country has kept for generations.

And by the way, that includes our commitment to Social Security. I've said before, Social Security is not the primary cause of our deficits, but it does face long-term challenges as our country grows older. And both parties are going to need to work together on a separate track to strengthen Social Security for our children and our grandchildren.

So this is how we can reduce spending: by scouring the budget for every dime of waste and inefficiency, by reforming government spending, and by making modest adjustments to Medicare and Medicaid. But all these reductions in spending, by themselves, will not solve our fiscal problems. We can’t just cut our way out of this hole. It’s going to take a balanced approach. If we’re going to make spending cuts -- many of which we wouldn’t make if we weren’t facing such large budget deficits -- then it’s only right that we ask everyone to pay their fair share.

You know, last week, Speaker of the House John Boehner gave a speech about the economy. And to his credit, he made the point that we can’t afford the kind of politics that says it’s “my way or the highway.” I was encouraged by that. Here’s the problem: In that same speech, he also came out against any plan to cut the deficit that includes any additional revenues whatsoever. He said -- I'm quoting him -- there is “only one option.” And that option and only option relies entirely on cuts. That means slashing education, surrendering the research necessary to keep America’s technological edge in the 21st century, and allowing our critical public assets like highways and bridges and airports to get worse. It would cripple our competiveness and our ability to win the jobs of the future. And it would also mean asking sacrifice of seniors and the middle class and the poor, while asking nothing of the wealthiest Americans and biggest corporations. So the Speaker says we can’t have it "my way or the highway," and then basically says, my way -- or the highway. That’s not smart. It’s not right. If we’re going to meet our responsibilities, we have to do it together.

Now, I’m proposing real, serious cuts in spending. When you include the $1 trillion in cuts I’ve already signed into law, these would be among the biggest cuts in spending in our history. But they’ve got to be part of a larger plan that’s balanced –- a plan that asks the most fortunate among us to pay their fair share, just like everybody else.

And that’s why this plan eliminates tax loopholes that primarily go to the wealthiest taxpayers and biggest corporations –- tax breaks that small businesses and middle-class families don’t get. And if tax reform doesn't get done, this plan asks the wealthiest Americans to go back to paying the same rates that they paid during the 1990s, before the Bush tax cuts.

I promise it’s not because anybody looks forward to the prospects of raising taxes or paying more taxes. I don’t. In fact, I’ve cut taxes for the middle class and for small businesses, and through the American Jobs Act, we’d cut taxes again to promote hiring and put more money into the pockets of people. But we can’t afford these special lower rates for the wealthy -– rates, by the way, that were meant to be temporary. Back when these first -- these tax cuts, back in 2001, 2003, were being talked about, they were talked about temporary measures. We can’t afford them when we’re running these big deficits.

Now, I am also ready to work with Democrats and Republicans to reform our entire tax code, to get rid of the decades of accumulated loopholes, special interest carve-outs, and other tax expenditures that stack the deck against small business owners and ordinary families who can’t afford Washington lobbyists or fancy accountants. Our tax code is more than 10,000 pages long. If you stack up all the volumes, they’re almost five feet tall. That means that how much you pay often depends less on what you make and more on how well you can game the system, and that's especially true of the corporate tax code.

We’ve got one of the highest corporate tax rates in the world, but it’s riddled with exceptions and special interest loopholes. So some companies get out paying a lot of taxes, while the rest of them end up having to foot the bill. And this makes our entire economy less competitive and our country a less desirable place to do business.

That has to change. Our tax code shouldn’t give an advantage to companies with the best-connected lobbyists. It should give an advantage to companies that invest in the United States of America and create jobs in the United States of America. And we can lower the corporate rate if we get rid of all these special deals.

So I am ready, I am eager, to work with Democrats and Republicans to reform the tax code to make it simpler, make it fairer, and make America more competitive. But any reform plan will have to raise revenue to help close our deficit. That has to be part of the formula. And any reform should follow another simple principle: Middle-class families shouldn’t pay higher taxes than millionaires and billionaires. That’s pretty straightforward. It’s hard to argue against that. Warren Buffett’s secretary shouldn’t pay a higher tax rate than Warren Buffett. There is no justification for it.

It is wrong that in the United States of America, a teacher or a nurse or a construction worker who earns $50,000 should pay higher tax rates than somebody pulling in $50 million. Anybody who says we can’t change the tax code to correct that, anyone who has signed some pledge to protect every single tax loophole so long as they live, they should be called out. They should have to defend that unfairness -- explain why somebody who's making $50 million a year in the financial markets should be paying 15 percent on their taxes, when a teacher making $50,000 a year is paying more than that -- paying a higher rate. They ought to have to answer for it. And if they’re pledged to keep that kind of unfairness in place, they should remember, the last time I checked the only pledge that really matters is the pledge we take to uphold the Constitution.

Now, we’re already hearing the usual defenders of these kinds of loopholes saying this is just “class warfare.” I reject the idea that asking a hedge fund manager to pay the same tax rate as a plumber or a teacher is class warfare. I think it’s just the right the thing to do. I believe the American middle class, who've been pressured relentlessly for decades, believe it’s time that they were fought for as hard as the lobbyists and some lawmakers have fought to protect special treatment for billionaires and big corporations.

Nobody wants to punish success in America. What’s great about this country is our belief that anyone can make it and everybody should be able to try -– the idea that any one of us can open a business or have an idea and make us millionaires or billionaires. This is the land of opportunity. That’s great. All I’m saying is that those who have done well, including me, should pay our fair share in taxes to contribute to the nation that made our success possible. We shouldn’t get a better deal than ordinary families get. And I think most wealthy Americans would agree if they knew this would help us grow the economy and deal with the debt that threatens our future.

It comes down to this: We have to prioritize. Both parties agree that we need to reduce the deficit by the same amount -- by $4 trillion. So what choices are we going to make to reach that goal? Either we ask the wealthiest Americans to pay their fair share in taxes, or we’re going to have to ask seniors to pay more for Medicare. We can’t afford to do both.

Either we gut education and medical research, or we’ve got to reform the tax code so that the most profitable corporations have to give up tax loopholes that other companies don’t get. We can’t afford to do both.

This is not class warfare. It’s math. The money is going to have to come from someplace. And if we’re not willing to ask those who've done extraordinarily well to help America close the deficit and we are trying to reach that same target of $4 trillion, then the logic, the math says everybody else has to do a whole lot more: We’ve got to put the entire burden on the middle class and the poor. We’ve got to scale back on the investments that have always helped our economy grow. We’ve got to settle for second-rate roads and second-rate bridges and second-rate airports, and schools that are crumbling.

That’s unacceptable to me. That’s unacceptable to the American people. And it will not happen on my watch. I will not support -- I will not support -- any plan that puts all the burden for closing our deficit on ordinary Americans. And I will veto any bill that changes benefits for those who rely on Medicare but does not raise serious revenues by asking the wealthiest Americans or biggest corporations to pay their fair share. We are not going to have a one-sided deal that hurts the folks who are most vulnerable.

None of the changes I’m proposing are easy or politically convenient. It’s always more popular to promise the moon and leave the bill for after the next election or the election after that. That’s been true since our founding. George Washington grappled with this problem. He said, “Towards the payment of debts, there must be revenue; that to have revenue there must be taxes; [and] no taxes can be devised which are not more or less inconvenient and unpleasant.” He understood that dealing with the debt is -- these are his words -- “always a choice of difficulties.” But he also knew that public servants weren’t elected to do what was easy; they weren’t elected to do what was politically advantageous. It’s our responsibility to put country before party. It’s our responsibility to do what’s right for the future.

And that’s what this debate is about. It’s not about numbers on a ledger; it’s not about figures on a spreadsheet. It’s about the economic future of this country, and it’s about whether we will do what it takes to create jobs and growth and opportunity while facing up to the legacy of debt that threatens everything we’ve built over generations.

And it’s also about fairness. It’s about whether we are, in fact, in this together, and we’re looking out for one another. We know what’s right. It’s time to do what’s right.

Thank you very much.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Speech at United Nations High-Level Meeting on Libya

Thank you for convening this meeting to address a task that must be the work of all of us -- supporting the people of Libya as they build a future that is free and democratic and prosperous. And I want to thank President Jalil for his remarks and for all that he and Prime Minister Jibril have done to help Libya reach this moment.

To all the heads of state, to all the countries represented here who have done so much over the past several months to ensure this day could come, I want to say thank you, as well.

Today, the Libyan people are writing a new chapter in the life of their nation. After four decades of darkness, they can walk the streets, free from a tyrant. They are making their voices heard -- in new newspapers, and on radio and television, in public squares and on personal blogs. They’re launching political parties and civil groups to shape their own destiny and secure their universal rights. And here at the United Nations, the new flag of a free Libya now flies among the community of nations.

Make no mistake -- credit for the liberation of Libya belongs to the people of Libya. It was Libyan men and women -- and children -- who took to the streets in peaceful protest, who faced down the tanks and endured the snipers’ bullets. It was Libyan fighters, often outgunned and outnumbered, who fought pitched battles, town-by-town, block-by-block. It was Libyan activists -- in the underground, in chat rooms, in mosques -- who kept a revolution alive, even after some of the world had given up hope.

It was Libyan women and girls who hung flags and smuggled weapons to the front. It was Libyans from countries around the world, including my own, who rushed home to help, even though they, too, risked brutality and death. It was Libyan blood that was spilled and Libya’s sons and daughters who gave their lives. And on that August day -- after all that sacrifice, after 42 long years -- it was Libyans who pushed their dictator from power.

At the same time, Libya is a lesson in what the international community can achieve when we stand together as one. I said at the beginning of this process, we cannot and should not intervene every time there is an injustice in the world. Yet it’s also true that there are times where the world could have and should have summoned the will to prevent the killing of innocents on a horrific scale. And we are forever haunted by the atrocities that we did not prevent, and the lives that we did not save. But this time was different. This time, we, through the United Nations, found the courage and the collective will to act.

When the old regime unleashed a campaign of terror, threatening to roll back the democratic tide sweeping the region, we acted as united nations, and we acted swiftly -- broadening sanctions, imposing an arms embargo. The United States led the effort to pass a historic resolution at the Security Council authorizing "all necessary measures" to protect the Libyan people. And when the civilians of Benghazi were threatened with a massacre, we exercised that authority. Our international coalition stopped the regime in its tracks, and saved countless lives, and gave the Libyan people the time and the space to prevail.

Important, too, is how this effort succeeded -- thanks to the leadership and contributions of many countries. The United States was proud to play a decisive role, especially in the early days, and then in a supporting capacity. But let’s remember that it was the Arab League that appealed for action. It was the world’s most effective alliance, NATO, that’s led a military coalition of nearly 20 nations. It’s our European allies -- especially the United Kingdom and France and Denmark and Norway -- that conducted the vast majority of air strikes protecting rebels on the ground. It was Arab states who joined the coalition, as equal partners. And it’s been the United Nations and neighboring countries -- including Tunisia and Egypt -- that have cared for the Libyans in the urgent humanitarian effort that continues today.

This is how the international community should work in the 21st century -- more nations bearing the responsibility and the costs of meeting global challenges. In fact, this is the very purpose of this United Nations. So every nation represented here today can take pride in the innocent lives we saved and in helping Libyans reclaim their country. It was the right thing to do.

Now, even as we speak, remnants of the old regime continue to fight. Difficult days are still ahead. But one thing is clear -- the future of Libya is now in the hands of the Libyan people. For just as it was Libyans who tore down the old order, it will be Libyans who build their new nation. And we’ve come here today to say to the people of Libya -- just as the world stood by you in your struggle to be free, we will now stand with you in your struggle to realize the peace and prosperity that freedom can bring.

In this effort, you will have a friend and partner in the United States of America. Today, I can announce that our ambassador is on his way back to Tripoli. And this week, the American flag that was lowered before our embassy was attacked will be raised again, over a re-opened American embassy. We will work closely with the new U.N. Support Mission in Libya and with the nations here today to assist the Libyan people in the hard work ahead.

First, and most immediately: security. So long as the Libyan people are being threatened, the NATO-led mission to protect them will continue. And those still holding out must understand -- the old regime is over, and it is time to lay down your arms and join the new Libya. As this happens, the world must also support efforts to secure dangerous weapons -- conventional and otherwise -- and bring fighters under central, civilian control. For without security, democracy and trade and investment cannot flourish.

Second: the humanitarian effort. The Transitional National Council has been working quickly to restore water and electricity and food supplies to Tripoli. But for many Libyans, each day is still a struggle -- to recover from their wounds, reunite with their families, and return to their homes. And even after the guns of war fall silent, the ravages of war will continue. So our efforts to assist its victims must continue. In this, the United States -- the United Nations will play a key role. And along with our partners, the United States will do our part to help the hungry and the wounded.

Third: a democratic transition that is peaceful, inclusive and just. President Jalil has just reaffirmed the Transitional National Council’s commitment to these principles, and the United Nations will play a central role in coordinating international support for this effort. We all know what is needed -- a transition that is timely, new laws and a constitution that uphold the rule of law, political parties and a strong civil society, and, for the first time in Libyan history, free and fair elections.

True democracy, however, must flow from its citizens. So as Libyans rightly seek justice for past crimes, let it be done in a spirit of reconciliation, and not reprisals and violence. As Libyans draw strength from their faith -- a religion rooted in peace and tolerance -- let there be a rejection of violent extremism, which offers nothing but death and destruction. As Libyans rebuild, let those efforts tap the experience of all those with the skills to contribute, including the many Africans in Libya. And as Libyans forge a society that is truly just, let it enshrine the rights and role of women at all levels of society. For we know that the nations that uphold the human rights of all people, especially their women, are ultimately more successful and more prosperous.

Which brings me to the final area where the world must stand with Libya, and that is restoring prosperity. For too long, Libya’s vast riches were stolen and squandered. Now that wealth must serve its rightful owners -- the Libyan people. As sanctions are lifted, as the United States and the international community unfreeze more Libyan assets, and as the country's oil production is restored, the Libyan people deserve a government that is transparent and accountable. And bound by the Libyan students and entrepreneurs who have forged friendships in the United States, we intend to build new partnerships to help unleash Libya’s extraordinary potential.

Now, none of this will be easy. After decades of iron rule by one man, it will take time to build the institutions needed for a democratic Libya. I’m sure there will be days of frustration; there will be days when progress is slow; there will be days when some begin to wish for the old order and its illusion of stability. And some in the world may ask, can Libya succeed? But if we have learned anything these many months, it is this: Don’t underestimate the aspirations and the will of the Libyan people.

So I want to conclude by speaking directly to the people of Libya. Your task may be new, the journey ahead may be fraught with difficulty, but everything you need to build your future already beats in the heart of your nation. It’s the same courage you summoned on that first February day; the same resilience that brought you back out the next day and the next, even as you lost family and friends; and the same unshakeable determination with which you liberated Benghazi, broke the siege of Misurata, and have fought through the coastal plain and the western mountains. It’s the same unwavering conviction that said, there’s no turning back; our sons and daughters deserve to be free.

In the days after Tripoli fell, people rejoiced in the streets and pondered the role ahead, and one of those Libyans said, “We have this chance now to do something good for our country, a chance we have dreamed of for so long.” So, to the Libyan people, this is your chance. And today the world is saying, with one unmistakable voice, we will stand with you as you seize this moment of promise, as you reach for the freedom, the dignity, and the opportunity that you deserve.

So, congratulations. And thank you very much.

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# 66th Session of the United Nations General Assembly Address

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary General, fellow delegates, ladies and gentlemen: It is a great honor for me to be here today. I would like to talk to you about a subject that is at the heart of the United Nations -- the pursuit of peace in an imperfect world. War and conflict have been with us since the beginning of civilizations. But in the first part of the 20th century, the advance of modern weaponry led to death on a staggering scale. It was this killing that compelled the founders of this body to build an institution that was focused not just on ending one war, but on averting others; a union of sovereign states that would seek to prevent conflict, while also addressing its causes. No American did more to pursue this objective than President Franklin Roosevelt. He knew that a victory in war was not enough. As he said at one of the very first meetings on the founding of the United Nations, “We have got to make, not merely peace, but a peace that will last.” The men and women who built this institution understood that peace is more than just the absence of war. A lasting peace -- for nations and for individuals -- depends on a sense of justice and opportunity, of dignity and freedom. It depends on struggle and sacrifice, on compromise, and on a sense of common humanity. One delegate to the San Francisco Conference that led to the creation of the United Nations put it well: “Many people,” she said, “have talked as if all that has to be done to get peace was to say loudly and frequently that we loved peace and we hated war. Now we have learned that no matter how much we love peace and hate war, we cannot avoid having war brought upon us if there are convulsions in other parts of the world.” The fact is peace is hard. But our people demand it. Over nearly seven decades, even as the United Nations helped avert a third world war, we still live in a world scarred by conflict and plagued by poverty. Even as we proclaim our love for peace and our hatred of war, there are still convulsions in our world that endanger us all. I took office at a time of two wars for the United States. Moreover, the violent extremists who drew us into war in the first place -- Osama bin Laden, and his al Qaeda organization -- remained at large. Today, we've set a new direction. At the end of this year, America’s military operation in Iraq will be over. We will have a normal relationship with a sovereign nation that is a member of the community of nations. That equal partnership will be strengthened by our support for Iraq -- for its government and for its security forces, for its people and for their aspirations. As we end the war in Iraq, the United States and our coalition partners have begun a transition in Afghanistan. Between now and 2014, an increasingly capable Afghan government and security forces will step forward to take responsibility for the future of their country. As they do, we are drawing down our own forces, while building an enduring partnership with the Afghan people. So let there be no doubt: The tide of war is receding. When I took office, roughly 180,000 Americans were serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. By the end of this year, that number will be cut in half, and it will continue to decline. This is critical for the sovereignty of Iraq and Afghanistan. It’s also critical to the strength of the United States as we build our nation at home.

Moreover, we are poised to end these wars from a position of strength. Ten years ago, there was an open wound and twisted steel, a broken heart in the center of this city. Today, as a new tower is rising at Ground Zero, it symbolizes New York’s renewal, even as al Qaeda is under more pressure than ever before. Its leadership has been degraded. And Osama bin Laden, a man who murdered thousands of people from dozens of countries, will never endanger the peace of the world again. So, yes, this has been a difficult decade. But today, we stand at a crossroads of history with the chance to move decisively in the direction of peace. To do so, we must return to the wisdom of those who created this institution. The United Nations’ Founding Charter calls upon us, "to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security." And Article 1 of this General Assembly’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights reminds us that, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and in rights." Those bedrock beliefs -- in the responsibility of states, and the rights of men and women -- must be our guide. And in that effort, we have reason to hope. This year has been a time of extraordinary transformation. More nations have stepped forward to maintain international peace and security. And more individuals are claiming their universal right to live in freedom and dignity. Think about it: One year ago, when we met here in New York, the prospect of a successful referendum in South Sudan was in doubt. But the international community overcame old divisions to support the agreement that had been negotiated to give South Sudan self-determination. And last summer, as a new flag went up in Juba, former soldiers laid down their arms, men and women wept with joy, and children finally knew the promise of looking to a future that they will shape. One year ago, the people of CÃ´te D’Ivoire approached a landmark election. And when the incumbent lost, and refused to respect the results, the world refused to look the other way. U.N. peacekeepers were harassed, but they did not leave their posts. The Security Council, led by the United States and Nigeria and France, came together to support the will of the people. And CÃ´te D’Ivoire is now governed by the man who was elected to lead.

One year ago, the hopes of the people of Tunisia were suppressed. But they chose the dignity of peaceful protest over the rule of an iron fist. A vendor lit a spark that took his own life, but he ignited a movement. In a face of a crackdown, students spelled out the word, "freedom." The balance of fear shifted from the ruler to those that he ruled. And now the people of Tunisia are preparing for elections that will move them one step closer to the democracy that they deserve. One year ago, Egypt had known one President for nearly 30 years. But for 18 days, the eyes of the world were glued to Tahrir Square, where Egyptians from all walks of life -- men and women, young and old, Muslim and Christian -- demanded their universal rights. We saw in those protesters the moral force of non-violence that has lit the world from Delhi to Warsaw, from Selma to South Africa -- and we knew that change had come to Egypt and to the Arab world.

One year ago, the people of Libya were ruled by the world’s longest-serving dictator. But faced with bullets and bombs and a dictator who threatened to hunt them down like rats, they showed relentless bravery. We will never forget the words of the Libyan who stood up in those early days of the revolution and said, “Our words are free now.” It’s a feeling you can’t explain. Day after day, in the face of bullets and bombs, the Libyan people refused to give back that freedom. And when they were threatened by the kind of mass atrocity that often went unchallenged in the last century, the United Nations lived up to its charter. The Security Council authorized all necessary measures to prevent a massacre. The Arab League called for this effort; Arab nations joined a NATO-led coalition that halted Qaddafi’s forces in their tracks.

In the months that followed, the will of the coalition proved unbreakable, and the will of the Libyan people could not be denied. Forty-two years of tyranny was ended in six months. From Tripoli to Misurata to Benghazi -- today, Libya is free. Yesterday, the leaders of a new Libya took their rightful place beside us, and this week, the United States is reopening our embassy in Tripoli.

This is how the international community is supposed to work -- nations standing together for the sake of peace and security, and individuals claiming their rights. Now, all of us have a responsibility to support the new Libya -- the new Libyan government as they confront the challenge of turning this moment of promise into a just and lasting peace for all Libyans. So this has been a remarkable year. The Qaddafi regime is over. Gbagbo, Ben Ali, Mubarak are no longer in power. Osama bin Laden is gone, and the idea that change could only come through violence has been buried with him. Something is happening in our world. The way things have been is not the way that they will be. The humiliating grip of corruption and tyranny is being pried open. Dictators are on notice. Technology is putting power into the hands of the people. The youth are delivering a powerful rebuke to dictatorship, and rejecting the lie that some races, some peoples, some religions, some ethnicities do not desire democracy. The promise written down on paper -- "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" -- is closer at hand. But let us remember: Peace is hard. Peace is hard. Progress can be reversed. Prosperity comes slowly. Societies can split apart. The measure of our success must be whether people can live in sustained freedom, dignity, and security. And the United Nations and its member states must do their part to support those basic aspirations. And we have more work to do. In Iran, we've seen a government that refuses to recognize the rights of its own people. As we meet here today, men and women and children are being tortured, detained and murdered by the Syrian regime. Thousands have been killed, many during the holy time of Ramadan. Thousands more have poured across Syria’s borders. The Syrian people have shown dignity and courage in their pursuit of justice -- protesting peacefully, standing silently in the streets, dying for the same values that this institution is supposed to stand for. And the question for us is clear: Will we stand with the Syrian people, or with their oppressors? Already, the United States has imposed strong sanctions on Syria’s leaders. We supported a transfer of power that is responsive to the Syrian people. And many of our allies have joined in this effort. But for the sake of Syria -- and the peace and security of the world -- we must speak with one voice. There's no excuse for inaction. Now is the time for the United Nations Security Council to sanction the Syrian regime, and to stand with the Syrian people. Throughout the region, we will have to respond to the calls for change. In Yemen, men, women and children gather by the thousands in towns and city squares every day with the hope that their determination and spilled blood will prevail over a corrupt system. America supports those aspirations. We must work with Yemen’s neighbors and our partners around the world to seek a path that allows for a peaceful transition of power from President Saleh, and a movement to free and fair elections as soon as possible.

In Bahrain, steps have been taken toward reform and accountability. We’re pleased with that, but more is required. America is a close friend of Bahrain, and we will continue to call on the government and the main opposition bloc -- the Wifaq -- to pursue a meaningful dialogue that brings peaceful change that is responsive to the people. We believe the patriotism that binds Bahrainis together must be more powerful than the sectarian forces that would tear them apart. It will be hard, but it is possible. We believe that each nation must chart its own course to fulfill the aspirations of its people, and America does not expect to agree with every party or person who expresses themselves politically. But we will always stand up for the universal rights that were embraced by this Assembly. Those rights depend on elections that are free and fair; on governance that is transparent and accountable; respect for the rights of women and minorities; justice that is equal and fair. That is what our people deserve. Those are the elements of peace that can last. Moreover, the United States will continue to support those nations that transition to democracy -- with greater trade and investment -- so that freedom is followed by opportunity. We will pursue a deeper engagement with governments, but also with civil society -- students and entrepreneurs, political parties and the press. We have banned those who abuse human rights from traveling to our country. And we’ve sanctioned those who trample on human rights abroad. And we will always serve as a voice for those who've been silenced.

Now, I know, particularly this week, that for many in this hall, there's one issue that stands as a test for these principles and a test for American foreign policy, and that is the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

One year ago, I stood at this podium and I called for an independent Palestine. I believed then, and I believe now, that the Palestinian people deserve a state of their own. But what I also said is that a genuine peace can only be realized between the Israelis and the Palestinians themselves. One year later, despite extensive efforts by America and others, the parties have not bridged their differences. Faced with this stalemate, I put forward a new basis for negotiations in May of this year. That basis is clear. It’s well known to all of us here. Israelis must know that any agreement provides assurances for their security. Palestinians deserve to know the territorial basis of their state. Now, I know that many are frustrated by the lack of progress. I assure you, so am I. But the question isn’t the goal that we seek -- the question is how do we reach that goal. And I am convinced that there is no short cut to the end of a conflict that has endured for decades. Peace is hard work. Peace will not come through statements and resolutions at the United Nations -- if it were that easy, it would have been accomplished by now. Ultimately, it is the Israelis and the Palestinians who must live side by side. Ultimately, it is the Israelis and the Palestinians -- not us -- who must reach agreement on the issues that divide them: on borders and on security, on refugees and Jerusalem. Ultimately, peace depends upon compromise among people who must live together long after our speeches are over, long after our votes have been tallied. That’s the lesson of Northern Ireland, where ancient antagonists bridged their differences. That’s the lesson of Sudan, where a negotiated settlement led to an independent state. And that is and will be the path to a Palestinian state -- negotiations between the parties. We seek a future where Palestinians live in a sovereign state of their own, with no limit to what they can achieve. There’s no question that the Palestinians have seen that vision delayed for too long. It is precisely because we believe so strongly in the aspirations of the Palestinian people that America has invested so much time and so much effort in the building of a Palestinian state, and the negotiations that can deliver a Palestinian state. But understand this as well: America’s commitment to Israel’s security is unshakeable. Our friendship with Israel is deep and enduring. And so we believe that any lasting peace must acknowledge the very real security concerns that Israel faces every single day.

Let us be honest with ourselves: Israel is surrounded by neighbors that have waged repeated wars against it. Israel’s citizens have been killed by rockets fired at their houses and suicide bombs on their buses. Israel’s children come of age knowing that throughout the region, other children are taught to hate them. Israel, a small country of less than eight million people, look out at a world where leaders of much larger nations threaten to wipe it off of the map. The Jewish people carry the burden of centuries of exile and persecution, and fresh memories of knowing that six million people were killed simply because of who they are. Those are facts. They cannot be denied.

The Jewish people have forged a successful state in their historic homeland. Israel deserves recognition. It deserves normal relations with its neighbors. And friends of the Palestinians do them no favors by ignoring this truth, just as friends of Israel must recognize the need to pursue a two-state solution with a secure Israel next to an independent Palestine. That is the truth -- each side has legitimate aspirations -- and that’s part of what makes peace so hard. And the deadlock will only be broken when each side learns to stand in the other’s shoes; each side can see the world through the other’s eyes. That’s what we should be encouraging. That’s what we should be promoting.

This body -- founded, as it was, out of the ashes of war and genocide, dedicated, as it is, to the dignity of every single person -- must recognize the reality that is lived by both the Palestinians and the Israelis. The measure of our actions must always be whether they advance the right of Israeli and Palestinian children to live lives of peace and security and dignity and opportunity. And we will only succeed in that effort if we can encourage the parties to sit down, to listen to each other, and to understand each other’s hopes and each other’s fears. That is the project to which America is committed. There are no shortcuts. And that is what the United Nations should be focused on in the weeks and months to come.

Now, even as we confront these challenges of conflict and revolution, we must also recognize -- we must also remind ourselves -- that peace is not just the absence of war. True peace depends on creating the opportunity that makes life worth living. And to do that, we must confront the common enemies of humanity: nuclear weapons and poverty, ignorance and disease. These forces corrode the possibility of lasting peace and together we're called upon to confront them.

To lift the specter of mass destruction, we must come together to pursue the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons. Over the last two years, we've begun to walk down that path. Since our Nuclear Security Summit in Washington, nearly 50 nations have taken steps to secure nuclear materials from terrorists and smugglers. Next March, a summit in Seoul will advance our efforts to lock down all of them. The New START Treaty between the United States and Russia will cut our deployed arsenals to the lowest level in half a century, and our nations are pursuing talks on how to achieve even deeper reductions. America will continue to work for a ban on the testing of nuclear weapons and the production of fissile material needed to make them.

And so we have begun to move in the right direction. And the United States is committed to meeting our obligations. But even as we meet our obligations, we’ve strengthened the treaties and institutions that help stop the spread of these weapons. And to do so, we must continue to hold accountable those nations that flout them.

The Iranian government cannot demonstrate that its program is peaceful. It has not met its obligations and it rejects offers that would provide it with peaceful nuclear power. North Korea has yet to take concrete steps towards abandoning its weapons and continues belligerent action against the South. There's a future of greater opportunity for the people of these nations if their governments meet their international obligations. But if they continue down a path that is outside international law, they must be met with greater pressure and isolation. That is what our commitment to peace and security demands.

To bring prosperity to our people, we must promote the growth that creates opportunity. In this effort, let us not forget that we’ve made enormous progress over the last several decades. Closed societies gave way to open markets. Innovation and entrepreneurship has transformed the way we live and the things that we do. Emerging economies from Asia to the Americas have lifted hundreds of millions of people from poverty. It’s an extraordinary achievement. And yet, three years ago, we were confronted with the worst financial crisis in eight decades. And that crisis proved a fact that has become clearer with each passing year -- our fates are interconnected. In a global economy, nations will rise, or fall, together.

And today, we confront the challenges that have followed on the heels of that crisis. Around the world recovery is still fragile. Markets remain volatile. Too many people are out of work. Too many others are struggling just to get by. We acted together to avert a depression in 2009. We must take urgent and coordinated action once more. Here in the United States, I've announced a plan to put Americans back to work and jumpstart our economy, at the same time as I’m committed to substantially reducing our deficits over time.

We stand with our European allies as they reshape their institutions and address their own fiscal challenges. For other countries, leaders face a different challenge as they shift their economy towards more self-reliance, boosting domestic demand while slowing inflation. So we will work with emerging economies that have rebounded strongly, so that rising standards of living create new markets that promote global growth. That’s what our commitment to prosperity demands.

To combat the poverty that punishes our children, we must act on the belief that freedom from want is a basic human right. The United States has made it a focus of our engagement abroad to help people to feed themselves. And today, as drought and conflict have brought famine to the Horn of Africa, our conscience calls on us to act. Together, we must continue to provide assistance, and support organizations that can reach those in need. And together, we must insist on unrestricted humanitarian access so that we can save the lives of thousands of men and women and children. Our common humanity is at stake. Let us show that the life of a child in Somalia is as precious as any other. That is what our commitment to our fellow human beings demand.

To stop disease that spreads across borders, we must strengthen our system of public health. We will continue the fight against HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. We will focus on the health of mothers and of children. And we must come together to prevent, and detect, and fight every kind of biological danger -- whether it’s a pandemic like H1N1, or a terrorist threat, or a treatable disease.

This week, America signed an agreement with the World Health Organization to affirm our commitment to meet this challenge. And today, I urge all nations to join us in meeting the HWO’s [sic] goal of making sure all nations have core capacities to address public health emergencies in place by 2012. That is what our commitment to the health of our people demands.

To preserve our planet, we must not put off action that climate change demands. We have to tap the power of science to save those resources that are scarce. And together, we must continue our work to build on the progress made in Copenhagen and Cancun, so that all the major economies here today follow through on the commitments that were made. Together, we must work to transform the energy that powers our economies, and support others as they move down that path. That is what our commitment to the next generation demands.

And to make sure our societies reach their potential, we must allow our citizens to reach theirs. No country can afford the corruption that plagues the world like a cancer. Together, we must harness the power of open societies and open economies. That’s why we’ve partnered with countries from across the globe to launch a new partnership on open government that helps ensure accountability and helps to empower citizens. No country should deny people their rights to freedom of speech and freedom of religion, but also no country should deny people their rights because of who they love, which is why we must stand up for the rights of gays and lesbians everywhere.

And no country can realize its potential if half its population cannot reach theirs. This week, the United States signed a new Declaration on Women’s Participation. Next year, we should each announce the steps we are taking to break down the economic and political barriers that stand in the way of women and girls. This is what our commitment to human progress demands. I know there’s no straight line to that progress, no single path to success. We come from different cultures, and carry with us different histories. But let us never forget that even as we gather here as heads of different governments, we represent citizens who share the same basic aspirations -- to live with dignity and freedom; to get an education and pursue opportunity; to love our families, and love and worship our God; to live in the kind of peace that makes life worth living.

It is the nature of our imperfect world that we are forced to learn these lessons over and over again. Conflict and repression will endure so long as some people refuse to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. Yet that is precisely why we have built institutions like this -- to bind our fates together, to help us recognize ourselves in each other -- because those who came before us believed that peace is preferable to war, and freedom is preferable to suppression, and prosperity is preferable to poverty. That’s the message that comes not from capitals, but from citizens, from our people.

And when the cornerstone of this very building was put in place, President Truman came here to New York and said, "The United Nations is essentially an expression of the moral nature of man’s aspirations." The moral nature of man’s aspirations. As we live in a world that is changing at a breathtaking pace, that’s a lesson that we must never forget.

Peace is hard, but we know that it is possible. So, together, let us be resolved to see that it is defined by our hopes and not by our fears. Together, let us make peace, but a peace, most importantly, that will last.

Thank you very much.

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# Address at the Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication

An earthquake and a hurricane may have delayed this day, but this is a day that would not be denied.

For this day, we celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s return to the National Mall. In this place, he will stand for all time, among monuments to those who fathered this nation and those who defended it; a black preacher with no official rank or title who somehow gave voice to our deepest dreams and our most lasting ideals, a man who stirred our conscience and thereby helped make our union more perfect.

And Dr. King would be the first to remind us that this memorial is not for him alone. The movement of which he was a part depended on an entire generation of leaders. Many are here today, and for their service and their sacrifice, we owe them our everlasting gratitude. This is a monument to your collective achievement.

Some giants of the civil rights movement -- like Rosa Parks and Dorothy Height, Benjamin Hooks, Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth -- they’ve been taken from us these past few years. This monument attests to their strength and their courage, and while we miss them dearly, we know they rest in a better place.

And finally, there are the multitudes of men and women whose names never appear in the history books -- those who marched and those who sang, those who sat in and those who stood firm, those who organized and those who mobilized -- all those men and women who through countless acts of quiet heroism helped bring about changes few thought were even possible. “By the thousands,” said Dr. King, “faceless, anonymous, relentless young people, black and white…have taken our whole nation back to those great wells of democracy which were dug deep by the founding fathers in the formulation of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.” To those men and women, to those foot soldiers for justice, know that this monument is yours, as well.

Nearly half a century has passed since that historic March on Washington, a day when thousands upon thousands gathered for jobs and for freedom. That is what our schoolchildren remember best when they think of Dr. King -- his booming voice across this Mall, calling on America to make freedom a reality for all of God’s children, [prophesying] of a day when the jangling discord of our nation would be transformed into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood.

It is right that we honor that march, that we lift up Dr. King’s “I Have a Dream” speech -- for without that shining moment, without Dr. King’s glorious words, we might not have had the courage to come as far as we have. Because of that hopeful vision, because of Dr. King’s moral imagination, barricades began to fall and bigotry began to fade. New doors of opportunity swung open for an entire generation. Yes, laws changed, but hearts and minds changed, as well.

Look at the faces here around you, and you see an America that is more fair and more free and more just than the one Dr. King addressed that day. We are right to savor that slow but certain progress -- progress that’s expressed itself in a million ways, large and small, across this nation every single day, as people of all colors and creeds live together, and work together, and fight alongside one another, and learn together, and build together, and love one another.

So it is right for us to celebrate today Dr. King’s dream and his vision of unity. And yet it is also important on this day to remind ourselves that such progress did not come easily; that Dr. King’s faith was hard-won; that it sprung out of a harsh reality and some bitter disappointments.

It is right for us to celebrate Dr. King’s marvelous oratory, but it is worth remembering that progress did not come from words alone. Progress was hard. Progress was purchased through enduring the smack of billy clubs and the blast of fire hoses. It was bought with days in jail cells and nights of bomb threats. For every victory during the height of the civil rights movement, there were setbacks and there were defeats.

We forget now, but during his life, Dr. King wasn’t always considered a unifying figure. Even after rising to prominence, even after winning the Nobel Peace Prize, Dr. King was vilified by many, denounced as a rabble rouser and an agitator, a communist and a radical. He was even attacked by his own people, by those who felt he was going too fast or those who felt he was going too slow; by those who felt he shouldn’t meddle in issues like the Vietnam War or the rights of union workers. We know from his own testimony the doubts and the pain this caused him, and that the controversy that would swirl around his actions would last until the fateful day he died.

I raise all this because nearly 50 years after the March on Washington, our work, Dr. King’s work, is not yet complete. We gather here at a moment of great challenge and great change. In the first decade of this new century, we have been tested by war and by tragedy; by an economic crisis and its aftermath that has left millions out of work, and poverty on the rise, and millions more just struggling to get by. Indeed, even before this crisis struck, we had endured a decade of rising inequality and stagnant wages. In too many troubled neighborhoods across the country, the conditions of our poorest citizens appear little changed from what existed 50 years ago -- neighborhoods with underfunded schools and broken-down slums, inadequate health care, constant violence, neighborhoods in which too many young people grow up with little hope and few prospects for the future.

Our work is not done. And so on this day, in which we celebrate a man and a movement that did so much for this country, let us draw strength from those earlier struggles. First and foremost, let us remember that change has never been quick. Change has never been simple, or without controversy. Change depends on persistence. Change requires determination. It took a full decade before the moral guidance of Brown v. Board of Education was translated into the enforcement measures of the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act, but those 10 long years did not lead Dr. King to give up. He kept on pushing, he kept on speaking, he kept on marching until change finally came.

And then when, even after the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act passed, African Americans still found themselves trapped in pockets of poverty across the country, Dr. King didn’t say those laws were a failure; he didn’t say this is too hard; he didn’t say, let’s settle for what we got and go home. Instead he said, let’s take those victories and broaden our mission to achieve not just civil and political equality but also economic justice; let’s fight for a living wage and better schools and jobs for all who are willing to work. In other words, when met with hardship, when confronting disappointment, Dr. King refused to accept what he called the “isness” of today. He kept pushing towards the “oughtness” of tomorrow.

And so, as we think about all the work that we must do -- rebuilding an economy that can compete on a global stage, and fixing our schools so that every child -- not just some, but every child -- gets a world-class education, and making sure that our health care system is affordable and accessible to all, and that our economic system is one in which everybody gets a fair shake and everybody does their fair share, let us not be trapped by what is. We can’t be discouraged by what is. We’ve got to keep pushing for what ought to be, the America we ought to leave to our children, mindful that the hardships we face are nothing compared to those Dr. King and his fellow marchers faced 50 years ago, and that if we maintain our faith, in ourselves and in the possibilities of this nation, there is no challenge we cannot surmount.

And just as we draw strength from Dr. King’s struggles, so must we draw inspiration from his constant insistence on the oneness of man; the belief in his words that “we are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.” It was that insistence, rooted in his Christian faith, that led him to tell a group of angry young protesters, “I love you as I love my own children,” even as one threw a rock that glanced off his neck.

It was that insistence, that belief that God resides in each of us, from the high to the low, in the oppressor and the oppressed, that convinced him that people and systems could change. It fortified his belief in non-violence. It permitted him to place his faith in a government that had fallen short of its ideals. It led him to see his charge not only as freeing black America from the shackles of discrimination, but also freeing many Americans from their own prejudices, and freeing Americans of every color from the depredations of poverty. And so at this moment, when our politics appear so sharply polarized, and faith in our institutions so greatly diminished, we need more than ever to take heed of Dr. King’s teachings. He calls on us to stand in the other person’s shoes; to see through their eyes; to understand their pain. He tells us that we have a duty to fight against poverty, even if we are well off; to care about the child in the decrepit school even if our own children are doing fine; to show compassion toward the immigrant family, with the knowledge that most of us are only a few generations removed from similar hardships.

To say that we are bound together as one people, and must constantly strive to see ourselves in one another, is not to argue for a false unity that papers over our differences and ratifies an unjust status quo. As was true 50 years ago, as has been true throughout human history, those with power and privilege will often decry any call for change as “divisive.” They’ll say any challenge to the existing arrangements are unwise and destabilizing. Dr. King understood that peace without justice was no peace at all; that aligning our reality with our ideals often requires the speaking of uncomfortable truths and the creative tension of non-violent protest.

But he also understood that to bring about true and lasting change, there must be the possibility of reconciliation; that any social movement has to channel this tension through the spirit of love and mutuality.

If he were alive today, I believe he would remind us that the unemployed worker can rightly challenge the excesses of Wall Street without demonizing all who work there; that the businessman can enter tough negotiations with his company’s union without vilifying the right to collectively bargain. He would want us to know we can argue fiercely about the proper size and role of government without questioning each other’s love for this country -- with the knowledge that in this democracy, government is no distant object but is rather an expression of our common commitments to one another. He would call on us to assume the best in each other rather than the worst, and challenge one another in ways that ultimately heal rather than wound.

In the end, that’s what I hope my daughters take away from this monument. I want them to come away from here with a faith in what they can accomplish when they are determined and working for a righteous cause. I want them to come away from here with a faith in other people and a faith in a benevolent God. This sculpture, massive and iconic as it is, will remind them of Dr. King’s strength, but to see him only as larger than life would do a disservice to what he taught us about ourselves. He would want them to know that he had setbacks, because they will have setbacks. He would want them to know that he had doubts, because they will have doubts. He would want them to know that he was flawed, because all of us have flaws.

It is precisely because Dr. King was a man of flesh and blood and not a figure of stone that he inspires us so. His life, his story, tells us that change can come if you don’t give up. He would not give up, no matter how long it took, because in the smallest hamlets and the darkest slums, he had witnessed the highest reaches of the human spirit; because in those moments when the struggle seemed most hopeless, he had seen men and women and children conquer their fear; because he had seen hills and mountains made low and rough places made plain, and the crooked places made straight and God make a way out of no way.

And that is why we honor this man -- because he had faith in us. And that is why he belongs on this Mall -- because he saw what we might become. That is why Dr. King was so quintessentially American -- because for all the hardships we’ve endured, for all our sometimes tragic history, ours is a story of optimism and achievement and constant striving that is unique upon this Earth. And that is why the rest of the world still looks to us to lead. This is a country where ordinary people find in their hearts the courage to do extraordinary things; the courage to stand up in the face of the fiercest resistance and despair and say this is wrong, and this is right; we will not settle for what the cynics tell us we have to accept and we will reach again and again, no matter the odds, for what we know is possible.

That is the conviction we must carry now in our hearts. As tough as times may be, I know we will overcome. I know there are better days ahead. I know this because of the man towering over us. I know this because all he and his generation endured -- we are here today in a country that dedicated a monument to that legacy.

And so with our eyes on the horizon and our faith squarely placed in one another, let us keep striving; let us keep struggling; let us keep climbing toward that promised land of a nation and a world that is more fair, and more just, and more equal for every single child of God.

Thank you, God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address on the Death of Muammar Qaddafi

Good afternoon, everybody. Today, the government of Libya announced the death of Muammar Qaddafi. This marks the end of a long and painful chapter for the people of Libya, who now have the opportunity to determine their own destiny in a new and democratic Libya.

For four decades, the Qaddafi regime ruled the Libyan people with an iron fist. Basic human rights were denied. Innocent civilians were detained, beaten and killed. And Libya’s wealth was squandered. The enormous potential of the Libyan people was held back, and terror was used as a political weapon.

Today, we can definitively say that the Qaddafi regime has come to an end. The last major regime strongholds have fallen. The new government is consolidating the control over the country. And one of the world’s longest-serving dictators is no more.

One year ago, the notion of a free Libya seemed impossible. But then the Libyan people rose up and demanded their rights. And when Qaddafi and his forces started going city to city, town by town, to brutalize men, women and children, the world refused to stand idly by.

Faced with the potential of mass atrocities -- and a call for help from the Libyan people -- the United States and our friends and allies stopped Qaddafi’s forces in their tracks. A coalition that included the United States, NATO and Arab nations persevered through the summer to protect Libyan civilians. And meanwhile, the courageous Libyan people fought for their own future and broke the back of the regime.

So this is a momentous day in the history of Libya. The dark shadow of tyranny has been lifted. And with this enormous promise, the Libyan people now have a great responsibility -- to build an inclusive and tolerant and democratic Libya that stands as the ultimate rebuke to Qaddafi’s dictatorship. We look forward to the announcement of the country’s liberation, the quick formation of an interim government, and a stable transition to Libya’s first free and fair elections. And we call on our Libyan friends to continue to work with the international community to secure dangerous materials, and to respect the human rights of all Libyans –- including those who have been detained.

We’re under no illusions -- Libya will travel a long and winding road to full democracy. There will be difficult days ahead. But the United States, together with the international community, is committed to the Libyan people. You have won your revolution. And now, we will be a partner as you forge a future that provides dignity, freedom and opportunity.

For the region, today’s events prove once more that the rule of an iron fist inevitably comes to an end. Across the Arab world, citizens have stood up to claim their rights. Youth are delivering a powerful rebuke to dictatorship. And those leaders who try to deny their human dignity will not succeed.

For us here in the United States, we are reminded today of all those Americans that we lost at the hands of Qaddafi’s terror. Their families and friends are in our thoughts and in our prayers. We recall their bright smiles, their extraordinary lives, and their tragic deaths. We know that nothing can close the wound of their loss, but we stand together as one nation by their side.

For nearly eight months, many Americans have provided extraordinary service in support of our efforts to protect the Libyan people, and to provide them with a chance to determine their own destiny. Our skilled diplomats have helped to lead an unprecedented global response. Our brave pilots have flown in Libya’s skies, our sailors have provided support off Libya’s shores, and our leadership at NATO has helped guide our coalition. Without putting a single U.S. service member on the ground, we achieved our objectives, and our NATO mission will soon come to an end.

This comes at a time when we see the strength of American leadership across the world. We’ve taken out al Qaeda leaders, and we’ve put them on the path to defeat. We’re winding down the war in Iraq and have begun a transition in Afghanistan. And now, working in Libya with friends and allies, we’ve demonstrated what collective action can achieve in the 21st century.

Of course, above all, today belongs to the people of Libya. This is a moment for them to remember all those who suffered and were lost under Qaddafi, and look forward to the promise of a new day. And I know the American people wish the people of Libya the very best in what will be a challenging but hopeful days, weeks, months and years ahead.

Thank you, very much.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Speech on Ending the War in Iraq Responsibly

Good afternoon, everybody. As a candidate for President, I pledged to bring the war in Iraq to a responsible end -- for the sake of our national security and to strengthen American leadership around the world. After taking office, I announced a new strategy that would end our combat mission in Iraq and remove all of our troops by the end of 2011.

As Commander-in-Chief, ensuring the success of this strategy has been one of my highest national security priorities. Last year, I announced the end to our combat mission in Iraq. And to date, we’ve removed more than 100,000 troops. Iraqis have taken full responsibility for their country’s security.

A few hours ago I spoke with Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki. I reaffirmed that the United States keeps its commitments. He spoke of the determination of the Iraqi people to forge their own future. We are in full agreement about how to move forward.

So today, I can report that, as promised, the rest of our troops in Iraq will come home by the end of the year. After nearly nine years, America’s war in Iraq will be over.

Over the next two months, our troops in Iraq -- tens of thousands of them -- will pack up their gear and board convoys for the journey home. The last American soldier[s] will cross the border out of Iraq with their heads held high, proud of their success, and knowing that the American people stand united in our support for our troops. That is how America’s military efforts in Iraq will end.

But even as we mark this important milestone, we’re also moving into a new phase in the relationship between the United States and Iraq. As of January 1st, and in keeping with our Strategic Framework Agreement with Iraq, it will be a normal relationship between sovereign nations, an equal partnership based on mutual interests and mutual respect.

In today’s conversation, Prime Minister Maliki and I agreed that a meeting of the Higher Coordinating Committee of the Strategic Framework Agreement will convene in the coming weeks. And I invited the Prime Minister to come to the White House in December, as we plan for all the important work that we have to do together. This will be a strong and enduring partnership. With our diplomats and civilian advisors in the lead, we’ll help Iraqis strengthen institutions that are just, representative and accountable. We’ll build new ties of trade and of commerce, culture and education, that unleash the potential of the Iraqi people. We’ll partner with an Iraq that contributes to regional security and peace, just as we insist that other nations respect Iraq’s sovereignty.

As I told Prime Minister Maliki, we will continue discussions on how we might help Iraq train and equip its forces -- again, just as we offer training and assistance to countries around the world. After all, there will be some difficult days ahead for Iraq, and the United States will continue to have an interest in an Iraq that is stable, secure and self-reliant. Just as Iraqis have persevered through war, I’m confident that they can build a future worthy of their history as a cradle of civilization.

Here at home, the coming months will be another season of homecomings. Across America, our servicemen and women will be reunited with their families. Today, I can say that our troops in Iraq will definitely be home for the holidays.

This December will be a time to reflect on all that we’ve been though in this war. I’ll join the American people in paying tribute to the more than one million Americans who have served in Iraq. We’ll honor our many wounded warriors and the nearly 4,500 American patriots -- and their Iraqi and coalition partners -- who gave their lives to this effort.

And finally, I would note that the end of war in Iraq reflects a larger transition. The tide of war is receding. The drawdown in Iraq allowed us to refocus our fight against al Qaeda and achieve major victories against its leadership -- including Osama bin Laden. Now, even as we remove our last troops from Iraq, we’re beginning to bring our troops home from Afghanistan, where we’ve begun a transition to Afghan security [and] leadership. When I took office, roughly 180,000 troops were deployed in both these wars. And by the end of this year that number will be cut in half, and make no mistake: It will continue to go down.

Meanwhile, yesterday marked the definitive end of the Qaddafi regime in Libya. And there, too, our military played a critical role in shaping a situation on the ground in which the Libyan people can build their own future. Today, NATO is working to bring this successful mission to a close.

So to sum up, the United States is moving forward from a position of strength. The long war in Iraq will come to an end by the end of this year. The transition in Afghanistan is moving forward, and our troops are finally coming home. As they do, fewer deployments and more time training will help keep our military the very best in the world. And as we welcome home our newest veterans, we’ll never stop working to give them and their families the care, the benefits and the opportunities that they have earned.

This includes enlisting our veterans in the greatest challenge that we now face as a nation -- creating opportunity and jobs in this country. Because after a decade of war, the nation that we need to build -- and the nation that we will build -- is our own; an America that sees its economic strength restored just as we’ve restored our leadership around the globe.

Thank you very much.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Speech to the Australian Parliament

Prime Minister Gillard, Leader Abbott, thank you both for your very warm welcome. Mr. Speaker, Mr. President, members of the House and Senate, ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for the honor of standing in this great chamber to reaffirm the bonds between the United States and the Commonwealth of Australia, two of the world’s oldest democracies and two of the world's oldest friends.

To you and the people of Australia, thank you for your extraordinary hospitality. And here, in this city -- this ancient “meeting place” -- I want to acknowledge the original inhabitants of this land, and one of the world’s oldest continuous cultures, the First Australians.

I first came to Australia as a child, traveling between my birthplace of Hawaii, and Indonesia, where I would live for four years. As an eight-year-old, I couldn’t always understand your foreign language. Last night I did try to talk some "Strine." Today I don’t want to subject you to any earbashing. I really do love that one and I will be introducing that into the vernacular in Washington.

But to a young American boy, Australia and its people -- your optimism, your easy-going ways, your irreverent sense of humor -- all felt so familiar. It felt like home. I’ve always wanted to return. I tried last year -- twice. But this is a Lucky Country, and today I feel lucky to be here as we mark the 60th anniversary of our unbreakable alliance.

The bonds between us run deep. In each other’s story we see so much of ourselves. Ancestors who crossed vast oceans -- some by choice, some in chains. Settlers who pushed west across sweeping plains. Dreamers who toiled with hearts and hands to lay railroads and to build cities. Generations of immigrants who, with each new arrival, add a new thread to the brilliant tapestry of our nations. And we are citizens who live by a common creed -- no matter who you are, no matter what you look like, everyone deserves a fair chance; everyone deserves a fair go.

Of course, progress in our society has not always come without tensions, or struggles to overcome a painful past. But we are countries with a willingness to face our imperfections, and to keep reaching for our ideals. That’s the spirit we saw in this chamber three years ago, as this nation inspired the world with a historic gesture of reconciliation with Indigenous Australians. It’s the spirit of progress, in America, which allows me to stand before you today, as President of the United States. And it’s the spirit I’ll see later today when I become the first U.S. President to visit the Northern Territory, where I’ll meet the Traditional Owners of the Land.

Nor has our progress come without great sacrifice. This morning, I was humbled and deeply moved by a visit to your war memorial to pay my respects to Australia’s fallen sons and daughters. Later today, in Darwin, I’ll join the Prime Minister in saluting our brave men and women in uniform. And it will be a reminder that -- from the trenches of the First World War to the mountains of Afghanistan -- Aussies and Americans have stood together, we have fought together, we have given lives together in every single major conflict of the past hundred years. Every single one.

This solidarity has sustained us through a difficult decade. We will never forget the attacks of 9/11, that took the lives not only of Americans, but people from many nations, including Australia. In the United States, we will never forget how Australia invoked the ANZUS Treaty -- for the first time ever -- showing that our two nations stood as one. And none of us will ever forget those we’ve lost to al Qaeda’s terror in the years since, including innocent Australians.

And that’s why, as both the Prime Minister and the Opposition Leader indicated, we are determined to succeed in Afghanistan. It is why I salute Australia -- outside of NATO, the largest contributor of troops to this vital mission. And it’s why we honor all those who have served there for our security, including 32 Australian patriots who gave their lives, among them Captain Bryce Duffy, Corporal Ashley Birt, and Lance Corporal Luke Gavin. We will honor their sacrifice by making sure that Afghanistan is never again used as a source for attacks against our people. Never again.

As two global partners, we stand up for the security and the dignity of people around the world. We see it when our rescue workers rush to help others in times of fire and drought and flooding rains. We see it when we partner to keep the peace -- from East Timor to the Balkans -- and when we pursue our shared vision: a world without nuclear weapons. We see it in the development that lifts up a child in Africa; the assistance that saves a family from famine; and when we extend our support to the people of the Middle East and North Africa, who deserve the same liberty that allows us to gather in this great hall of democracy.

This is the alliance we reaffirm today -- rooted in our values; renewed by every generation. This is the partnership we worked to deepen over the past three years. And today I can stand before you and say with confidence that the alliance between the United States and Australia has never been stronger. It has been to our past; our alliance continues to be indispensable to our future. So here, among close friends, I’d like to address the larger purpose of my visit to this region -- our efforts to advance security, prosperity and human dignity across the Asia Pacific.

For the United States, this reflects a broader shift. After a decade in which we fought two wars that cost us dearly, in blood and treasure, the United States is turning our attention to the vast potential of the Asia Pacific region. In just a few weeks, after nearly nine years, the last American troops will leave Iraq and our war there will be over. In Afghanistan, we’ve begun a transition -- a responsible transition -- so Afghans can take responsibility for their future and so coalition forces can begin to draw down. And with partners like Australia, we’ve struck major blows against al Qaeda and put that terrorist organization on the path to defeat, including delivering justice to Osama bin Laden.

So make no mistake, the tide of war is receding, and America is looking ahead to the future that we must build. From Europe to the Americas, we've strengthened alliances and partnerships. At home, we’re investing in the sources of our long-term economic strength -- the education of our children, the training of our workers, the infrastructure that fuels commerce, the science and the research that leads to new breakthroughs. We’ve made hard decisions to cut our deficit and put our fiscal house in order -- and we will continue to do more. Because our economic strength at home is the foundation of our leadership in the world, including here in the Asia Pacific.

Our new focus on this region reflects a fundamental truth -- the United States has been, and always will be, a Pacific nation. Asian immigrants helped build America, and millions of American families, including my own, cherish our ties to this region. From the bombing of Darwin to the liberation of Pacific islands, from the rice paddies of Southeast Asia to a cold Korean Peninsula, generations of Americans have served here, and died here -- so democracies could take root; so economic miracles could lift hundreds of millions to prosperity. Americans have bled with you for this progress, and we will not allow it -- we will never allow it to be reversed.

Here, we see the future. As the world’s fastest-growing region -- and home to more than half the global economy -- the Asia Pacific is critical to achieving my highest priority, and that's creating jobs and opportunity for the American people. With most of the world’s nuclear power and some half of humanity, Asia will largely define whether the century ahead will be marked by conflict or cooperation, needless suffering or human progress.

As President, I have, therefore, made a deliberate and strategic decision -- as a Pacific nation, the United States will play a larger and long-term role in shaping this region and its future, by upholding core principles and in close partnership with our allies and friends.

Let me tell you what this means. First, we seek security, which is the foundation of peace and prosperity. We stand for an international order in which the rights and responsibilities of all nations and all people are upheld. Where international law and norms are enforced. Where commerce and freedom of navigation are not impeded. Where emerging powers contribute to regional security, and where disagreements are resolved peacefully. That's the future that we seek.

Now, I know that some in this region have wondered about America’s commitment to upholding these principles. So let me address this directly. As the United States puts our fiscal house in order, we are reducing our spending. And, yes, after a decade of extraordinary growth in our military budgets -- and as we definitively end the war in Iraq, and begin to wind down the war in Afghanistan -- we will make some reductions in defense spending.

As we consider the future of our armed forces, we've begun a review that will identify our most important strategic interests and guide our defense priorities and spending over the coming decade. So here is what this region must know. As we end today’s wars, I have directed my national security team to make our presence and mission in the Asia Pacific a top priority. As a result, reductions in U.S. defense spending will not -- I repeat, will not -- come at the expense of the Asia Pacific.

My guidance is clear. As we plan and budget for the future, we will allocate the resources necessary to maintain our strong military presence in this region. We will preserve our unique ability to project power and deter threats to peace. We will keep our commitments, including our treaty obligations to allies like Australia. And we will constantly strengthen our capabilities to meet the needs of the 21st century. Our enduring interests in the region demand our enduring presence in the region. The United States is a Pacific power, and we are here to stay.

Indeed, we are already modernizing America’s defense posture across the Asia Pacific. It will be more broadly distributed -- maintaining our strong presence in Japan and the Korean Peninsula, while enhancing our presence in Southeast Asia. Our posture will be more flexible -- with new capabilities to ensure that our forces can operate freely. And our posture will be more sustainable, by helping allies and partners build their capacity, with more training and exercises.

We see our new posture here in Australia. The initiatives that the Prime Minister and I announced yesterday will bring our two militaries even closer together. We’ll have new opportunities to train with other allies and partners, from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean. And it will allow us to respond faster to the full range of challenges, including humanitarian crises and disaster relief.

Since World War II, Australians have warmly welcomed American service members who've passed through. On behalf of the American people, I thank you for welcoming those who will come next, as they ensure that our alliance stays strong and ready for the tests of our time.

We see America’s enhanced presence in the alliance that we’ve strengthened: In Japan, where our alliance remains a cornerstone of regional security. In Thailand, where we’re partnering for disaster relief. In the Philippines, where we’re increasing ship visits and training. And in South Korea, where our commitment to the security of the Republic of Korea will never waver. Indeed, we also reiterate our resolve to act firmly against any proliferation activities by North Korea. The transfer of nuclear materials or material by North Korea to states or non-state entities would be considered a grave threat to the United States and our allies, and we would hold North Korea fully accountable for the consequences of such action.

We see America’s enhanced presence across Southeast Asia -- in our partnership with Indonesia against piracy and violent extremism, and in our work with Malaysia to prevent proliferation; in the ships we’ll deploy to Singapore, and in our closer cooperation with Vietnam and Cambodia; and in our welcome of India as it “looks east” and plays a larger role as an Asian power.

At the same time, we’ll reengage with our regional organizations. Our work in Bali this week will mark my third meeting with ASEAN leaders, and I’ll be proud to be the first American President to attend the East Asia Summit. And together, I believe we can address shared challenges, such as proliferation and maritime security, including cooperation in the South China Sea.

Meanwhile, the United States will continue our effort to build a cooperative relationship with China. All of our nations -- Australia, the United States -- all of our nations have a profound interest in the rise of a peaceful and prosperous China. That's why the United States welcomes it. We’ve seen that China can be a partner from reducing tensions on the Korean Peninsula to preventing proliferation. And we’ll seek more opportunities for cooperation with Beijing, including greater communication between our militaries to promote understanding and avoid miscalculation. We will do this, even as we continue to speak candidly to Beijing about the importance of upholding international norms and respecting the universal human rights of the Chinese people.

A secure and peaceful Asia is the foundation for the second area in which America is leading again, and that's advancing our shared prosperity. History teaches us the greatest force the world has ever known for creating wealth and opportunity is free markets. So we seek economies that are open and transparent. We seek trade that is free and fair. And we seek an open international economic system, where rules are clear and every nation plays by them.

In Australia and America, we understand these principles. We’re among the most open economies on Earth. Six years into our landmark trade agreement, commerce between us has soared. Our workers are creating new partnerships and new products, like the advanced aircraft technologies we build together in Victoria. We’re the leading investor in Australia, and you invest more in America than you do in any other nation, creating good jobs in both countries.

We recognize that economic partnerships can’t just be about one nation extracting another’s resources. We understand that no long-term strategy for growth can be imposed from above. Real prosperity -- prosperity that fosters innovation, and prosperity that endures -- comes from unleashing our greatest economic resource, and that’s the entrepreneurial spirit, the talents of our people.

So even as America competes aggressively in Asian markets, we’re forging the economic partnerships that create opportunity for all. Building on our historic trade agreement with South Korea, we’re working with Australia and our other APEC partners to create a seamless regional economy. And with Australia and other partners, we’re on track to achieve our most ambitious trade agreement yet, and a potential model for the entire region -- the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

The United States remains the world’s largest and most dynamic economy. But in an interconnected world, we all rise and fall together. That’s why I pushed so hard to put the G20 at the front and center of global economic decision-making -- to give more nations a leadership role in managing the international economy, including Australia. And together, we saved the world economy from a depression. And now, our urgent challenge is to create the growth that puts people to work.

We need growth that is fair, where every nation plays by the rules; where workers rights are respected, and our businesses can compete on a level playing field; where the intellectual property and new technologies that fuel innovation are protected; and where currencies are market driven so no nation has an unfair advantage.

We also need growth that is broad -- not just for the few, but for the many -- with reforms that protect consumers from abuse and a global commitment to end the corruption that stifles growth. We need growth that is balanced, because we will all prosper more when countries with large surpluses take action to boost demand at home.

And we need growth that is sustainable. This includes the clean energy that creates green jobs and combats climate change, which cannot be denied. We see it in the stronger fires, the devastating floods, the Pacific islands confronting rising seas. And as countries with large carbon footprints, the United States and Australia have a special responsibility to lead.

Every nation will contribute to the solution in its own way -- and I know this issue is not without controversy, in both our countries. But what we can do -- and what we are doing -- is to work together to make unprecedented investments in clean energy, to increase energy efficiency, and to meet the commitments we made at Copenhagen and Cancun. We can do this, and we will.

As we grow our economies, we’ll also remember the link between growth and good governance -- the rule of law, transparent institutions, the equal administration of justice. Because history shows that, over the long run, democracy and economic growth go hand in hand. And prosperity without freedom is just another form of poverty.

And this brings me to the final area where we are leading -- our support for the fundamental rights of every human being. Every nation will chart its own course. Yet it is also true that certain rights are universal; among them, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion, and the freedom of citizens to choose their own leaders.

These are not American rights, or Australian rights, or Western rights. These are human rights. They stir in every soul, as we’ve seen in the democracies that have succeeded here in Asia. Other models have been tried and they have failed -- fascism and communism, rule by one man and rule by committee. And they failed for the same simple reason: They ignore the ultimate source of power and legitimacy -- the will of the people. Yes, democracy can be messy and rough -- I understand you mix it up quite well during Question Time. But whatever our differences of party or of ideology, we know in our democracies we are blessed with the greatest form of government ever known to man.

So as two great democracies, we speak up for those freedoms when they are threatened. We partner with emerging democracies, like Indonesia, to help strengthen the institutions upon which good governance depends. We encourage open government, because democracies depend on an informed and active citizenry. We help strengthen civil societies, because they empower our citizens to hold their governments accountable. And we advance the rights of all people -- women, minorities and indigenous cultures -- because when societies harness the potential of all their citizens, these societies are more successful, they are more prosperous and they are more just.

These principles have guided our approach to Burma, with a combination of sanctions and engagement. And today, Aung San Suu Kyi is free from house arrest. Some political prisoners have been released, and the government has begun a dialogue. Still, violations of human rights persist. So we will continue to speak clearly about the steps that must be taken for the government of Burma to have a better relationship with the United States.

This is the future we seek in the Asia Pacific -- security, prosperity and dignity for all. That’s what we stand for. That’s who we are. That’s the future we will pursue, in partnership with allies and friends, and with every element of American power. So let there be no doubt: In the Asia Pacific in the 21st century, the United States of America is all in.

Still, in times of great change and uncertainty, the future can seem unsettling. Across a vast ocean, it’s impossible to know what lies beyond the horizon. But if this vast region and its people teach us anything, it’s the yearning for liberty and progress will not be denied.

It’s why women in this country demanded that their voices be heard, making Australia the first nation to let women vote and run for parliament and, one day, become Prime Minister. It’s why the people took to the streets -- from Delhi to Seoul, from Manila to Jakarta -- to throw off colonialism and dictatorship and build some of the world’s largest democracies.

It’s why a soldier in a watchtower along the DMZ defends a free people in the South, and why a man from the North risks his life to escape across the border. Why soldiers in blue helmets keep the peace in a new nation. And why women of courage go into brothels to save young girls from modern-day slavery, which must come to an end.

It’s why men of peace in saffron robes faced beatings and bullets, and why every day -- from some of the world’s largest cities to dusty rural towns, in small acts of courage the world may never see -- a student posts a blog; a citizen signs a charter; an activist remains unbowed, imprisoned in his home, just to have the same rights that we cherish here today.

Men and women like these know what the world must never forget. The currents of history may ebb and flow, but over time they move -- decidedly, decisively -- in a single direction. History is on the side of the free -- free societies, free governments, free economies, free people. And the future belongs to those who stand firm for those ideals, in this region and around the world.

This is the story of the alliance we celebrate today. This is the essence of America’s leadership; it is the essence of our partnership. This is the work we will carry on together, for the security and prosperity and dignity of all people.

So God bless Australia. God bless America. And God bless the friendship between our two peoples.

Thank you very much.

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# Tribal Nations Conference Address

Thank you so much. Thank you. Everybody please have a seat. It is wonderful to see all of you. Thank you, Phyllis, for the wonderful introduction.

I want to thank all the tribal leaders who are here for making this year’s conference the most successful yet. I want to acknowledge outstanding members of my team that have helped pull this together, but, more importantly, day in and day out are thinking about what we can do to make sure that all the tribes that are represented have a voice here in Washington.

First of all, my outstanding Secretary of the Interior, Ken Salazar. We are so proud of him. Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, Larry Echo Hawk. Hey! And our outstanding solicitor for the Department of Interior, Hilary Tompkins.

Now, today, I’m here not only as President. As I’ve mentioned before, I am also here as an adopted member of the Crow Nation. So I’d like to recognize my adoptive Mom and Dad, Sonny and Mary Black Eagle, who are backstage. They’re going to be coming out here in a little bit. I’m so grateful they took me into their family. I bet they’re grateful that I never went through the “terrible twos” -- or “terrible teens.” They got me after I was a little more polished.

Ken Salazar, he works so hard on the issues that matter to all of you. And we also have members of Congress here as well who are great partners in this effort. And I finally -- I want to give a shout-out to the young people who are here as part of the White House program called “Champions for Change.” Really remarkable young people. I had a chance to meet them backstage. There’s Teressa Baldwin, who’s working to prevent teen suicide among Alaska Natives. LeVon Thomas, who's bringing green jobs to the Navajo Nation. Dallas Duplessis, who started a gardening club to promote healthy eating in Tulalip, Washington. She wrote, “Our goal is not to be couch potatoes, but to grow some potatoes.” I think Michelle would like that one. Standing in this room, with leaders of all ages, it’s impossible not to be optimistic about the future of Indian Country. Obviously, we face tough times. But you still believe that tomorrow can be better than today. You’re out there making your communities better places to live. What you expect -- and what you deserve -- is a federal government that helps, not hinders, your efforts. You deserve leaders in Washington who fight for you every single day.

That’s one of the reasons I ran for this office. When I visited the Crow Nation during the campaign, I said my job was not just to win an election; it was to make sure that Washington starts focusing on you. I promised a true government-to-government relationship -- a relationship that recognizes our sometimes painful history, a relationship that respects the unique heritage of Native Americans and that includes you in the dream that we all share.

And together, we're building that relationship. I told you I would bring tribal leaders to Washington to reflect -- to develop an agenda that reflects your hopes and your concerns. And now, for a third year in a row, we have kept that promise. I told you that when I was President, we wouldn’t just pay lip service to the idea of consultation. And today, we're holding every Cabinet agency responsible for working together with Indian tribes.

I told you I'd appoint Native Americans to senior positions in the White House. And I know that many of you have worked with Kim Teehee of Cherokee Nation, my senior policy advisor for Native American issues; and Charlie Galbraith of the Navajo Nation, in our office of Intergovernmental Affairs.

We’re working to make our government-to-government relationship even stronger. We asked Congress to recognize the power of tribes to prosecute perpetrators of domestic violence, whether they’re Indian or non-Indian. And in the wake of the Carcieri decision, we've asked Congress to restore the Secretary of the Interior’s authority to take land into trust for federally recognized Indian tribes.

So this new relationship represents a major step forward. It is change. But I promised even more than that. I told you that as President, I would work with you to tackle the most difficult problems facing Native American families. And that’s exactly what we’ve done. We passed the Tribal Law and Order Act, and began making Indian Country a safer place to live. We permanently authorized the Indian Health Care Improvement Act, and made quality health care accessible to more Native Americans.

Just this week, we streamlined leasing regulations, which will lead to more homes, more businesses, more renewable energy on the reservation. That’s what change is.

And finally, we said that even as we include Indian tribes in the broader promise of America, we're going to keep native traditions alive. So when Michelle launched Let’s Move! in Indian Country, she brought lacrosse players to the White House, and invited Native American children to plant the “three sisters” crops in the White House vegetable garden.

While our work together is far from over, today we can see what change looks like. It's the Native American-owned small business that's opening its doors, or a worker helping a school renovate. It’s new roads and houses. It’s wind turbines going up on tribal lands, and crime going down in tribal communities. That’s what change looks like.

So we should be proud of what we’ve done -- together. But of course, that should sharpen our resolve to do even more. Because as long as Native Americans face unemployment and poverty rates that are far higher than the national average, we’re going to have more work to do. And I wake up every day focused on how to get this economy growing and create jobs for every American, faster. We’re working to rebuild an economy where no matter who you are, no matter what you look like -– black, white, Latino, Asian, Native American –- you can make it if you try.

And that’s why I proposed the American Jobs Act -- to help all Americans, including First Americans, make it through these tough times. It’s why my administration has addressed the obstacles that are unique to Indian country by guaranteeing loans for homeowners and small business owners and tribes. It’s why we're working to equip your communities with high-speed Internet access.

And even as we meet at this moment, we have to prepare the next generation for the future -- which is why, earlier today, I signed an executive order to launch the White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education.

Secretary Duncan -- who is here -- Secretary Salazar, they’re going to work together on this effort to prepare Native American youth to compete for the high-skilled, good jobs of tomorrow. We’re going to find ways to reduce the dropout rate. We’re going to help students who've already dropped out re-enter the education system. And we’re going to strengthen our Tribal Colleges and Universities. They are cornerstones of their community and they deserve our support.

So we've made progress together. And a lot of that progress is possible because of all of you -- because the ideas that you’ve shared at the last two conferences, and that you’re sharing at this conference. And that’s why I’m looking forward to hearing the results of the discussion that you have today. I want to know what we can do to keep tackling the tough issues -- from education to jobs to health care to public safety.

It would be nice to say that the work was done, but we know the truth. We haven’t solved all our problems. We’ve got a long road ahead. But I believe that one day, we’re going to be able to look back on these years and say that this was a turning point. This was the moment when we began to build a strong middle class in Indian Country; the moment when businesses, large and small, began opening up in reservations; the moment when we stopped repeating the mistakes of the past, and began building a better future together, one that honors old traditions and welcomes every Native American into the American Dream.

We’ve got to finish what we started. So today, I want to thank all of you for everything that you do. I want to ask you to keep going. And when you go back home, making your communities better places to live, I want you all to know that you’ve got a partner in Washington. You have an administration that understands the challenges that you face and, most importantly, you’ve got a President who’s got your back.

So thank you. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

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# Address on the Economy at Osawatomie High School

Good afternoon, everybody.

Well, I want to start by thanking a few folks who’ve joined us today. We’ve got the mayor of Osawatomie, Phil Dudley is here. We have your superintendent Gary French in the house. And we have the principal of Osawatomie High, Doug Chisam. And I have brought your former governor, who is doing now an outstanding job as Secretary of Health and Human Services -- Kathleen Sebelius is in the house. We love Kathleen.

Well, it is great to be back in the state of Tex -- state of Kansas. I was giving Bill Self a hard time, he was here a while back. As many of you know, I have roots here. I’m sure you’re all familiar with the Obamas of Osawatomie. Actually, I like to say that I got my name from my father, but I got my accent -- and my values -- from my mother. She was born in Wichita. Her mother grew up in Augusta. Her father was from El Dorado. So my Kansas roots run deep.

My grandparents served during World War II. He was a soldier in Patton’s Army; she was a worker on a bomber assembly line. And together, they shared the optimism of a nation that triumphed over the Great Depression and over fascism. They believed in an America where hard work paid off, and responsibility was rewarded, and anyone could make it if they tried -- no matter who you were, no matter where you came from, no matter how you started out.

And these values gave rise to the largest middle class and the strongest economy that the world has ever known. It was here in America that the most productive workers, the most innovative companies turned out the best products on Earth. And you know what? Every American shared in that pride and in that success -- from those in the executive suites to those in middle management to those on the factory floor. So you could have some confidence that if you gave it your all, you’d take enough home to raise your family and send your kids to school and have your health care covered, put a little away for retirement.

Today, we’re still home to the world’s most productive workers. We’re still home to the world’s most innovative companies. But for most Americans, the basic bargain that made this country great has eroded. Long before the recession hit, hard work stopped paying off for too many people. Fewer and fewer of the folks who contributed to the success of our economy actually benefited from that success. Those at the very top grew wealthier from their incomes and their investments -- wealthier than ever before. But everybody else struggled with costs that were growing and paychecks that weren’t -- and too many families found themselves racking up more and more debt just to keep up.

Now, for many years, credit cards and home equity loans papered over this harsh reality. But in 2008, the house of cards collapsed. We all know the story by now: Mortgages sold to people who couldn’t afford them, or even sometimes understand them. Banks and investors allowed to keep packaging the risk and selling it off. Huge bets -- and huge bonuses -- made with other people’s money on the line. Regulators who were supposed to warn us about the dangers of all this, but looked the other way or didn’t have the authority to look at all.

It was wrong. It combined the breathtaking greed of a few with irresponsibility all across the system. And it plunged our economy and the world into a crisis from which we’re still fighting to recover. It claimed the jobs and the homes and the basic security of millions of people -- innocent, hardworking Americans who had met their responsibilities but were still left holding the bag.

And ever since, there’s been a raging debate over the best way to restore growth and prosperity, restore balance, restore fairness. Throughout the country, it’s sparked protests and political movements -- from the tea party to the people who’ve been occupying the streets of New York and other cities. It’s left Washington in a near-constant state of gridlock. It’s been the topic of heated and sometimes colorful discussion among the men and women running for president.

But, Osawatomie, this is not just another political debate. This is the defining issue of our time. This is a make-or-break moment for the middle class, and for all those who are fighting to get into the middle class. Because what’s at stake is whether this will be a country where working people can earn enough to raise a family, build a modest savings, own a home, secure their retirement. Now, in the midst of this debate, there are some who seem to be suffering from a kind of collective amnesia. After all that’s happened, after the worst economic crisis, the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, they want to return to the same practices that got us into this mess. In fact, they want to go back to the same policies that stacked the deck against middle-class Americans for way too many years. And their philosophy is simple: We are better off when everybody is left to fend for themselves and play by their own rules.

I am here to say they are wrong. I’m here in Kansas to reaffirm my deep conviction that we’re greater together than we are on our own. I believe that this country succeeds when everyone gets a fair shot, when everyone does their fair share, when everyone plays by the same rules. These aren’t Democratic values or Republican values. These aren’t 1 percent values or 99 percent values. They’re American values. And we have to reclaim them.

You see, this isn’t the first time America has faced this choice. At the turn of the last century, when a nation of farmers was transitioning to become the world’s industrial giant, we had to decide: Would we settle for a country where most of the new railroads and factories were being controlled by a few giant monopolies that kept prices high and wages low? Would we allow our citizens and even our children to work ungodly hours in conditions that were unsafe and unsanitary? Would we restrict education to the privileged few? Because there were people who thought massive inequality and exploitation of people was just the price you pay for progress.

Theodore Roosevelt disagreed. He was the Republican son of a wealthy family. He praised what the titans of industry had done to create jobs and grow the economy. He believed then what we know is true today, that the free market is the greatest force for economic progress in human history. It’s led to a prosperity and a standard of living unmatched by the rest of the world.

But Roosevelt also knew that the free market has never been a free license to take whatever you can from whomever you can. He understood the free market only works when there are rules of the road that ensure competition is fair and open and honest. And so he busted up monopolies, forcing those companies to compete for consumers with better services and better prices. And today, they still must. He fought to make sure businesses couldn’t profit by exploiting children or selling food or medicine that wasn’t safe. And today, they still can’t.

And in 1910, Teddy Roosevelt came here to Osawatomie and he laid out his vision for what he called a New Nationalism. “Our country,” he said, “…means nothing unless it means the triumph of a real democracy…of an economic system under which each man shall be guaranteed the opportunity to show the best that there is in him.”

Now, for this, Roosevelt was called a radical. He was called a socialist -- even a communist. But today, we are a richer nation and a stronger democracy because of what he fought for in his last campaign: an eight-hour work day and a minimum wage for women -- insurance for the unemployed and for the elderly, and those with disabilities; political reform and a progressive income tax.

Today, over 100 years later, our economy has gone through another transformation. Over the last few decades, huge advances in technology have allowed businesses to do more with less, and it’s made it easier for them to set up shop and hire workers anywhere they want in the world. And many of you know firsthand the painful disruptions this has caused for a lot of Americans.

Factories where people thought they would retire suddenly picked up and went overseas, where workers were cheaper. Steel mills that needed 100 -- or 1,000 employees are now able to do the same work with 100 employees, so layoffs too often became permanent, not just a temporary part of the business cycle. And these changes didn’t just affect blue-collar workers. If you were a bank teller or a phone operator or a travel agent, you saw many in your profession replaced by ATMs and the Internet.

Today, even higher-skilled jobs, like accountants and middle management can be outsourced to countries like China or India. And if you’re somebody whose job can be done cheaper by a computer or someone in another country, you don’t have a lot of leverage with your employer when it comes to asking for better wages or better benefits, especially since fewer Americans today are part of a union.

Now, just as there was in Teddy Roosevelt’s time, there is a certain crowd in Washington who, for the last few decades, have said, let’s respond to this economic challenge with the same old tune. “The market will take care of everything,” they tell us. If we just cut more regulations and cut more taxes -- especially for the wealthy -- our economy will grow stronger. Sure, they say, there will be winners and losers. But if the winners do really well, then jobs and prosperity will eventually trickle down to everybody else. And, they argue, even if prosperity doesn’t trickle down, well, that’s the price of liberty.

Now, it’s a simple theory. And we have to admit, it’s one that speaks to our rugged individualism and our healthy skepticism of too much government. That’s in America’s DNA. And that theory fits well on a bumper sticker. But here’s the problem: It doesn’t work. It has never worked. It didn’t work when it was tried in the decade before the Great Depression. It’s not what led to the incredible postwar booms of the ‘50s and ‘60s. And it didn’t work when we tried it during the last decade. I mean, understand, it’s not as if we haven’t tried this theory.

Remember in those years, in 2001 and 2003, Congress passed two of the most expensive tax cuts for the wealthy in history. And what did it get us? The slowest job growth in half a century. Massive deficits that have made it much harder to pay for the investments that built this country and provided the basic security that helped millions of Americans reach and stay in the middle class -- things like education and infrastructure, science and technology, Medicare and Social Security.

Remember that in those same years, thanks to some of the same folks who are now running Congress, we had weak regulation, we had little oversight, and what did it get us? Insurance companies that jacked up people’s premiums with impunity and denied care to patients who were sick, mortgage lenders that tricked families into buying homes they couldn’t afford, a financial sector where irresponsibility and lack of basic oversight nearly destroyed our entire economy.

We simply cannot return to this brand of “you’re on your own” economics if we’re serious about rebuilding the middle class in this country. We know that it doesn’t result in a strong economy. It results in an economy that invests too little in its people and in its future. We know it doesn’t result in a prosperity that trickles down. It results in a prosperity that’s enjoyed by fewer and fewer of our citizens.

Look at the statistics. In the last few decades, the average income of the top 1 percent has gone up by more than 250 percent to 1.2 million dollars per year. I’m not talking about millionaires, people who have a million dollars. I’m saying people who make a million dollars every single year. For the top one hundredth of 1 percent, the average income is now 27 million dollars per year. The typical CEO who used to earn about 30 times more than his or her worker now earns 110 times more. And yet, over the last decade the incomes of most Americans have actually fallen by about 6 percent.

Now, this kind of inequality -- a level that we haven’t seen since the Great Depression -- hurts us all. When middle-class families can no longer afford to buy the goods and services that businesses are selling, when people are slipping out of the middle class, it drags down the entire economy from top to bottom. America was built on the idea of broad-based prosperity, of strong consumers all across the country. That’s why a CEO like Henry Ford made it his mission to pay his workers enough so that they could buy the cars he made. It’s also why a recent study showed that countries with less inequality tend to have stronger and steadier economic growth over the long run.

Inequality also distorts our democracy. It gives an outsized voice to the few who can afford high-priced lobbyists and unlimited campaign contributions, and it runs the risk of selling out our democracy to the highest bidder. It leaves everyone else rightly suspicious that the system in Washington is rigged against them, that our elected representatives aren’t looking out for the interests of most Americans.

But there’s an even more fundamental issue at stake. This kind of gaping inequality gives lie to the promise that’s at the very heart of America: that this is a place where you can make it if you try. We tell people -- we tell our kids -- that in this country, even if you’re born with nothing, work hard and you can get into the middle class. We tell them that your children will have a chance to do even better than you do. That’s why immigrants from around the world historically have flocked to our shores.

And yet, over the last few decades, the rungs on the ladder of opportunity have grown farther and farther apart, and the middle class has shrunk. You know, a few years after World War II, a child who was born into poverty had a slightly better than 50-50 chance of becoming middle class as an adult. By 1980, that chance had fallen to around 40 percent. And if the trend of rising inequality over the last few decades continues, it’s estimated that a child born today will only have a one-in-three chance of making it to the middle class -- 33 percent.

It’s heartbreaking enough that there are millions of working families in this country who are now forced to take their children to food banks for a decent meal. But the idea that those children might not have a chance to climb out of that situation and back into the middle class, no matter how hard they work? That’s inexcusable. It is wrong. It flies in the face of everything that we stand for.

Now, fortunately, that’s not a future that we have to accept, because there’s another view about how we build a strong middle class in this country -- a view that’s truer to our history, a vision that’s been embraced in the past by people of both parties for more than 200 years. It’s not a view that we should somehow turn back technology or put up walls around America. It’s not a view that says we should punish profit or success or pretend that government knows how to fix all of society’s problems. It is a view that says in America we are greater together -- when everyone engages in fair play and everybody gets a fair shot and everybody does their fair share.

So what does that mean for restoring middle-class security in today’s economy? Well, it starts by making sure that everyone in America gets a fair shot at success. The truth is we’ll never be able to compete with other countries when it comes to who’s best at letting their businesses pay the lowest wages, who’s best at busting unions, who’s best at letting companies pollute as much as they want. That’s a race to the bottom that we can’t win, and we shouldn’t want to win that race. Those countries don’t have a strong middle class. They don’t have our standard of living.

The race we want to win, the race we can win is a race to the top -- the race for good jobs that pay well and offer middle-class security. Businesses will create those jobs in countries with the highest-skilled, highest-educated workers, the most advanced transportation and communication, the strongest commitment to research and technology.

The world is shifting to an innovation economy and nobody does innovation better than America. Nobody does it better. No one has better colleges. Nobody has better universities. Nobody has a greater diversity of talent and ingenuity. No one’s workers or entrepreneurs are more driven or more daring. The things that have always been our strengths match up perfectly with the demands of the moment.

But we need to meet the moment. We’ve got to up our game. We need to remember that we can only do that together. It starts by making education a national mission -- a national mission. Government and businesses, parents and citizens. In this economy, a higher education is the surest route to the middle class. The unemployment rate for Americans with a college degree or more is about half the national average. And their incomes are twice as high as those who don’t have a high school diploma. Which means we shouldn’t be laying off good teachers right now -- we should be hiring them. We shouldn’t be expecting less of our schools –- we should be demanding more. We shouldn’t be making it harder to afford college -- we should be a country where everyone has a chance to go and doesn’t rack up $100,000 of debt just because they went.

In today’s innovation economy, we also need a world-class commitment to science and research, the next generation of high-tech manufacturing. Our factories and our workers shouldn’t be idle. We should be giving people the chance to get new skills and training at community colleges so they can learn how to make wind turbines and semiconductors and high-powered batteries. And by the way, if we don’t have an economy that’s built on bubbles and financial speculation, our best and brightest won’t all gravitate towards careers in banking and finance. Because if we want an economy that’s built to last, we need more of those young people in science and engineering. This country should not be known for bad debt and phony profits. We should be known for creating and selling products all around the world that are stamped with three proud words: Made in America.

Today, manufacturers and other companies are setting up shop in the places with the best infrastructure to ship their products, move their workers, communicate with the rest of the world. And that’s why the over 1 million construction workers who lost their jobs when the housing market collapsed, they shouldn’t be sitting at home with nothing to do. They should be rebuilding our roads and our bridges, laying down faster railroads and broadband, modernizing our schools -- all the things other countries are already doing to attract good jobs and businesses to their shores.

Yes, business, and not government, will always be the primary generator of good jobs with incomes that lift people into the middle class and keep them there. But as a nation, we’ve always come together, through our government, to help create the conditions where both workers and businesses can succeed. And historically, that hasn’t been a partisan idea. Franklin Roosevelt worked with Democrats and Republicans to give veterans of World War II -- including my grandfather, Stanley Dunham -- the chance to go to college on the G.I. Bill. It was a Republican President, Dwight Eisenhower, a proud son of Kansas -- who started the Interstate Highway System, and doubled down on science and research to stay ahead of the Soviets.

Of course, those productive investments cost money. They’re not free. And so we’ve also paid for these investments by asking everybody to do their fair share. Look, if we had unlimited resources, no one would ever have to pay any taxes and we would never have to cut any spending. But we don’t have unlimited resources. And so we have to set priorities. If we want a strong middle class, then our tax code must reflect our values. We have to make choices.

Today that choice is very clear. To reduce our deficit, I’ve already signed nearly $1 trillion of spending cuts into law and I’ve proposed trillions more, including reforms that would lower the cost of Medicare and Medicaid.

But in order to structurally close the deficit, get our fiscal house in order, we have to decide what our priorities are. Now, most immediately, short term, we need to extend a payroll tax cut that’s set to expire at the end of this month. If we don’t do that, 160 million Americans, including most of the people here, will see their taxes go up by an average of $1,000 starting in January and it would badly weaken our recovery. That’s the short term.

In the long term, we have to rethink our tax system more fundamentally. We have to ask ourselves: Do we want to make the investments we need in things like education and research and high-tech manufacturing -- all those things that helped make us an economic superpower? Or do we want to keep in place the tax breaks for the wealthiest Americans in our country? Because we can’t afford to do both. That is not politics. That’s just math.

Now, so far, most of my Republican friends in Washington have refused under any circumstance to ask the wealthiest Americans to go to the same tax rate they were paying when Bill Clinton was president. So let’s just do a trip down memory lane here.

Keep in mind, when President Clinton first proposed these tax increases, folks in Congress predicted they would kill jobs and lead to another recession. Instead, our economy created nearly 23 million jobs and we eliminated the deficit. Today, the wealthiest Americans are paying the lowest taxes in over half a century. This isn’t like in the early ‘50s, when the top tax rate was over 90 percent. This isn’t even like the early ‘80s, when the top tax rate was about 70 percent. Under President Clinton, the top rate was only about 39 percent. Today, thanks to loopholes and shelters, a quarter of all millionaires now pay lower tax rates than millions of you, millions of middle-class families. Some billionaires have a tax rate as low as 1 percent. One percent.

That is the height of unfairness. It is wrong. It’s wrong that in the United States of America, a teacher or a nurse or a construction worker, maybe earns $50,000 a year, should pay a higher tax rate than somebody raking in $50 million. It’s wrong for Warren Buffett’s secretary to pay a higher tax rate than Warren Buffett. And by the way, Warren Buffett agrees with me. So do most Americans -- Democrats, independents and Republicans. And I know that many of our wealthiest citizens would agree to contribute a little more if it meant reducing the deficit and strengthening the economy that made their success possible.

This isn’t about class warfare. This is about the nation’s welfare. It’s about making choices that benefit not just the people who’ve done fantastically well over the last few decades, but that benefits the middle class, and those fighting to get into the middle class, and the economy as a whole.

Finally, a strong middle class can only exist in an economy where everyone plays by the same rules, from Wall Street to Main Street. As infuriating as it was for all of us, we rescued our major banks from collapse, not only because a full-blown financial meltdown would have sent us into a second Depression, but because we need a strong, healthy financial sector in this country.

But part of the deal was that we wouldn’t go back to business as usual. And that’s why last year we put in place new rules of the road that refocus the financial sector on what should be their core purpose: getting capital to the entrepreneurs with the best ideas, and financing millions of families who want to buy a home or send their kids to college.

Now, we’re not all the way there yet, and the banks are fighting us every inch of the way. But already, some of these reforms are being implemented.

If you’re a big bank or risky financial institution, you now have to write out a “living will” that details exactly how you’ll pay the bills if you fail, so that taxpayers are never again on the hook for Wall Street’s mistakes. There are also limits on the size of banks and new abilities for regulators to dismantle a firm that is going under. The new law bans banks from making risky bets with their customers’ deposits, and it takes away big bonuses and paydays from failed CEOs, while giving shareholders a say on executive salaries.

This is the law that we passed. We are in the process of implementing it now. All of this is being put in place as we speak. Now, unless you’re a financial institution whose business model is built on breaking the law, cheating consumers and making risky bets that could damage the entire economy, you should have nothing to fear from these new rules.

Some of you may know, my grandmother worked as a banker for most of her life -- worked her way up, started as a secretary, ended up being a vice president of a bank. And I know from her, and I know from all the people that I’ve come in contact with, that the vast majority of bankers and financial service professionals, they want to do right by their customers. They want to have rules in place that don’t put them at a disadvantage for doing the right thing. And yet, Republicans in Congress are fighting as hard as they can to make sure that these rules aren’t enforced.

I’ll give you a specific example. For the first time in history, the reforms that we passed put in place a consumer watchdog who is charged with protecting everyday Americans from being taken advantage of by mortgage lenders or payday lenders or debt collectors. And the man we nominated for the post, Richard Cordray, is a former attorney general of Ohio who has the support of most attorney generals, both Democrat and Republican, throughout the country. Nobody claims he’s not qualified.

But the Republicans in the Senate refuse to confirm him for the job; they refuse to let him do his job. Why? Does anybody here think that the problem that led to our financial crisis was too much oversight of mortgage lenders or debt collectors?

Of course not. Every day we go without a consumer watchdog is another day when a student, or a senior citizen, or a member of our Armed Forces -- because they are very vulnerable to some of this stuff -- could be tricked into a loan that they can’t afford -- something that happens all the time. And the fact is that financial institutions have plenty of lobbyists looking out for their interests. Consumers deserve to have someone whose job it is to look out for them. And I intend to make sure they do. And I want you to hear me, Kansas: I will veto any effort to delay or defund or dismantle the new rules that we put in place.

We shouldn’t be weakening oversight and accountability. We should be strengthening oversight and accountability. I’ll give you another example. Too often, we’ve seen Wall Street firms violating major anti-fraud laws because the penalties are too weak and there’s no price for being a repeat offender. No more. I’ll be calling for legislation that makes those penalties count so that firms don’t see punishment for breaking the law as just the price of doing business.

The fact is this crisis has left a huge deficit of trust between Main Street and Wall Street. And major banks that were rescued by the taxpayers have an obligation to go the extra mile in helping to close that deficit of trust. At minimum, they should be remedying past mortgage abuses that led to the financial crisis. They should be working to keep responsible homeowners in their home. We’re going to keep pushing them to provide more time for unemployed homeowners to look for work without having to worry about immediately losing their house.

The big banks should increase access to refinancing opportunities to borrowers who haven’t yet benefited from historically low interest rates. And the big banks should recognize that precisely because these steps are in the interest of middle-class families and the broader economy, it will also be in the banks’ own long-term financial interest. What will be good for consumers over the long term will be good for the banks.

Investing in things like education that give everybody a chance to succeed. A tax code that makes sure everybody pays their fair share. And laws that make sure everybody follows the rules. That’s what will transform our economy. That’s what will grow our middle class again. In the end, rebuilding this economy based on fair play, a fair shot, and a fair share will require all of us to see that we have a stake in each other’s success. And it will require all of us to take some responsibility.

It will require parents to get more involved in their children’s education. It will require students to study harder. It will require some workers to start studying all over again. It will require greater responsibility from homeowners not to take out mortgages they can’t afford. They need to remember that if something seems too good to be true, it probably is.

It will require those of us in public service to make government more efficient and more effective, more consumer-friendly, more responsive to people’s needs. That’s why we’re cutting programs that we don’t need to pay for those we do. That’s why we’ve made hundreds of regulatory reforms that will save businesses billions of dollars. That’s why we’re not just throwing money at education, we’re challenging schools to come up with the most innovative reforms and the best results.

And it will require American business leaders to understand that their obligations don’t just end with their shareholders. Andy Grove, the legendary former CEO of Intel, put it best. He said, “There is another obligation I feel personally, given that everything I’ve achieved in my career, and a lot of what Intel has achieved…were made possible by a climate of democracy, an economic climate and investment climate provided by the United States.”

This broader obligation can take many forms. At a time when the cost of hiring workers in China is rising rapidly, it should mean more CEOs deciding that it’s time to bring jobs back to the United States -- not just because it’s good for business, but because it’s good for the country that made their business and their personal success possible.

I think about the Big Three auto companies who, during recent negotiations, agreed to create more jobs and cars here in America, and then decided to give bonuses not just to their executives, but to all their employees, so that everyone was invested in the company’s success.

I think about a company based in Warroad, Minnesota. It’s called Marvin Windows and Doors. During the recession, Marvin’s competitors closed dozens of plants, let hundreds of workers go. But Marvin’s did not lay off a single one of their 4,000 or so employees -- not one. In fact, they’ve only laid off workers once in over a hundred years. Mr. Marvin’s grandfather even kept his eight employees during the Great Depression.

Now, at Marvin’s when times get tough, the workers agree to give up some perks and some pay, and so do the owners. As one owner said, “You can’t grow if you’re cutting your lifeblood -- and that’s the skills and experience your workforce delivers.” For the CEO of Marvin’s, it’s about the community. He said, “These are people we went to school with. We go to church with them. We see them in the same restaurants. Indeed, a lot of us have married local girls and boys. We could be anywhere, but we are in Warroad.”

That’s how America was built. That’s why we’re the greatest nation on Earth. That’s what our greatest companies understand. Our success has never just been about survival of the fittest. It’s about building a nation where we’re all better off. We pull together. We pitch in. We do our part. We believe that hard work will pay off, that responsibility will be rewarded, and that our children will inherit a nation where those values live on.

And it is that belief that rallied thousands of Americans to Osawatomie -- maybe even some of your ancestors -- on a rain-soaked day more than a century ago. By train, by wagon, on buggy, bicycle, on foot, they came to hear the vision of a man who loved this country and was determined to perfect it.

“We are all Americans,” Teddy Roosevelt told them that day. “Our common interests are as broad as the continent.” In the final years of his life, Roosevelt took that same message all across this country, from tiny Osawatomie to the heart of New York City, believing that no matter where he went, no matter who he was talking to, everybody would benefit from a country in which everyone gets a fair chance.

And well into our third century as a nation, we have grown and we’ve changed in many ways since Roosevelt’s time. The world is faster and the playing field is larger and the challenges are more complex. But what hasn’t changed -- what can never change -- are the values that got us this far. We still have a stake in each other’s success. We still believe that this should be a place where you can make it if you try. And we still believe, in the words of the man who called for a New Nationalism all those years ago, “The fundamental rule of our national life,” he said, “the rule which underlies all others -- is that, on the whole, and in the long run, we shall go up or down together.” And I believe America is on the way up.

Thank you. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Weekly Address Honoring Iraq War Troops & Veterans

This week marked a historic moment in the life of our country and our military.

For nearly nine years, our nation has been at war in Iraq. More than 1.5 million Americans have served there with honor, skill, and bravery. Tens of thousands have been wounded. Military families have sacrificed greatly -- none more so than the families of those nearly 4,500 Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice. All of them – our troops, veterans, and their families -- will always have the thanks of a grateful nation.

On Thursday, the colors our Armed Forces fought under in Iraq were formally cased in a ceremony in Baghdad before beginning their journey back home. Our troops are now preparing to make their final march across the border and out of the country. Iraq’s future will be in the hands of its own people. Our war there will be over. All of our troops will be out of Iraq. And this holiday season, all of us can finally say: Welcome home. This is an extraordinary achievement -- one made possible by the hard work and sacrifice of the men and women who had the courage to serve. And there’s a lesson to learn from that -- a lesson about our character as a nation.

See, there’s a reason our military is the most respected institution in America. They don’t see themselves or each other as Democrats first or Republicans first. They see themselves as Americans first.

For all our differences and disagreements, they remind us that we are all a part of something bigger; that we are one nation and one people. And for all our challenges, they remind us that there is nothing we can’t do when we stick together.

They’re the finest our nation has to offer. Many will remain in the military and go on to the next mission. Others will take off the uniform and become veterans. But their commitment to service doesn’t end when they take off the uniform -- in fact, I’m confident the story of their service to America is just beginning.

After years of rebuilding Iraq, it is time to enlist our veterans and all our people in the work of rebuilding America. Folks like my grandfather came back from World War II to form the backbone of the largest middle class in history. And today’s generation of veterans -- the 9/11 Generation of veterans -- is armed with the skills, discipline, and leadership to attack the defining challenge of our time: rebuilding an economy where hard work pays off, where responsibility is rewarded, where anyone can make it if they try.

Now it is up to us to serve these brave men and women as well as they serve us. Every day, they meet their responsibilities to their families and their country. Now it’s time to meet ours -- especially those of us who you sent to serve in Washington. This cannot be a country where division and discord stand in the way of our progress. This is a moment where we must come together to ensure that every American has the chance to work for a decent living, own their own home, send their kids to college, and secure a decent retirement.

This is a moment for us to build a country that lives up to the ideals that so many of our bravest Americans have fought and even died for. That is our highest obligation as citizens. That is the welcome home that our troops deserve.

Thank you.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address on Military Strategy Review

Good morning, everybody. The United States of America is the greatest force for freedom and security that the world has ever known. And in no small measure, that's because we've built the best-trained, best-led, best-equipped military in history -- and as Commander-in-Chief, I'm going to keep it that way.

Indeed, all of us on this stage -- every single one of us -- have a profound responsibility to every soldier, sailor, airman, Marine and Coast Guardsman who puts their life on the line for America. We owe them a strategy with well-defined goals; to only send them into harm's way when it's absolutely necessary; to give them the equipment and the support that they need to get the job done; and to care for them and their families when they come home. That is our solemn obligation.

And over the past three years, that's what we've done. We've continued to make historic investments in our military -- our troops and their capabilities, our military families and our veterans. And thanks to their extraordinary service, we've ended our war in Iraq. We've decimated al Qaeda's leadership. We've delivered justice to Osama bin Laden, and we've put that terrorist network on the path to defeat. We've made important progress in Afghanistan, and we've begun to transition so Afghans can assume more responsibility for their own security. We joined allies and partners to protect the Libyan people as they ended the regime of Muammar Qaddafi.

Now we're turning the page on a decade of war. Three years ago, we had some 180,000 troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. Today, we've cut that number in half. And as the transition in Afghanistan continues, more of our troops will continue to come home. More broadly, around the globe we've strengthened alliances, forged new partnerships, and served as a force for universal rights and human dignity.

In short, we've succeeded in defending our nation, taking the fight to our enemies, reducing the number of Americans in harm's way, and we've restored America's global leadership. That makes us safer and it makes us stronger. And that's an achievement that every American -- especially those Americans who are proud to wear the uniform of the United States Armed Forces -- should take great pride in.

This success has brought our nation, once more, to a moment of transition. Even as our troops continue to fight in Afghanistan, the tide of war is receding. Even as our forces prevail in today's missions, we have the opportunity -- and the responsibility -- to look ahead to the force that we are going to need in the future.

At the same time, we have to renew our economic strength here at home, which is the foundation of our strength around the world. And that includes putting our fiscal house in order. To that end, the Budget Control Act passed by Congress last year -- with the support of Republicans and Democrats alike -- mandates reductions in federal spending, including defense spending. I've insisted that we do that responsibly. The security of our nation and the lives of our men and women in uniform depend on it.

That's why I called for this comprehensive defense review -- to clarify our strategic interests in a fast-changing world, and to guide our defense priorities and spending over the coming decade -- because the size and the structure of our military and defense budgets have to be driven by a strategy, not the other way around. Moreover, we have to remember the lessons of history. We can't afford to repeat the mistakes that have been made in the past -- after World War II, after Vietnam -- when our military was left ill prepared for the future. As Commander in Chief, I will not let that happen again. Not on my watch.

We need a start -- we need a smart, strategic set of priorities. The new guidance that the Defense Department is releasing today does just that. I want to thank Secretary Panetta and General Dempsey for their extraordinary leadership during this process. I want to thank the service secretaries and chiefs, the combatant commanders and so many defense leaders -- military and civilian, active, Guard and reserve -- for their contributions. Many of us met repeatedly -- asking tough questions, challenging our own assumptions and making hard choices. And we've come together today around an approach that will keep our nation safe and our military the finest that the world have ever known.

This review also benefits from the contributions of leaders from across my national security team -- from the departments of State, Homeland Security and Veterans Affairs, as well as the intelligence community. And this is critical, because meeting the challenges of our time cannot be the work of our military alone -- or the United States alone. It requires all elements of our national power, working together in concert with our allies and our partners.

So I'm going to let Leon and Marty go into the details. But I just want to say that this effort reflects the guidance that I personally gave throughout this process. Yes, the tide of war is receding. But the question that this strategy answers is what kind of military will we need long after the wars of the last decade are over. And today, we're fortunate to be moving forward from a position of strength.

As I made clear in Australia, we will be strengthening our presence in the Asia Pacific, and budget reductions will not come at the expense of that critical region. We're going to continue investing in our critical partnerships and alliances, including NATO, which has demonstrated time and again -- most recently in Libya -- that it's a force multiplier. We will stay vigilant, especially in the Middle East.

As we look beyond the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan -- and the end of long-term nation-building with large military footprints -- we'll be able to ensure our security with smaller conventional ground forces. We'll continue to get rid of outdated Cold War-era systems so that we can invest in the capabilities that we need for the future, including intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, counterterrorism, countering weapons of mass destruction and the ability to operate in environments where adversaries try to deny us access.

So, yes, our military will be leaner, but the world must know the United States is going to maintain our military superiority with armed forces that are agile, flexible and ready for the full range of contingencies and threats.

We're also going to keep faith with those who serve, by making sure our troops have the equipment and capabilities they need to succeed, and by prioritizing efforts that focus on wounded warriors, mental health and the well-being of our military families. And as our newest veterans rejoin civilian life, we'll keep working to give our veterans the care, the benefits and job opportunities that they deserve and that they have earned.

Finally, although today is about our defense strategy, I want to close with a word about the defense budget that will flow from this strategy. The details will be announced in the coming weeks. Some will no doubt say that the spending reductions are too big; others will say that they're too small. It will be easy to take issue with a particular change in a particular program. But I'd encourage all of us to remember what President Eisenhower once said -- that "each proposal must be weighed in the light of a broader consideration: the need to maintain balance in and among national programs." After a decade of war, and as we rebuild the source of our strength -- at home and abroad -- it's time to restore that balance.

I think it's important for all Americans to remember, over the past 10 years, since 9/11, our defense budget grew at an extraordinary pace. Over the next 10 years, the growth in the defense budget will slow, but the fact of the matter is this: It will still grow, because we have global responsibilities that demand our leadership. In fact, the defense budget will still be larger than it was toward the end of the Bush Administration. And I firmly believe, and I think the American people understand, that we can keep our military strong and our nation secure with a defense budget that continues to be larger than roughly the next 10 countries combined.

So again, I want to thank Secretary Panetta, Chairman Dempsey, all the defense leaders who are on this stage, and some who are absent, for their leadership and their partnership throughout this process. Our men and women in uniform give their very best to America every single day, and in return they deserve the very best from America. And I thank all of you for the commitment to the goal that we all share: keeping America strong and secure in the 21st century, and keeping our Armed Forces the very best in the world.

And with that, I will turn this discussion over to Leon and to Marty, who can explain more and take your questions.

So thank you very much. I understand this is the first time a President has done this. It's a pretty nice room.

Thank you guys.

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# Third Presidential State of the Union Address

[AUTHENTICITY CERTIFIED: Text version below transcribed directly from audio]

Thank you. Thank you. Please be seated.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, members of Congress, distinguished guests, and fellow Americans:

Last month, I went to Andrews Air Force Base and welcomed home some of our last troops to serve in Iraq. Together, we offered a final, proud salute to the colors under which more than a million of our fellow citizens fought -- and several thousand gave their lives.

We gather tonight knowing that this generation of heroes has made the United States safer and more respected around the world. For the first time in nine years, there are no Americans fighting in Iraq. For the first time in two decades, Osama bin Laden is not a threat to this country. Most of al Qaeda’s top lieutenants have been defeated. The Taliban’s momentum has been broken, and some troops in Afghanistan have begun to come home.

These achievements are a testament to the courage, selflessness and teamwork of America’s Armed Forces. At a time when too many of our institutions have let us down, they exceed all expectations. They’re not consumed with personal ambition. They don’t obsess over their differences. They focus on the mission at hand. They work together.

Imagine what we could accomplish if we followed their example. Think about the America within our reach: a country that leads the world in educating its people; an America that attracts a new generation of high-tech manufacturing and high-paying jobs; a future where we’re in control of our own energy, and our security and prosperity aren’t so tied to unstable parts of the world; an economy built to last, where hard work pays off, and responsibility is rewarded.

We can do this. I know we can, because we’ve done it before. At the end of World War II, when another generation of heroes returned home from combat, they built the strongest economy and middle class the world has ever known. My grandfather, a veteran of Patton’s Army, got the chance to go to college on the GI Bill. My grandmother, who worked on a bomber assembly line, was part of a workforce that turned out the best products on Earth. The two of them shared the optimism of a nation that had triumphed over a depression and fascism. They understood they were part of something larger; that they were contributing to a story of success that every American had a chance to share -- the basic American promise that if you worked hard, you could do well enough to raise a family, own a home, send your kids to college, and put a little away for retirement.

The defining issue of our time is how to keep that promise alive. No challenge is more urgent. No debate is more important. We can either settle for a country where a shrinking number of people do really well while a growing number of Americans barely get by, or we can restore an economy where everyone gets a fair shot, and everyone does their fair share, and everyone plays by the same set of rules. What’s at stake aren’t Democratic values or Republican values, but American values. And we have to reclaim them.

Let’s remember how we got here. Long before the recession, jobs and manufacturing began leaving our shores. Technology made businesses more efficient, but also made some jobs obsolete. Folks at the top saw their incomes rise like never before, but most hardworking Americans struggled with costs that were growing, paychecks that weren’t, and personal debt that kept piling up.

In 2008, the house of cards collapsed. We learned that mortgages had been sold to people who couldn’t afford or understand them. Banks had made huge bets and bonuses with other people’s money. Regulators had looked the other way, or didn’t have the authority to stop the bad behavior.

It was wrong. It was irresponsible. And it plunged our economy into a crisis that put millions out of work, saddled us with more debt, and left innocent, hardworking Americans holding the bag. In the six months before I took office, we lost nearly 4 million jobs. And we lost another 4 million before our policies were in full effect.

Those are the facts. But so are these: In the last 22 months, businesses have created more than 3 million jobs.

Last year, they created the most jobs since 2005. American manufacturers are hiring again, creating jobs for the first time since the late 1990s. Together, we’ve agreed to cut the deficit by more than 2 trillion dollars. And we’ve put in place new rules to hold Wall Street accountable, so a crisis like this never happens again.

The state of our Union is getting stronger. And we’ve come too far to turn back now. As long as I’m President, I will work with anyone in this chamber to build on this momentum. But I intend to fight obstruction with action, and I will oppose any effort to return to the very same policies that brought on this economic crisis in the first place.

No, we will not go back to an economy weakened by outsourcing, bad debt, and phony financial profits. Tonight, I want to speak about how we move forward, and lay out a blueprint for an economy that’s built to last -- an economy built on American manufacturing, American energy, skills for American workers, and a renewal of American values.

Now, this blueprint begins with American manufacturing.

On the day I took office, our auto industry was on the verge of collapse. Some even said we should let it die. With a million jobs at stake, I refused to let that happen. In exchange for help, we demanded responsibility. We got workers and automakers to settle their differences. We got the industry to retool and restructure. Today, General Motors is back on top as the world’s number-one automaker. Chrysler has grown faster in the U.S. than any major car company. Ford is investing billions in U.S. plants and factories. And together, the entire industry added nearly 160,000 jobs.

We bet on American workers. We bet on American ingenuity. And tonight, the American auto industry is back.

What’s happening in Detroit can happen in other industries. It can happen in Cleveland and Pittsburgh and Raleigh. We can’t bring every job back that’s left our shore. But right now, it’s getting more expensive to do business in places like China. Meanwhile, America is more productive. A few weeks ago, the CEO of Master Lock told me that it now makes business sense for him to bring jobs back home. Today, for the first time in 15 years, Master Lock’s unionized plant in Milwaukee is running at full capacity.

So we have a huge opportunity, at this moment, to bring manufacturing back. But we have to seize it. Tonight, my message to business leaders is simple: Ask yourselves what you can do to bring jobs back to your country, and your country will do everything we can to help you succeed.

We should start with our tax code. Right now, companies get tax breaks for moving jobs and profits overseas. Meanwhile, companies that choose to stay in America get hit with one of the highest tax rates in the world. It makes no sense, and everyone knows it. So let’s change it.

First, if you’re a business that wants to outsource jobs, you shouldn’t get a tax deduction for doing it. That money should be used to cover moving expenses for companies like Master Lock that decide to bring jobs home.

Second, no American company should be able to avoid paying its fair share of taxes by moving jobs and profits overseas. From now on, every multinational company should have to pay a basic minimum tax. And every penny should go towards lowering taxes for companies that choose to stay here and hire here in America.

Third, if you’re an American manufacturer, you should get a bigger tax cut. If you’re a high-tech manufacturer, we should double the tax deduction you get for making your products here. And if you want to relocate in a community that was hit hard when a factory left town, you should get help financing a new plant, equipment, or training for new workers.

So my message is simple. It is time to stop rewarding businesses that ship jobs overseas, and start rewarding companies that create jobs right here in America. Send me these tax reforms, and I will sign them right away.

We’re also making it easier for American businesses to sell products all over the world. Two years ago, I set a goal of doubling U.S. exports over five years. With the bipartisan trade agreements we signed into law, we’re on track to meet that goal ahead of schedule. And soon, there will be millions of new customers for American goods in Panama, Colombia, and South Korea. Soon, there will be new cars on the streets of Seoul imported from Detroit, and Toledo, and Chicago.

I will go anywhere in the world to open new markets for American products. And I will not stand by when our competitors don’t play by the rules. We’ve brought trade cases against China at nearly twice the rate as the last Administration -- and it’s made a difference. Over a thousand Americans are working today because we stopped a surge in Chinese tires. But we need to do more. It’s not right when another country lets our movies, music, and software be pirated. It’s not fair when foreign manufacturers have a leg up on ours only because they’re heavily subsidized.

Tonight, I’m announcing the creation of a Trade Enforcement Unit that will be charged with investigating unfair trading practices in countries like China. There will be more inspections to prevent counterfeit or unsafe goods from crossing our borders. And this Congress should make sure that no foreign company has an advantage over American manufacturing when it comes to accessing financing or new markets like Russia. Our workers are the most productive on Earth, and if the playing field is level, I promise you -- America will always win.

I also hear from many business leaders who want to hire in the United States but can’t find workers with the right skills. Growing industries in science and technology have twice as many openings as we have workers who can do the job. Think about that -- openings at a time when millions of Americans are looking for work. It’s inexcusable. And we know how to fix it.

Jackie Bray is a single mom from North Carolina who was laid off from her job as a mechanic. Then Siemens opened a gas turbine factory in Charlotte, and formed a partnership with Central Piedmont Community College. The company helped the college design courses in laser and robotics training. It paid Jackie’s tuition, then hired her to help operate their plant.

I want every American looking for work to have the same opportunity as Jackie did. Join me in a national commitment to train 2 million Americans with skills that will lead directly to a job. My Administration has already lined up more companies that want to help. Model partnerships between businesses like Siemens and community colleges in places like Charlotte, and Orlando, and Louisville are up and running. Now you need to give more community colleges the resources they need to become community career centers -- places that teach people skills that businesses are looking for right now, from data management to high-tech manufacturing.

And I want to cut through the maze of confusing training programs, so that from now on, people like Jackie have one program, one website, and one place to go for all the information and help that they need. It is time to turn our unemployment system into a reemployment system that puts people to work.

These reforms will help people get jobs that are open today. But to prepare for the jobs of tomorrow, our commitment to skills and education has to start earlier.

For less than 1 percent of what our nation spends on education each year, we’ve convinced nearly every state in the country to raise their standards for teaching and learning -- the first time that’s happened in a generation.

But challenges remain. And we know how to solve them.

At a time when other countries are doubling down on education, tight budgets have forced states to lay off thousands of teachers. We know a good teacher can increase the lifetime income of a classroom by over 250,000 dollars. A great teacher can offer an escape from poverty to the child who dreams beyond his circumstance. Every person in this chamber can point to a teacher who changed the trajectory of their lives. Most teachers work tirelessly, with modest pay, sometimes digging into their own pocket for school supplies -- just to make a difference.

Teachers matter. So instead of bashing them, or defending the status quo, let’s offer schools a deal. Give them the resources to keep good teachers on the job, and reward the best ones. And in return, grant schools flexibility: to teach with creativity and passion; to stop teaching to the test; and to replace teachers who just aren’t helping kids learn. That’s a bargain worth making.

We also know that when students don’t walk away from their education, more of them walk the stage to get their diploma. When students are not allowed to drop out, they do better. So tonight, I am proposing that every state -- every state -- requires that all students stay in high school until they graduate or turn 18.

When kids do graduate, the most daunting challenge can be the cost of college. At a time when Americans owe more in tuition debt than credit card debt, this Congress needs to stop the interest rates on student loans from doubling in July.

Extend the tuition tax credit we started that saves millions of middle-class families thousands of dollars, and give more young people the chance to earn their way through college by doubling the number of work-study jobs in the next five years.

Of course, it’s not enough for us to increase student aid. We can’t just keep subsidizing skyrocketing tuition; we’ll run out of money. States also need to do their part, by making higher education a higher priority in their budgets. And colleges and universities have to do their part by working to keep costs down.

Recently, I spoke with a group of college presidents who’ve done just that. Some schools redesign courses to help students finish more quickly. Some use better technology. The point is, it’s possible. So let me put colleges and universities on notice: If you can’t stop tuition from going up, the funding you get from taxpayers will go down. Higher education can’t be a luxury -- it is an economic imperative that every family in America should be able to afford.

Let’s also remember that hundreds of thousands of talented, hardworking students in this country face another challenge: the fact that they aren’t yet American citizens. Many were brought here as small children, are American through and through, yet they live every day with the threat of deportation. Others came more recently, to study business and science and engineering, but as soon as they get their degree, we send them home to invent new products and create new jobs somewhere else.

That doesn’t make sense.

I believe as strongly as ever that we should take on illegal immigration. That’s why my Administration has put more boots on the border than ever before. That’s why there are fewer illegal crossings than when I took office. The opponents of action are out of excuses. We should be working on comprehensive immigration reform right now.

But if election-year politics keeps Congress from acting on a comprehensive plan, let’s at least agree to stop expelling responsible young people who want to staff our labs, start new businesses, defend this country. Send me a law that gives them the chance to earn their citizenship. I will sign it right away.

You see, an economy built to last is one where we encourage the talent and ingenuity of every person in this country. That means women should earn equal pay for equal work. It means we should support everyone who’s willing to work, and every risk-taker and entrepreneur who aspires to become the next Steve Jobs.

After all, innovation is what America has always been about. Most new jobs are created in start-ups and small businesses. So let’s pass an agenda that helps them succeed. Tear down regulations that prevent aspiring entrepreneurs from getting the financing to grow. Expand tax relief to small businesses that are raising wages and creating good jobs. Both parties agree on these ideas. So put them in a bill, and get it on my desk this year.

Innovation also demands basic research. Today, the discoveries taking place in our federally financed labs and universities could lead to new treatments that kill cancer cells but leave healthy ones untouched. New lightweight vests for cops and soldiers that can stop any bullet. Don’t gut these investments in our budget. Don’t let other countries win the race for the future. Support the same kind of research and innovation that led to the computer chip and the Internet; to new American jobs and new American industries.

And nowhere is the promise of innovation greater than in American-made energy. Over the last three years, we’ve opened millions of new acres for oil and gas exploration, and tonight, I’m directing my Administration to open more than 75 percent of our potential offshore oil and gas resources. Right now -- right now -- American oil production is the highest that it’s been in eight years. That’s right -- eight years. Not only that -- last year, we relied less on foreign oil than in any of the past 16 years.

But with only 2 percent of the world’s oil reserves, oil isn’t enough. This country needs an all-out, all-of-the-above strategy that develops every available source of American energy. A strategy that’s cleaner, cheaper, and full of new jobs.

We have a supply of natural gas that can last America nearly 100 years. And my Administration will take every possible action to safely develop this energy. Experts believe this will support more than 600,000 jobs by the end of the decade. And I’m requiring all companies that drill for gas on public lands to disclose the chemicals they use. Because America will develop this resource without putting the health and safety of our citizens at risk.

The development of natural gas will create jobs and power trucks and factories that are cleaner and cheaper, proving that we don’t have to choose between our environment and our economy. And by the way, it was public research dollars, over the course of 30 years, that helped develop the technologies to extract all this natural gas out of shale rock –- reminding us that government support is critical in helping businesses get new energy ideas off the ground.

Now, what’s true for natural gas is just as true for clean energy. In three years, our partnership with the private sector has already positioned America to be the world’s leading manufacturer of high-tech batteries. Because of federal investments, renewable energy use has nearly doubled, and thousands of Americans have jobs because of it.

When Bryan Ritterby was laid off from his job making furniture, he said he worried that at 55, no one would give him a second chance. But he found work at Energetx, a wind turbine manufacturer in Michigan. Before the recession, the factory only made luxury yachts. Today, it’s hiring workers like Bryan, who said, “I’m proud to be working in the industry of the future.”

Our experience with shale gas, our experience with natural gas, shows us that the payoffs on these public investments don’t always come right away. Some technologies don’t pan out; some companies fail. But I will not walk away from the promise of clean energy. I will not walk away from workers like Bryan. I will not cede the wind or solar or battery industry to China or Germany because we refuse to make the same commitment here.

We’ve subsidized oil companies for a century. That’s long enough. It’s time to end the taxpayer giveaways to an industry that rarely has been more profitable, and double-down on a clean energy industry that never has been more promising. Pass clean energy tax credits. Create these jobs.

We can also spur energy innovation with new incentives. The differences in this chamber may be too deep right now to pass a comprehensive plan to fight climate change. But there’s no reason why Congress shouldn’t at least set a clean energy standard that creates a market for innovation. So far, you haven’t acted. Well, tonight, I will. I’m directing my Administration to allow the development of clean energy on enough public land to power 3 million homes. And I’m proud to announce that the Department of Defense, working with us, the world’s largest consumer of energy, will make one of the largest commitments to clean energy in history -- with the Navy purchasing enough capacity to power a quarter of a million homes a year.

Of course, the easiest way to save money is to waste less energy. So here’s a proposal: Help manufacturers eliminate energy waste in their factories and give businesses incentives to upgrade their buildings. Their energy bills will be 100 billion dollars lower over the next decade, and America will have less pollution, more manufacturing, more jobs for construction workers who need them. Send me a bill that creates these jobs.

Building this new energy future should be just one part of a broader agenda to repair America’s infrastructure. So much of America needs to be rebuilt. We’ve got crumbling roads and bridges; a power grid that wastes too much energy; an incomplete high-speed broadband network that prevents a small business owner in rural America from selling her products all over the world.

During the Great Depression, America built the Hoover Dam and the Golden Gate Bridge. After World War II, we connected our states with a system of highways. Democratic and Republican Administrations invested in great projects that benefited everybody, from the workers who built them to the businesses that still use them today.

In the next few weeks, I will sign an executive order clearing away the red tape that slows down too many construction projects. But you need to fund these projects. Take the money we’re no longer spending at war, use half of it to pay down our debt, and use the rest to do some nation-building right here at home.

There’s never been a better time to build, especially since the construction industry was one of the hardest hit when the housing bubble burst. Of course, construction workers weren’t the only ones who were hurt. So were millions of innocent Americans who’ve seen their home values decline. And while government can’t fix the problem on its own, responsible homeowners shouldn’t have to sit and wait for the housing market to hit bottom to get some relief.

And that’s why I’m sending this Congress a plan that gives every responsible homeowner the chance to save about 3,000 dollars a year on their mortgage, by refinancing at historically low rates. No more red tape. No more runaround from the banks. A small fee on the largest financial institutions will ensure that it won’t add to the deficit and will give those banks that were rescued by taxpayers a chance to repay a deficit of trust.

Let’s never forget: Millions of Americans who work hard and play by the rules every day deserve a government and a financial system that do the same. It’s time to apply the same rules from top to bottom. No bailouts, no handouts, and no copouts. An America built to last insists on responsibility from everybody.

We’ve all paid the price for lenders who sold mortgages to people who couldn’t afford them, and buyers who knew they couldn’t afford them. That’s why we need smart regulations to prevent irresponsible behavior. Rules to prevent financial fraud or toxic dumping or faulty medical devices -- these don’t destroy the free market. They make the free market work better.

There’s no question that some regulations are outdated, unnecessary, or too costly. In fact, I’ve approved fewer regulations in the first three years of my presidency than my Republican predecessor did in his. I’ve ordered every federal agency to eliminate rules that don’t make sense. We’ve already announced over 500 reforms, and just a fraction of them will save business and citizens more than 10 billion dollars over the next five years. We got rid of one rule from 40 years ago that could have forced some dairy farmers to spend 10,000 dollars a year proving that they could contain a spill -- because milk was somehow classified as an oil. With a rule like that, I guess it was worth crying over spilled milk.

Now, I’m confident a farmer can contain a milk spill without a federal agency looking over his shoulder. Absolutely. But I will not back down from making sure an oil company can contain the kind of oil spill we saw in the Gulf two years ago. I will not back down from protecting our kids from mercury poisoning, or making sure that our food is safe and our water is clean. I will not go back to the days when health insurance companies had unchecked power to cancel your policy, deny your coverage, or charge women differently than men.

And I will not go back to the days when Wall Street was allowed to play by its own set of rules. The new rules we passed restore what should be any financial system’s core purpose: Getting funding to entrepreneurs with the best ideas, and getting loans to responsible families who want to buy a home, or start a business, or send their kids to college.

So if you are a big bank or financial institution, you’re no longer allowed to make risky bets with your customers’ deposits. You’re required to write out a “living will” that details exactly how you’ll pay the bills if you fail -- because the rest of us are not bailing you out ever again. And if you’re a mortgage lender or a payday lender or a credit card company, the days of signing people up for products they can’t afford with confusing forms and deceptive practices -- those days are over. Today, American consumers finally have a watchdog in Richard Cordray with one job: to look out for them.

We’ll also establish a Financial Crimes Unit of highly trained investigators to crack down on large-scale fraud and protect people’s investments. Some financial firms violate major anti-fraud laws because there’s no real penalty for being a repeat offender. That’s bad for consumers, and it’s bad for the vast majority of bankers and financial service professionals who do the right thing. So pass legislation that makes the penalties for fraud count.

And tonight, I’m asking my Attorney General to create a special unit of federal prosecutors and leading state attorney general to expand our investigations into the abusive lending and packaging of risky mortgages that led to the housing crisis. This new unit will hold accountable those who broke the law, speed assistance to homeowners, and help turn the page on an era of recklessness that hurt so many Americans.

Now, a return to the American values of fair play and shared responsibility will help protect our people and our economy. But it should also guide us as we look to pay down our debt and invest in our future.

Right now, our most immediate priority is stopping a tax hike on 160 million working Americans while the recovery is still fragile. People cannot afford losing 40 dollars out of each paycheck this year. There are plenty of ways to get this done. So let’s agree right here, right now: No side issues. No drama. Pass the payroll tax cut without delay. Let’s get it done.

When it comes to the deficit, we’ve already agreed to more than 2 trillion dollars in cuts and savings. But we need to do more, and that means making choices. Right now, we’re poised to spend nearly 1 trillion dollars more on what was supposed to be a temporary tax break for the wealthiest 2 percent of Americans. Right now, because of loopholes and shelters in the tax code, a quarter of all millionaires pay lower tax rates than millions of middle-class households. Right now, Warren Buffett pays a lower tax rate than his secretary.

Do we want to keep these tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans? Or do we want to keep our investments in everything else -- like education and medical research; a strong military and care for our veterans? Because if we’re serious about paying down our debt, we can’t do both.

The American people know what the right choice is. So do I. As I told the Speaker this summer, I’m prepared to make more reforms that rein in the long-term costs of Medicare and Medicaid, and strengthen Social Security, so long as those programs remain a guarantee of security for seniors.

But in return, we need to change our tax code so that people like me, and an awful lot of members of Congress, pay our fair share of taxes.

Tax reform should follow the Buffett Rule. If you make more than 1 million dollars a year, you should not pay less than 30 percent in taxes. And my Republican friend Tom Coburn is right: Washington should stop subsidizing millionaires. In fact, if you’re earning a million dollars a year, you shouldn’t get special tax subsidies or deductions. On the other hand, if you make under 250,000 dollars a year, like 98 percent of American families, your taxes shouldn’t go up. You’re the ones struggling with rising costs and stagnant wages. You’re the ones who need relief.

Now, you can call this class warfare all you want. But asking a billionaire to pay at least as much as his secretary in taxes? Most Americans would call that common sense.

We don’t begrudge financial success in this country. We admire it. When Americans talk about folks like me paying my fair share of taxes, it’s not because they envy the rich. It’s because they understand that when I get a tax break I don’t need and the country can’t afford, it either adds to the deficit, or somebody else has to make up the difference -- like a senior on a fixed income, or a student trying to get through school, or a family trying to make ends meet. That’s not right. Americans know that’s not right. They know that this generation’s success is only possible because past generations felt a responsibility to each other, and to the future of their country, and they know our way of life will only endure if we feel that same sense of shared responsibility. That’s how we’ll reduce our deficit. That’s an America built to last.

Now, I recognize that people watching tonight have differing views about taxes and debt, energy and health care. But no matter what party they belong to, I bet most Americans are thinking the same thing right about now: Nothing will get done in Washington this year, or next year, or maybe even the year after that, because Washington is broken.

Can you blame them for feeling a little cynical?

The greatest blow to our confidence in our economy last year didn’t come from events beyond our control. It came from a debate in Washington over whether the United States would pay its bills or not. Who benefited from that fiasco?

I’ve talked tonight about the deficit of trust between Main Street and Wall Street. But the divide between this city and the rest of the country is at least as bad -- and it seems to get worse every year.

Some of this has to do with the corrosive influence of money in politics. So together, let’s take some steps to fix that. Send me a bill that bans insider trading by members of Congress; I will sign it tomorrow. Let’s limit any elected official from owning stocks in industries they impact. Let’s make sure people who bundle campaign contributions for Congress can’t lobby Congress, and vice versa -- an idea that has bipartisan support, at least outside of Washington.

Some of what’s broken has to do with the way Congress does its business these days. A simple majority is no longer enough to get anything -- even routine business -- passed through the Senate. Neither party has been blameless in these tactics. Now both parties should put an end to it. For starters, I ask the Senate to pass a simple rule that all judicial and public service nominations receive a simple up or down vote within 90 days.

The executive branch also needs to change. Too often, it’s inefficient, outdated and remote. That’s why I’ve asked this Congress to grant me the authority to consolidate the federal bureaucracy, so that our government is leaner, quicker, and more responsive to the needs of the American people.

Finally, none of this can happen unless we also lower the temperature in this town. We need to end the notion that the two parties must be locked in a perpetual campaign of mutual destruction; that politics is about clinging to rigid ideologies instead of building consensus around common-sense ideas.

I’m a Democrat. But I believe what Republican Abraham Lincoln believed: That government should do for people only what they cannot do better by themselves, and no more. That’s why my education reform offers more competition, and more control for schools and states. That’s why we’re getting rid of regulations that don’t work. That’s why our health care law relies on a reformed private market, not a government program.

On the other hand, even my Republican friends who complain the most about government spending have supported federally financed roads, and clean energy projects, and federal offices for the folks back home.

The point is, we should all want a smarter, more effective government. And while we may not be able to bridge our biggest philosophical differences this year, we can make real progress. With or without this Congress, I will keep taking actions that help the economy grow. But I can do a whole lot more with your help. Because when we act together, there’s nothing the United States of America can’t achieve. That’s the lesson we’ve learned from our actions abroad over the last few years.

Ending the Iraq war has allowed us to strike decisive blows against our enemies. From Pakistan to Yemen, the al Qaeda operatives who remain are scrambling, knowing that they can’t escape the reach of the United States of America.

From this position of strength, we’ve begun to wind down the war in Afghanistan. Ten thousand of our troops have come home. Twenty-three thousand more will leave by the end of this summer. This transition to Afghan lead will continue, and we will build an enduring partnership with Afghanistan, so that it is never again a source of attacks against America.

As the tide of war recedes, a wave of change has washed across the Middle East and North Africa, from Tunis to Cairo; from Sana’a to Tripoli. A year ago, Qaddafi was one of the world’s longest-serving dictators -- a murderer with American blood on his hands. Today, he is gone. And in Syria, I have no doubt that the Assad regime will soon discover that the forces of change cannot be reversed, and that human dignity cannot be denied.

How this incredible transformation will end remains uncertain. But we have a huge stake in the outcome. And while it’s ultimately up to the people of the region to decide their fate, we will advocate for those values that have served our own country so well. We will stand against violence and intimidation. We will stand for the rights and dignity of all human beings -- men and women; Christians, Muslims and Jews. We will support policies that lead to strong and stable democracies and open markets, because tyranny is no match for liberty.

And we will safeguard America’s own security against those who threaten our citizens, our friends, and our interests. Look at Iran. Through the power of our diplomacy, a world that was once divided about how to deal with Iran’s nuclear program now stands as one. The regime is more isolated than ever before; its leaders are faced with crippling sanctions, and as long as they shirk their responsibilities, this pressure will not relent.

Let there be no doubt: America is determined to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, and I will take no options off the table to achieve that goal.

But a peaceful resolution of this issue is still possible, and far better, and if Iran changes course and meets its obligations, it can rejoin the community of nations.

The renewal of American leadership can be felt across the globe. Our oldest alliances in Europe and Asia are stronger than ever. Our ties to the Americas are deeper. Our ironclad commitment -- and I mean ironclad -- to Israel’s security has meant the closest military cooperation between our two countries in history.

We’ve made it clear that America is a Pacific power, and a new beginning in Burma has lit a new hope. From the coalitions we’ve built to secure nuclear materials, to the missions we’ve led against hunger and disease; from the blows we’ve dealt to our enemies, to the enduring power of our moral example, America is back.

Anyone who tells you otherwise, anyone who tells you that America is in decline or that our influence has waned, doesn’t know what they’re talking about.

That’s not the message we get from leaders around the world who are eager to work with us. That’s not how people feel from Tokyo to Berlin, from Cape Town to Rio, where opinions of America are higher than they’ve been in years. Yes, the world is changing. No, we can’t control every event. But America remains the one indispensable nation in world affairs -- and as long as I’m President, I intend to keep it that way.

That’s why, working with our military leaders, I’ve proposed a new defense strategy that ensures we maintain the finest military in the world, while saving nearly half a trillion dollars in our budget. To stay one step ahead of our adversaries, I’ve already sent this Congress legislation that will secure our country from the growing dangers of cyber-threats.

Above all, our freedom endures because of the men and women in uniform who defend it. As they come home, we must serve them as well as they’ve served us. That includes giving them the care and the benefits they have earned -- which is why we’ve increased annual VA spending every year I’ve been President. And it means enlisting our veterans in the work of rebuilding our nation.

With the bipartisan support of this Congress, we’re providing new tax credits to companies that hire vets. Michelle and Jill Biden have worked with American businesses to secure a pledge of 135,000 jobs for veterans and their families. And tonight, I’m proposing a Veterans Jobs Corps that will help our communities hire veterans as cops and firefighters, so that America is as strong as those who defend her.

Which brings me back to where I began. Those of us who’ve been sent here to serve can learn a thing or two from the service of our troops. When you put on that uniform, it doesn’t matter if you’re black or white; Asian, Latino, Native American; conservative, liberal; rich, poor; gay, straight. When you’re marching into battle, you look out for the person next to you, or the mission fails. When you’re in the thick of the fight, you rise or fall as one unit, serving one nation, leaving no one behind.

One of my proudest possessions is the flag that the SEAL Team took with them on the mission to get bin Laden. On it are each of their names. Some may be Democrats. Some may be Republicans. But that doesn’t matter. Just like it didn’t matter that day in the Situation Room, when I sat next to Bob Gates -- a man who was George Bush’s defense secretary -- and Hillary Clinton -- a woman who ran against me for President.

All that mattered that day was the mission. No one thought about politics. No one thought about themselves. One of the young men involved in the raid later told me that he didn’t deserve credit for the mission. It only succeeded, he said, because every single member of that unit did their job -- the pilot who landed the helicopter that spun out of control; the translator who kept others from entering the compound; the troops who separated the women and children from the fight; the SEALs who charged up the stairs. More than that, the mission only succeeded because every member of that unit trusted each other -- because you can’t charge up those stairs, into darkness and danger, unless you know that there’s somebody behind you, watching your back.

So it is with America. Each time I look at that flag, I’m reminded that our destiny is stitched together like those 50 stars and those 13 stripes. No one built this country on their own. This nation is great because we built it together. This nation is great because we worked as a team. This nation is great because we get each other’s backs. And if we hold fast to that truth, in this moment of trial, there is no challenge too great; no mission too hard. As long as we are joined in common purpose, as long as we maintain our common resolve, our journey moves forward, and our future is hopeful, and the state of our Union will always be strong.

Thank you, God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.

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# Address on Housing at Falls Church

Thank you so much. Everybody please have a seat. Have a seat. It is great to be back in Falls Church. Thank you for having me.

Last week, in my State of the Union, I laid out my blueprint for an economy that’s built to last. And I want to assure you I am not going to go over the whole thing again this morning. That was a long speech. I'm not going to repeat the whole thing. But I do want to talk about some of the issues that I discussed last week because the blueprint we put forward was one that focuses on restoring what have always been this country's greatest strengths -- American manufacturing, American energy, skills and education for American workers so that we can compete with anybody around the world in this 21st century economy, and most importantly, the American values of fairness and responsibility. Fairness and responsibility.

Now, we know what happens, because we've just seen it -- what happened when we stray from those values. We saw what happened over the past decade when we strayed from those values -- especially when it comes to the massive housing bubble that burst and hurt so many people. Millions of families who did the right and the responsible thing, folks who shopped for a home that they could afford, secured a mortgage, made their payments each month -- they were hurt badly by the irresponsible actions of other people who weren’t playing by the same rules, weren’t taking the same care, weren’t acting as responsibly. By lenders who sold loans to people who they knew couldn’t afford the mortgages; and buyers who bought homes they knew they couldn’t afford; and banks that packaged those mortgages up and traded them to reap phantom profits, knowing that they were building a house of cards.

It was wrong. It was wrong. It triggered the worst economic crisis of our lifetimes. And it has been the single biggest drag on our recovery from a terrible recession. Crushing debt has kept millions of consumers from spending. A lack of building demand has kept hundreds of thousands of construction workers idle. Everybody involved in the home-building business -- folks who make windows, folks who make carpets -- they've all been impacted. The challenge is massive in size and in scope, because we've got a multitrillion-dollar housing industry. And economists can tell you how it’s affected all sorts of statistics, from GDP to consumer confidence.

But what’s at stake is more than just statistics. It’s personal. I’ve been saying that this is a make-or-break moment for the middle class. And this housing crisis struck right at the heart of what it means to be middle class in America: our homes -- the place where we invest our nest egg, place where we raise our family, the place where we plant roots in a community, the place where we build memories.

It’s personal. It affects so much of how people feel about their lives, about their communities, about the country, about the economy. We need to do everything in our power to repair the damage and make responsible families whole again. Everything we can.

Now, the truth is it’s going to take more time than any of us would like for the housing market to fully recover from this crisis. This was a big bubble, and when it burst it had a big effect. Home prices started a pretty steady decline about five years ago. And government certainly can’t fix the entire problem on its own. But it is wrong for anybody to suggest that the only option for struggling, responsible homeowners is to sit and wait for the housing market to hit bottom. I refuse to accept that, and so do the American people.

There are more than 10 million homeowners across the country right now who, because of an unprecedented decline in home prices that is no fault of their own, owe more on their mortgage than their homes are worth. It means your mortgage, your house is underwater.

Here in Falls Church, home values have fallen by about a quarter from their peak. In places like Las Vegas, more than half of all homeowners are underwater. More than half. So it’s going to take a while for those prices to rise again. But there are actions we can take right now to provide some relief to folks who've been responsible, have done the right thing, and are making their payments on time.

Already, thanks to the outstanding work, in part, of my Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Shaun Donovan, who's here today -- yes, there he is, the good-looking guy in the front here. The housing plan we launched a couple years ago has helped nearly 1 million responsible homeowners refinance their mortgages, and they’re saving an average of $300 on their payments each month -- $300 -- which is great.

But I’ll be honest -- the programs that we put forward haven’t worked at the scale that we hoped. Not as many people have taken advantage of it as we wanted. Mortgage rates are as low as they’ve been in half a century, and when that happens, usually homeowners flock to refinance their mortgages -- so a lot of people take advantage of it and save a lot of money. But this time too many families haven’t been able to take advantage of the low rates, because falling prices lock them out of the market. They were underwater; made it more difficult for them to refinance.

Then you’ve got all the fees involved in refinancing. And a lot of people just said, you know what, even though I’d like to be, obviously, cutting down my monthly payment, the banks just aren’t being real encouraging.

So last year we took aggressive action that allowed more families to participate. And today we’re doing even more. This is the main reason I’m here today.

As I indicated at the State of the Union last week, I am sending Congress a plan that will give every responsible homeowner in America the chance to save about $3,000 a year on their mortgage by refinancing at historically low rates. No more red tape. No more runaround from the banks. And a small fee on the largest financial institutions will make sure it doesn’t add to our deficit.

I want to be clear: This plan, like the other actions we’ve taken, will not help the neighbors down the street who bought a house they couldn’t afford, and then walked away and left a foreclosed home behind. It’s not designed for those who’ve acted irresponsibly, but it can help those who’ve acted responsibly. It’s not going to help those who bought multiple homes just to speculate and flip the house and make a quick buck, but it can help those who’ve acted responsibly.

What this plan will do is help millions of responsible homeowners who make their payments on time but find themselves trapped under falling home values or wrapped up in red tape.

If you’re ineligible for refinancing just because you’re underwater on your mortgage, through no fault of your own, this plan changes that. You’ll be able to refinance at a lower rate. You’ll be able to save hundreds of dollars a month that you can put back in your pocket. Or you can choose those savings to rebuild equity in your homes, which will help most underwater homeowners come back up for air more quickly.

Now, to move this part of my plan, we’re going to need Congress to act. We’re going to need Congress to act. I hear some murmuring in the audience here. We need them to act. But we’re not just going to wait for Congress. We’re going to keep building a firewall to prevent the same kinds of abuses that led this crisis -- led to this crisis in the first place. So there are things we can do administratively that are also going to help responsible homeowners.

Already, we’ve set up a special task force I asked my Attorney General to establish to investigate the kind of activity banks took when they packaged and sold risky mortgages. And that task force is ramping up its work as we speak. We’re going to keep at it and hold people who broke the law accountable and help restore confidence in the market. We’re going to speed assistance to homeowners. And we’re going to turn the page on an era of recklessness that hurt so many hardworking Americans.

Today, I’m also proposing a Homeowners Bill of Rights -- one straightforward set of common-sense rules of the road that every family knows they can count on when they’re shopping for a mortgage. No more hidden fees or conflicts of interest. No more getting the runaround when you call about your loan. No more fine print that you used to get families to take a deal that is not as good as the one they should have gotten. New safeguards against inappropriate foreclosures. New options to avoid foreclosure if you’ve fallen on hardship or a run of bad luck. And a new, simple, clear form for new buyers of a home.

Now, think about it. This is the most important purchase a family makes. But how many of you have had to deal with overly complicated mortgage forms and hidden clauses and complex terms? I remember when Michelle and I bought our first condo -- and we're both lawyers. And we’re looking through the forms and kind of holding it up -- reading it again -- "What does this phrase mean?" And that’s for two trained lawyers. The forms, the confusion, the potential for abuse is too great just because the forms were too complicated.

So this is what a mortgage form should look like. This is it. Now that our new consumer watchdog agency is finally running at full steam now that Richard Cordray is in as the Director of the Consumer Finance Protection Bureau -- they’re moving forward on important protections like this new, shorter mortgage form. Simple, not complicated. Informative, not confusing. Terms are clear. Fees are transparent.

This, by the way, is what some of the folks in Congress are trying to roll back and prevent from happening.

Audience: Booo --

President Obama: I guess they like complicated things that confuse consumers and allow them to be cheated. I prefer actions that are taken to make things simpler and easier to understand for consumers -- so that they can get the best deal possible, especially on the biggest single investment that most people will ever make.

Americans making a down payment on their dreams shouldn’t be terrified by pages and pages of fine print. They should be confident they’re making the right decision for their future.

There’s more that we’re announcing today. We’re working to turn more foreclosed homes into rental housing, because as we know and a lot of families know, that empty house or “for sale” sign down the block can bring down the price of homes across the neighborhood. We’re working to make sure people don’t lose their homes just because they lose their jobs. These are steps that can make a concrete difference in people’s lives right now.

As I said earlier, no program or policy will solve all the problems in a multitrillion-dollar housing market. The heights of the housing bubble reached before it burst, those were unsustainable, and it’s going to take time to fully recover. That requires everybody to do their part.

As much as our economic challenges were born of eroding home values and portfolio values, they were also born of an erosion of some old-fashioned American values. An economy that’s built to last, that’s on a firm foundation, so that middle-class families have a sense of security and those who want to get in the middle class can make it if they’re working hard -- that demands responsibility from everyone.

Government must take responsibility for rules that are fair and fairly enforced. Banks and lenders must be held accountable for ending the practices that helped cause this crisis in the first place. And all of us have to take responsibility for our own actions -- or lack of action.

So I urge Congress to act. Pass this plan. Help more families keep their homes. Help more neighborhoods remain vibrant. Help keep more dreams defended and alive. And I promise you that I’ll keep doing everything I can to make the future brighter for this community, for this commonwealth, for this country.

Thank you, everybody. God bless you. God bless the United States of America. Thank you.

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# Address on Veterans Job Corps

Thank you! Thank you, guys. Thank you so much. Everybody, please have a seat. Well, good morning, everybody. Jacob, thank you for that introduction. More importantly, thank you for your extraordinary service to our country.

I want to acknowledge two outstanding members of my Cabinet who are here today -- Secretary of Veterans Affairs Ric Shinseki is in the house, also one of our finest -- himself, one of our finest veterans and obviously an extraordinary leader when he was in our Army. And I also want to acknowledge Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, who's in the house.

And we’re joined by another president -- the International Association of Firefighters president, Harold Schaitberger, is here.

Now, this is a fire station that holds some special significance for our country. On September 11th, the firefighters of this house were among the first to respond to the attack on the Pentagon. You guys answered this nation’s call during its hour of need. And in the years that followed, as Americans went to war, some of you answered that call as well.

Today’s 9/11 generation of veterans has already earned a special place in our history. Our veterans -- and all the brave men and women who serve our country -- are the reason why America’s military is the greatest in the history of the world. In the face of great odds and grave danger, they get the job done. They work as a team. They personify the very best that America has to offer.

That’s true on the battlefront. But we’re here today because it's also true on the home front. After a decade of war, our nation needs to do some building right here in the United States of America.

Now, this morning, we received more good news about our economy. In January, American businesses added another 257,000 jobs. The unemployment rate came down because more people found work. And altogether, we’ve added 3.7 million new jobs over the last 23 months.

Now, these numbers will go up and down in the coming months, and there's still far too many Americans who need a job, or need a job that pays better than the one they have now. But the economy is growing stronger. The recovery is speeding up. And we've got to do everything in our power to keep it going.

We can't go back to the policies that led to the recession. And we can't let Washington stand in the way of our recovery. We want Washington to be helping with the recovery, not making it tougher.

The most important thing Congress needs to do right now is to stop taxes from going up on 160 million Americans at the end of this month. They've got to renew the payroll tax cut that they extended only for a couple of months. They need to pass an extension of the payroll tax cut and unemployment insurance -- and do it without drama, without delay, without linking it to some ideological side issues. They just need to get it done. It shouldn't be that complicated. Now is not the time for self-inflicted wounds to our economy. Now is the time for action.

So I want to send a clear message to Congress: Do not slow down the recovery that we're on. Don't muck it up. Keep it moving in the right direction.

Beyond preventing a tax hike, we need to do a lot more to create an economy that’s built to last. To restore American manufacturing, we need to stop giving tax breaks to companies that ship jobs overseas; give those tax breaks to companies that are investing in plants and equipment and hiring workers right here in the United States of America. That makes a lot of sense.

To reduce our dependency on foreign oil, we need to stop subsidizing oil companies that are already making record profits, and double down on clean energy, that creates jobs and creates opportunities in new industries but also improves our security, because we're not as dependent on foreign oil.

To make sure our businesses don’t have to move overseas to find skilled workers, we've got to invest in education, and make sure college is affordable for every hardworking American.

And -- this is the reason we're here today -- we need to make sure that as our troops return from battle, they can find a job when they get home. That’s what I want to talk about today.

The war in Iraq is over. The war in Afghanistan is moving to a new phase -- we're transitioning to Afghan lead. Over the past decade, nearly 3 million service members have transitioned back to civilian life, and more are joining them every day.

When these men and women come home, they bring unparalleled skills and experience. Folks like Jacob -- they’ve saved lives in some of the toughest conditions imaginable. They’ve managed convoys and moved tons of equipment over dangerous terrain. They’ve tracked millions of dollars of military assets. They've handled pieces of equipment that are worth tens of millions of dollars. They do incredible work. Nobody is more skilled, more precise, more diligent, more disciplined.

Our veterans are some of the most highly trained, highly educated, highly skilled workers that we’ve got. These are Americans that every business should be competing to attract. These are the Americans we want to keep serving here at home as we rebuild this country. So we’re going to do everything we can to make sure that when our troops come home, they come home to new jobs and new opportunities and new ways to serve their country.

Now, this has been a top priority of mine since I came into office. Already, we’ve helped 600,000 veterans and their family members go back to school on the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill. We’ve hired over 120,000 veterans to serve in the federal government. We’ve made it easier for veterans to access all sorts of employment services. We’ve set up online tools to connect veterans with job openings that match their skills.

Michelle and Jill Biden have worked with the private sector, with businesses, to secure a pledge of 135,000 jobs for veterans and their families. And with the support of Democrats and Republicans, we’ve put in place two new tax credits for companies that hire veterans.

So these are all important steps. We’ve made progress. But we’ve got to do more. There’s more we can do. In my State of the Union address, I proposed a new initiative, called the Veterans Jobs Corps, to put veterans back to work protecting and rebuilding America. And today, we’re laying out the details of this proposal.

First, we want to help communities hire more veterans as cops and firefighters. You guys have seen what a great job Jacob is doing. Well, there are a whole bunch of folks like that who could be doing that same outstanding work all across the country. But it’s not that easy these days to get a job at a firehouse.

Over the past few years, tight budgets have forced a lot of states, a lot of local communities to lay off a lot of first responders. Now, my administration -- when I first came into office, one of the first things we did was, through the Recovery Act, make sure that states and local governments helped -- or got the help that they needed to prevent some of these layoffs. And thousands of jobs were saved all across the country.

Harold and I were talking as we came over here -- thousands of firefighter jobs were saved because of the actions we took. But budgets are still tight, and that’s a problem we need to fix. Jobs that protect our families and our communities shouldn’t be the first on the chopping block. They should be one of our highest priorities as a nation.

Over the past three years, my administration has made it possible for states to keep thousands of first responders on the job. But today, we’re announcing that communities who make it a priority to recruit veterans will be among the first in line when it comes to getting help from the federal government.

And I know that’s one of the things, Chief, that you’ve been doing here in Arlington.

So we want to prioritize veterans and we want to help states and local communities hire veterans to firehouses and police stations all across the country.

The second thing we want to do is to connect up to 20,000 veterans with jobs that involve rebuilding local communities or national parks. That’s why Ken Salazar is here as the Interior Secretary. He needs some help. And our veterans are highly qualified to help him. They’ve already risked their lives defending America. They should have the opportunity to rebuild America. We’ve got roads and bridges in and around our national parks in need of repair. Let’s fix them.

Of course, Congress needs to fund these projects. Congress should take the money that we’re no longer spending on war, use half of it to pay down our debt, and use the rest to do some nation-building here at home, to improve the quality of life right here in the United States of America -- and put our veterans to work.

So let’s get more cops on the beat. Let’s gets more rangers in the parks. Let’s get more firefighters on call. And, in the process, we’re going to put more veterans back to work. It’s good for our communities, it’s good for our economy, and it’s good for our country.

And for veterans who want to do something else -- maybe put their leadership skills to use starting a small business -- we’re going to start offering entrepreneurial training to our veterans. We want service members prepared for battle -- and for professional success when they come home. So we should do all that we can to support our troops and our veterans -- in helping them start a business, in helping them get a foothold in a fire station like this one, and start moving up the ranks, doing outstanding work the way Jacob has been doing. But we also need to follow their lead. We want to help them, but we should also learn from them. We should remember from our veterans that no matter what the circumstances, those men and women in uniform -- a lot like the firefighters in this fire station -- work together. Act as a team. Finish the job. That’s what we've got to do when it comes to our nation's recovery.

These are challenging times for America, but we’ve faced challenging times before. On the grounds here you've got a stone from the Pentagon and a beam from the World Trade Center. And that reminds us of our resolve as a people. They remind us that when we come together as one people and as one community, one nation, then we prevail. That’s who we are.

This is a nation that exists because generations of Americans worked together to build it. This is a nation where, out of many, we come together as one. Those are the values that every veteran understands. Those are values that this fire station understands. We've got to make sure that we return to those values. And if we do, then I guarantee you we'll remind everybody around the world just why it is the United States is the greatest country on Earth.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you. God bless America.

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# Address Toasting Iraq War Veterans

Thank you, Joe Biden, for not only outstanding remarks, but the extraordinary leadership you showed in helping to guide our policies.

To Secretary Panetta, General Dempsey, to all the commanders who are here and did so much under such extraordinary circumstances to arrive at an outcome in which the Iraqi people have an opportunity to chart their own destiny, thank you for the great work that you've done.

I do have to say, despite Deanie's advice, I thought Dempsey was going to burst into song. [Laughter] You have not lived until you hear him belt out an Irish ballad. His voice is better than mine. I think you're never a prophet in your own land, Marty, so your wives are there to cut you down a peg.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen: This house has stood for more than two centuries, through war and peace, through hardship and through prosperity. These rooms have hosted Presidents and Prime Ministers and kings and queens. But in the history of this house, there's never been a night quite like this. Because this evening, we welcome, not the statesmen who decide great questions of war and peace, but citizens, men and women from every corner of our country, from every rank of our military, every branch of our service, who answer the call, who go to war, who defend the peace.

And in a culture that celebrates fame and fortune, yours are not necessarily household names. They're something more: the patriots who serve in our name. And after nearly 9 years of war in Iraq, tonight is an opportunity for us to express our gratitude and to say once more: Welcome home.

This is not the first time that we've paid tribute to those who served courageously in Iraq. This will not be the last. And history reminds us of our obligations as a nation at moments like this. This year will mark the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam war, a time when our veterans didn't always receive the respect and the thanks that they so richly deserved, and that's a mistake that we must never repeat.

The good news is, already, we've seen Americans come together -- in small towns and big cities all across the country -- to honor your service in Iraq. And tonight, on behalf of Michelle and myself, on behalf of over 300 Americans -- 300 million Americans, we want to express those simple words that we can never say enough, and that's thank you.

In your heart, each of you carries your own story: the pride of a job well done, the pain of losing a friend, a comrade. Ernie Pyle, who celebrated our GIs in World War II, said that your world can never be known to the rest of us. Tonight what we can do is convey what you've meant to the rest of us, because through the dust and the din and the fog of war, the glory of your service always shone through. In your noble example, we see the virtues and the values that sustain America, that keep this country great.

You taught us about duty. Blessed to live in the land of the free, you could have opted for an easier path, but you know that freedom is not free. And so you volunteered, and you stepped forward, and you raised your hand, and you took an oath to protect and defend, to serve a cause greater than yourself, knowing, in a time of war, you could be sent into harm's way.

You taught us about resolve. Invasion turned to insurgency and then sectarian strife. But you persevered, tour after tour, year after year. Indeed, we're mindful that even as we gather here, Iraq veterans continue to risk their lives in Afghanistan, and our prayers are with them all tonight.

In one of our Nation's longest wars, you wrote one of the most extraordinary chapters in American military history. Now the Iraqi people have a chance to forge their own destiny, and every one of you who served there can take pride in knowing you gave the Iraqis this opportunity, that you succeeded in your mission.

You taught us about devotion to country and to comrades, but most of all, to family. Because I know that some of the hardest days of war were the moments you missed back home: the birthdays, the anniversaries, when your little girl or boy took their first wobbly steps. And behind every one of you was a parent, a spouse, a son or a daughter, trying to stay strong and praying for the day that you'd come home safe. And that's why Michelle and Dr. Biden have made it their mission to make sure America takes care of your families, because they inspire us as much as you do. And they deserve that honor as much as you do.

That's why I'd ask all the spouses and the partners and families to stand up and accept our gratitude for your remarkable service, especially because you look so good tonight.

You taught us about sacrifice, a love of country so deep, so profound, you were willing to give your lives for it. And tonight we pay solemn tribute to all who did. We remember the first, on that first day of war: Major Jay Thomas Aubin, Captain Ryan Anthony Beaupre, Corporal Brian Matthew Kennedy, Staff Sergeant Kendall Damon Waters-Bey. And we remember the last, Specialist David Emanuel Hickman, November 14, 2011.

Separated by nearly 9 years, they are bound for all time, among the nearly 4,500 American patriots who gave all that they had to give. To their families, including the Gold Star families here tonight, know that we will never forget their sacrifice and that your loved ones live on in the soul of our Nation, now and forever.

You taught us about strength, the kind that comes from within, the kind that we see in our wounded warriors. For you, coming home was the start of another battle: the battle to recover, to stand, to walk, to serve again. And in your resilience we see the essence of America, because we do not give up. No matter the hardship, we push on. And just as the wounds of war can last a lifetime, so does America's commitment to you and all who serve to give you the care you earned and the opportunities you need as you begin the next proud chapter in your lives.

And finally, all of you taught us a lesson about the character of our country. As you look across this room tonight, you look at our military -- we draw strength from every part of our American family -- every color, every creed, every background, every belief, and every day, you succeed together, as one American team.

As your Commander in Chief, I could not be more proud of you. As an American, as a husband and father of two daughters, I could not be more grateful for your example of the kind of country we can be, of what we can achieve when we stick together.

So I'll leave you with a picture that captures this spirit. It's from that day in December, when the last convoy rolled out, five American soldiers standing beside their vehicle, marked with the words, "Last vehicle out of Iraq." They're young, men and women, shoulder to shoulder, proud, heads held high, finally going home. And they were asked what it was like to be, literally, the last troops out of Iraq. And one of them gave a simple reply: "We completed the mission." We completed the mission. We did our jobs.

So I propose a toast: To the country we love, to the men and women who defend her, and to that faith -- that fundamental American faith—that says no mission is too hard, no challenge is too great, through tests and through trials, we don't simply endure, we emerge stronger than before, knowing that America's greatest days are still to come, and they are great because of you.

Cheers.

[President Obama offers toast.]

God bless you and your families, and may God continue to bless those in uniform and the United States of America.

Thank you very much, everybody. May dinner be served.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address to the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee

Well, good morning, everyone.

Rosy, thank you for your kind words. I have never seen Rosy on the basketball court. I'll bet it would be a treat. Rosy, you've been a dear friend of mine for a long time and a tireless advocate for the unbreakable bonds between Israel and the United States. And as you complete your term as President, I salute your leadership and your commitment.

I want to thank the board of directors. As always, I’m glad to see my long-time friends in the Chicago delegation. I also want to thank the members of Congress who are with us here today, and who will be speaking to you over the next few days. You've worked hard to maintain the partnership between the United States and Israel. And I especially want to thank my close friend, and leader of the Democratic National Committee, Debbie Wasserman Schultz.

I’m glad that my outstanding young Ambassador to Israel, Dan Shapiro, is in the house. I understand that Dan is perfecting his Hebrew on his new assignment, and I appreciate his constant outreach to the Israeli people. And I’m also pleased that we’re joined by so many Israeli officials, including Ambassador Michael Oren. And tomorrow, I’m very much looking forward to welcoming Prime Minister Netanyahu and his delegation back to the White House.

Every time I come to AIPAC, I’m especially impressed to see so many young people here. You don't yet get the front seats -- I understand. You have to earn that. But students from all over the country who are making their voices heard and engaging deeply in our democratic debate. You carry with you an extraordinary legacy of more than six decades of friendship between the United States and Israel. And you have the opportunity -- and the responsibility -- to make your own mark on the world. And for inspiration, you can look to the man who preceded me on this stage, who's being honored at this conference -- my friend, President Shimon Peres.

Shimon was born a world away from here, in a shtetl in what was then Poland, a few years after the end of the first world war. But his heart was always in Israel, the historic homeland of the Jewish people. And when he was just a boy he made his journey across land and sea -- toward home.

In his life, he has fought for Israel’s independence, and he has fought for peace and security. As a member of the Haganah and a member of the Knesset, as a Minister of Defense and Foreign Affairs, as a Prime Minister and as President -- Shimon helped build the nation that thrives today: the Jewish state of Israel. But beyond these extraordinary achievements, he has also been a powerful moral voice that reminds us that right makes might -- not the other way around.

Shimon once described the story of the Jewish people by saying it proved that, "slings, arrows and gas chambers can annihilate man, but cannot destroy human values, dignity, and freedom." And he has lived those values. He has taught us to ask more of ourselves, and to empathize more with our fellow human beings. I am grateful for his life's work and his moral example. And I'm proud to announce that later this spring, I will invite Shimon Peres to the White House to present him with America’s highest civilian honor -- the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

In many ways, this award is a symbol of the broader ties that bind our nations. The United States and Israel share interests, but we also share those human values that Shimon spoke about: A commitment to human dignity. A belief that freedom is a right that is given to all of God's children. An experience that shows us that democracy is the one and only form of government that can truly respond to the aspirations of citizens.

America’s Founding Fathers understood this truth, just as Israel’s founding generation did. President Truman put it well, describing his decision to formally recognize Israel only minutes after it declared independence. He said,

I had faith in Israel before it was established. I believe it has a glorious future before it -- as not just another sovereign nation, but as an embodiment of the great ideals of our civilization.

For over six decades, the American people have kept that faith. Yes, we are bound to Israel because of the interests that we share -- in security for our communities, prosperity for our people, the new frontiers of science that can light the world. But ultimately it is our common ideals that provide the true foundation for our relationship. That is why America’s commitment to Israel has endured under Democratic and Republican Presidents, and congressional leaders of both parties. In the United States, our support for Israel is bipartisan, and that is how it should stay.

AIPAC’s work continually nurtures this bond. And because of AIPAC’s effectiveness in carrying out its mission, you can expect that over the next several days, you will hear many fine words from elected officials describing their commitment to the U.S.-Israel relationship. But as you examine my commitment, you don’t just have to count on my words. You can look at my deeds. Because over the last three years, as President of the United States, I have kept my commitments to the state of Israel. At every crucial juncture -- at every fork in the road -- we have been there for Israel. Every single time.

Four years ago, I stood before you and said that, "Israel’s security is sacrosanct. It is non-negotiable." That belief has guided my actions as President. The fact is, my administration’s commitment to Israel’s security has been unprecedented. Our military and intelligence cooperation has never been closer. Our joint exercises and training have never been more robust. Despite a tough budget environment, our security assistance has increased every single year. We are investing in new capabilities. We’re providing Israel with more advanced technology -- the types of products and systems that only go to our closest friends and allies. And make no mistake: We will do what it takes to preserve Israel’s qualitative military edge -- because Israel must always have the ability to defend itself, by itself, against any threat.

This isn’t just about numbers on a balance sheet. As a senator, I spoke to Israeli troops on the Lebanese border. I visited with families who’ve known the terror of rocket fire in Sderot. And that’s why, as President, I have provided critical funding to deploy the Iron Dome system that has intercepted rockets that might have hit homes and hospitals and schools in that town and in others. Now our assistance is expanding Israel’s defensive capabilities, so that more Israelis can live free from the fear of rockets and ballistic missiles. Because no family, no citizen, should live in fear.

And just as we’ve been there with our security assistance, we've been there through our diplomacy. When the Goldstone report unfairly singled out Israel for criticism, we challenged it. When Israel was isolated in the aftermath of the flotilla incident, we supported them. When the Durban conference was commemorated, we boycotted it, and we will always reject the notion that Zionism is racism.

When one-sided resolutions are brought up at the Human Rights Council, we oppose them. When Israeli diplomats feared for their lives in Cairo, we intervened to save them. When there are efforts to boycott or divest from Israel, we will stand against them. And whenever an effort is made to de-legitimize the state of Israel, my administration has opposed them. So there should not be a shred of doubt by now -- when the chips are down, I have Israel’s back.

Which is why, if during this political season -- you hear some questions regarding my administration’s support for Israel, remember that it’s not backed up by the facts. And remember that the U.S.-Israel relationship is simply too important to be distorted by partisan politics. America’s national security is too important. Israel’s security is too important.

Of course, there are those who question not my security and diplomatic commitments, but rather my administration’s ongoing pursuit of peace between Israelis and Palestinians. So let me say this: I make no apologies for pursuing peace. Israel’s own leaders understand the necessity of peace. Prime Minister Netanyahu, Defense Minister Barak, President Peres -- each of them have called for two states, a secure Israel that lives side by side with an independent Palestinian state. I believe that peace is profoundly in Israel’s security interest.

The reality that Israel faces -- from shifting demographics, to emerging technologies, to an extremely difficult international environment -- demands a resolution of this issue. And I believe that peace with the Palestinians is consistent with Israel’s founding values -- because of our shared belief in self-determination, and because Israel’s place as a Jewish and democratic state must be protected.

Of course, peace is hard to achieve. There’s a reason why it's remained elusive for six decades. The upheaval and uncertainty in Israel’s neighborhood makes it that much harder -- from the horrific violence raging in Syria, to the transition in Egypt. And the division within the Palestinian leadership makes it harder still -- most notably, with Hamas’s continued rejection of Israel’s very right to exist.

But as hard as it may be, we should not, and cannot, give in to cynicism or despair. The changes taking place in the region make peace more important, not less. And I've made it clear that there will be no lasting peace unless Israel’s security concerns are met. That's why we continue to press Arab leaders to reach out to Israel, and will continue to support the peace treaty with Egypt. That’s why -- just as we encourage Israel to be resolute in the pursuit of peace -- we have continued to insist that any Palestinian partner must recognize Israel’s right to exist, and reject violence, and adhere to existing agreements. And that is why my administration has consistently rejected any efforts to short-cut negotiations or impose an agreement on the parties.

As Rosy noted, last year, I stood before you and pledged that, "the United States will stand up against efforts to single Israel out at the United Nations." As you know, that pledge has been kept. Last September, I stood before the United Nations General Assembly and reaffirmed that any lasting peace must acknowledge the fundamental legitimacy of Israel and its security concerns. I said that America’s commitment to Israel’s security is unshakeable, our friendship with Israel is enduring, and that Israel must be recognized. No American President has made such a clear statement about our support for Israel at the United Nations at such a difficult time. People usually give those speeches before audiences like this one -- not before the General Assembly.

And I must say, there was not a lot of applause. But it was the right thing to do. And as a result, today there is no doubt -- anywhere in the world -- that the United States will insist upon Israel’s security and legitimacy. That will be true as we continue our efforts to pursue -- in the pursuit of peace. And that will be true when it comes to the issue that is such a focus for all of us today: Iran’s nuclear program -- a threat that has the potential to bring together the worst rhetoric about Israel’s destruction with the world’s most dangerous weapons.

Let’s begin with a basic truth that you all understand: No Israeli government can tolerate a nuclear weapon in the hands of a regime that denies the Holocaust, threatens to wipe Israel off the map, and sponsors terrorist groups committed to Israel’s destruction. And so I understand the profound historical obligation that weighs on the shoulders of Bibi Netanyahu and Ehud Barak, and all of Israel’s leaders.

A nuclear-armed Iran is completely counter to Israel’s security interests. But it is also counter to the national security interests of the United States.

Indeed, the entire world has an interest in preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon. A nuclear-armed Iran would thoroughly undermine the non-proliferation regime that we've done so much to build. There are risks that an Iranian nuclear weapon could fall into the hands of a terrorist organization. It is almost certain that others in the region would feel compelled to get their own nuclear weapon, triggering an arms race in one of the world's most volatile regions. It would embolden a regime that has brutalized its own people, and it would embolden Iran’s proxies, who have carried out terrorist attacks from the Levant to southwest Asia.

And that is why, four years ago, I made a commitment to the American people, and said that we would use all elements of American power to pressure Iran and prevent it from acquiring a nuclear weapon. And that is what we have done.

When I took office, the efforts to apply pressure on Iran were in tatters. Iran had gone from zero centrifuges spinning to thousands, without facing broad pushback from the world. In the region, Iran was ascendant -- increasingly popular, and extending its reach. In other words, the Iranian leadership was united and on the move, and the international community was divided about how to go forward.

And so from my very first months in office, we put forward a very clear choice to the Iranian regime: a path that would allow them to rejoin the community of nations if they meet their international obligations, or a path that leads to an escalating series of consequences if they don't. In fact, our policy of engagement -- quickly rebuffed by the Iranian regime -- allowed us to rally the international community as never before, to expose Iran’s intransigence, and to apply pressure that goes far beyond anything that the United States could do on our own.

Because of our efforts, Iran is under greater pressure than ever before. Some of you will recall, people predicted that Russia and China wouldn’t join us to move toward pressure. They did. And in 2010 the U.N. Security Council overwhelmingly supported a comprehensive sanctions effort. Few thought that sanctions could have an immediate bite on the Iranian regime. They have, slowing the Iranian nuclear program and virtually grinding the Iranian economy to a halt in 2011. Many questioned whether we could hold our coalition together as we moved against Iran’s Central Bank and oil exports. But our friends in Europe and Asia and elsewhere are joining us. And in 2012, the Iranian government faces the prospect of even more crippling sanctions.

That is where we are today -- because of our work. Iran is isolated, its leadership divided and under pressure. And by the way, the Arab Spring has only increased these trends, as the hypocrisy of the Iranian regime is exposed, and its ally -- the Assad regime -- is crumbling.

Of course, so long as Iran fails to meet its obligations, this problem remains unresolved. The effective implementation of our policy is not enough -- we must accomplish our objective. And in that effort, I firmly believe that an opportunity still remains for diplomacy -- backed by pressure -- to succeed.

The United States and Israel both assess that Iran does not yet have a nuclear weapon, and we are exceedingly vigilant in monitoring their program. Now, the international community has a responsibility to use the time and space that exists. Sanctions are continuing to increase, and this July -- thanks to our diplomatic coordination -- a European ban on Iranian oil imports will take hold. Faced with these increasingly dire consequences, Iran’s leaders still have the opportunity to make the right decision. They can choose a path that brings them back into the community of nations, or they can continue down a dead end.

And given their history, there are, of course, no guarantees that the Iranian regime will make the right choice. But both Israel and the United States have an interest in seeing this challenge resolved diplomatically. After all, the only way to truly solve this problem is for the Iranian government to make a decision to forsake nuclear weapons. That’s what history tells us.

Moreover, as President and Commander-in-Chief, I have a deeply held preference for peace over war. I have sent men and women into harm’s way. I've seen the consequences of those decisions in the eyes of those I meet who've come back gravely wounded, and the absence of those who don’t make it home. Long after I leave this office, I will remember those moments as the most searing of my presidency. And for this reason, as part of my solemn obligation to the American people, I will only use force when the time and circumstances demand it. And I know that Israeli leaders also know all too well the costs and consequences of war, even as they recognize their obligation to defend their country.

We all prefer to resolve this issue diplomatically. Having said that, Iran’s leaders should have no doubt about the resolve of the United States -- just as they should not doubt Israel’s sovereign right to make its own decisions about what is required to meet its security needs.

I have said that when it comes to preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, I will take no options off the table, and I mean what I say. That includes all elements of American power: A political effort aimed at isolating Iran; a diplomatic effort to sustain our coalition and ensure that the Iranian program is monitored; an economic effort that imposes crippling sanctions; and, yes, a military effort to be prepared for any contingency.

Iran’s leaders should understand that I do not have a policy of containment; I have a policy to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. And as I have made clear time and again during the course of my presidency, I will not hesitate to use force when it is necessary to defend the United States and its interests.

Moving forward, I would ask that we all remember the weightiness of these issues; the stakes involved for Israel, for America, and for the world. Already, there is too much loose talk of war. Over the last few weeks, such talk has only benefited the Iranian government, by driving up the price of oil, which they depend on to fund their nuclear program. For the sake of Israel’s security, America’s security, and the peace and security of the world, now is not the time for bluster. Now is the time to let our increased pressure sink in, and to sustain the broad international coalition we have built. Now is the time to heed the timeless advice from Teddy Roosevelt: Speak softly; carry a big stick. And as we do, rest assured that the Iranian government will know our resolve, and that our coordination with Israel will continue.

These are challenging times. But we've been through challenging times before, and the United States and Israel have come through them together. Because of our cooperation, citizens in both our countries have benefited from the bonds that bring us together. I'm proud to be one of those people. In the past, I've shared in this forum just why those bonds are so personal for me: the stories of a great uncle who helped liberate Buchenwald, to my memories of returning there with Elie Wiesel; from sharing books with President Peres to sharing seders with my young staff in a tradition that started on the campaign trail and continues in the White House; from the countless friends I know in this room to the concept of "tikkun olam" that has enriched and guided my life.

As Harry Truman understood, Israel’s story is one of hope. We may not agree on every single issue -- no two nations do, and our democracies contain a vibrant diversity of views. But we agree on the big things -- the things that matter. And together, we are working to build a better world -- one where our people can live free from fear; one where peace is founded upon justice; one where our children can know a future that is more hopeful than the present.

There is no shortage of speeches on the friendship between the United States and Israel. But I'm also mindful of the proverb, "A man is judged by his deeds, not his words." So if you want to know where my heart lies, look no further than what I have done -- to stand up for Israel; to secure both of our countries; and to see that the rough waters of our time lead to a peaceful and prosperous shore.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you. God bless the people of Israel. God bless the United States of America.

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# Address at Hankuk University

Thank you. Please, thank you very much. Thank you very much. To President Park, faculty, staff and students, thank you so much for this very warm welcome. It is a great honor to be here at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies. I want to thank Dr. Park for, a few moments ago, making me an honorary alumni of the university. I know that this school has one of the world’s finest foreign language programs -- which means that your English is much better than my Korean. All I can say is, kamsa hamnida. Now, this is my third visit to the Republic of Korea as President. I've now been to Seoul more times than any other capital -- except for Washington, D.C., of course. This reflects the extraordinary bonds between our two countries and our commitment to each other. I’m pleased that we’re joined by so many leaders here today, Koreans and Americans, who help keep us free and strong and prosperous every day. That includes our first Korean-American ambassador to the Republic of Korea -- Ambassador Sung Kim. I’ve seen the deep connections between our peoples in my own life -- among friends, colleagues. I’ve seen it so many patriotic Korean Americans, including a man born in this city of Seoul, who came to America and has dedicated his life to lifting up the poor and sick of the world. And last week I was proud to nominate him to lead the World Bank -- Dr. Jim Yong Kim. I’ve also seen the bonds in our men and women in uniform, like the American and Korean troops I visited yesterday along the DMZ -- Freedom’s Frontier. And we salute their service and are very grateful for them. We honor all those who have given their lives in our defense, including the 46 brave souls who perished aboard the Cheonan two years ago today. And in their memory we reaffirm the enduring promise at the core of our alliance -- we stand together, and the commitment of the United States to the defense and the security of the Republic of Korea will never waver. Most of all, I see the strength of our alliance in all of you. For decades, this school has produced leaders -- public servants, diplomats, businesspeople -- who’ve helped propel the modern miracle that is Korea-- transforming it from crushing poverty to one of the world’s most dynamic economies; from authoritarianism to a thriving democracy; from a country focused inward to a leader for security and prosperity not only in this region but also around the world -- a truly “Global Korea.” So to all the students here today, this is the Korea your generation will inherit. And I believe there's no limits to what our two nations can achieve together. For like your parents and grandparents before you, you know that the future is what we make of it. And you know that in our digital age, we can connect and innovate across borders like never before -- with your smart phones and Twitter and Me2Day and Kakao Talk. It’s no wonder so many people around the world have caught the Korean Wave, Hallyu. Or consider this: In advance of my visit, our embassy invited Koreans to send us your questions using social media. Some of you may have sent questions. And they called it, "Ask President Obama." Now, one of you -- maybe it was you, maybe it was somebody else -- this is true -- asked this question: “Have you posted, yourself, a supportive opinion on a website under a disguised name, pretending you are one of the supporters of President Obama?” I hadn’t thought of this. But the truth is I have not done this. Maybe my daughters have. But I haven’t done that myself. So our shared future -- and the unprecedented opportunity to meet shared challenges together -- is what brings me to Seoul. Over the next two days, under President Lee’s leadership, we’ll move ahead with the urgent work of preventing nuclear terrorism by securing the world’s nuclear materials. This is an important part of the broader, comprehensive agenda that I want to talk with you about today -- our vision of a world without nuclear weapons. Three years ago, I traveled to Prague and I declared America’s commitment to stopping the spread of nuclear weapons and to seeking a world without them. I said I knew that this goal would not be reached quickly, perhaps not in my lifetime, but I knew we had to begin, with concrete steps. And in your generation, I see the spirit we need in this endeavor -- an optimism that beats in the hearts of so many young people around the world. It’s that refusal to accept the world as it is, the imagination to see the world as it ought to be, and the courage to turn that vision into reality. So today, with you, I want to take stock of our journey and chart our next steps. Here in Seoul, more than 50 nations will mark our progress toward the goal we set at the summit I hosted two years ago in Washington -- securing the world’s vulnerable nuclear materials in four years so that they never fall into the hands of terrorists. And since then, nations -- including the United States -- have boosted security at nuclear facilities. South Korea, Japan, Pakistan and others are building new centers to improve nuclear security and training. Nations like Kazakhstan have moved nuclear materials to more secure locations. Mexico, and just yesterday Ukraine, have joined the ranks of nations that have removed all the highly enriched uranium from their territory. All told, thousands of pounds of nuclear material have been removed from vulnerable sites around the world. This was deadly material that is now secure and can now never be used against a city like Seoul. We’re also using every tool at our disposal to break up black markets and nuclear material. Countries like Georgia and Moldova have seized highly enriched uranium from smugglers. And countries like Jordan are building their own counter-smuggling teams, and we’re tying them together in a global network of intelligence and law enforcement. Nearly 20 nations have now ratified the treaties and international partnerships that are at the center of our efforts. And I should add that with the death of Osama bin Laden and the major blows that we’ve struck against al Qaeda, a terrorist organization that has actively sought nuclear weapons is now on the path to defeat. So in short, the international community has made it harder than ever for terrorists to acquire nuclear weapons, and that has made us all safer. We’re building an international architecture that can ensure nuclear safety. But we’re under no illusions. We know that nuclear material, enough for many weapons, is still being stored without adequate protection. And we know that terrorists and criminal gangs are still trying to get their hands on it -- as well as radioactive material for a dirty bomb. We know that just the smallest amount of plutonium -- about the size of an apple -- could kill hundreds of thousands and spark a global crisis. The danger of nuclear terrorism remains one of the greatest threats to global security. And that's why here in Seoul, we need to keep at it. And I believe we will. We’re expecting dozens of nations to announce over the next several days that they’ve fulfilled the promises they made two years ago. And we’re now expecting more commitments -- tangible, concrete action -- to secure nuclear materials and, in some cases, remove them completely. This is the serious, sustained global effort that we need, and it's an example of more nations bearing the responsibility and the costs of meeting global challenges. This is how the international community should work in the 21st century. And Korea is one of the key leaders in this process. The United States will continue to do our part -- securing our own material and helping others protect theirs. We’re moving forward with Russia to eliminate enough plutonium for about 17,000 nuclear weapons and turn it instead into electricity. I can announce today a new agreement by the United States and several European partners toward sustaining the supply of medical isotopes that are used to treat cancer and heart disease without the use of highly enriched uranium. And we will work with industry and hospitals and research centers in the United States and around the world, to recover thousands of unneeded radiological materials so that they can never do us harm. Now, American leadership has been essential to progress in a second area -- taking concrete steps towards a world without nuclear weapons. As a party to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, this is our obligation, and it’s one that I take very seriously. But I believe the United States has a unique responsibility to act -- indeed, we have a moral obligation. I say this as President of the only nation ever to use nuclear weapons. I say it as a Commander-in-Chief who knows that our nuclear codes are never far from my side. Most of all, I say it as a father, who wants my two young daughters to grow up in a world where everything they know and love can’t be instantly wiped out. Over the past three years, we’ve made important progress. With Russia, we’re now reducing our arsenal under the New START Treaty -- the most comprehensive arms control agreement in nearly 20 years. And when we’re done, we will have cut American and Russian deployed nuclear warheads to their lowest levels since the 1950s. As President, I changed our nuclear posture to reduce the number and role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy. I made it clear that the United States will not develop new nuclear warheads. And we will not pursue new military missions for nuclear weapons. We’ve narrowed the range of contingencies under which we would ever use or threaten to use nuclear weapons. At the same time, I’ve made it clear that so long as nuclear weapons exist, we’ll work with our Congress to maintain a safe, secure and effective arsenal that guarantees the defense not only of the United States but also our allies -- including South Korea and Japan. My administration’s nuclear posture recognizes that the massive nuclear arsenal we inherited from the Cold War is poorly suited to today’s threats, including nuclear terrorism. So last summer, I directed my national security team to conduct a comprehensive study of our nuclear forces. That study is still underway. But even as we have more work to do, we can already say with confidence that we have more nuclear weapons than we need. Even after New START, the United States will still have more than 1,500 deployed nuclear weapons, and some 5,000 warheads. I firmly believe that we can ensure the security of the United States and our allies, maintain a strong deterrent against any threat, and still pursue further reductions in our nuclear arsenal. Going forward, we’ll continue to seek discussions with Russia on a step we have never taken before -- reducing not only our strategic nuclear warheads, but also tactical weapons and warheads in reserve. I look forward to discussing this agenda with President Putin when we will meet in May. Missile defense will be on the agenda, but I believe this should be an area of cooperation, not tension. And I’m confident that, working together, we can continue to make progress and reduce our nuclear stockpiles. Of course, we’ll consult closely with our allies every step of the way, because the security and defense of our allies, both in Europe and Asia, is not negotiable. Here in Asia, we've urged China -- with its growing nuclear arsenal -- to join us in a dialogue on nuclear issues. That offer remains open. And more broadly, my administration will continue to pursue ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. And after years of delay, it’s time to find a path forward on a new treaty that verifiably ends the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons -- ends it once and for all. By working to meet our responsibilities as a nuclear power, we’ve made progress in a third area -- strengthening the global regime that prevents the spread of nuclear weapons. When I came into office, the cornerstone of the world’s effort -- which is the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty -- was fraying. Iran had started spinning thousands of centrifuges. North Korea conducted another nuclear test. And the international community was largely divided on how to respond. Over the past three years, we have begun to reverse that dynamic. Working with others, we’ve enhanced the global partnership that prevent proliferation. The International Atomic Energy Agency is now conducting the strongest inspections ever. And we’ve upheld the basic bargain of the NPT: Countries with nuclear weapons, like the United States and Russia, will move towards disarmament; countries without nuclear weapons will not acquire them; and all countries can have access to peaceful nuclear energy. Because of these efforts, the international community is more united and nations that attempt to flout their obligations are more isolated. Of course, that includes North Korea. Here in Korea, I want to speak directly to the leaders in Pyongyang. The United States has no hostile intent toward your country. We are committed to peace. And we are prepared to take steps to improve relations, which is why we have offered nutritional aid to North Korean mothers and children. But by now it should be clear, your provocations and pursuit of nuclear weapons have not achieved the security you seek; they have undermined it. Instead of the dignity you desire, you're more isolated. Instead of earning the respect of the world, you've been met with strong sanctions and condemnation. You can continue down the road you are on, but we know where that leads. It leads to more of the same -- more broken dreams, more isolation, ever more distance between the people of North Korea and the dignity and the opportunity that they deserve. And know this: There will be no rewards for provocations. Those days are over. To the leaders of Pyongyang I say, this is the choice before you. This is the decision that you must make. Today we say, Pyongyang, have the courage to pursue peace and give a better life to the people of North Korea. This same principle applies with respect to Iran. Under the NPT, Iran has the right to peaceful nuclear energy. In fact, time and again the international community -- including the United States -- has offered to help Iran develop nuclear energy peacefully. But time and again Iran has refused, instead taking the path of denial, deceit and deception. And that is why Iran also stands alone, as the only member of the NPT unable to convince the international community that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes -- the only member. That’s why the world has imposed unprecedented sanctions, slowing Iran’s nuclear program. The international community is now poised to enter talks with Iran’s leaders. Once again, there is the possibility of a diplomatic resolution that gives Iran access to peaceful nuclear energy while addressing the concerns of the international community. Today, I’ll meet with the leaders of Russia and China as we work to achieve a resolution in which Iran fulfills its obligations. There is time to solve this diplomatically. It is always my preference to solve these issues diplomatically. But time is short. Iran’s leaders must understand they, too, face a choice. Iran must act with the seriousness and sense of urgency that this moment demands. Iran must meet its obligations. For the global response to Iran and North Korea’s intransigence, a new international norm is emerging: Treaties are binding; rules will be enforced; and violations will have consequences. We refuse to consign ourselves to a future where more and more regimes possess the world’s most deadly weapons. And this brings me to the final area where we’ve made progress -- a renewed commitment to harnessing the power of the atom not for war, but for peaceful purposes. After the tragedy at Fukushima, it was right and appropriate that nations moved to improve the safety and security of nuclear facilities. We’re doing so in the United States. It’s taking place all across the world. As we do, let’s never forget the astonishing benefits that nuclear technology has brought to our lives. Nuclear technology helps make our food safe. It prevents disease in the developing world. It’s the high-tech medicine that treats cancer and finds new cures. And, of course, it’s the energy -- the clean energy that helps cut the carbon pollution that contributes to climate change. Here in South Korea, as you know, as a leader in nuclear energy, you’ve shown the progress and prosperity that can be achieved when nations embrace peaceful nuclear energy and reject the development of nuclear arms. And with rising oil prices and a warming climate, nuclear energy will only become more important. That’s why, in the United States, we’ve restarted our nuclear industry as part of a comprehensive strategy to develop every energy source. We supported the first new nuclear power plant in three decades. We’re investing in innovative technologies so we can build the next generation of safe, clean nuclear power plants. And we’re training the next generation of scientists and engineers who are going to unlock new technologies to carry us forward. One of the great challenges they’ll face and that your generation will face is the fuel cycle itself in producing nuclear energy. We all know the problem: The very process that gives us nuclear energy can also put nations and terrorists within the reach of nuclear weapons. We simply can’t go on accumulating huge amounts of the very material, like separated plutonium, that we’re trying to keep away from terrorists. And that’s why we’re creating new fuel banks, to help countries realize the energy they seek without increasing the nuclear dangers that we fear. That’s why I’ve called for a new framework for civil nuclear cooperation. We need an international commitment to unlocking the fuel cycle of the future. In the United States we’re investing in the research and development of new fuel cycles so that dangerous materials can’t be stolen or diverted. And today I urge nations to join us in seeking a future where we harness the awesome power of the atom to build and not to destroy. In this sense, we see how the efforts I’ve described today reinforce each other. When we enhance nuclear security, we’re in a stronger position to harness safe, clean nuclear energy. When we develop new, safer approaches to nuclear energy, we reduce the risk of nuclear terrorism and proliferation. When nations, including my own, fulfill our responsibilities, it strengthens our ability to ensure that other nations fulfill their responsibilities. And step by step, we come closer to the security and peace of a world without nuclear weapons. I know that there are those who deride our vision. There are those who say ours is an impossible goal that will be forever out of reach. But to anyone who doubts the great progress that is possible, I tell them, come to Korea. Come to this country, which rose from the ashes of war -- a country that rose from the ashes of war, turning rubble into gleaming cities. Stand where I stood yesterday, along a border that is the world’s clearest contrast between a country committed to progress, a country committed to its people, and a country that leaves its own citizens to starve. Come to this great university, where a new generation is taking its place in the world -- helping to create opportunities that your parents and grandparents could only imagine. Come and see some of the courageous individuals who join us today -- men and women, young and old, born in the North, but who left all they knew behind and risked their lives to find freedom and opportunity here in the South. In your life stories we see the truth -- Koreans are one people. And if just given the chance, if given their freedom, Koreans in the North are capable of great progress as well. Looking out across the DMZ yesterday, but also looking into your eyes today, I’m reminded of another country’s experience that speaks to the change that is possible in our world. After a terrible war, a proud people was divided. Across a fortified border, armies massed, ready for war. For decades, it was hard to imagine a different future. But the forces of history and hopes of man could not be denied. And today, the people of Germany are whole again -- united and free. No two places follow the same path, but this much is true: The currents of history cannot be held back forever. The deep longing for freedom and dignity will not go away. So, too, on this divided peninsula. The day all Koreans yearn for will not come easily or without great sacrifice. But make no mistake, it will come. And when it does, change will unfold that once seemed impossible. And checkpoints will open and watchtowers will stand empty, and families long separated will finally be reunited. And the Korean people, at long last, will be whole and free. Like our vision of a world without nuclear weapons, our vision of a Korea that stands as one may not be reached quickly. But from this day until then, and all the days that follow, we take comfort in knowing that the security we seek, the peace we want, is closer at hand because of the great alliance between the United States and the Republic of Korea; and because we stand for the dignity and freedom of all Koreans. And no matter the test, no matter the trial, we stand together. We work together. We go together.

Katchi kapshida! Thank you very much.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address On Repealing Oil and Gas Subsidies

Thank you very much. Everybody, please have a seat. Sorry we’re running just a little bit behind, but I figured it’s a great day to enjoy the Rose Garden.

Today, members of Congress have a simple choice to make: They can stand with the big oil companies, or they can stand with the American people.

Right now, the biggest oil companies are raking in record profits –- profits that go up every time folks pull up into a gas station. But on top of these record profits, oil companies are also getting billions a year -- billions a year in taxpayer subsidies -- a subsidy that they’ve enjoyed year after year for the last century.

Think about that. It’s like hitting the American people twice. You’re already paying a premium at the pump right now. And on top of that, Congress, up until this point, has thought it was a good idea to send billions of dollars more in tax dollars to the oil industry.

It’s not as if these companies can’t stand on their own. Last year, the three biggest U.S. oil companies took home more than $80 billion in profits. Exxon pocketed nearly $4.7 million every hour. And when the price of oil goes up, prices at the pump go up, and so do these companies’ profits. In fact, one analysis shows that every time gas goes up by a penny, these companies usually pocket another $200 million in quarterly profits. Meanwhile, these companies pay a lower tax rate than most other companies on their investments, partly because we’re giving them billions in tax giveaways every year.

Now, I want to make clear, we all know that drilling for oil has to be a key part of our overall energy strategy. We want U.S. oil companies to be doing well. We want them to succeed. That’s why under my administration, we’ve opened up millions of acres of federal lands and waters to oil and gas production. We’ve quadrupled the number of operating oil rigs to a record high. We’ve added enough oil and gas pipeline to circle the Earth and then some. And just yesterday, we announced the next step for potential new oil and gas exploration in the Atlantic.

So the fact is, we’re producing more oil right now than we have in eight years, and we’re importing less of it as well. For two years in a row, America has bought less oil from other countries than we produce here at home -- for the first time in over a decade.

So American oil is booming. The oil industry is doing just fine. With record profits and rising production, I’m not worried about the big oil companies. With high oil prices around the world, they’ve got more than enough incentive to produce even more oil. That’s why I think it’s time they got by without more help from taxpayers who are already having a tough enough time paying the bills and filling up their gas tank. And I think it’s curious that some folks in Congress, who are the first to belittle investments in new sources of energy, are the ones that are fighting the hardest to maintain these giveaways for the oil companies.

Instead of taxpayer giveaways to an industry that’s never been more profitable, we should be using that money to double-down on investments in clean energy technologies that have never been more promising -- investments in wind power and solar power and biofuels; investments in fuel-efficient cars and trucks, and energy-efficient homes and buildings. That’s the future. That’s the only way we're going to break this cycle of high gas prices that happen year after year after year. As the economy is growing, the only time you start seeing lower gas prices is when the economy is doing badly. That’s not the kind of pattern that we want to be in. We want the economy doing well, and people to be able to afford their energy costs.

And keep in mind, we can’t just drill our way out of this problem. As I said, oil production here in the United States is doing very well, and it's been doing well even as gas prices are going up. Well, the reason is because we use more than 20 percent of the world’s oil but we only have 2 percent of the world’s known oil reserves. And that means we could drill every drop of American oil tomorrow but we’d still have to buy oil from other countries to make up the difference. We’d still have to depend on other countries to meet our energy needs. And because it’s a world market, the fact that we’re doing more here in the United States doesn’t necessarily help us because even U.S. oil companies they’re selling that oil on a worldwide market. They’re not keeping it just for us. And that means that if there’s rising demand around the world then the prices are going to up.

That’s not the future that I want for America. I don’t want folks like these back here and the folks in front of me to have to pay more at the pump every time that there’s some unrest in the Middle East and oil speculators get nervous about whether there’s going to be enough supply. I don’t want our kids to be held hostage to events on the other side of the world.

I want us to control our own destiny. I want us to forge our own future. And that’s why, as long as I’m President, America is going to pursue an all-of-the-above energy strategy, which means we will continue developing our oil and gas resources in a robust and responsible way. But it also means that we’re going to keep developing more advanced homegrown biofuels, the kinds that are already powering truck fleets across America.

We’re going to keep investing in clean energy like the wind power and solar power that’s already lighting thousands of homes and creating thousands of jobs. We’re going to keep manufacturing more cars and trucks to get more miles to the gallon so that you can fill up once every two weeks instead of every week. We’re going to keep building more homes and businesses that waste less energy so that you’re in charge of your own energy bills.

We’re going to do all of this by harnessing our most inexhaustible resource: American ingenuity and American imagination. That’s what we need to keep going. That’s what’s at stake right now. That’s the choice that we face. And that’s the choice that’s facing Congress today. They can either vote to spend billions of dollars more in oil subsidies that keep us trapped in the past, or they can vote to end these taxpayer subsidies that aren’t needed to boost oil production so that we can invest in the future. It’s that simple.

And as long as I’m President, I’m betting on the future. And as the people I’ve talked to around the country, including the people who are behind me here today, they put their faith in the future as well. That’s what we do as Americans. That’s who we are. We innovate. We discover. We seek new solutions to some of our biggest challenges. And, ultimately, because we stick with it, we succeed. And I believe that we’re going to do that again. Today, the American people are going to be watching Congress to see if they have that same faith.

Thank you very much, everybody.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address at an Associated Press Luncheon

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# National Holocaust Memorial Museum Address

Good morning, everyone. It is a great honor to be with you here today. Of course, it is a truly humbling moment to be introduced by Elie Wiesel. Along with Sara Bloomfield, the outstanding director here, we just spent some time among the exhibits, and this is now the second visit I've had here. My daughters have come here. It is a searing occasion whenever you visit. And as we walked, I was taken back to the visit that Elie mentioned, the time that we traveled together to Buchenwald.

And I recall how he showed me the barbed-wire fences and the guard towers. And we walked the rows where the barracks once stood, where so many left this Earth -- including Elie’s father, Shlomo. We stopped at an old photo -- men and boys lying in their wooden bunks, barely more than skeletons. And if you look closely, you can see a 16-year old boy, looking right at the camera, right into your eyes. You can see Elie.

And at the end of our visit that day, Elie spoke of his father. "I thought one day I will come back and speak to him," he said, "of times in which memory has become a sacred duty of all people of goodwill." Elie, you've devoted your life to upholding that sacred duty. You’ve challenged us all -- as individuals, and as nations -- to do the same, with the power of your example, the eloquence of your words, as you did again just now. And so to you and Marion, we are extraordinarily grateful.

To Sara, to Tom Bernstein, to Josh Bolten, members of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, and everyone who sustains this living memorial -- thank you for welcoming us here today. To the members of Congress, members of the diplomatic corps, including Ambassador Michael Oren of Israel, we are glad to be with you.

And most of all, we are honored to be in the presence of men and women whose lives are a testament to the endurance and the strength of the human spirit -- the inspiring survivors. It is a privilege to be with you, on a very personal level. As I’ve told some of you before, I grew up hearing stories about my great uncle -- a soldier in the 89th Infantry Division who was stunned and shaken by what he saw when he helped to liberate Ordruf, part of Buchenwald. And I’ll never forget what I saw at Buchenwald, where so many perished with the words of Sh’ma Yis’ra’eil on their lips.

I’ve stood with survivors, in the old Warsaw ghettos, where a monument honors heroes who said we will not go quietly; we will stand up, we will fight back. And I’ve walked those sacred grounds at Yad Vashem, with its lesson for all nations -- the Shoah cannot be denied.

During my visit to Yad Vashem I was given a gift, inscribed with those words from the Book of Joel: "Has the like of this happened in your days or in the days of your fathers? Tell your children about it, and let your children tell theirs, and their children the next generation." That’s why we’re here. Not simply to remember, but to speak.

I say this as a President, and I say it as a father. We must tell our children about a crime unique in human history. The one and only Holocaust -- six million innocent people -- men, women, children, babies -- sent to their deaths just for being different, just for being Jewish. We tell them, our children, about the millions of Poles and Catholics and Roma and gay people and so many others who also must never be forgotten. Let us tell our children not only how they died, but also how they lived -- as fathers and mothers, and sons and daughters, and brothers and sisters who loved and hoped and dreamed, just like us.

We must tell our children about how this evil was allowed to happen -- because so many people succumbed to their darkest instincts, and because so many others stood silent. Let us also tell our children about the Righteous Among the Nations. Among them was Jan Karski, a young Polish Catholic, who witnessed Jews being put on cattle cars, who saw the killings, and who told the truth, all the way to President Roosevelt himself.

Jan Karski passed away more than a decade ago. But today, I’m proud to announce that this spring I will honor him with America’s highest civilian honor -- the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

We must tell our children. But more than that, we must teach them. Because remembrance without resolve is a hollow gesture. Awareness without action changes nothing. In this sense, "never again" is a challenge to us all -- to pause and to look within.

For the Holocaust may have reached its barbaric climax at Treblinka and Auschwitz and Belzec, but it started in the hearts of ordinary men and women. And we have seen it again -- madness that can sweep through peoples, sweep through nations, embed itself. The killings in Cambodia, the killings in Rwanda, the killings in Bosnia, the killings in Darfur -- they shock our conscience, but they are the awful extreme of a spectrum of ignorance and intolerance that we see every day; the bigotry that says another person is less than my equal, less than human. These are the seeds of hate that we cannot let take root in our heart.

"Never again" is a challenge to reject hatred in all of its forms -- including anti-Semitism, which has no place in a civilized world. And today, just steps from where he gave his life protecting this place, we honor the memory of Officer Stephen Tyrone Johns, whose family joins us today.

"Never again" is a challenge to defend the fundamental right of free people and free nations to exist in peace and security -- and that includes the State of Israel. And on my visit to the old Warsaw Ghetto, a woman looked me in the eye, and she wanted to make sure America stood with Israel. She said, "It’s the only Jewish state we have." And I made her a promise in that solemn place. I said I will always be there for Israel. So when efforts are made to equate Zionism to racism, we reject them. When international fora single out Israel with unfair resolutions, we vote against them. When attempts are made to delegitimize the state of Israel, we oppose them. When faced with a regime that threatens global security and denies the Holocaust and threatens to destroy Israel, the United States will do everything in our power to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon.

"Never again" is a challenge to societies. We’re joined today by communities who’ve made it your mission to prevent mass atrocities in our time. This museum’s Committee of Conscience, NGOs, faith groups, college students, you’ve harnessed the tools of the digital age -- online maps and satellites and a video and social media campaign seen by millions. You understand that change comes from the bottom up, from the grassroots. You understand -- to quote the task force convened by this museum -- "preventing genocide is an achievable goal." It is an achievable goal. It is one that does not start from the top; it starts from the bottom up.

It’s remarkable -- as we walked through this exhibit, Elie and I were talking as we looked at the unhappy record of the State Department and so many officials here in the United States during those years. And he asked, "What would you do?" But what you all understand is you don't just count on officials, you don't just count on governments. You count on people -- and mobilizing their consciences.

And finally, "never again" is a challenge to nations. It’s a bitter truth -- too often, the world has failed to prevent the killing of innocents on a massive scale. And we are haunted by the atrocities that we did not stop and the lives we did not save.

Three years ago today, I joined many of you for a ceremony of remembrance at the U.S. Capitol. And I said that we had to do "everything we can to prevent and end atrocities." And so I want to report back to some of you today to let you know that as President I’ve done my utmost to back up those words with deeds. Last year, in the first-ever presidential directive on this challenge, I made it clear that "preventing mass atrocities and genocide is a core national security interest and a core moral responsibility of the United States of America."

That does not mean that we intervene militarily every time there’s an injustice in the world. We cannot and should not. It does mean we possess many tools -- diplomatic and political, and economic and financial, and intelligence and law enforcement and our moral suasion -- and using these tools over the past three years, I believe -- I know -- that we have saved countless lives.

When the referendum in South Sudan was in doubt, it threatened to reignite a conflict that had killed millions. But with determined diplomacy, including by some people in this room, South Sudan became the world’s newest nation. And our diplomacy continues, because in Darfur, in Abyei, in Southern Kordofan and the Blue Nile, the killing of innocents must come to an end. The Presidents of Sudan and South Sudan must have the courage to negotiate -- because the people of Sudan and South Sudan deserve peace. That is work that we have done, and it has saved lives.

When the incumbent in CÃ´te D’Ivoire lost an election but refused to give it up -- give up power, it threatened to unleash untold ethnic and religious killings. But with regional and international diplomacy, and U.N. peacekeepers who stood their ground and protected civilians, the former leader is now in The Hague, and CÃ´te D’Ivoire is governed by its rightful leader -- and lives were saved.

When the Libyan people demanded their rights and Muammar Qaddafi’s forces bore down on Benghazi, a city of 700,000, and threatened to hunt down its people like rats, we forged with allies and partners a coalition that stopped his troops in their tracks. And today, the Libyan people are forging their own future, and the world can take pride in the innocent lives that we saved.

And when the Lord’s Resistance Army led by Joseph Kony continued its atrocities in Central Africa, I ordered a small number of American advisors to help Uganda and its neighbors pursue the LRA. And when I made that announcement, I directed my National Security Council to review our progress after 150 days. We have done so, and today I can announce that our advisors will continue their efforts to bring this madman to justice, and to save lives. It is part of our regional strategy to end the scourge that is the LRA, and help realize a future where no African child is stolen from their family and no girl is raped and no boy is turned into a child soldier.

We’ve stepped up our efforts in other ways. We’re doing more to protect women and girls from the horror of wartime sexual violence. With the arrest of fugitives like Ratko Mladic, charged with ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, the world sent a message to war criminals everywhere: We will not relent in bringing you to justice. Be on notice. And for the first time, we explicitly barred entry into the United States of those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Now we’re doing something more. We’re making sure that the United States government has the structures, the mechanisms to better prevent and respond to mass atrocities. So I created the first-ever White House position dedicated to this task. It’s why I created a new Atrocities Prevention Board, to bring together senior officials from across our government to focus on this critical mission. This is not an afterthought. This is not a sideline in our foreign policy. The board will convene for the first time today, at the White House. And I’m pleased that one of its first acts will be to meet with some of your organizations -- citizens and activists who are partners in this work, who have been carrying this torch.

Going forward, we’ll strengthen our tools across the board, and we'll create new ones. The intelligence community will prepare, for example, the first-ever National Intelligence Estimate on the risk of mass atrocities and genocide. We're going to institutionalize the focus on this issue. Across government, "alert channels" will ensure that information about unfolding crises -- and dissenting opinions -- quickly reach decision-makers, including me.

Our Treasury Department will work to more quickly deploy its financial tools to block the flow of money to abusive regimes. Our military will take additional steps to incorporate the prevention of atrocities into its doctrine and its planning. And the State Department will increase its ability to surge our diplomats and experts in a crisis. USAID will invite people and high-tech companies to help create new technologies to quickly expose violations of human rights. And we’ll work with other nations so the burden is better shared -- because this is a global responsibility.

In short, we need to be doing everything we can to prevent and respond to these kinds of atrocities -- because national sovereignty is never a license to slaughter your people.

We recognize that, even as we do all we can, we cannot control every event. And when innocents suffer, it tears at our conscience. Elie alluded to what we feel as we see the Syrian people subjected to unspeakable violence, simply for demanding their universal rights. And we have to do everything we can. And as we do, we have to remember that despite all the tanks and all the snipers, all the torture and brutality unleashed against them, the Syrian people still brave the streets. They still demand to be heard. They still seek their dignity. The Syrian people have not given up, which is why we cannot give up.

And so with allies and partners, we will keep increasing the pressure, with a diplomatic effort to further isolate Assad and his regime, so that those who stick with Assad know that they are making a losing bet. We’ll keep increasing sanctions to cut off the regime from the money it needs to survive. We’ll sustain a legal effort to document atrocities so killers face justice, and a humanitarian effort to get relief and medicine to the Syrian people. And we’ll keep working with the "Friends of Syria" to increase support for the Syrian opposition as it grows stronger.

Indeed, today we’re taking another step. I’ve signed an executive order that authorizes new sanctions against the Syrian government and Iran and those that abet them for using technologies to monitor and track and target citizens for violence. These technologies should not empower -- these technologies should be in place to empower citizens, not to repress them. And it’s one more step that we can take toward the day that we know will come -- the end of the Assad regime that has brutalized the Syrian people -- and allow the Syrian people to chart their own destiny.

Even with all the efforts I’ve described today, even with everything that hopefully we have learned, even with the incredible power of museums like this one, even with everything that we do to try to teach our children about our own responsibilities, we know that our work will never be done. There will be conflicts that are not easily resolved. There will be senseless deaths that aren’t prevented. There will be stories of pain and hardship that test our hopes and try our conscience. And in such moments it can be hard to imagine a more just world.

It can be tempting to throw up our hands and resign ourselves to man’s endless capacity for cruelty. It’s tempting sometimes to believe that there is nothing we can do. And all of us have those doubts. All of us have those moments -- perhaps especially those who work most ardently in these fields.

So in the end, I come back to something Elie said that day we visited Buchenwald together. Reflecting on all that he had endured, he said, "We had the right to give up." "We had the right to give up on humanity, to give up on culture, to give up on education, to give up on the possibility of living one's life with dignity, in a world that has no place for dignity." They had that right. Imagine what they went through. They had the right to give up. Nobody would begrudge them that. Who’d question someone giving up in such circumstances?

But, Elie said, "We rejected that possibility, and we said, no, we must continue believing in a future." To stare into the abyss, to face the darkness and insist there is a future -- to not give up, to say yes to life, to believe in the possibility of justice.

To Elie and to the survivors who are here today, thank you for not giving up. You show us the way. You show us the way. If you cannot give up, if you can believe, then we can believe. If you can continue to strive and speak, then we can speak and strive for a future where there’s a place for dignity for every human being. That has been the cause of your lives. It must be the work of our nation and of all nations.

So God bless you.

And God bless the United States of America.

Thank you very much.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# White House Correspondents' Dinner Address 2012

Thank you. Good evening, everybody. Good evening. I could not be more thrilled to be here tonight -- at the White House Correspondents’ Dinner. This is great crowd. They’re already laughing. It’s terrific.

Chuck Todd -- love you, brother. I’m delighted to see some of the cast members of Glee are here. And Jimmy Kimmel, it’s an honor, man. What’s so funny?

My fellow Americans, we gather during a historic anniversary. Last year at this time -- in fact, on this very weekend -- we finally delivered justice to one of the world’s most notorious individuals. [photo of Donald Trump appears onscreen] Now, this year, we gather in the midst of a heated election season. And Axelrod tells me I should never miss a chance to reintroduce myself to the American people. So tonight, this is how I’d like to begin: My name is Barack Obama. My mother was born in Kansas. My father was born in Kenya. And I was born, of course, in Hawaii.

In 2009, I took office in the face of some enormous challenges. Now, some have said I blame too many problems on my predecessor, but let’s not forget that’s a practice that was initiated by George W. Bush. Since then, Congress and I have certainly had our differences; yet, I’ve tried to be civil, to not take any cheap shots. And that’s why I want to especially thank all the members who took a break from their exhausting schedule of not passing any laws to be here tonight. Let’s give them a big round of applause.

Despite many obstacles, much has changed during my time in office. Four years ago, I was locked in a brutal primary battle with Hillary Clinton. Four years later, she won’t stop drunk-texting me from Cartagena.

Four years ago, I was a Washington outsider. Four years later, I’m at this dinner. Four years ago, I looked like this. Today, I look like this. And four years from now, I will look like this. That’s not even funny.

Anyway, it’s great to be here this evening in the vast, magnificent Hilton ballroom -- or what Mitt Romney would call a little fixer-upper. I mean, look at this party. We’ve got men in tuxes, women in gowns, fine wine, first-class entertainment. I was just relieved to learn this was not a GSA conference. Unbelievable. Not even the mind reader knew what they were thinking.

Of course, the White House Correspondents’ Dinner is known as the prom of Washington D.C. -- a term coined by political reporters who clearly never had the chance to go to an actual prom.

Our chaperone for the evening is Jimmy Kimmel -- who is perfect for the job since most of tonight’s audience is in his key demographic -- people who fall asleep during Nightline. Jimmy got his start years ago on The Man Show. In Washington, that’s what we call a congressional hearing on contraception.

And plenty of journalists are here tonight. I'd be remiss if I didn’t congratulate the Huffington Post on their Pulitzer Prize. You deserve it, Arianna. There's no one else out there linking to the kinds of hard-hitting journalism that HuffPo is linking to every single day. Give them a round of applause. And you don’t pay them -- it's a great business model.

Even Sarah Palin is getting back into the game, guest hosting on The Today Show -- which reminds me of an old saying: What's the difference between a hockey mom and a pit bull? A pit bull is delicious. A little soy sauce.

Now, I know at this point many of you are expecting me to go after my likely opponent, Newt Gingrich. Newt, there's still time, man. But I'm not going to do that -- I'm not going to attack any of the Republican candidates. Take Mitt Romney -- he and I actually have a lot in common. We both think of our wives as our better halves, and polls show, to a alarmingly insulting extent, the American people agree. We also both have degrees from Harvard; I have one, he has two. What a snob.

Of course, we've also had our differences. Recently, his campaign criticized me for slow jamming the news with Jimmy Fallon. In fact, I understand Governor Romney was so incensed he asked his staff if he could get some equal time on The Merv Griffin Show. Still, I guess Governor Romney is feeling pretty good about things because he took a few hours off the other day to see The Hunger Games -- some of you have seen it. It's a movie about people who court wealthy sponsors and then brutally savage each other until only one contestant is left standing. I'm sure this was a really good change of pace for him. I have not seen The Hunger Games; not enough class warfare for me.

Of course, I know everybody is predicting a nasty election, and thankfully, we've all agreed that families are off limits. Dogs, however, are apparently fair game. And while both campaigns have had some fun with this, the other day I saw a new ad from one of these outside groups that, frankly, I think crossed the line. I know Governor Romney says he has no control over what his super PACs do, but can we show the ad real quick?

That’s pretty rough -- but I can take it, because my stepfather always told me, it's a boy-eat-dog world out there.

Now, if I do win a second term as President, let me just say something to all the -- let me just say something to all my conspiracy-oriented friends on the right who think I'm planning to unleash some secret agenda: You're absolutely right. So allow me to close with a quick preview of the secret agenda you can expect in a second Obama administration.

In my first term, I sang Al Green; in my second term, I'm going with Young Jeezy.

Mrs. Obama: Yeah.

Mr. President: Michelle said, yeah. I sing that to her sometimes.

In my first term, we ended the war in Iraq; in my second term, I will win the war on Christmas. In my first term, we repealed the policy known as "don't ask, don't tell" -- wait, though; in my second term, we will replace it with a policy known as, it's raining men. In my first term, we passed health care reform; in my second term, I guess I'll pass it again.

I do want to end tonight on a slightly more serious note -- whoever takes the oath of office next January will face some great challenges, but he will also inherit traditions that make us greater than the challenges we face. And one of those traditions is represented here tonight: a free press that isn't afraid to ask questions, to examine and to criticize. And in service of that mission, all of you make sacrifices.

Tonight, we remember journalists such as Anthony Shadid and Marie Colvin -- who made the ultimate sacrifice as they sought to shine a light on some of the most important stories of our time. So whether you are a blogger or a broadcaster, whether you take on powerful interests here at home or put yourself in harm's way overseas, I have the greatest respect and admiration for what you do. I know sometimes you like to give me a hard time -- and I certainly like to return the favor -- but I never forget that our country depends on you. You help protect our freedom, our democracy, and our way of life.

And just to set the record straight, I really do enjoy attending these dinners. In fact, I had a lot more material prepared, but I have to get the Secret Service home in time for their new curfew.

Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you.

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# Commencement Address at Barnard College

Thank you, President Spar, trustees, President Bollinger. Hello, Class of 2012! Congratulations on reaching this day. Thank you for the honor of being able to be a part of it.

There are so many people who are proud of you -- your parents, family, faculty, friends -- all who share in this achievement. So please give them a big round of applause. To all the moms who are here today, you could not ask for a better Mother’s Day gift than to see all of these folks graduate.

I have to say, though, whenever I come to these things, I start thinking about Malia and Sasha graduating, and I start tearing up and -- it's terrible. I don't know how you guys are holding it together.

I will begin by telling a hard truth: I’m a Columbia college graduate. I know there can be a little bit of a sibling rivalry here. But I’m honored nevertheless to be your commencement speaker today -- although I’ve got to say, you set a pretty high bar given the past three years. Hillary Clinton -- Meryl Streep -- Sheryl Sandberg -- these are not easy acts to follow.

But I will point out Hillary is doing an extraordinary job as one of the finest Secretaries of State America has ever had. We gave Meryl the Presidential Medal of Arts and Humanities. Sheryl is not just a good friend; she’s also one of our economic advisers. So it’s like the old saying goes -- keep your friends close, and your Barnard commencement speakers even closer. There's wisdom in that.

Now, the year I graduated -- this area looks familiar -- the year I graduated was 1983, the first year women were admitted to Columbia. Sally Ride was the first American woman in space. Music was all about Michael and the Moonwalk.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Do it!

THE PRESIDENT: No Moonwalking. No Moonwalking today.

We had the Walkman, not iPods. Some of the streets around here were not quite so inviting. Times Square was not a family destination. So I know this is all ancient history. Nothing worse than commencement speakers droning on about bygone days. But for all the differences, the Class of 1983 actually had a lot in common with all of you. For we, too, were heading out into a world at a moment when our country was still recovering from a particularly severe economic recession. It was a time of change. It was a time of uncertainty. It was a time of passionate political debates.

You can relate to this because just as you were starting out finding your way around this campus, an economic crisis struck that would claim more than 5 million jobs before the end of your freshman year. Since then, some of you have probably seen parents put off retirement, friends struggle to find work. And you may be looking toward the future with that same sense of concern that my generation did when we were sitting where you are now.

Of course, as young women, you’re also going to grapple with some unique challenges, like whether you’ll be able to earn equal pay for equal work; whether you’ll be able to balance the demands of your job and your family; whether you’ll be able to fully control decisions about your own health.

And while opportunities for women have grown exponentially over the last 30 years, as young people, in many ways you have it even tougher than we did. This recession has been more brutal, the job losses steeper. Politics seems nastier. Congress more gridlocked than ever. Some folks in the financial world have not exactly been model corporate citizens.

No wonder that faith in our institutions has never been lower, particularly when good news doesn’t get the same kind of ratings as bad news anymore. Every day you receive a steady stream of sensationalism and scandal and stories with a message that suggest change isn’t possible; that you can’t make a difference; that you won’t be able to close that gap between life as it is and life as you want it to be.

My job today is to tell you don’t believe it. Because as tough as things have been, I am convinced you are tougher. I’ve seen your passion and I’ve seen your service. I’ve seen you engage and I’ve seen you turn out in record numbers. I’ve heard your voices amplified by creativity and a digital fluency that those of us in older generations can barely comprehend. I’ve seen a generation eager, impatient even, to step into the rushing waters of history and change its course.

And that defiant, can-do spirit is what runs through the veins of American history. It’s the lifeblood of all our progress. And it is that spirit which we need your generation to embrace and rekindle right now.

See, the question is not whether things will get better -- they always do. The question is not whether we’ve got the solutions to our challenges -- we’ve had them within our grasp for quite some time. We know, for example, that this country would be better off if more Americans were able to get the kind of education that you’ve received here at Barnard -- if more people could get the specific skills and training that employers are looking for today.

We know that we’d all be better off if we invest in science and technology that sparks new businesses and medical breakthroughs; if we developed more clean energy so we could use less foreign oil and reduce the carbon pollution that’s threatening our planet.

We know that we’re better off when there are rules that stop big banks from making bad bets with other people’s money and -- when insurance companies aren’t allowed to drop your coverage when you need it most or charge women differently from men. Indeed, we know we are better off when women are treated fairly and equally in every aspect of American life -- whether it’s the salary you earn or the health decisions you make.

We know these things to be true. We know that our challenges are eminently solvable. The question is whether together, we can muster the will -- in our own lives, in our common institutions, in our politics -- to bring about the changes we need. And I’m convinced your generation possesses that will. And I believe that the women of this generation -- that all of you will help lead the way.

Now, I recognize that’s a cheap applause line when you're giving a commencement at Barnard. It’s the easy thing to say. But it’s true. It is -- in part, it is simple math. Today, women are not just half this country; you’re half its workforce. More and more women are out-earning their husbands. You’re more than half of our college graduates, and master’s graduates, and PhDs. So you’ve got us outnumbered.

After decades of slow, steady, extraordinary progress, you are now poised to make this the century where women shape not only their own destiny but the destiny of this nation and of this world.

But how far your leadership takes this country, how far it takes this world -- well, that will be up to you. You’ve got to want it. It will not be handed to you. And as someone who wants that future -- that better future -- for you, and for Malia and Sasha, as somebody who’s had the good fortune of being the husband and the father and the son of some strong, remarkable women, allow me to offer just a few pieces of advice. That's obligatory. Bear with me.

My first piece of advice is this: Don’t just get involved. Fight for your seat at the table. Better yet, fight for a seat at the head of the table.

It’s been said that the most important role in our democracy is the role of citizen. And indeed, it was 225 years ago today that the Constitutional Convention opened in Philadelphia, and our founders, citizens all, began crafting an extraordinary document. Yes, it had its flaws -- flaws that this nation has strived to protect (perfect) over time. Questions of race and gender were unresolved. No woman’s signature graced the original document -- although we can assume that there were founding mothers whispering smarter things in the ears of the founding fathers. I mean, that's almost certain.

What made this document special was that it provided the space -- the possibility -- for those who had been left out of our charter to fight their way in. It provided people the language to appeal to principles and ideals that broadened democracy’s reach. It allowed for protest, and movements, and the dissemination of new ideas that would repeatedly, decade after decade, change the world -- a constant forward movement that continues to this day.

Our founders understood that America does not stand still; we are dynamic, not static. We look forward, not back. And now that new doors have been opened for you, you’ve got an obligation to seize those opportunities.

You need to do this not just for yourself but for those who don’t yet enjoy the choices that you’ve had, the choices you will have. And one reason many workplaces still have outdated policies is because women only account for 3 percent of the CEOs at Fortune 500 companies. One reason we’re actually refighting long-settled battles over women’s rights is because women occupy fewer than one in five seats in Congress.

Now, I’m not saying that the only way to achieve success is by climbing to the top of the corporate ladder or running for office -- although, let’s face it, Congress would get a lot more done if you did. That I think we’re sure about. But if you decide not to sit yourself at the table, at the very least you’ve got to make sure you have a say in who does. It matters.

Before women like Barbara Mikulski and Olympia Snowe and others got to Congress, just to take one example, much of federally-funded research on diseases focused solely on their effects on men. It wasn’t until women like Patsy Mink and Edith Green got to Congress and passed Title IX, 40 years ago this year, that we declared women, too, should be allowed to compete and win on America’s playing fields. Until a woman named Lilly Ledbetter showed up at her office and had the courage to step up and say, you know what, this isn’t right, women weren’t being treated fairly -- we lacked some of the tools we needed to uphold the basic principle of equal pay for equal work.

So don’t accept somebody else’s construction of the way things ought to be. It’s up to you to right wrongs. It’s up to you to point out injustice. It’s up to you to hold the system accountable and sometimes upend it entirely. It’s up to you to stand up and to be heard, to write and to lobby, to march, to organize, to vote. Don’t be content to just sit back and watch.

Those who oppose change, those who benefit from an unjust status quo, have always bet on the public’s cynicism or the public's complacency. Throughout American history, though, they have lost that bet, and I believe they will this time as well. But ultimately, Class of 2012, that will depend on you. Don’t wait for the person next to you to be the first to speak up for what’s right. Because maybe, just maybe, they’re waiting on you.

Which brings me to my second piece of advice: Never underestimate the power of your example. The very fact that you are graduating, let alone that more women now graduate from college than men, is only possible because earlier generations of women -- your mothers, your grandmothers, your aunts -- shattered the myth that you couldn’t or shouldn’t be where you are.

I think of a friend of mine who’s the daughter of immigrants. When she was in high school, her guidance counselor told her, you know what, you’re just not college material. You should think about becoming a secretary. Well, she was stubborn, so she went to college anyway. She got her master’s. She ran for local office, won. She ran for state office, she won. She ran for Congress, she won. And lo and behold, Hilda Solis did end up becoming a secretary -- she is America’s Secretary of Labor.

So think about what that means to a young Latina girl when she sees a Cabinet secretary that looks like her. Think about what it means to a young girl in Iowa when she sees a presidential candidate who looks like her. Think about what it means to a young girl walking in Harlem right down the street when she sees a U.N. ambassador who looks like her. Do not underestimate the power of your example.

This diploma opens up new possibilities, so reach back, convince a young girl to earn one, too. If you earned your degree in areas where we need more women -- like computer science or engineering -- reach back and persuade another student to study it, too. If you're going into fields where we need more women, like construction or computer engineering -- reach back, hire someone new. Be a mentor. Be a role model.

Until a girl can imagine herself, can picture herself as a computer programmer, or a combatant commander, she won’t become one. Until there are women who tell her, ignore our pop culture obsession over beauty and fashion -- and focus instead on studying and inventing and competing and leading, she’ll think those are the only things that girls are supposed to care about. Now, Michelle will say, nothing wrong with caring about it a little bit. You can be stylish and powerful, too. That's Michelle’s advice.

And never forget that the most important example a young girl will ever follow is that of a parent. Malia and Sasha are going to be outstanding women because Michelle and Marian Robinson are outstanding women. So understand your power, and use it wisely.

My last piece of advice -- this is simple, but perhaps most important: Persevere. Persevere. Nothing worthwhile is easy. No one of achievement has avoided failure -- sometimes catastrophic failures. But they keep at it. They learn from mistakes. They don’t quit.

You know, when I first arrived on this campus, it was with little money, fewer options. But it was here that I tried to find my place in this world. I knew I wanted to make a difference, but it was vague how in fact I’d go about it. But I wanted to do my part to do my part to shape a better world.

So even as I worked after graduation in a few unfulfilling jobs here in New York -- I will not list them all -- even as I went from motley apartment to motley apartment, I reached out. I started to write letters to community organizations all across the country. And one day, a small group of churches on the South Side of Chicago answered, offering me work with people in neighborhoods hit hard by steel mills that were shutting down and communities where jobs were dying away.

The community had been plagued by gang violence, so once I arrived, one of the first things we tried to do was to mobilize a meeting with community leaders to deal with gangs. And I’d worked for weeks on this project. We invited the police; we made phone calls; we went to churches; we passed out flyers. The night of the meeting we arranged rows and rows of chairs in anticipation of this crowd. And we waited, and we waited. And finally, a group of older folks walked in to the hall and they sat down. And this little old lady raised her hand and asked, “Is this where the bingo game is?” It was a disaster. Nobody showed up. My first big community meeting -- nobody showed up.

And later, the volunteers I worked with told me, that's it; we’re quitting. They'd been doing this for two years even before I had arrived. They had nothing to show for it. And I’ll be honest, I felt pretty discouraged as well. I didn't know what I was doing. I thought about quitting. And as we were talking, I looked outside and saw some young boys playing in a vacant lot across the street. And they were just throwing rocks up at a boarded building. They had nothing better to do -- late at night, just throwing rocks. And I said to the volunteers, “Before you quit, answer one question. What will happen to those boys if you quit? Who will fight for them if we don’t? Who will give them a fair shot if we leave?

And one by one, the volunteers decided not to quit. We went back to those neighborhoods and we kept at it. We registered new voters, and we set up after-school programs, and we fought for new jobs, and helped people live lives with some measure of dignity. And we sustained ourselves with those small victories. We didn’t set the world on fire. Some of those communities are still very poor. There are still a lot of gangs out there. But I believe that it was those small victories that helped me win the bigger victories of my last three and a half years as President.

And I wish I could say that this perseverance came from some innate toughness in me. But the truth is, it was learned. I got it from watching the people who raised me. More specifically, I got it from watching the women who shaped my life.

I grew up as the son of a single mom who struggled to put herself through school and make ends meet. She had marriages that fell apart; even went on food stamps at one point to help us get by. But she didn’t quit. And she earned her degree, and made sure that through scholarships and hard work, my sister and I earned ours. She used to wake me up when we were living overseas -- wake me up before dawn to study my English lessons. And when I’d complain, she’d just look at me and say, “This is no picnic for me either, buster.”

And my mom ended up dedicating herself to helping women around the world access the money they needed to start their own businesses -- she was an early pioneer in microfinance. And that meant, though, that she was gone a lot, and she had her own struggles trying to figure out balancing motherhood and a career. And when she was gone, my grandmother stepped up to take care of me.

She only had a high school education. She got a job at a local bank. She hit the glass ceiling, and watched men she once trained promoted up the ladder ahead of her. But she didn’t quit. Rather than grow hard or angry each time she got passed over, she kept doing her job as best as she knew how, and ultimately ended up being vice president at the bank. She didn’t quit.

And later on, I met a woman who was assigned to advise me on my first summer job at a law firm. And she gave me such good advice that I married her. And Michelle and I gave everything we had to balance our careers and a young family. But let’s face it, no matter how enlightened I must have thought myself to be, it often fell more on her shoulders when I was traveling, when I was away. I know that when she was with our girls, she’d feel guilty that she wasn’t giving enough time to her work, and when she was at her work, she’d feel guilty she wasn’t giving enough time to our girls. And both of us wished we had some superpower that would let us be in two places at once. But we persisted. We made that marriage work.

And the reason Michelle had the strength to juggle everything, and put up with me and eventually the public spotlight, was because she, too, came from a family of folks who didn’t quit -- because she saw her dad get up and go to work every day even though he never finished college, even though he had crippling MS. She saw her mother, even though she never finished college, in that school, that urban school, every day making sure Michelle and her brother were getting the education they deserved. Michelle saw how her parents never quit. They never indulged in self-pity, no matter how stacked the odds were against them. They didn't quit.

Those are the folks who inspire me. People ask me sometimes, who inspires you, Mr. President? Those quiet heroes all across this country -- some of your parents and grandparents who are sitting here -- no fanfare, no articles written about them, they just persevere. They just do their jobs. They meet their responsibilities. They don't quit. I'm only here because of them. They may not have set out to change the world, but in small, important ways, they did. They certainly changed mine.

So whether it’s starting a business, or running for office, or raising a amazing family, remember that making your mark on the world is hard. It takes patience. It takes commitment. It comes with plenty of setbacks and it comes with plenty of failures.

But whenever you feel that creeping cynicism, whenever you hear those voices say you can’t make a difference, whenever somebody tells you to set your sights lower -- the trajectory of this country should give you hope. Previous generations should give you hope. What young generations have done before should give you hope. Young folks who marched and mobilized and stood up and sat in, from Seneca Falls to Selma to Stonewall, didn’t just do it for themselves; they did it for other people.

That’s how we achieved women’s rights. That's how we achieved voting rights. That's how we achieved workers’ rights. That's how we achieved gay rights. That’s how we’ve made this Union more perfect.

And if you’re willing to do your part now, if you're willing to reach up and close that gap between what America is and what America should be, I want you to know that I will be right there with you. If you are ready to fight for that brilliant, radically simple idea of America that no matter who you are or what you look like, no matter who you love or what God you worship, you can still pursue your own happiness, I will join you every step of the way.

Now more than ever -- Now more than ever, America needs what you, the Class of 2012, has to offer. America needs you to reach high and hope deeply. And if you fight for your seat at the table, and you set a better example, and you persevere in what you decide to do with your life, I have every faith not only that you will succeed, but that, through you, our nation will continue to be a beacon of light for men and women, boys and girls, in every corner of the globe.

So thank you. Congratulations. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

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# Shimon Peres Presidential Medal of Freedom Remarks

On behalf of Michelle and myself, welcome to the White House on this beautiful summer evening.

The United States is fortunate to have many allies and partners around the world. Of course, one of our strongest allies, and one of our closest friends, is the State of Israel. And no individual has done so much over so many years to build our alliance and to bring our two nations closer as the leader that we honor tonight -- our friend, Shimon Peres.

Among many special guests this evening we are especially grateful for the presence of Shimon’s children -- Tzvia, Yoni and Chemi, and their families. Please rise so we can give you a big round of applause.

We have here someone representing a family that has given so much for peace, a voice for peace that carries on with the legacy of her father, Yitzhak Rabin -- and that's Dalia. We are grateful to have you here. Leaders who’ve helped ensure that the United States is a partner for peace -- and in particular, I'm so pleased to see Secretary Madeleine Albright, who is here this evening. And one of the great moral voices of our time and an inspiration to us all -- Professor Elie Wiesel.

The man, the life that we honor tonight is nothing short of extraordinary. Shimon took on his first assignment in Ben-Gurion’s Haganah, during the struggle for Israeli independence in 1947, when he was still in his early 20s. He ran for President of Israel -- and won -- when he was 83.

By the way, I should mention that I just learned that his son-in-law is also his doctor. And I asked for all his tips.

Shimon has been serving his nation -- and strengthening the bonds between our two nations -- for some 65 years, the entire life of the State of Israel. Ben-Gurion and Meir, Begin and Rabin -- these giants of Israel’s founding generation now belong to the ages. But tonight, we have the rare privilege in history -- and that's to be in the presence of a true Founding Father.

Shimon, you have never stopped serving. And in two months we’ll join our Israeli friends in marking another milestone -- your 89th birthday.

Now, I think Shimon would be the first to tell you that in the ups and downs of Israeli politics, he has been counted out more than once. But in him we see the essence of Israel itself -- an indomitable spirit that will not be denied. He’s persevered, serving in virtually every position -- in dozens of cabinets, some two dozen ministerial posts, defense minister, finance minister, foreign minister three times. Try that, Madeleine. And now, the 9th President of Israel. And I think President Clinton would agree with me on this -- Shimon Peres is the ultimate "Comeback Kid."

And he’s still going -- on Facebook, on You Tube -- connecting with young people; looking to new technologies, always "facing tomorrow." Recently, he was asked, "What do you want your legacy to be?" And Shimon replied, "Well, it’s too early for me to think about it."

Shimon, you earned your place in history long ago. And I know your work is far from done. But tonight is another example of how it’s never too early for the rest of us to celebrate your legendary life.

Shimon teaches us to never settle for the world as it is. We have a vision for the world as it ought to be, and we have to strive for it. Perhaps Shimon’s spirit comes from what he calls the Jewish "dissatisfaction gene." "A good Jew," he says, "can never be satisfied." There is a constant impulse to question, to do even better. So, too, with nations -- we must keep challenging ourselves, keep striving for our ideals, for the future that we know is possible.

Shimon knows the necessity of strength. As Ben-Gurion said, "An Israel capable of defending herself, which cannot be destroyed, can bring peace nearer." And so he’s worked with every American President since John F. Kennedy. That’s why I’ve worked with Prime Minister Netanyahu to ensure that the security cooperation between the United States and Israel is closer and stronger than it has ever been -- because the security of the State of Israel is non-negotiable, and the bonds between us are unbreakable.

Of course, Shimon also knows that a nation’s security depends not just on the strength of its arms, but upon the righteousness of its deeds -- its moral compass. He knows, as Scripture teaches, that we must not only seek peace, but we must pursue peace. And so it has been the cause of his life -- peace, security and dignity, for Israelis and Palestinians and all Israel’s Arab neighbors. And even in the darkest moments, he’s never lost hope in -- as he puts it -- "a Middle East that is not a killing field but a field of creativity and growth."

At times, some have seen his hope and called Shimon Peres a dreamer. And they are right. Just look at his life. The dream of generations, after 2,000 years, to return to Israel, the historic homeland of the Jewish people -- Shimon lived it. The dream of independence, a Jewish State of Israel -- he helped win it. The dream of an Israel strong enough to defend itself, by itself, against any threat, backed by an ironclad alliance with the United States of America -- he helped build it.

The dream of making the desert bloom -- he and his wife Sonya were part of the generation that achieved it. The dream of the high-tech Israel we see today -- he helped spark it. That historic handshake on the White House lawn -- he helped to create it. That awful night in Tel Aviv, when he and Yitzhak sang a Song for Peace, and the grief that followed -- he guided his people through it. The dream of democracy in the Middle East and the hopes of a new generation, including so many young Arabs -- he knows we must welcome it and nurture it.

So, yes, Shimon Peres -- born in a shtetl in what was then Poland, who rose to become President of Israel -- he is a dreamer. And rightly so. For he knows what we must never forget: With faith in ourselves and courage in our hearts, no dream is too big, no vision is beyond our reach.

And so it falls on each of us -- to all of us -- to keep searching, to keep striving for that future that we know is possible, for the peace our children deserve.

And so it is a high honor for me to bestow this statesman, this warrior for peace, America’s highest civilian honor -- the Presidential Medal of Freedom. And I’d ask you to please join me in welcoming President Peres to the presentation.

[The citation is read.]

Military Aide:

The President of the United States of America awards this Presidential Medal of Freedom to Shimon Peres. An ardent advocate for Israel’s security and the cause of lasting peace, Shimon Peres has devoted his life to public service. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for the profound role he played in Middle East peace talks that led to the Oslo Accords, and he continues to serve the Israeli people with courage and dignity. Through his unwavering devotion to his country and the cooperation of nations, he has strengthened the unbreakable bonds between Israel and the United States.

President Obama: Before inviting remarks from President Peres, I’d like to conclude by inviting you all to join me in a toast, with the words that Shimon spoke when he accepted the Peace Prize in Oslo:

From my earliest youth, I have known that while one is obliged to plan with care the stages of one's journey, one is entitled to dream, and keep dreaming, of its destination. A man may feel as old as his years, yet as young as his dreams.

Shimon, to all our friends here tonight, and to our fellow citizens across America and Israel -- may we never lose sight of our destination. Shalom, and may we always be as young as our dreams.

L’chaim. Cheers.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# On the USSC Ruling on the Affordable Care Act

Good afternoon. Earlier today, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the Affordable Care Act -- the name of the health care reform we passed two years ago. In doing so, they've reaffirmed a fundamental principle that here in America -- in the wealthiest nation on Earth – no illness or accident should lead to any family’s financial ruin.

I know there will be a lot of discussion today about the politics of all this, about who won and who lost. That’s how these things tend to be viewed here in Washington. But that discussion completely misses the point. Whatever the politics, today’s decision was a victory for people all over this country whose lives will be more secure because of this law and the Supreme Court’s decision to uphold it.

And because this law has a direct impact on so many Americans, I want to take this opportunity to talk about exactly what it means for you.

First, if you’re one of the more than 250 million Americans who already have health insurance, you will keep your health insurance -- this law will only make it more secure and more affordable. Insurance companies can no longer impose lifetime limits on the amount of care you receive. They can no longer discriminate against children with preexisting conditions. They can no longer drop your coverage if you get sick. They can no longer jack up your premiums without reason. They are required to provide free preventive care like check-ups and mammograms -- a provision that's already helped 54 million Americans with private insurance. And by this August, nearly 13 million of you will receive a rebate from your insurance company because it spent too much on things like administrative costs and CEO bonuses, and not enough on your health care.

There’s more. Because of the Affordable Care Act, young adults under the age of 26 are able to stay on their parent's health care plans -- a provision that's already helped 6 million young Americans. And because of the Affordable Care Act, seniors receive a discount on their prescription drugs -- a discount that's already saved more than 5 million seniors on Medicare about $600 each.

All of this is happening because of the Affordable Care Act. These provisions provide common-sense protections for middle class families, and they enjoy broad popular support. And thanks to today’s decision, all of these benefits and protections will continue for Americans who already have health insurance.

Now, if you’re one of the 30 million Americans who don’t yet have health insurance, starting in 2014 this law will offer you an array of quality, affordable, private health insurance plans to choose from. Each state will take the lead in designing their own menu of options, and if states can come up with even better ways of covering more people at the same quality and cost, this law allows them to do that, too. And I’ve asked Congress to help speed up that process, and give states this flexibility in year one.

Once states set up these health insurance marketplaces, known as exchanges, insurance companies will no longer be able to discriminate against any American with a preexisting health condition. They won’t be able to charge you more just because you’re a woman. They won’t be able to bill you into bankruptcy. If you’re sick, you’ll finally have the same chance to get quality, affordable health care as everyone else. And if you can’t afford the premiums, you'll receive a credit that helps pay for it.

Today, the Supreme Court also upheld the principle that people who can afford health insurance should take the responsibility to buy health insurance. This is important for two reasons.

First, when uninsured people who can afford coverage get sick, and show up at the emergency room for care, the rest of us end up paying for their care in the form of higher premiums.

And second, if you ask insurance companies to cover people with preexisting conditions, but don’t require people who can afford it to buy their own insurance, some folks might wait until they’re sick to buy the care they need -- which would also drive up everybody else’s premiums.

That’s why, even though I knew it wouldn’t be politically popular, and resisted the idea when I ran for this office, we ultimately included a provision in the Affordable Care Act that people who can afford to buy health insurance should take the responsibility to do so. In fact, this idea has enjoyed support from members of both parties, including the current Republican nominee for President.

Still, I know the debate over this law has been divisive. I respect the very real concerns that millions of Americans have shared. And I know a lot of coverage through this health care debate has focused on what it means politically.

Well, it should be pretty clear by now that I didn’t do this because it was good politics. I did it because I believed it was good for the country. I did it because I believed it was good for the American people.

There’s a framed letter that hangs in my office right now. It was sent to me during the health care debate by a woman named Natoma Canfield. For years and years, Natoma did everything right. She bought health insurance. She paid her premiums on time. But 18 years ago, Natoma was diagnosed with cancer. And even though she’d been cancer-free for more than a decade, her insurance company kept jacking up her rates, year after year. And despite her desire to keep her coverage -- despite her fears that she would get sick again -- she had to surrender her health insurance, and was forced to hang her fortunes on chance.

I carried Natoma’s story with me every day of the fight to pass this law. It reminded me of all the Americans, all across the country, who have had to worry not only about getting sick, but about the cost of getting well.

Natoma is well today. And because of this law, there are other Americans -- other sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers -- who will not have to hang their fortunes on chance. These are the Americans for whom we passed this law.

The highest Court in the land has now spoken. We will continue to implement this law. And we'll work together to improve on it where we can. But what we won’t do -- what the country can’t afford to do -- is refight the political battles of two years ago, or go back to the way things were.

With today’s announcement, it’s time for us to move forward -- to implement and, where necessary, improve on this law. And now is the time to keep our focus on the most urgent challenge of our time: putting people back to work, paying down our debt, and building an economy where people can have confidence that if they work hard, they can get ahead.

But today, I’m as confident as ever that when we look back five years from now, or 10 years from now, or 20 years from now, we’ll be better off because we had the courage to pass this law and keep moving forward.

Thank you. God bless you, and God bless America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Remarks on the Shooting Tragedy in Aurora, Colorado

Let me first of all say how grateful I am for all of you being here, and how -- how much we appreciate everything that you've done. I know that there are a lot of people here who have been so engaged in the campaign, have sacrificed so much, people who've been involved back since 2007. And...so I...want all of you to know how appreciative I am.

And I know many of you came here today for a campaign event. I was looking forward to having a fun conversation with you about some really important matters that we face as a country and the differences between myself and my opponent in this election.

But this morning, we woke up to news of a tragedy that reminds us of all the ways that we are united as one American family.

By now, many of you know, many of you have heard that a few miles outside of Denver, in a town call Aurora, at least 12 people were killed when a gunman opened fire in a movie theater, and dozens more are being treated for injuries at a local hospital. Some of the victims are being treated at a children’s hospital.

Now, we’re still gathering all the facts about what happened in Aurora, but what we do know is that the police have one suspect in custody. And the federal government stands ready to do whatever is necessary to bring whoever is responsible for this heinous crime to justice -- and we will take every step possible to ensure the safety of all of our people.

We're going to stand by our neighbors in Colorado during this extraordinarily difficult time. And I had a chance to speak with the Mayor of Aurora as well as the Governor of Colorado to express, not just on behalf of Michelle and myself, but the entire American family, how heartbroken we are.

Now, even as we learn how this happened and who's responsible, we may never understand what leads anybody to terrorize their fellow human beings like this. Such violence, such evil is senseless. It's beyond reason.

But while we will never know fully what causes somebody to take the life of another, we do know what makes life worth living. The people we lost in Aurora loved and they were loved. They were mothers and fathers; they were husbands and wives; sisters and brothers; sons and daughters, friends and neighbors. They had hopes for the future and they had dreams that were not yet fulfilled.

And if there’s anything to take away from this tragedy it’s the reminder that life is very fragile. Our time here is limited and it is precious. And what matters at the end of the day is not the small things; it’s not the trivial things, which so often consume us and our daily lives. Ultimately, it’s how we choose to treat one another and how we love one another.

It’s -- It's what we do on a daily basis to give our lives meaning and to give our lives purpose. That’s what matters. At the end of the day, what we’ll remember will be those we loved and what we did for others. That’s why we’re here.

I’m sure that many of you who are parents here had the same reaction that I did when I heard this news. My daughters go to the movies. What if Malia and Sasha had been at the theater, as so many of our kids do every day? Michelle and I will be fortunate enough to hug our girls a little tighter tonight, and I’m sure you will do the same with your children. But for those parents who may not be so lucky, we have to embrace them and let them know we will be there for them as a nation.

So, again, I am -- I'm so grateful that all of you are here. I am...so moved by your support. But there are going to be other days for politics. This, I think, is a day for prayer and reflection.

For -- So -- So what I’d ask everybody to do, I’d like us to pause in a moment of silence for the victims of this terrible tragedy, for the people who knew them and loved them, for those who are still struggling to recover, and for all the victims of less publicized acts of violence that plague our communities every single day.

So if everybody can just take a moment.

[>Silence observed<]

Thank you, everybody.

I hope all of you will keep the people of Aurora in your hearts and minds today. May the Lord bring them comfort and healing in hard days to come.

I am grateful to all of you, and I hope that as a consequence of today’s events, as -- as you leave here, you spend a little time thinking about the incredible blessings that God has given us.

Thank you very much, everybody.

God bless you.

God bless the United States of America.

# Address to the 113th Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars

Thank you! Hello VFW! Thank you so much. Please, please, everybody have a seat.

Commander DeNoyer, thank you for your introduction, and your service in Vietnam and on behalf of America's veterans. I want to thank your executive director, Bob Wallace; your next commander, who I look forward to working with, John Hamilton. And to Gwen Rankin, Leanne Lemley, and the entire Ladies Auxiliary, thank you for your patriotic service to America.

I stand before you as our hearts still ache over the tragedy in Aurora, Colorado. Yesterday I was in Aurora, with families whose loss is hard to imagine -- with the wounded, who are fighting to recover; with a community and a military base in the midst of their grief. And they told me of the loved ones they lost. And here today, it's fitting to recall those who wore our nation's uniform:

Staff Sergeant Jesse Childress -- an Air Force reservist, 29 years old, a cyber specialist who loved sports, the kind of guy, said a friend, who'd help anybody.

Petty Officer Third Class John Larimer -- 27 years old, who, like his father and grandfather before him, joined the Navy, and who is remembered as an outstanding shipmate.

Rebecca Wingo -- 32 years old, a veteran of the Air Force, fluent in Chinese, who served as a translator; a mother, whose life will be an inspiration to her two little girls.

And Jonathan Blunk -- from Reno, just 26 years old, but a veteran of three Navy tours, whose family and friends will always know that in that theater he gave his own life to save another.

These young patriots were willing to serve in faraway lands, yet they were taken from us here at home. And yesterday I conveyed to their families a message on behalf of all Americans: We honor your loved ones. We salute their service. And as you summon the strength to carry on and keep bright their legacy, we stand with you as one united American family.

Veterans of Foreign Wars, in you I see the same shining values, the virtues that make America great. When our harbor was bombed and fascism was on the march, when the fighting raged in Korea and Vietnam, when our country was attacked on that clear September morning, when our forces were sent to Iraq -- you answered your country’s call. Because you know what Americans must always remember -- our nation only endures because there are patriots who protect it.

In the crucible of battle, you were tested in ways the rest of us will never know. You carry in your hearts the memory of the comrades you lost. For you understand that we must honor our fallen heroes not just on Memorial Day, but all days. And when an American goes missing, or is taken prisoner, we must do everything in our power to bring them home.

Even after you took off the uniform, you never stopped serving. You took care of each other -- fighting for the benefits and care you had earned. And you’ve taken care of the generations that followed, including our newest veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan. On behalf of all our men and women in uniform, and on behalf of the American people, I want to thank you, VFW. Thank you for your outstanding work.

Of course, some among you -- our Vietnam veterans -- didn’t always receive that thanks, at least not on time. This past Memorial Day, I joined some of you at The Wall to begin the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War. And it was another chance to say what should have been said all along: You did your duty, and you made us proud. And as this 50th anniversary continues, I’d ask all our Vietnam vets to stand, or raise your hand, as we say: Thank you and welcome home.

Every generation among you served to keep us strong and free. And it falls to us, those that follow, to preserve what you won. Four years ago, I stood before you at a time of great challenge for our nation. We were engaged in two wars. Al Qaeda was entrenched in their safe havens in Pakistan. Many of our alliances were frayed. Our standing in the world had suffered. We were in the worst recession of our lifetimes. Around the world, some questioned whether the United States still had the capacity to lead.

So, four years ago, I made you a promise. I pledged to take the fight to our enemies, and renew our leadership in the world. As President, that’s what I’ve done. And as you reflect on recent years, as we look ahead to the challenges we face as a nation and the leadership that’s required, you don’t just have my words, you have my deeds. You have my track record. You have the promises I’ve made and the promises that I’ve kept.

I pledged to end the war in Iraq honorably, and that’s what we’ve done. After I took office, we removed nearly 150,000 U.S. troops from Iraq. And some said that bringing our troops home last year was a mistake. They would have kept tens of thousands of our forces in Iraq -- indefinitely, without a clear mission. Well, when you’re Commander-in-Chief, you owe the troops a plan, you owe the country a plan -- and that includes recognizing not just when to begin wars, but also how to end them.

So we brought our troops home responsibly. They left with their heads held high, knowing they gave Iraqis a chance to forge their own future. And today, there are no Americans fighting in Iraq, and we are proud of all the Americans who served there.

I pledged to make it a priority to take out the terrorists who had attacked us on 9/11. And as a candidate, I said that if we had Osama bin Laden in our sights, we would act to keep America safe -- even if it meant going into Pakistan. Some of you remember, at the time, that comment drew quite a bit of criticism. But since I took office, we’ve worked with our allies and our partners to take out more top al Qaeda leaders than any time since 9/11. And thanks to the courage and the skill of our forces, Osama bin Laden will never threaten America again, and al Qaeda is on the road to defeat.

I pledged to finish the job in Afghanistan. After years of drift, we had to break the momentum of the Taliban, and build up the capacity and the capability of Afghans. And so, working with our commanders, we came up with a new strategy, and we ordered additional forces to get the job done. This is still a tough fight. But thanks to the incredible services and sacrifices of our troops, we pushed the Taliban back; we’re training Afghan forces; we’ve begun the transition to Afghan lead.

Again, there are those who argued against a timeline for ending this war -- or against talking about it publicly. But you know what, that’s not a plan for America’s security either. After 10 years of war, and given the progress we’ve made, I felt it was important that the American people -- and our men and women in uniform -- know our plan to end this war responsibly. And so by the end of this summer, more than 30,000 of our troops will have come home. Next year, Afghans will take the lead for their own security. In 2014, the transition will be complete. And even as our troops come home, we’ll have a strong partnership with the Afghan people, and we will stay vigilant so Afghanistan is never again a source for attacks against America.

We’re not just ending these wars; we’re doing it in a way that achieves our objectives. Moreover, it’s allowed us to broaden our vision and begin a new era of American leadership. We’re leading from Europe to the Asia Pacific, with alliances that have never been stronger. We’re leading the fight against nuclear dangers. We’ve applied the strongest sanctions ever on Iran and North Korea -- nations that cannot be allowed to threaten the world with nuclear weapons. We’re leading on behalf of freedom -- standing with people in the Middle East and North Africa as they demand their rights; protecting the Libyan people as they rid the world of Muammar Qaddafi.

Today, we’re also working for a transition so the Syrian people can have a better future, free of the Assad regime. And given the regime’s stockpiles of chemical weapons, we will continue to make it clear to Assad and those around him that the world is watching, and that they will be held accountable by the international community and the United States, should they make the tragic mistake of using those weapons. And we will continue to work with our friends and our allies and the Syrian opposition on behalf of the day when the Syrian people have a government that respects their basic rights to live in peace and freedom and dignity.

Because we’re leading around the world, people have a new attitude toward America. There’s more confidence in our leadership. We see it everywhere we go. We saw it as grateful Libyans waved American flags. We see it across the globe -- when people are asked, which country do you admire the most, one nation comes out on top -- the United States of America.

So this is the progress that we’ve made. Thanks to the extraordinary service of our men and women in uniform, we’re winding down a decade of war; we’re destroying the terrorist network that attacked us; we’re strengthening the alliances that extend our values. And today, every American can be proud that the United States is safer and stronger and more respected in the world.

And all this allows us to fulfill another promise that I made to you four years ago -- strengthening our military. After 10 years of operations, our soldiers will now have fewer and shorter deployments, which means more time on the home front to keep their families strong; more time to heal from the wounds of war; more time to improve readiness and prepare for future threats.

As President, I’ve continued to make historic investments to keep our armed forces strong. And guided by our new defense strategy, we will maintain our military superiority. It will be second to none as long as I am President and well into the future. We’ve got the best-trained, best-led, best-equipped military in history. And as Commander-in-Chief I am going to keep it that way.

And by the way, given all the rhetoric lately -- it is political season -- let’s also set the record straight on the budget. Those big, across-the-board cuts, including defense, that Congress said would occur next year if they couldn’t reach a deal to reduce the deficit? Let’s understand, first of all, there’s no reason that should happen, because people in Congress ought to be able to come together and agree on a plan, a balanced approach that reduces the deficit and keeps our military strong. It should be done.

And there are a number of Republicans in Congress who don’t want you to know that most of them voted for these cuts. Now they’re trying to wriggle out of what they agreed to. Instead of making tough choices to reduce the deficit, they’d rather protect tax cuts for some of the wealthiest Americans, even if it risks big cuts in our military. And I’ve got to tell you, VFW, I disagree. If the choice is between tax cuts that the wealthiest Americans don’t need and funding our troops that they definitely need to keep our country strong, I will stand with our troops every single time.

So let’s stop playing politics with our military. Let’s get serious and reduce our deficit and keep our military strong. Let’s take some of the money that we’re saving because we’re not fighting in Iraq and because we’re winding down in Afghanistan -- use half that money to pay down our deficit; let’s use half of it to do some nation-building here in the United States of America.

Let’s keep taking care of our extraordinary military families. For the first time ever, we’ve made military families and veterans a top priority not just at DOD, not just at the VA, but across the government. As Richard mentioned, this has been a mission for my wife, Michelle, and Vice President Joe Biden’s wife, Dr. Jill Biden. Today, more people across America in every segment of society are Joining Forces to give our military families the respect and the support that they deserve.

And there’s another way we can honor those who serve. It may no longer be a crime for con artists to pass themselves off as heroes, but one thing is certain -- it is contemptible. So this week, we will launch a new website, a living memorial, so the American people can see who’s been awarded our nation’s highest honors. Because no American hero should ever have their valor stolen.

This leads me to another promise I made four years ago -- upholding America’s sacred trust with our veterans. I promised to strengthen the VA, and that promise has been kept. In my first year, we achieved the largest percentage increase in the VA budget in 30 years. And we’re going to keep making historic investments in our veterans. When Richard came to the Oval Office, we talked about what those automatic budget cuts -- sequestration -- could mean for the VA. So my Administration has made it clear: Your veteran’s benefits are exempt from sequestration. They are exempt. And because advance appropriations is now the law of the land, veterans' health care is protected from the budget battles in Washington.

I promised you that I’d stand up for veterans' health care. As long as I’m President, I will not allow VA health care to be turned into a voucher system, subject to the whims of the insurance market. Some have argued for this plan. I could not disagree more. You don’t need vouchers, you need the VA health care that you have earned and that you depend on.

So we’ve made dramatic investments to help care for our veterans. For our Vietnam veterans, we declared that more illnesses are now presumed connected to your exposure to Agent Orange. As a result of our decision, Vietnam-era vets and your families received nearly 4 billion dollars in disability pay. You needed it; you fought for it. We heard you and we got it done.

We’ve added mobile clinics for our rural veterans; more tailored care for our women veterans; unprecedented support for veterans with Traumatic Brain Injury. All tolled, we’ve made VA health care available to nearly 800,000 veterans who didn’t have it before. And we’re now supporting caregivers and families with the skills and the stipends to help care for the veterans that they love.

Of course, more veterans in the system means more claims. So we’ve hired thousands of claims processors. We’re investing in paperless systems. To their credit, the dedicated folks at the VA are now completing one million claims a year. But there’s been a tidal wave of new claims. And when I hear about veterans waiting months, or years, for your benefits -- it is unacceptable. And we are doing something about it.

We’re taking all those folks who processed your Agent Orange claims -- more than 1,200 experts -- and giving them a new mission: Attack the backlog. We’re prioritizing veterans with the most serious disabilities. And the VA and DOD will work harder towards a seamless transition so new veterans aren’t just piled on to the backlog. And we will not rest -- I will not be satisfied until we get this right. And today, I’m also calling on all those who help our vets complete their claims -- state VAs, physicians and veteran groups like the VFW -- to join us. You know how this can work better, so let’s get it done, together.

We’re also focused on the urgent needs of our veterans with PTSD. We’ve poured tremendous resources into this fight -- thousands of more counselors and more clinicians, more care and more treatment. And we've made it easier for veterans with PTSD to qualify for VA benefits. But after a decade of war, it’s now an epidemic. We’re losing more troops to suicide -- one every single day -- than we are in combat. According to some estimates, about 18 veterans are taking their lives each day -- more every year than all the troops killed in Iraq and Afghanistan combined. That's a tragedy. It's heartbreaking. It should not be happening in the United States of America.

So when I hear about servicemembers and veterans who had the courage to seek help but didn’t get it, who died waiting, that's an outrage. And I’ve told Secretary Panetta, Chairman Dempsey and Secretary Shinseki we’ve got to do better. This has to be all hands on deck.

So our message to everyone who’s ever worn the uniform -- if you’re hurting, it’s not a sign of weakness to seek help, it’s a sign of strength. And when you do, we’ll be there and do more to help -- including more counselors and clinicians to help you heal. We need to end this tragedy, VFW. And we're going to work together to make it happen.

So, too with our campaign to end homelessness among our veterans. We’ve now helped to bring tens of thousands of veterans off the streets and into permanent housing. This has to be a core mission, because every veteran who has fought for America ought to have a home in America.

And this brings me to the last promise I want to discuss with you. Four years ago, I said that I’d do everything I could to help our veterans realize the American Dream, to enlist you in building a stronger America. After all, our veterans have the skills that America needs. So today, our economy is growing and creating jobs, but it’s still too hard for too many folks to find work, especially our younger veterans, our veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan. And with a million more troops rejoining civilian life in the years ahead -- and looking for work -- we’ve got to step up our game, at every stage of their careers.

So today, I’m announcing a major overhaul of our transition assistance program. We’re going to set up a kind of "reverse boot camp" for our departing servicemembers. Starting this year, they’ll get more personalized assistance as they plan their careers. We’ll provide the training they need to find that job, or pursue that education, or start that business. And just as they’ve maintained their military readiness, we’ll have new standards of "career readiness."

In addition, by making the Post-9/11 GI Bill a priority, we’ve helped more than 800,000 veterans and their families pursue their education. And I’ve issued an executive order to help put a stop to schools that are ripping off our veterans.

I’ve directed the federal government to step up on jobs. Since I took office, we’ve hired more than 200,000 veterans into the federal government. We made it a priority. And we’re keeping track -- every agency, every department: What are you doing for our veterans?

I’ve challenged community health centers to hire thousands of veterans as physicians and nurses. And as we help local communities hire new police officers and firefighters and first responders, we’re giving a preference to veterans.

We’re also fighting to get more vets hired in the private sector. With new tools like our online Veterans Jobs Bank, we’re connecting veterans directly to jobs. We’re helping thousands of veterans get certified for good-paying jobs in manufacturing. We succeeded in passing tax credits for businesses that hire our veterans and our wounded warriors. And this morning, I signed into law the Veteran Skills to Jobs Act -- making it easier for veterans to transfer their outstanding military skills into the licenses and credentials they need to get civilian jobs.

If you are a young man that is in charge of a platoon or millions of dollars of equipment and are taking responsibility, or you’re a medic out in the field who is saving lives every single day -- when you come home, you need to be credentialed and certified quickly so you can get on the job. People should understand how skilled you are. And there shouldn’t be bureaucrats or runarounds. We’ve got to put those folks to work.

Last summer, I also challenged the private sector to hire or train 100,000 veterans or their spouses. Michelle and Jill Biden have been leading the effort, through Joining Forces. And so far, thousands of patriotic businesses have hired or trained more than 90,000 veterans and spouses. And our message to companies is simple: If you want somebody who gets the job done, then hire a vet. Hire a vet. Hire a vet and they will make you proud just like they’ve made America proud.

And we’re fighting for veterans who want to start their own businesses, including more training in entrepreneurship. It’s one of the reasons we’ve cut taxes -- 18 times for small businesses, including veteran-owned businesses. And the effects ripple out, because vets are more likely to hire vets.

So today, we can point to progress. More veterans are finding jobs; the unemployment rate for veterans has come down. Yes, it’s still too high, but it’s coming down. And now we’ve got to sustain that momentum. It’s one of the reasons I’ve proposed to Congress a Veterans Jobs Corps to put our veterans back to work protecting and rebuilding America. And today, I am again calling on Congress: Pass this Veterans Jobs Corps and extend the tax credits for businesses that hire veterans so we can give these American heroes the jobs and opportunities that they deserve.

So, VFW, these are the promises that I made. These are the promises that I’ve kept. Where we still have more to do, we will not rest. That’s my vow to you. I’ve got your back. I’ve got your six. Because we have a solemn obligation to all who serve -- not just for the years you’re in uniform, but for all the decades that follow, and because even though today’s wars are ending, the hard work of taking care of our newest veterans has only just begun.

Just as you protected America, we’re going to pass our country to the next generation, stronger and safer and more respected in the world. So if anyone tries to tell you that our greatness has passed, that America is in decline, you tell them this: Just like the 20th century, the 21st is going to be another great American Century. For we are Americans, blessed with the greatest form of government ever devised by man, a democracy dedicated to freedom and committed to the ideals that still light the world. We will never apologize for our way of life; we will never waver in its defense.

We are a nation that freed millions and turned adversaries into allies. We are the Americans who defended the peace and turned back aggression. We are Americans who welcome our global responsibilities and our global leadership. The United States has been, and will remain, the one indispensable nation in world affairs.

And you, you are the soldiers, the sailors, the airmen, the Marines and the Coast Guardsmen who have kept us strong. We will honor your legacy. And we will ensure that the military you served, and the America that we love, remains the greatest force for freedom that the world has ever known.

God bless you.

God bless all of our veterans.

And God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Second Democratic Presidential Nomination Acceptance Speech

Thank you. Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you.

Michelle, I love you so much. A few nights ago, everybody was reminded just what a lucky man I am. The other night, I think the entire country saw just how lucky I am. Malia and Sasha, we are so proud of you. And yes, you do have to go to school in the morning. And Joe Biden, thank you for being the very best Vice President I could have ever hoped for, and being a strong and loyal friend.

Madam Chairwoman, delegates, I accept your nomination for President of the United States.

Now, the first time I addressed this convention in 2004, I was a younger man; a Senate candidate from Illinois who spoke about hope -- not blind optimism, not wishful thinking, but hope in the face of difficulty; hope in the face of uncertainty, that dogged faith in the future which has pushed this nation forward, even when the odds are great, even when the road is long.

Eight years later, that hope has been tested -- by the cost of war, by one of the worst economic crises in history, and by political gridlock that’s left us wondering whether it’s still even possible to tackle the challenges of our time.

I know campaigns can seem small, even silly sometimes. Trivial things become big distractions. Serious issues become sound bites. The truth gets buried under an avalanche of money and advertising. If you’re sick of hearing me approve this message, believe me, so am I.

But when all is said and done -- when you pick up that ballot to vote -- you will face the clearest choice of any time in a generation. Over the next few years, big decisions will be made in Washington -- on jobs, the economy, taxes and deficits, energy, education, war and peace -- decisions that will have a huge impact on our lives and our children’s lives for decades to come.

And on every issue, the choice you face won’t just be between two candidates or two parties. It will be a choice between two different paths for America; a choice between two fundamentally different visions for the future. Ours is a fight to restore the values that built the largest middle class and the strongest economy the world has ever known -- the values my grandfather defended as a soldier in Patton’s Army, the values that drove my grandmother to work on a bomber assembly line while he was gone.

They knew they were part of something larger -- a nation that triumphed over fascism and depression, a nation where the most innovative businesses turned out the world’s best products, and everyone shared in that pride and success -- from the corner office to the factory floor. My grandparents were given the chance to go to college, buy their own -- their own home, and fulfill the basic bargain at the heart of America’s story: the promise that hard work will pay off, that responsibility will be rewarded, that everyone gets a fair shot, and everyone does their fair share, and everyone plays by the same rules -- from Main Street to Wall Street to Washington, D.C.

And I ran for President because I saw that basic bargain slipping away. I began my career helping people in the shadow of a shuttered steel mill, at a time when too many good jobs were starting to move overseas. And by 2008, we had seen nearly a decade in which families struggled with costs that kept rising but paychecks that didn’t, folks racking up more and more debt just to make the mortgage or pay tuition, put gas in the car or food on the table. And when the house of cards collapsed in the Great Recession, millions of innocent Americans lost their jobs, their homes, their life savings -- a tragedy from which we're still fighting to recover.

Now, our friends down in Tampa at the Republican convention were more than happy to talk about everything they think is wrong with America, but they didn’t have much to say about how they’d make it right. They want your vote, but they don’t want you to know their plan. And that’s because all they have to offer is the same prescriptions they’ve had for the last 30 years: "Have a surplus? Try a tax cut." "Deficit too high? Try another." "Feel a cold coming on? Take two tax cuts, roll back some regulations, and call us in the morning!"

Now, I’ve cut taxes for those who need it -- middle-class families, small businesses -- but I don’t believe that another round of tax breaks for millionaires will bring good jobs to our shores, or pay down our deficit. I don’t believe that firing teachers or kicking students off financial aid will grow the economy, or help us compete with the scientists and engineers coming out of China. After all we’ve been through, I don’t believe that rolling back regulations on Wall Street will help the small businesswoman expand, or the laid-off construction worker keep his home. We have been there. We’ve tried that. And we’re not going back. We are moving forward, America.

Now, I won't pretend the path I'm offering is quick or easy. I never have. You didn't elect me to tell you what you wanted to hear. You elected me to tell you the truth. And the truth is, it will take more than a few years for us to solve challenges that have built up over decades. It'll require common effort, shared responsibility, and the kind of bold, persistent experimentation that Franklin Roosevelt pursued during the only crisis worse than this one. And by the way, those of us who carry on his party's legacy should remember that not every problem can be remedied with another government program or dictate from Washington.

But know this, America: Our problems can be solved. Our challenges can be met. The path we offer may be harder but it leads to a better place, and I'm asking you to choose that future. I'm asking you to rally around a set of goals for your country, goals in manufacturing, energy, education, national security, and the deficit -- real, achievable plans that will lead to new jobs, more opportunity, and rebuild this economy on a stronger foundation. That's what we can do in the next four years, and that is why I am running for a second term as President of the United States.

We can choose a future where we export more products and outsource fewer jobs. After a decade that was defined by what we bought and borrowed, we're getting back to basics and doing what America's always done best. We are making things again. I've met workers in Detroit and Toledo who feared they'd never build another American car; and today they can't build them fast enough because we reinvented a dying auto industry that's back on the top of the world. I worked with business leaders who are bringing jobs back to America not because our workers make less pay, but because we make better products -- because we work harder and smarter than anyone else. I've signed trade agreements that are helping our companies sell more goods to millions of new customers, goods that are stamped with three proud words: "Made in America." And after a decade of decline, this country created over half a million manufacturing jobs in the last two-and-half years.

And now you have a choice: We can give more tax breaks to corporations that shift jobs overseas or we can start rewarding companies that open new plants and train new workers and create new jobs here in the United States of America. We can help big factories and small businesses double their exports. And if we choose this path, we can create a million new manufacturing jobs in the next four years.

You can make that happen. You can choose that future.

You can choose the path where we control more of our own energy. After 30 years of inaction, we raised fuel standards so that by the middle of the next decade, cars and trucks will go twice as far on a gallon of gas. We have doubled our use of renewable energy, and thousands of Americans have jobs today building wind turbines and long-lasting batteries. In the last year alone, we cut oil imports by one million barrels a day, more than any Administration in recent history. And today the United States of America is less dependent on foreign oil than at any time in the last two decades.

So now you have a choice, between a strategy that reverses this progress or one that builds on it. We've opened millions of new acres for oil and gas exploration in the last three years, and we'll open more. But unlike my opponent, I will not let oil companies write this country's energy plan or endanger our coastlines or collect another four billion dollars in corporate welfare from our taxpayers. We're offering a better path.

We're offering a better path where we -- a -- a future where we keep investing in wind and solar and clean coal, where farmers and scientists harness new biofuels to power our cars and trucks, where construction workers build homes and factories that waste less energy, where -- where we develop a hundred-year supply of natural gas that's right beneath our feet. If you choose this path, we can cut our oil imports in half by 2020 and support more than 600,000 new jobs in natural gas alone. And yes, my plan will continue to reduce the carbon pollution that is heating our planet, because climate change is not a hoax. More droughts and floods and wildfires are not a joke. They are a threat to our children's future. And in this election, you can do something about it.

You can choose a future where more Americans have the chance to gain the skills they need to compete, no matter how old they are or how much money they have.

Education was the gateway to opportunity for me. It was the gateway for Michelle. It was -- It was the gateway for most of you. And now more than ever it is the gateway to a middle-class life. For the first time in a generation, nearly every state has answered our call to raise their standards for teaching and learning. Some of the worst schools in the country have made real gains in math and reading. Millions of students are paying less for college today because we finally took on a system that wasted billions of taxpayer dollars on banks and lenders.

And now you have a choice. We can gut education, or we can decide that in the United States of America, no child should have her dreams deferred because of a crowded classroom or a crumbling school. No family should have to set aside a college acceptance letter because they don't have the money. No company should have to look for workers overseas because they couldn't find any with the right skills here at home. That's not our future. That is not our future.

A government has a role in this -- but teachers must inspire; principals must lead; parents must instill a thirst for learning; and students, you've got to do the work. And together, I promise you we can out-educate and outcompete any nation on earth.

So help me. Help me recruit a hundred thousand math and science teachers within 10 years and improve early childhood education. Help give two million workers the chance to learn skills at their community college that will lead directly to a job. Help us work with colleges and universities to cut in half the growth of tuition costs over the next 10 years. We can meet that goal together. You can choose that future for America. That's our future.

You know, in a world of new threats and new challenges, you can choose leadership that has been tested and proven. Four years ago I promised to end the war in Iraq. We did. I promised to refocus on the terrorists who actually attacked us on 9/11, and we have. We've blunted the Taliban's momentum in Afghanistan and in 2014, our longest war will be over. A new tower rises above the New York skyline; al-Qaida is on the path to defeat; and Osama bin Laden is dead.

And tonight we pay tribute to the Americans who still serve in harm's way. We are forever in debt to a generation whose sacrifice has made this country safer and more respected. We will never forget you and so long as I'm Commander-in-Chief we will sustain the strongest military the world has ever known. When you take off the uniform, we will serve you as well as you've served us, because no one who fights for this country should have to fight for a job or a roof over their heads or the care that they need when they come home.

Around the world, we've strengthened old alliances and forged new coalitions to stop the spread of nuclear weapons. We've reasserted our power across the Pacific and stood up to China on behalf of our workers. From Burma to Libya to South Sudan, we have advanced the rights and dignity of all human beings -- men and women, Christians and Muslims and Jews.

But for all the progress that we've made, challenges remain. Terrorist plots must be disrupted. Europe's crisis must be contained. Our commitment to Israel's security must not waver, and neither must our pursuit of peace. The Iranian government must face a world that stays united against its nuclear ambitions. The historic change sweeping across the Arab world must be defined not by the iron fist of a dictator or the hate of extremists, but by the hopes and aspirations of ordinary people who are reaching for the same rights that we celebrate here today.

So now we have a choice. My opponent and his running mate are new to foreign policy. But from all that we've seen and heard, they want to take us back to an era of blustering and blundering that cost America so dearly. After all, you don't call Russia our number one enemy1 -- not al-Qaida, Russia -- unless you're still stuck in a Cold War mind warp. You might not be ready for diplomacy with Beijing if you can't visit the Olympics without insulting our closest ally.

My opponent -- My opponent said that it was tragic to end the war in Iraq. And he won't tell us how he'll end the war in Afghanistan. Well, I have, and I will. And while my opponent would spend more money on military hardware that our Joint Chiefs don't even want, I will use the money we're no longer spending on war to pay down our debt and put more people back to work -- rebuilding roads and bridges, and schools and runways, because after two wars that have cost us thousands of lives and over a trillion dollars, it's time to do some nation building right here at home.

You can choose a future where we reduce our deficit without sticking it to the middle class. Independent experts say that my plan would cut our deficit by four trillion dollars. And last summer I worked with Republicans in Congress to cut a billion dollars in spending, because those of us who believe government can be a force for good should work harder than anyone to reform it so that it's leaner and more efficient and more responsive to the American people.

I want to reform the tax code so it's simple, fair, and asks the wealthiest households to pay higher taxes on incomes over 250,000 dollars -- the same rate we had when Bill Clinton was President, the same rate we had when our economy created nearly 23 million new jobs, the biggest surplus in history and a whole lot of millionaires to boot.

Now, I'm still eager to reach an agreement based on the principles of my bipartisan debt commission. No party has a monopoly on wisdom. No democracy works without compromise. I want to get this done, and we can get it done. But when Governor Romney and his friends in Congress tell us we can somehow lower our deficits by spending trillions more on new tax breaks for the wealthy, well -- what'd Bill Clinton call it? You do the arithmetic. You do the math.

I refuse to go along with that, and as long as I'm President I never will. I refuse to ask middle-class families to give up their deductions for owning a home or raising their kids just to pay for another millionaire's tax cut. I refuse to ask students to pay more for college or kick children out of Head Start programs to eliminate health insurance for millions of Americans who are poor and elderly or disabled -- all so those with the most can pay less. I'm not going along with that.

And I will never -- I will never turn Medicare into a voucher. No American should ever have to spend their golden years at the mercy of insurance companies. They should retire with the care and the dignity that they have earned. Yes, we will reform and strengthen Medicare for the long haul, but we'll do it by reducing the cost of health care, not by asking seniors to pay thousands of dollars more. And we will keep the promise of Social Security by taking the responsible steps to strengthen it, not by turning it over to Wall Street.

This is the choice we now face. This is what the election comes down to. Over and over, we've been told by our opponents that bigger tax cuts and fewer regulations are the only way, that since government can't do everything, it should do almost nothing. If you can't afford health insurance, hope that you don't get sick. If a company releases toxic pollution into the air your children breathe, well, that's the price of progress. If you can't afford to start a business or go to college, take my opponent's advice and borrow money from your parents.

You know what? That's not who we are. That's not what this country's about. As Americans, we believe we are endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights, rights that no man or government can take away. We insist on personal responsibility and we celebrate individual initiative. We're not entitled to success. We have to earn it. We honor the strivers, the dreamers, the risk-takers, the entrepreneurs who have always been the driving force behind our free enterprise system, the greatest engine of growth and prosperity that the world's ever known.

But we also believe in something called "citizenship" -- citizenship, a word at the very heart of our founding, a word at the very essence of our democracy, the idea that this country only works when we accept certain obligations to one another and to future generations.

We believe that when a CEO pays his autoworkers enough to buy the cars that they build, the whole company does better.

We believe that when a family can no longer be tricked into signing a mortgage they can't afford, that family's protected, but so is the value of other people's homes -- and so is the entire economy.

We believe the little girl who's offered an escape from poverty by a great teacher or a grant for college could become the next Steve Jobs or the scientist who cures cancer or the President of the United States -- and it is in our power to give her that chance.

We know that churches and charities can often make more of a difference than a poverty program alone. We don't want handouts for people who refuse to help themselves, and we certainly don't want bailouts for banks that break the rules.

We don't think the government can solve all of our problems, but we don't think the government is the source of all of our problems -- any more than our welfare recipients or corporations or unions or immigrants or gays or any other group we're told to blame for our troubles -- because -- because America, we understand that this democracy is ours.

We, the people, recognize that we have responsibilities as well as rights; that our destinies are bound together; that a freedom which asks only, what's in it for me, a freedom without a commitment to others, a freedom without love or charity or duty or patriotism, is unworthy of our founding ideals and those who died in their defense. As citizens, we understand that America is not about what can be done for us. It's about what can be done by us together, through the hard and frustrating but necessary work of self-government. That's what we believe.

So you see, the election four years ago wasn't about me. It was about you. My fellow citizens: You were the change.

You're the reason there's a little girl with a heart disorder in Phoenix who'll get the surgery she needs because an insurance company can't limit her coverage. You did that.

You're the reason a young man in Colorado who never thought he'd be able to afford his dream of earning a medical degree is about to get that chance. You made that possible.

You're the reason a young immigrant who grew up here and went to school here and pledged allegiance to our flag will no longer be deported from the only country she's ever called home; why selfless soldiers won't be kicked out of the military because of who they are or who they love; why thousands of families have finally been able to say to the loved ones who served us so bravely: "Welcome home." Welcome home. You did that. You did that. You did that.

If you turn away now -- If you turn away now, if you buy into the cynicism that the change we fought for isn't possible, well, change will not happen. If you give up on the idea that your voice can make a difference, then other voices will fill the void -- the lobbyists and special interests, the people with the 10 million dollar checks who are trying to buy this election and those who are trying to make it harder for you to vote, Washington politicians who want to decide who you can marry or control health care choices that women should be making for themselves. Only you can make sure that doesn't happen. Only you have the power to move us forward.

You know, I recognize that times have changed since I first spoke to this convention. Times have changed and so have I. I'm no longer just a candidate: I'm the President. And...that means I know what it means to send young Americans into battle, for I've held in my arms the mothers and fathers of those who didn't return. I've shared the pain of families who've lost their homes, and the frustration of workers who've lost their jobs. If the critics are right that I've made all my decisions based on polls, then I must not be very good at reading them.

And while I'm very proud of what we've achieved together, I'm far more mindful of my own failings -- knowing exactly what Lincoln meant when he said, "I have been driven to my knees many times by the overwhelming conviction that I had no place else to go."

But as I stand here tonight, I have never been more hopeful about America; not because I think I have all the answers; not because I'm naive about the magnitude of our challenges -- I'm hopeful because of you.

The young woman I met at a science fair who won national recognition for her biology research while living with her family at a homeless shelter -- she gives me hope.

The auto worker who won the lottery after his plant almost closed, but kept coming to work every day, and bought flags for his whole town and one of the cars that he built to surprise his wife -- he gives me hope.

The family business in Warroad, Minnesota, that didn't lay off a single one of their 4,000 employees when the recession hit, even when their competitors shut down dozens of plants, even when it meant the owner gave up some perks and some pay, because they understood that their biggest asset was the community and the workers who had helped build that business -- they give me hope.

I think about the young sailor I met at Walter Reed Hospital still recovering from a grenade attack that would cause him to have his leg amputated above the knee. And six months ago we would watch him walk into a White House dinner honoring those who served in Iran [Iraq], tall and 20 pounds heavier, dashing in his uniform, with a big grin on his face, sturdy on his new leg. And I remember how a few months after that I would watch him on a bicycle, racing with his fellow wounded warriors on a sparkling spring day, inspiring other heroes who had just begun the hard path he had traveled. He gives me hope. He gives me hope.

I -- I don't know what party these men and women belong to. I don't know if they'll vote for me. But I know that their spirit defines us. They remind me, in the words of Scripture, that ours is a future filled with hope. And if you share that faith with me, if you share that hope with me, I ask you tonight for your vote.

If you reject the notion that this nation's promise is reserved for the few, your voice must be heard in this election.

If you reject the notion that our government is forever beholden to the highest bidder, you need to stand up in this election.

If you believe that new plants and factories can dot our landscape, that new energy can power our future, that new schools can provide ladders of opportunity to this nation of dreamers, if you believe in a country where everyone gets a fair shot, and everyone does their fair share and everyone plays by the same rules, then I need you to vote this November.

America, I never said this journey would be easy and I won't promise that now. Yes, our path is harder but it leads to a better place. Yes, our road is longer but we travel it together.

We don't turn back. We leave no one behind. We pull each other up. We draw strength from our victories and we learn from our mistakes, but we keep our eyes fixed on that distant horizon knowing that providence is with us and that we are surely blessed to be citizens of the greatest nation on earth.

Thank you, God bless you, and God bless these United States.

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# Rose Garden Address on Benghazi Attacks

Good morning. Every day, all across the world, American diplomats and civilians work tirelessly to advance the interests and values of our nation. Often, they are away from their families. Sometimes, they brave great danger.

Yesterday, four of these extraordinary Americans were killed in an attack on our diplomatic post in Benghazi. Among those killed was our Ambassador, Chris Stevens, as well as Foreign Service Officer Sean Smith. We are still notifying the families of the others who were killed. And today, the American people stand united in holding the families of the four Americans in our thoughts and in our prayers.

The United States condemns in the strongest terms this outrageous and shocking attack. We're working with the government of Libya to secure our diplomats. I've also directed my administration to increase our security at diplomatic posts around the world. And make no mistake, we will work with the Libyan government to bring to justice the killers who attacked our people.

Since our founding, the United States has been a nation that respects all faiths. We reject all efforts to denigrate the religious beliefs of others. But there is absolutely no justification to this type of senseless violence. None. The world must stand together to unequivocally reject these brutal acts.

Already, many Libyans have joined us in doing so, and this attack will not break the bonds between the United States and Libya. Libyan security personnel fought back against the attackers alongside Americans. Libyans helped some of our diplomats find safety, and they carried Ambassador Stevens’s body to the hospital, where we tragically learned that he had died.

It's especially tragic that Chris Stevens died in Benghazi because it is a city that he helped to save. At the height of the Libyan revolution, Chris led our diplomatic post in Benghazi. With characteristic skill, courage, and resolve, he built partnerships with Libyan revolutionaries, and helped them as they planned to build a new Libya. When the Qaddafi regime came to an end, Chris was there to serve as our ambassador to the new Libya, and he worked tirelessly to support this young democracy, and I think both Secretary Clinton and I relied deeply on his knowledge of the situation on the ground there. He was a role model to all who worked with him and to the young diplomats who aspire to walk in his footsteps.

Along with his colleagues, Chris died in a country that is still striving to emerge from the recent experience of war. Today, the loss of these four Americans is fresh, but our memories of them linger on. I have no doubt that their legacy will live on through the work that they did far from our shores and in the hearts of those who love them back home.

Of course, yesterday was already a painful day for our nation as we marked the solemn memory of the 9/11 attacks. We mourned with the families who were lost on that day. I visited the graves of troops who made the ultimate sacrifice in Iraq and Afghanistan at the hallowed grounds of Arlington Cemetery, and had the opportunity to say thank you and visit some of our wounded warriors at Walter Reed. And then last night, we learned the news of this attack in Benghazi.

As Americans, let us never, ever forget that our freedom is only sustained because there are people who are willing to fight for it, to stand up for it, and in some cases, lay down their lives for it. Our country is only as strong as the character of our people and the service of those both civilian and military who represent us around the globe.

No acts of terror will ever shake the resolve of this great nation, alter that character, or eclipse the light of the values that we stand for. Today we mourn four more Americans who represent the very best of the United States of America. We will not waver in our commitment to see that justice is done for this terrible act. And make no mistake, justice will be done.

But we also know that the lives these Americans led stand in stark contrast to those of their attackers. These four Americans stood up for freedom and human dignity. They should give every American great pride in the country that they served, and the hope that our flag represents to people around the globe who also yearn to live in freedom and with dignity.

We grieve with their families, but let us carry on their memory, and let us continue their work of seeking a stronger America and a better world for all of our children.

Thank you. May God bless the memory of those we lost and may God bless the United States of America.

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# Address at the Transfer of Remains Ceremony for the Victims of the Attacks on the U.S. Consulate at Benghazi

Scripture teaches us,

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.1

Glen Doherty never shied from adventure. He believed that, in his life, he could make a difference -- a calling he fulfilled as a Navy SEAL. He served with distinction in Iraq and worked in Afghanistan. And there, in Benghazi, as he tended to others, he laid down his life, loyal as always, protecting his friends. Today, Glen is home.

Tyrone Woods devoted 20 years of his life to the SEALs -- the consummate "quiet professional." At the Salty Frog Bar, they might not have known, but "Rone" also served in Iraq and Afghanistan. And there, in Benghazi, he was far from Dorothy and Tyrone Jr., Hunter and little Kai. And he laid down his life, as he would have for them, protecting his friends. And today, Rone is home.

Sean Smith, it seems, lived to serve -- first, in the Air Force, then, with you at the State Department. He knew the perils of this calling from his time in Baghdad. And there, in Benghazi, far from home, he surely thought of Heather and Samantha and Nathan. And he laid down his life in service to us all. Today, Sean is home.

Chris Stevens was everything America could want in an ambassador, as the whole country has come to see -- how he first went to the region as a young man in the Peace Corps, how during the revolution, he arrived in Libya on that cargo ship, how he believed in Libya and its people and how they loved him back. And there, in Benghazi, he laid down his life for his friends -- Libyan and American -- and for us all. Today, Chris is home.

Four Americans, four patriots -- they loved this country and they chose to serve it, and served it well. They had a mission and they believed in it. They knew the danger and they accepted it. They didn’t simply embrace the American ideal, they lived it. They embodied it -- the courage, the hope and, yes, the idealism, that fundamental American belief that we can leave this world a little better than before. That’s who they were and that’s who we are. And if we want to truly honor their memory, that’s who we must always be.

I know that this awful loss, the terrible images of recent days, the pictures we’re seeing again today, have caused some to question this work. And there is no doubt these are difficult days. In moments such as this -- so much anger and violence --even the most hopeful among us must wonder.

But amid all of the images of this week, I also think of the Libyans who took to the streets with homemade signs expressing their gratitude to an American who believed in what we could achieve together. I think of the man in Benghazi with his sign in English, a message he wanted all of us to hear that said, "Chris Stevens was a friend to all Libyans. Chris Stevens was a friend."

That’s the message these four patriots sent. That’s the message that each of you sends every day -- civilians, military -- to people in every corner of the world, that America is a friend, and that we care not just about our own country, not just about our own interests, but about theirs; that even as voices of suspicion and mistrust seek to divide countries and cultures from one another, the United States of America will never retreat from the world. We will never stop working for the dignity and freedom that every person deserves, whatever their creed, whatever their faith.

That’s the essence of American leadership. That’s the spirit that sets us apart from other nations. This was their work in Benghazi, and this is the work we will carry on.

To you -- their families and colleagues -- to all Americans, know this: Their sacrifice will never be forgotten. We will bring to justice those who took them from us. We will stand fast against the violence on our diplomatic missions. We will continue to do everything in our power to protect Americans serving overseas, whether that means increasing security at our diplomatic posts, working with host countries, which have an obligation to provide security, and making it clear that justice will come to those who harm Americans.

Most of all, even in our grief, we will be resolute. For we are Americans, and we hold our head high knowing that because of these patriots -- because of you -- this country that we love will always shine as a light unto the world.

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

The flag they served under now carries them home.

May God bless the memory of these men who laid down their lives for us all.

May God watch over your families and all who loved them

And may God bless these United States of America.

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# Address at the Clinton Global Initiative on Human Trafficking

Well, good afternoon, everybody. And, President Clinton, thank you for your very kind introduction. Although I have to admit, I really did like the speech a few weeks ago a little bit better. Afterwards, somebody tweeted that somebody needs to make him "Secretary of Explaining Things." Although they didn’t use the word, "things."

President Clinton, you are a tireless, passionate advocate on behalf of what's best in our country. You have helped to improve and save the lives of millions of people around the world. I am grateful for your friendship and your extraordinary leadership. And I think I speak for the entire country when we say that you continue to be a great treasure for all of us.

As always, I also have to thank President Clinton for being so understanding with the record-breaking number of countries visited by our Secretary of State. As we’ve seen again in recent days, Hillary Clinton is a leader of grace and grit -- and I believe she will go down as one of the finest Secretaries of State in American history. So we are grateful to her.

To the dedicated CGI staff and every organization that's made commitments and touched the lives of hundreds of millions of people, thank you for being an example of what we need more of in the world, especially in Washington -- working together to actually solve problems.

And that’s why I’m here. As Bill mentioned, I’ve come to CGI every year that I’ve been President, and I’ve talked with you about how we need to sustain the economic recovery, how we need to create more jobs. I’ve talked about the importance of development -- from global health to our fight against HIV/AIDS to the growth that lifts nations to prosperity. We've talked about development and how it has to include women and girls -- because by every benchmark, nations that educate their women and girls end up being more successful.

And today, I want to discuss an issue that relates to each of these challenges. It ought to concern every person, because it is a debasement of our common humanity. It ought to concern every community, because it tears at our social fabric. It ought to concern every business, because it distorts markets. It ought to concern every nation, because it endangers public health and fuels violence and organized crime. I’m talking about the injustice, the outrage, of human trafficking, which must be called by its true name -- modern slavery.

Now, I do not use that word, "slavery" lightly. It evokes obviously one of the most painful chapters in our nation’s history. But around the world, there’s no denying the awful reality. When a man, desperate for work, finds himself in a factory or on a fishing boat or in a field, working, toiling, for little or no pay, and beaten if he tries to escape -- that is slavery. When a woman is locked in a sweatshop, or trapped in a home as a domestic servant, alone and abused and incapable of leaving -- that’s slavery.

When a little boy is kidnapped, turned into a child soldier, forced to kill or be killed -- that’s slavery. When a little girl is sold by her impoverished family -- girls my daughters’ age -- runs away from home, or is lured by the false promises of a better life, and then imprisoned in a brothel and tortured if she resists -- that’s slavery. It is barbaric, and it is evil, and it has no place in a civilized world.

Now, as a nation, we’ve long rejected such cruelty. Just a few days ago, we marked the 150th anniversary of a document that I have hanging in the Oval Office -- the Emancipation Proclamation. With the advance of Union forces, it brought a new day -- that "all persons held as slaves" would thenceforth be forever free. We wrote that promise into our Constitution. We spent decades struggling to make it real. We joined with other nations, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, so that "slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms."

A global movement was sparked, with the Trafficking Victims Protection Act -- signed by President Clinton and carried on by President Bush.

And here at CGI, you’ve made impressive commitments in this fight. We are especially honored to be joined today by advocates who dedicate their lives -- and, at times, risk their lives -- to liberate victims and help them recover. This includes men and women of faith, who, like the great abolitionists before them, are truly doing the Lord’s work -- evangelicals, the Catholic Church, International Justice Mission and World Relief, even individual congregations, like Passion City Church in Atlanta, and so many young people of faith who've decided that their conscience compels them to act in the face of injustice. Groups like these are answering the Bible’s call -- to "seek justice" and "rescue the oppressed." Some of them join us today, and we are grateful for your leadership.

Now, as President, I’ve made it clear that the United States will continue to be a leader in this global movement. We’ve got a comprehensive strategy. We’re shining a spotlight on the dark corners where it persists. Under Hillary’s leadership, we’re doing more than ever -- with our annual trafficking report, with new outreach and partnerships -- to give countries incentives to meet their responsibilities and calling them out when they don’t.

I recently renewed sanctions on some of the worst abusers, including North Korea and Eritrea. We’re partnering with groups that help women and children escape from the grip of their abusers. We’re helping other countries step up their own efforts. And we’re seeing results. More nations have passed and more are enforcing modern anti-trafficking laws.

Last week I was proud to welcome to the Oval Office not only a great champion of democracy but a fierce advocate against the use of forced labor and child soldiers -- Aung San Suu Kyi. And as part of our engagement, we’ll encourage Burma to keep taking steps to reform -- because nations must speak with one voice: Our people and our children are not for sale.

But for all the progress that we’ve made, the bitter truth is that trafficking also goes on right here, in the United States. It’s the migrant worker unable to pay off the debt to his trafficker. The man, lured here with the promise of a job, his documents then taken, and forced to work endless hours in a kitchen. The teenage girl, beaten, forced to walk the streets. This should not be happening in the United States of America.

As President, I directed my administration to step up our efforts -- and we have. For the first time, at Hillary’s direction, our annual trafficking report now includes the United States, because we can’t ask other nations to do what we are not doing ourselves. We’ve expanded our interagency task force to include more federal partners, including the FBI. The intelligence community is devoting more resources to identifying trafficking networks. We’ve strengthened protections so that foreign-born workers know their rights.

And most of all, we’re going after the traffickers. New anti-trafficking teams are dismantling their networks. Last year, we charged a record number of these predators with human trafficking. We’re putting them where they belong -- behind bars.

But with more than 20 million victims of human trafficking around the world -- think about that, more than 20 million -- they’ve got a lot more to do. And that’s why, earlier this year, I directed my administration to increase our efforts. And today, I can announce a series of additional steps that we’re going to take.

First, we’re going to do more to spot it and stop it. We’ll prepare a new assessment of human trafficking in the United States so we better understand the scope and scale of the problem. We’ll strengthen training, so investigators and law enforcement are even better equipped to take action -- and treat victims as victims, not as criminals. We’re going to work with Amtrak, and bus and truck inspectors, so that they’re on the lookout. We’ll help teachers and educators spot the signs as well, and better serve those who are vulnerable, especially our young people.

Second, we’re turning the tables on the traffickers. Just as they are now using technology and the Internet to exploit their victims, we’re going to harness technology to stop them. We’re encouraging tech companies and advocates and law enforcement -- and we’re also challenging college students -- to develop tools that our young people can use to stay safe online and on their smart phones.

Third, we’ll do even more to help victims recover and rebuild their lives. We’ll develop a new action plan to improve coordination across the federal government. We’re increasing access to services to help survivors become self-sufficient. We’re working to simplify visa procedures for "T" visas so that innocent victims from other countries can stay here as they help us prosecute their traffickers.

This coming year, my Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships will make the fight against human trafficking a focus of its work. They’re doing great work. And I’m also proud to announce a new partnership with Humanity United, which is a leader in anti-trafficking -- a multi-million dollar challenge to local communities to find new ways to care for trafficking victims. And I want to thank Johns Hopkins University, which will be focusing on how to best care for child victims.

Now, finally, as one of the largest purchasers of goods and services in the world, the United States government will lead by example. We’ve already taken steps to make sure our contractors do not engage in forced labor. And today we’re going to go further. I’ve signed a new executive order that raises the bar. It’s specific about the prohibitions. It does more to protect workers. It ensures stronger compliance. In short, we’re making clear that American tax dollars must never, ever be used to support the trafficking of human beings. We will have zero tolerance. We mean what we say. We will enforce it.

Of course, no government, no nation, can meet this challenge alone. Everybody has a responsibility. Every nation can take action. Modern anti-trafficking laws must be passed and enforced and justice systems must be strengthened. Victims must be cared for. So here in the United States, Congress should renew the Trafficking Victims Protection Act. Whether you are a conservative or a liberal, Democrat or Republican, this is a no-brainer. This is something we should all agree on. We need to get that done.

And more broadly, as nations, let’s recommit to addressing the underlying forces that push so many into bondage in the first place. With development and economic growth that creates legitimate jobs, there’s less likelihood of indentured servitude around the globe. A sense of justice that says no child should ever be exploited, that has to be burned into the cultures of every country. A commitment to equality -- as in the Equal Futures Partnership that we launched with other nations yesterday so societies empower our sisters and our daughters just as much as our brothers and sons.

And every business can take action. All the business leaders who are here and our global economy companies have a responsibility to make sure that their supply chains, stretching into the far corners of the globe, are free of forced labor. The good news is more and more responsible companies are holding themselves to higher standards. And today, I want to salute the new commitments that are being made. That includes the new Global Business Coalition Against Trafficking -- companies that are sending a message: Human trafficking is not a business model, it is a crime, and we are going to stop it. We’re proud of them.

Every faith community can take action as well, by educating their congregations, by joining in coalitions that are bound by a love of God and a concern for the oppressed. And like that Good Samaritan on the road to Jericho, we can’t just pass by, indifferent. We’ve got to be moved by compassion. We’ve got to bind up the wounds. Let’s come together around a simple truth -- that we are our brother’s keepers and we are our sister’s keepers.

And finally, every citizen can take action: by learning more; by going to the website that we helped create -- SlaveryFootprint.org; by speaking up and insisting that the clothes we wear, the food we eat, the products we buy are made free of forced labor; by standing up against the degradation and abuse of women.

That’s how real change happens -- from the bottom up. And if you doubt that, ask Marie Godet Niyonyota, from the Congo. Think about Marie’s story. She was kidnapped by rebels, turned into a slave. She was abused -- physically and sexually. They got her pregnant five times. In one awful battle, her children were killed -- all five of them. Miraculously, she survived and escaped. And with care and support, she began to heal. And she learned to read and write and sew, and today Marie is back home, working toward a new future.

Or ask Ima Matul. She grew up in Indonesia, and at 17 was given the opportunity to work as a nanny here in the United States. But when she arrived, it turned out to be a nightmare. Cooking, cleaning -- 18-hour days, seven days a week. One beating was so bad it sent her to the emergency room. And finally, she escaped. And with the help from a group that cared, today Ima has a stable job. She’s an advocate -- she’s even testified before Congress.

Or ask Sheila White, who grew up in the Bronx. Fleeing an abusive home, she fell in with a guy who said he’d protect her. Instead, he sold her -- just 15 years old -- 15 -- to men who raped her and beat her, and burned her with irons. And finally, after years -- with the help of a non-profit led by other survivors -- she found the courage to break free and get the services she needed. Sheila earned her GED. Today she is a powerful, fierce advocate who helped to pass a new anti-trafficking law right here in New York.

These women endured unspeakable horror. But in their unbreakable will, in their courage, in their resilience, they remind us that this cycle can be broken; victims can become not only survivors, they can become leaders and advocates, and bring about change.

And I just met Ima and Sheila and several of their fellow advocates, and I have to tell you they are an incredible inspiration. They are here -- they’ve chosen to tell their stories. I want them to stand and be recognized because they are inspiring all of us. Please -- Sheila, Ima.

To Ima and Sheila, and each of you -- in the darkest hours of your lives, you may have felt utterly alone, and it seemed like nobody cared. And the important thing for us to understand is there are millions around the world who are feeling that same way at this very moment.

Right now, there is a man on a boat, casting the net with his bleeding hands, knowing he deserves a better life, a life of dignity, but doesn’t know if anybody is paying attention. Right now, there’s a woman, hunched over a sewing machine, glancing beyond the bars on the window, knowing if just given the chance, she might some day sell her own wares, but she doesn’t think anybody is paying attention. Right now, there’s a young boy, in a brick factory, covered in dust, hauling his heavy load under a blazing sun, thinking if he could just go to school, he might know a different future, but he doesn’t think anybody is paying attention. Right now, there is a girl, somewhere trapped in a brothel, crying herself to sleep again, and maybe daring to imagine that some day, just maybe, she might be treated not like a piece of property, but as a human being.

And so our message today, to them, is -- to the millions around the world -- we see you. We hear you. We insist on your dignity. And we share your belief that if just given the chance, you will forge a life equal to your talents and worthy of your dreams.

Our fight against human trafficking is one of the great human rights causes of our time, and the United States will continue to lead it -- in partnership with you. The change we seek will not come easy, but we can draw strength from the movements of the past. For we know that every life saved -- in the words of that great Proclamation -- is "an act of justice," worthy of "the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of Almighty God."

That’s what we believe. That’s what we're fighting for. And I'm so proud to be in partnership with CGI to make this happen.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you. God bless America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# 67th Session of the United Nations General Assembly Address

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary General, fellow delegates, ladies and gentleman: I would like to begin today by telling you about an American named Chris Stevens.

Chris was born in a town called Grass Valley, California, the son of a lawyer and a musician. As a young man, Chris joined the Peace Corps, and taught English in Morocco. And he came to love and respect the people of North Africa and the Middle East. He would carry that commitment throughout his life. As a diplomat, he worked from Egypt to Syria, from Saudi Arabia to Libya. He was known for walking the streets of the cities where he worked -- tasting the local food, meeting as many people as he could, speaking Arabic, listening with a broad smile.

Chris went to Benghazi in the early days of the Libyan revolution, arriving on a cargo ship. As America’s representative, he helped the Libyan people as they coped with violent conflict, cared for the wounded, and crafted a vision for the future in which the rights of all Libyans would be respected. And after the revolution, he supported the birth of a new democracy, as Libyans held elections, and built new institutions, and began to move forward after decades of dictatorship.

Chris Stevens loved his work. He took pride in the country he served, and he saw dignity in the people that he met. And two weeks ago, he traveled to Benghazi to review plans to establish a new cultural center and modernize a hospital. That’s when America’s compound came under attack. Along with three of his colleagues, Chris was killed in the city that he helped to save. He was 52 years old.

I tell you this story because Chris Stevens embodied the best of America. Like his fellow Foreign Service officers, he built bridges across oceans and cultures, and was deeply invested in the international cooperation that the United Nations represents. He acted with humility, but he also stood up for a set of principles -- a belief that individuals should be free to determine their own destiny, and live with liberty, dignity, justice, and opportunity.

The attacks on the civilians in Benghazi were attacks on America. We are grateful for the assistance we received from the Libyan government and from the Libyan people. There should be no doubt that we will be relentless in tracking down the killers and bringing them to justice. And I also appreciate that in recent days, the leaders of other countries in the region -- including Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen -- have taken steps to secure our diplomatic facilities, and called for calm. And so have religious authorities around the globe.

But understand, the attacks of the last two weeks are not simply an assault on America. They are also an assault on the very ideals upon which the United Nations was founded -- the notion that people can resolve their differences peacefully; that diplomacy can take the place of war; that in an interdependent world, all of us have a stake in working towards greater opportunity and security for our citizens.

If we are serious about upholding these ideals, it will not be enough to put more guards in front of an embassy, or to put out statements of regret and wait for the outrage to pass. If we are serious about these ideals, we must speak honestly about the deeper causes of the crisis -- because we face a choice between the forces that would drive us apart and the hopes that we hold in common.

Today, we must reaffirm that our future will be determined by people like Chris Stevens -- and not by his killers. Today, we must declare that this violence and intolerance has no place among our United Nations.

It has been less than two years since a vendor in Tunisia set himself on fire to protest the oppressive corruption in his country, and sparked what became known as the Arab Spring. And since then, the world has been captivated by the transformation that’s taken place, and the United States has supported the forces of change.

We were inspired by the Tunisian protests that toppled a dictator, because we recognized our own beliefs in the aspiration of men and women who took to the streets.

We insisted on change in Egypt, because our support for democracy ultimately put us on the side of the people.

We supported a transition of leadership in Yemen, because the interests of the people were no longer being served by a corrupt status quo.

We intervened in Libya alongside a broad coalition, and with the mandate of the United Nations Security Council, because we had the ability to stop the slaughter of innocents, and because we believed that the aspirations of the people were more powerful than a tyrant.

And as we meet here, we again declare that the regime of Bashar al-Assad must come to an end so that the suffering of the Syrian people can stop and a new dawn can begin.

We have taken these positions because we believe that freedom and self-determination are not unique to one culture. These are not simply American values or Western values -- they are universal values. And even as there will be huge challenges to come with a transition to democracy, I am convinced that ultimately government of the people, by the people, and for the people is more likely to bring about the stability, prosperity, and individual opportunity that serve as a basis for peace in our world.

So let us remember that this is a season of progress. For the first time in decades, Tunisians, Egyptians and Libyans voted for new leaders in elections that were credible, competitive, and fair. This democratic spirit has not been restricted to the Arab world. Over the past year, we’ve seen peaceful transitions of power in Malawi and Senegal, and a new President in Somalia. In Burma, a President has freed political prisoners and opened a closed society, a courageous dissident has been elected to parliament, and people look forward to further reform. Around the globe, people are making their voices heard, insisting on their innate dignity, and the right to determine their future.

And yet the turmoil of recent weeks reminds us that the path to democracy does not end with the casting of a ballot. Nelson Mandela once said: "To be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others."

True democracy demands that citizens cannot be thrown in jail because of what they believe, and that businesses can be opened without paying a bribe. It depends on the freedom of citizens to speak their minds and assemble without fear, and on the rule of law and due process that guarantees the rights of all people.

In other words, true democracy -- real freedom -- is hard work. Those in power have to resist the temptation to crack down on dissidents. In hard economic times, countries must be tempted -- may be tempted to rally the people around perceived enemies, at home and abroad, rather than focusing on the painstaking work of reform.

Moreover, there will always be those that reject human progress -- dictators who cling to power, corrupt interests that depend on the status quo, and extremists who fan the flames of hate and division. From Northern Ireland to South Asia, from Africa to the Americas, from the Balkans to the Pacific Rim, we’ve witnessed convulsions that can accompany transitions to a new political order.

At time, the conflicts arise along the fault lines of race or tribe. And often they arise from the difficulties of reconciling tradition and faith with the diversity and interdependence of the modern world. In every country, there are those who find different religious beliefs threatening; in every culture, those who love freedom for themselves must ask themselves how much they’re willing to tolerate freedom for others.

That is what we saw play out in the last two weeks, as a crude and disgusting video sparked outrage throughout the Muslim world. Now, I have made it clear that the United States government had nothing to do with this video, and I believe its message must be rejected by all who respect our common humanity.

It is an insult not only to Muslims, but to America as well -- for as the city outside these walls makes clear, we are a country that has welcomed people of every race and every faith. We are home to Muslims who worship across our country. We not only respect the freedom of religion, we have laws that protect individuals from being harmed because of how they look or what they believe. We understand why people take offense to this video because millions of our citizens are among them.

I know there are some who ask why we don’t just ban such a video. And the answer is enshrined in our laws: Our Constitution protects the right to practice free speech.

Here in the United States, countless publications provoke offense. Like me, the majority of Americans are Christian, and yet we do not ban blasphemy against our most sacred beliefs. As President of our country and Commander-in-Chief of our military, I accept that people are going to call me awful things every day -- and I will always defend their right to do so.

Americans have fought and died around the globe to protect the right of all people to express their views, even views that we profoundly disagree with. We do not do so because we support hateful speech, but because our founders understood that without such protections, the capacity of each individual to express their own views and practice their own faith may be threatened. We do so because in a diverse society, efforts to restrict speech can quickly become a tool to silence critics and oppress minorities.

We do so because given the power of faith in our lives, and the passion that religious differences can inflame, the strongest weapon against hateful speech is not repression; it is more speech -- the voices of tolerance that rally against bigotry and blasphemy, and lift up the values of understanding and mutual respect.

Now, I know that not all countries in this body share this particular understanding of the protection of free speech. We recognize that. But in 2012, at a time when anyone with a cell phone can spread offensive views around the world with the click of a button, the notion that we can control the flow of information is obsolete. The question, then, is how do we respond?

And on this we must agree: There is no speech that justifies mindless violence. There are no words that excuse the killing of innocents. There's no video that justifies an attack on an embassy. There's no slander that provides an excuse for people to burn a restaurant in Lebanon, or destroy a school in Tunis, or cause death and destruction in Pakistan.

In this modern world with modern technologies, for us to respond in that way to hateful speech empowers any individual who engages in such speech to create chaos around the world. We empower the worst of us if that’s how we respond.

More broadly, the events of the last two weeks also speak to the need for all of us to honestly address the tensions between the West and the Arab world that is moving towards democracy.

Now, let me be clear: Just as we cannot solve every problem in the world, the United States has not and will not seek to dictate the outcome of democratic transitions abroad. We do not expect other nations to agree with us on every issue, nor do we assume that the violence of the past weeks or the hateful speech by some individuals represent the views of the overwhelming majority of Muslims, any more than the views of the people who produced this video represents those of Americans. However, I do believe that it is the obligation of all leaders in all countries to speak out forcefully against violence and extremism.

It is time to marginalize those who -- even when not directly resorting to violence -- use hatred of America, or the West, or Israel, as the central organizing principle of politics. For that only gives cover, and sometimes makes an excuse, for those who do resort to violence.

That brand of politics -- one that pits East against West, and South against North, Muslims against Christians and Hindu and Jews -- can’t deliver on the promise of freedom. To the youth, it offers only false hope. Burning an American flag does nothing to provide a child an education. Smashing apart a restaurant does not fill an empty stomach. Attacking an embassy won’t create a single job. That brand of politics only makes it harder to achieve what we must do together: educating our children, and creating the opportunities that they deserve; protecting human rights, and extending democracy’s promise.

Understand America will never retreat from the world. We will bring justice to those who harm our citizens and our friends, and we will stand with our allies. We are willing to partner with countries around the world to deepen ties of trade and investment, and science and technology, energy and development -- all efforts that can spark economic growth for all our people and stabilize democratic change.

But such efforts depend on a spirit of mutual interest and mutual respect. No government or company, no school or NGO will be confident working in a country where its people are endangered. For partnerships to be effective our citizens must be secure and our efforts must be welcomed.

A politics based only on anger -- one based on dividing the world between "us" and "them" -- not only sets back international cooperation, it ultimately undermines those who tolerate it. All of us have an interest in standing up to these forces.

Let us remember that Muslims have suffered the most at the hands of extremism. On the same day our civilians were killed in Benghazi, a Turkish police officer was murdered in Istanbul only days before his wedding; more than 10 Yemenis were killed in a car bomb in Sana’a; several Afghan children were mourned by their parents just days after they were killed by a suicide bomber in Kabul.

The impulse towards intolerance and violence may initially be focused on the West, but over time it cannot be contained. The same impulses toward extremism are used to justify war between Sunni and Shia, between tribes and clans. It leads not to strength and prosperity but to chaos. In less than two years, we have seen largely peaceful protests bring more change to Muslim-majority countries than a decade of violence. And extremists understand this. Because they have nothing to offer to improve the lives of people, violence is their only way to stay relevant. They don’t build; they only destroy.

It is time to leave the call of violence and the politics of division behind. On so many issues, we face a choice between the promise of the future, or the prisons of the past. And we cannot afford to get it wrong. We must seize this moment. And America stands ready to work with all who are willing to embrace a better future.

The future must not belong to those who target Coptic Christians in Egypt -- it must be claimed by those in Tahrir Square who chanted, "Muslims, Christians, we are one." The future must not belong to those who bully women -- it must be shaped by girls who go to school, and those who stand for a world where our daughters can live their dreams just like our sons.

The future must not belong to those corrupt few who steal a country’s resources -- it must be won by the students and entrepreneurs, the workers and business owners who seek a broader prosperity for all people. Those are the women and men that America stands with; theirs is the vision we will support. The future must not belong to those who slander the prophet of Islam. But to be credible, those who condemn that slander must also condemn the hate we see in the images of Jesus Christ that are desecrated, or churches that are destroyed, or the Holocaust that is denied.

Let us condemn incitement against Sufi Muslims and Shiite pilgrims. It’s time to heed the words of Gandhi: "Intolerance is itself a form of violence and an obstacle to the growth of a true democratic spirit." Together, we must work towards a world where we are strengthened by our differences, and not defined by them. That is what America embodies, that’s the vision we will support.

Among Israelis and Palestinians, the future must not belong to those who turn their backs on a prospect of peace. Let us leave behind those who thrive on conflict, those who reject the right of Israel to exist. The road is hard, but the destination is clear -- a secure, Jewish state of Israel and an independent, prosperous Palestine. Understanding that such a peace must come through a just agreement between the parties, America will walk alongside all who are prepared to make that journey.

In Syria, the future must not belong to a dictator who massacres his people. If there is a cause that cries out for protest in the world today, peaceful protest, it is a regime that tortures children and shoots rockets at apartment buildings. And we must remain engaged to assure that what began with citizens demanding their rights does not end in a cycle of sectarian violence.

Together, we must stand with those Syrians who believe in a different vision -- a Syria that is united and inclusive, where children don’t need to fear their own government, and all Syrians have a say in how they are governed -- Sunnis and Alawites, Kurds and Christians. That’s what America stands for. That is the outcome that we will work for -- with sanctions and consequences for those who persecute, and assistance and support for those who work for this common good. Because we believe that the Syrians who embrace this vision will have the strength and the legitimacy to lead.

In Iran, we see where the path of a violent and unaccountable ideology leads. The Iranian people have a remarkable and ancient history, and many Iranians wish to enjoy peace and prosperity alongside their neighbors. But just as it restricts the rights of its own people, the Iranian government continues to prop up a dictator in Damascus and supports terrorist groups abroad. Time and again, it has failed to take the opportunity to demonstrate that its nuclear program is peaceful, and to meet its obligations to the United Nations.

So let me be clear. America wants to resolve this issue through diplomacy, and we believe that there is still time and space to do so. But that time is not unlimited. We respect the right of nations to access peaceful nuclear power, but one of the purposes of the United Nations is to see that we harness that power for peace. And make no mistake, a nuclear-armed Iran is not a challenge that can be contained. It would threaten the elimination of Israel, the security of Gulf nations, and the stability of the global economy. It risks triggering a nuclear-arms race in the region, and the unraveling of the non-proliferation treaty. That’s why a coalition of countries is holding the Iranian government accountable. And that’s why the United States will do what we must to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.

We know from painful experience that the path to security and prosperity does not lie outside the boundaries of international law and respect for human rights. That’s why this institution was established from the rubble of conflict. That is why liberty triumphed over tyranny in the Cold War. And that is the lesson of the last two decades as well.

History shows that peace and progress come to those who make the right choices. Nations in every part of the world have traveled this difficult path. Europe, the bloodiest battlefield of the 20th century, is united, free and at peace. From Brazil to South Africa, from Turkey to South Korea, from India to Indonesia, people of different races, religions, and traditions have lifted millions out of poverty, while respecting the rights of their citizens and meeting their responsibilities as nations.

And it is because of the progress that I’ve witnessed in my own lifetime, the progress that I’ve witnessed after nearly four years as President, that I remain ever hopeful about the world that we live in. The war in Iraq is over. American troops have come home. We’ve begun a transition in Afghanistan, and America and our allies will end our war on schedule in 2014. Al Qaeda has been weakened, and Osama bin Laden is no more. Nations have come together to lock down nuclear materials, and America and Russia are reducing our arsenals. We have seen hard choices made -- from Naypyidaw to Cairo to Abidjan -- to put more power in the hands of citizens.

At a time of economic challenge, the world has come together to broaden prosperity. Through the G20, we have partnered with emerging countries to keep the world on the path of recovery. America has pursued a development agenda that fuels growth and breaks dependency, and worked with African leaders to help them feed their nations. New partnerships have been forged to combat corruption and promote government that is open and transparent, and new commitments have been made through the Equal Futures Partnership to ensure that women and girls can fully participate in politics and pursue opportunity. And later today, I will discuss our efforts to combat the scourge of human trafficking.

All these things give me hope. But what gives me the most hope is not the actions of us, not the actions of leaders -- it is the people that I’ve seen. The American troops who have risked their lives and sacrificed their limbs for strangers half a world away; the students in Jakarta or Seoul who are eager to use their knowledge to benefit mankind; the faces in a square in Prague or a parliament in Ghana who see democracy giving voice to their aspirations; the young people in the favelas of Rio and the schools of Mumbai whose eyes shine with promise. These men, women, and children of every race and every faith remind me that for every angry mob that gets shown on television, there are billions around the world who share similar hopes and dreams. They tell us that there is a common heartbeat to humanity.

So much attention in our world turns to what divides us. That’s what we see on the news. That's what consumes our political debates. But when you strip it all away, people everywhere long for the freedom to determine their destiny; the dignity that comes with work; the comfort that comes with faith; and the justice that exists when governments serve their people -- and not the other way around.

The United States of America will always stand up for these aspirations, for our own people and for people all across the world. That was our founding purpose. That is what our history shows. That is what Chris Stevens worked for throughout his life.

And I promise you this: Long after the killers are brought to justice, Chris Stevens’s legacy will live on in the lives that he touched -- in the tens of thousands who marched against violence through the streets of Benghazi; in the Libyans who changed their Facebook photo to one of Chris; in the signs that read, simply, "Chris Stevens was a friend to all Libyans."

They should give us hope. They should remind us that so long as we work for it, justice will be done, that history is on our side, and that a rising tide of liberty will never be reversed.

Thank you very much.

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# First U.S. Presidential Candidate Debate

LEHRER: Good evening from the Magness Arena at the University of Denver in Denver, Colorado. I'm Jim Lehrer of the "PBS NewsHour," and I welcome you to the first of the 2012 Presidential debates between President Barack Obama, the Democratic nominee, and former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney, the Republican nominee.

This debate and the next three -- two Presidential, one vice Presidential -- are sponsored by the Commission on Presidential Debates. Tonight's 90 minutes will be about domestic issues and will follow a format designed by the commission. There will be six roughly 15-minute segments with two-minute answers for the first question, then open discussion for the remainder of each segment.

Thousands of people offered suggestions on segment subjects or questions via the Internet and other means, but I made the final selections. And for the record, they were not submitted for approval to the commission or the candidates.

The segments as I announced in advance will be three on the economy and one each on health care, the role of government and governing, with an emphasis throughout on differences, specifics and choices. Both candidates will also have two-minute closing statements.

The audience here in the hall has promised to remain silent -- no cheers, applause, boos, hisses, among other noisy distracting things, so we may all concentrate on what the candidates have to say. There is a noise exception right now, though, as we welcome President Obama and Governor Romney.

Gentlemen, welcome to you both. Let's start the economy, segment one, and let's begin with jobs. What are the major differences between the two of you about how you would go about creating new jobs? You have two minutes. Each of you have two minutes to start. A coin toss has determined, Mr. President, you go first.

President Obama: Well, thank you very much, Jim, for this opportunity. I want to thank Governor Romney and the University of Denver for your hospitality.

There are a lot of points I want to make tonight, but the most important one is that 20 years ago I became the luckiest man on Earth because Michelle Obama agreed to marry me.

And so I just want to wish, Sweetie, you happy anniversary and let you know that a year from now we will not be celebrating it in front of 40 million people.

You know, four years ago we went through the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression: millions of jobs were lost; the auto industry was on the brink of collapse; the financial system had frozen up.

And because of the resilience and the determination of the American people, we've begun to fight our way back. Over the last 30 months, we've seen 5 million jobs in the private sector created. The auto industry has come roaring back. And housing has begun to rise.

But we all know that we've still got a lot of work to do. And so the question here tonight is not where we've been, but where we're going.

Governor Romney has a perspective that says if we cut taxes, skewed towards the wealthy, and roll back regulations, that we'll be better off. I've got a different view.

I think we've got to invest in education and training. I think it's important for us to develop new sources of energy here in America, that we change our tax code to make sure that we're helping small businesses and companies that are investing here in the United States, that we take some of the money that we're saving as we wind down two wars to rebuild America and that we reduce our deficit in a balanced way that allows us to make these critical investments.

Now, it ultimately is going to be up to the voters -- to you -- which path we should take. Are we going to double on top-down economic policies that helped to get us into this mess or do we embrace a new economic patriotism that says America does best when the middle class does best? And I'm looking forward to having that debate.

LEHRER: Governor Romney, two minutes.

Governor Romney:

Thank you, Jim. It's an honor to be here with you, and I appreciate the chance to be with the President. I'm pleased to be at the University of Denver, appreciate their welcome, and also the Presidential Commission on these debates.

And congratulations to you, Mr. President, on your anniversary. I'm sure this was the most romantic place you could imagine, here -- here with me. So I...Congratulations. This is obviously a very tender topic. I've had the occasion over the last couple of years of meeting people across the country. I was in Dayton, Ohio, and a woman grabbed my arm and she said, "I've been out of work since May. Can you help me?"

Ann yesterday was at a rally in Denver and a woman came up to her with a baby in her arms and said, "Ann, my husband has had four jobs in three years, part-time jobs. He's lost his most recent job and we've now just lost our home. Can you help us?" And the answer is, yes, we can help, but it's going to take a different path. Not the one we've been on, not the one the President describes as a top-down, cut taxes for the rich. That's not what I'm going to do.

My plan has five basic parts. One, get us energy independent, North American energy independent. That creates about 4 million jobs. Number two, open up more trade, particularly in Latin America. Crack down on China, if and when they cheat. Number three, make sure our people have the skills they need to succeed and the best schools in the world. We're far away from that now. Number four, get to us a balanced budget. Number five, champion small business. It's small business that creates the jobs in America, and over the last four years, small business people have decided that America may not be the place to open a new business because new business startups are down to a 30-year low.

Now, I'm concerned that the path that we're on has just been unsuccessful. The President has a view very similar to the view he had when he ran four years, that a bigger government, spending more, taxing more, regulating more -- if you will, trickle-down government -- would work. That's not the right answer for America. I'll restore the vitality that gets America working again. Thank you.

LEHRER: Mr. President, please respond directly to what the governor just said about trickle-down -- his trick-down approach, as he said yours is.

President Obama:

Well, let me talk specifically about what I think we need to do. First, we've got to improve our education system and we've made enormous progress drawing on ideas both from Democrats and Republicans that are already starting to show gains in some of the toughest to deal with schools. We've got a program called Race to the Top that has prompted reforms in 46 states around the country, raising standards, improving how we train teachers.

So now I want to hire another 100,000 new math and science teachers, and create 2 million more slots in our community colleges so that people can get trained for the jobs that are out there right now. And I want to make sure that we keep tuition low for our young people.

When it comes to our tax code, Governor Romney and I both agree that our corporate tax rate is too high, so I want to lower it, particularly for manufacturing, taking it down to 25 percent. But I also want to close those loopholes that are giving incentives for companies that are shipping jobs overseas. I want to provide tax breaks for companies that are investing here in the United States.

On energy, Governor Romney and I, we both agree that we've got to boost American energy production, and oil and natural gas production are higher than they've been in years. But I also believe that we've got to look at the energy sources of the future, like wind and solar and biofuels, and make those investments.

So all of this is possible. Now, in order for us to do it, we do have to close our deficit, and one of the things I'm sure we'll be discussing tonight is, how do we deal with our tax code? And how do we make sure that we are reducing spending in a responsible way, but also, how do we have enough revenue to make those investments?

And this is where there's a difference, because Governor Romney's central economic plan calls for a $5 trillion tax cut -- on top of the extension of the Bush tax cuts -- that's another trillion dollars -- and $2 trillion in additional military spending that the military hasn't asked for. That's $8 trillion. How we pay for that, reduce the deficit, and make the investments that we need to make, without dumping those costs onto middle-class Americans, I think is one of the central questions of this campaign.

LEHRER: Both of you have spoken about a lot of different things, and we're going to try to get through them in as specific a way as we possibly can. But, first, Governor Romney, do you have a question that you'd like to ask the President directly about something he just said?

Governor Romney:

Well, sure. I'd like to clear up the record and go through it piece by piece.

First of all, I don't have a $5 trillion tax cut. I don't have a tax cut of a scale that you're talking about. My view is that we ought to provide tax relief to people in the middle class. But I'm not going to reduce the share of taxes paid by high-income people. High-income people are doing just fine in this economy. They'll do fine whether you're President or I am.

The people who are having the hard time right now are middle- income Americans. Under the President's policies, middle-income Americans have been buried. They're just being crushed. Middle-income Americans have seen their income come down by $4,300. This is a -- this is a tax in and of itself. I'll call it the economy tax. It's been crushing.

At the same time, gasoline prices have doubled under the President. Electric rates are up. Food prices are up. Health care costs have gone up by $2,500 a family. Middle-income families are being crushed.

And so the question is how to get them going again. And I've described it. It's energy and trade, the right kind of training programs, balancing our budget and helping small business. Those are the -- the cornerstones of my plan.

But the President mentioned a couple of other ideas I'll just note. First, education. I agree: Education is key, particularly the future of our economy. But our training programs right now, we've got 47 of them, housed in the federal government, reporting to eight different agencies. Overhead is overwhelming. We've got to get those dollars back to the states and go to the workers so they can create their own pathways to get in the training they need for jobs that will really help them.

The second area, taxation, we agree, we ought to bring the tax rates down. And I do, both for corporations and for individuals. But in order for us not to lose revenue, have the government run out of money, I also lower deductions and credits and exemptions, so that we keep taking in the same money when you also account for growth.

The third area, energy. Energy is critical, and the President pointed out correctly that production of oil and gas in the U.S. is up. But not due to his policies. In spite of his policies.

Mr. President, all of the increase in natural gas and oil has happened on private land, not on government land. On government land, your administration has cut the number of permits and licenses in half. If I'm President, I'll double them, and also get the -- the oil from offshore and Alaska. And I'll bring that pipeline in from Canada.

And, by the way, I like coal. I'm going to make sure we can continue to burn clean coal. People in the coal industry feel like it's getting crushed by your policies. I want to get America and North America energy independent so we can create those jobs.

And finally, with regards to that tax cut, look, I'm not looking to cut massive taxes and to reduce the -- the revenues going to the government. My -- my number-one principal is, there will be no tax cut that adds to the deficit. I want to underline that: no tax cut that adds to the deficit.

But I do want to reduce the burden being paid by middle-income Americans. And I -- and to do that, that also means I cannot reduce the burden paid by high-income Americans. So any -- any language to the contrary is simply not accurate.

LEHRER: Mr. President?

President Obama:

Well, I think -- let's talk about taxes, because I think it's instructive. Now, four years ago, when I stood on this stage, I said that I would cut taxes for middle-class families. And that's exactly what I did. We cut taxes for middle-class families by about $3,600.

And the reason is, because I believe that we do best when the middle class is doing well. And by giving them those tax cuts, they had a little more money in their pocket, and so maybe they can buy a new car. They are certainly in a better position to weather the extraordinary recession that we went through. They can buy a computer for their kid who's going off to college, which means they're spending more money, businesses have more customers, businesses make more profits, and then hire more workers.

Now, Governor Romney's proposal that he has been promoting for 18 months calls for a $5 trillion tax cut, on top of $2 trillion of additional spending for our military. And he is saying that he is going to pay for it by closing loopholes and deductions. The problem is that he's been asked over 100 times how you would close those deductions and loopholes, and he hasn't been able to identify them. But I'm going to make an important point here, Jim.

LEHRER: All right.

President Obama:

When you add up all the loopholes and deductions that upper-income individuals can -- are currently taking advantage of, you take those all away, you don't come close to paying for $5 trillion in tax cuts and $2 trillion in additional military spending.

And that's why independent studies looking at this said the only way to meet Governor Romney's pledge of not reducing the deficit or -- or -- or not adding to the deficit is by burdening middle-class families. The average middle-class family with children would pay about $2,000 more.

Now, that's not my analysis. That's the analysis of economists who have looked at this. And -- and that kind of top -- top-down economics, where folks at the top are doing well, so the average person making $3 million is getting a $250,000 tax break, while middle-class families are burdened further, that's not what I believe is a recipe for economic growth.

LEHRER: All right. What is the difference? Let's just stay on taxes. Just -- let's just stay on taxes for [inaudible]. What is the difference...

Governor Romney:

Well, but -- but virtually -- virtually everything he just said about my tax plan is inaccurate. So if the tax plan he described were a tax plan I was asked to support, I'd say absolutely not. I'm not looking for a $5 trillion tax cut. What I've said is I won't put in place a tax cut that adds to the deficit. That's part one. So there's no economist that can say Mitt Romney's tax plan adds $5 trillion if I say I will not add to the deficit with my tax plan.

Number two, I will not reduce the share paid by high-income individuals. I know that you and your running mate keep saying that and I know it's a popular thing to say with a lot of people, but it's just not the case. Look, I've got five boys. I'm used to people saying something that's not always true, but just keep on repeating it and ultimately hoping I'll believe it. But that -- that is not the case. All right? I will not reduce the taxes paid by high-income Americans.

And number three, I will not under any circumstances raise taxes on middle-income families. I will lower taxes on middle-income families. Now, you cite a study. There are six other studies that looked at the study you describe and say it's completely wrong. I saw a study that came out today that said you're going to raise taxes by $3,000 to $4,000 on middle-income families.

There are all these studies out there. But let's get at the bottom line. That is, I want to bring down rates. I want to bring the rates down, at the same time lower deductions and exemptions and credits and so forth, so we keep getting the revenue we need. And you'd think, well, then why lower the rates?

And the reason is because small business pays that individual rate; 54 percent of America's workers work in businesses that are taxed not at the corporate tax rate, but at the individual tax rate. And if we lower that rate, they will be able to hire more people. For me, this is about jobs. This is about getting jobs for the American people.

LEHRER: That's where we started. Yeah. Do you challenge what the governor just said about his own plan?

President Obama:

Well, for 18 months he's been running on this tax plan. And now, five weeks before the election, he's saying that his big, bold idea is, "Never mind."

And the fact is that if you are lowering the rates the way you described, Governor, then it is not possible to come up with enough deductions and loopholes that only affect high-income individuals to avoid either raising the deficit or burdening the middle class. It's -- it's math. It's arithmetic.

Now, Governor Romney and I do share a deep interest in encouraging small-business growth. So at the same time that my tax plan has already lowered taxes for 98 percent of families, I also lowered taxes for small businesses 18 times. And what I want to do is continue the tax rates -- the tax cuts that we put into place for small businesses and families.

But I have said that for incomes over $250,000 a year, that we should go back to the rates that we had when Bill Clinton was President, when we created 23 million new jobs, went from deficit to surplus, and created a whole lot of millionaires to boot.

And the reason this is important is because by doing that, we cannot only reduce the deficit, we cannot only encourage job growth through small businesses, but we're also able to make the investments that are necessary in education or in energy.

And we do have a difference, though, when it comes to definitions of small business. Under -- under my plan, 97 percent of small businesses would not see their income taxes go up. Governor Romney says, well, those top 3 percent, they're the job creators, they'd be burdened.

But under Governor Romney's definition, there are a whole bunch of millionaires and billionaires who are small businesses. Donald Trump is a small business. Now, I know Donald Trump doesn't like to think of himself as small anything, but -- but that's how you define small businesses if you're getting business income.

And that kind of approach, I believe, will not grow our economy, because the only way to pay for it without either burdening the middle class or blowing up our deficit is to make drastic cuts in things like education, making sure that we are continuing to invest in basic science and research, all the things that are helping America grow. And I think that would be a mistake.

LEHRER: All right.

Governor Romney:

Jim, let me just come back on that -- on that point, which is these...

LEHRER: Just for the -- just for record...

Governor Romney:

... the small businesses we're talking about...

LEHRER: Excuse me. Excuse me. Just so everybody understands, we're way over our first 15 minutes.

Governor Romney:

It's fun, isn't it?

LEHRER: It's OK, it's great. No problem. Well, you all don't have -- you don't have a problem, I don't have a problem, because we're still on the economy. We're going to come back to taxes. I want move on to the deficit and a lot of other things, too. OK, but go ahead, sir.

Governor Romney:

You bet. Well, President, you're -- Mr. President, you're absolutely right, which is that, with regards to 97 percent of the businesses are not -- not taxed at the 35 percent tax rate, they're taxed at a lower rate. But those businesses that are in the last 3 percent of businesses happen to employ half -- half of all the people who work in small business. Those are the businesses that employ one-quarter of all the workers in America. And your plan is to take their tax rate from 35 percent to 40 percent.

Now, and -- and I've talked to a guy who has a very small business. He's in the electronics business in -- in St. Louis. He has four employees. He said he and his son calculated how much they pay in taxes, federal income tax, federal payroll tax, state income tax, state sales tax, state property tax, gasoline tax. It added up to well over 50 percent of what they earned. And your plan is to take the tax rate on successful small businesses from 35 percent to 40 percent. The National Federation of Independent Businesses has said that will cost 700,000 jobs.

I don't want to cost jobs. My priority is jobs. And so what I do is I bring down the tax rates, lower deductions and exemptions, the same idea behind Bowles-Simpson, by the way, get the rates down, lower deductions and exemptions, to create more jobs, because there's nothing better for getting us to a balanced budget than having more people working, earning more money, paying more taxes. That's by far the most effective and efficient way to get this budget balanced.

President Obama:

Jim, I -- you may want to move onto another topic, but I -- I would just say this to the American people. If you believe that we can cut taxes by $5 trillion and add $2 trillion in additional spending that the military is not asking for, $7 trillion -- just to give you a sense, over 10 years, that's more than our entire defense budget -- and you think that by closing loopholes and deductions for the well-to-do, somehow you will not end up picking up the tab, then Governor Romney's plan may work for you.

But I think math, common sense, and our history shows us that's not a recipe for job growth. Look, we've tried this. We've tried both approaches. The approach that Governor Romney's talking about is the same sales pitch that was made in 2001 and 2003, and we ended up with the slowest job growth in 50 years, we ended up moving from surplus to deficits, and it all culminated in the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression.

Bill Clinton tried the approach that I'm talking about. We created 23 million new jobs. We went from deficit to surplus. And businesses did very well. So, in some ways, we've got some data on which approach is more likely to create jobs and opportunity for Americans and I believe that the economy works best when middle-class families are getting tax breaks so that they've got some money in their pockets, and those of us who have done extraordinarily well because of this magnificent country that we live in, that we can afford to do a little bit more to make sure we're not blowing up the deficit.

ROMNEY: Jim, the President began this segment, so I think I get the last word.

LEHRER: Well, you're going to get the first word in the next segment.

ROMNEY: All right. Well, but he gets the first word of that segment. I get the last word [inaudible]. I hope. Let me just make this comment. I think first of all, let me -- let me repeat -- let me repeat what I said. I'm not in favor of a $5 trillion tax cut. That's not my plan. My plan is not to put in place any tax cut that will add to the deficit. That's point one. So you may keep referring to it as a $5 trillion tax cut, but that's not my plan.

Number two, let's look at history. My plan is not like anything that's been tried before. My plan is to bring down rates, but also bring down deductions and exemptions and credits at the same time so the revenue stays in, but that we bring down rates to get more people working.

My priority is putting people back to work in America. They're suffering in this country. And we talk about evidence. Look at the evidence of the last four years. It's absolutely extraordinary. We've got 23 million people out of work or stopped looking for work in this country. It's just -- it's -- we've got -- when the President took office, 32 million people on food stamps; 47 million on food stamps today; economic growth this year slower than last year, and last year slower than the year before.

Going forward with the status quo is not going to cut it for the American people who are struggling today.

LEHRER: All right. Let's talk -- we're still on the economy. This is, theoretically now, a second segment still on the economy, and specifically on what to do about the federal deficit, the federal debt. And the question, you each have two minutes on this, and Governor Romney, you -- you go first because the President went first on segment one. And the question is this, what are the differences between the two of you as to how you would go about tackling the deficit problem in this country?

Governor Romney:

Good. I'm glad you raised that, and it's a -- it's a critical issue. I think it's not just an economic issue, I think it's a moral issue. I think it's, frankly, not moral for my generation to keep spending massively more than we take in, knowing those burdens are going to be passed on to the next generation and they're going to be paying the interest and the principal all their lives. And the amount of debt we're adding, at a trillion a year, is simply not moral.

So how do we deal with it? Well, mathematically, there are three ways that you can cut a deficit. One, of course, is to raise taxes. Number two is to cut spending. And number is to grow the economy, because if more people work in a growing economy, they're paying taxes, and you can get the job done that way. The President would -- President would prefer raising taxes. I understand. The problem with raising taxes is that it slows down the rate of growth. And you could never quite get the job done. I want to lower spending and encourage economic growth at the same time.

What things would I cut from spending? Well, first of all, I will eliminate all programs by this test, if they don't pass it: Is the program so critical it's worth borrowing money from China to pay for it? And if not, I'll get rid of it. Obamacare's on my list. I apologize, Mr. President. I use that term with all respect, by the way.

President Obama:

I like it.

Governor Romney:

Good. OK, good. So I'll get rid of that. I'm sorry, Jim, I'm going to stop the subsidy to PBS. I'm going to stop other things. I like PBS, I love Big Bird. Actually like you, too. But I'm not going to -- I'm not going to keep on spending money on things to borrow money from China to pay for. That's number one. Number two, I'll take programs that are currently good programs but I think could be run more efficiently at the state level and send them to the state. Number three, I'll make government more efficient and to cut back the number of employees, combine some agencies and departments. My cutbacks will be done through attrition, by the way.

This is the approach we have to take to get America to a balanced budget. The President said he'd cut the deficit in half. Unfortunately, he doubled it. Trillion-dollar deficits for the last four years. The President's put it in place as much public debt -- almost as much debt held by the public as al prior Presidents combined.

LEHRER: Mr. President, two minutes.

President Obama:

When I walked into the Oval Office, I had more than a trillion-dollar deficit greeting me. And we know where it came from: two wars that were paid for on a credit card; two tax cuts that were not paid for; and a whole bunch of programs that were not paid for; and then a massive economic crisis.

And despite that, what we've said is, yes, we had to take some initial emergency measures to make sure we didn't slip into a Great Depression, but what we've also said is, let's make sure that we are cutting out those things that are not helping us grow.

So 77 government programs, everything from aircrafts that the Air Force had ordered but weren't working very well, 18 government -- 18 government programs for education that were well-intentioned, not weren't helping kids learn, we went after medical fraud in Medicare and Medicaid very aggressively, more aggressively than ever before, and have saved tens of billions of dollars, $50 billion of waste taken out of the system.

And I worked with Democrats and Republicans to cut a trillion dollars out of our discretionary domestic budget. That's the largest cut in the discretionary domestic budget since Dwight Eisenhower.

Now, we all know that we've got to do more. And so I've put forward a specific $4 trillion deficit reduction plan. It's on a website. You can look at all the numbers, what cuts we make and what revenue we raise.

And the way we do it is $2.50 for every cut, we ask for $1 of additional revenue, paid for, as I indicated earlier, by asking those of us who have done very well in this country to contribute a little bit more to reduce the deficit. Governor Romney earlier mentioned the Bowles-Simpson commission. Well, that's how the commission -- bipartisan commission that talked about how we should move forward suggested we have to do it, in a balanced way with some revenue and some spending cuts. And this is a major difference that Governor Romney and I have.

Let -- let me just finish their point, because you're looking for contrast. You know, when Governor Romney stood on a stage with other Republican candidates for the nomination and he was asked, would you take $10 of spending cuts for just $1 of revenue? And he said no.

Now, if you take such an unbalanced approach, then that means you are going to be gutting our investments in schools and education. It means that Governor Romney...talked about Medicaid and how we could send it back to the states, but effectively this means a 30 percent cut in the primary program we help for seniors who are in nursing homes, for kids who are with disabilities.

LEHRER: Mr. President, I'm sorry.

President Obama:

And -- and that is not a right strategy for us to move forward.

LEHRER: Way over the two minutes.

President Obama:

Sorry.

LEHRER: Governor, what about Simpson-Bowles? Do you support Simpson-Bowles?

Governor Romney:

Simpson-Bowles, the President should have grabbed that.

LEHRER: No, I mean, do you support Simpson-Bowles?

Governor Romney:

I have my own plan. It's not the same as Simpson- Bowles. But in my view, the President should have grabbed it. If you wanted to make some adjustments to it, take it, go to Congress, fight for it.

President Obama:

That's what we've done, made some adjustments to it, and we're putting it forward before Congress right now, a $4 trillion plan...

Governor Romney:

But you've been -- but you've been President four years...You've been President four years. You said you'd cut the deficit in half. It's now four years later. We still have trillion-dollar deficits. The CBO says we'll have a trillion-dollar deficit each of the next four years. If you're re-elected, we'll get to a trillion-dollar debt.

I mean, you have said before you'd cut the deficit in half. And this -- I love this idea of $4 trillion in cuts. You found $4 trillion of ways to reduce or to get closer to a balanced budget, except we still show trillion-dollar deficits every year. That doesn't get the job done.

Let me come back and say, why is it that I don't want to raise taxes? Why don't I want to raise taxes on people? And actually, you said it back in 2010. You said, "Look, I'm going to extend the tax policies that we have now; I'm not going to raise taxes on anyone, because when the economy is growing slow like this, when we're in recession, you shouldn't raise taxes on anyone."

Well, the economy is still growing slow. As a matter of fact, it's growing much more slowly now than when you made that statement. And so if you believe the same thing, you just don't want to raise taxes on people. And the reality is it's not just wealthy people -- you mentioned Donald Trump. It's not just Donald Trump you're taxing. It's all those businesses that employ one-quarter of the workers in America; these small businesses that are taxed as individuals.

You raise taxes and you kill jobs. That's why the National Federation of Independent Businesses said your plan will kill 700,000 jobs. I don't want to kill jobs in this environment.

I'll make one more point.

LEHRER: [inaudible] answer the taxes thing for a moment.

Governor Romney:

OK.

LEHRER: Mr. President?

President Obama:

Well, we've had this discussion before.

LEHRER: About the idea that in order to reduce the deficit, there has to be revenue in addition to cuts.

President Obama:

There has to be revenue in addition to cuts. Now, Governor Romney has ruled out revenue. He's ruled out revenue.

[Crosstalk]

Governor Romney:

Absolutely.

[Crosstalk]

Governor Romney:

Look, the revenue I get is by more people working, getting higher pay, paying more taxes. That's how we get growth and how we balance the budget. But the idea of taxing people more, putting more people out of work, you'll never get there. You'll never balance the budget by raising taxes. Spain -- Spain spends 42 percent of their total economy on government. We're now spending 42 percent of our economy on government. I don't want to go down the path to Spain. I want to go down the path of growth that puts Americans to work with more money coming in because they're working.

LEHRER: But -- but Mr. President, you're saying in order to -- to get the job done, it's got to be balanced. You've got to have...

[Crosstalk]

President Obama:

If -- if we're serious, we've got to take a balanced, responsible approach. And by the way, this is not just when it comes to individual taxes. Let's talk about corporate taxes.

Now, I've identified areas where we can, right away, make a change that I believe would actually help the economy.

The oil industry gets $4 billion a year in corporate welfare. Basically, they get deductions that those small businesses that Governor Romney refers to, they don't get.

Now, does anybody think that ExxonMobil needs some extra money, when they're making money every time you go to the pump? Why wouldn't we want to eliminate that? Why wouldn't we eliminate tax breaks for corporate jets? My attitude is, if you got a corporate jet, you can probably afford to pay full freight, not get a special break for it.

When it comes to corporate taxes, Governor Romney has said he wants to, in a revenue neutral way, close loopholes, deductions -- he hasn't identified which ones they are -- but that thereby bring down the corporate rate.

Well, I want to do the same thing, but I've actually identified how we can do that. And part of the way to do it is to not give tax breaks to companies that are shipping jobs overseas.

Right now, you can actually take a deduction for moving a plant overseas. I think most Americans would say that doesn't make sense. And all that raises revenue.

And so if we take a balanced approach, what that then allows us to do is also to help young people, the way we already have during my administration, make sure that they can afford to go to college.

It means that the teacher that I met in Las Vegas, a wonderful young lady, who describes to me -- she's got 42 kids in her class. The first two weeks she's got them, some of them sitting on the floor until finally they get reassigned. They're using text books that are 10 years old.

That is not a recipe for growth. That's not how America was built. And so budgets reflect choices.

Ultimately, we're going to have to make some decisions. And if we're asking for no revenue, then that means that we've got to get rid of a whole bunch of stuff.

And the magnitude of the tax cuts that you're talking about, Governor, would end up resulting in severe hardship for people, but more importantly, would not help us grow.

As I indicated before, when you talk about shifting Medicaid to states, we're talking about potentially a 30 -- a 30 percent cut in Medicaid over time.

Now, you know, that may not seem like a big deal when it just is, you know, numbers on a sheet of paper, but if we're talking about a family who's got an autistic kid and is depending on that Medicaid, that's a big problem.

And governors are creative. There's no doubt about it. But they're not creative enough to make up for 30 percent of revenue on something like Medicaid. What ends up happening is some people end up not getting help.

Governor Romney:

Jim, let's -- we've gone on a lot of topics there, and so it's going to take a minute to go from Medicaid to schools...

LEHRER: Come back to...

[Crosstalk]

Governor Romney:

... to oil, to tax breaks, then companies going overseas. So let's go through them one by one. First of all, the Department of Energy has said the tax break for oil companies is $2.8 billion a year. And it's actually an accounting treatment, as you know, that's been in place for a hundred years. Now...

President Obama:

It's time to end it.

Governor Romney:

And in one year, you provided $90 billion in breaks to the green energy world. Now, I like green energy as well, but that's about 50 years' worth of what oil and gas receives. And you say Exxon and Mobil. Actually, this $2.8 billion goes largely to small companies, to drilling operators and so forth. But, you know, if we get that tax rate from 35 percent down to 25 percent, why that $2.8 billion is on the table. Of course it's on the table. That's probably not going to survive you get that rate down to 25 percent. But don't forget, you put $90 billion, like 50 years' worth of breaks, into -- into solar and wind, to Solyndra and Fisker and Tester and Ener1. I mean, I had a friend who said you don't just pick the winners and losers, you pick the losers, all right? So this -- this is not -- this is not the kind of policy you want to have if you want to get America energy secure.

The second topic, which is you said you get a deduction for taking a plant overseas. Look, I've been in business for 25 years. I have no idea what you're talking about. I maybe need to get a new accountant.

LEHRER: Let's...

Governor Romney:

But -- but the idea that you get a break for shipping jobs overseas is simply not the case.

[Crosstalk]

Governor Romney:

What we do have right now is a setting where I'd like to bring money from overseas back to this country.

And, finally, Medicaid to states? I'm not quite sure where that came in, except this, which is, I would like to take the Medicaid dollars that go to states and say to a state, you're going to get what you got last year, plus inflation, plus 1 percent, and then you're going to manage your care for your poor in the way you think best.

And I remember, as a governor, when this idea was floated by Tommy Thompson, the governors -- Republican and Democrats -- said, please let us do that. We can care for our own poor in so much better and more effective a way than having the federal government tell us how to care for our poor.

So -- so let's state -- one of the magnificent things about this country is the whole idea that states are the laboratories of democracy. Don't have the federal government tell everybody what kind of training programs they have to have and what kind of Medicaid they have to have. Let states do this.

And, by the way, if a state gets in trouble, well, we can step in and see if we can find a way to help them.

LEHRER: Let's go.

Governor Romney:

But -- but the right -- the right approach is one which relies on the brilliance of our people and states, not the federal government.

LEHRER: [inaudible] and we're going on -- still on the economy, on another -- but another part of it...

President Obama:

OK.

LEHRER: All right? All right. This is segment three, the economy. Entitlements. First -- first answer goes to you, two minutes, Mr. President. Do you see a major difference between the two of you on Social Security?

President Obama:

You know, I suspect that, on Social Security, we've got a somewhat similar position. Social Security is structurally sound. It's going to have to be tweaked the way it was by Ronald Reagan and Speaker -- Democratic Speaker Tip O'Neill. But it is -- the basic structure is sound.

But -- but I want to talk about the values behind Social Security and Medicare, and then talk about Medicare, because that's the big driver of our deficits right now.

You know, my grandmother -- some of you know -- helped to raise me. My grandparents did. My grandfather died a while back. My grandmother died three days before I was elected President. And she was fiercely independent. She worked her way up, only had a high school education, started as a secretary, ended up being the vice President of a local bank. And she ended up living alone by choice.

And the reason she could be independent was because of Social Security and Medicare. She had worked all her life, put in this money, and understood that there was a basic guarantee, a floor under which she could not go.

And that's the perspective I bring when I think about what's called entitlements. You know, the name itself implies some sense of dependency on the part of these folks. These are folks who've worked hard, like my grandmother, and there are millions of people out there who are counting on this.

So my approach is to say, how do we strengthen the system over the long term? And in Medicare, what we did was we said, we are going to have to bring down the costs if we're going to deal with our long-term deficits, but to do that, let's look where some of the money's going.

$716 billion we were able to save from the Medicare program by no longer overpaying insurance companies by making sure that we weren't overpaying providers. And using that money, we were actually able to lower prescription drug costs for seniors by an average of $600, and we were also able to make a -- make a significant dent in providing them the kind of preventive care that will ultimately save money through the -- throughout the system.

So the way for us to deal with Medicare in particular is to lower health care costs. When it comes to Social Security, as I said, you don't need a major structural change in order to make sure that Social Security is there for the future.

LEHRER: We'll follow up on this. First, Governor Romney, you have two minutes on Social Security and entitlements.

Governor Romney:

Well, Jim, our seniors depend on these programs, and I know anytime we talk about entitlements, people become concerned that something's going to happen that's going to change their life for the worse.

And the answer is neither the President nor I are proposing any changes for any current retirees or near retirees, either to Social Security or Medicare. So if you're 60 or around 60 or older, you don't need to listen any further.

But for younger people, we need to talk about what changes are going to be occurring. Oh, I just thought about one. And that is, in fact, I was wrong when I said the President isn't proposing any changes for current retirees. In fact he is on Medicare. On Social Security he's not.

But on Medicare, for current retirees, he's cutting $716 billion from the program. Now, he says by not overpaying hospitals and providers. Actually just going to them and saying, "We're going to reduce the rates you get paid across the board, everybody's going to get a lower rate." That's not just going after places where there's abuse. That's saying we're cutting the rates. Some 15 percent of hospitals and nursing homes say they won't take anymore Medicare patients under that scenario.

We also have 50 percent of doctors who say they won't take more Medicare patients.

This -- we have 4 million people on Medicare Advantage that will lose Medicare Advantage because of those $716 billion in cuts. I can't understand how you can cut Medicare $716 billion for current recipients of Medicare.

Now, you point out, well, we're putting some back. We're going to give a better prescription program. That's $1 -- that's $1 for every $15 you've cut. They're smart enough to know that's not a good trade. I want to take that $716 billion you've cut and put it back into Medicare. By the way, we can include a prescription program if we need to improve it. But the idea of cutting $716 billion from Medicare to be able to balance the additional cost of Obamacare is, in my opinion, a mistake. And with regards to young people coming along, I've got proposals to make sure Medicare and Social Security are there for them without any question.

LEHRER: Mr. President?

President Obama:

First of all, I think it's important for Governor Romney to present this plan that he says will only affect folks in the future. And the essence of the plan is that you would turn Medicare into a voucher program. It's called premium support, but it's understood to be a voucher program. His running mate...

LEHRER: And you don't support that?

President Obama:

I don't. And let me explain why.

Governor Romney:

Again, that's for future...

President Obama:

I understand.

Governor Romney:

... people, right, not for current retirees.

President Obama:

For -- so if you're -- if you're 54 or 55, you might want to listen 'cause this -- this will affect you.

The idea, which was originally presented by Congressman Ryan, your running mate, is that we would give a voucher to seniors and they could go out in the private marketplace and buy their own health insurance.

The problem is that because the voucher wouldn't necessarily keep up with health care inflation, it was estimated that this would cost the average senior about $6,000 a year.

Now, in fairness, what Governor Romney has now said is he'll maintain traditional Medicare alongside it. But there's still a problem, because what happens is, those insurance companies are pretty clever at figuring out who are the younger and healthier seniors. They recruit them, leaving the older, sicker seniors in Medicare. And every health care economist that looks at it says, over time, what'll happen is the traditional Medicare system will collapse.

And then what you've got is folks like my grandmother at the mercy of the private insurance system precisely at the time when they are most in need of decent health care.

So, I don't think vouchers are the right way to go. And this is not my own -- only my opinion. AARP thinks that the -- the savings that we obtained from Medicare bolster the system, lengthen the Medicare trust fund by eight years. Benefits were not affected at all. And ironically, if you repeal Obamacare, and I have become fond of this term, "Obamacare," if you repeal it, what happens is those seniors right away are going to be paying $600 more in prescription care. They're now going to have to be paying copays for basic checkups that can keep them healthier.

And the primary beneficiary of that repeal are insurance companies that are estimated to gain billions of dollars back when they aren't making seniors any healthier. And I don't think that's the right approach when it comes to making sure that Medicare is stronger over the long term.

LEHRER: We'll talk about -- specifically about health care in a moment. But what -- do you support the voucher system, Governor?

Governor Romney:

What I support is no change for current retirees and near-retirees to Medicare. And the President supports taking $716 billion out of that program.

LEHRER: And what about the vouchers?

[Crosstalk]

Governor Romney:

So that's -- that's number one.

Number two is for people coming along that are young, what I do to make sure that we can keep Medicare in place for them is to allow them either to choose the current Medicare program or a private plan. Their choice. They get to choose -- and they'll have at least two plans that will be entirely at no cost to them. So they don't have to pay additional money, no additional $6,000. That's not going to happen. They'll have at least two plans. And by the way, if the government can be as efficient as the private sector and offer premiums that are as low as the private sector, people will be happy to get traditional Medicare or they'll be able to get a private plan.

I know my own view is I'd rather have a private plan. I'd just assume not have the government telling me what kind of health care I get. I'd rather be able to have an insurance company. If I don't like them, I can get rid of them and find a different insurance company. But people make their own choice.

The other thing we have to do to save Medicare? We have to have the benefits high for those that are low income, but for higher income people, we're going to have to lower some of the benefits. We have to make sure this program is there for the long term. That's the plan that I've put forward.

And, by the way the idea came not even from Paul Ryan or -- or Senator Wyden, who's the co-author of the bill with -- with Paul Ryan in the Senate, but also it came from Bill -- Bill Clinton's chief of staff. This is an idea that's been around a long time, which is saying, hey, let's see if we can't get competition into the Medicare world so that people can get the choice of different plans at lower cost, better quality. I believe in competition.

President Obama:

Jim, if I -- if I can just respond very quickly, first of all, every study has shown that Medicare has lower administrative costs than private insurance does, which is why seniors are generally pretty happy with it.

And private insurers have to make a profit. Nothing wrong with that. That's what they do. And so you've got higher administrative costs, plus profit on top of that. And if you are going to save any money through what Governor Romney's proposing, what has to happen is, is that the money has to come from somewhere.

And when you move to a voucher system, you are putting seniors at the mercy of those insurance companies. And over time, if traditional Medicare has decayed or fallen apart, then they're stuck. And this is the reason why AARP has said that your plan would weaken Medicare substantially. And that's why they were supportive of the approach that we took.

One last point I want to make. We do have to lower the cost of health care, not just in Medicare and Medicaid...

LEHRER: Talk about that in a minute.

President Obama:

... but -- but -- but overall.

LEHRER: OK.

President Obama:

And so...

Governor Romney:

That's -- that's a big topic. Can we -- can we stay on Medicare?

President Obama:

Is that a -- is that a separate topic?

[Crosstalk]

LEHRER: Yeah, we're going to -- yeah, I want to get to it.

President Obama:

I'm sorry.

LEHRER: But all I want to do is go very quickly...

Governor Romney:

Let's get back to Medicare.

LEHRER: ... before we leave the economy...

Governor Romney:

Let's get back to Medicare.

[Crosstalk]

Governor Romney:

The President said that the government can provide the service at lower cost and without a profit.

LEHRER: All right.

Governor Romney:

If that's the case, then it will always be the best product that people can purchase.

LEHRER: Wait a minute, Governor.

Governor Romney:

But my experience -- my experience the private sector typically is able to provide a better product at a lower cost.

LEHRER: All right. Can we -- can the two of you agree that the voters have a choice -- a clear choice between the two...

Governor Romney:

Absolutely.

LEHRER: ... of you on Medicare?

Governor Romney:

Absolutely.

President Obama:

Absolutely.

LEHRER: All right. So to finish quickly, briefly, on the economy, what is your view about the level of federal regulation of the economy right now? Is there too much? And in your case, Mr. President, is there -- should there be more? Beginning with you. This is not a new two-minute segment to start. And we'll go for a few minutes, and then we're going to go to health care, OK?

Governor Romney:

Regulation is essential. You can't have a free market work if you don't have regulation. As a businessperson, I had to have -- I need to know the regulations. I needed them there. You couldn't have people opening up banks in their -- in their garage and making loans. I mean, you have to have regulations so that you can have an economy work. Every free economy has good regulation. At the same time, regulation can become excessive.

LEHRER: Is it excessive now, do you think?

Governor Romney:

In some places, yes. Other places, no.

LEHRER: Like where?

[Crosstalk]

Governor Romney:

No, it can become out of date. And what's happened with some of the legislation that's been passed during the President's term, you've seen regulation become excessive, and it's hurt -- it's hurt the economy. Let me give you an example. Dodd-Frank was passed. And it includes within it a number of provisions that I think has some unintended consequences that are harmful to the economy. One is it designates a number of banks as too big to fail, and they're effectively guaranteed by the federal government. This is the biggest kiss that's been given to -- to New York banks I've ever seen. This is an enormous boon for them. There've been 122 community and small banks have closed since Dodd- Frank.

So there's one example. Here's another. In Dodd-Frank...

LEHRER: Do you want to repeal Dodd-Frank?

Governor Romney:

Well, I would repeal and replace it. We're not going to get rid of all regulation. You have to have regulation. And there are some parts of Dodd-Frank that make all the sense in the world. You need transparency, you need to have leverage limits for...

LEHRER: Well, here's a specific...

[Crosstalk]

Governor Romney:

But let's -- let's mention -- let me mention the other one. Let's talk...

[Crosstalk]

LEHRER: No, let's not. Let's let him respond -- let's let him respond to this specific on Dodd-Frank and what the governor just said.

President Obama:

I think this is a great example. The reason we have been in such a enormous economic crisis was prompted by reckless behavior across the board.

Now, it wasn't just on Wall Street. You had loan officers were -- that were giving loans and mortgages that really shouldn't have been given, because the folks didn't qualify. You had people who were borrowing money to buy a house that they couldn't afford. You had credit agencies that were stamping these as A1 great investments when they weren't.

But you also had banks making money hand over fist, churning out products that the bankers themselves didn't even understand, in order to make big profits, but knowing that it made the entire system vulnerable.

So what did we do? We stepped in and had the toughest reforms on Wall Street since the 1930s. We said you've got -- banks, you've got to raise your capital requirements. You can't engage in some of this risky behavior that is putting Main Street at risk. We've going to make sure that you've got to have a living will so -- so we can know how you're going to wind things down if you make a bad bet so we don't have other taxpayer bailouts. In the meantime, by the way, we also made sure that all the help that we provided those banks was paid back every single dime, with interest.

Now, Governor Romney has said he wants to repeal Dodd-Frank. And, you know, I appreciate and it appears we've got some agreement that a marketplace to work has to have some regulation. But in the past, Governor Romney has said he just want to repeal Dodd- Frank, roll it back. And so the question is: Does anybody out there think that the big problem we had is that there was too much oversight and regulation of Wall Street? Because if you do, then Governor Romney is your candidate. But that's not what I believe.

Governor Romney:

Sorry, but that's just not -- that's just not the facts. Look, we have to have regulation on Wall Street. That's why I'd have regulation. But I wouldn't designate five banks as too big to fail and give them a blank check. That's one of the unintended consequences of Dodd-Frank. It wasn't thought through properly. We need to get rid of that provision because it's killing regional and small banks. They're getting hurt.

Let me mention another regulation in Dodd-Frank. You say we were giving mortgages to people who weren't qualified. That's exactly right. It's one of the reasons for the great financial calamity we had. And so Dodd-Frank correctly says we need to have qualified mortgages, and if you give a mortgage that's not qualified, there are big penalties, except they didn't ever go on and define what a qualified mortgage was.

It's been two years. We don't know what a qualified mortgage is yet. So banks are reluctant to make loans, mortgages. Try and get a mortgage these days. It's hurt the housing market because Dodd-Frank didn't anticipate putting in place the kinds of regulations you have to have. It's not that Dodd-Frank always was wrong with too much regulation. Sometimes they didn't come out with a clear regulation.

I will make sure we don't hurt the functioning of our -- of our marketplace and our business, because I want to bring back housing and get good jobs.

LEHRER: All right. I think we have another clear difference between the two of you. Now, let's move to health care where I know there is a clear difference, and that has to do with the Affordable Care Act, Obamacare. And it's a two-minute new -- new segment, and that means two minutes each. And you go first, Governor Romney. You want it repealed. You want the Affordable Care Act repealed. Why?

Governor Romney:

I sure do. Well, in part, it comes, again, from my experience. You know, I was in New Hampshire. A woman came to me and she said, look, I can't afford insurance for myself or my son. I met a couple in Appleton, Wisconsin, and they said, we're thinking of dropping our insurance, we can't afford it.

And the number of small businesses I've gone to that are saying they're dropping insurance because they can't afford it, the cost of health care is just prohibitive. And -- and we've got to deal with cost.

And, unfortunately, when -- when -- when you look at Obamacare, the Congressional Budget Office has said it will cost $2,500 a year more than traditional insurance. So it's adding to cost. And as a matter of fact, when the President ran for office, he said that, by this year, he would have brought down the cost of insurance for each family by $2,500 a family. Instead, it's gone up by that amount. So it's expensive. Expensive things hurt families. So that's one reason I don't want it.

Second reason, it cuts $716 billion from Medicare to pay for it. I want to put that money back in Medicare for our seniors. Number three, it puts in place an unelected board that's going to tell people ultimately what kind of treatments they can have. I don't like that idea. Fourth, there was a survey done of small businesses across the country, said, what's been the effect of Obamacare on your hiring plans? And three-quarters of them said it makes us less likely to hire people. I just don't know how the President could have come into office, facing 23 million people out of work, rising unemployment, an economic crisis at the -- at the kitchen table, and spend his energy and passion for two years fighting for Obamacare instead of fighting for jobs for the American people. It has killed jobs.

And the best course for health care is to do what we did in my state: craft a plan at the state level that fits the needs of the state. And then let's focus on getting the costs down for people, rather than raising it with the $2,500 additional premium.

LEHRER: Mr. President, the argument against repeal?

President Obama:

Well, four years ago, when I was running for office, I was traveling around and having those same conversations that Governor Romney talks about. And it wasn't just that small businesses were seeing costs skyrocket and they couldn't get affordable coverage even if they wanted to provide it to their employees. It wasn't just that this was the biggest driver of our federal deficit, our overall health care costs, but it was families who were worried about going bankrupt if they got sick, millions of families, all across the country.

If they had a pre-existing condition, they might not be able to get coverage at all. If they did have coverage, insurance companies might impose an arbitrary limit. And so as a consequence, they're paying their premiums, somebody gets really sick, lo and behold, they don't have enough money to pay the bills, because the insurance companies say that they've hit the limit.

So we did work on this, alongside working on jobs, because this is part of making sure that middle-class families are secure in this country.

And let me tell you exactly what Obamacare did. Number one, if you've got health insurance, it doesn't mean a government takeover. You keep your own insurance. You keep your own doctor. But it does say insurance companies can't jerk you around. They can't impose arbitrary lifetime limits. They have to let you keep your kid on their insurance -- your insurance plan until you're 26 years old. And it also says that you're going to have to get rebates if insurance companies are spending more on administrative costs and profits than they are on actual care.

Number two, if you don't have health insurance, we're essentially setting up a group plan that allows you to benefit from group rates that are typically 18 percent lower than if you're out there trying to get insurance on the individual market.

Now, the last point I'd make before...

LEHRER: Two minutes -- two minutes is up, sir.

President Obama:

No, I think -- I had five seconds before you interrupted me, was -- the irony is that we've seen this model work really well in Massachusetts, because Governor Romney did a good thing, working with Democrats in the state to set up what is essentially the identical model and as a consequence people are covered there. It hasn't destroyed jobs. And as a consequence, we now have a system in which we have the opportunity to start bringing down costs, as opposed to just leaving millions of people out in the cold.

LEHRER: Your five seconds went away a long time ago. All right, Governor. Governor, tell -- tell the President directly why you think what he just said is wrong about Obamacare?

Governor Romney:

Well, I did with my first statement.

[Crosstalk]

Governor Romney:

First of all, I like the way we did it in Massachusetts. I like the fact that in my state, we had Republicans and Democrats come together and work together. What you did instead was to push through a plan without a single Republican vote. As a matter of fact, when Massachusetts did something quite extraordinary -- elected a Republican senator to stop Obamacare, you pushed it through anyway.

So entirely on a partisan basis, instead of bringing America together and having a discussion on this important topic, you pushed through something that you and Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid thought was the best answer and drove it through.

What we did in a legislature 87 percent Democrat, we worked together; 200 legislators in my legislature, only two voted against the plan by the time we were finished. What were some differences? We didn't raise taxes. You've raised them by $1 trillion under Obamacare. We didn't cut Medicare. Of course, we don't have Medicare, but we didn't cut Medicare by $716 billion.

We didn't put in place a board that can tell people ultimately what treatments they're going to receive. We didn't also do something that I think a number of people across this country recognize, which is put -- put people in a position where they're going to lose the insurance they had and they wanted.

Right now, the CBO says up to 20 million people will lose their insurance as Obamacare goes into effect next year. And likewise, a study by McKinsey and Company of American businesses said 30 percent of them are anticipating dropping people from coverage.

So for those reasons, for the tax, for Medicare, for this board, and for people losing their insurance, this is why the American people don't want Medicare -- don't want Obamacare. It's why Republicans said, do not do this, and the Republicans had -- had the plan. They put a plan out. They put out a plan, a bipartisan plan. It was swept aside.

I think something this big, this important has to be done on a bipartisan basis. And we have to have a President who can reach across the aisle and fashion important legislation with the input from both parties.

President Obama:

Governor Romney said this has to be done on a bipartisan basis. This was a bipartisan idea. In fact, it was a Republican idea. And Governor Romney at the beginning of this debate wrote and said what we did in Massachusetts could be a model for the nation.

And I agree that the Democratic legislators in Massachusetts might have given some advice to Republicans in Congress about how to cooperate, but the fact of the matter is, we used the same advisers, and they say it's the same plan.

It -- when Governor Romney talks about this board, for example, unelected board that we've created, what this is, is a group of health care experts, doctors, et cetera, to figure out, how can we reduce the cost of care in the system overall?

Because there -- there are two ways of dealing with our health care crisis. One is to simply leave a whole bunch of people uninsured and let them fend for themselves, to let businesses figure out how long they can continue to pay premiums until finally they just give up, and their workers are no longer getting insured, and that's been the trend line.

Or, alternatively, we can figure out, how do we make the cost of care more effective? And there are ways of doing it.

So at Cleveland Clinic, one of the best health care systems in the world, they actually provide great care cheaper than average. And the reason they do is because they do some smart things. They -- they say, if a patient's coming in, let's get all the doctors together at once, do one test instead of having the patient run around with 10 tests. Let's make sure that we're providing preventive care so we're catching the onset of something like diabetes. Let's -- let's pay providers on the basis of performance as opposed to on the basis of how many procedures they've -- they've engaged in.

Now, so what this board does is basically identifies best practices and says, let's use the purchasing power of Medicare and Medicaid to help to institutionalize all these good things that we do.

And the fact of the matter is that, when Obamacare is fully implemented, we're going to be in a position to show that costs are going down. And over the last two years, health care premiums have gone up -- it's true -- but they've gone up slower than any time in the last 50 years. So we're already beginning to see progress. In the meantime, folks out there with insurance, you're already getting a rebate.

Let me make one last point. Governor Romney says, we should replace it, I'm just going to repeal it, but -- but we can replace it with something. But the problem is, he hasn't described what exactly we'd replace it with, other than saying we're going to leave it to the states.

But the fact of the matter is that some of the prescriptions that he's offered, like letting you buy insurance across state lines, there's no indication that that somehow is going to help somebody who's got a pre-existing condition be able to finally buy insurance. In fact, it's estimated that by repealing Obamacare, you're looking at 50 million people losing health insurance...

LEHRER: Let's...

President Obama:

... at a time when it's vitally important.

LEHRER: Let's let the governor explain what you would do...

Governor Romney:

Well...

LEHRER: ... if Obamacare is repealed. How would you replace it?

[Crosstalk]

Governor Romney:

Well, actually it's -- it's -- it's a lengthy description. But, number one, preexisting conditions are covered under my plan. Number two, young people are able to stay on their family plan. That's already offered in the private marketplace. You don't have to have the government mandate that for that to occur. But let's come back to something the President and I agree on, which is the key task we have in health care is to get the cost down so it's more affordable for families. And then he has as a model for doing that a board of people at the government, an unelected board, appointed board, who are going to decide what kind of treatment you ought to have.

[Crosstalk]

Governor Romney:

In my opinion, the government is not effective in -- in bringing down the cost of almost anything. As a matter of fact, free people and free enterprises trying to find ways to do things better are able to be more effective in bringing down the cost than the government will ever be. Your example of the Cleveland Clinic is my case in point, along with several others I could describe. This is the private market. These are small -- these are enterprises competing with each other, learning how to do better and better jobs. I used to consult to businesses -- excuse me, to hospitals and to health care providers. I was astonished at the creativity and innovation that exists in the American people.

In order to bring the cost of health care down, we don't need to have a board of 15 people telling us what kinds of treatments we should have. We instead need to put insurance plans, providers, hospitals, doctors on target such that they have an incentive, as you say, performance pay, for doing an excellent job, for keeping costs down, and that's happening. Innermountain Healthcare does it superbly well, Mayo Clinic is doing it superbly well, Cleveland Clinic, others.

But the right answer is not to have the federal government take over health care and start mandating to the providers across America, telling a patient and a doctor what kind of treatment they can have. That's the wrong way to go. The private market and individual responsibility always work best.

President Obama:

Let me just point out first of all this board that we're talking about can't make decisions about what treatments are given. That's explicitly prohibited in the law. But let's go back to what Governor Romney indicated, that under his plan, he would be able to cover people with preexisting conditions.

Well, actually Governor, that isn't what your plan does. What your plan does is to duplicate what's already the law, which says if you are out of health insurance for three months, then you can end up getting continuous coverage and an insurance company can't deny you if you've -- if it's been under 90 days.

But that's already the law and that doesn't help the millions of people out there with preexisting conditions. There's a reason why Governor Romney set up the plan that he did in Massachusetts. It wasn't a government takeover of health care. It was the largest expansion of private insurance. But what it does say is that "insurers, you've got to take everybody."

Now, that also means that you've got more customers. But when -- when Governor Romney says that he'll replace it with something, but can't detail how it will be in fact replaced and the reason he set up the system he did in Massachusetts was because there isn't a better way of dealing with the preexisting conditions problem.

It just reminds me of, you know, he says that he's going to close deductions and loopholes for his tax plan. That's how it's going to be paid for, but we don't know the details. He says that he's going to replace Dodd-Frank, Wall Street reform, but we don't know exactly which ones. He won't tell us. He now says he's going to replace Obamacare and ensure that all the good things that are in it are going to be in there and you don't have to worry.

And at some point, I think the American people have to ask themselves, is the reason that Governor Romney is keeping all these plans to replace secret because they're too good? Is it -- is it because that somehow middle-class families are going to benefit too much from them?

No. The reason is, is because, when we reform Wall Street, when we tackle the problem of pre-existing conditions, then, you know, these are tough problems and we've got to make choices. And the choices we've made have been ones that ultimately are benefiting middle-class families all across the country.

LEHRER: We're going to move to...

Governor Romney:

No. I -- I have to respond to that.

LEHRER: No, but...

Governor Romney:

Which is -- which is my experience as a governor is if I come in and -- and lay down a piece of legislation and say, "It's my way or the highway," I don't get a lot done. What I do is the same way that Tip O'Neill and Ronald Reagan worked together some years ago. When Ronald Reagan ran for office, he laid out the principles that he was going to foster. He said he was going to lower tax rates. He said he was going to broaden the base. You've said the same thing, you're going to simplify the tax code, broaden the base.

Those are my principles. I want to bring down the tax burden on middle-income families. And I'm going to work together with Congress to say, OK, what -- what are the various ways we could bring down deductions, for instance? One way, for instance, would be to have a single number. Make up a number, $25,000, $50,000. Anybody can have deductions up to that amount. And then that number disappears for high-income people. That's one way one could do it. One could follow Bowles-Simpson as a model and take deduction by deduction and make differences that way. There are alternatives to accomplish the objective I have, which is to bring down rates, broaden the base, simplify the code, and create incentives for growth. And with regards to health care, you had remarkable details with regards to my pre-existing condition plan. You obviously studied up on -- on my plan. In fact, I do have a plan that deals with people with pre-existing conditions. That's part of my health care plan. And what we did in Massachusetts is a model for the nation state by state. And I said that at that time.

The federal government taking over health care for the entire nation and whisking aside the 10th Amendment, which gives states the rights for these kinds of things, is not the course for America to have a stronger, more vibrant economy.

LEHRER: That is a terrific segue to our next segment, and is the role of government. And -- and let's see. Role of government. And it is -- you are first on this, Mr. President. And the question is this. Do you believe, both of you -- but you had the first two minutes on this, Mr. President -- do you believe there's a fundamental difference between the two of you as to how you view the mission of the federal government?

President Obama:

Well, I definitely think there are differences.

LEHRER: And do you -- yeah.

President Obama:

The first role of the federal government is to keep the American people safe. That's its most basic function. And as commander-in-chief, that is something that I've worked on and thought about every single day that I've been in the Oval Office. But I also believe that government has the capacity, the federal government has the capacity to help open up opportunity and create ladders of opportunity and to create frameworks where the American people can succeed. Look, the genius of America is the free enterprise system and freedom and the fact that people can go out there and start a business, work on an idea, make their own decisions.

But as Abraham Lincoln understood, there are also some things we do better together. So, in the middle of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln said, let's help to finance the Transcontinental Railroad, let's start the National Academy of Sciences, let's start land grant colleges, because we want to give these gateways of opportunity for all Americans, because if all Americans are getting opportunity, we're all going to be better off. That doesn't restrict people's freedom. That enhances it.

And so what I've tried to do as President is to apply those same principles.

And when it comes to education what I've said is we've got to reform schools that are not working. We use something called Race to the Top. Wasn't a top-down approach, Governor. What we've said is to states, we'll give you more money if you initiate reforms. And as a consequence, you had 46 states around the country who have made a real difference.

But what I've also said is let's hire another 100,000 math and science teachers to make sure we maintain our technological lead and our people are skilled and able to succeed. And hard-pressed states right now can't all do that. In fact we've seen layoffs of hundreds of thousands of teachers over the last several years, and Governor Romney doesn't think we need more teachers. I do, because I think that that is the kind of investment where the federal government can help.

It can't do it all, but it can make a difference. And as a consequence we'll have a better trained workforce and that will create jobs because companies want to locate in places where we've got a skilled workforce.

LEHRER: Two minutes, Governor, on the role of government. Your view?

Governor Romney:

Well, first, I love great schools. Massachusetts, our schools are ranked number one of all 50 states. And the key to great schools, great teachers. So I reject the idea that I don't believe in great teachers or more teachers. Every school district, every state should make that decision on their own. The role of government: Look behind us. The Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. The role of government is to promote and protect the principles of those documents.

First, life and liberty. We have a responsibility to protect the lives and liberties of our people, and that means a military second to none. I do not believe in cutting our military. I believe in maintaining the strength of America's military.

Second, in that line that says we are endowed by our creator with our rights, I believe we must maintain our commitment to religious tolerance and freedom in this country. That statement also says that we are endowed by our creator with the right to pursue happiness as we choose. I interpret that as, one, making sure that those people who are less fortunate and can't care for themselves are cared by -- by one another.

We're a nation that believes that we're all children of the same god and we care for those that have difficulties, those that are elderly and have problems and challenges, those that are disabled. We care for them. And we -- we look for discovery and innovation, all these things desired out of the American heart to provide the pursuit of happiness for our citizens.

But we also believe in maintaining for individuals the right to pursue their dreams and not to have the government substitute itself for the rights of free individuals. And what we're seeing right now is, in my view, a -- a trickle-down government approach, which has government thinking it can do a better job than free people pursuing their dreams. And it's not working.

And the proof of that is 23 million people out of work. The proof of that is 1 out of 6 people in poverty. The proof of that is we've gone from 32 million on food stamps to 47 million on food stamps. The proof of that is that 50 percent of college graduates this year can't find work.

LEHRER: All right.

Governor Romney:

We know that the path we're taking is not working. It's time for a new path.

LEHRER: All right. Let's go through some specifics in terms of what -- how each of you views the role of government. How do -- education. Does the federal government have a responsibility to improve the quality of public education in America?

Governor Romney:

Well, the primary responsibility for education is -- is, of course, at the state and local level. But the federal government also can play a very important role. And I -- and I agree with Secretary Arne Duncan, he's -- some ideas he's put forward on Race to the Top, not all of them, but some of them I agree with and -- and congratulate him for pursuing that. The federal government can get local and -- and state schools to do a better job.

My own view, by the way, is I've added to that. I happen to believe, I want the kids that are getting federal dollars from IDEA or Title I -- these are disabled kids or -- or -- or poor kids or -- or lower-income kids, rather, I want them to be able to go to the school of their choice. So all federal funds, instead of going to the -- to the state or to the school district, I'd have go, if you will, follow the child and let the parent and the child decide where to send their -- their -- their student.

LEHRER: How do you see the federal government's responsibility to, as I say, to improve the quality of public education in this country?

President Obama:

Well, as I've indicated, I think that it has a significant role to play. Through our Race to the Top program, we've worked with Republican and Democratic governors to initiate major reforms, and they're having an impact right now.

LEHRER: Do you think you have a difference with your views and -- and those of Governor Romney on -- about education and the federal government?

President Obama:

You know, this is where budgets matter, because budgets reflect choices. So when Governor Romney indicates that he wants to cut taxes and potentially benefit folks like me and him, and to pay for it we're having to initiate significant cuts in federal support for education, that makes a difference.

You know, his -- his running mate, Congressman Ryan, put forward a budget that reflects many of the principles that Governor Romney's talked about. And it wasn't very detailed. This seems to be a trend. But -- but what it did do is to -- if you extrapolated how much money we're talking about, you'd look at cutting the education budget by up to 20 percent.

When it comes to community colleges, we are seeing great work done out there all over the country because we have the opportunity to train people for jobs that exist right now. And one of the things I suspect Governor Romney and I probably agree on is getting businesses to work with community colleges so that they're setting up their training programs...

LEHRER: Do you -- do you agree, Governor?

President Obama:

Let me just finish the point.

[Crosstalk]

President Obama:

The -- where they're partnering so that they're designing training programs. And people who are going through them know that there's a job waiting for them if they complete it. That makes a big difference, but that requires some federal support.

Let me just say one final example. When it comes to making college affordable, whether it's two-year or four-year, one of the things that I did as President was we were sending $60 billion to banks and lenders as middlemen for the student loan program, even though the loans were guaranteed. So there was no risk for the banks or the lenders, but they were taking billions out of the system.

And we said, "Why not cut out the middleman?" And as a consequence, what we've been able to do is to provide millions more students assistance, lower or keep low interest rates on student loans. And this is an example of where our priorities make a difference.

Governor Romney, I genuinely believe cares about education, but when he tells a student that, you know, "you should borrow money from your parents to go to college," you know, that indicates the degree to which, you know, there may not be as much of a focus on the fact that folks like myself, folks like Michelle, kids probably who attend University of Denver, just don't have that option.

And for us to be able to make sure that they've got that opportunity and they can walk through that door, that is vitally important not just to those kids. It's how we're going to grow this economy over the long term.

LEHRER: We're running out of time, gentlemen.

[Crosstalk]

LEHRER: Governor?

Governor Romney:

Mr. President, Mr. President, you're entitled as the President to your own airplane and to your own house, but not to your own facts. All right, I'm not going to cut education funding. I don't have any plan to cut education funding and -- and grants that go to people going to college. I'm planning on [inaudible] to grow. So I'm not planning on making changes there.

But you make a very good point, which is that the place you put your money just makes a pretty clear indication of where your heart is. You put $90 billion into -- into green jobs. And I -- look, I'm all in favor of green energy. $90 billion, that would have -- that would have hired 2 million teachers. $90 billion.

And these businesses, many of them have gone out of business, I think about half of them, of the ones have been invested in have gone out of business. A number of them happened to be owned by people who were contributors to your campaigns.

Look, the right course for America's government, we were talking about the role of government, is not to become the economic player, picking winners and losers, telling people what kind of health treatment they can receive, taking over the health care system that has existed in this country for a long, long time and has produced the best health records in the world.

The right answer for government is say, How do we make the private sector become more efficient and more effective? How do we get schools to be more competitive? Let's grade them. I propose we grade our schools so parents know which schools are succeeding and failing, so they can take their child to a -- to a school that he's being more successful.

I don't want to cut our commitment to education. I wanted to make it more effective and efficient. And by the way, I've had that experience. I don't just talk about it. I've been there. Massachusetts schools are ranked number one in the nation. This is not because I didn't have commitment to education. It's because I care about education for all of our kids.

LEHRER: All right, gentlemen...

[Crosstalk]

LEHRER: Excuse me [inaudible]. Excuse me, sir. We've got -- we've got -- barely have three minutes left. I'm not going to grade the two of you and say your answers have been too long or I've done a poor job.

President Obama:

You've done a great job.

LEHRER: Oh, well, no. But the fact is government -- the role of government and governing, we've lost a pod in other words. So we only have three -- three minutes left in the -- in the debate before we go to your closing statements. And so I want to ask finally here, and remember, we've got three minutes total time here -- and the question is this. Many of the legislative functions of the federal government right now are in a state of paralysis as a result of partisan gridlock. If elected, in your case, if re-elected, in your case, what would you do about that?

Governor?

Governor Romney:

Jim, I had the great experience -- it didn't seem like it at the time -- of being elected in a state where my legislature was 87 percent Democrat. And that meant I figured out from day one I had to get along and I had to work across the aisle to get anything done. We drove our schools to be number one in the nation. We cut taxes 19 times.

LEHRER: But what would you do as President?

Governor Romney:

We -- as President, I will sit on day one -- actually, the day after I get elected -- I'll sit down with leaders -- the Democratic leaders, as well as Republican leaders, and continue -- as we did in my state -- we met every Monday for a couple hours, talked about the issues and the challenges in the -- in the -- in our state in that case. We have to work on a collaborative basis, not because we're going to compromise our principle, but because there's common ground.

And the challenges America faces right now -- look, the reason I'm in this race is there are people that are really hurting today in this country. And we face -- this deficit could crush the future generations. What's happening in the Middle East, there are developments around the world that are of real concern.

LEHRER: All right.

Governor Romney:

And Republicans and Democrats both love America. But we need to have leadership -- leadership in Washington that will actually bring people together and get the job done and could not care less if -- if it's a Republican or a Democrat. I've done it before. I'll do it again.

LEHRER: Mr. President?

President Obama:

Well, first of all, I think Governor Romney's going to have a busy first day, because he's also going to repeal Obamacare, which will not be very popular among Democrats as you're sitting down with them.

But, look, my philosophy has been, I will take ideas from anybody, Democrat or Republican, as long as they're advancing the cause of making middle-class families stronger and giving ladders of opportunity to the middle class. That's how we cut taxes for middle- class families and small businesses. That's how we cut a trillion dollars of spending that wasn't advancing that cause. That's how we signed three trade deals into law that are helping us to double our exports and sell more American products around the world. That's how we repealed "don't ask/don't tell." That's how we ended the war in Iraq, as I promised, and that's how we're going to wind down the war in Afghanistan. That's how we went after Al Qaida and bin Laden.

So we've -- we've seen progress even under Republican control of the House of Representatives. But, ultimately, part of being principled, part of being a leader is, A, being able to describe exactly what it is that you intend to do, not just saying, "I'll sit down," but you have to have a plan.

Number two, what's important is occasionally you've got to say no, to -- to -- to folks both in your own party and in the other party. And, you know, yes, have we had some fights between me and the Republicans when -- when they fought back against us reining in the excesses of Wall Street? Absolutely, because that was a fight that needed to be had.

When -- when we were fighting about whether or not we were going to make sure that Americans had more security with their health insurance and they said no, yes, that was a fight that we needed to have.

LEHRER: All right

President Obama:

And so part of leadership and governing is both saying what it is that you are for, but also being willing to say no to some things. And I've got to tell you, Governor Romney, when it comes to his own party during the course of this campaign, has not displayed that willingness to say no to some of the more extreme parts of his party.

LEHRER: That brings us to closing statements. It was a coin toss. Governor Romney, you won the toss and you elected to go last, so you have a closing two minutes, Mr. President.

President Obama:

Well, Jim, I want to thank you, and I want to thank Governor Romney, because I think was a terrific debate, and I very much appreciate it. And I want to thank the University of Denver.

You know, four years ago, we were going through a major crisis. And yet my faith and confidence in the American future is undiminished. And the reason is because of its people, because of the woman I met in North Carolina who decided at 55 to go back to school because she wanted to inspire her daughter and now has a job from that new training that she's gotten; because a company in Minnesota who was willing to give up salaries and perks for their executives to make sure that they didn't lay off workers during a recession.

The auto workers that you meet in Toledo or Detroit take such pride in building the best cars in the world, not just because of a paycheck, but because it gives them that sense of pride, that they're helping to build America. And so the question now is how do we build on those strengths. And everything that I've tried to do, and everything that I'm now proposing for the next four years in terms of improving our education system or developing American energy or making sure that we're closing loopholes for companies that are shipping jobs overseas and focusing on small businesses and companies that are creating jobs here in the United States, or closing our deficit in a responsible, balanced way that allows us to invest in our future.

All those things are designed to make sure that the American people, their genius, their grit, their determination, is -- is channeled and -- and they have an opportunity to succeed. And everybody's getting a fair shot. And everybody's getting a fair share -- everybody's doing a fair share, and everybody's playing by the same rules.

You know, four years ago, I said that I'm not a perfect man and I wouldn't be a perfect President. And that's probably a promise that Governor Romney thinks I've kept. But I also promised that I'd fight every single day on behalf of the American people, the middle class, and all those who were striving to get into the middle class. I've kept that promise and if you'll vote for me, then I promise I'll fight just as hard in a second term.

LEHRER: Governor Romney, your two-minute closing.

Governor Romney:

Thank you, Jim, and Mr. President. And thank you for tuning in this evening. This is a -- this is an important election and I'm concerned about America. I'm concerned about the direction America has been taking over the last four years.

I -- I know this is bigger than an election about the two of us as individuals. It's bigger than our respective parties. It's an election about the course of America. What kind of America do you want to have for yourself and for your children. And there really are two very different paths that we began speaking about this evening, and over the course of this month we're going to have two more Presidential debates and a vice Presidential debate. We're talk about those two paths.

But they lead in very different directions. And it's not just looking to our words that you have to take in evidence of where they go. You can look at the record.

There's no question in my mind that if the President were to be reelected you'll continue to see a middle-class squeeze with incomes going down and prices going up. I'll get incomes up again. You'll see chronic unemployment. We've had 43 straight months with unemployment above 8 percent. If I'm President I will create -- help create 12 million new jobs in this country with rising incomes.

If the President's reelected, Obamacare will be fully installed. In my view that's going to mean a whole different way of life for people who counted on the insurance plan they had in the past. Many will lose it. You're going to see health premiums go up by some $2,500 per family.

If I'm elected we won't have Obama. We'll put in place the kind of principles that I put in place in my own state and allow each state to craft their own programs to get people insured and we'll focus on getting the cost of health care down.

If the President were to be reelected you're going to see a $716 billion cut to Medicare. You'll have 4 million people who will lose Medicare Advantage. You'll have hospital and providers that'll no longer accept Medicare patients. I'll restore that $716 billion to Medicare.

And finally, military. The President's reelected you'll see dramatic cuts to our military. The secretary of defense has said these would be even devastating. I will not cut our commitment to our military. I will keep America strong and get America's middle class working again. Thank you, Jim.

LEHRER: Thank you, Governor. Thank you, Mr. President. The next debate will be the vice Presidential event on Thursday, October 11th at Centre College in Danville, Kentucky. For now, from the University of Denver, I'm Jim Lehrer. Thank you, and good night.

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# Second U.S. Presidential Candidate Debate

Ms. Crowley: Gentlemen, thank you both for joining us here tonight. We have a lot of folks who have been waiting all day to talk to you, so I want to get right to it. Governor Romney, as you know, you won the coin toss, so the first question will go to you. And I want to turn to a first-time voter, Jeremy Epstein, who has a question for you.

Q: Mr. President, Governor Romney, as a 20-year-old college student, all I hear from professors, neighbors and others is that when I graduate I'll have little chance to get employment. What can you say to reassure me, but more importantly, my parents, that I will be able to sufficiently support myself after I graduate?

Governor Romney: Thank you, Jeremy. I appreciate your question. And thank you for being here this evening. And to all of those from Nassau County here that have come, thank you for your time. Thank you to Hofstra University and to Candy Crowley for organizing and leading this event.

Thank you, Mr. President, also for being part of this debate.

Your question is one that's being asked by college kids all over this country. I was in Pennsylvania with someone who had just graduated. This was in Philadelphia -- and she said I've got my degree, I can't find a job. I've got three part-time jobs; they’re just barely enough to pay for my food and pay for an apartment. I can't begin to pay back my student loans.

So what we have to do is two things. We have to make sure that we make it easier for kids to afford college, and also make sure that when they get out of college there’s a job. When I was governor of Massachusetts, to get a high school degree you had to pass an exam. If you graduated in the top quarter of your class, we gave you a John and Abigail Adams scholarship -- four years tuition-free to the college of your choice in Massachusetts that's a public institution.

I want to make sure we keep our Pell Grant program growing. We're also going to have our loan program so that people are able to afford school. But the key thing is to make sure you can get a job when you get out of school. And what’s happened over the last four years has been very, very hard for America’s young people.

I want you to be able to get a job. I know what it takes to get this economy going. With half of college kids graduating this year without a college -- excuse me -- without a job and without a college-level job, that’s just unacceptable. And likewise, you got more and more debt on your back. So more debt and less jobs. I'm going to change that. I know what it takes to create good jobs again. I know what it takes to make sure that you have the kind of opportunity you deserve.

And kids across this country are going to recognize we're bringing back an economy. It’s not going to be like the last four years. The middle class has been crushed over the last four years. And jobs have been too scarce. I know what it takes to bring them back, and I'm going to do that and make sure when you graduate -- when do you graduate?

Q: 2014.

Governor Romney:

2014. When you come out in 2014, I presume I'm going to be President -- I'm going to make sure you get a job. Thanks, Jeremy.

Q: Thank you.

Governor Romney:

Yeah, you bet.

Ms. Crowley: Mr. President.

President Obama: Jeremy, first of all, your future is bright. And the fact that you’re making an investment in higher education is critical not just to you, but to the entire nation. Now, the most important thing we can do is to make sure that we are creating jobs in this country, but not just jobs -- good-paying jobs, ones that can support a family.

And what I want to do is build on the 5 million jobs that we’ve created over the last 30 months in the private sector alone. And there are a bunch of things that we can do to make sure your future is bright.

Number one: I want to build manufacturing jobs in this country again. When Governor Romney said we should let Detroit go bankrupt, I said, we’re going to bet on American workers and the American auto industry, and it’s come surging back. I want to do that in industries not just in Detroit but all across the country. And that means we change our tax code so we’re giving incentives to companies that are investing here in the United States and creating jobs here. It also means we’re helping them and small businesses to export all around the world to new markets.

Number two: We’ve got to make sure that we have the best education system in the world. And the fact that you’re going to college is great, but I want everybody to get a great education. And we’ve worked hard to make sure that student loans are available for folks like you. But I also want to make sure that community colleges are offering slots for workers to get retrained for the jobs that are there right now, and the jobs of the future.

Number three: We’ve got to control our own energy. Not only oil and natural gas, which we’ve been investing in, but also we’ve got to make sure we’re building the energy sources of the future -- not just thinking about next year, but 10 years from now, 20 years from now. That's why we invest in solar and wind and biofuels, energy-efficient cars.

We’ve got to reduce our deficit, but we’ve got to do it in a balanced way -- asking the wealthy to pay a little bit more along with cuts so that we can invest in education like yours. And let’s take the money that we’ve been spending on war over the last decade to rebuild America -- roads, bridges, schools. We do those things, not only is your future going to be bright, but America’s future is going to be bright as well.

Ms. Crowley: Let me ask you for a more immediate answer, beginning with Mr. Romney. Just quickly, what can you do? We’re looking at a situation where 40 percent of the unemployed have been unemployed for six months or more. They don't have the two years that Jeremy has. What about those long-term unemployed who need a job right now?

Governor Romney:

Well, what you're seeing in this country is 23 million people struggling to find a job and a lot of them, as you say, Candy, have been out of work for a long, long, long time. The President’s policies have been exercised over the last four years and they haven’t put Americans back to work. We have fewer people working today than we had when the President took office. If the -- the unemployment rate was 7.8 percent when he took office; it’s 7.8 percent now. But if you calculated that unemployment rate taking back the people who dropped out of the workforce, it would be 10.7 percent.

We have not made the progress we need to make to put people back to work. That's why I put out a five-point plan that gets America 12 million new jobs in four years and rising take-home pay. It’s going to help Jeremy get a job when he comes out of school. It’s going to help people across the country that are unemployed right now.

And one thing that the President said, which I want to make sure that we understand -- he said that I said we should take Detroit bankrupt. And that's right. My plan was to have the company go through bankruptcy like 7-Eleven did and Macy's and Continental Airlines, and come out stronger. And I know he keeps saying, you wanted to take Detroit bankrupt. Well, the President took Detroit bankrupt. You took General Motors bankrupt. You took Chrysler bankrupt. So when you say that I wanted to take the auto industry bankrupt, you actually did.

And I think it's important to know that was a process that was necessary to get those companies back on their feet so they could start hiring more people. That was precisely what I recommended and ultimately what happened.

Ms. Crowley: Let me give the President a chance. Go ahead.

President Obama: Candy, what Governor Romney said just isn't true. He wanted to take them into bankruptcy without providing them any way to stay open, and we would have lost a million jobs. And don't take my word for it. Take the executives at GM and Chrysler, some of whom are Republicans, may even support Governor Romney, but they'll tell you his prescription wasn't going to work.

And Governor Romney says he's got a five-point plan. Governor Romney doesn't have a five-point plan; he has a one-point plan. And that plan is to make sure that folks at the top play by a different set of rules. That's been his philosophy in the private sector. That's been his philosophy as governor. That's been his philosophy as a presidential candidate. You can make a lot of money and pay lower tax rates than somebody who makes a lot less. You can ship jobs overseas and get tax breaks for it. You can invest in a company, bankrupt it, lay off the workers, strip away their pensions and you still make money.

That's exactly the philosophy that we've seen in place for the last decade. That's what's been squeezing middle-class families. And we have fought back for four years to get out of that mess. The last thing we need to do is to go back to the very same policies that got us there.

Ms. Crowley: Mr. President, the next question is going to be for you here. And Mr. Romney -- Governor Romney, they'll be plenty of chances here to go on, but I want to --

Governor Romney:

That Detroit answer --

Ms. Crowley: -- we have all these folks -- I will let you absolutely --

Governor Romney:

-- and the rest of the answer, way off the mark.

Ms. Crowley: Okay. You certainly will have lots of time here coming up, because I want to move you on to something that's sort of connected to cars here and go over -- and we want to get a question from Phillip DiCola [ph].

Q: Your Energy Secretary, Steven Chu, has now been on record three times stating it's not policy of his department to help lower gas prices. Do you agree with Secretary Chu that this is not the job of the Energy Department?

President Obama: The most important thing we can do is to make sure we control our own energy. So here's what I've done since I've been President. We have increased oil production to the highest levels in 16 years. Natural gas production is the highest it's been in decades. We have seen increases in coal production and coal employment.

But what I've also said is we can't just produce traditional sources of energy. We've also got to look to the future. That's why we doubled fuel-efficiency standards on cars. That means that in the middle of the next decade, any car you buy you're going to end up going twice as far on a gallon of gas. That's why we've doubled clean energy production like wind and solar and biofuels.

And all these things have contributed to us lowering our oil imports to the lowest levels in 16 years. Now, I want to build on that. And that means, yes, we still continue to open up new areas for drilling. We continue to make it a priority for us to go after natural gas. We've got potentially 600,000 jobs and a hundred years' worth of energy right beneath our feet with natural gas. And we can do it in an environmentally sound way.

But we've also got to continue to figure out how we have efficient energy, because ultimately that's how we're going to reduce demand and that's what's going to keep gas prices lower.

Now, Governor Romney will say he's got an all-of-the-above plan. But basically, his plan is to let the oil companies write the energy policies. So he's got the oil and gas part, but he doesn't have the clean energy part.

And if we’re only thinking about tomorrow or the next day, and not thinking about 10 years from now, we're not going to control our own economic future. Because China, Germany -- they're making these investments. And I'm not going to cede those jobs of the future to those countries. I expect those new energy sources to be built right here in the United States. That's going to help Jeremy get a job. It's also going to make sure that you're not paying as much for gas.

Ms. Crowley: Governor, on the subject of gas prices?

Governor Romney:

Well, let's look at the President's policies, all right, as opposed to the rhetoric, because we've had four years of policies being played out. And the President is right in terms of the additional oil production, but none of it came on federal land.

As a matter of fact, oil production is down 14 percent this year on federal land, and gas production is down 9 percent. Why? Because the President cut in half the number of licenses and permits for drilling on federal lands and in federal waters. So where did the increase come from? Well, a lot of it came from the Bakken Range in North Dakota. What was his participation there? The America brought a criminal action against the people drilling up there for oil -- this massive new resource we have. And what was the cause? Twenty or 25 birds were killed and they brought out a migratory bird act to go after them on a criminal basis.

Look, I want to make sure we use our oil, our coal, our gas, our nuclear, our renewables. I believe very much in our renewable capabilities -- ethanol, wind, solar -- would be an important part of our energy mix. But what we don't need is to have the President keeping us from taking advantage of oil, coal and gas. This has not been Mr. Oil or Mr. Gas or Mr. Coal. Talk to the people that are working in those industries.

I was in coal country. People grabbed my arms and say, please save my job. The head of the EPA said you can't build a coal plant, it’s virtually impossible given our regulations. When the President ran for office, he said, if you build a coal plant you can go ahead, but you’ll go bankrupt. That's not the right course for America. Let’s take advantage of the energy resources we have as well as the energy sources for the future. And if we do that, if we do what I'm planning on doing, which is getting us energy-independent -- North America energy independence within eight years -- you’re going to see manufacturing jobs come back, because our energy is low-cost. They’re already beginning to come back, because of our abundant energy.

I'll get America and North America energy independent. I'll do it by more drilling, more permits and licenses. We're going to bring that pipeline in from Canada. How in the world the President said no to that pipeline I will never know. This is about bringing good jobs back for the middle class of America and that's what I'm going to do.

Ms. Crowley: Mr. President, let me just see if I can move you to the gist of this question, which is are we looking at the new normal? I can tell you that tomorrow morning a lot of people in Hempstead will wake up and fill up and they will find that the price of gas is over $4 a gallon. Is it within the purview of the government to bring those prices down, or are we looking at the new normal?

President Obama: Candy, there’s no doubt that world demand has gone up. But our production is going up. And we're using oil more efficiently. And very little of what Governor Romney just said is true.

We've opened up public lands. We're actually drilling more on public lands than in the previous administration -- and the previous President was an oil man. And natural gas isn't just appearing magically -- we're encouraging it and working with the industry.

And when I hear Governor Romney say he’s a big coal guy -- and keep in mind, when -- Governor, when you were governor of Massachusetts, you stood in front of a coal plant and pointed at it and said, “This plant kills” -- and took great pride in shutting it down. And now suddenly you’re a big champion of coal.

So what I've tried to do is be consistent. With respect to something like coal, we made the largest investment in clean-coal technology to make sure that even as we're producing more coal, we're producing it cleaner and smarter. Same thing with oil. Same thing with natural gas.

And the proof is our oil imports are down to the lowest levels in 20 years. Oil production is up; natural gas production is up; and most importantly, we're also starting to build cars that are more efficient. And that's creating jobs. That means those cars can be exported because that's the demand around the world, and it also means that it will save money in your pocketbook. That's the strategy you need, an all-of-the-above strategy, and that's what we're going to do in the next four years.

Governor Romney:

But that's not what you’ve done in the last four years. That's the problem. In the last four years you cut permits and licenses on federal land and federal waters in half.

President Obama: Not true, Governor Romney.

Governor Romney:

So how much did you cut it by --

President Obama: Not true.

Governor Romney:

By how much did you cut them by then?

President Obama: Governor, we have actually produced more oil --

Governor Romney:

No, no, how much did you cut licenses and permits on federal land and federal waters?

President Obama: Governor Romney, here’s what we did: There were a whole bunch of oil companies --

Governor Romney:

No, I had a question, and the question was how much did you cut them by? How much did you cut them by?

President Obama: You want me to answer a question, I'm happy to answer the question.

Governor Romney:

All right, and it is?

President Obama: Here’s what happened: You had a whole bunch of oil companies who had leases on public lands that they weren’t using. So what we said was, you can’t just sit on this for 10, 20, 30 years, decide when you want to drill, when you want to produce, when it’s most profitable for you. These are public lands, so if you want to drill on public lands, you use it or you lose it. And so what we did was take away those leases, and we are now re-letting them so that we can actually make a profit.

Governor Romney:

And production on private -- on government lands is down.

President Obama: And production is up. No it isn’t.

Governor Romney:

Production on government land of oil is down 14 percent --

President Obama: Governor --

Governor Romney:

-- and production of gas is down 9 percent.

President Obama: -- what you’re saying is just not true. It’s just not true.

Governor Romney:

It’s absolutely true. Look, there’s no question but that the people recognize that we have not produced more oil and gas --

President Obama: I’ll give you your time. Go ahead.

Governor Romney:

-- on federal lands and in federal waters. And coal -- coal production is not up; coal jobs are not up. I was just at a coal facility where some 1,200 people lost their jobs. The right course for America is to have a true all-of-the-above policy. I don’t think anyone really believes that you’re a person who’s going to be pushing for oil and gas and coal. You’ll get your chance in a moment. I’m still speaking.

President Obama: Well, Governor, if you --

Governor Romney:

And the answer is, I don’t believe people think that’s the case because I --

President Obama: -- if you’re asking me a question, I’m going to answer it.

Governor Romney:

It wasn’t a question.

President Obama: Okay. All right.

Governor Romney:

That was a statement. I don’t think the American people believe that. I will fight for oil, coal and natural gas. And the proof of whether a strategy is working or not is what the price is that you’re paying at the pump. If you’re paying less than you paid a year or two ago, why, then, the strategy is working. But you’re paying more.

When the President took office, the price of gasoline here in Nassau County was about a buck-eighty-six a gallon. Now it’s four bucks a gallon. The price of electricity is up. If the President’s energy policies are working, you’re going to see the cost of energy come down.

I will fight to create more energy in this country to get America energy secure, and part of that is bringing in a pipeline of oil from Canada, taking advantage of the oil and coal we have here; drilling offshore in Alaska; drilling offshore in Virginia, where the people want it. Those things will get us the energy we need.

Ms. Crowley: Mr. President, could you address -- because we did finally get to gas prices here -- could you address what the Governor said, which is if your energy policy was working, the price of gasoline would not be $4 a gallon here. Is that true?

President Obama: Well, think about what the Governor just said. He said, when I took office the price of gasoline was $1.80, $1.86. Why is that? Because the economy was on the verge of collapse. Because we were about to go through the worst recession since the Great Depression, as a consequence of some of the same policies that Governor Romney is now promoting. So it’s conceivable that Governor Romney could bring down gas prices, because with his policies we might be back in that same mess.

What I want to do is to create an economy that is strong and at the same time produce energy. And with respect to this pipeline that Governor Romney keeps on talking about -- we've built enough pipeline to wrap around the entire Earth once. So I’m all for pipelines. I’m all for oil production. What I’m not for is us ignoring the other half of the equation.

So, for example, on wind energy, when Governor Romney says these are imaginary jobs, when you’ve got thousands of people right now in Iowa, right now in Colorado, who are working, creating wind power with good-paying manufacturing jobs, and the Republican Senator in Iowa is all for it, providing tax credits to help this work. And Governor Romney says, I’m opposed; I’d get rid of it. That’s not an energy strategy for the future. And we need to win that future. And I intend to win it as President of the United States.

Ms. Crowley: I’ve got to move you along. And the next question is for you.

Governor Romney:

No, he got the first -- he actually got the first question, so I get the last question -- last answer on that one.

Ms. Crowley: Actually in the follow-up it doesn’t quite work like that. But I’m going to give you a chance here. I promise you, I’m going to. And the next question is for you, so if you want to continue on. But I don’t want to leave all these guys sitting here.

Governor Romney:

Candy, I don’t have a policy of stopping wind jobs in Iowa. And they’re not phantom jobs, they’re real jobs. I appreciate wind jobs in Iowa and across our country. I appreciate the jobs in coal and oil and gas.

Ms. Crowley: Okay, thank you --

Governor Romney:

I’m going to make sure that taking advantage of our energy resources will bring back manufacturing to America. We’re going to get through a very aggressive energy policy -- 3.5 million more jobs in this country. It’s critical to our future.

President Obama: Candy, it’s okay, I’m used to being interrupted.

Ms. Crowley: We’re going to move you along to taxes. All right, we’re going to move you both along to taxes over here and all these folks that have been waiting. Governor, this question is for you. It comes from Mary Polano [ph].

Governor Romney:

Hi, Mary.

Q: Governor Romney, you have stated that if you’re elected President you would plan to reduce the tax rates for all the tax brackets, and that you would work with the Congress to eliminate some deductions in order to make up for the loss in revenue. Concerning these various deductions -- the mortgage deduction, the charitable deductions, the Child Tax Credit, and also the -- oh, what’s that other credit?

President Obama: You’re doing great.

Q: Oh, I remember -- the education credits, which are important to me because I have children in college. What would be your position on those things, which are important to the middle class?

Governor Romney:

Thank you very much. And let me tell you, you’re absolutely right about part of that, which is I want to bring the rates down. I want to simplify the tax code, and I want to get middle-income taxpayers to have lower taxes. And the reason I want middle-income taxpayers to have lower taxes is because middle-income taxpayers have been buried over the past four years.

You’ve seen as middle-income people in this country -- incomes go down $4,300 a family, even as gasoline prices have gone up $2,000. Health insurance premiums up $2,500. Food prices up. Utility prices up. The middle-income families in America have been crushed over the last four years, so I want to get some relief to middle-income families. That's part one.

Now, how about deductions? Because I’m going to bring rates down across the board for everybody, but I’m going to limit deductions and exemptions and credits, particularly for people at the high end, because I am not going to have people at the high end pay less than they're paying now. The top 5 percent of taxpayers will continue to pay 60 percent of the income tax the nation collects. So that will stay the same.

Middle-income people are going to get a tax break. And so in terms of bringing down deductions, one way of doing that would be to say everybody gets -- I’ll pick a number -- $25,000 of deductions and credits, and you can decide which ones to use. Your home mortgage interest deduction, charity, child tax credit and so forth, you can use those as part of fill in that bucket, if you will, of deductions. But your rate comes down, and the burden also comes down on you for one more reason, and that is every middle-income taxpayer no longer will pay any tax on interest, dividends, or capital gains; no tax on your savings.

That makes life a lot easier. If you’re getting interest from a bank, if you’re getting a statement from a mutual fund, or any other kind of investments you have, you don't have to worry about filing taxes on that because there will be no taxes for anybody making $200,000 a year and less on your interest, dividends and capital gains.

Why am I lowering taxes on the middle class? Because under the last four years, they’ve been buried, and I want to help people in the middle class. And I will not -- I will not under any circumstances reduce the share that's being paid by the highest income taxpayers. And I will not under any circumstances increase taxes on the middle class.

The President’s spending, the President’s borrowing will cause this nation to have to raise taxes on the American people, not just at the high end. A recent study has shown that people in the middle class will see $4,000 a year higher taxes as a result of the spending and borrowing of this administration. I will not let that happen. I’ll get us on track to a balanced budget, and I’m going to reduce the tax burden on middle-income families. And what’s that going to do? It’s going to help those families, and it’s going to create incentives to start growing jobs again in this country.

Ms. Crowley: Thanks, Governor.

President Obama: My philosophy on taxes has been simple, and that is I want to give middle-class families and folks who are striving to get into the middle class some relief -- because they have been hit hard, over the last decade, over the last 15, over the last 20 years.

So four years ago, I stood on a stage just like this one -- actually, it was a town hall -- and I said, I would cut taxes for middle-class families, and that's what I've done -- by $3,600. I said I would cut taxes for small businesses -- who are the drivers and engines of growth -- and we've cut them 18 times. And I want to continue those tax cuts for middle-class families and for small businesses.

But what I've also said is if we're serious about reducing the deficit, if this is genuinely a moral obligation to the next generation, then in addition to some tough spending cuts, we've also got to make sure that the wealthy do a little bit more.

So what I've said is your first $250,000 worth of income, no change. And that means 98 percent of American families, 97 percent of small businesses, they will not see a tax increase. I'm ready to sign that bill right now. The only reason it's not happening is because Governor Romney's allies in Congress have held the 98 percent hostage, because they want tax breaks for the top 2 percent.

But what I've also said is for above $250,000, we can go back to the tax rates we had when Bill Clinton was President. We created 23 million new jobs. That's part of what took us from deficits to surplus. It will be good for our economy and it will be good for job creation.

Now, Governor Romney has a different philosophy. He was on "60 Minutes" just two weeks ago and he was asked, is it fair for somebody like you making $20 million a year to pay a lower tax rate than a nurse or bus driver, somebody making $50,000 a year. And he said, yes, I think that's fair. Not only that, he said, I think that's what grows the economy.

Well, I fundamentally disagree with that. I think what grows the economy is when you get that tax credit that we put in place for your kids going to college. I think that grows the economy. I think what grows the economy is when we make sure small businesses are getting a tax credit for hiring veterans who fought for our country. That grows our economy.

So we just have a different theory. And when Governor Romney stands here, after a year of campaigning when during a Republican primary, he stood on stage and said, I'm going to give tax cuts -- he didn't say tax rate cuts, he said tax cuts -- to everybody including the top 1 percent, you should believe him, because that's been his history. And that's exactly the kind of top-down economics that is not going to work if we want a strong middle class and an economy that's thriving for everybody.

Ms. Crowley: Governor Romney, I'm sure you've got a reply there.

Governor Romney:

You're absolutely right. You heard what I said about my tax plan. The top 5 percent will continue to pay 60 percent, as they do today. I'm not looking to cut taxes for wealthy people. I am looking to cut taxes for middle-income people.

And why do I want to bring rates down and at the same time lower exemptions and deductions, particularly for people at the high end? Because if you bring rates down, it makes it easier for small business to keep more of their capital and hire people. And for me, this is about jobs. I want to get America's economy going again. Fifty-four percent of America's workers work in businesses that are taxed as individuals. So when you bring those rates down, those small businesses are able to keep more money and hire more people.

For me, I look at what's happened in the last four years and say this has been a disappointment. We can do better than this. We don't have to settle for how many months -- 43 months with unemployment above 8 percent, 23 million Americans struggling to find a good job right now. There are 3.5 million more women living in poverty today than when the President took office. We don’t have to live like this.

We can get this economy going again. My five-point plan does it. Energy independence for North America in five years; opening up more trade, particularly in Latin America; cracking down on China when they cheat; getting us to a balanced budget; fixing our training programs for our workers; and, finally, championing small business.

I want to help small businesses grow and thrive. I know how to make that happen. I spent my life in the private sector. I know why jobs come and why they go. And they're going now because of the policies of this administration.

Ms. Crowley: Governor, let me ask the President something about what you just said. The Governor says that he is not going to allow the top 5 percent -- I believe is what he said -- to have a tax cut, that it will all even out, that what he wants to do is give that tax cut to the middle class. Settled?

President Obama: No, it's not settled. Look, the cost of lowering rates for everybody across the board 20 percent, along with what he also wants to do in terms of eliminating the estate tax, along with what he wants to do in terms of corporate changes in the tax code, it costs about $5 trillion.

Governor Romney then also wants to spend $2 trillion on additional military programs, even though the military is not asking for them. That's $7 trillion. He also wants to continue the Bush tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans. That's another trillion dollars. That's $8 trillion.

Now, what he says is he's going to make sure that this doesn't add to the deficit and he's going to cut middle-class taxes. But when he's asked how are you going to do it, which deductions, which loopholes are you going to close, he can't tell you. The fact that he only has to pay 14 percent on his taxes when a lot of you are paying much higher, he's already taken that off the board. Capital gains are going to continue to be at a low rate, so we're not going to get money that way.

We haven't heard from the Governor any specifics beyond Big Bird and eliminating funding for Planned Parenthood in terms of how he pays for that.

Now, Governor Romney was a very successful investor. If somebody came to you, Governor, with a plan that said, here, I want to spend $7 or $8 trillion and then we’re going to pay for it, but we can’t tell you until maybe after the election how we’re going to do it, you wouldn’t have taken such a sketchy deal.

And neither should you, the American people, because the math doesn’t add up. And what’s at stake here is one of two things. Either, Candy, this blows up the deficit -- because keep in mind, this is just to pay for the additional spending that he’s talking about -- $7-$8 trillion -- that’s before we even get to the deficit we already have.

Or, alternatively, it’s got to be paid for not only by closing deductions for wealthy individuals -- that will pay for about 4 percent reduction in tax rates -- you’re going to be paying for it. You’ll lose some deductions. And you can’t buy this sales pitch. Nobody who’s looked at it that’s serious actually believes it adds up.

Ms. Crowley: Mr. President, let me get the Governor in on this. And, Governor, let’s, before we get into a vast array of who says -- what study says what, if it shouldn’t add up, if somehow when you get in there, there isn’t enough tax revenue coming in, if somehow the numbers don’t add up, would you be willing to look again at a 20 percent --

Governor Romney:

Well, of course they add up. I was someone who ran businesses for 25 years and balanced the budget. I ran the Olympics and balanced the budget. I ran the state of a Massachusetts as a governor, to the extent any governor does, and balanced the budget all four years. When we’re talking about math that doesn’t add up, how about $4 trillion of deficits over the last four years -- $5 trillion? That’s math that doesn’t add up. We have a President talking about someone’s plan in a way that’s completely foreign to what my real plan is.

And then we have his own record, which is we have four consecutive years where he said, when he was running for office, he would cut the deficit in half. Instead, he’s doubled it. We’ve gone from $10 trillion of national debt to $16 trillion of national debt. If the President were reelected, we’d go to almost $20 trillion of national debt. This puts us on a road to Greece.

I know what it takes to balance budgets. I’ve done it my entire life. So for instance, when he says, yours is a $5 trillion cut -- well, no, it’s not, because I’m offsetting some of the reductions, withholding down some of the deductions and I --

President Obama: Candy --

Ms. Crowley: Governor, I’ve got to --

Governor Romney:

I’m sorry --

Ms. Crowley: Actually, I need to have you both hang -- I understand the stakes here. I understand both of you, but I will get run out of town if I don’t allow --

Governor Romney:

And I just described to you, Mr. President, I just described to you precisely how I’d do it --

Ms. Crowley: You will get --

Governor Romney:

-- which is with a single number that people can put -- and they can put their deductions and credits into that bucket.

President Obama: Are we keeping track of --

Ms. Crowley: Let me -- Mr. President, we’re keeping track, I promise you. And, Mr. President, the next question is for you --

President Obama: Great, looking forward to it.

Ms. Crowley: -- so stay standing. And it’s Catherine Fenton who has a question for you.

Q: In what new ways do you intend to rectify the inequalities in the workplace, specifically regarding females making only 72 percent of what their male counterparts earn?

President Obama: Well, Catherine, this is a great question. And I was raised by a single mom who had to put herself through school while looking after two kids. And she worked hard every day and made a lot of sacrifices to make sure we got everything we needed.

My grandmother, she started off as a secretary in a bank. She never got a college education even though she was smart as a whip. And she worked her way up to become a vice president at a local bank, but she hit the glass ceiling. She trained people who would end up becoming her bosses during the course of her career. She didn't complain. That's not what you did in that generation.

And this is one of the reasons why one of the first -- the first bill I signed was something called the Lilly Ledbetter bill, and it was named after this amazing woman who had been doing the same job as a man for years, found out that she was getting paid less, and the Supreme Court said that she couldn’t bring suit because she should have found out about it earlier, where she had no way of finding out about it. So we fixed that. And that's an example of the kind of advocacy that we need, because women are increasingly the breadwinners in the family. This is not just a women’s issue. This is a family issue; this is a middle-class issue. And that's why we’ve got to fight for it.

It also means that we’ve got to make sure that young people like yourself are able to afford a college education. Earlier, Governor Romney talked about he wants to make Pell grants and other education accessible for young people. Well, the truth of the matter is, is that that's exactly what we’ve done. We’ve expanded Pell grants for millions of people, including millions of young women all across the country. We did it by taking $60 billion that was going to banks and lenders as middlemen for the student loan program, and we said let’s just cut out the middle man. Let’s give the money directly to students. And as a consequence, we’ve seen millions of young people be able to afford college, and that's going to make sure that young women are going to be able to compete in that marketplace.

But we’ve got to enforce the laws, which is what we are doing. And we’ve also got to make sure that in every walk of life, we do not tolerate discrimination. That's been one of the hallmarks of my administration. I’m going to continue to push on this issue for the next four years.

Ms. Crowley: Governor Romney, pay equity for women.

Governor Romney:

Thank you, an important topic, and one which I learned a great deal about, particularly as I was serving as governor of my state, because I had the chance to pull together a cabinet, and all the applicants seemed to be men. And I went to my staff and I said, how come all the people for these jobs are all men? They said, well, these are the people that have the qualifications. And I said, well, gosh, can’t we find some women that are also qualified? And so we took a concerted effort to go out and find women who had backgrounds that could be qualified to become members of our cabinet. I went to a number of women’s groups and said, can you help us find folks? And they brought us whole binders full of women.

I was proud of the fact that after I staffed my cabinet and my senior staff, that the University of New York in Albany did a survey of all 50 states and concluded that mine had more women in senior leadership positions than any other state in America.

Now, one of the reasons I was able to get so many good women to be part of that team was because of our recruiting effort, but number two, because I recognize that if you’re going to have women in the workforce that sometimes they need to be more flexible. My chief of staff, for instance, had two kids that were still in school. She said, I can’t be here until 7:00 p.m. or 8:00 p.m. at night; I need to be able to get home at 5:00 p.m. so I can be there for making dinner for my kids and being with them when they get home from school. So we said, fine, let’s have a flexible schedule so you can have hours that work for you.

We’re going to have to have employers in the new economy, in the economy I’m going to bring to play, that are going to be so anxious to get good workers, they’re going to be anxious to hire women.

In the last four years, women have lost 580,000 jobs. That's the net of what's happened in the last four years. We’re still down 580,000 jobs. I mentioned 3.5 million women more now in poverty than four years ago.

What we can do to help young women and women of all ages is to have a strong economy, so strong that employers are looking to find good employees and bringing them into their workforce, and adapting to a flexible work schedule that gives women the opportunities that they would otherwise not be able to afford.

This is what I’ve done. It’s what I look forward to doing. And I know what it takes to make an economy work. And I know what a working economy looks like. And an economy with 7.8 percent unemployment is not a real strong economy. An economy that has 23 million people looking for work is not a strong economy. An economy with 50 percent of kids graduating from college that can’t find a job, or a college-level job -- that's not what we have to have. I’m going to help women in America get good work by getting a stronger economy and by supporting women in the workforce.

Ms. Crowley: Mr. President, why don't you get in on this quickly, please?

President Obama: Catherine, I just want to point out that when Governor Romney’s campaign was asked about the Lilly Ledbetter bill, whether he supported it, he said, I’ll get back to you. And that's not the kind of advocacy that women need in any economy.

Now, there are some other issues that have a bearing on how women succeed in the workplace -- for example, their health care. A major difference in this campaign is that Governor Romney feels comfortable having politicians in Washington decide the health care choices that women are making. I think that's a mistake.

In my health care bill, I said insurance companies need to provide contraceptive coverage to everybody who’s insured, because this is not just a health issue, it’s an economic issue for women. It makes a difference. This is money out of that family’s pocket.

Governor Romney not only opposed it, he suggested that in fact employers should be able to make the decision as to whether or not a woman gets contraception through her insurance coverage. That's not the kind of advocacy that women need.

When Governor Romney says that we should eliminate funding for Planned Parenthood, there are millions of women all across the country who rely on Planned Parenthood for not just contraceptive care; they rely on it for mammograms, for cervical cancer screenings. That's a pocketbook issue for women and families all across the country, and it makes a difference in terms of how well and effectively women are able to work.

When we talk about child care and the credits that we’re providing, that makes a difference in terms of whether they can go out there and earn a living for their family.

These are not just women’s issues. These are family issues. These are economic issues. And one of the things that makes us grow as an economy is when everybody participates, and women are getting the same, fair deal as men are. And I’ve got two daughters and I want to make sure that they have the same opportunities that anybody’s sons have. And that's a part of what I’m fighting for as President of the United States.

Ms. Crowley: I want to move us along here to Susan Katz [ph] who has a question. And, Governor, it’s for you.

Q: Governor Romney, I am an undecided voter because I’m disappointed with the lack of progress I’ve seen in the last four years. However, I do attribute much of America’s economic and international problems to the failings and missteps of the Bush administration. Since both you and President Bush are Republicans, I fear a return to the policies of those years should you win this election. What is the biggest difference between you and George W. Bush? And how do you differentiate yourself from George W. Bush?

Governor Romney:

Thank you. And I appreciate that question. I just want to make sure that -- I think I was supposed to get that last answer, but I want to point out that I don't believe --

President Obama: I don't think so, Candy. I want to make sure your timekeepers are working here.

Governor Romney:

The time --

Ms. Crowley: The timekeepers are all working.

President Obama: All right.

Ms. Crowley: And let me tell you that the last part, it’s for the two of you to talk to one another, and it isn’t quite as ordered as you think. But go ahead and use this two minutes any way you’d like to, the question is on the floor.

Governor Romney:

I’d just note that I don't believe that bureaucrats in Washington should tell someone whether they can use contraceptives or not, and I don't believe employers should tell someone whether they could have contraceptive care or not. Every woman in America should have access to contraceptives. And the President’s statement of my policy is completely and totally wrong.

President Obama: Governor, that's not true.

Governor Romney:

Let me come back and answer your question. President Bush and I are different people, and these are different times. And that's why my five-point plan is so different than what he would have done.

For instance, we can now by virtue of new technology actually get all the energy we need in North America without having to go to the Arabs or the Venezuelans or anyone else. That wasn’t true in his time. That's why my policy starts with a very robust policy to get all that energy in North America, become energy secure.

Number two, trade: I’ll crack down on China. President Bush didn't. I’m also going to dramatically expand trade in Latin America. It’s been growing about 12 percent per year over a long period of time. I want to add more free trade agreements so we’ll have more trade.

Number three, I’m going to get us to a balanced budget. President Bush didn't. President Obama was right -- he said that that was outrageous to have deficits as high as half a trillion dollars under the Bush years. He was right. But then he put in place deficits twice that size for every one of his four years, and his forecast for the next four years is more deficits almost that large. So that's the next way I’m different than President Bush.

And then let’s take the last one, championing small business. Our party has been focused on big business too long. I came through small business. I understand how hard it is to start a small business. That's why everything I’ll do is designed to help small businesses grow and add jobs. I want to keep their taxes down on small business. I want regulators to see their job as encouraging small enterprise, not crushing it.

And the thing I find most troubling about Obamacare -- well, it’s a long list -- but one of the things I find most troubling is that when you go out and talk to small businesses and ask them what they think about it, they tell you it keeps them from hiring more people.

My priority is jobs. I know how to make that happen. And President Bush had a very different path for a very different time. My path is designed in getting small businesses to grow and hire people.

Ms. Crowley: Thanks, Governor.

Mr. President.

President Obama: Well, first of all, I think it’s important to tell you that we did come in during some tough times. We were losing 800,000 jobs a month when I started. But we have been digging our way out of policies that were misplaced and focused on the top doing very well and middle-class folks not doing well. And we’ve seen 30 consecutive -- 31 consecutive months of job growth, 5.2 million new jobs created. And the plans that I talked about will create even more.

But when Governor Romney says that he has a very different economic plan, the centerpiece of his economic plan are tax cuts. That’s what took us from surplus to deficit. When he talks about getting tough on China, keep in mind that Governor Romney invested in companies that were pioneers of outsourcing to China, and is currently investing in countries -- in companies that are building surveillance equipment for China to spy on its own folks.

Governor, you’re the last person who is going to get tough on China.

And what we’ve done when it comes to trade is not only sign three trade deals to open up new markets, but we’ve also set up a task force for trade that goes after anybody who is taking advantage of American workers or businesses, and not creating a level playing field. We’ve brought twice as many cases against unfair trading practices than the previous administration and we’ve won every single one that’s been decided.

When I said that we had to make sure that China was not flooding our domestic market with cheap tires, Governor Romney said I was being protectionist, that it wouldn’t be helpful to American workers. Well, in fact, we saved a thousand jobs. And that’s the kind of tough trade actions that are required.

But the last point I want to make is this: There are some things where Governor Romney is different from George Bush. George Bush didn’t propose turning Medicare into a voucher. George Bush embraced comprehensive immigration reform; he didn’t call for self-deportation. George Bush never suggested that we eliminate funding for Planned Parenthood.

So there are differences between Governor Romney and George Bush, but they’re not on economic policy. In some ways, he’s gone to a more extreme place when it comes to social policy. And I think that’s a mistake. That’s not how we’re going to move our economy forward.

Ms. Crowley: I want to move you both along to the next question because it’s in the same wheelhouse so you will be able to respond. But the President does get this question. I want to call on Michael Jones.

Q: Mr. President, I voted for you in 2008. What have you done or accomplished to earn my vote in 2012? I’m not that optimistic as I was in 2012. Most things I need for everyday living are very expensive.

President Obama: Well, we’ve gone through a tough four years, there’s no doubt about it. But four years ago, I told the American people and I told you I would cut taxes for middle-class families, and I did. I told you I’d cut taxes for small businesses, and I have. I said that I’d end the war in Iraq, and I did. I said we’d refocus attention on those who actually attacked us on 9/11, and we have gone after al Qaeda’s leadership like never before and Osama bin Laden is dead.

I said that we would put in place health care reform to make sure that insurance companies can't jerk you around, and if you don't have health insurance, that you'd have a chance to get affordable insurance -- and I have. I committed that I would rein in the excesses of Wall Street, and we passed the toughest Wall Street reforms since the 1930s. We've created 5 million jobs -- gone from 800,000 jobs a month being lost -- and we are making progress. We saved an auto industry that was on the brink of collapse.

Now, does that mean you're not struggling? Absolutely not. A lot of us are. And that's why the plan that I've put forward for manufacturing, and education, and reducing our deficit in a sensible way, using the savings from ending wars to rebuild America and putting people back to work, making sure that we are controlling our own energy, but not just the energy of today, but also the energy of the future -- all those things will make a difference.

So the point is the commitments I've made I've kept. And those that I haven't been able to keep, it's not for lack of trying and we're going to get it done in a second term. But you should pay attention to this campaign, because Governor Romney has made some commitments as well, and I suspect he'll keep those, too. When members of the Republican Congress say, we're going to sign a no-tax pledge so that we don’t ask a dime from millionaires and billionaires to reduce our deficit so we can still invest in education and helping kids go to college, he said, me, too.

When they said, we're going to cut Planned Parenthood funding, he said, me, too. When they said, we're going to repeal Obamacare -- the first thing I'm going to do, despite the fact that it's the same health care plan that he passed in Massachusetts and is working well -- he said, me too. That is not the kind of leadership that you need, but you should expect that those are promises he's going to keep.

Ms. Crowley: Mr. President, let me let --

President Obama: And the choice in this election is going to be whose promises are going to be more likely to help you in your life, make sure your kids can go to college, make sure that you are getting a good-paying job, making sure that Medicare and Social Security will be there for you.

Ms. Crowley: Thank you.

Governor.

Governor Romney:

I think you know better. I think you know that these last four years haven't been so good as the President just described, and that you don't feel like you're confident that the next four years are going to be much better either. I can tell you that if you were to elect President Obama, you know what you're going to get. You're going to get a repeat of the last four years. We just can't afford four more years like the last four years.

He said that by now we'd have unemployment at 5.4 percent. The difference between where it is and 5.4 percent is 9 million Americans without work. I wasn't the one that said 5.4 percent. This was the President's plan -- didn't get there.

He said he would have by now put forward a plan to reform Medicare and Social Security, because he pointed out they're on the road to bankruptcy. He would reform them. He'd get that done. He hasn't even made a proposal on either one. He said in his first year he’d put out an immigration plan that would deal with our immigration challenges -- didn't even file it.

This is a President who has not been able to do what he said he’d do. He said that he’d cut in half the deficit -- he hasn’t done that either; in fact, he doubled it. He said that by now, middle-income families would have a reduction in their health insurance premiums by $2,500 a year. It’s gone up by $2,500 a year. And if Obamacare is passed -- or implemented -- it’s already been passed -- if it’s implemented fully, it will be another $2,500 on top.

The middle class is getting crushed under the policies of a President who has not understood what it takes to get the economy working again. He keeps saying, look, I’ve created 5 million jobs. That’s after losing 5 million jobs. The entire record is such that the unemployment has not been reduced in this country. The unemployment, the number of people who are still looking for work, is still 23 million Americans. There are more people in poverty -- one out of six people in poverty.

How about food stamps? When he took office, 32 million people were on food stamps. Today, 47 million people are on food stamps. How about the growth of the economy? It’s growing more slowly this year than last year, and more slowly last year than the year before.

The President wants to do well, I understand. But the policies he’s put in place, from Obamacare to Dodd-Frank to his tax policies to his regulatory policies -- these policies combined have not let this economy take off and grow like it could have. You might say, well, you got an example of when it worked better? Yes. In the Reagan recession, where unemployment hit 10.8 percent, between that period -- the end of that recession and the equivalent period of time to today, Ronald Reagan’s recovery created twice as many jobs as this President’s recovery.

Five million jobs doesn’t even keep up with our population growth. And the only reason the unemployment rate seems a little lower today is because of all the people that have dropped out of the workforce.

The President has tried, but his policies haven’t worked. He’s great as a speaker and describing his plans and his vision. That’s wonderful, except we have a record to look at. And that record shows he just hasn’t been able to cut the deficit, to put in place reforms for Medicare and Social Security to preserve them, to get us the rising incomes we need. Median incomes down $4,300 a family, and 23 million Americans out of work -- that’s what this election is about. It’s about who can get the middle class in this country a bright and prosperous future and assure our kids the kind of hope and optimism they deserve.

Ms. Crowley: Governor, I want to move you along. Don’t go away, and we’ll have plenty of time to respond. We are quite aware of the clock for both of you. But I want to bring in a different subject here. Mr. President, I’ll be right back with you. Lorraine Osario [ph] has a question for you about a topic we have not heard.

President Obama: This is for Governor Romney?

Ms. Crowley: Yes, this is for Governor Romney, and we’ll be right with you, Mr. President. Thanks.

Governor Romney:

Is it Lorena?

Q: Lorraine.

Governor Romney:

Lorraine?

Q: Yes, Lorraine. How are you doing?

Governor Romney:

Good, thanks.

Q: President. Romney: What do you plan on doing with immigrants without their green card that are currently living here as productive members of society?

Governor Romney:

Thank you, Lorraine. Did I get that right? Good. Thank you for question. And let me step back and tell you what I’d like to do with our immigration policy broadly, and include an answer to your question.

First of all, this is a nation of immigrants. We welcome people coming to this country as immigrants. My dad was born in Mexico of American parents; Ann’s dad was born in Wales and is a first-generation American. We welcome legal immigrants into this country.

I want our legal system to work better. I want it to be streamlined. I want it to be clearer. I don’t think you have to -- shouldn’t have to hire a lawyer to figure out how to get into this country legally. I also think that we should give visas to people -- green cards, rather, to people who graduate with skills that we need. People around the world with accredited degrees in science and math get a green card stapled to their diploma; come to the U.S. of A. We should make sure that our legal system works.

Number two, we’re going to have to stop illegal immigration. There are 4 million people who are waiting in line to get here legally. Those who’ve come here illegally take their place. So I will not grant amnesty to those who’ve come here illegally. What I will do is I’ll put in place an employment verification system and make sure that employers that hire people who have come here illegally are sanctioned for doing so. I won’t put in place magnets for people coming here illegally. So, for instance, I would not give driver’s licenses to those that have come here illegally, as the President would.

The kids of those that came here illegally -- those kids I think should have a pathway to become a permanent resident of the United States. And military service, for instance, is one way they would have that kind of pathway to become a permanent resident.

Now, when the President ran for office he said that he’d put in place in his first year a piece of legislation -- he’d file a bill in his first year that would reform our immigration system -- protect legal immigration, stop illegal immigration. He didn’t do it. He had a Democrat House, a Democrat Senate, a supermajority in both houses. Why did he fail to even promote legislation that would have provided an answer for those that want to come here legally and for those that are here illegally today? That’s a question I think the President will have a chance to answer to answer right now.

President Obama: Good, I look forward to it. Was it Lorena? Lorraine. We are a nation of immigrants. We’re just a few miles away from Ellis Island. We all understand what this country has become because talent from all around the world wants to come here. People are willing to take risks. People who want to build on their dreams and make sure their kids have even bigger dreams than they have.

But we’re also a nation of laws. So what I’ve said is we need to fix a broken immigration system. And I’ve done everything I can on my own, and sought cooperation from Congress to make sure that we fixed the system.

First thing we did was to streamline the legal immigration system to reduce the backlog, make it easier, simpler and cheaper for people who are waiting in line, obeying the law, to make sure that they can come here and contribute to our country. And that's good for our economic growth. They’ll start new businesses. They’ll make things happen that create jobs here in the United States.

Number two, we do have to deal with our border, so we put more Border Patrol on than any time in history, and the flow of undocumented workers across the border is actually lower than it’s been in 40 years.

What I’ve also said is if we’re going to go after folks who are here illegally, we should do it smartly and go after folks who are criminals, gangbangers, people who are hurting the community -- not after students. Not after folks who are here just because they're trying to figure out how to feed their families. And that's what we’ve done.

And what I’ve also said is for young people who come here, brought here oftentimes by their parents, have gone to school here, pledged allegiance to the flag, think of this as their country, understand themselves as Americans in every way except having papers, then we should make sure that we give them a pathway to citizenship. And that's what I’ve done administratively.

Now, Governor Romney just said that he wants to help those young people, too. But during the Republican primary he said, I will veto the DREAM Act that would allow these young people to have access. His main strategy during the Republican primary was to say, we’re going to encourage self-deportation -- making life so miserable on folks that they’ll leave.

He called the Arizona law a model for the nation -- part of the Arizona law said that law enforcement officers could stop folks because they suspected maybe they looked like they might be undocumented workers and check their papers. And you know what, if my daughter or yours looks to somebody like they're not a citizen, I don't want to empower somebody like that.

So we can fix this system in a comprehensive way. And when Governor Romney says the challenge is, well, Obama didn't try -- that's not true. I sat down with Democrats and Republicans at the beginning of my term, and I said, let’s fix this system, including senators previously who had supported it on the Republican side. But it’s very hard for Republicans in Congress to support comprehensive immigration reform if their standard bearer has said that, this is not something I’m interested in supporting.

Ms. Crowley: Let me get the Governor in here, Mr. President. Let’s speak to, if you could, Governor --

Governor Romney:

Let’s.

Ms. Crowley: -- the idea of self-deportation.

Governor Romney:

No, let me go back and speak to the points that the President made and let’s get them correct. I did not say that the Arizona law was a model for the nation in that aspect. I said that the E-Verify portion of the Arizona law, which is -- which is the portion of the law which says that employers could be able to determine whether someone is here illegally or not illegally, that that was a model for the nation. That's number one.

Number two, I asked the President a question I think Hispanics and immigrants all over the nation have asked. He was asked this on Univision the other day. Why, when you said you’d file legislation in your first year, didn’t you do it? And he didn’t answer. He doesn’t answer that question. He said the standard bearer wasn’t for it. I’m glad you thought I was a standard bearer four years ago, but I wasn't. Four years ago, you said in your first year, you would file legislation. In his first year, I was just getting -- licking my wounds from having been beaten by John McCain, all right. I was not the standard bearer. My view is that this President should have honored his promise to do as he said.

Now, let me mention one other thing and that is self-deportation says let people make their own choice. What I was saying is we’re not going to round up 12 million people, undocumented, illegals, and take them out of the nation. Instead, let people make their own choice. And if they find that they can’t get the benefits here that they want and they can’t find the job they want, then they’ll make a decision to go a place where they have better opportunities.

But I’m not in favor of rounding up people and taking them out of this country. I am in favor, as the President has said and I agree with him, which is that if people have committed crimes we’ve got to get them out of this country.

Let me mention something else the President said. It was a moment ago and I didn’t get a chance to -- when he was describing Chinese investments and so forth --

President Obama: Candy, hold on a second. At some point --

Governor Romney:

Mr. President, I’m still speaking.

Ms. Crowley: I’m sorry --

Governor Romney:

Mr. President, why don't you let me finish --

President Obama:: Governor Romney, I’m used to --

Governor Romney:

I’m going -- I’m going to continue -- I’m going to continue. If the President made --

Ms. Crowley: Go ahead and finish, Governor Romney. Governor Romney, if you could make it short. See all these people, they’ve been waiting for you. Could you make it short and then --

Governor Romney:

Yes, just going to make a point. Any investments I have over the last eight years have been managed by a blind trust. And I understand they do include investments outside the United States, including in Chinese companies. Mr. President, have you looked at your pension?

President Obama: Candy --

Governor Romney:

Have you looked at your pension?

President Obama: I’ve got to say -- Candy --

Governor Romney:

Mr. President, have you looked at your pension?

President Obama: You know, I don’t look at my pension. It’s not as big as yours so it doesn’t take as long.

Governor Romney:

Let me give you some advice.

President Obama: I don’t check it that often.

Governor Romney:

Look at your pension. You also have investments in Chinese companies. You also have investments outside the United States. You also have investments through a Cayman’s trust.

Ms. Crowley: We are sort of way off topic here, Governor Romney.

President Obama: We’re a little off topic here.

Ms. Crowley: We are completely off immigration.

President Obama: I know we were talking about immigration.

Ms. Crowley: And we’ve -- quickly, Mr. President --

President Obama: I do want to make sure --

Ms. Crowley: If I could have you sit down, Governor Romney. Thank you.

President Obama: I do want to make sure that we just understand something. Governor Romney says he wasn’t referring to Arizona as a model for the nation. His top advisor on immigration is the guy who designed the Arizona law, the entirety of it. Not E-Verify, the whole thing. That’s his policy. And it’s a bad policy. And it won’t help us grow.

Look, when we think about immigration, we have to understand there are folks all around the world who still see America as the land of promise. And they provide us energy and they provide us innovation, and they start companies like Intel and Google -- and we want to encourage that.

Now, we’ve got to make sure that we do it in a smart way, in a comprehensive way, and we make the legal system better. But when we make this into a divisive political issue, and when we don’t have bipartisan support -- I can deliver, Governor, a whole bunch of Democrats to get comprehensive immigration reform done, and we can’t --

Governor Romney:

I’ll get it done. I’ll get it done the first year --

President Obama: -- we have not seen Republicans serious about this issue at all.

Ms. Crowley: Mr. President, let me move you on here, please. Mr. President --

President Obama: And it’s time for them to get serious on this.

Ms. Crowley: Don’t go away, though.

President Obama: This used to be a bipartisan issue.

Ms. Crowley: Right. Don’t go away, because --

President Obama: I’m here.

Ms. Crowley: -- I want you to talk to Carey Ladka [ph], who wants to switch the topic for us.

President Obama: Okay. Hi, Carey.

Q: Good evening, Mr. President.

President Obama: I’m sorry, what’s your name?

Q: It’s Carey. Carey Ladka [ph].

President Obama: Great to see you, Carey.

Q: This question actually comes from a brain trust of my friends at Global Telecom Supply in Mineola yesterday. We were sitting around talking about Libya, and we were reading and became aware of reports that the State Department refused extra security for our embassy in Benghazi, Libya, prior to the attacks that killed four Americans. Who was it that denied enhanced security, and why?

President Obama: Well, let me, first of all, talk about our diplomats, because they serve all around the world and do an incredible job in a very dangerous situation. And these aren’t just representatives of the United States. They’re my representatives. I send them there, oftentimes into harm’s way. I know these folks, and I know these families. So nobody is more concerned about their safety and security than I am.

So as soon as we found out that the Benghazi consulate was being overrun, I was on the phone with my national security team, and I gave them three instructions. Number one, beef up our security and procedures not just in Libya but in every embassy and consulate in the region. Number two, investigate exactly what happened, regardless of where the facts lead us, to make sure that folks are held accountable and it doesn’t happen again. And number three, we are going to find out who did this and we are going to hunt them down, because one of the things that I’ve said throughout my presidency is when folks mess with Americans, we go after them.

Now, Governor Romney had a very different response. While we were still dealing with our diplomats being threatened, Governor Romney put out a press release, trying to make political points. And that's not how a Commander-in-Chief operates. You don't turn national security into a political issue, certainly not right when it’s happening.

And people -- not everybody agrees with some of the decisions I’ve made, but when it comes to our national security, I mean what I say. I said I’d end the war in Libya -- in Iraq, and I did. I said that we’d go after al Qaeda and bin Laden -- we have. I said we’d transition out of Afghanistan and start making sure that Afghans are responsible for their own security. That's what I’m doing.

And when it comes to this issue, when I say that we are going to find out exactly what happened, everybody will be held accountable -- and I am ultimately responsible for what’s taking place there, because these are my folks, and I’m the one who has to greet those coffins when they come home, you know that I mean what I say.

Ms. Crowley: Mr. President, I’ve got to move us along.

Governor?

Governor Romney:

Thank you, Carey, for your question. It’s an important one, and I think the President just said correctly that the buck does stop at his desk, and he takes responsibility for that -- for the failure in providing those security resources. And those terrible things may well happen from time to time. I feel very deeply sympathetic for the families of those who lost loved ones. And today there’s a memorial service for one of those that was lost in this tragedy. We think of their families and care for them deeply.

There were other issues associated with this tragedy. There were many days that passed before we knew whether this was a spontaneous demonstration or actually whether it was a terrorist attack. And there was no demonstration involved. It was a terrorist attack. And it took a long time for that to be told to the American people.

Whether there was some misleading or instead whether we just didn’t know what happened, I think you have to ask yourself, why didn’t we know five days later when the Ambassador to the United Nations went on TV to say that this was a demonstration -- how could we have not known?

But I find more troubling than this that on the day following the assassination of the United States ambassador -- the first time that's happened since 1979 -- when we have four Americans killed there, when apparently we didn’t know what happened, that the President, the day after that happened, flies to Las Vegas for a political fundraiser, then the next day to Colorado for another event, another political event. I think these actions taken by a President and a leader have symbolic significance, and perhaps even material significance in that you’d hope that during that time we could call in the people who were actually eyewitnesses. We’ve read their accounts now about what happened. It was very clear this was not a demonstration. This was an attack by terrorists.

And this calls into question the President’s whole policy in the Middle East. Look what's happening in Syria, in Egypt, now in Libya. Consider the distance between ourselves and Israel. The President said that he was going to put daylight between us and Israel. We have Iran four years closer to a nuclear bomb.

Syria -- Syria is not just the tragedy of 30,000 civilians being killed by a military, but also a strategically significant player for America. The President’s policies throughout the Middle East began with an apology tour, and pursue a strategy of leading from behind. And this strategy is unraveling before our very eyes.

Ms. Crowley: Because we’re closing in, I want to still get a lot of people in. I want to ask you something, Mr. President, and then have the Governor just quickly. Your Secretary of State, as I’m sure you know, has said that she takes full responsibility for the attack on the diplomatic mission in Benghazi. Does the buck stop with your Secretary of State, as far as what went on here?

President Obama: Secretary Clinton has done an extraordinary job, but she works for me. I’m the President, and I’m always responsible. And that’s why nobody is more interested in finding out exactly what happened than I do.

The day after the attack, Governor, I stood in the Rose Garden and I told the American people and the world that we are going to find out exactly what happened, that this was an act of terror, and I also said that we’re going to hunt down those who committed this crime. And then a few days later, I was there greeting the caskets coming into Andrews Air Force Base, and grieving with the families.

And the suggestion that anybody on my team -- whether the Secretary of State, our U.N. Ambassador -- anybody on my team would play politics or mislead when we’ve lost four of our own, Governor, is offensive. That’s not what we do. That’s not what I do as President. That’s not what I do as Commander-in-Chief.

Ms. Crowley: Governor, if you want to reply quickly to this please.

Governor Romney:

Yes, I surely do. I think it’s interesting the President just said something, which is that on the day after the attack he went in the Rose Garden and said that this was an attack of terror.

President Obama: That’s what I said.

Governor Romney:

You said in the Rose Garden the day after the attack it was an act of terror? It was not a spontaneous demonstration?

President Obama: Please proceed.

Governor Romney:

Is that what you’re saying?

President Obama: Please proceed, Governor.

Governor Romney:

I want to make sure we get that for the record, because it took the President 14 days before he called the attack in Benghazi an act of terror.

President Obama: Get the transcript.

Ms. Crowley: He did, in fact, sir. So let me call it an act of terror in the Rose Garden. He used the word --

President Obama: Can you say that a little louder, Candy?

Ms. Crowley: He did call it an act of terror. It did, as well, take -- it did, as well, take two weeks or so for the whole idea of there being a riot out there about this tape to come out. You are correct about that.

Governor Romney:

The administration indicated that this was a reaction to a video and was a spontaneous reaction.

Ms. Crowley: They did.

Governor Romney:

It took them a long time to say this was a terrorist act by a terrorist group. And to suggest -- am I incorrect in that regard? On Sunday, your Secretary --

President Obama: Candy?

Governor Romney:

-- excuse me, the Ambassador to the United Nations went on the Sunday television shows and spoke about how this was a spontaneous reaction.

President Obama: Candy, I’m happy to have a longer conversation about foreign policy.

Ms. Crowley: Mr. President, let me -- I know you -- absolutely. But I want to move you on.

President Obama: Okay, I’m happy to do that, too.

Ms. Crowley: And also, people can go to the transcripts and --

President Obama: I just want to make sure that --

Ms. Crowley: -- figure out what was said and when.

President Obama: -- all those wonderful folks are going to have a chance to get some of their questions answered.

Ms. Crowley: Because what I want to do, Mr. President -- stand there for a second, because I want to introduce you to Nina Gonzalez, who brought up a question that we hear a lot both over the Internet and from this crowd.

Q: President Obama, during the Democratic National Convention in 2008, you stated you wanted to keep AK-47s out of the hands of criminals. What has your administration done or plan to do to limit the availability of assault weapons?

President Obama: We’re a nation that believes in the Second Amendment, and I believe in the Second Amendment. We’ve got a long tradition of hunting and sportsmen, and people who want to make sure they can protect themselves.

But there have been too many instances during the course of my presidency where I’ve had to comfort families who have lost somebody -- most recently, out in Aurora. Just a couple of weeks ago -- actually probably about a month, I saw a mother who I had met at the bedside of her son who had been shot in that theater. And her son had been shot through the head. And we spent some time and we said a prayer. And remarkably, about two months later, this young man and his mom showed up, and he looked unbelievable -- good as new. But there were a lot of families who didn’t have that good fortune, and whose sons or daughters or husbands didn’t survive.

So my belief is that, A, we have to enforce the laws we’ve already got; make sure that we’re keeping guns out of the hands of criminals, those who are mentally ill. We’ve done a much better job in terms of background checks, but we’ve got more to do when it comes to enforcement.

But I also share your belief that weapons that were designed for soldiers in war theaters don’t belong on our streets. And so what I’m trying to do is to get a broader conversation about how do we reduce the violence generally. Part of it is seeing if we can get an assault weapons ban reintroduced, but part of it is also looking at other sources of the violence -- because, frankly, in my hometown of Chicago there’s an awful lot of violence, and they’re not using AK-47s, they’re using cheap handguns.

And so what can we do to intervene, to make sure that young people have opportunity? That our schools are working? That if there’s violence on the streets, that working with faith groups and law enforcement, we can catch it before it gets out of control.

And so what I want is a comprehensive strategy. Part of it is seeing if we can get automatic weapons that kill folks in amazing numbers out of the hands of criminals and the mentally ill. But part of it is also going deeper and seeing if we can get into these communities and making sure we catch violent impulses before they occur.

Ms. Crowley: Governor Romney, the question is about assault weapons, AK-47s.

Governor Romney:

Yes, I’m not in favor of new pieces of legislation on guns and taking guns away or making certain guns illegal. We, of course, don't want to have automatic weapons, and that's already illegal in this country to have automatic weapons.

What I believe is we have to do, as the President mentioned towards the end of his remarks there, which is to make enormous efforts to enforce the gun laws that we have and to change the culture of violence we have. And you ask how are we going to do that? And there are a number of things. He mentioned good schools. I totally agree. We were able to drive our schools to be number one in the nation in my state, and I believe if we do a better job in education, we’ll give people the hope and opportunity they deserve and perhaps less violence from that.

But let me mention another thing, and that is parents. We need moms and dads helping raise kids. Wherever possible, the benefit of having two parents in the home -- and that's not always possible -- a lot of great single moms, single dads, but, gosh, to tell our kids that before they have babies, they ought to think about getting married to someone, that's a great idea, because if there’s a two-parent family, the prospect of living in poverty goes down dramatically. The opportunities that the child will be able to achieve increase dramatically. So we can make changes in the way our culture works to help bring people away from violence and give them opportunity and bring them in the American system.

The greatest failure we’ve had with regards to gun violence in some respects is what is known as Fast and Furious, which was a program under this administration. And how it worked exactly I think we don't know precisely, but where thousands of automatic and AK-47-type weapons were given to people that ultimately gave them to drug lords that used those weapons against their own citizens and killed Americans with them. And this was a program of the government. For what purpose it was put in place, I can't imagine. But it’s one of the great tragedies related to violence in our society which has occurred during this administration, which I think the American people would like to understand fully. It’s been investigated to a degree, but the administration has carried out executive privilege to prevent all the information from coming out. I’d like to understand, who were the ones that did this, what the idea was behind it, why it led to the violence. Thousands of guns going to Mexico --

President Obama: Candy.

Governor Romney:

-- drug lords --

Ms. Crowley: Governor, if I could, the question was about these assault weapons that once were banned and are no longer banned. I know that you signed an assault weapons ban when you were in Massachusetts. Obviously with this question, you no longer do support that. Why is that? Given the kind of violence that we see sometimes with these mass killings, why is that, that you’ve changed your mind?

Governor Romney:

Well, Candy, actually, in my state, the pro-gun folks and the anti-gun folks came together and put together a piece of legislation. And it’s referred to as an assault weapon ban, but it had, at the signing of the bill, both the pro-gun and the anti-gun people came together because it provided opportunities for both that both wanted. There were hunting opportunities, for instance, that hadn’t previously been available and so forth. So it was a mutually agreed upon piece of legislation. That’s what we need more of, Candy. What we have right now in Washington is a place that’s gridlocked.

Ms. Crowley: So if you could get people to agree to it, you’d be for it?

President Obama: Candy.

Governor Romney:

We haven’t had the leadership in Washington to work at a bipartisan basis. I was able to do that in my state and bring these two together.

President Obama: Candy.

Ms. Crowley: Mr. President.

President Obama: First of all, I think Governor Romney was for an assault weapons ban before he was against it. And he said that the reason he changed his mind was, in part, because he was seeking the endorsement of the National Rifle Association. So that’s on the record.

But I think that one area we agree on is the importance of parents and the importance of schools -- because I do believe that if our young people have opportunity, then they’re less likely to engage in these kind of violent acts. We’re not going to eliminate everybody who is mentally disturbed, and we’ve got to make sure that they don’t get weapons, but we can make a difference in terms of ensuring that every young person in America, regardless of where they come from, what they look like, have a chance to succeed.

And, Candy, we haven’t had a chance to talk about education much, but I think it is very important to understand that the reforms we’ve put in place, working with 46 governors around the country, are seeing schools that are some of the ones that are the toughest for kids starting to succeed -- we’re starting to see gains in math and science.

When it comes to community colleges, we are setting up programs, including with Nassau Community College, to retrain workers, including young people who may have dropped out of school, but now are getting another chance -- training them for the jobs that exist right now. And in fact, employers are looking for skilled workers, and so we’re matching them up, giving them access to higher education. As I said, we have made sure that millions of young people are able to get an education that they weren’t able to get before. Now --

Ms. Crowley: Mr. President, I have to move you along here. You said you wanted to get this question so we need to do it here.

President Obama: Just one second, because this is important. This is part of the choice in this election. When Governor Romney was asked whether teachers -- hiring more teachers was important to growing our economy, Governor Romney said that doesn’t grow our economy.

Ms. Crowley: Mr. President, it was guns here so I need to move us along. The question was guns so let me --

President Obama: But this will make a difference in terms of whether or not we can move this economy forward for these young people and reduce our violence.

Ms. Crowley: Okay. Thank you so much. I want to ask Carol Goldberg to stand up because she gets to a question that both these men have been passionate about. It’s for Governor Romney.

Q: The outsourcing of American jobs overseas has taken a toll on our economy. What plans do you have to put back and keep jobs here in the United States?

Governor Romney:

Boy, great question, an important question because you’re absolutely right. The place where we’ve seen manufacturing go has been China. China is now the largest manufacturer in the world -- used to be the United States of America. A lot of good people have lost jobs. A half a million manufacturing jobs have been lost in the last four years -- that’s total over the last four years. One of the reasons for that is that people think it’s more attractive in some cases to go offshore than to stay here. We have made it less attractive for enterprises to stay here than to go offshore from time to time.

What I will do as President is make sure it's more attractive to come to America again. This is the way we're going to create jobs in this country. It's not by trickle-down government, saying we're going to take more money from people and hire more government workers, raise more taxes, put in place more regulations. Trickle-down government has never worked here, has never worked anywhere.

I want to make America the most attractive place in the world for entrepreneurs, for small business, for big business to invest and grow in America. Now, we're going to have to make sure that as we trade with other nations that they play by the rules, and China hasn't. One of the reasons -- or one of the ways they don't play by the rules is artificially holding down the value of their currency. Because if they put their currency down low, that means their prices on their goods are low, and that makes them advantageous in the marketplace. We lose sales and manufacturers here in the U.S. making the same products can't compete.

China has been a currency manipulator for years and years and years. And the President has a regular opportunity to label them as a currency manipulator, but refuses to do so. On day one, I will label China a currency manipulator, which will allow me as President to be able to put in place, if necessary, tariffs where I believe that they are taking unfair advantage of our manufacturers.

So we're going to make sure the people we trade with around the world play by the rules. But let me not just stop there. Don't forget what's key to bringing back jobs here is not just finding someone else to punish -- and I'm going to be strict with people who we trade with to make sure they follow the law and play by the rules -- but it's also to make America the most attractive place in the world for businesses of all kinds. That's why I want to bring down the tax rates on small employers, big employers, so they want to be here.

Canada's tax rate on companies is now 15 percent. Ours is 35 percent. So if you're starting a business, where would you rather start it? We have to be competitive if we're going to create more jobs here. Regulations have quadrupled -- the rate of regulations quadrupled under this President. I've talked to small businesses across the country. They say, we feel like we're under attack from our own government. I want to make sure that regulators see their job as encouraging small business, not crushing it. And there's no question but that Obamacare has been an extraordinary deterrent to enterprises of all kinds hiring people.

My priority is making sure that we get more people hired. If we have more people hired, if we get back manufacturing jobs, if we get back all kinds of jobs into this country, then you're going to see rising incomes again. The reason incomes are down is because unemployment is so high. I know what it takes to get this to happen. And my plan will do that. And one part of it is to make sure that we keep China playing by the rules. Thank you.

Ms. Crowley: Mr. President, two minutes here because we are then going to go to our last question.

President Obama: We need to create jobs here. And both Governor Romney and I agree actually that we should lower our corporate tax rate. It's too high. But there's a difference in terms of how we would do it. I want to close loopholes that allow companies to deduct expenses when they move to China that allow them to profit offshore and not have to get taxed, so they have tax advantages offshore. All those changes in our tax code would make a difference.

Now, Governor Romney actually wants to expand those tax breaks. One of his big ideas when it comes to corporate tax reform would be to say if you invest overseas, you make profits overseas, you don't have to pay U.S. taxes. But of course, if you're a small business or a mom-and-pop business or a big business starting up here, you've got to pay even the reduced rate that Governor Romney is talking about. And it's estimated that that will create 800,000 new jobs -- the problem is they'll be in China or India or Germany. That's not the way we're going to create jobs here.

The way we're going to create jobs here is not just to change our tax code, but also to double our exports. And we are on pace to double our exports, one of the commitments I made when I was President. That's creating tens of thousands of jobs all across the country. That's why we've kept on pushing trade deals, but trade deals that make sure that American workers and American businesses are getting a good deal.

Now, Governor Romney talked about China, as I already indicated. In the private sector, Governor Romney's company invested in what were called "pioneers of outsourcing." That's not my phrase. It's what reporters called it. And as far as currency manipulation, the currency has actually gone up 11 percent since I’ve been President because we have pushed them hard. And we’ve put unprecedented trade pressure on China. That's why exports have significantly increased under my presidency. That's going to help to create jobs here.

Ms. Crowley: Mr. President, we have a really short time for a quick discussion here. iPad, the Macs, the iPhones -- they are all manufactured in China. One of the major reasons is labor is so much cheaper here. How do you convince a great American company to bring that manufacturing back here?

Governor Romney:

The answer is very straightforward: We can compete with anyone in the world as long as the playing field is level. China has been cheating over the years -- one, by holding down the value of their currency; number two, by stealing our intellectual property -- our designs, our patents, our technology. There’s even an Apple store in China that's a counterfeit Apple store selling counterfeit goods. They hack into our computers. We will have to have people play on a fair basis. That's number one.

Number two, we have to make America the most attractive place for entrepreneurs, for people who want to expand a business. That's what brings jobs in. The President’s characterization of my tax plan is --

President Obama: How much time you got, Candy?

Governor Romney:

-- is completely -- is completely --

Ms. Crowley: Let me go to the --

Governor Romney:

-- is completely false. Let me tell you.

Ms. Crowley: Let me go to the President here because we really are --

President Obama: All right, I’m --

Ms. Crowley: -- because we really are running out of time. And the question is, can we ever get -- we can't get wages like that. It can't be sustained here.

President Obama: Candy, there are some jobs that are not going to come back because they're low-wage, low-skill jobs. I want high-wage, high-skill jobs. That's why we have to emphasize manufacturing. That's why we have to invest in advanced manufacturing. That's why we’ve got to make sure that we’ve got the best science and research in the world.

And when we talk about deficits, if we’re adding to our deficit for tax cuts for folks who don't need them, and we’re cutting investments in research and science that will create the next Apple, create the next new innovation that will sell products around the world, we will lose that race. If we’re not training engineers to make sure that they are equipped here in this country, then companies won’t come here. Those investments are what’s going to help to make sure that we continue to lead this world economy not just next year, but 10 years from now, 50 years from now, 100 years from now.

Ms. Crowley: Thanks, Mr. President.

Governor Romney:

Government does not create jobs.

Ms. Crowley: Governor Romney.

Governor Romney:

Government does not create jobs.

Ms. Crowley: Governor Romney, I want to introduce you to Barry Green because he’s going to have the last question to you first.

Governor Romney:

Barry? Oh, there’s Barry. Hi, Barry.

Q: Hi, Governor. I think this is a tough question. Each of you, what do you believe is the biggest misperception that the American people have about you as a man and a candidate? Using specific examples, can you take this opportunity to debunk that misperception and set us straight?

Governor Romney:

Thank you, and that's an opportunity for me, and I appreciate it. In the nature of a campaign, it seems that some campaigns are focused on attacking a person rather than prescribing their own future and the things they’d like to do. In the course of that, I think the President’s campaign has tried to characterize me as someone who’s very different than who I am. I care about 100 percent of the American people. I want 100 percent of the American people to have a bright and prosperous future. I care about our kids. I understand what it takes to make a bright and prosperous future for America again. I spent my life in the private sector, not in government. I’m a guy who wants to help, with the experience I have, the American people.

My passion probably flows from the fact that I believe in God and I believe we’re all children of the same God. I believe we have a responsibility to care for one another. I served as a missionary for my church. I served as a pastor in my congregation for about 10 years. I’ve sat across the table from people who are out of work, and worked with them to try and find new work, or to help them through tough times.

I went to the Olympics when they were in trouble to try and get them on track. And as governor of my state, I was able to get 100 percent of my people insured, all my kids, about 98 percent of the adults; was able also to get our schools ranked at number one in the nation, so 100 percent of our kids would have a bright opportunity for a future.

I understand that I can get this country on track again. We don't have to settle for what we’re going through. We don't have to settle for gasoline at $4. We don't have to settle for unemployment at a chronically high level. We don't have to settle for 47 million people on food stamps. We don't have to settle for 50 percent of kids coming out of college not able to get work. We don't have to settle for 23 million people struggling to find a good job.

If I become President, I’ll get America working again. I will get us on track to a balanced budget. The President hasn’t. I will. I’ll make sure we can reform Medicare and Social Security to preserve them for coming generations. The President said he would. He didn’t.

Ms. Crowley: Governor --

Governor Romney:

I’ll get our incomes up. And by the way, I’ve done these things. I served as governor and showed I could get them done.

Ms. Crowley: Mr. President, last two minutes belong to you.

President Obama: Barry, I think a lot of this campaign, maybe over the last four years, has been devoted to this notion that I think government creates jobs, that that somehow is the answer. That's not what I believe.

I believe that the free enterprise system is the greatest engine of prosperity the world has ever known. I believe in self-reliance and individual initiative, and risk-takers being rewarded. But I also believe that everybody should have a fair shot and everybody should do their fair share, and everybody should play by the same rules, because that's how our economy is grown. That's how we built the world’s greatest middle class. And that is part of what's at stake in this election. There's a fundamentally different vision about how we move our country forward.

I believe Governor Romney is a good man, loves his family, cares about his faith. But I also believe that when he said behind closed doors that 47 percent of the country consider themselves victims, who refuse personal responsibility, think about who he was talking about -- folks on Social Security who have worked all their lives; veterans who have sacrificed for this country; students who are out there trying to hopefully advance their own dreams but also this country’s dreams; soldiers who are overseas fighting for us right now; people who are working hard every day, paying payroll tax, gas taxes, but don't make enough income.

And I want to fight for them. That's what I’ve been doing for the last four years, because if they succeed, I believe the country succeeds.

And when my grandfather fought in World War II, and he came back, and he got a GI Bill and that allowed him to go to college, that wasn’t a handout. That was something that advanced the entire country. And I want to make sure that the next generation has those same opportunities. That's why I’m asking for your vote, and that's why I’m asking for another four years.

Ms. Crowley: President Obama, Governor Romney, thank you for being here tonight. On that note, we have come to an end of this town hall debate. Our thanks to the participants for their time, and to the people of Hofstra University for their hospitality. The next and final debate takes place Monday night at Lynn University in Boca Raton, Florida. Don't forget to watch. Election Day is three weeks from today. Don't forget to vote.

Good night.

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# Third U.S. Presidential Candidate Debate

\*Mr. Schieffer: Good evening from the campus of Lynn University here in Boca Raton, Florida. This is the fourth and last debate of the 2012 campaign, brought to you by the Commission on Presidential Debates. This one is on foreign policy. I'm Bob Schieffer of CBS News.

The questions are mine and I have not shared them with the candidates or their aides. The audience has taken a vow of silence -- no applause, no reaction of any kind -- except right now, when we welcome President Barack Obama and Governor Mitt Romney.\*

Gentlemen, your campaigns have agreed to certain rules, and they are simple. They’ve asked me to divide the evening into segments. I'll pose a question at the beginning of each segment. You will each have two minutes to respond, and then we will have a general discussion until we move to the next segment.

Tonight’s debate, as both of you know, comes on the 50th anniversary of the night that President Kennedy told the world that the Soviet Union had installed nuclear missiles in Cuba, perhaps the closest we've ever come to nuclear war. And it is a sobering reminder that every President faces at some point an unexpected threat to our national security from abroad.

So let’s begin.

The first segment is the challenge of a changing Middle East and the new face of terrorism. I'm going to put this into two segments, so you’ll have two topic questions within this one segment on the subject. The first question -- and it concerns Libya.

The controversy over what happened there continues. Four Americans are dead, including an American Ambassador. Questions remain of what happened: What caused it? Was it spontaneous? Was it an intelligence failure? Was it a policy failure? Was there an attempt to mislead people about what really happened?

Governor Romney, you said this was an example of an American policy in the Middle East that is unraveling before our very eyes. I'd like to hear each of you give your thoughts on that. Governor Romney, you won the toss -- you go first.

Governor Romney:

Thank you, Bob. And thank you for agreeing to moderate this debate this evening. Thank you to Lynn University for welcoming us here. And, Mr. President, it’s good to be with you again. We were together at a humorous event a little earlier, and it’s nice to maybe be funny this time -- not on purpose. We'll see what happens.

This is obviously an area of great concern to the entire world, and to America in particular, which is to see a complete change in the structure and the environment in the Middle East. With the Arab Spring came a great deal of hope that there would be a change towards more moderation, an opportunity for greater participation on the part of women in public life and in economic life in the Middle East. But instead we've seen in nation after nation a number of disturbing events.

Of course, we see in Syria, 30,000 civilians having been killed by the military there. We see in Libya, an attack, apparently by -- I think we know now -- by terrorists of some kind against our people there, four people dead. Our hearts and minds go to them.

Mali has been taken over -- the northern part of Mali by al Qaeda-type individuals. We have in Egypt a Muslim Brotherhood president. And so what we're seeing is a pretty dramatic reversal of the kind of hopes we had for that region. Of course, the greatest threat of all is Iran, four years closer to a nuclear weapon.

And we're going to have to recognize that we have to do as the President has done -- I congratulate him on taking out Osama bin Laden and going after the leadership in al Qaeda. But we can't kill our way out of this mess. We're going to have to put in place a very comprehensive and robust strategy to help the world of Islam and other parts of the world reject this radical, violent extremism, which is -- it’s certainly not on the run. It’s certainly not hiding. This is a group that is now involved in 10 or 12 countries. And it presents an enormous threat to our friends, to the world, to America long term, and we must have a comprehensive strategy to help reject this kind of extremism.

Mr. Schieffer: Mr. President.

President Obama: Well, my first job as Commander-in-Chief, Bob, is to keep the American people safe. And that's what we've done over the last four years. We ended the war in Iraq, refocused our attention on those who actually killed us on 9/11. And as a consequence, al Qaeda’s core leadership has been decimated.

In addition, we're now able to transition out of Afghanistan in a responsible way, making sure that Afghans take responsibility for their own security. And that allows us also to rebuild alliances and make friends around the world to combat future threats. Now, with respect to Libya, as I indicated in the last debate, when we received that phone call, I immediately made sure that, number one, we did everything we could to secure those Americans who were still in harm’s way; number two, that we would investigate exactly what happened; and number three, most importantly, that we would go after those who killed Americans and we would bring them to justice. And that’s exactly what we’re going to do.

But I think it’s important to step back and think about what happened in Libya. Now, keep in mind that I and Americans took leadership in organizing an international coalition that made sure that we were able to -- without putting troops on the ground, at the cost of less than what we spent in two weeks in Iraq -- liberate a country that had been under the yoke of dictatorship for 40 years, got rid of a despot who had killed Americans. And, as a consequence, despite this tragedy, you had tens of thousands of Libyans, after the events in Benghazi, marching and saying, “America is our friend. We stand with them.” Now, that represents the opportunity we have to take advantage of.

And, Governor Romney, I’m glad that you agree that we have been successful in going after al Qaeda, but I have to tell you that your strategy previously has been one that has been all over the map, and is not designed to keep Americans safe or to build on the opportunities that exist in the Middle East.

Governor Romney:

Well, my strategy is pretty straightforward, which is to go after the bad guys, to make sure we do our very best to interrupt them, to kill them, to take them out of the picture. But my strategy is broader than that. That’s important, of course. But the key that we’re going to have to pursue is a pathway to get the Muslim world to be able to reject extremism on its own. We don’t want another Iraq. We don’t want another Afghanistan. That’s not the right course for us.

The right course for us is to make sure that we go after the people who are leaders of these various anti-American groups and these jihadists, but also help the Muslim world. And how do we do that? A group of Arab scholars came together, organized by the U.N., to look at how we can help the world reject these terrorists. And the answer they came up with was this: One, more economic development. We should key our foreign aid, our direct foreign investment -- and that of our friends -- we should coordinate it to make sure that we push back and give them more economic development. Number two, better education. Number three, gender equality. Number four, the rule of law. We have to help these nations create civil societies.

But what’s been happening over the last couple of years is as we’ve watched this tumult in the Middle East, this rising tide of chaos occur, you see al Qaeda rushing in. You see other jihadist groups rushing in. And they’re throughout many nations in the Middle East.

It’s wonderful that Libya seems to be making some progress, despite this terrible tragedy. But next door, of course, we have Egypt -- Libya is 6 million population, Egypt 80 million population. We want to make sure that we’re seeing progress throughout the Middle East, with Mali now having North Mali taken over by al Qaeda; with Syria having Assad continuing to kill -- to murder his own people. This is a region in tumult. And of course, Iran on the path to a nuclear weapon -- we’ve got real problems in the region.

Mr. Schieffer: Let’s give the President a chance.

President Obama: Governor Romney, I’m glad that you recognize that al Qaeda is a threat, because a few months ago, when you were asked what’s the biggest geopolitical threat facing America, you said Russia -- not al Qaeda -- you said Russia. And the 1980s are now calling to ask for their foreign policy back because the Cold War has been over for 20 years.

But, Governor, when it comes to our foreign policy, you seem to want to import the foreign policies of the 1980s, just like the social policies of the 1950s, and the economic policies of the 1920s.

You say that you’re not interested in duplicating what happened in Iraq, but just a few weeks ago you said you think we should have more troops in Iraq right now. And the challenge we have -- I know you haven’t been in a position to actually execute foreign policy, but every time you’ve offered an opinion, you’ve been wrong. You said we should have gone into Iraq, despite the fact that there were no weapons of mass destruction. You said that we should still have troops in Iraq to this day.

You indicated that we shouldn’t be passing nuclear treaties with Russia, despite the fact that 71 senators -- Democrats and Republicans -- voted for it. You’ve said that, first, we should not have a timeline in Afghanistan; then you said we should; now you say maybe, or it depends -- which means not only were you wrong, but you were also confusing and sending mixed messages both to our troops and our allies.

So what we need to do with respect to the Middle East is strong, steady leadership, not wrong and reckless leadership that is all over the map. And unfortunately, that's the kinds of opinions that you’ve offered throughout this campaign, and it is not a recipe for American strength or keeping America safe over the long term.

Mr. Schieffer: I’m going to add a couple of minutes here to give you a chance to respond.

Governor Romney:

Well, of course, I don't concur with what the President said about my own record and the things that I’ve said. They don't happen to be accurate.

But I can say this -- that we’re talking about the Middle East and how to help the Middle East reject the kind of terrorism we’re seeing and the rising tide of tumult and confusion. And attacking me is not an agenda. Attacking me is not talking about how we’re going to deal with the challenges that exist in the Middle East and take advantage of the opportunity there and stem the tide of this violence.

But I’ll respond to a couple of the things you mentioned. First of all, Russia I indicated is a geopolitical foe, not a --

President Obama: Number one geopolitical --

Governor Romney:

Excuse me. It’s a geopolitical foe, and I said in the same -- in the same paragraph I said, and Iran is the greatest national security threat we face. Russia does continue to battle us in the U.N. time and time again. I have clear eyes on this. I’m not going to wear rose-colored glasses when it comes to Russia or Mr. Putin. And I’m certainly not going to say to him, I’ll give you more flexibility after the election. After the election, he’ll get more backbone.

Number two, with regards to Iraq, you and I agreed, I believe, that there should have been a status of forces agreement. Did you --

President Obama: That's not true.

Governor Romney:

Oh, you didn't -- you didn't want a status of forces agreement?

President Obama: No, what I -- what I would not have done is left 10,000 troops in Iraq that would tie us down. That certainly would not help us in the Middle East.

Governor Romney:

I’m sorry. You actually -- there was an effort on the part of the President --

President Obama: You are --

Governor Romney:

-- to have a Status of Forces Agreement --

President Obama: He was --

Governor Romney:

And I concurred in that and said that we should have some number of troops that stayed on. That was something I concurred with --

President Obama: Governor --

Governor Romney:

-- your posture. That was my posture as well. You thought it should have been 5,000 troops.

President Obama: Governor --

Governor Romney:

I thought it should have been more troops. But you know what, the answer was --

President Obama: This is just a few weeks ago.

Governor Romney:

-- we got no troops through whatsoever.

President Obama: This is just a few weeks ago that you indicated that we should still have troops in Iraq.

Governor Romney:

No, I didn't. I’m sorry, that's --

President Obama: You made a major speech.

Governor Romney:

I indicated that you -- I indicated that you failed to put in place a status of forces agreement --

President Obama: Governor --

Governor Romney:

-- at the end of the conflict that existed in Iraq.

President Obama: Governor, here’s one thing --

Mr. Schieffer: Let him answer, please.

President Obama: Here’s one thing I’ve learned as Commander-in-Chief. You’ve got to be clear both to our allies and our enemies about where you stand and what you mean. Now, you just gave a speech a few weeks ago in which you said we should still have troops in Iraq. That is not a recipe for making sure that we are taking advantage of the opportunities and meeting the challenges of the Middle East.

Now, it is absolutely true that we cannot just beat these challenges militarily. And so what I’ve done, throughout my presidency and will continue to do, is, number one, make sure that these countries are supporting our counterterrorism efforts.

Number two, make sure that they are standing by our interests in Israel’s security -- because it is a true friend and our greatest ally in the region.

Number three, we do have to make sure that we’re protecting religious minorities and women because these countries can’t develop unless all the population -- not just half of it -- is developing.

Number four, we do have to develop their economic capabilities. But number five, the other thing that we have to do is recognize that we can’t continue to do nation-building in these regions -- part of American leadership is making sure that we’re doing nation-building here at home. That will help us maintain the kind of American leadership that we need.

Mr. Schieffer: Let me interject the second topic question in this segment about the Middle East and so on. And that is -- you both mentioned -- alluded to this, and that is Syria.

The war in Syria has now spilled over into Lebanon. We have, what, more than a hundred people that were killed there in a bomb. There were demonstrations there, eight people dead. Mr. President, it’s been more than a year since you saw -- you told Assad he had to go. Since then, 30,000 Syrians have died. We’ve had 300,000 refugees. The war goes on; he’s still there. Should we reassess our policy and see if we can find a better way to influence events there, or is that even possible? And you go first, sir.

President Obama: What we’ve done is organize the international community, saying Assad has to go. We’ve mobilized sanctions against that government. We have made sure that they are isolated. We have provided humanitarian assistance, and we are helping the opposition organize. And we’re particularly interested in making sure that we’re mobilizing the moderate forces inside of Syria.

But ultimately, Syrians are going to have to determine their own future. And so everything we’re doing, we’re doing in consultation with our partners in the region -- including Israel, which obviously has a huge interest in seeing what happens in Syria; coordinating with Turkey and other countries in the region that have a great interest in this.

Now, what we’re seeing taking place in Syria is heartbreaking. And that’s why we are going to do everything we can to make sure that we are helping the opposition. But we also have to recognize that for us to get more entangled militarily in Syria is a serious step. And we have to do so making absolutely certain that we know who we are helping, that we’re not putting arms in the hands of folks who eventually could turn them against us or our allies in the region.

And I am confident that Assad’s days are numbered. But what we can’t do is to simply suggest that, as Governor Romney at times has suggested, that giving heavy weapons, for example, to the Syrian opposition is a simple proposition that would lead us to be safer over the long term.

Mr. Schieffer: Governor.

Governor Romney:

Well, let’s step back and talk about what’s happening in Syria and how important it is. First of all, 30,000 people being killed by their government is a humanitarian disaster. Secondly, Syria is an opportunity for us because Syria plays an important role in the Middle East, particularly right now, Syria is Iran’s only ally in the Arab world. It’s their route to the sea. It’s the route for them to arm Hezbollah in Lebanon, which threatens, of course, our ally, Israel. And so seeing Syria remove Assad is a very high priority for us. Number two, seeing a replacement government being responsible people is critical for us.

And finally, we don’t want to have military involvement there. We don’t want to get drawn in to a military conflict. And so the right course for us is working through our partners and with our own resources to identify responsible parties within Syria, organize them, bring them together in a form of, not government, a form of council that can take the lead in Syria, and then make sure they have the arms necessary to defend themselves.

We do need to make sure that they don’t have arms that get into the wrong hands, that those arms could be used to hurt us down the road. We need to make sure as well that we coordinate this effort with our allies, and particularly with Israel. But the Saudis and the Qatari and the Turks are all very concerned about this. They’re willing to work with us. We need to have a very effective leadership effort in Syria, making sure that the insurgents there are armed and that the insurgents that become armed are people who will be the responsible parties.

Recognize -- I believe that Assad must go. I believe he will go. But I believe we want to make sure that we have the relationships of friendship with the people that take his place, such that in the years to come, we see Syria as a friend and Syria as a responsible party in the Middle East.

This is a critical opportunity for America. And what I’m afraid of is we’ve watched over the past year or so, first the President saying, well, we’ll let the U.N. deal with it and Assad -- excuse me -- Kofi Annan came in and said we’re going to try -- have a ceasefire. That didn’t work. Then it looked to the Russians and said, let’s see if you can do something. We should be playing the leadership role there -- not on the ground with military, but play the leadership role.

Mr. Schieffer: All right.

President Obama: We are playing the leadership role. We organized the Friends of Syria. We are mobilizing humanitarian support and support for the opposition. And we are making sure that those we help are those who will be friends of ours in the long term and friends of our allies in the region over the long term.

But going back to Libya, because this is an example of how we make choices -- when we went into Libya, and we were able to immediately stop the massacre there because of the unique circumstances and the coalition that we had helped to organize, we also had to make sure that Muammar Qaddafi didn’t stay there.

And to the Governor’s credit, you supported us going into Libya and the coalition that we organized. But when it came time to making sure that Qaddafi did not stay in power, that he was captured, Governor, your suggestion was that this was mission creep, that this was mission muddle.

Imagine if we had pulled out at that point. Muammar Qaddafi had more American blood on his hands than any individual other than Osama bin Laden, and so we were going to make sure that we finished the job. That’s part of the reason why the Libyans stand with us. But we did so in a careful, thoughtful way, making certain that we knew who we were dealing with; that those forces of moderation on the ground were ones that we could work with. And we have to take the same kind of steady, thoughtful leadership when it comes to Syria. That’s exactly what we’re doing.

Mr. Schieffer: Governor, can I just ask you, would you go beyond what the administration would do? Like, for example, would you put in no-fly zones over Syria?

Governor Romney:

I don’t want to have our military involved in Syria. I don’t think there’s a necessity to put our military in Syria at this stage. I don’t anticipate that in the future. As I indicated, our objectives are to replace Assad and to have in place a new government which is friendly to us -- a responsible government, if possible. And I want to make sure they get armed and they have the arms necessary to defend themselves, but also to remove Assad.

But I do not want to see a military involvement on the part of our troops. And this isn’t going to be necessary. We have -- with our partners in the region, we have sufficient resources to support those groups.

But, look, this has been going on for a year. This is a time -- this should have been a time for American leadership. We should have taken a leading role -- not militarily, but a leading role organizationally, governmentally -- to bring together the parties there, to find responsible parties.

As you hear from intelligence sources even today, the insurgents are highly disparate; they haven’t come together; they haven’t formed a unity group, a council of some kind. That needs to happen. America can help that happen. And we need to make sure they have the arms they need to carry out the very important role, which is getting rid of Assad.

Mr. Schieffer: Can we get a quick response, Mr. President? Because I want to ask about Egypt.

President Obama: I’ll be very quick. What you just heard Governor Romney said is he doesn’t have different ideas, and that’s because we’re doing exactly what we should be doing to try to promote a moderate Syrian leadership and an effective transition so that we get Assad out. That’s the kind of leadership we’ve shown. That’s the kind of leadership we’ll continue to show.

Mr. Schieffer: May I ask you, during the Egyptian turmoil, there came a point when you said it was time for President Mubarak to go.

President Obama: Right.

Mr. Schieffer: Some in your administration thought perhaps we should have waited a while on that. Do you have any regrets about that?

President Obama: No, I don’t, because I think that America has to stand with democracy. The notion that we would have tanks run over those young people who were in Tahrir Square -- that is not the kind of American leadership that John F. Kennedy talked about 50 years ago.

But what I’ve also said is that now that you have a democratically elected government in Egypt, they have to make sure that they take responsibility for protecting religious minorities -- and we have put significant pressure on them to make sure they’re doing that; to recognize the rights of women, which is critical throughout the region. These countries can’t develop if young women are not given the kind of education that they need. They have to abide by their treaty with Israel. That is a red line for us, because not only is Israel’s security at stake, but our security is at stake if that unravels.

They have to make sure that they’re cooperating with us when it comes to counterterrorism. And we will help them with respect to developing their own economy -- because ultimately, what’s going to make the Egyptian revolution successful for the people of Egypt but also for the world is if those young people who gathered there are seeing opportunities. Their aspirations are similar to young people’s here. They want jobs. They want to be able to make sure their kids are going to a good school. They want to make sure that they have a roof over their heads and that they have the prospects of a better life in the future.

And so one of the things that we’ve been doing is, for example, organizing entrepreneurship conferences with these Egyptians to give them a sense of how they can start rebuilding their economy in a way that’s non-corrupt, that’s transparent.

But what is also important for us to understand is, is that for America to be successful in this region, there are some things that we’re going to have to do here at home as well. One of the challenges over the last decade is we’ve done experiments in nation-building in places like Iraq and Afghanistan, and we’ve neglected, for example, developing our own economy, our own energy sectors, our own education system. And it’s very hard for us to project leadership around the world when we’re not doing what we need to do here.

Mr. Schieffer: Governor Romney, I’m going to hear your response to that. But I would just ask you, would you have stuck with Mubarak?

Governor Romney:

No. I believe, as the President indicated, and said at the time that I supported his action there. I felt that -- I wish we would have had a better vision of the future. I wish that, looking back at the beginning of the President’s term and even further back than that, that we would have recognized that there was a growing energy and passion for freedom in that part of the world, and that we would have worked more aggressively with our friend and with other friends in the region to have them make the transition towards a more representative form of government, such that it didn’t explode in the way it did.

But once it exploded, I felt the same as the President did, which is these freedom voices in the streets of Egypt were the people who were speaking of our principles. And President Mubarak had done things which were unimaginable, and the idea of him crushing his people was not something that we could possibly support.

Let me step back and talk about what I think our mission has to be in the Middle East and even more broadly -- because our purpose is to make sure the world is more -- is peaceful. We want a peaceful planet. We want people to be able to enjoy their lives and know they’re going to have a bright and prosperous future and not be at war. That’s our purpose. And the mantle of leadership for promoting the principles of peace has fallen to America. We didn’t ask for it, but it’s an honor that we have it. But for us to be able to promote those principles of peace requires us to be strong, and that begins with a strong economy here at home. And unfortunately, the economy is not stronger.

When the President of Iraq -- excuse me, of Iran, Ahmadinejad, says that our debt makes us not a great country, that’s a frightening thing. The former chief of -- the Joint Chiefs of Staff said that -- Admiral Mullen -- said that our debt is the biggest national security threat we face.

We have weakened our economy. We need a strong economy. We need to have, as well, a strong military. Our military is second to none in the world. We’re blessed with terrific soldiers and extraordinary technology and intelligence. But the idea of a trillion dollars in cuts through sequestration and budget cuts to the military would change that.

We need to have strong allies. Our association and connection with our allies is essential to America’s strength. We’re the great nation that has allies -- 42 allies and friends around the world. And finally we have to stand by our principles.

And if we’re strong in each of those things, American influence will grow. But, unfortunately, in nowhere in the world is America’s influence greater today than it was four years ago.

Mr. Schieffer: All right.

Governor Romney:

And that's because we’ve become weaker --

President Obama: Bob, I think --

Governor Romney:

-- on each of those four dimensions.

Mr. Schieffer: You’re going to get a chance to respond to that because that's a perfect segue into our next segment, and that is what is America’s role in the world. And that is the question: What do each of you see as our role in the world? And I believe, Governor Romney, it’s your turn to go first.

Governor Romney:

Well, I absolutely believe that America has a responsibility and the privilege of helping defend freedom and promote the principles that make the world more peaceful, and those principles include human rights, human dignity, free enterprise, freedom of expression, elections -- because when there are elections, people tend to vote for peace. They don't vote for war. So we want to promote those principles around the world.

We recognize that there are places of conflict in the world. We want to end those conflicts to the extent humanly possible. But in order to be able to fulfill our role in the world, America must be strong. America must lead. And for that to happen, we have to strengthen our economy here at home. You can't have 23 million people struggling to get a job. You can't have an economy that over the last three years keeps slowing down in its growth rate. You can't have kids coming out of college, half of whom can't find a job today, or a job that's commensurate with their college degree. We have to get our economy going.

And our military -- we’ve got to strengthen our military long term. We don't know what the world is going to throw at us down the road. We make decisions today in a military that will confront challenges we can't imagine. In the 2000 debates, there was no mention of terrorism, for instance. And a year later, 9/11 happened. So we have to make decisions based upon uncertainty, and that means a strong military. I will not cut our military budget.

We have to also stand by our allies. I think the tension that existed between Israel and the United States was very unfortunate. I think also that pulling our missile defense program out of Poland in the way we did was also unfortunate in terms of, if you will, disrupting the relationship in some ways that existed between us.

And then of course, with regards to standing for our principles, when the students took the streets in Tehran, and the people there protested, the Green Revolution occurred. For the President to be silent, I thought was an enormous mistake. We have to stand for our principles, stand for our allies, stand for a strong military and stand for a stronger economy.

Mr. Schieffer: Mr. President.

President Obama: America remains the one indispensible nation, and the world needs a strong America, and it is stronger now than when I came into office. Because we ended the war in Iraq, we were able to refocus our attention on not only the terrorist threat, but also beginning a transition process in Afghanistan.

It also allowed us to refocus on alliances and relationships that had been neglected for a decade. And, Governor Romney, our alliances have never been stronger -- in Asia, in Europe, in Africa, with Israel, where we have unprecedented military and intelligence cooperation, including dealing with the Iranian threat.

But what we also have been able to do is position ourselves so we can start rebuilding America. And that’s what my plan does -- making sure that we’re bringing manufacturing back to our shores so that we’re creating jobs here, as we’ve done with the auto industry -- not rewarding companies that are shipping jobs overseas; making sure that we’ve got the best education system in the world, including retraining our workers for the jobs of tomorrow.

Doing everything we can to control our own energy. We’ve cut our oil imports to the lowest level in two decades because we’ve developed oil and natural gas, but we also have to develop clean energy technologies that will allow us to cut our exports in half by 2020. That’s the kind of leadership that we need to show.

And we’ve got to make sure that we reduce our deficit. Unfortunately, Governor Romney’s plan doesn’t do it. We’ve got to do it in a responsible way by cutting out spending we don’t need, but also by asking the wealthiest to pay a little bit more. That way we can invest in the research and technology that’s always kept us at the cutting edge.

Now, Governor Romney has taken a different approach throughout this campaign. Both at home and abroad, he has proposed wrong and reckless policies. He’s praised George Bush as a good economic steward and Dick Cheney as somebody who shows great wisdom and judgment. And taking us back to those kinds of strategies that got us into this mess are not the way that we are going to maintain leadership in the 21st century.

Mr. Schieffer: Governor Romney, wrong and reckless policies?

Governor Romney:

I’ve got the policy for a future, an agenda for the future. And when it comes to our economy here at home, I know what it takes to create 12 million new jobs and rising take-home pay. And what we’ve seen over the last four years is something I don’t want to see over the next four years.

The President said by now we’d be at 5.4 percent unemployment. We’re 9 million jobs short of that. I will get America working again and see rising take-home pay again, and I’ll do it with five simple steps.

Number one, we are going to have North American energy independence. We’re going to do it by taking full advantage of oil, coal, gas, nuclear, and our renewables. Number two, we’re going to increase our trade. Trade grows about 12 percent per year. It doubles about every five or so years. We can do better than that, particularly in Latin America.

The opportunities for us in Latin America we have just not taken advantage of fully. As a matter of fact, Latin America’s economy is almost as big as the economy of China. We’re all focused on China. Latin America is a huge opportunity for us -- time zone, language opportunities.

Number three, we’re going to have to have training programs that work for our workers and schools that finally put the parents and the teachers and the kids first, and the teachers unions are going to have to go behind.

And then we’re going to have to get to a balanced budget. We can’t expect entrepreneurs and businesses, large and small, to take their life savings or their company’s money and invest in America if they think we’re headed to the road to Greece. And that’s where we’re going right now unless we finally get off this spending and borrowing binge. And I’ll get us on track to a balanced budget.

And finally, number five, we’ve got to champion small business. Small businesses are where jobs come from. Two-thirds of our jobs come from small businesses. New business formation is down at the lowest level in 30 years under this administration. I want to bring it back and get back good jobs and rising take-home pay.

President Obama: Well, let’s talk about what we need to compete. First of all, Governor Romney talks about small businesses, but, Governor, when you were in Massachusetts, small businesses development ranked about 48th, I think, out of 50 states in Massachusetts because the policies that you’re promoting actually don’t help small businesses. And the way you define small businesses include folks at the very top -- they include you and me. That’s not the kind of small business promotion we need.

But let’s take an example that we know is going to make a difference in the 21st century, and that’s our education policy. We didn’t have a lot of chance to talk about this in the last debate. Under my leadership, what we’ve done is reformed education, working with governors -- 46 states. We’ve seen progress and gains in schools that were having a terrible time, and they’re starting to finally make progress. And what I now want to do is to hire more teachers, especially in math and science, because we know that we’ve fallen behind when it comes to math and science. And those teachers can make a difference.

Now, Governor Romney, when you were asked by teachers whether or not this would help the economy grow, you said this isn’t going to help the economy grow. When you were asked about reduced class sizes, you said class sizes don’t make a difference. But I tell you, if you talk to teachers, they will tell you it does make a difference. And if we’ve got math teachers who are able to provide the kind of support that they need for our kids, that’s what’s going to determine whether or not the new businesses are created here. Companies are going to locate here depending on whether we’ve got the most highly skilled workforce.

And the kinds of budget proposals that you’ve put forward, when we don’t ask either you or me to pay a dime more in terms of reducing the deficit, but instead we slash support for education, that’s undermining our long-term competitiveness. That is not good for America’s position in the world -- and the world notices.

Mr. Schieffer: Let me get back to foreign policy.

Governor Romney:

Well, look --

Mr. Schieffer: Can I just get back to --

Governor Romney:

Well, I need to speak a moment if you’ll let me, Bob --

Mr. Schieffer:: Okay.

Governor Romney:

-- just about education, because I’m so proud of the state that I had the chance to be governor of. We have, every two years, tests that look at how well our kids are doing. Fourth-graders and eighth-graders are tested in English and math. While I was governor, I was proud that our fourth-graders came out number one of all 50 states in English and then also in math, and our eighth-graders number one in English and also in math. First time one state had been number one in all four measures.

How did we do that? Well, Republicans and Democrats came together on a bipartisan basis to put in place education principles that focused on having great teachers in the classroom, and that was --

President Obama: Ten years earlier, Governor.

Governor Romney:

-- and that was what allowed us to become the number-one state in the nation.

President Obama: But that was 10 years before you took office.

Governor Romney:

And this is -- and we were --

Mr. Schieffer: Gentlemen.

Governor Romney:

Absolutely --

President Obama: And then you cut education spending when you came into office.

Governor Romney:

The first -- and we kept our schools number one in the nation. They’re still number one today.

Mr. Schieffer: All right.

Governor Romney:

And the principles that we put in place -- we also gave kids not just a graduation exam that determined whether they were up to the skills needed to be able to compete, but also if they graduated in the top quarter of their class they got a four-year, tuition-free ride at any Massachusetts public institution of higher learning.

President Obama: That happened before you came into office, though.

Mr. Schieffer: Governor --

Governor Romney:

That was actually mine. Actually, Mr. President, you’ve got that fact wrong.

Mr. Schieffer: Let me just -- I want to try to shift it, because we have heard some of this in the other debates. Governor, you say you want a bigger military, you want a bigger Navy. You don’t want to cut defense spending. What I want to ask you -- we’re talking about financial problems in this country -- where are you going to get the money?

Governor Romney:

Well, let’s come back and talk about the military, but all the way through. First of all, I’m going through from the very beginning -- we’re going to cut about 5 percent of the discretionary budget, excluding military. That’s number one, all right? And that’s --

Mr. Schieffer: But can you do this without driving us deeper into debt?

Governor Romney:

The good news is -- I’ll be happy to have you take a look. Come on our website; you’ll look at how we get to a balanced budget within 8 to 10 years. We do it by getting -- by reducing spending in a whole series of programs. By the way, number one I get rid of is Obamacare. There are a number of things that sound good, but, frankly, we just can’t afford them, and that one doesn’t sound good and it’s not affordable. So I get rid of that one from day one. To the extent humanly possible, we get that out. We take program after program that we don’t absolutely have to have and we get rid of them.

Number two, we take some programs that we are going to keep, like Medicaid, which is a program for the poor -- we take that health care program for the poor and we give it to the states to run because states run these programs more efficiently. As a governor, I thought, please, give me this program. I can run this more efficiently than the federal government.

Mr. Schieffer: Can he do that?

Governor Romney:

And states, by the way, are proving it. States like Arizona, Rhode Island have taken these Medicaid dollars, have shown they can run these programs more cost-effectively. And so I want to do those two things. It gets us to a balanced budget within 8 to 10 years.

President Obama: Bob --

Mr. Schieffer: Let --

Governor Romney:

Let’s get back to the military, though.

Mr. Schieffer: Well, that’s what I’m trying to find out about.

President Obama: He should have answered the first question. Look, Governor Romney has called for $5 trillion of tax cuts that he says he’s going to pay for by closing deductions. Now, the math doesn’t work, but he continues to claim that he’s going to do it. He then wants to spend another $2 trillion on military spending that our military is not asking for.

Now, keep in mind that our military spending has gone up every single year that I’ve been in office. We spend more on our military than the next 10 countries combined -- China, Russia, France, the United Kingdom, you name it -- next 10. And what I did was work with our Joint Chiefs of Staff to think about what are we going to need in the future to make sure that we are safe, and that’s the budget that we’ve put forward.

But what you can’t do is spend $2 trillion in additional military spending that the military is not asking for; $5 trillion on tax cuts. You say that you’re going to pay for it by closing loopholes and deductions without naming what those loopholes and deductions are, and then somehow you’re also going to deal with the deficit that we’ve already got. The math simply doesn’t work.

But when it comes to our military, what we have to think about is not just budgets. We’ve got think about capabilities. We need to be thinking about cybersecurity. We need to be thinking about space. That's exactly what our budget does, but it’s driven by strategy. It’s not driven by politics. It’s not driven by members of Congress and what they would like to see. It’s driven by what are we going to need to keep the American people safe. That's exactly what our budget does.

And it also then allows us to reduce our deficit, which is a significant national security concern, because we’ve got to make sure that our economy is strong at home so that we can project military power overseas.

Governor Romney:

Bob, I’m pleased that I’ve balanced budgets. I was in the world of business for 25 years. You didn't balance your budget, you went out of business. I went to the Olympics that was out of balance, and we got it on balance and made a success there. I had the chance to be governor of our state; four years in a row, Democrats and Republicans came together to balance the budget. We cut taxes 19 times, balanced our budget.

The President hasn’t balanced a budget yet. I expect to have the opportunity to do so myself. I’m going to be able to balance the budget.

Let’s talk about military spending, and that's this -- our Navy --

Mr. Schieffer: Thirty seconds.

Governor Romney:

Our Navy is old -- excuse me, our Navy is smaller now than any time since 1917. The Navy said they needed 313 ships to carry out their mission; we’re now down to 285. We’re headed down to the low 200s if we go through with sequestration. That's unacceptable to me. I want to make sure that we have the ships that are required by our Navy.

Our Air Force is older and smaller than any time since it was founded in 1947. We’ve changed for the first time since FDR -- since FDR, we had the -- we’ve always had the strategy of saying we could fight in two conflicts at once. Now we’re changing to one conflict.

Look, this, in my view, is the highest responsibility of the President of the United States, which is to maintain the safety of the American people. And I will not cut our military budget by a trillion dollars, which is the combination of the budget cuts the President has, as well as the sequestration cuts. That, in my view, is making our future less certain and less secure --

President Obama: Bob, I just need to comment on this. First of all, the sequester is not something that I proposed. It’s something that Congress has proposed. It will not happen. The budget that we’re talking about is not reducing our military spending, it’s maintaining it.

But I think Governor Romney maybe hasn’t spent enough time looking at how our military works. You mentioned the Navy, for example, and that we have fewer ships than we did in 1916. Well, Governor, we also have fewer horses and bayonets, because the nature of our military has changed. We have these things called aircraft carriers where planes land on them. We have these ships that go underwater, nuclear submarines. And so the question is not a game of Battleship where we’re counting ships; it’s what are our capabilities.

And so when I sit down with the Secretary of the Navy and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, we determine how are we going to be best able to meet all of our defense needs in a way that also keeps faith with our troops, that also makes sure that our veterans have the kind of support that they need when they come home. And that is not reflected in the kind of budget that you’re putting forward, because it just doesn’t work. And we visited the website quite a bit and it still doesn’t work.

Mr. Schieffer: A lot to cover. I’d like to move to the next segment: Red lines -- Israel and Iran. Would either of you -- and you’ll have two minutes -- and, President Obama, you have the first go at this one. Would either of you be willing to declare that an attack on Israel is an attack on the United States -- which, of course, is the same promise that we give to our close allies like Japan. And if you made such a declaration, would not that deter Iran? It’s certainly deterred the Soviet Union for a long, long time when we made that promise to our allies.

Mr. President.

President Obama: First of all, Israel is a true friend; it is our greatest ally in the region. And if Israel is attacked, America will stand with Israel. I’ve made that clear throughout my presidency.

Mr. Schieffer: So you’re saying we’ve already made that declaration?

President Obama: I will stand with Israel if they are attacked. And this is the reason why, working with Israel, we have created the strongest military and intelligence cooperation between our two countries in history. In fact, this week, we’ll be carrying out the largest military exercise with Israel in history -- this very week.

But to the issue of Iran, as long as I’m President of the United States, Iran will not get a nuclear weapon. I made that clear when I came into office. We then organized the strongest coalition and the strongest sanctions against Iran in history, and it is crippling their economy. Their currency has dropped 80 percent. Their oil production has plunged to the lowest level since they were fighting a war with Iraq 20 years ago. So their economy is in shambles.

And the reason we did this is because a nuclear Iran is a threat to our national security and it’s a threat to Israel’s national security. We cannot afford to have a nuclear arms race in the most volatile region in the world. Iran is a state sponsor of terrorism, and for them to be able to provide nuclear technology to non-state actors, that’s unacceptable. And they have said that they want to see Israel wiped off the map.

So the work that we’ve done with respect to sanctions now offers Iran a choice: They can take the diplomatic route and end their nuclear program, or they will have to face a united world and a United States President -- me -- who said we’re not going to take any options off the table.

The disagreement I have with Governor Romney is that during the course of this campaign, he’s often talked as if we should take premature military action. I think that would be a mistake, because when I’ve sent young men and women into harm’s way, I always understand that that is the last resort, not the first resort.

Mr. Schieffer: Two minutes.

Governor Romney:

Well, first of all, I want to underscore the same point the President made, which is that if I’m President of the United States -- when I’m President of the United States, we will stand with Israel. And if Israel is attacked, we have their back, not just diplomatically, not just culturally, but militarily. That’s number one.

Number two, with regards to Iran and the threat of Iran -- there’s no question but that a nuclear Iran, a nuclear-capable Iran is unacceptable to America. It presents a threat not only to our friends, but ultimately a threat to us to have Iran have nuclear material, nuclear weapons that could be used against us or used to be threatening to us.

It’s also essential for us to understand what our mission is in Iran, and that is to dissuade Iran from having a nuclear weapon through peaceful and diplomatic means. And crippling sanctions are something I called for five years ago -- when I was in Israel speaking at the Herzliya conference, I laid out seven steps. Crippling sanctions were number one and they do work. You’re seeing it right now in the economy. It’s absolutely the right thing to do to have crippling sanctions. I’d have put them in place earlier, but it’s good that we have them.

Number two, something I would add today is I would tighten those sanctions. I would say that ships that carry Iranian oil can’t come into our ports. I imagine the EU would agree with us as well. Not only ships couldn’t, I’d say companies that are moving their oil can’t; people who are trading in their oil can’t. I would tighten those sanctions further.

Secondly, I’d take on diplomatic isolation efforts. I’d make sure that Ahmadinejad is indicted under the genocide convention. His words amount to genocide in citation. I would indict him for it. I would also make sure that their diplomats are treated like the pariah they are around the world -- the same way we treated the apartheid diplomats of South Africa. We need to increase pressure time and time again on Iran because anything other than a solution to this which says -- which stops this nuclear folly of theirs is unacceptable to America.

And of course, a military action is the last resort. It is something one would only -- only consider if all of the other avenues had been tried to their full extent.

Mr. Schieffer: Let me ask both of you, there are -- as you know, there are reports that Iran and the United States as part of an international group have agreed in principle to talks about Iran’s nuclear program. What is the deal -- if there are such talks, what is the deal that you would accept?

Mr. President.

President Obama: Well, first of all, those are reports in the newspaper. They are not true. But our goal is to get Iran to recognize it needs to give up its nuclear program and abide by the U.N. resolutions that have been in place -- because they have the opportunity to reenter the community of nations. And we would welcome that.

There are people in Iran who have the same aspirations as people all around the world for a better life. And we hope that their leadership takes the right decision. But the deal we’ll accept is they end their nuclear program. It’s very straightforward.

And I’m glad that Governor Romney agrees with the steps that we’re taking. There have been times, Governor, frankly, during the course of this campaign where it sounded like you thought that you’d do the same things we did, but you’d say them louder and somehow that would make a difference. And it turns out that the work involved in setting up these crippling sanctions is painstaking. It’s meticulous.

We started from the day we got into office. And the reason it was so important -- and this is a testament to how we’ve restored American credibility and strength around the world -- is we had to make sure that all the countries participated, even countries like Russia and China, because if it’s just us that are imposing sanctions, we’ve had sanctions in place for a long time. It’s because we got everybody to agree that Iran is seeing so much pressure. And we’ve got to maintain that pressure.

There is a deal to be had, and that is that they abide by the rules that have already been established; they convince the international community they are not pursuing a nuclear program; there are inspections that are very intrusive, but over time what they can do is regain credibility.

In the meantime, though, we’re not going to let up the pressure until we have clear evidence that that takes place.

And one last thing, just to make this point -- the clock is ticking. We’re not going to allow Iran to perpetually engage in negotiations that lead nowhere. And I’ve been very clear to them. Because of the intelligence coordination that we do with a range of countries, including Israel, we have a sense of when they would get breakout capacity, which means that we would not be able to intervene in time to stop their nuclear program. And that clock is ticking.

Mr. Schieffer: All right.

President Obama: And we’re going to make sure that if they do not meet the demands of the international community, then we are going to take all options necessary to make sure they don't have a nuclear weapon.

Mr. Schieffer: Governor.

Governor Romney:

I think from the very beginning, one of the challenges we’ve had with Iran is that they have looked at this administration and felt that the administration was not as strong as it needed to be. I think they saw weakness where they had expected to find American strength.

And I say that because from the very beginning, the President, in his campaign some four years ago, said he’d meet with all the world’s worst actors in his first year. He’d sit down with Chavez and Kim Jong-il, with Castro and with President Ahmadinejad of Iran. And I think they looked and thought, well, that's an unusual honor to receive from the President of the United States.

And then the President began what I’ve called an apology tour of going to various nations in the Middle East and criticizing America. I think they looked at that and saw weakness. Then when there were dissidents in the streets of Tehran, a Green Revolution, holding signs saying, is America with us, the President was silent. I think they noticed that as well. And I think that when the President said he was going to create daylight between ourselves and Israel, that they noticed that as well.

All of these things suggested, I think, to the Iranian mullahs that, hey, we can keep on pushing along here, we can keep talks going on, we’re just going to keep on spinning centrifuges. Now there are some 10,000 centrifuges spinning uranium, preparing to create a nuclear threat to the United States and to the world. That’s unacceptable for us.

And it’s essential for a President to show strength from the very beginning, to make it very clear what is acceptable and not acceptable. And an Iranian nuclear program is not acceptable to us. They must not develop nuclear capability. And the way to make sure they understand that is by having from the very beginning the tightest sanctions possible. They need to be tightened. Our diplomatic isolation needs to be tougher. We need to indict Ahmadinejad. We need to put the pressure on them as hard as we possibly can, because if we do that, we won’t have to take the military action.

President Obama: Bob, let me just respond. Nothing Governor Romney just said is true, starting with this notion of me apologizing. This has been probably the biggest whopper that’s been told during the course of this campaign. And every fact-checker and every reporter who’s looked at it, Governor, has said this is not true.

And when it comes to tightening sanctions, look, as I said before, we’ve put in the toughest, most crippling sanctions ever. And the fact is, while we were coordinating an international coalition to make sure these sanctions were effective, you were still invested in a Chinese state oil company that was doing business with the Iranian oil sector. So I’ll let the American people decide, judge who is going to be more effective and more credible when it comes to imposing crippling sanctions.

And with respect to our attitude about the Iranian Revolution, I was very clear about the murderous activities that had taken place and that was contrary to international law and everything that civilized people stand for. And so the strength that we have shown in Iran is shown by the fact that we’ve been able to mobilize the world.

When I came into office, the world was divided; Iran was resurgent. Iran is at its weakest point economically, strategically, militarily, than in many years. And we are going to continue to keep the pressure on to make sure that they do not get a nuclear weapon. That’s in America’s national interest, and that will be the case so long as I’m President.

Governor Romney:

We’re four years closer to a nuclear Iran. We’re four years closer to a nuclear Iran. And we should not have wasted these four years to the extent they’ve continued to be able to spin these centrifuges and get that much closer. That’s number one.

Number two, Mr. President, the reason I call it an apology tour is because you went to the Middle East and you flew to Egypt and to Saudi Arabia and to Turkey and Iraq, and -- and, by the way, you skipped Israel, our closest friend in the region, but you went to the other nations. And, by the way, they noticed that you skipped Israel. And then in those nations, and on Arabic TV, you said that America had been dismissive and derisive. You said that on occasion America has dictated to other nations. Mr. President, America has not dictated to other nations. We have freed other nations from dictator.

President Obama: Bob, let me respond. If we’re going to talk about trips that we’ve taken -- when I was a candidate for office, the first trip I took was to visit our troops. And when I went to Israel as a candidate, I didn’t take donors, I didn’t attend fundraisers. I went to Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum there, to remind myself the nature of evil and why our bond with Israel will be unbreakable.

And then I went down to the border town of Sderot, which had experienced missiles raining down from Hamas. And I saw families there who showed me where missiles had come down near their children’s bedrooms, and I was reminded of what that would mean if those were my kids -- which is why, as President, we funded an Iron Dome program to stop those missiles. So that’s how I’ve used my travels, when I traveled to Israel and when I traveled to the region.

And the central question at this point is going to be who’s going to be credible to all parties involved. And they can look at my track record -- whether it’s Iran’s sanctions, whether it’s dealing with counterterrorism, whether it’s supporting democracy, whether it’s supporting women’s rights, whether it’s supporting religious minorities -- and they can say that the President of the United States and the United States of America has stood on the right side of history. And that kind of credibility is precisely why we’ve been able to show leadership on a wide range of issues facing the world right now.

Mr. Schieffer: What if the Prime Minister of Israel called you on the phone and said, “Our bombers are on the way. We’re going to bomb Iran” -- what do you say?

Governor Romney:

Bob, let’s not go into hypotheticals of that nature. Our relationship with Israel, my relationship with the Prime Minister of Israel is such that we would not get a call saying our bombers are on the way or their fighters are on the way. This is the kind of thing that would have been discussed and thoroughly evaluated well before that kind of last minute --

Mr. Schieffer: So you’re saying --

Governor Romney:

I’m just saying that’s just not --

Mr. Schieffer: Okay, well, let’s see what --

Governor Romney:

Let’s come back to what the President was speaking about, which is what’s happening in the world, and the President’s statement that things are going so well. Look, I look at what’s happening around the world and I see Iran four years closer to a bomb. I see the Middle East with a rising tide of violence, chaos, tumult. I see jihadists continuing to spread -- whether they’re rising or just about the same level, hard to precisely measure but it’s clear they’re there. They’re very strong. I see Syria with 30,000 civilians dead. Assad is still in power. I see our trade deficit with China larger than it’s -- growing larger every year, as a matter of fact. I look around the world and I don’t feel that -- you see North Korea continuing to export their nuclear technology. Russia has said they’re not going to follow Nunn-Lugar anymore. They’re -- back away from a nuclear proliferation treaty that we had with them.

I look around the world -- I don’t see our influence growing around the world. I see our influence receding -- in part because of the failure of the President to deal with our economic challenges at home; in part because of our withdrawal from our commitment to our military in the way I think it ought to be; in part because of the turmoil with Israel. I mean, the President received a letter from 38 Democrat senators saying that tensions with Israel were a real problem. They asked him, please repair the tension -- Democrat senators -- please repair the damage in his own party.

President Obama: All right, Governor, the problem is, is that on a whole range of issues -- whether it’s the Middle East, whether it’s Afghanistan, whether it’s Iraq, whether it’s now Iran -- you’ve been all over the map. I mean, I’m pleased that you now are endorsing our policy of applying diplomatic pressure and potentially having bilateral discussions with the Iranians to end their nuclear program.

But just a few years ago, you said that’s something you’d never do. In the same way that you initially opposed a timetable in Afghanistan; now you’re for it, although it depends. In the same way that you say you would have ended the war in Iraq, but recently gave a speech saying that we should have 20,000 more folks in there. The same way that you said that it was mission creep to go after Qaddafi.

When it comes to going after Osama bin Laden, you said, well, any President would make that call. But when you were a candidate in 2008 -- as I was -- and I said if I got bin Laden in our sights, I would take that shot, you said we shouldn’t move heaven and earth to get one man. You said we should ask Pakistan for permission. And if we had asked Pakistan for permission, we would not have gotten it [him]. And it was worth moving heaven and earth to get him

After we killed bin Laden, I was at Ground Zero for a memorial and talked to a young woman who was four years old when 9/11 happened. And the last conversation she had with her father was him calling from the Twin Towers, saying, “Peyton, I love you, and I will always watch over you.” And for the next decade she was haunted by that conversation. And she said to me, “By finally getting bin Laden, that brought some closure to me.” And when we do things like that, when we bring those who have harmed us to justice, that sends a message to the world, and it tells Peyton that we did not forget her father.

Mr. Schieffer: All right.

President Obama: And I make that point because that’s the kind of clarity of leadership -- and those decisions are not always popular. Those decisions generally are not poll-tested. And even some in my own party, including my current Vice President, had the same critique as you did. But what the American people understand is, is that I look at what we need to get done to keep the American people safe and to move our interests forward, and I make those decisions.

Mr. Schieffer: All right, let’s go and that leads us -- this takes us right to the next segment, Governor, America’s longest war, Afghanistan and Pakistan --

Governor Romney:

Bob --

Mr. Schieffer: Governor, you get to go first here.

Governor Romney:

You can’t -- okay, but you can’t have the President just lay out a whole series of items without giving me a chance to respond.

Mr. Schieffer: Well, with respect, sir, you had laid out quite a program there.

Governor Romney:

Well, that's probably true.

Mr. Schieffer: And we’ll give you -- we’ll give you --

President Obama: We’ll agree --

Mr. Schieffer: We’ll catch up. The United States is scheduled to turn over responsibility for security in Afghanistan to the Afghan government in 2014. At that point we will withdraw our combat troops, leave a smaller force of Americans -- if I understand our policy -- in Afghanistan for training purposes. It seems to me the key question here is what do you do if the deadline arrives and it is obvious the Afghans are unable to handle their security? Do we still leave? And I believe, Governor Romney, you go first.

Governor Romney:

Well, we’re going to be finished by 2014. And when I’m President, we’ll make sure we bring our troops out by the end of 2014. The commanders and the generals there are on track to do so. We’ve seen progress over the last several years. The surge has been successful, and the training program is proceeding apace. There are a large number of Afghan security forces -- 350,000 -- that are ready to step in to provide security, and we’re going to be able to make that transition by the end of 2014. So our troops will come home at that point.

I can tell you at the same time that we will make sure that we look at what’s happening in Pakistan and recognize that what’s happening in Pakistan is going to have a major impact on the success in Afghanistan. And I say that because I know a lot of people just feel like we should brush our hands and walk away -- and I don't mean you, Mr. President -- but some people in our nation feel that Pakistan isn’t being nice to us and that we should just walk away from them.

Pakistan is important to the region, to the world, and to us, because Pakistan has a hundred nuclear warheads, and they're rushing to build a lot more. They’ll have more than Great Britain sometime in the relatively near future. They also have the Haqqani Network and the Taliban existent within their country.

And so a Pakistan that falls apart, becomes a failed state, would be of extraordinary danger to Afghanistan and to us. And so we’re going to have to remain helpful in encouraging Pakistan to move towards a more stable government and rebuild a relationship with us. And that means that our aid that we provide to Pakistan is going to have to be conditioned upon certain benchmarks being met. So for me, I look at this as both a need to help move Pakistan in the right direction and also to get Afghanistan to be ready, and they will be ready by the end of 2014.

Mr. Schieffer: Mr. President.

President Obama: When I came into office, we were still bogged down in Iraq, and Afghanistan had been drifting for a decade. We ended the war in Iraq, refocused our attention on Afghanistan. And we did deliver a surge of troops. That was facilitated in part because we had ended the war in Iraq. And we are now in a position where we have met many of the objectives that got us there in the first place.

Part of what had happened is we had forgotten why we had gone. We went because there were people who were responsible for 3,000 American deaths. And so we decimated al Qaeda’s core leadership in the border regions between Afghanistan and Pakistan. We then started to build up Afghan forces, and we're now in a position where we can transition out, because there’s no reason why Americans should die when Afghans are perfectly capable of defending their own country.

That transition has to take place in a responsible fashion. We’ve been there a long time, but we’ve got to make sure that we and our coalition partners are pulling out responsibly and giving Afghans the capabilities that they need.

But what I think the American people recognize is after a decade of war, it’s time to do some nation-building here at home. And what we can now do is free up some resources to, for example, put Americans back to work -- especially our veterans -- rebuilding our roads, our bridges, our schools; making sure that our veterans are getting the care that they need when it comes to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury; making sure that the certifications that they need for good jobs of the future are in place.

I was having lunch with some -- a veteran in Minnesota who had been a medic dealing with the most extreme circumstances. When he came home and he wanted to become a nurse, he had to start from scratch. And what we’ve said is let’s change those certifications. The First Lady has done great work with an organization called Joining Forces, putting our veterans back to work. And as a consequence, veterans’ unemployment is actually now lower than the general population; it was higher when I came into office.

So those are the kinds of things that we can now do because we’re making that transition in Afghanistan.

Mr. Schieffer: All right, let me go to Governor Romney, because you talked about Pakistan and what needs to be done there. General Allen, our commander in Afghanistan, says that Americans continue to die at the hands of groups who are supported by Pakistan. We know that Pakistan has arrested the doctor who helped us catch Obama [sic] -- bin Laden. It still provides safe haven for terrorists. Yet we continue to give Pakistan billions of dollars. Is it time for us to divorce Pakistan?

Governor Romney:

No, it’s not time to divorce a nation on Earth that has 100 nuclear weapons and is on the way to double that at some point; a nation that has serious threats from terrorist groups within its nation -- as I indicated before, the Taliban, the Haqqani Network. It’s a nation that’s not like others and it does not have a civilian leadership that is calling the shots there. You’ve got the ISI, their intelligence organization, that’s probably the most powerful of three branches there. Then you have the military and then you have the civilian government.

This is a nation which, if it falls apart, if it becomes a failed state, there are nuclear weapons there, and you’ve got terrorists there who could grab their hands onto those nuclear weapons. This is an important part of the world for us. Pakistan is technically an ally, and they’re not acting very much like an ally right now, but we have some work to do.

And I don’t blame the administration for the fact that the relationship with Pakistan is strained. We had to go into Pakistan. We had to go in there to get Osama bin Laden. That was the right thing to do. And that upset them, but there was obviously a great deal of anger even before that. But we’re going to have to work with the people in Pakistan to try and help them move to a more responsible course than the one that they’re on.

It’s important for them. It’s important for the nuclear weapons. It’s important for the success of Afghanistan, because inside Pakistan you have a large -- Pashtuns that are Taliban. They’re going to come rushing back in to Afghanistan when we go, and that’s one of the reasons the Afghan security forces have so much work to do to be able to fight against that.

But it’s important for us to recognize that we can’t just walk away from Pakistan. But we do need to make sure that as we send support for them, that this is tied to them making progress on matters that would lead them to becoming a civil society.

Mr. Schieffer: Let me ask you, Governor -- because we know President Obama’s position on this -- what is your position on the use of drones?

Governor Romney:

Well, I believe that we should use any and all means necessary to take out people who pose a threat to us and our friends around the world. And it’s widely reported that drones are being used in drone strikes, and I support that entirely, and feel the President was right to up the usage of that technology, and believe that we should continue to use it to continue to go after the people who represent a threat to this nation and to our friends.

Let me also note that, as I said earlier, we’re going to have to do more than just going after leaders and killing bad guys, important as that is. We’re also going to have to have a far more effective and comprehensive strategy to help move the world away from terror and Islamic extremism. We haven’t done that yet.

We talk a lot about these things, but you look at the record -- you look at the record of the last four years and say, is Iran closer to a bomb? Yes. Is the Middle East in tumult? Yes. Is al Qaeda on the run, on its heels? No. Are Israel and the Palestinians closer to reaching a peace agreement? No, they haven’t had talks in two years. We have not seen the progress we need to have. And I’m convinced that with strong leadership and an effort to build a strategy based upon helping these nations reject extremism, we can see the kind of peace and prosperity the world demands.

President Obama: Well, keep in mind, our strategy wasn’t just going after bin Laden. We’ve created partnerships throughout the region to deal with extremism -- in Somalia, in Yemen, in Pakistan. And what we’ve also done is engage these governments in the kind of reforms that are actually going to make a difference in people’s lives day to day -- to make sure that their governments aren’t corrupt; to make sure that they are treating women with the kind of respect and dignity that every nation that succeeds has shown; and to make sure that they’ve got a free market system that works. So across the board, we are engaging them in building capacity in these countries, and we’ve stood on the side of democracy.

One thing I think Americans should be proud of -- when Tunisians began to protest, this nation -- me, my administration -- stood with them earlier than just about any other country. In Egypt, we stood on the side of democracy. In Libya, we stood on the side of the people. And as a consequence, there’s no doubt that attitudes about Americans have changed.

But there are always going to be elements in these countries that potentially threaten the United States, and we want to shrink those groups and those networks, and we can do that. But we’re always also going to have to maintain vigilance when it comes to terrorist activities. The truth, though, is that al Qaeda is much weaker than it was when I came into office, and they don’t have the same capacities to attack the U.S. homeland and our allies as they did four years ago.

Mr. Schieffer: Let’s go to the next segment, because it’s a very important one. It is the rise of China and future challenges for America. I want to just begin this by asking both of you -- and, Mr. President, you go first this time -- what do you believe is the greatest future threat to the national security of this country?

President Obama: Well, I think it will continue to be terrorist networks. We have to remain vigilant, as I just said. But with respect to China, China is both an adversary but also a potential partner in the international community if it’s following the rules. So my attitude coming into office was that we are going to insist that China plays by the same rules as everybody else.

Now, I know Americans had seen jobs being shipped overseas, businesses and workers not getting a level playing field when it came to trade. And that’s the reason why I set up a trade task force to go after cheaters when it came to international trade. That’s the reason why we have brought more cases against China for violating trade rules than the other -- the previous administration had done in two terms. And we’ve won just about every case that we filed, that has been decided.

In fact, just recently, steel workers in Ohio and throughout the Midwest, Pennsylvania, are in a position now to sell steel to China because we won that case. We had a tire case in which they were flooding us with cheap domestic tires -- or cheap Chinese tires -- and we put a stop to it and, as a consequence, saved jobs throughout America.

I have to say that Governor Romney criticized me for being too tough in that tire case; said this wouldn’t be good for American workers and that it would protectionist. But I tell you, those workers don’t feel that way. They feel as if they had finally an administration who was going to take this issue seriously.

Over the long term, in order for us to compete with China, we’ve also got to make sure, though, that we’re taking care of business here at home. If we don’t have the best education system in the world, if we don't continue to put money into research and technology that will allow us to create great businesses here in the United States, that’s how we lose the competition. And unfortunately, Governor Romney’s budget and his proposals would not allow us to make those investments.

Mr. Schieffer: All right. Governor.

Governor Romney:

Well, first of all, it’s not government that makes business successful. It’s not government investments that make businesses grow and hire people. Let me also note that the greatest threat that the world faces, the greatest national security threat is a nuclear Iran.

Let’s talk about China. China has an interest that’s very much like ours in one respect, and that is they want a stable world. They don’t want war. They don’t want to see protectionism. They don’t want to see the world break out into various form of chaos, because they have to manufacture goods and put people to work. They have about 20,000 -- 20 million, rather, people coming out of the farms every year, coming into the cities, needing jobs. So they want the economy to work and the world to be free and open. And so we can be a partner with China. We don’t have to be an adversary in any way, shape, or form. We can work with them. We can collaborate with them if they're willing to be responsible.

Now, they look at us and say, is it a good idea to be with America? How strong are we going to be? How strong is our economy? They look at the fact that we owe them a trillion dollars and owe other people $16 trillion in total, including them. They look at our decision to cut back on our military capabilities -- a trillion dollars. The Secretary of Defense called these trillion dollars of cuts to our military devastating. It’s not my term. It’s the President’s own Secretary of Defense called them devastating. They look at America’s commitments around the world and they see what’s happening, and they say, well, okay, is America going to be strong? And the answer is, yes, if I’m President, America will be very strong.

We’ll also make sure that we have trade relations with China that work for us. I’ve watched year in and year out as companies have shut down and people have lost their jobs because China has not played by the same rules, in part by holding down artificially the value of their currency; it holds down the prices of their goods. It means our goods aren’t as competitive, and we lose jobs. That's got to end. They're making some progress. They need to make more. That's why on day one I will label them a currency manipulator, which allows us to apply tariffs where they're taking jobs.

They're stealing our intellectual property, our patents, our designs, our technology, hacking into our computers, counterfeiting our goods. They have to understand we want to trade with them, we want a world that's stable, we like free enterprise, but you’ve got to play by the rules.

Mr. Schieffer: Well, Governor, let me just ask you, if you declare them a currency manipulator on day one, some people say you’re just going to start a trade war with China on day one. Is that -- isn’t there a risk that that could happen?

Governor Romney:

Well, they sell us about this much stuff every year, and we sell them about this much stuff every year. So it’s pretty clear who doesn't want a trade war. And there’s one going on right now which we don't know about -- it’s a silent one, and they're winning. We have enormous trade imbalance with China. And it’s worse this year than last year. And it’s worst last year than the year before.

And so we have to understand that we can't just surrender and lose jobs year in and year out. We have to say to our friends in China, look, you guys are playing aggressively, we understand it, but this can't keep on going. You can't keep on holding down the value of your currency, stealing our intellectual property, counterfeiting our products, selling them around the world -- even into the United States.

I was with one company that makes valves in process industries. And they said, look, we were having some valves coming in that were broken and we had to repair them under warranty. And we looked them up, and they had our serial number on them, and then we noticed that there was more than one with that same serial number. There were counterfeit products being made overseas with the same serial number as a U.S. company, the same packaging. These were being sold into our market and around the world as if they were made by the U.S. competitor. This can't go on. I want a great relationship with China. China can be our partner, but that doesn't mean they can just roll all over us and steal our jobs on an unfair basis.

President Obama: Well, Governor Romney is right, you are familiar with jobs being shipped overseas because you invested in companies that were shipping jobs overseas. And that's your right. I mean, that's how our free market works. But I’ve made a different bet on American workers.

If we had taken your advice, Governor Romney, about our auto industry, we’d be buying cars from China instead of selling cars to China. If we take your advice with respect to how we change our tax code so that companies that are in profits overseas don’t pay U.S. taxes compared to companies here that are paying taxes, that’s estimated to create 800,000 jobs. The problem is they won’t be here; they’ll be in places like China.

And if we’re not making investments in education and basic research, which is not something that the private sector is doing at a sufficient pace right now and has never done, then we will lose the lead in things like clean energy technology.

Now, with respect to what we’ve done with China already, U.S. exports have doubled since I came into office to China. And, actually, currencies are at their most advantageous point for U.S. exporters since 1993. We absolutely have to make more progress, and that’s why we’re going to keep on pressing.

And when it comes to our military and Chinese security, part of the reason that we were able to pivot to the Asia Pacific region after having ended the war in Iraq and transitioning out of Afghanistan is precisely because this is going to be a massive growth area in the future.

And we believe China can be a partner, but we’re also sending a very clear signal that America is a Pacific power, that we are going to have a presence there. We are working with countries in the region to make sure, for example, that ships can pass through, that commerce continues. And we’re organizing trade relations with countries other than China so that China starts feeling more pressure about meeting basic international standards. That’s the kind of leadership we’ve shown in the region. That’s the kind of leadership that we’ll continue to show.

Governor Romney:

I just want to take one of those points. Again, attacking me is not talking about an agenda for getting more trade and opening up more jobs in this country. But the President mentioned the auto industry and that somehow I would be in favor of jobs being elsewhere. Nothing could be further from the truth. I’m a son of Detroit. I was born in Detroit. My dad was head of a car company. I like American cars, and I would do nothing to hurt the U.S. auto industry.

My plan to get the industry on its feet when it was in real trouble was not to start writing checks. It was President Bush that wrote the first checks. I disagreed with that. I said they need -- these companies need to go through a managed bankruptcy. And in that process, they can get government help and government guarantees, but they need to go through bankruptcy to get rid of excess cost and the debt burden that they’d built up. And fortunately, the President --

President Obama: Governor Romney, that’s not what you said.

Governor Romney:

Fortunately, the President -- you can take a look at the op-ed. You can take a look at the op-ed.

President Obama: Governor Romney, you did not say that you would provide governor help.

Governor Romney:

You know, I’m still speaking. I said that we would provide guarantees, and that was what was able to allow these companies to go through bankruptcy, to come out of bankruptcy. Under no circumstances would I do anything other than to help this industry get on its feet. And the idea that has been suggested, that I would liquidate the industry -- of course not, of course not.

President Obama: Let’s check the record.

Governor Romney:

That’s the height of silliness. I have never said I would --

President Obama: Let’s check the record.

Governor Romney:

-- liquidate the industry. I want to keep the industry going and thriving.

President Obama: Governor, the people of Detroit don’t forget.

Governor Romney:

And that’s why I have the kind of commitment to make sure that our industries in this country can compete and be successful. We in this country can compete successfully with anyone in the world, and we’re going to. We’re going to have to have a President, however, that doesn’t think that somehow the government investing in car companies like Tessella and Fisker, making electric battery cars -- this is not research, Mr. President. These are the government investing in companies, investing in Solyndra. This is a company -- this isn’t basic research. I want to invest in research. Research is great. Providing funding to universities and think tanks -- great. But investing in companies -- absolutely not. That’s the wrong way to go.

President Obama: Governor, the fact of the matter is --

Governor Romney:

I’m still speaking. So I want to make sure that we make America more competitive and that we do those things that make America the most attractive place in the world for entrepreneurs, innovators, businesses to grow. But your investing in companies doesn’t do that. In fact, it makes it less likely for them to come here, because the private sector is not going to invest in a solar company --

President Obama: Governor, I’m happy to respond. You’ve held the floor for a while.

Governor Romney:

-- if you’re investing government money in someone else’s.

President Obama: Look, I think anybody out there can check the record. Governor Romney, you keep on trying to airbrush history here. You were very clear that you would not provide government assistance to the U.S. auto companies even if they went through bankruptcy. You said that they could get it in the private marketplace. That wasn’t true. They would have gone through --

Governor Romney:

You’re wrong. You’re wrong, Mr. President.

President Obama: No, I am not wrong.

Governor Romney:

You’re wrong.

President Obama: I am not wrong.

Governor Romney:

People can look it up -- you’re right.

President Obama: People will look it up.

Governor Romney:

Good.

President Obama: But more importantly, it is true that in order for us to be competitive, we’re going to have to make some smart choices right now. Cutting our education budget -- that’s not a smart choice. That will not help us compete with China. Cutting our investments in research and technology -- that’s not a smart choice. That will not help us compete with China. Bringing down our deficit by adding $7 trillion of tax cuts and military spending that our military is not asking for, before we even get to the debt that we currently have -- that is not going to make us more competitive.

Those are the kinds of choices that the American people face right now. Having a tax code that rewards companies that are shipping jobs overseas instead of companies that are investing here in the United States -- that will not make us more competitive. And the one thing that I’m absolutely clear about is that after a decade in which we saw a drift, jobs being shipped overseas, nobody championing American workers and American businesses, we’ve now begun to make some real progress. What we can’t do is go back to the same policies that got us into such difficulty in the first place. And that’s why we have to move forward and not go back.

Governor Romney:

I couldn’t agree more about going forward, but I certainly don’t want to go back to the policies of the last four years. The policies of the last four years has seen incomes in America decline every year for middle-income families, now down $4,300 during your term. Twenty-three million Americans still struggling to find a good job.

When you came to office, 32 million people on food stamps; today, 47 million people on food stamps. When you came to office, just over $10 trillion in debt; now $16 trillion in debt. It hasn’t worked. You said by now we’d be at 5.4 percent unemployment. We’re 9 million jobs short of that. I’ve met some of those people. I met them in Appleton, Wisconsin. I met a young woman in Philadelphia who’s coming out of college, can't find work. Ann was with someone just the other day that was just weeping about not being able to get work. It’s just a tragedy in a nation so prosperous as ours that these last four years have been so hard.

And that's why it’s so critical that we make America once again the most attractive place in the world to start businesses, to build jobs, to grow the economy. And that's not going to happen by just hiring teachers.

Look, I’d love to -- I love teachers, and I’m happy to have states and communities that want to hire teachers do that. By the way, I don't like to have the federal government start pushing its way deeper and deeper into our schools; let the states and localities do that. I was a governor -- the federal government didn't hire our teachers.

Mr. Schieffer: Governor.

Governor Romney:

But I love teachers, but I want to get our private sector growing, and I know how to do it.

Mr. Schieffer: I think we all love teachers.

Gentlemen, thank you so much for a very vigorous debate. We have come to the end. It is time for closing statements. I believe you’re first, Mr. President.

President Obama: Well, thank you very much, Bob, Governor Romney, and to Lynn University.

You’ve now heard three debates, months of campaigning and way too many TV commercials. And now you’ve got a choice. Over the last four years, we’ve made real progress digging our way out of policies that gave us two prolonged wars, record deficits, and the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.

And Governor Romney wants to take us back to those policies -- a foreign policy that's wrong and reckless; economic policies that won’t create jobs, won't reduce our deficit, but will make sure that folks at the very top don't have to play by the same rules that you do. And I’ve got a different vision for America.

I want to build on our strengths. And I’ve put forward a plan to make sure that we’re bringing manufacturing jobs back to our shores by rewarding companies and small businesses that are investing here, not overseas. I want to make sure we’ve got the best education system in the world, and we’re retaining our workers for the jobs of tomorrow.

I want to control our own energy by developing oil and natural gas, but also the energy sources of the future. Yes, I want to reduce our deficit by cutting spending that we don't need, but also by asking the wealthy to do a little bit more so that we can invest in things like research and technology that are the key to a 21st-century economy.

As Commander-in-Chief, I will maintain the strongest military in the world, keep faith with our troops, and go after those who would do us harm. But after a decade of war, I think we all recognize we’ve got to do some nation-building here at home rebuilding our roads, our bridges, and especially caring for our veterans who sacrificed so much for our freedom.

We’ve been through tough times, but we always bounce back because of our character, because we pull together. And if I have the privilege of being your President for another four years, I promise you I will always listen to your voices, I will fight for your families, and I will work every single day to make sure that America continues to be the greatest nation on Earth. Thank you.

Mr. Schieffer: Governor.

Governor Romney:

Thank you. Bob, Mr. President, folks at Lynn University, good to be with you. I’m optimistic about the future. I’m excited about our prospects as a nation. I want to see peace. I want to see growing peace in this country. It’s our objective. We have an opportunity to have real leadership. America is going to have that kind of leadership and continue to promote principles of peace that will make the world a safer place, and make people in this country more confident that their future is secure.

I also to want to make sure that we get this economy going. And there are two very different paths the country can take. One is a path represented by the President, which, at the end of four years, would mean we’d have $20 trillion in debt, heading towards Greece. I’ll get us on track to a balanced budget.

The President’s path will mean continuing declining in take-home pay. I want to make sure our take-home pay turns around and starts to grow. The President’s path means 20 million people out of work, struggling for a good job. I’ll get people back to work with 12 million new jobs.

I’m going to make sure that we get people off of food stamps, not by cutting the program, but by getting them good jobs. America is going to come back, and for that to happen, we’re going to have to have a President who can work across the aisle.

I was in a state where my legislature was 87 percent Democrat. I learned how to get along on the other side of the aisle. We’ve got to do that in Washington. Washington is broken. I know what it takes to get this country back, and we’ll work with good Democrats and good Republicans to do that.

This nation is the hope of the Earth. We’ve been blessed by having a nation that’s free and prosperous thanks to the contributions of the Greatest Generation. They’ve held a torch for the world to see, a torch of freedom and hope and opportunity. Now it’s our turn to take that torch. I’m convinced we’ll do it.

We need strong leadership. I’d like to be that leader with your support. I’ll work with you. I’ll lead you in an open and honest way. And I ask for your vote. I’d like to be the next President of the United States to support and help this great nation, and to make sure that we all together maintain America as the hope of the Earth. Thank you so much.

Mr. Schieffer: Gentlemen, thank you both so much. That brings an end to this year’s debates. And we want to thank Lynn University and its students for having us. As I always do at the end of these debates, I leave you with the words of my mom, who said, go vote. It makes you feel big and strong. Good night.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address on Hurricane Sandy After ERT Briefings

Hello, everybody. I just received a full briefing from our emergency response teams, including FEMA, and agencies that are going to be helpful in the response and recovery efforts -- the Department of Energy, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of Health and Human Services.

Obviously, everybody is aware at this point that this is going to be a big and powerful storm. And all across the Eastern seaboard, I think everybody is taking the appropriate preparations. I’ve spoken to all the governors in all these states. They have issues emergency declarations. Those have been turned around quickly here in the White House. We have prepositioned assets so that FEMA personnel are working closely with state and local governments. We’re making sure that food and water and emergency generation is available for those communities that are going to be hardest hit. We anticipate that the center of the storm is going to land fall sometime this evening. But because of the nature of this storm, we are certain that this is going to be a slow-moving process through a wide swath of the country, and millions of people are going to be affected.

So the most important message that I have for the public right now is, please listen to what your state and local officials are saying. When they tell you to evacuate, you need to evacuate. Do not delay. Don’t pause; don’t question the instructions that are being given, because this is a serious storm and it could potentially have fatal consequence if people haven’t acted quickly.

The good news is, is that the governors and local officials I think have had a few days of preparation. There's been extraordinarily close coordination between state, federal, and local governments. And so we’re confident that the assets are prepositioned for an effective response in the aftermath of the storm.

But keep in mind that for folks who are not following instructions, if you are not evacuating when you’ve been asked to evacuate, you’re putting first responders at danger. We’re going to have to have search-and-rescue teams in and around multiple states all at the same time. And although we’ve got Coast Guard and the Department of Defense all positioned, if the public is not following instructions, that makes it more dangerous for people and it means that we could have fatalities that could have been avoided. Transportation is going to be tied up for a long time. And probably the most significant impact for a lot of people, in addition to flooding, is going to be getting power back on. We anticipate that there are going to be a lot of trees down, a lot of water. And despite the fact that the power companies are working very closely with their various state officials and local officials to make sure that they are bringing in as many assets as possible and getting those ready in preparation for the storm, the fact is that a lot of these emergency crews are not going to be able to get into position to start restoring power until some of these winds have died down. And because of the nature of this storm, that may take several days. So the public should anticipate that there’s going to be a lot of power outages, and it may take time for that power to get back on. The same is true with transportation; there are going to be a lot of backlogs, and even after the storm has cleared, it’s going to take a considerable amount of time for airlines, subways, trains, and so forth, potentially to get back on schedule, depending on the amount of damage that has occurred.

Let me summarize just by saying that I’m extraordinarily grateful for the cooperation of our state and local officials. The conversations that I’ve had with all the governors indicate that at this point there are no unmet needs. I think everybody is taking this very seriously. We’ve gotten prepositioned all the resources that we need.

But right now, the key is to make sure that the public is following instructions. For those of you who still need additional information about how to respond, you can go to Ready.gov -- that’s Ready.gov. And that website should provide you with all the information that your family needs in terms of how you can prepare for this storm.

Our thoughts and prayers go out to all the people who are potentially affected. We are extraordinarily grateful for our first responders, because they’re going to be working 24/7 around the clock, non-stop. And I want to make sure that our thoughts and prayers go out to all those who may end up be dealing with a very difficult situation over the next several days.

Last point I’ll make, though -- this is going to be a big storm. It’s going to be a difficult storm. The great thing about America is when we go through tough times like this we all pull together. We look out for our friends. We look out for our neighbors. And we set aside whatever issues we may have otherwise to make sure that we respond appropriately and with swiftness. And that’s exactly what I anticipate is going to happen here.

So I want to thank all the federal teams, state and local teams that are in place. I’m confident that we’re ready. But I think the public needs to prepare for the fact that this is going to take a long time for us to clean up. The good news is we will clean up and we will get through this.

Question: What about the impact on the election, sir?

President Obama: I am not worried at this point about the impact on the election. I’m worried about the impact on families, and I’m worried about the impact on our first responders. I’m worried about the impact on our economy and on transportation.

The election will take care of itself next week. Right now, our number-one priority is to make sure that we are saving lives, that our search-and-rescue teams are going to be in place, that people are going to get the food, the water, the shelter that they need in case of emergency, and that we respond as quickly as possible to get the economy back on track.

Thank you, everybody.

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# Address at the American Red Cross on Hurricane Sandy

Alright. First of all, I want to thank Gail and Charlie who are on the scene doing work every time we have a disaster here in the United States of America. But obviously, the Red Cross is doing outstanding work internationally, so we want to thank them for their outstanding work.

A few things that I want to emphasize to the public at the top. This storm is not yet over. We’ve gotten briefings from the National Hurricane Center. It is still moving north. There are still communities that could be affected. And so I want to emphasize there are still risks of flooding, there are still risks of down power lines, risks of high winds. And so it is very important for the public to continue to monitor the situation in your local community, listen to your state and local officials, follow instructions. The more you follow instructions, the easier it is for our first responders to make sure that they are dealing with true emergency situations. So the better prepared individual families are for the situation, the easier it is going to be for us to deal with it.

Next, obviously, I want to talk about the extraordinary hardship that we’ve seen over the last 48 hours. Our thoughts and prayers go out to all the families who have lost loved ones. Unfortunately, there have been fatalities as a consequence of Hurricane Sandy, and it’s not clear that we’ve counted up all the fatalities at this point. And obviously, this is something that is heartbreaking for the entire nation. And we certainly feel profoundly for all the families whose lives have been upended and are going to be going through some very tough times over the next several days and perhaps several weeks and months.

The most important message I have for them is that America is with you. We are standing behind you, and we are going to do everything we can to help you get back on your feet.

Earlier today I had a conversation with the governors and many of the mayors in the affected areas, including Governor Christie, Governor Cuomo, and Mayor Bloomberg. I want to praise them for the extraordinary work that they have done. Sadly, we are getting more experience with these kinds of big impact storms along the East Coast, and the preparation shows. Were it not for the outstanding work that they and their teams have already done and will continue to do in the affected regions, we could have seen more deaths and more property damage. So they have done extraordinary work working around the clock. The coordination between the state, local, and federal governments has been outstanding.

Obviously, we’re now moving into the recovery phase in a lot of the most severely affected areas. New Jersey, New York in particular have been pounded by this storm. Connecticut has taken a big hit. Because of some of the work that had been done ahead of time, we’ve been able to get over a thousand FEMA officials in place, pre-positioned. We’ve been able to get supplies, food, medicine, water, emergency generators to ensure that hospitals and law enforcement offices are able to stay up and running as they are out there responding.

We are going to continue to push as hard as we can to make sure that power is up throughout the region. And obviously, this is mostly a local responsibility, and the private utilities are going to have to lean forward, but we are doing everything we can to provide them additional resources so that we can expedite getting power up and running in many of these communities.

There are places like Newark, New Jersey, for example, where you’ve got 80, 90 percent of the people without power. We can't have a situation where that lasts for days on end. And so my instructions to the federal agency has been, do not figure out why we can't do something; I want you to figure out how we do something. I want you to cut through red tape. I want you to cut through bureaucracy. There’s no excuse for inaction at this point. I want every agency to lean forward and to make sure that we are getting the resources where they need -- where they're needed as quickly as possible.

So I want to repeat -- my message to the federal government: No bureaucracy, no red tape. Get resources where they're needed as fast as possible, as hard as possible, and for the duration, because the recovery process obviously in a place like New Jersey is going to take a significant amount of time. The recovery process in a lower Manhattan is going to take a lot of time.

And part of what we’re trying to do here is also to see where are some resources that can be brought to bear that maybe traditionally are not used in these kind of disaster situations. For example, there may be military assets that allow us to help move equipment to ensure that pumping and getting the flooding out of New York subway systems can proceed more quickly. There may be resources that we can bring to bear to help some of the private utilities get their personnel and their equipment in place more swiftly so that we can get power up and running as soon as possible.

So my message to the governors and the mayors and, through them, to the communities that have been hit so hard is that we are going to do everything we can to get resources to you and make sure that any unmet need that is identified, we are responding to it as quickly as possible. And I told the mayors and the governors if they're getting no for an answer somewhere in the federal government, they can call me personally at the White House.

Now, obviously, the state, local, federal response is important, but what we do as a community, what we do as neighbors and as fellow citizens is equally important. So a couple of things that I want the public to know they can do.

First of all, because our local law enforcement, our first responders are being swamped, to the extent that everybody can be out there looking out for their neighbors, especially older folks, I think that's really important. If you’ve got a neighbor nearby, you’re not sure how they're handling a power outage, flooding, et cetera, go over, visit them, knock on their door, make sure that they're doing okay. That can make a big difference. The public can be the eyes and ears in terms of identifying unmet needs.

Second thing, the reason we’re here is because the Red Cross knows what it’s doing when it comes to emergency response. And so for people all across the country who have not been affected, now is the time to show the kind of generosity that makes America the greatest nation on Earth. And a good place to express that generosity is by contributing to the Red Cross.

Obviously, you can go on their website. The Red Cross knows what they're doing. They're in close contact with federal, state, and local officials. They will make sure that we get the resources to those families as swiftly as possible. And again, I want to thank everybody here who is doing such a great job when it comes to the disaster response.

The final message I’d just say is during the darkness of the storm, I think we also saw what’s brightest in America. I think all of us obviously have been shocked by the force of Mother Nature as we watch it on television. At the same time, we’ve also seen nurses at NYU Hospital carrying fragile newborns to safety. We’ve seen incredibly brave firefighters in Queens, waist-deep in water, battling infernos and rescuing people in boats.

One of my favorite stories is down in North Carolina, the Coast Guard going out to save a sinking ship. They sent a rescue swimmer out, and the rescue swimmer said, “Hi, I’m Dan. I understand you guys need a ride.” That kind of spirit of resilience and strength, but most importantly looking out for one another, that's why we always bounce back from these kinds of disasters.

This is a tough time for a lot of people -- millions of folks all across the Eastern Seaboard. But America is tougher, and we’re tougher because we pull together. We leave nobody behind. We make sure that we respond as a nation and remind ourselves that whenever an American is in need, all of us stand together to make sure that we’re providing the help that's necessary.

So I just want to thank the incredible response that we’ve already seen, but I do want to remind people this is going to take some time. It is not going to be easy for a lot of these communities to recovery swiftly, and so it’s going to be important that we sustain that spirit of resilience, that we continue to be good neighbors for the duration until everybody is back on their feet.

Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you, Red Cross.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Second Presidential Election Victory Speech

Thank you. Thank you so much.

Tonight, more than 200 years after a former colony won the right to determine its own destiny, the task of perfecting our union moves forward.

It moves forward because of you. It moves forward because you reaffirmed the spirit that has triumphed over war and depression; the spirit that has lifted this country from the depths of despair to the great heights of hope -- the belief that while each of us will pursue our own individual dreams, we are an American family, and we rise or fall together, as one nation, and as one people.

Tonight, in this election, you, the American people, reminded us that while our road has been hard, while our journey has been long, we have picked ourselves up, we have fought our way back, and we know in our hearts that for the United States of America, the best is yet to come.

I want to thank every American who participated in this election. Whether you voted for the very first time or waited in line for a very long time -- by the way, we have to fix that. Whether you pounded the pavement or picked up the phone -- whether you held an Obama sign or a Romney sign, you made your voice heard, and you made a difference.

I just spoke with Governor Romney, and I congratulated him and Paul Ryan on a hard-fought campaign. We may have battled fiercely, but it’s only because we love this country deeply, and we care so strongly about its future. From George to Lenore to their son Mitt, the Romney family has chosen to give back to America through public service, and that is a legacy that we honor and applaud tonight.

In the weeks ahead, I also look forward to sitting down with Governor Romney to talk about where we can work together to move this country forward.

I want to thank my friend and partner of the last four years, America’s happy warrior -- the best Vice President anybody could ever hope for -- Joe Biden.

And I wouldn’t be the man I am today without the woman who agreed to marry me 20 years ago. Let me say this publicly -- Michelle, I have never loved you more. I have never been prouder to watch the rest of America fall in love with you, too, as our nation’s First Lady. Sasha and Malia, before our very eyes, you're growing up to become two strong, smart, beautiful young women, just like your mom. And I’m so proud of you guys. But I will say that for now, one dog is probably enough.

To the best campaign team and volunteers in the history of politics -- the best. The best ever. Some of you were new this time around, and some of you have been at my side since the very beginning. But all of you are family. No matter what you do or where you go from here, you will carry the memory of the history we made together, and you will have the lifelong appreciation of a grateful President. Thank you for believing all the way, through every hill, through every valley. You lifted me up the whole way. And I will always be grateful for everything that you've done and all the incredible work that you put in.

I know that political campaigns can sometimes seem small, even silly. And that provides plenty of fodder for the cynics who tell us that politics is nothing more than a contest of egos, or the domain of special interests. But if you ever get the chance to talk to folks who turned out at our rallies, and crowded along a rope line in a high school gym, or saw folks working late at a campaign office in some tiny county far away from home, you'll discover something else.

You’ll hear the determination in the voice of a young field organizer who’s worked his way through college, and wants to make sure every child has that same opportunity. You’ll hear the pride in the voice of a volunteer who’s going door to door because her brother was finally hired when the local auto plant added another shift. You’ll hear the deep patriotism in the voice of a military spouse who’s working the phones late at night to make sure that no one who fights for this country ever has to fight for a job, or a roof over their head when they come home.

That’s why we do this. That’s what politics can be. That’s why elections matter. It's not small; it's big. It's important.

Democracy in a nation of 300 million can be noisy and messy and complicated. We have our own opinions. Each of us has deeply held beliefs. And when we go through tough times, when we make big decisions as a country, it necessarily stirs passions, stirs up controversy. That won’t change after tonight -- and it shouldn’t. These arguments we have are a mark of our liberty, and we can never forget that as we speak, people in distant nations are risking their lives right now just for a chance to argue about the issues that matter, the chance to cast their ballots like we did today.

But despite all our differences, most of us share certain hopes for America’s future. We want our kids to grow up in a country where they have access to the best schools and the best teachers -- a country that lives up to its legacy as the global leader in technology and discovery and innovation, with all the good jobs and new businesses that follow.

We want our children to live in an America that isn’t burdened by debt; that isn’t weakened by inequality; that isn’t threatened by the destructive power of a warming planet.

We want to pass on a country that’s safe and respected and admired around the world; a nation that is defended by the strongest military on Earth and the best troops this world has ever known -- but also a country that moves with confidence beyond this time of war to shape a peace that is built on the promise of freedom and dignity for every human being.

We believe in a generous America; in a compassionate America; in a tolerant America, open to the dreams of an immigrant’s daughter who studies in our schools and pledges to our flag. To the young boy on the South Side of Chicago who sees a life beyond the nearest street corner. To the furniture worker’s child in North Carolina who wants to become a doctor or a scientist, an engineer or entrepreneur, a diplomat or even a President. That’s the future we hope for. That’s the vision we share. That’s where we need to go. Forward. That's where we need to go.

Now, we will disagree, sometimes fiercely, about how to get there. As it has for more than two centuries, progress will come in fits and starts. It's not always a straight line. It's not always a smooth path. By itself, the recognition that we have common hopes and dreams won’t end all the gridlock, or solve all our problems, or substitute for the painstaking work of building consensus, and making the difficult compromises needed to move this country forward. But that common bond is where we must begin.

Our economy is recovering. A decade of war is ending. A long campaign is now over. And whether I earned your vote or not, I have listened to you. I have learned from you. And you've made me a better President. With your stories and your struggles, I return to the White House more determined and more inspired than ever about the work there is to do, and the future that lies ahead.

Tonight, you voted for action, not politics as usual. You elected us to focus on your jobs, not ours. And in the coming weeks and months, I am looking forward to reaching out and working with leaders of both parties to meet the challenges we can only solve together: reducing our deficit; reforming our tax code; fixing our immigration system; freeing ourselves from foreign oil. We've got more work to do.

But that doesn’t mean your work is done. The role of citizen in our democracy does not end with your vote. America has never been about what can be done for us. It’s about what can be done by us, together, through the hard and frustrating but necessary work of self-government. That's the principle we were founded on.

This country has more wealth than any nation, but that’s not what makes us rich. We have the most powerful military in history, but that’s not what makes us strong. Our university, culture are the envy of the world, but that’s not what keeps the world coming to our shores.

What makes America exceptional are the bonds that hold together the most diverse nation on Earth -- the belief that our destiny is shared; that this country only works when we accept certain obligations to one another, and to future generations; that the freedom which so many Americans have fought for and died for comes with responsibilities as well as rights, and among those are love and charity and duty and patriotism. That's what makes America great.

I am hopeful tonight because I have seen this spirit at work in America. I’ve seen it in the family business whose owners would rather cut their own pay than lay off their neighbors, and in the workers who would rather cut back their hours than see a friend lose a job.

I’ve seen it in the soldiers who re-enlist after losing a limb, and in those SEALs who charged up the stairs into darkness and danger because they knew there was a buddy behind them, watching their back.

I’ve seen it on the shores of New Jersey and New York, where leaders from every party and level of government have swept aside their differences to help a community rebuild from the wreckage of a terrible storm.

And I saw it just the other day in Mentor, Ohio, where a father told the story of his eight-year-old daughter, whose long battle with leukemia nearly cost their family everything, had it not been for health care reform passing just a few months before the insurance company was about to stop paying for her care. I had an opportunity to not just talk to the father, but meet this incredible daughter of his. And when he spoke to the crowd, listening to that father’s story, every parent in that room had tears in their eyes, because we knew that little girl could be our own. And I know that every American wants her future to be just as bright.

That’s who we are. That’s the country I'm so proud to lead as your President. And tonight, despite all the hardship we’ve been through, despite all the frustrations of Washington, I've never been more hopeful about our future. I have never been more hopeful about America. And I ask you to sustain that hope.

I’m not talking about blind optimism -- the kind of hope that just ignores the enormity of the tasks ahead or the roadblocks that stand in our path. I’m not talking about the wishful idealism that allows us to just sit on the sidelines or shirk from a fight. I have always believed that hope is that stubborn thing inside us that insists, despite all the evidence to the contrary, that something better awaits us, so long as we have the courage to keep reaching, to keep working, to keep fighting.

America, I believe we can build on the progress we’ve made, and continue to fight for new jobs, and new opportunity, and new security for the middle class. I believe we can keep the promise of our founding -- the idea that if you’re willing to work hard, it doesn’t matter who you are, or where you come from, or what you look like, or where you love -- it doesn’t matter whether you're black or white, or Hispanic or Asian, or Native American, or young or old, or rich or poor, abled, disabled, gay or straight -- you can make it here in America if you’re willing to try.

I believe we can seize this future together -- because we are not as divided as our politics suggest; we're not as cynical as the pundits believe; we are greater than the sum of our individual ambitions; and we remain more than a collection of red states and blue states. We are, and forever will be, the United States of America. And together, with your help, and God’s grace, we will continue our journey forward, and remind the world just why it is that we live in the greatest nation on Earth.

Thank you, America. God bless you. God bless these United States.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Post Election Address on the Economy

Thank you. Well, good afternoon, everybody. Now that those of us on the campaign trail have had a chance to get a little sleep -- it’s time to get back to work. And there is plenty of work to do.

As I said on Tuesday night, the American people voted for action, not politics as usual. You elected us to focus on your jobs, not ours. And in that spirit, I’ve invited leaders of both parties to the White House next week, so we can start to build consensus around the challenges that we can only solve together. And I also intend to bring in business and labor and civic leaders from all across the country here to Washington to get their ideas and input as well.

At a time when our economy is still recovering from the Great Recession, our top priority has to be jobs and growth. That’s the focus of the plan I talked about during the campaign. It’s a plan to reward small businesses and manufacturers that create jobs here, not overseas. It’s a plan to give people the chance to get the education and training that businesses are looking for right now. It’s a plan to make sure this country is a global leader in research and technology and clean energy, which will attract new companies and high-wage jobs to America. It’s a plan to put folks back to work, including our veterans, rebuilding our roads and our bridges, and other infrastructure. And it’s a plan to reduce our deficit in a balanced and responsible way.

Our work is made that much more urgent because at the end of this year, we face a series of deadlines that require us to make major decisions about how to pay our deficit down -- decisions that will have a huge impact on the economy and the middle class, both now and in the future. Last year, I worked with Democrats and Republicans to cut a trillion dollars’ worth of spending that we just couldn’t afford. I intend to work with both parties to do more -- and that includes making reforms that will bring down the cost of health care so we can strengthen programs like Medicaid and Medicare for the long haul.

But as I’ve said before, we can’t just cut our way to prosperity. If we’re serious about reducing the deficit, we have to combine spending cuts with revenue -- and that means asking the wealthiest Americans to pay a little more in taxes. That’s how we did it -- That's how we did it in the 1990s, when Bill Clinton was President. That’s how we can reduce the deficit while still making the investments we need to build a strong middle class and a strong economy. That’s the only way we can still afford to train our workers, or help our kids pay for college, or make sure that good jobs in clean energy or high-tech manufacturing don’t end up in countries like China.

Now, already, I’ve put forward a detailed plan that allows us to make these investments while reducing our deficit by 4 trillion dollars over the next decade. I want to be clear -- I’m not wedded to every detail of my plan. I’m open to compromise. I’m open to new ideas. I’m committed to solving our fiscal challenges. But I refuse to accept any approach that isn’t balanced. I am not going to ask students and seniors and middle-class families to pay down the entire deficit while people like me, making over 250,000, dollars aren’t asked to pay a dime more in taxes. I'm not going to do that.

And I just want to point out this was a central question during the election. It was debated over and over again. And on Tuesday night, we found out that the majority of Americans agree with my approach -- and that includes Democrats, independents, and a lot of Republicans across the country, as well as independent economists and budget experts. That’s how you reduce the deficit -- with a balanced approach.

So our job now is to get a majority in Congress to reflect the will of the American people. And I believe we can get that majority. I was encouraged to hear Speaker Boehner agree that tax revenue has to be part of this equation -- so I look forward to hearing his ideas when I see him next week.

And let me make one final point that every American needs to hear. Right now, if Congress fails to come to an agreement on an overall deficit reduction package by the end of the year, everybody’s taxes will automatically go up on January 1st -- everybody’s -- including the 98 percent of Americans who make less than 250,000 dollars a year. And that makes no sense. It would be bad for the economy and would hit families that are already struggling to make ends meet.

Now, fortunately, we shouldn’t need long negotiations or drama to solve that part of the problem. While there may be disagreement in Congress over whether or not to raise taxes on folks making over 250,000 dollars a year, nobody -- not Republicans, not Democrats -- want taxes to go up for folks making under 250,000 dollars a year. So let’s not wait. Even as we’re negotiating a broader deficit reduction package, let’s extend the middle-class tax cuts right now. Let's do that right now.

That one step -- that one step -- would give millions of families -- 98 percent of Americans and 97 percent of small businesses -- the certainty that they need going into the new year. It would immediately take a huge chunk of the economic uncertainty off the table, and that will lead to new jobs and faster growth. Business will know that consumers, they're not going to see a big tax increase. They'll know that most small businesses won't see a tax increase. And so a lot of the uncertainty that you're reading about, that will be removed.

In fact, the Senate has already passed a bill doing exactly this, so all we need is action from the House. And I’ve got the pen ready to sign the bill right away. I'm ready to do it. I'm ready to do it.

The American people understand that we’re going to have differences and disagreements in the months to come. They get that. But on Tuesday, they said loud and clear that they won’t tolerate dysfunction. They won’t tolerate politicians who view compromise as a dirty word. Not when so many Americans are still out of work. Not when so many families and small business owners are still struggling to pay the bills.

What the American people are looking for is cooperation. They're looking for consensus. They're looking for common sense. Most of all, they want action. I intend to deliver for them in my second term, and I expect to find willing partners in both parties to make that happen. So let’s get to work.

Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you.

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# First Press Conference Following Presidential Reelection

Good afternoon, everybody. Please have a seat. I hear you have some questions for me. But let me just make a few remarks at the top, and then I'll open it up.

First of all, I want to reiterate what I said on Friday. Right now, our economy is still recovering from a very deep and damaging crisis, so our top priority has to be jobs and growth. We’ve got to build on the progress that we’ve made, because this nation succeeds when we’ve got a growing, thriving middle class.

And that’s the idea at the core of the plan that I talked about on the campaign trail over the last year: Rewarding manufacturers and small businesses that create jobs here, not overseas; providing more Americans the chance to earn the skills that businesses are looking for right now; keeping this country at the forefront of research, technology, and clean energy; putting people back to work rebuilding our roads, our bridges, and our schools; and reducing our deficit in a balanced and responsible way.

Now, on this last item, we face a very clear deadline that requires us to make some big decisions on jobs, taxes and deficits by the end of the year. Both parties voted to set this deadline. And I believe that both parties can work together to make these decisions in a balanced and responsible way.

Yesterday, I had a chance to meet with labor and civic leaders for their input. Today, I’m meeting with CEOs of some of America’s largest companies. And I’ll meet with leaders of both parties of Congress before the week is out. Because there’s only one way to solve these challenges, and that is to do it together.

As I’ve said before, I’m open to compromise and I’m open to new ideas. And I’ve been encouraged over the past week to hear Republican after Republican agree on the need for more revenue from the wealthiest Americans as part of our arithmetic if we’re going to be serious about reducing the deficit.

Because when it comes to taxes, there are two pathways available: Option one, if Congress fails to act by the end of the year, everybody’s taxes will automatically go up -- including the 98 percent of Americans who make less than $250,000 a year and the 97 percent of small businesses who earn less than $250,000 a year. That doesn’t make sense. Our economy can’t afford that right now. Certainly no middle-class family can afford that right now. And nobody in either party says that they want it to happen.

The other option is to pass a law right now that would prevent any tax hike whatsoever on the first $250,000 of everybody’s income. And by the way, that means every American, including the wealthiest Americans, get a tax cut. It means that 98 percent of all Americans, and 97 percent of all small businesses won’t see their taxes go up a single dime. The Senate has already passed a law like this. Democrats in the House are ready to pass a law like this. And I hope Republicans in the House come on board, too.

We should not hold the middle class hostage while we debate tax cuts for the wealthy. We should at least do what we agree on, and that's to keep middle-class taxes low. And I’ll bring everyone in to sign it right away so we can give folks some certainty before the holiday season.

I won’t pretend that figuring out everything else will be easy, but I'm confident we can do it -- and I know we have to. I know that that's what the American people want us to do. That was the very clear message from the election last week. And that was the message of a letter that I received over the weekend.

It came from a man in Tennessee who began by writing that he didn’t vote for me -- which is okay. But what he said was even though he didn’t give me his vote, he’s giving me his support to move this country forward. And he said the same to his Republican representatives in Washington. He said that he’ll back each of us, regardless of party, as long as we work together to make life better for all of us. And he made it clear that if we don’t make enough progress, he’ll be back in touch.

“My hope,” he wrote, “is that we can make progress in light of personal and party principles, special interest groups, and years of business as usual. We’ve got to work together and put our differences aside.”

I couldn't say it better myself. That’s precisely what I intend to do.

And with that, let me open it up for your questions. And I'm going to start off with Ben Feller of AP.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Can you assure the American people that there have been no breaches of national security or classified information in the scandal involving Generals Petraeus and Allen? And do you think that you as Commander-in-Chief and the American people should have been told that the CIA chief was under investigation before the election?

President Obama: Well, I have no evidence at this point from what I've seen that classified information was disclosed that in any way would have had a negative impact on our national security.

Obviously there’s an ongoing investigation. I don't want to comment on the specifics of the investigation. The FBI has its own protocols in terms of how they proceed, and I'm going to let Director Mueller and others examine those protocols and make some statements to the public generally.

I do want to emphasize what I’ve said before: General Petraeus had an extraordinary career. He served this country with great distinction in Iraq, in Afghanistan, and as head of the CIA. By his own assessment, he did not meet the standards that he felt were necessary as the Director of CIA with respect to this personal matter that he is now dealing with, with his family and with his wife. And it’s on that basis that he tendered his resignation, and it’s on that basis that I accepted it.

But I want to emphasize that from my perspective at least, he has provided this country an extraordinary service. We are safer because of the work that Dave Petraeus has done. And my main hope right now is, is that he and his family are able to move on and that this ends up being a single side note on what has otherwise been an extraordinary career.

Question: What about voters? Did they deserve to know?

President Obama: Again, I think you’re going to have to talk to the FBI in terms of what their general protocols are when it comes to what started off as a potential criminal investigation. One of the challenges here is, is that we’re not supposed to meddle in criminal investigations, and that’s been our practice. And I think that there are certain procedures that both the FBI follow, or DOJ follow, when they’re involved in these investigations. That’s traditionally been how we view things, in part because people are innocent until proven guilty, and we want to make sure that we don’t pre-judge these kinds of situations. And so my expectation is, is that they followed protocols that they already established.

Jessica Yellin. Where’s Jessica?

Question: Mr. President, on the fiscal cliff, two years ago, sir, you said that you wouldn’t extend the Bush-era tax cuts, but at the end of the day, you did. So, respectfully, sir, why should the American people and the Republicans believe that you won’t cave again this time?

President Obama: Well, two years ago, the economy was in a different situation. We were still very much in the early parts of recovering from the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. And ultimately, we came together not only to extend the Bush tax cuts, but also a wide range of policies that were going to be good for the economy at that point -- unemployment insurance extensions, payroll tax extension -- all of which made a difference, and is part of the reason why what we've seen now is 32 consecutive months of job growth and over 5.5 million jobs created and the unemployment rate coming down.

But what I said at the time is what I meant, which is this was a one-time proposition. And what I have told leaders privately as well as publicly is that we cannot afford to extend the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy. What we can do is make sure that middle-class taxes don’t go up.

And so the most important step we can take right now -- I think the foundation for a deal that helps the economy, creates jobs, gives consumers certainty, which means gives businesses confidence that they're going to have consumers during the holiday season -- is if we right away say 98 percent of Americans are not going to see their taxes go up; 97 percent of small businesses are not going to see their taxes go up.

If we get that in place, we are actually removing half of the fiscal cliff. Half of the danger to our economy is removed by that single step.

And what we can then do is shape a process whereby we look at tax reform -- which I'm very eager to do. I think we can simplify our tax system. I think we can make it more efficient. We can eliminate loopholes and deductions that have a distorting effect on our economy. I believe that we have to continue to take a serious look at how we reform our entitlements, because health care costs continue to be the biggest driver of our deficits.

So there is a package to be shaped, and I'm confident that parties -- folks of goodwill in both parties can make that happen. But what I'm not going to do is to extend Bush tax cuts for the wealthiest 2 percent that we can't afford, and according to economists, will have the least positive impact on our economy.

Question: You've said that the wealthiest must pay more. Would closing loopholes instead of raising rates for them satisfy you?

President Obama: I think that there are loopholes that can be closed, and we should look at how we can make the process of deductions, the filing process easier, simpler. But when it comes to the top 2 percent, what I’m not going to do is to extend further a tax cut for folks who don’t need it, which would cost close to a trillion dollars.

And it’s very difficult to see how you make up that trillion dollars -- if we’re serious about deficit reduction -- just by closing loopholes and deductions. The math tends not to work. And I think it’s important to establish a basic principle that was debated extensively during the course of this campaign. I mean, this shouldn’t be a surprise to anybody. If there was one thing that everybody understood was a big difference between myself and Mr. Romney, it was when it comes to how we reduce our deficit, I argued for a balanced, responsible approach, and part of that included making sure that the wealthiest Americans pay a little bit more.

I think every voter out there understood that that was an important debate, and the majority of voters agreed with me. By the way, more voters agreed with me on this issue than voted for me. So we’ve got a clear majority of the American people who recognize if we’re going to be serious about deficit reduction, we’ve got to do it in a balanced way.

The only question now is are we going to hold the middle class hostage in order to go ahead and let that happen? Or can we all step back and say, here’s something we agree on -- we don’t want middle-class taxes to go up. Let’s go ahead and lock that in. That will be good for the economy. It will be good for consumers. It will be good for businesses. It takes the edge off the fiscal cliff. And let’s also then commit ourselves to the broader package of deficit reduction that includes entitlement changes and it includes potentially tax reform, as well as I’m willing to look at additional work that we can do on the discretionary spending side.

So I want a big deal. I want a comprehensive deal. I want to see if we can, at least for the foreseeable future, provide certainty to businesses and the American people so that we can focus on job growth, so that we’re also investing in the things that we need. But right now what I want to make sure of is that taxes on middle-class families don’t go up. And there’s a very easy way to do that. We could get that done by next week.

Lori Montenegro, Telemundo.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. On immigration reform, the criticism in the past has been that you did not put forth legislation with specific ideas and send it up to the Hill. This time around you have said again that this will be one of the top priorities for a second term. Will you then send legislation to the Hill? And exactly what do you envision is broad immigration reform? Does that include a legalization program? And also, what lessons, if any, did Democrats learn from this last election and the Latino vote?

President Obama: Well, I think what was incredibly encouraging was to see a significant increase in Latino turnout. It is the fastest-growing group in the country. And historically what you’ve seen is the Latino vote, vote at lower rates than the broader population, and that's beginning to change. You're starting to see a sense of empowerment and civic participation that I think is going to be powerful and good for the country.

And it is why I’m very confident that we can get immigration reform done. Before the election I had given a couple interviews where I predicted that the Latino vote was going to be strong, and that that would cause some reflection on the part of Republicans about their position on immigration reform. I think we’re starting to see that already. I think that's a positive sign.

This has not historically been a partisan issue -- we’ve had President Bush and John McCain and others who have supported comprehensive immigration reform in the past. So we need to seize the moment. And my expectation is, is that we get a bill introduced and we begin the process in Congress very soon after my inauguration. And in fact, some conversations I think are already beginning to take place among senators and congressmen and my staff about what would this look like.

And when I say comprehensive immigration reform, it is very similar to the outlines of previous efforts at comprehensive immigration reform. I think it should include a continuation of the strong border security measures that we’ve taken because we have to secure our borders. I think it should contain serious penalties for companies that are purposely hiring undocumented workers and taking advantage of them. And I do think that there should be a pathway for legal status for those who are living in this country, are not engaged in criminal activity, are here simply to work. It’s important for them to pay back-taxes. It’s important for them to learn English. It’s important for them to potentially pay a fine. But to give them the avenue whereby they can resolve their legal status here in this country I think is very important.

Obviously, making sure that we put into law what the first step that we’ve taken administratively dealing with the DREAM Act kids is very important as well. One thing that I’m very clear about is that young people who are brought here through no fault of their own, who have gone to school here, pledged allegiance to our flag, want to serve in our military, want to go to school and contribute to our society, that they shouldn’t be under the cloud of deportation, that we should give them every opportunity to earn their citizenship.

And so there are other components to it, obviously. The business community continues to be concerned about getting enough high-skill workers, and I am a believer that if you’ve got a PhD in physics or computer science who wants to stay here and start a business here, we shouldn’t make it harder for him to stay here; we should try to encourage him to contribute to this society.

I think that the agricultural sector obviously has very specific concerns about making sure that they’ve got a workforce that helps deliver food to our tables.

So there are going to be a bunch of components to it, but I think whatever process we have needs to make sure our border security is strong, needs to deal with employers effectively, needs to provide a pathway for the undocumented here, needs to deal with the DREAM Act kids. And I think that’s something that we can get done.

Chuck Todd. Where’s Chuck?

Question: Mr. President, I just want to follow on both Ben’s question and Jessica’s question. On having to do with Ben’s question --

President Obama: How about Lori’s question? Do you want to follow up on that one, too?

Question: No, I feel like you answered that one completely.

Are you withholding judgment on whether you should have known sooner that there was a potential -- that there was an investigation into whether your CIA Director -- potentially there was a national security breach with your CIA Director -- do you believe you should have known sooner? Are you withholding judgment until the investigation is complete on that front?

And then the follow-up to Jessica’s question -- tax rates. Are you -- is there no deal at the end of the year if tax rates for the top 2 percent aren’t the Clinton tax rates, period? No ifs, ands, or buts -- any room in negotiating on that specific aspect of the fiscal cliff?

President Obama: I am withholding judgment with respect to how the entire process surrounding General Petraeus came up. We don’t have all the information yet, but I want to say that I have a lot of confidence generally in the FBI, and they’ve got a difficult job. And so I’m going to wait and see to see if there’s any other --

Question: -- that you should have known? Do you think in hindsight --

President Obama: Well, I mean, Chuck, what I’ll say is, is that if -- it is also possible that had we been told, then you’d be sitting here asking a question about why were you interfering in a criminal investigation. So I think it’s best right now for us to just see how this whole process unfolded.

With respect to the tax rates, I just want to emphasize I am open to new ideas. If Republican counterparts or some Democrats have a great idea for us to raise revenue, maintain progressivity, make sure the middle class isn’t getting hit, reduces our deficit, encourages growth, I’m not going to just slam the door in their face. I want to hear ideas from everybody.

Question: -- red line.

President Obama: Look, I believe this is solvable. I think that fair-minded people can come to an agreement that does not cause the economy to go back into recession, that protects middle-class families, that focuses on jobs and growth, and reduces our deficit. I’m confident it can be done.

My budget, frankly, does it. I understand that -- I don’t expect the Republicans simply to adopt my budget. That’s not realistic. So I recognize that we're going to have to compromise. And as I said on Election Night, compromise is hard, and not everybody gets 100 percent of what they want and not everybody is going to be perfectly happy.

But what I will not do is to have a process that is vague, that says we're going to sort of, kind of, raise revenue through dynamic scoring or closing loopholes that have not been identified. And the reason I won't do that is because I don’t want to find ourselves in a position six months from now or a year from now where, lo and behold, the only way to close the deficit is to sock it to middle-class families, or to burden families that have disabled kids or have a parent in a nursing home, or suddenly we've got to cut more out of our basic research budget that is the key to growing the economy in the long term.

So that’s my concern. I'm less concerned about red lines, per se. What I'm concerned about is not finding ourselves in a situation where the wealthy aren't paying more or aren't paying as much as they should, middle-class families one way or another are making up the difference -- that’s the kind of status quo that has been going on here too long, and that’s exactly what I argued against during this campaign. And if there’s one thing that I'm pretty confident about is the American people understood what they were getting when they gave me this incredible privilege of being in office for another four years.

They want compromise. They want action. But they also want to make sure that middle-class folks aren't bearing the entire burden and sacrifice when it comes to some of these big challenges. They expect that folks at the top are doing their fair share as well. And that’s going to be my guiding principle during these negotiations, but, more importantly, during the next four years of my administration.

Nancy Cordes.

Question: Mr. President, on Election Night, you said that you were looking forward to speaking with Governor Romney, sitting down in the coming weeks to discuss ways that you could work together on this nation's problems. Have you extended that invitation? Has he accepted? And in what ways do you think you can work together?

President Obama: We haven't scheduled something yet. I think everybody forgets that the election was only a week ago and -- I know I've forgotten. I forgot on Wednesday. So I think everybody needs to catch their breath. I'm sure that Governor Romney is spending some time with his family.

And my hope is, before the end of the year, though, that we have a chance to sit down and talk. There are certain aspects of Governor Romney’s record and his ideas that I think could be very helpful.

Question: Such as?

President Obama: Well, to give you one example, I do think he did a terrific job running the Olympics. And that skill set of trying to figure out how do we make something work better applies to the federal government. There are a lot of ideas that I don’t think are partisan ideas but are just smart ideas about how can we make the federal government more customer friendly; how can we make sure that we’re consolidating programs that are duplicative; how can we eliminate additional waste. He presented some ideas during the course of the campaign that I actually agree with. So it would be interesting to talk to him about something like that. There may be ideas that he has with respect to jobs and growth that can help middle-class families that I want to hear.

So I’m not either prejudging what he’s interested in doing, nor am I suggesting I’ve got some specific assignment. But what I want to do is to get ideas from him and see if there are some ways that we can potentially work together.

Question: But when it comes to your relationships with Congress, one of the most frequent criticisms we’ve heard over the past few years from members on both sides is that you haven’t done enough to reach out and build relationships. Are there concrete ways that you plan to approach your relationships with Congress in a second term?

President Obama: Look, I think there’s no doubt that I can always do better, and so I will examine ways that I can make sure to communicate my desire to work with everybody, so long as it’s advancing the cause of strengthening our middle class and improving our economy. I’ve got a lot of good relationships with folks both in the House and the Senate. I have a lot of relationships on both sides of the aisle. It hasn’t always manifested itself in the kind of agreements that I’d like to see between Democrats and Republicans. And so I think all of us have responsibilities to see if there are things that we can improve on. And I don’t exempt myself from needing to do some self-reflection and see if I can improve our working relationship.

There are probably going to be still some very sharp differences. And as I said during the campaign, there are going to be times where there are fights, and I think those are fights that need to be had. But what I think the American people don’t want to see is a focus on the next election instead of a focus on them.

And I don’t have another election. And Michelle and I were talking last night about what an incredible honor and privilege it is to be put in this position. And there are people all across this country, millions of folks, who worked so hard to help us get elected, but there are also millions of people who may not have voted for us but are also counting on us. And we take that responsibility very seriously. I take that responsibility very seriously. And I hope and intend to be an even better President in the second term than I was in the first.

Jonathan Karl.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Senator John McCain and Senator Lindsey Graham both said today that they want to have Watergate-style hearings on the attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, and said that if you nominate Susan Rice to be Secretary of State, they will do everything in their power to block her nomination. As Senator Graham said, he simply doesn’t trust Ambassador Rice after what she said about Benghazi. I’d like your reaction to that. And would those threats deter you from making a nomination like that?

President Obama: Well, first of all, I’m not going to comment at this point on various nominations that I’ll put forward to fill out my Cabinet for the second term. Those are things that are still being discussed.

But let me say specifically about Susan Rice, she has done exemplary work. She has represented the United States and our interests in the United Nations with skill and professionalism and toughness and grace.

As I’ve said before, she made an appearance at the request of the White House in which she gave her best understanding of the intelligence that had been provided to her. If Senator McCain and Senator Graham and others want to go after somebody, they should go after me. And I’m happy to have that discussion with them. But for them to go after the U.N. Ambassador, who had nothing to do with Benghazi, and was simply making a presentation based on intelligence that she had received, and to besmirch her reputation is outrageous.

And we’re after an election now. I think it is important for us to find out exactly what happened in Benghazi, and I’m happy to cooperate in any ways that Congress wants. We have provided every bit of information that we have, and we will continue to provide information. And we’ve got a full-blown investigation, and all that information will be disgorged to Congress.

And I don't think there’s any debate in this country that when you have four Americans killed, that's a problem. And we’ve got to get to the bottom of it, and there needs to be accountability. We’ve got to bring those who carried it out to justice. They won’t get any debate from me on that.

But when they go after the U.N. Ambassador, apparently because they think she’s an easy target, then they’ve got a problem with me. And should I choose, if I think that she would be the best person to serve America in the capacity of the State Department, then I will nominate her. That's not a determination that I’ve made yet.

Ed Henry.

Question: I want to take Chuck’s lead and just ask a very small follow-up, which is whether you feel you have a mandate not just on taxes but on a range of issues because of your decisive victory?

But I want to stay on Benghazi, based on what Jon asked because you said, if they want to come after me, come after me. I wanted to ask about the families of these four Americans who were killed. Sean Smith’s father, Ray, said he believes his son basically called 911 for help and they didn't get it. And I know you’ve said you grieve for these four Americans, that it’s being investigated, but the families have been waiting for more than two months. So I would like to -- for you to address the families, if you can. On 9/11, as Commander-in-Chief, did you issue any orders to try to protect their lives?

President Obama: Ed, I’ll address the families not through the press. I’ll address the families directly, as I already have. And we will provide all the information that is available about what happened on that day. That’s what the investigation is for.

But as I’ve said repeatedly, if people don’t think that we did everything we can to make sure that we saved the lives of folks who I sent there and who were carrying out missions on behalf of the United States, then you don’t know how our Defense Department thinks or our State Department thinks or our CIA thinks. Their number-one priority is obviously to protect American lives. That’s what our job is. Now --

Question: [Inaudible.]

President Obama: Ed, I will put forward every bit of information that we have. I can tell you that immediately upon finding out that our folks were in danger, that my orders to my national security team were do whatever we need to do to make sure they’re safe. And that’s the same order that I would give any time that I see Americans are in danger, whether they’re civilian or military, because that’s our number-one priority.

With respect to the issue of mandate, I’ve got one mandate. I’ve got a mandate to help middle-class families and families that are working hard to try to get into the middle class. That’s my mandate. That’s what the American people said. They said: Work really hard to help us. Don’t worry about the politics of it; don’t worry about the party interests; don’t worry about the special interests. Just work really hard to see if you can help us get ahead -- because we’re working really hard out here and we’re still struggling, a lot of us. That’s my mandate.

I don’t presume that because I won an election that everybody suddenly agrees with me on everything. I’m more than familiar with all the literature about presidential overreach in second terms. We are very cautious about that. On the other hand, I didn’t get reelected just to bask in reelection. I got elected to do work on behalf of American families and small businesses all across the country who are still recovering from a really bad recession, but are hopeful about the future.

And I am, too. The one thing that I said during the campaign that maybe sounds like a bunch of campaign rhetoric, but now that the campaign is over I am going to repeat it and hopefully you guys will really believe me -- when you travel around the country, you are inspired by the grit and resilience and hard work and decency of the American people. And it just makes you want to work harder. You meet families who are -- have overcome really tough odds and somehow are making it and sending their kids to college. And you meet young people who are doing incredible work in disadvantaged communities because they believe in the American ideal and it should available for everybody. And you meet farmers who are helping each other during times of drought, and you meet businesses that kept their doors open during the recession, even though the owner didn’t have to take a salary.

And when you talk to these folks, you say to yourself, man, they deserve a better government than they've been getting. They deserve all of us here in Washington to be thinking every single day, how can I make things a little better for them -- which isn't to say that everything we do is going to be perfect, or that there aren't just going to be some big, tough challenges that we have to grapple with. But I do know the federal government can make a difference.

We're seeing it right now on the Jersey coast and in New York. People are still going through a really tough time; the response hasn't been perfect; but it's been aggressive and strong and fast and robust, and a lot of people have been helped because of it. And that’s a pretty good metaphor for how I want the federal government to operate generally, and I'm going to do everything I can to make sure it does.

Christi Parson. Hey.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President, and congratulations, by the way.

President Obama: Thanks.

Question: One quick follow up --

President Obama: Christi was there when I was running for state Senate.

Question: That’s right, I was.

President Obama: So Christi and I go back a ways.

Question: I've never seen you lose. I wasn't looking that one time.

President Obama: There you go.

Question: One quick follow-up, and then I want to ask you about Iran. I just want to make sure I understood what you said. Can you envision any scenario in which we do go off the fiscal cliff at the end of the year?

And on Iran, are you preparing a final diplomatic push here to resolve the nuclear program issue, and are we headed toward one-on-one talks?

President Obama: Well, obviously, we can all imagine a scenario where we go off the fiscal cliff. If despite the election, if despite the dangers of going over the fiscal cliff and what that means for our economy, that there’s too much stubbornness in Congress that we can't even agree on giving middle-class families a tax cut, then middle-class families are all going to end up having a big tax hike. And that’s going to be a pretty rude shock for them, and I suspect will have a big impact on the holiday shopping season, which, in turn, will have an impact on business planning and hiring, and we can go back into a recession.

It would be a bad thing. It is not necessary. So I want to repeat: Step number one that we can take in the next couple of weeks, provide certainty to middle-class families -- 98 percent of families who make less than $250,000 a year, 97 percent of small businesses -- that their taxes will not go up a single dime next year. Give them that certainty right now. We can get that done.

We can then set up a structure whereby we are dealing with tax reform, closing deductions, closing loopholes, simplifying, dealing with entitlements. And I’m ready and willing to make big commitments to make sure that we’re locking in the kind of deficit reductions that stabilize our deficit, start bringing it down, start bringing down our debt. I’m confident we can do it.

And, look, I’ve been living with this for a couple of years now. I know the math pretty well. And it really is arithmetic; it’s not calculus. There are some tough things that have to be done, but there is a way of doing this that does not hurt middle-class families, that does not hurt our seniors, doesn’t hurt families with disabled kids, allows us to continue to invest in those things that make us grow, like basic research and education, helping young people afford going to college. As we’ve already heard from some Republican commentators, a modest tax increase on the wealthy is not going to break their backs; they’ll still be wealthy. And it will not impinge on business investment.

So we know how to do this. This is just a matter of whether or not we come together and go ahead and say, Democrats and Republicans, we’re both going to hold hands and do what’s right for the American people. And I hope that’s what happens.

With respect to Iran, I very much want to see a diplomatic resolution to the problem. I was very clear before the campaign, I was clear during the campaign, and I’m now clear after the campaign -- we’re not going to let Iran get a nuclear weapon. But I think there is still a window of time for us to resolve this diplomatically. We’ve imposed the toughest sanctions in history. It is having an impact on Iran’s economy.

There should be a way in which they can enjoy peaceful nuclear power while still meeting their international obligations and providing clear assurances to the international community that they’re not pursuing a nuclear weapon.

And so, yes, I will try to make a push in the coming months to see if we can open up a dialogue between Iran and not just us, but the international community, to see if we can get this things resolved. I can’t promise that Iran will walk through the door that they need to walk through, but that would be very much the preferable option.

Question: And under what circumstances would one-on-one conversations take place?

President Obama: I won’t talk about the details in negotiations. But I think it’s fair to say we want to get this resolved, and we’re not going to be constrained by diplomatic niceties or protocols. If Iran is serious about wanting to resolve this, they’ll be in a position to resolve it.

Question: At one point just prior to the election that was talk that talks might be imminent.

President Obama: That was not true, and it’s not true as of today.

Just going to knock through a couple others. Mark Landler. Where’s Mark? There he is right in front of me.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. In his endorsement of you a few weeks ago, Mayor Bloomberg said he was motivated by the belief that you would do more to confront the threat of climate change than your opponent. Tomorrow you’re going up to New York City where you’re going to, I assume, see people who are still suffering the effects of Hurricane Sandy, which many people say is further evidence of how a warming globe is changing our weather. What specifically do you plan to do in a second term to tackle the issue of climate change? And do you think the political will exists in Washington to pass legislation that could include some kind of attacks on carbon?

President Obama: As you know, Mark, we can’t attribute any particular weather event to climate change. What we do know is the temperature around the globe is increasing faster than was predicted even 10 years ago. We do know that the Arctic ice cap is melting faster than was predicted even five years ago. We do know that there have been extraordinarily -- there have been an extraordinarily large number of severe weather events here in North America, but also around the globe.

And I am a firm believer that climate change is real, that it is impacted by human behavior and carbon emissions. And as a consequence, I think we've got an obligation to future generations to do something about it.

Now, in my first term, we doubled fuel efficiency standards on cars and trucks. That will have an impact. That will take a lot of carbon out of the atmosphere. We doubled the production of clean energy, which promises to reduce the utilization of fossil fuels for power generation. And we continue to invest in potential breakthrough technologies that could further remove carbon from our atmosphere. But we haven't done as much as we need to.

So what I'm going to be doing over the next several weeks, next several months, is having a conversation, a wide-ranging conversation with scientists, engineers, and elected officials to find out what can -- what more can we do to make a short-term progress in reducing carbons, and then working through an education process that I think is necessary -- a discussion, a conversation across the country about what realistically can we do long term to make sure that this is not something we're passing on to future generations that's going to be very expensive and very painful to deal with.

I don't know what either Democrats or Republicans are prepared to do at this point, because this is one of those issues that's not just a partisan issue; I also think there are regional differences. There’s no doubt that for us to take on climate change in a serious way would involve making some tough political choices. And understandably, I think the American people right now have been so focused, and will continue to be focused on our economy and jobs and growth, that if the message is somehow we're going to ignore jobs and growth simply to address climate change, I don't think anybody is going to go for that. I won't go for that.

If, on the other hand, we can shape an agenda that says we can create jobs, advance growth, and make a serious dent in climate change and be an international leader, I think that's something that the American people would support.

So you can expect that you’ll hear more from me in the coming months and years about how we can shape an agenda that garners bipartisan support and helps move this agenda forward.

Question: Sounds like you're saying, though, in the current environment, we're probably still short of a consensus on some kind of attack.

President Obama: That I'm pretty certain of. And, look, we're still trying to debate whether we can just make sure that middle-class families don't get a tax hike. Let’s see if we can resolve that. That should be easy. This one is hard -- but it’s important because one of the things that we don't always factor in are the costs involved in these natural disasters; we just put them off as something that's unconnected to our behavior right now. And I think what -- based on the evidence we're seeing, is that what we do now is going to have an impact and a cost down the road if we don’t do something about it.

All right, last question. Mark Felsenthal. Where’s Mark?

Question: Thank you. Mr. President, the Assad regime is engaged in a brutal crackdown on its people. France has recognized the opposition coalition. What would it take for the United States to do the same? And is there any point at which the United States would consider arming the rebels?

President Obama: I was one of the first leaders I think around the world to say Assad had to go, in response to the incredible brutality that his government displayed in the face of what were initially peaceful protests.

Obviously, the situation in Syria has deteriorated since then. We have been extensively engaged with the international community as well as regional powers to help the opposition. We have committed to hundreds of millions of dollars of humanitarian aid to help folks both inside of Syria and outside of Syria. We are constantly consulting with the opposition on how they can get organized so that they’re not splintered and divided in the face of the onslaught from the Assad regime.

We are in very close contact with countries like Turkey and Jordan that immediately border Syria and have an impact -- and obviously Israel, which is having already grave concerns, as we do, about, for example, movements of chemical weapons that might occur in such a chaotic atmosphere and that could have an impact not just within Syria, but on the region as a whole.

I’m encouraged to see that the Syrian opposition created an umbrella group that may have more cohesion than they’ve had in the past. We’re going to be talking to them. My envoys are going to be traveling to various meetings that are going to be taking place with the international community and the opposition.

We consider them a legitimate representative of the aspirations of the Syrian people. We’re not yet prepared to recognize them as some sort of government in exile, but we do think that it is a broad-based representative group. One of the questions that we’re going to continue to press is making sure that that opposition is committed to a democratic Syria, an inclusive Syria, a moderate Syria.

We have seen extremist elements insinuate themselves into the opposition, and one of the things that we have to be on guard about -- particularly when we start talking about arming opposition figures -- is that we’re not indirectly putting arms in the hands of folks who would do Americans harm, or do Israelis harm, or otherwise engage in actions that are detrimental to our national security.

So we're constantly probing and working on that issue. The more engaged we are, the more we'll be in a position to make sure that we are encouraging the most moderate, thoughtful elements of the opposition that are committed to inclusion, observance of human rights, and working cooperatively with us over the long term.

Thank you very much.

Question: -- spending side of the fiscal cliff. On spending, the $1.2 trillion trigger, is that something that you can see having a short-term component -- because I remember you said it's not happening --

President Obama: That was a great question, but it would be a horrible precedent for me to answer your question just because you yelled it out.

So thank you very much, guys.

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# Address at Yangon University

Myanmar Naingan, Mingalaba! I am very honored to be here at this university and to be the first President of the United States of America to visit your country.

I came here because of the importance of your country. You live at the crossroads of East and South Asia. You border the most populated nations on the planet. You have a history that reaches back thousands of years, and the ability to help determine the destiny of the fastest growing region of the world.

I came here because of the beauty and diversity of your country. I have seen just earlier today the golden stupa of Shwedagon, and have been moved by the timeless idea of metta -- the belief that our time on this Earth can be defined by tolerance and by love. And I know this land reaches from the crowded neighborhoods of this old city to the homes of more than 60,000 villages; from the peaks of the Himalayas, the forests of Karen State, to the banks of the Irrawady River.

I came here because of my respect for this university. It was here at this school where opposition to colonial rule first took hold. It was here that Aung San edited a magazine before leading an independence movement. It was here that U Thant learned the ways of the world before guiding it at the United Nations. Here, scholarship thrived during the last century and students demanded their basic human rights. Now, your Parliament has at last passed a resolution to revitalize this university and it must reclaim its greatness, because the future of this country will be determined by the education of its youth.

I came here because of the history between our two countries. A century ago, American traders, merchants and missionaries came here to build bonds of faith and commerce and friendship. And from within these borders in World War II, our pilots flew into China and many of our troops gave their lives. Both of our nations emerged from the British Empire, and the United States was among the first countries to recognize an independent Union of Burma. We were proud to found an American Center in Rangoon and to build exchanges with schools like this one. And through decades of differences, Americans have been united in their affection for this country and its people. Above all, I came here because of America’s belief in human dignity. Over the last several decades, our two countries became strangers. But today, I can tell you that we always remained hopeful about the people of this country, about you. You gave us hope and we bore witness to your courage.

We saw the activists dressed in white visit the families of political prisoners on Sundays and monks dressed in saffron protesting peacefully in the streets. We learned of ordinary people who organized relief teams to respond to a cyclone, and heard the voices of students and the beats of hip-hop artists projecting the sound of freedom. We came to know exiles and refugees who never lost touch with their families or their ancestral home. And we were inspired by the fierce dignity of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, as she proved that no human being can truly be imprisoned if hope burns in your heart.

When I took office as President, I sent a message to those governments who ruled by fear. I said, in my inauguration address, “We will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist.” And over the last year and a half, a dramatic transition has begun, as a dictatorship of five decades has loosened its grip. Under President Thein Sein, the desire for change has been met by an agenda for reform. A civilian now leads the government, and a parliament is asserting itself.

The once-outlawed National League for Democracy stood in an election, and Aung San Suu Kyi is a Member of Parliament. Hundreds of prisoners of conscience have been released, and forced labor has been banned. Preliminary cease-fires have been reached with ethnic armies, and new laws allow for a more open economy.

So today, I’ve come to keep my promise and extend the hand of friendship. America now has an Ambassador in Rangoon, sanctions have been eased, and we will help rebuild an economy that can offer opportunity for its people, and serve as an engine of growth for the world. But this remarkable journey has just begun, and has much further to go. Reforms launched from the top of society must meet the aspirations of citizens who form its foundation. The flickers of progress that we have seen must not be extinguished -- they must be strengthened; they must become a shining North Star for all this nation’s people.

And your success in that effort is important to the United States, as well as to me. Even though we come from different places, we share common dreams: to choose our leaders; to live together in peace; to get an education and make a good living; to love our families and our communities. That’s why freedom is not an abstract idea; freedom is the very thing that makes human progress possible -- not just at the ballot box, but in our daily lives.

One of our greatest Presidents in the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, understood this truth. He defined America’s cause as more than the right to cast a ballot. He understood democracy was not just voting. He called upon the world to embrace four fundamental freedoms: freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. These four freedoms reinforce one another, and you cannot fully realize one without realizing them all.

So that's the future that we seek for ourselves, and for all people. And that is what I want to speak to you about today.

First, we believe in the right of free expression so that the voices of ordinary people can be heard, and governments reflect their will -- the people's will.

In the United States, for more than two centuries, we have worked to keep this promise for all of our citizens -- to win freedom for those who were enslaved; to extend the right to vote for women and African Americans; to protect the rights of workers to organize.

And we recognize no two nations achieve these rights in exactly the same way, but there is no question that your country will be stronger if it draws on the strength of all of its people. That’s what allows nations to succeed. That’s what reform has begun to do.

Instead of being repressed, the right of people to assemble together must now be fully respected. Instead of being stifled, the veil of media censorship must continue to be lifted. And as you take these steps, you can draw on your progress. Instead of being ignored, citizens who protested the construction of the Myitsone dam were heard. Instead of being outlawed, political parties have been allowed to participate. You can see progress being made. As one voter said during the parliamentary elections here, “Our parents and grandparents waited for this, but never saw it.” And now you can see it. You can taste freedom.

And to protect the freedom of all the voters, those in power must accept constraints. That's what our American system is designed to do. Now, America may have the strongest military in the world, but it must submit to civilian control. I, as the President of the United States, make determinations that the military then carries out, not the other way around. As President and Commander-In-Chief, I have that responsibility because I'm accountable to the people.

Now, on other hand, as President, I cannot just impose my will on Congress -- the Congress of the United States -- even though sometimes I wish I could. The legislative branch has its own powers and its own prerogatives, and so they check my power and balance my power. I appoint some of our judges, but I cannot tell them how to rule, because every person in America -- from a child living in poverty to me, the President of the United States -- is equal under the law. And a judge can make a determination as to whether or not I am upholding the law or breaking the law. And I am fully accountable to that law.

And I describe our system in the United States because that's how you must reach for the future that you deserve -- a future where a single prisoner of conscience is one too many. You need to reach for a future where the law is stronger than any single leader, because it's accountable to the people. You need to reach for a future where no child is made to be a soldier and no woman is exploited, and where the laws protect them even if they're vulnerable, even if they're weak; a future where national security is strengthened by a military that serves under civilians and a Constitution that guarantees that only those who are elected by the people may govern.

On that journey, America will support you every step of the way -- by using our assistance to empower civil society; by engaging your military to promote professionalism and human rights; and by partnering with you as you connect your progress towards democracy with economic development.

So advancing that journey will help you pursue a second freedom -- the belief that all people should be free from want. It's not enough to trade a prison of powerlessness for the pain of an empty stomach. But history shows that governments of the people and by the people and for the people are far more powerful in delivering prosperity. And that's the partnership we seek with you.

When ordinary people have a say in their own future, then your land can’t just be taken away from you. And that's why reforms must ensure that the people of this nation can have that most fundamental of possessions -- the right to own the title to the land on which you live and on which you work.

When your talents are unleashed, then opportunity will be created for all people. America is lifting our ban on companies doing business here, and your government has lifted restrictions on investment and taken steps to open up your economy. And now, as more wealth flows into your borders, we hope and expect that it will lift up more people. It can't just help folks at the top. It has to help everybody. And that kind of economic growth, where everybody has opportunity -- if you work hard, you can succeed -- that's what gets a nation moving rapidly when it comes to develop.

But that kind of growth can only be created if corruption is left behind. For investment to lead to opportunity, reform must promote budgets that are transparent and industry that is privately owned.

To lead by example, America now insists that our companies meet high standards of openness and transparency if they're doing business here. And we'll work with organizations like the World Bank to support small businesses and to promote an economy that allows entrepreneurs, small businesspeople to thrive and allows workers to keep what they earn. And I very much welcome your government’s recent decision to join what we've called our Open Government Partnership, so that citizens can come to expect accountability and learn exactly how monies are spent and how your system of government operates.

Above all, when your voices are heard in government, it's far more likely that your basic needs will be met. And that’s why reform must reach the daily lives of those who are hungry and those who are ill, and those who live without electricity or water. And here, too, America will do our part in working with you.

Today, I was proud to reestablish our USAID mission in this country, which is our lead development agency. And the United States wants to be a partner in helping this country, which used to be the rice bowl of Asia, to reestablish its capacity to feed its people and to care for its sick, and educate its children, and build its democratic institutions as you continue down the path of reform.

This country is famous for its natural resources, and they must be protected against exploitation. And let us remember that in a global economy, a country’s greatest resource is its people. So by investing in you, this nation can open the door for far more prosperity -- because unlocking a nation’s potential depends on empowering all its people, especially its young people.

Just as education is the key to America’s future, it is going to the be the key to your future as well. And so we look forward to working with you, as we have with many of your neighbors, to extend that opportunity and to deepen exchanges among our students. We want students from this country to travel to the United States and learn from us, and we want U.S. students to come here and learn from you.

And this truth leads me to the third freedom that I want to discuss: the freedom to worship -- the freedom to worship as you please, and your right to basic human dignity.

This country, like my own country, is blessed with diversity. Not everybody looks the same. Not everybody comes from the same region. Not everybody worships in the same way. In your cities and towns, there are pagodas and temples, and mosques and churches standing side by side. Well over a hundred ethnic groups have been a part of your story. Yet within these borders, we’ve seen some of the world’s longest running insurgencies, which have cost countless lives, and torn families and communities apart, and stood in the way of development.

No process of reform will succeed without national reconciliation. You now have a moment of remarkable opportunity to transform cease-fires into lasting settlements, and to pursue peace where conflicts still linger, including in Kachin State. Those efforts must lead to a more just and lasting peace, including humanitarian access to those in need, and a chance for the displaced to return home.

Today, we look at the recent violence in Rakhine State that has caused so much suffering, and we see the danger of continued tensions there. For too long, the people of this state, including ethnic Rakhine, have faced crushing poverty and persecution. But there is no excuse for violence against innocent people. And the Rohingya hold themselves -- hold within themselves the same dignity as you do, and I do.

National reconciliation will take time, but for the sake of our common humanity, and for the sake of this country’s future, it is necessary to stop incitement and to stop violence. And I welcome the government’s commitment to address the issues of injustice and accountability, and humanitarian access and citizenship. That’s a vision that the world will support as you move forward.

Every nation struggles to define citizenship. America has had great debates about these issues, and those debates continue to this day, because we’re a nation of immigrants -- people coming from every different part of the world. But what we’ve learned in the United States is that there are certain principles that are universal, apply to everybody no matter what you look like, no matter where you come from, no matter what religion you practice. The right of people to live without the threat that their families may be harmed or their homes may be burned simply because of who they are or where they come from.

Only the people of this country ultimately can define your union, can define what it means to be a citizen of this country. But I have confidence that as you do that you can draw on this diversity as a strength and not a weakness. Your country will be stronger because of many different cultures, but you have to seize that opportunity. You have to recognize that strength.

I say this because my own country and my own life have taught me the power of diversity. The United States of America is a nation of Christians and Jews, and Muslims and Buddhists, and Hindus and non-believers. Our story is shaped by every language; it’s enriched by every culture. We have people from every corners of the world. We’ve tasted the bitterness of civil war and segregation, but our history shows us that hatred in the human heart can recede; that the lines between races and tribes fade away. And what’s left is a simple truth: e pluribus unum -- that’s what we say in America. Out of many, we are one nation and we are one people. And that truth has, time and again, made our union stronger. It has made our country stronger. It’s part of what has made America great.

We amended our Constitution to extend the democratic principles that we hold dear. And I stand before you today as President of the most powerful nation on Earth, but recognizing that once the color of my skin would have denied me the right to vote. And so that should give you some sense that if our country can transcend its differences, then yours can, too. Every human being within these borders is a part of your nation’s story, and you should embrace that. That’s not a source of weakness, that’s a source of strength -- if you recognize it.

And that brings me to the final freedom that I will discuss today, and that is the right of all people to live free from fear.

In many ways, fear is the force that stands between human beings and their dreams. Fear of conflict and the weapons of war. Fear of a future that is different from the past. Fear of changes that are reordering our societies and economy. Fear of people who look different, or come from a different place, or worship in a different way. In some of her darkest moments, when Aung San Suu Kyi was imprisoned, she wrote an essay about freedom from fear. She said fear of losing corrupts those who wield it -- “Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it, and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those who are subject to it.”

That's the fear that you can leave behind. We see that chance in leaders who are beginning to understand that power comes from appealing to people’s hopes, not people's fears. We see it in citizens who insist that this time must be different, that this time change will come and will continue. As Aung San Suu Kyi wrote: “Fear is not the natural state of civilized man.” I believe that. And today, you are showing the world that fear does not have to be the natural state of life in this country.

That’s why I am here. That’s why I came to Rangoon. And that’s why what happens here is so important -- not only to this region, but to the world. Because you're taking a journey that has the potential to inspire so many people. This is a test of whether a country can transition to a better place.

The United States of America is a Pacific nation, and we see our future as bound to those nations and peoples to our West. And as our economy recovers, this is where we believe we will find enormous growth. As we have ended the wars that have dominated our foreign policy for a decade, this region will be a focus for our efforts to build a prosperous peace.

Here in Southeast Asia, we see the potential for integration among nations and people. And as President, I have embraced ASEAN for reasons that go beyond the fact that I spent some of my childhood in this region, in Indonesia. Because with ASEAN, we see nations that are on the move -- nations that are growing, and democracies that are emerging; governments that are cooperating; progress that’s building on the diversity that spans oceans and islands and jungles and cities, peoples of every race and every religion. This is what the 21st century should look like if we have the courage to put aside our differences and move forward with a sense of mutual interest and mutual respect.

And here in Rangoon, I want to send a message across Asia: We don’t need to be defined by the prisons of the past. We need to look forward to the future. To the leadership of North Korea, I have offered a choice: let go of your nuclear weapons and choose the path of peace and progress. If you do, you will find an extended hand from the United States of America.

In 2012, we don’t need to cling to the divisions of East, West and North and South. We welcome the peaceful rise of China, your neighbor to the North; and India, your neighbor to the West. The United Nations -- the United States will work with any nation, large or small, that will contribute to a world that is more peaceful and more prosperous, and more just and more free. And the United States will be a friend to any nation that respects the rights of its citizens and the responsibilities of international law.

That's the nation, that's the world that you can start to build here in this historic city. This nation that's been so isolated can show the world the power of a new beginning, and demonstrate once again that the journey to democracy goes hand in hand with development. I say this knowing that there are still countless people in this country who do not enjoy the opportunities that many of you seated here do. There are tens of millions who have no electricity. There are prisoners of conscience who still await release. There are refugees and displaced peoples in camps where hope is still something that lies on the distant horizon.

Today, I say to you -- and I say to everybody that can hear my voice -- that the United States of America is with you, including those who have been forgotten, those who are dispossessed, those who are ostracized, those who are poor. We carry your story in our heads and your hopes in our hearts, because in this 21st century with the spread of technology and the breaking down of barriers, the frontlines of freedom are within nations and individuals, not simply between them.

As one former prisoner put it in speaking to his fellow citizens, “Politics is your job. It’s not only for [the] politicians.” And we have an expression in the United States that the most important office in a democracy is the office of citizen -- not President, not Speaker, but citizen.

So as extraordinary and difficult and challenging and sometimes frustrating as this journey may seem, in the end, you, the citizens of this country, are the ones who must define what freedom means. You're the ones who are going to have to seize freedom, because a true revolution of the spirit begins in each of our hearts. It requires the kind of courage that so many of your leaders have already displayed.

The road ahead will be marked by huge challenges, and there will be those who resist the forces of change. But I stand here with confidence that something is happening in this country that cannot be reversed, and the will of the people can lift up this nation and set a great example for the world. And you will have in the United States of America a partner on that long journey. So, cezu tin bad de.

Thank you.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Statement on the Sandy Hook Elementary School Shootings in Newtown, Connecticut

This afternoon, I spoke with Governor Malloy and FBI Director Mueller. I offered Governor Malloy my condolences on behalf of the nation, and made it clear he will have every single resource that he needs to investigate this heinous crime, care for the victims, counsel their families.

We’ve endured too many of these tragedies in the past few years. And each time I learn the news I react not as a President, but as anybody else would -- as a parent. And that was especially true today. I know there’s not a parent in America who doesn’t feel the same overwhelming grief that I do.

The majority of those who died today were children -- beautiful little kids between the ages of 5 and 10 years old. They had their entire lives ahead of them -- birthdays, graduations, weddings, kids of their own. Among the fallen were also teachers -- men and women who devoted their lives to helping our children fulfill their dreams.

So our hearts are broken today -- for the parents and grandparents, sisters and brothers of these little children, and for the families of the adults who were lost. Our hearts are broken for the parents of the survivors as well, for as blessed as they are to have their children home tonight, they know that their children’s innocence has been torn away from them too early, and there are no words that will ease their pain.

As a country, we have been through this too many times. Whether it’s an elementary school in Newtown, or a shopping mall in Oregon, or a temple in Wisconsin, or a movie theater in Aurora, or a street corner in Chicago -- these neighborhoods are our neighborhoods, and these children are our children. And we're going to have to come together and take meaningful action to prevent more tragedies like this, regardless of the politics.

This evening, Michelle and I will do what I know every parent in America will do, which is hug our children a little tighter and we’ll tell them that we love them, and we’ll remind each other how deeply we love one another. But there are families in Connecticut who cannot do that tonight. And they need all of us right now. In the hard days to come, that community needs us to be at our best as Americans. And I will do everything in my power as President to help.

Because while nothing can fill the space of a lost child or loved one, all of us can extend a hand to those in need -- to remind them that we are there for them, that we are praying for them, that the love they felt for those they lost endures not just in their memories but also in ours.

May God bless the memory of the victims and, in the words of [Scripture], heal the brokenhearted and bind up their wounds.

# Interfaith Prayer Vigil Address at Newtown High School

Thank you, Governor. To all the families, first responders, to the community of Newtown, clergy, guests -- Scripture tells us:

Do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, inwardly, we are being renewed day by day.For light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all, so we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven not built by human hands.

We gather here in memory of twenty beautiful children and six remarkable adults. They lost their lives in a school that could have been any school; in a quiet town full of good and decent people that could be any town in America.

Here in Newtown, I come to offer the love and prayers of a nation. I am very mindful that mere words cannot match the depths of your sorrow, nor can they heal your wounded hearts. I can only hope it helps for you to know that you’re not alone in your grief; that our world too has been torn apart; that all across this land of ours, we have wept with you, we’ve pulled our children tight. And you must know that whatever measure of comfort we can provide, we will provide; whatever portion of sadness that we can share with you to ease this heavy load, we will gladly bear it.

Newtown -- you are not alone.

As these difficult days have unfolded, you’ve also inspired us with stories of strength and resolve and sacrifice. We know that when danger arrived in the halls of Sandy Hook Elementary, the school’s staff did not flinch, they did not hesitate. Dawn Hochsprung and Mary Sherlach, Vicki Soto, Lauren Rousseau, Rachel Davino and Anne Marie Murphy -- they responded as we all hope we might respond in such terrifying circumstances -- with courage and with love, giving their lives to protect the children in their care.

We know that there were other teachers who barricaded themselves inside classrooms, and kept steady through it all, and reassured their students by saying "wait for the good guys, they’re coming"; "show me your smile."

And we know that good guys came. The first responders who raced to the scene, helping to guide those in harm’s way to safety, and comfort those in need, holding at bay their own shock and trauma because they had a job to do, and others needed them more.

And then there were the scenes of the schoolchildren, helping one another, holding each other, dutifully following instructions in the way that young children sometimes do; one child even trying to encourage a grown-up by saying, "I know karate. So it’s okay. I’ll lead the way out."

As a community, you’ve inspired us, Newtown. In the face of indescribable violence, in the face of unconscionable evil, you’ve looked out for each other, and you’ve cared for one another, and you’ve loved one another. This is how Newtown will be remembered. And with time, and God’s grace, that love will see you through.

But we, as a nation, we are left with some hard questions. Someone once described the joy and anxiety of parenthood as the equivalent of having your heart outside of your body all the time, walking around. With their very first cry, this most precious, vital part of ourselves -- our child -- is suddenly exposed to the world, to possible mishap or malice. And every parent knows there is nothing we will not do to shield our children from harm. And yet, we also know that with that child’s very first step, and each step after that, they are separating from us; that we won’t -- that we can’t always be there for them. They’ll suffer sickness and setbacks and broken hearts and disappointments. And we learn that our most important job is to give them what they need to become self-reliant and capable and resilient, ready to face the world without fear.

And we know we can’t do this by ourselves. It comes as a shock at a certain point where you realize, no matter how much you love these kids, you can’t do it by yourself. That this job of keeping our children safe, and teaching them well, is something we can only do together, with the help of friends and neighbors, the help of a community, and the help of a nation. And in that way, we come to realize that we bear a responsibility for every child because we’re counting on everybody else to help look after ours; that we’re all parents; that they’re all our children.

This is our first task -- caring for our children. It’s our first job. If we don’t get that right, we don’t get anything right. That’s how, as a society, we will be judged.

And by that measure, can we truly say, as a nation, that we are meeting our obligations? Can we honestly say that we’re doing enough to keep our children -- all of them -- safe from harm? Can we claim, as a nation, that we’re all together there, letting them know that they are loved, and teaching them to love in return? Can we say that we’re truly doing enough to give all the children of this country the chance they deserve to live out their lives in happiness and with purpose?

I’ve been reflecting on this the last few days, and if we’re honest with ourselves, the answer is no. We’re not doing enough. And we will have to change.

Since I’ve been President, this is the fourth time we have come together to comfort a grieving community torn apart by a mass shooting. The fourth time we’ve hugged survivors. The fourth time we’ve consoled the families of victims. And in between, there have been an endless series of deadly shootings across the country, almost daily reports of victims, many of them children, in small towns and big cities all across America -- victims whose -- much of the time, their only fault was being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

We can’t tolerate this anymore. These tragedies must end. And to end them, we must change. We will be told that the causes of such violence are complex, and that is true. No single law -- no set of laws can eliminate evil from the world, or prevent every senseless act of violence in our society.

But that can’t be an excuse for inaction. Surely, we can do better than this. If there is even one step we can take to save another child, or another parent, or another town, from the grief that has visited Tucson, and Aurora, and Oak Creek, and Newtown, and communities from Columbine to Blacksburg before that -- then surely we have an obligation to try.

In the coming weeks, I will use whatever power this office holds to engage my fellow citizens -- from law enforcement to mental health professionals to parents and educators -- in an effort aimed at preventing more tragedies like this. Because what choice do we have? We can’t accept events like this as routine. Are we really prepared to say that we’re powerless in the face of such carnage, that the politics are too hard? Are we prepared to say that such violence visited on our children year after year after year is somehow the price of our freedom?

All the world’s religions -- so many of them represented here today -- start with a simple question: Why are we here? What gives our life meaning? What gives our acts purpose? We know our time on this Earth is fleeting. We know that we will each have our share of pleasure and pain; that even after we chase after some earthly goal, whether it’s wealth or power or fame, or just simple comfort, we will, in some fashion, fall short of what we had hoped. We know that no matter how good our intentions, we will all stumble sometimes, in some way. We will make mistakes, we will experience hardships. And even when we’re trying to do the right thing, we know that much of our time will be spent groping through the darkness, so often unable to discern God’s heavenly plans.

There’s only one thing we can be sure of, and that is the love that we have -- for our children, for our families, for each other. The warmth of a small child’s embrace -- that is true. The memories we have of them, the joy that they bring, the wonder we see through their eyes, that fierce and boundless love we feel for them, a love that takes us out of ourselves, and binds us to something larger -- we know that’s what matters. We know we’re always doing right when we’re taking care of them, when we’re teaching them well, when we’re showing acts of kindness. We don’t go wrong when we do that.

That’s what we can be sure of. And that’s what you, the people of Newtown, have reminded us. That’s how you’ve inspired us. You remind us what matters. And that’s what should drive us forward in everything we do, for as long as God sees fit to keep us on this Earth.

“Let the little children come to me,” Jesus said, “and do not hinder them -- for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.”

Charlotte. Daniel. Olivia. Josephine. Ana. Dylan. Madeleine. Catherine. Chase. Jesse. James. Grace. Emilie. Jack. Noah. Caroline. Jessica. Benjamin. Avielle. Allison.

God has called them all home. For those of us who remain, let us find the strength to carry on, and make our country worthy of their memory.

May God bless and keep those we’ve lost in His heavenly place. May He grace those we still have with His holy comfort. And may He bless and watch over this community, and the United States of America.

# Press Conference

Good morning, everybody.

It’s now been five days since the heartbreaking tragedy in Newtown, Connecticut; three days since we gathered as a nation to pray for the victims. And today, a few more of the 20 small children and six educators who were taken from us will be laid to rest.

We may never know all the reasons why this tragedy happened. We do know that every day since, more Americans have died of gun violence. We know such violence has terrible consequences for our society. And if there is even one thing that we can do to prevent any of these events, we have a deep obligation -- all of us -- to try.

Over these past five days, a discussion has reemerged as to what we might do not only to deter mass shootings in the future, but to reduce the epidemic of gun violence that plagues this country every single day. And it’s encouraging that people of all different backgrounds and beliefs and political persuasions have been willing to challenge some old assumptions and change longstanding positions.

That conversation has to continue. But this time, the words need to lead to action.

We know this is a complex issue that stirs deeply held passions and political divides. And as I said on Sunday night, there’s no law or set of laws that can prevent every senseless act of violence in our society. We’re going to need to work on making access to mental health care at least as easy as access to a gun. We’re going to need to look more closely at a culture that all too often glorifies guns and violence. And any actions we must take must begin inside the home and inside our hearts.

But the fact that this problem is complex can no longer be an excuse for doing nothing. The fact that we can’t prevent every act of violence doesn’t mean we can’t steadily reduce the violence, and prevent the very worst violence.

That’s why I’ve asked the Vice President to lead an effort that includes members of my Cabinet and outside organizations to come up with a set of concrete proposals no later than January -- proposals that I then intend to push without delay. This is not some Washington commission. This is not something where folks are going to be studying the issue for six months and publishing a report that gets read and then pushed aside. This is a team that has a very specific task, to pull together real reforms right now. I asked Joe to lead this effort in part because he wrote the 1994 Crime Bill that helped law enforcement bring down the rate of violent crime in this country. That plan -- That bill also included the assault weapons ban that was publicly supported at the time by former Presidents including Ronald Reagan.

The good news is there’s already a growing consensus for us to build from. A majority of Americans support banning the sale of military-style assault weapons. A majority of Americans support banning the sale of high-capacity ammunition clips. A majority of Americans support laws requiring background checks before all gun purchases, so that criminals can’t take advantage of legal loopholes to buy a gun from somebody who won’t take the responsibility of doing a background check at all.

I urge the new Congress to hold votes on these measures next year in a timely manner. And considering Congress hasn’t confirmed a director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms in six years -- the agency that works most closely with state and local law enforcement to keep illegal guns out of the hands of criminals -- I’d suggest that they make this a priority early in the year.

Look, like the majority of Americans, I believe that the Second Amendment guarantees an individual right to bear arms. This country has a strong tradition of gun ownership that’s been handed down from generation to generation. Obviously across the country there are regional differences. There are differences between how people feel in urban areas and rural areas. And the fact is the vast majority of gun owners in America are responsible -- they buy their guns legally and they use them safely, whether for hunting or sport shooting, collection or protection.

But you know what, I am also betting that the majority -- the vast majority -- of responsible, law-abiding gun owners would be some of the first to say that we should be able to keep an irresponsible, law-breaking few from buying a weapon of war. I’m willing to bet that they don’t think that using a gun and using common sense are incompatible ideas -- that an unbalanced man shouldn’t be able to get his hands on a military-style assault rifle so easily; that in this age of technology, we should be able to check someone’s criminal records before he or she can check out at a gun show; that if we work harder to keep guns out of the hands of dangerous people, there would be fewer atrocities like the one in Newtown -- or any of the lesser-known tragedies that visit small towns and big cities all across America every day.

Since Friday morning, a police officer was gunned down in Memphis, leaving four children without their mother. Two officers were killed outside a grocery store in Topeka. A woman was shot and killed inside a Las Vegas casino. Three people were shot inside an Alabama hospital. A four-year-old was caught in a drive-by in Missouri, and taken off life support just yesterday. Each one of these Americans was a victim of the everyday gun violence that takes the lives of more than 10,000 Americans every year -- violence that we cannot accept as routine.

So I will use all the powers of this office to help advance efforts aimed at preventing more tragedies like this. We won’t prevent them all -- but that can’t be an excuse not to try. It won’t be easy -- but that can't be an excuse not to try.

And I'm not going to be able to do it by myself. Ultimately if this effort is to succeed it’s going to require the help of the American people -- it’s going to require all of you. If we're going to change things, it’s going to take a wave of Americans -- mothers and fathers, daughters and sons, pastors, law enforcement, mental health professionals -- and, yes, gun owners -- standing up and saying “enough” on behalf of our kids.

It will take commitment and compromise, and most of all, it will take courage. But if those of us who were sent here to serve the public trust can summon even one tiny iota of the courage those teachers, that principal in Newtown summoned on Friday -- if cooperation and common sense prevail -- then I’m convinced we can make a sensible, intelligent way to make the United States of America a safer, stronger place for our children to learn and to grow.

Thank you. And now I'm going to let the Vice President go and I'm going to take a few questions. And I will start with Ben Feller.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. I'd like to ask you about the other serious issue consuming this town right now, the fiscal cliff.

President Obama: Right.

Question: Haven’t you betrayed some of the voters who supported you in the election by changing your positions on who should get a tax increase and by including Social Security benefits now in this mix? And more broadly, there seems to be a deepening sense that negotiations aren't going very well right now. Can you give us a candid update? Are we likely to go over the cliff?

President Obama: Well, first of all, there's no reason why we should. Remember what I said during the campaign. I thought that it was important for us to reduce our deficit in a balanced and responsible way. I said it was important for us to make sure that millionaires and billionaires paid their fair share. I said that we were going to have to make some tough cuts, some tough decisions on the spending side, but what I wouldn't do was hurt vulnerable families only to pay for a tax cut for somebody like me. And what I said was that the ultimate package would involve a balance of spending cuts and tax increases.

That's exactly what I've put forward. What I've said is, is that in order to arrive at a compromise, I am prepared to do some very tough things -- some things that some Democrats don't want to see and probably there are a few Republicans who don't want to see either. But the only way that we're going to be able to stabilize the economy, make sure we've got a platform for long-term economic growth, that we get our deficits under control and we make sure that middle-class families are protected is if we come up with something that members of both parties in Congress can support.

And that's the plan that I've put forward. I have gone at least halfway in meeting some of the Republicans' concerns, recognizing that even though we campaigned on these issues, even though the majority of Americans agree with me that we should be raising taxes on the wealthiest few as a means of reducing the deficit, I have also said that I'm willing to identify some spending cuts that make sense.

And, frankly, up until about a couple of days ago, if you looked at it, the Republicans in the House and Speaker Boehner I think were in a position to say, we've gotten a fair deal. The fact that they haven't taken it yet is puzzling and I think a question that you're going to have to address to them.

I remain optimistic, though, because if you look at what the Speaker has proposed, he's conceded that income tax rates should go up -- except right now he only wants to have them go up for millionaires. If you're making $900,000, somehow he thinks that you can't afford to pay a little more in taxes. But the principle that rates are going to need to go up he's conceded.

I've said I'm willing to make some cuts. What separates us is probably a few hundred billion dollars. The idea that we would put our economy at risk because you can't bridge that gap doesn’t make a lot of sense.

So I'm going to continue to talk to the Speaker and the other leaders up in Congress. But, ultimately, they've got to do their job. Right now their job is to make sure that middle-class taxes do not go up and that we have a balanced, responsible package of deficit reduction.

It is there for all to see. It is a deal that can get done. But it is not going to be -- it cannot be done if every side wants 100 percent. And part of what voters were looking for is some compromise up here. That’s what folks want. They understand that they're not going to get 100 percent of what they want. And for some reason, that message has not yet taken up on Capitol Hill.

And when you think about what we've gone through over the last couple of months -- a devastating hurricane, and now one of the worst tragedies in our memory -- the country deserves folks to be willing to compromise on behalf of the greater good, and not tangle themselves up in a whole bunch of ideological positions that don’t make much sense.

So I remain not only open to conversations, but I remain eager to get something done. I'd like to get it done before Christmas. There's been a lot of posturing up on Capitol Hill, instead of just going ahead and getting stuff done. And we've been wasting a lot of time. It is the right thing to do. I'm prepared to get it done. But they're going to have to go ahead and make some adjustments.

And I'll just give you one other example. The Speaker now is proposing what he calls plan B. So he says, well, this would raise taxes only on folks making a million dollars or more. What that means is an average of a $50,000 tax break for every millionaire out there, at the same time as we're not providing unemployment insurance for 2 million people who are still out there looking for work. It actually means a tax increase for millions of working families across the country at the same time as folks like me would be getting a tax break. That violates the core principles that were debated during the course of this election and that the American people determined was the wrong way to go.

And so my hope is, is that the Speaker and his caucus, in conjunction with the other legislative leaders up there, can find a way to make sure that middle-class families don’t see their taxes go up on January 1st; that we make sure that those things that middle-class families count on like tax credits for college, or making sure that they’re getting some help when it comes to raising their kids through things like the child tax credit, that that gets done; and that we have a balanced package for deficit reduction, which is exactly what I’ve put forward.

Question: Will you give more ground if you need to, or are you done?

President Obama: If you look at the package that I put forward, it is a balanced package by any definition. We have put forward real cuts in spending that are hard to do, in every category. And by any measure, by any traditional calculation, by the measures that Republicans themselves have used in the past, this would be as large a piece of deficit reduction as we’ve seen in the last 20 years. And if you combine that with the increased revenue from the wealthy paying a little bit more, then you actually have something that would stabilize our deficit and debt for a decade -- for 10 years.

Now, the notion that we would not do that, but instead the Speaker would run a play that keeps tax cuts for folks making $500,000 or $700,000 or $800,000 or $900,000 a year, and gives more tax breaks to millionaires and billionaires, and raises taxes on middle-class families, and then has no cuts in it -- which is what he says he wants -- doesn’t make much sense.

I mean, let’s just think about the logic for a second. They’re thinking about voting for raising taxes at least on folks over a million, which they say they don’t want to do, but they’re going to reject spending cuts that they say they do want to do. That defies logic. There’s no explanation for that.

I think that any objective person out there looking would say that we’ve put forward a very balanced plan and it’s time for us to go ahead and get it done. That’s what the country needs right now. Because I think folks have been through some wrenching times, we’re still recovering from a very tough recession, and what they’re hoping for is a sense of stability, focus, compromise, common sense over the next couple of years. And I think we can provide it. But this is a good test for them.

Carol Lee.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Just to follow on Ben's question, what is your next move? Are we in a position now where you're just waiting for the Speaker to make a move?

President Obama: Well, I'm going to reach out to all the leaders involved over the next couple of days and find out what is it that's holding this thing up. What is holding it up? If the argument from Republicans is we haven't done enough spending cuts, that argument is not going to fly because we've got close to a trillion dollars of spending cuts. And when you add interest, then it's more than a trillion dollars in spending cuts.

If the argument is that they can't do -- they can't increase tax rates on folks making $700,000 or $800,000 a year, that's not a persuasive argument to me and it's certainly not a persuasive argument to the American people.

It may be that members of their caucus haven't looked at exactly what we've proposed. It may be that if we provide more information or there's greater specificity or we work through some of their concerns, that we can get some movement then.

But the fact of the matter is, is that what would violate my commitment to voters is if I ended up agreeing to a plan that put more of the burden on middle-class families and less of a burden on the wealthy in an effort to reduce our deficit. That's not something I'm going to do. What would violate my commitment to voters would be to put forward a plan that makes it harder for young people to go to college, that makes it harder for a family with a disabled kid to care for that kid.

And there's a threshold that you reach where the balance tips, even in making compromises that are required to get something done in this town, where you are hurting people in order to give another advantage to folks who don't need help. And we had an extensive debate about this for a year. And not only does the majority of the American people agree with me, about half of Republican voters agree with me on this.

So at some point, there's got to be I think a recognition on the part of my Republican friends that -- take the deal. They will be able to claim that they have worked with me over the last two years to reduce the deficit more than any other deficit reduction package; that we will have stabilized it for 10 years. That is a significant achievement for them. They should be proud of it. But they keep on finding ways to say no, as opposed to finding ways to say yes.

And I don’t know how much of that just has to do with -- it is very hard for them to say yes to me. But at some point, they’ve got to take me out of it and think about their voters, and think about what’s best for the country. And if they do that -- if they’re not worried about who’s winning and who’s losing, did they score a point on the President, did they extract that last little concession, did they force him to do something he really doesn’t want to do just for the heck of it, and they focus on actually what’s good for the country, I actually think we can get this done.

Question: You mentioned the $700,000 and $800,000. Are you willing to move on income level and are there specific things that you would do --

President Obama: I’m not going to get into specific negotiations here. My point is simple, Carol, that if you look at Speaker Boehner’s proposal and you look at my proposal, they’re actually pretty close. They keep on saying that somehow we haven’t put forward real spending cuts. Actually, there was I think a graph in The New York Times today that showed -- they’re the same categories, right? There’s a little bit of tweaks here and there; there are a few differences, but we’re right there.

And on the revenue side, there’s a difference in terms of them wanting to preserve tax breaks for folks between $250,000 and a million that we just can’t afford. I mean, keep in mind I’m in that income category; I’d love to not pay as much in taxes. But I also think it’s the right thing to do for us to make sure that people who have less -- people who are working, people who are striving, people who are hoping for their kids -- that they have opportunity. That’s what we campaigned about. That’s what we talked about.

And this is not a situation where I’m unwilling to compromise. This is not a situation where I’m trying to rub their face in anything. I think anybody who looks at this objectively would say that coming off my election, I have met them at least halfway in order to get something done for the country.

And so I noticed that there were a couple of headlines out there saying, oh, we’re now in the land of political posturing, and it’s the usual he said-he said atmosphere. But look at the facts. Look at where we started; look at where they started. My proposal is right there in the middle.

We should be able to get this done. Let’s get it done. We don’t have a lot of time.

Carrie. Where’s -- there you are.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President.

President Obama: Yes.

Question: What is your level of confidence that if you are able to reach a comprehensive deal with the Speaker, that he will be able to bring his members onboard and get it passed? Essentially, do you still trust Speaker Boehner in this process?

President Obama: There is no doubt that the Speaker has challenges in his caucus, and I recognize that. I’m often reminded when I speak to the Republican leadership that the majority of their caucus’s membership come from districts that I lost. And so sometimes they may not see an incentive in cooperating with me, in part because they’re more concerned about challenges from a tea party candidate, or challenges from the right, and cooperating with me may make them vulnerable. I recognize that.

But, goodness, if this past week has done anything, it should just give us some perspective. If there’s one thing we should have after this week, it should be a sense of perspective about what’s important. And I would like to think that members of that caucus would say to themselves: You know what, we disagree with the President on a whole bunch of things. We wish the other guy had won. We’re going to fight him on a whole range of issues over the next four years. We think his philosophy is all screwed up. But right now, what the country needs is for us to compromise, get a deficit reduction deal in place; make sure middle class taxes don’t go up; make sure that we’re laying the foundations for growth; give certainty to businesses large and small; not put ourselves through some sort of self-inflicted crisis every six months; allow ourselves time to focus on things like preventing the tragedy in Newtown from happening again; focus on issues like energy and immigration reform and all the things that will really make a determination as to whether our country grows over the next four years, 10 years, 40 years.

And if you just pull back from the immediate political battles, if you kind of peel off the partisan war paint, then we should be able to get something done.

And I think the Speaker would like to get that done. I think an environment needs to be created within not just the House Republican caucus, but also among Senate Republicans that say, the campaign is over and let’s see if we can do what’s right for the country -- at least for the next month. And then we can reengage in all the other battles that they’ll want to fight.

Question: If you don’t get it done, Republicans have said they’ll try to use the debt limit as a next pressure point. Would you negotiate with them in that context?

President Obama: No. And I’ve been very clear about this. This is the United States of America, the greatest country on Earth, the world’s economic superpower. And the idea that we lurch from crisis to crisis, and every six months, or every nine months, that we threaten not to pay our bills on stuff we’ve already bought, and default, and ruin the full faith and credit of the United States of America -- that’s not how you run a great country.

So I’ve put forward a very clear principle: I will not negotiate around the debt ceiling. We’re not going to play the same game that we saw happen in 2011 -- which was hugely destructive; hurt our economy; provided more uncertainty to the business community than anything else that happened.

And I'm not alone in this. If you go to Wall Street, including talking to a whole bunch of folks who spent a lot of money trying to beat me, they would say it would be disastrous for us to use the debt ceiling as a cudgel to try to win political points on Capitol Hill.

So we're not going to do that -- which is why I think that part of what I hope over the next couple of days we see is a recognition that there is a way to go ahead and get what it is that you've been fighting for. These guys have been fighting for spending cuts. They can get some very meaningful spending cuts. This would amount to $2 trillion -- $2 trillion -- in spending cuts over the last couple of years. And in exchange, they're getting a little over a trillion dollars in revenue. And that meets the pledge that I made during the campaign, which was $2 to $2.50 of spending cuts for every revenue increase. And that's an approach that I think most Americans think is appropriate.

But I will not negotiate around the debt ceiling. We're not going to do that again.

Question: Sir, may I ask a question about Newtown, please?

President Obama: Yes, I've got David Jackson.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Getting back to the gun issue, you alluded to the fact that Washington commissions don't have the greatest reputation in the world. What makes you think this one is going to be different given the passage of time and the political power of gun rights groups like the National Rifle Association?

President Obama: Well, this is not going to be a commission. Joe is going to gather up some key Cabinet members who have an interest in this issue. We're going to reach out to a bunch of stakeholders. We're going to be reaching out to members of Congress who have an interest in this issue. It's not as if we have to start from scratch. There are a whole bunch of proposals that have been thought about, debated, but hopefully also some new ideas in terms of how we deal with this issue.

Their task is going to be to sift through every good idea that's out there, and even take a look at some bad ideas before disposing of them, and come up with a concrete set of recommendations in about a month. And I would hope that our memories aren't so short that what we saw in Newtown isn't lingering with us, that we don't remain passionate about it only a month later.

And as soon as we get those recommendations, I will be putting forward very specific proposals. I will be talking about them in my State of The Union and we will be working with interested members of Congress to try to get some of them done.

And the idea that we would say this is terrible, this is a tragedy, never again, and we don’t have the sustained attention span to be able to get this done over the next several months doesn’t make sense. I have more confidence in the American people than that. I have more confidence in the parents, the mothers and fathers that I’ve been meeting over the last several days all across the country from all political persuasions, including a lot of gun owners, who say, you know what, this time we’ve got to do things differently.

Question: What about the NRA?

President Obama: Well, the NRA is an organization that has members who are mothers and fathers. And I would expect that they’ve been impacted by this as well. And hopefully they’ll do some self-reflection.

And here’s what we know -- that any single gun law can’t solve all these problems. We’re going to have to look at mental health issues. We’re going to have to look at schools. There are going to be a whole range of things that Joe’s group looks at. We know that issues of gun safety will be an element of it. And what we’ve seen over the last 20 years, 15 years, is the sense that anything related to guns is somehow an encroachment on the Second Amendment. What we’re looking for here is a thoughtful approach that says we can preserve our Second Amendment, we can make sure that responsible gun owners are able to carry out their activities, but that we’re going to actually be serious about the safety side of this; that we’re going to be serious about making sure that something like Newtown or Aurora doesn’t happen again.

And there is a big chunk of space between what the Second Amendment means and having no rules at all. And that space is what Joe is going to be working on to try to identify where we can find some common ground.

So I’ve got -- I’m going to take one last question.

Go ahead, Jake.

Question: It seems to a lot of observers that you made the political calculation in 2008 in your first term and in 2012 not to talk about gun violence. You had your position on renewing the ban on semiautomatic rifles that then-Senator Biden put into place, but you didn’t do much about it. This is not the first issue -- the first incident of horrific gun violence of your four years. Where have you been?

President Obama: Well, here’s where I’ve been, Jake. I’ve been President of the United States dealing with the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, an auto industry on the verge of collapse, two wars. I don’t think I’ve been on vacation.

And so I think all of us have to do some reflection on how we prioritize what we do here in Washington. And as I said on Sunday, this should be a wake-up call for all of us to say that if we are not getting right the need to keep our children safe, then nothing else matters. And it’s my commitment to make sure that we do everything we can to keep our children safe.

A lot of things go in -- are involved in that, Jake. So making sure they’ve got decent health care and making sure they’ve got a good education, making sure that their parents have jobs -- those are all relevant as well. Those aren’t just sort of side issues. But there’s no doubt that this has to be a central issue. And that’s exactly why I’m confident that Joe is going to take this so seriously over the next couple months.

All right. Thank you, everybody.

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# Eulogy for Senator Daniel Ken Inouye

To Irene, Ken, Jennifer, Danny's friends and former colleagues, it is an extraordinary honor to be here with you in this magnificent place to pay tribute to a man who would probably we wondering what all the fuss is about.

This Tuesday was in many ways a day like any other. The sun rose; the sun set; the great work of our democracy carried on. But in a fundamental sense it was different. It was the first day in many of our lives -- certainly my own -- that the halls of the United States Congress were not graced by the presence of Daniel Ken Inouye.

Danny was elected to the U.S. Senate when I was two years old. He had been elected to Congress a couple of years before I was born. He would remain my senator until I left Hawaii for college.

Now, even though my mother and grandparents took great pride that they had voted for him, I confess that I wasn't paying much attention to the United States Senate at the age of four or five or six. It wasn't until I was 11 years old that I recall even learning what a U.S. senator was, or it registering, at least. It was during my summer vacation with my family -- my first trip to what those of us in Hawaii call the Mainland.

So we flew over the ocean, and with my mother and my grandmother and my sister, who at the time was two, we traveled around the country. It was a big trip. We went to Seattle, and we went to Disneyland -- which was most important. We traveled to Kansas where my grandmother's family was from, and went to Chicago, and went to Yellowstone. And we took Greyhound buses most of the time, and we rented cars, and we would stay at local motels or Howard Johnson's. And if there was a pool at one of these motels, even if it was just tiny, I would be very excited. And the ice machine was exciting -- and the vending machine, I was really excited about that.

But this is at a time when you didn’t have 600 stations and 24 hours' worth of cartoons. And so at night, if the TV was on, it was what your parents decided to watch. And my mother that summer would turn on the TV every night during this vacation and watch the Watergate hearings. And I can't say that I understood everything that was being discussed, but I knew the issues were important. I knew they spoke to some basic way about who we were and who we might be as Americans.

And so, slowly, during the course of this trip, which lasted about a month, some of this seeped into my head. And the person who fascinated me most was this man of Japanese descent with one arm, speaking in this courtly baritone, full of dignity and grace. And maybe he captivated my attention because my mom explained that this was our senator and that he was upholding what our government was all about. Maybe it was a boyhood fascination with the story of how he had lost his arm in a war. But I think it was more than that.

Now, here I was, a young boy with a white mom, a black father, raised in Indonesia and Hawaii. And I was beginning to sense how fitting into the world might not be as simple as it might seem. And so to see this man, this senator, this powerful, accomplished person who wasn't out of central casting when it came to what you'd think a senator might look like at the time, and the way he commanded the respect of an entire nation I think it hinted to me what might be possible in my own life.

This was a man who as a teenager stepped up to serve his country even after his fellow Japanese Americans were declared enemy aliens; a man who believed in America even when its government didn't necessarily believe in him. That meant something to me. It gave me a powerful sense -- one that I couldn’t put into words -- a powerful sense of hope.

And as I watched those hearings, listening to Danny ask all those piercing questions night after night, I learned something else. I learned how our democracy was supposed to work, our government of and by and for the people; that we had a system of government where nobody is above the law, where we have an obligation to hold each other accountable, from the average citizen to the most powerful of leaders, because these things that we stand for, these ideals that we hold dear are bigger than any one person or party or politician.

And, somehow, nobody communicated that more effectively than Danny Inouye. You got a sense, as Joe mentioned, of just a fundamental integrity; that he was a proud Democrat, but most importantly, he was a proud American. And were it not for those two insights planted in my head at the age of 11, in between Disneyland and a trip to Yellowstone, I might never have considered a career in public service. I might not be standing here today.

I think it's fair to say that Danny Inouye was perhaps my earliest political inspiration. And then, for me to have the privilege of serving with him, to be elected to the United States Senate and arrive, and one of my first visits is to go to his office, and for him to greet me as a colleague, and treat me with the same respect that he treated everybody he met, and to sit me down and give me advice about how the Senate worked and then regale me with some stories about wartime and his recovery -- stories full of humor, never bitterness, never boastfulness, just matter-of-fact -- some of them I must admit a little off-color. I couldn’t probably repeat them in the cathedral. There’s a side of Danny that -- well.

Danny once told his son his service to this country had been for the children, or all the sons and daughters who deserved to grow up in a nation that never questioned their patriotism. This is my country, he said. Many of us have fought hard for the right to say that. And, obviously, Rick Shinseki described what it meant for Japanese Americans, but my point is, is that when he referred to our sons and daughters he wasn’t just talking about Japanese Americans. He was talking about all of us. He was talking about those who serve today who might have been excluded in the past. He’s talking about me.

And that’s who Danny was. For him, freedom and dignity were not abstractions. They were values that he had bled for, ideas he had sacrificed for, rights he understood as only someone can who has had them threatened, had them taken away.

The valor that earned him our nation’s highest military decoration -- a story so incredible that when you actually read the accounts, you think this -- you couldn’t make this up. It’s like out of an action movie. That valor was so rooted in a deep and abiding love of this country. And he believed, as we say in Hawaii that we’re a single ‘ohana -- that we're one family. And he devoted his life to making that family strong.

After experiencing the horror of war himself, Danny also felt a profound connection to those who followed. It wasn’t unusual for him to take time out of his busy schedule to sit down with a veteran or a fellow amputee, trading stories, telling jokes -- two heroes, generations apart, sharing an unspoken bond that was forged in battle and tempered in peace. In no small measure because of Danny’s service, our military is, and will always remain, the best in the world, and we recognize our sacred obligation to give our veterans the care they deserve.

Of course, Danny didn’t always take credit for the difference he made. Ever humble, one of the only landmarks that bear his name is a Marine Corps mess hall in Hawaii. And when someone asked him how he wanted to be remembered, Danny said, “I represented the people of Hawaii and this nation honestly and to the best of my ability. I think I did okay.”

Danny, you were more than okay. You were extraordinary.

It’s been mentioned that Danny ended his convention speech in Chicago in 1968 with the word, “aloha.” “To some of you who visited us, it may have meant hello,” he said, but “To others, it may have meant goodbye. Those of us who’ve been privileged to live in Hawaii understand aloha means I love you.”

And as someone who has been privileged to live in Hawaii, I know that he embodied the very best of that spirit, the very best of “aloha.” It’s fitting it was the last word that Danny spoke on this Earth. He may have been saying goodbye to us. Maybe he was saying hello to someone waiting on the other side. But it was a final expression most of all of his love for the family and friends that he cared so much about, for the men and women he was honored to serve with, for the country that held such a special place in his heart.

And so we remember a man who inspired all of us with his courage, and moved us with his compassion, that inspired us with his integrity, and who taught so many of us -- including a young kid growing up in Hawaii -- that America has a place for everyone.

May God bless Daniel Inouye.

And may God grant us more souls like his.

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# Final First Term Press Conference

Please have a seat, everybody. Good morning. I thought it might make sense to take some questions this week, as my first term comes to an end.

It’s been a busy and productive four years. And I expect the same for the next four years. I intend to carry out the agenda that I campaigned on -- an agenda for new jobs, new opportunity, and new security for the middle class.

Right now, our economy is growing, and our businesses are creating new jobs, so we are poised for a good year if we make smart decisions and sound investments -- and as long as Washington politics don’t get in the way of America’s progress.

As I said on the campaign, one component to growing our economy and broadening opportunity for the middle class is shrinking our deficits in a balanced and responsible way. And for nearly two years now, I’ve been fighting for such a plan -- one that would reduce our deficits by $4 trillion over the next decade, which would stabilize our debt and our deficit in a sustainable way for the next decade. That would be enough not only to stop the growth of our debt relative to the size of our economy, but it would make it manageable so it doesn’t crowd out the investments we need to make in people and education and job training and science and medical research -- all the things that help us grow.

Now, step by step, we’ve made progress towards that goal. Over the past two years, I’ve signed into law about $1.4 trillion in spending cuts. Two weeks ago, I signed into law more than $600 billion in new revenue by making sure the wealthiest Americans begin to pay their fair share. When you add the money that we’ll save in interest payments on the debt, all together that adds up to a total of about $2.5 trillion in deficit reduction over the past two years -- not counting the $400 billion already saved from winding down the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

So we've made progress. We are moving towards our ultimate goal of getting to a $4 trillion reduction. And there will be more deficit reduction when Congress decides what to do about the $1.2 trillion in automatic spending cuts that have been pushed off until next month.

The fact is, though, we can’t finish the job of deficit reduction through spending cuts alone. The cuts we’ve already made to priorities other than Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security and defense mean that we spend on everything from education to public safety less as a share of our economy than it has -- than has been true for a generation. And that’s not a recipe for growth.

So we’ve got to do more both to stabilize our finances over the medium and long term, but also spur more growth in the short term. I’ve said I’m open to making modest adjustments to programs like Medicare to protect them for future generations. I’ve also said that we need more revenue through tax reform by closing loopholes in our tax code for the wealthiest Americans. If we combine a balanced package of savings from spending on health care and revenues from closing loopholes, we can solve the deficit issue without sacrificing our investments in things like education that are going to help us grow.

It turns out the American people agree with me. They listened to an entire year’s debate over this issue, and they made a clear decision about the approach they prefer. They don’t think it’s fair, for example, to ask a senior to pay more for his or her health care, or a scientist to shut down lifesaving research so that a multimillionaire investor can pay less in tax rates than a secretary. They don’t think it’s smart to protect endless corporate loopholes and tax breaks for the wealthiest Americans rather than rebuild our roads and our schools, invest in our workers’ skills, or help manufacturers bring jobs back to America. So they want us to get our books in order in a balanced way, where everybody pulls their weight, everyone does their part.

That's what I want as well. That's what I've proposed. And we can get it done, but we're going to have to make sure that people are looking at this in a responsible way rather than just through the lens of politics.

Now, the other congressionally imposed deadline coming up is the so-called debt ceiling -- something most Americans hadn’t even heard of before two years ago. I want to be clear about this. The debt ceiling is not a question of authorizing more spending. Raising the debt ceiling does not authorize more spending. It simply allows the country to pay for spending that Congress has already committed to. These are bills that have already been racked up and we need to pay them.

So while I’m willing to compromise and find common ground over how to reduce our deficits, America cannot afford another debate with this Congress about whether or not they should pay the bills they’ve already racked up.

If congressional Republicans refuse to pay America’s bills on time, Social Security checks and veterans’ benefits will be delayed. We might not be able to pay our troops, or honor our contracts with small business owners. Food inspectors, air traffic controllers, specialists who track down loose nuclear material wouldn’t get their paychecks. Investors around the world will ask if the United States of America is, in fact, a safe bet. Markets could go haywire. Interest rates would spike for anybody who borrows money -- every homeowner with a mortgage, every student with a college loan, every small business owner who wants to grow and hire. It would be a self-inflicted wound on the economy. It would slow down our growth, might tip us into recession, and ironically, would probably increase our deficit.

So to even entertain the idea of this happening -- of the United States of America not paying its bills -- is irresponsible. It’s absurd. As the Speaker said two years ago, it would be -- and I'm quoting Speaker Boehner now -- “a financial disaster, not only for us, but for the worldwide economy.”

So we've got to pay our bills. And Republicans in Congress have two choices here: They can act responsibly, and pay America’s bills; or they can act irresponsibly, and put America through another economic crisis. But they will not collect a ransom in exchange for not crashing the American economy. The financial well-being of the American people is not leverage to be used. The full faith and credit of the United States of America is not a bargaining chip.

And they better choose quickly, because time is running short. The last time Republicans in Congress even flirted with this idea, our AAA credit rating was downgraded for the first time in our history; our businesses created the fewest jobs of any month in nearly the past three years; and, ironically, the whole fiasco actually added to the deficit.

So it shouldn’t be surprising, given all this talk, that the American people think Washington is hurting, rather than helping, the country at the moment. They see their representatives consumed with partisan brinksmanship over paying our bills, while they overwhelmingly want us to focus on growing the economy and creating more jobs.

So let’s finish this debate. Let’s give our businesses and the world the certainty that our economy and our reputation are still second to none. We pay our bills. We handle our business. And then we can move on -- because America has a lot to do. We’ve got to create more jobs. We've got to boost the wages of those who have work. We’ve got to reach for energy independence. We've got to reform our immigration system. We’ve got to give our children the best education possible, and we've got to do everything we can to protect them from the horrors of gun violence.

And let me say I’m grateful to Vice President Biden for his work on this issue of gun violence and for his proposals, which I'm going to be reviewing today and I will address in the next few days and I intend to vigorously pursue.

So, with that, I'm going to take some questions. And I'm going to start with Julie Pace of AP. And I want to congratulate Julie for this new, important job.

Question: Thank you very much.

President Obama: Yes.

Question: I wanted to ask about gun violence. Today marks the one-year -- or one-month anniversary of the shooting in Newtown, which seemed to generate some momentum for reinstating the assault weapons ban. But there’s been fresh opposition to that ban from the NRA. And even Harry Reid has said that he questions whether it could pass Congress. Given that, how hard will you push for an assault weapons ban? And if one cannot pass Congress, what other measures would need to be included in a broad package in order to curb gun violence successfully?

President Obama: Well, as I said, the Vice President and a number of members of my Cabinet went through a very thorough process over the last month, meeting with a lot of stakeholders in this including the NRA, listened to proposals from all quarters, and they’ve presented me now with a list of sensible, common-sense steps that can be taken to make sure that the kinds of violence we saw at Newtown doesn't happen again.

I’m going to be meeting with the Vice President today. I expect to have a fuller presentation later in the week to give people some specifics about what I think we need to do.

My starting point is not to worry about the politics; my starting point is to focus on what makes sense, what works; what should we be doing to make sure that our children are safe and that we’re reducing the incidents of gun violence. And I think we can do that in a sensible way that comports with the Second Amendment.

And then members of Congress I think are going to have to have a debate and examine their own conscience -- because if, in fact -- and I believe this is true -- everybody across party lines was as deeply moved and saddened as I was by what happened in Newtown, then we’re going to have to vote based on what we think is best. We’re going to have to come up with answers that set politics aside. And that's what I expect Congress to do.

But what you can count is, is that the things that I’ve said in the past -- the belief that we have to have stronger background checks, that we can do a much better job in terms of keeping these magazine clips with high capacity out of the hands of folks who shouldn’t have them, an assault weapons ban that is meaningful -- that those are things I continue to believe make sense.

Will all of them get through this Congress? I don’t know. But what’s uppermost in my mind is making sure that I’m honest with the American people and with members of Congress about what I think will work, what I think is something that will make a difference. And to repeat what I’ve said earlier -- if there is a step we can take that will save even one child from what happened in Newtown, we should take that step.

Question: Can a package be discussed to allow an assault weapons ban?

President Obama: I’ll present the details later in the week.

Chuck Todd, NBC.

Question: Thank you, sir. As you know, the Senate Democrats, Harry Reid sent you a letter begging you, essentially, to take -- consider some sort of executive action on this debt ceiling issue. I know you’ve said you’re not negotiating on it. Your administration has ruled out the various ideas that have been out there -- the 14th Amendment. But just this morning, one of the House Democratic leaders, Jim Clyburn, asked you to use the 14th Amendment and even said, sometimes that’s what it takes. He brought up the Emancipation Proclamation as saying it took executive action when Congress wouldn’t act, and he compared the debt ceiling to that. So are you considering a plan B, and if not, why not?

President Obama: Well, Chuck, the issue here is whether or not America pays its bills. We are not a deadbeat nation. And so there’s a very simple solution to this: Congress authorizes us to pay our bills.

Now, if the House and the Senate want to give me the authority so that they don’t have to take these tough votes, if they want to put the responsibility on me to raise the debt ceiling, I’m happy to take it. Mitch McConnell, the Republican Leader in the Senate, had a proposal like that last year, and I’m happy to accept it. But if they want to keep this responsibility, then they need to go ahead and get it done.

And there are no magic tricks here. There are no loopholes. There are no easy outs. This is a matter of Congress authorizes spending. They order me to spend. They tell me, you need to fund our Defense Department at such and such a level; you need to send out Social Security checks; you need to make sure that you are paying to care for our veterans. They lay all this out for me because they have the spending power. And so I am required by law to go ahead and pay these bills.

Separately, they also have to authorize the raising of the debt ceiling in order to make sure that those bills are paid. And so, what Congress can't do is tell me to spend X, and then say, but we're not going to give you the authority to go ahead and pay the bills.

And I just want to repeat -- because I think sometimes the American people, understandably, aren't following all the debates here in Washington -- raising the debt ceiling does not authorize us to spend more. All it does is say that America will pay its bills. And we are not a dead-beat nation. And the consequences of us not paying our bills, as I outlined in my opening statement, would be disastrous.

So I understand the impulse to try to get around this in a simple way. But there's one way to get around this. There's one way to deal with it. And that is for Congress to authorize me to pay for those items of spending that they have already authorized.

And the notion that Republicans in the House, or maybe some Republicans in the Senate, would suggest that “in order for us to get our way on our spending priorities, that we would risk the full faith and credit of the United States” -- that I think is not what the Founders intended. That's not how I think most Americans think our democracy should work. They've got a point of view; Democrats in Congress have a point of view. They need to sit down and work out a compromise.

Question: You just outlined an entire rationale for why this can't happen.

President Obama: Yes.

Question: And if -- then if -- and you're not negotiating on the debt ceiling.

President Obama: Yes.

Question: So you're not negotiating and they say you have to negotiate, and you're not considering another plan B, then do you just wait it out and we do go -- we do see all these things happen?

President Obama: Well look, Chuck, there are -- there's a pretty straightforward way of doing this and that is to set the debt ceiling aside, we pay our bills, and then we have a vigorous debate about how we're going to do further deficit reduction in a balanced way.

Keep in mind that what we've heard from some Republicans in both the House and the Senate is that they will only increase the debt ceiling by the amount of spending cuts that they're able to push through and -- in order to replace the automatic spending cuts of the sequester -- that's $1.2 trillion. Say it takes another trillion or trillion-two to get us through one more year, they'd have to identify $2.5 trillion in cuts just to get the debt ceiling extended to next year -- $2.5 trillion.

They can't even -- Congress has not been able to identify $1.2 trillion in cuts that they're happy with. Because these same Republicans say they don’t want to cut defense; they've claimed that they don't want to gut Medicare or harm the vulnerable. But the truth of the matter is that you can't meet their own criteria without drastically cutting Medicare, or having an impact on Medicaid, or affecting our defense spending. So the math just doesn’t add up.

Now, here’s what would work. What would work would be for us to say we’ve already done close to $2 trillion in deficit reduction, and if you add the interest that we won’t be paying because of less spending and increased revenue, it adds up to about $2.5 trillion. The consensus is we need about $4 trillion to stabilize our debt and our deficit, which means we need about $1.5 trillion more. The package that I offered to Speaker Boehner before we -- before the New Year would achieve that. We were actually fairly close in terms of arriving at that number.

So if the goal is to make sure that we are being responsible about our debt and our deficit, if that’s the conversation we’re having, I’m happy to have that conversation. And by closing some additional loopholes through tax reform -- which Speaker Boehner has acknowledged can raise money in a sensible way -- and by doing some additional cuts, including making sure that we are reducing our health care spending, which is the main driver of our deficits, we can arrive at a package that gets this thing done.

I’m happy to have that conversation. What I will not do is to have that negotiation with a gun at the head of the American people -- the threat that “unless we get our way, unless you gut Medicare or Medicaid, or otherwise slash things that the American people don’t believe should be slashed, that we’re going to threaten to wreck the entire economy.” That is not how historically this has been done. That’s not how we’re going to do it this time.

Question: No plan B? You're not searching for any other --

President Obama: Chuck, what I’m saying to you is that there is no simpler solution, no ready, credible solution, other than Congress either give me the authority to raise the debt ceiling, or exercise the responsibility that they have kept for themselves and raise the debt ceiling. Because this is about paying your bills.

Everybody here understands this. I mean, this is not a complicated concept. You don’t go out to dinner and then eat all you want, and then leave without paying the check. And if you do, you’re breaking the law. And Congress should think about it the same way that the American people do. You don’t -- now, if Congress wants to have a debate about maybe we shouldn’t go out to dinner next time, maybe we should go to a more modest restaurant, that’s fine. That’s a debate that we should have. But you don’t say, in order for me to control my appetites, I’m going to not pay the people who already provided me services, people who already lent me the money. That’s not showing any discipline. All that’s doing is not meeting your obligations. You can’t do that.

And that’s not a credible way to run this government. We’ve got to stop lurching from crisis to crisis to crisis, when there’s this clear path ahead of us that simply requires some discipline, some responsibility and some compromise. That’s where we need to go. That’s how this needs to work.

Major Garrett.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. As you well know, sir, finding votes for the debt ceiling can sometimes be complicated. You, yourself, as a member of the Senate, voted against a debt ceiling increase. And in previous aspects of American history -- President Reagan in 1985, President George Herbert Walker Bush in 1990, President Clinton in 1997 -- all signed deficit reduction deals that were contingent upon or in the context of raising the debt ceiling. You, yourself, four times have done that. Three times, those were related to deficit reduction or budget maneuvers.

What Chuck and I and I think many people are curious about is this new, adamant desire on your part not to negotiate, when that seems to conflict with the entire history in the modern era of American Presidents and the debt ceiling, and your own history on the debt ceiling. And doesn’t that suggest that we are going to go into a default situation because no one is talking to each other about how to resolve this?

President Obama: Well, no, Major, I think if you look at the history, getting votes for the debt ceiling is always difficult, and budgets in this town are always difficult. I went through this just last year. But what’s different is we never saw a situation as we saw last year in which certain groups in Congress took such an absolutist position that we came within a few days of defaulting. And the fact of the matter is, is that we have never seen the debt ceiling used in this fashion, where the notion was, you know what, we might default unless we get 100 percent of what we want. That hasn’t happened.

Now, as I indicated before, I’m happy to have a conversation about how we reduce our deficits further in a sensible way. Although one thing I want to point out is that the American people are also concerned about how we grow our economy, how we put people back to work, how we make sure that we finance our workers getting properly trained and our schools are giving our kids the education we deserve. There’s a whole growth agenda which will reduce our deficits that’s important as well.

But what you’ve never seen is the notion that has been presented, so far at least, by the Republicans that deficit reduction -- we’ll only count spending cuts; that we will raise the deficit -- or the debt ceiling dollar for dollar on spending cuts. There are a whole set of rules that have been established that are impossible to meet without doing severe damage to the economy.

And so what we’re not going to do is put ourselves in a position where in order to pay for spending that we’ve already incurred, that our two options are we’re either going to profoundly hurt the economy and hurt middle-class families and hurt seniors and hurt kids who are trying to go to college, or, alternatively, we’re going to blow up the economy. We’re not going to do that.

Question: [Inaudible] -- open to a one-to-three-month extension to the debt ceiling -- whatever Congress sends you, you’re okay with it?

President Obama: No, not whatever Congress sends me. They’re going to have to send me something that’s sensible. And we shouldn’t be doing this --

Question: -- [inaudible] --

President Obama: -- and we shouldn’t be doing this on a one to three-month timeframe. Why would we do that? This is the United States of America, Major. What, we can’t manage our affairs in such a way that we pay our bills and we provide some certainty in terms of how we pay our bills?

Look, I don’t think anybody would consider my position unreasonable here. I have --

Question: But why does it presuppose the need to negotiate and talk about this on a daily basis? Because if default is the biggest threat to the economy, why not talk about it --

President Obama: Major, I am happy to have a conversation about how we reduce our deficits. I’m not going to have a monthly or every-three-months conversation about whether or not we pay our bills. Because that in and of itself does severe damage. Even the threat of default hurts our economy. It’s hurting our economy as we speak. We shouldn’t be having that debate.

If we want to have a conversation about how to reduce our deficit, let’s have that. We’ve been having that for the last two years. We just had an entire campaign about it. And by the way, the American people agreed with me that we should reduce our deficits in a balanced way that also takes into account the need for us to grow this economy and put people back to work.

And despite that conversation, and despite the election results, the position that’s been taken on the part of some House Republicans is that, “no, we’ve got to do it our way, and if we don’t, we simply won’t pay America’s bills.” Well, that can’t be a position that is sustainable over time. It’s not one that's good for the economy now. It's certainly not going to be the kind of precedent that I want to establish not just for my presidency, but for future Presidents, even if it was on the other side.

Democrats don't like voting for the debt ceiling when a Republican is President, and yet you -- but you never saw a situation in which Democrats suggested somehow that we would go ahead and default if we didn't get 100 percent of our way. That's just not how it's supposed to work.

Jon Karl.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. On the issue of guns, given how difficult it will be -- some would say impossible -- to get any gun control measure passed through this Congress, what are you willing or able to do, using the powers of your presidency, to act without Congress? And I'd also like to know, what do you make of these long lines we're seeing at gun shows and gun stores all around the country? I mean, even in Connecticut, applications for guns are up since the shooting in Newtown.

President Obama: Well, my understanding is the Vice President is going to provide a range of steps that we can take to reduce gun violence. Some of them will require legislation. Some of them I can accomplish through executive action. And so I'll be reviewing those today. And as I said, I'll speak in more detail to what we're going to go ahead and propose later in the week.

But I'm confident that there are some steps that we can take that don't require legislation and that are within my authority as President. And where you get a step that has the opportunity to reduce the possibility of gun violence then I want to go ahead and take it.

Question: Any idea of what kind of steps?

President Obama: Well, I think, for example, how we are gathering data, for example, on guns that fall into the hands of criminals, and how we track that more effectively -- there may be some steps that we can take administratively as opposed through legislation.

As far as people lining up and purchasing more guns, I think that we've seen for some time now that those who oppose any common-sense gun control or gun safety measures have a pretty effective way of ginning up fear on the part of gun owners that somehow the federal government is about to take all your guns away. And there's probably an economic element to that. It obviously is good for business.

But I think that those of us who look at this problem have repeatedly said that responsible gun owners, people who have a gun for protection, for hunting, for sportsmanship, they don't have anything to worry about. The issue here is not whether or not we believe in the Second Amendment. The issue is, are there some sensible steps that we can take to make sure that somebody like the individual in Newtown can't walk into a school and gun down a bunch of children in a shockingly rapid fashion. And surely, we can do something about that.

But part of the challenge that we confront is, is that even the slightest hint of some sensible, responsible legislation in this area fans this notion that somehow, here it comes and everybody's guns are going to be taken away. It's unfortunate, but that's the case. And if you look at over the first four years of my administration, we’ve tried to tighten up and enforce some of the laws that were already on the books. But it would be pretty hard to argue that somehow gun owners have had their rights infringed.

Question: So you think this is an irrational fear that's driving all these people to go and stock up --

President Obama: Excuse me?

Question: Do you think this is an irrational fear --

President Obama: Well, as I said, I think it's a fear that's fanned by those who are worried about the possibility of any legislation getting out there.

Julianna Goldman.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. I just want to come back to the debt ceiling, because in the summer of 2011, you said that you wouldn't negotiate on the debt ceiling, and you did. Last year, you said that you wouldn't extend any of the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy, and you did. So as you say now that you're not going to negotiate on the debt ceiling this year, why should House Republicans take that seriously and think that if we get to the one-minute-to-midnight scenario, that you're not going to back down?

President Obama: Well, first of all, Julianna, let's take the example of this year and the fiscal cliff. I didn't say that I would not have any conversations at all about extending the Bush tax cuts. What I said was we weren't going to extend Bush tax cuts for the wealthy -- and we didn't. Now, you can argue that during the campaign I said -- I set the criteria for wealthy at $250,000 and we ended up being at $400,000. But the fact of the matter is millionaires, billionaires are paying significantly more in taxes, just as I said. So from the start, my concern was making sure that we had a tax code that was fair and that protected the middle class, and my biggest priority was making sure that middle-class taxes did not go up.

The difference between this year and 2011 is the fact that we've already made $1.2 trillion in cuts. And at the time, I indicated that there were cuts that we could sensibly make that would not damage our economy, would not impede growth. I said at the time I think we should pair it up with revenue in order to have an overall balanced package. But my own budget reflected cuts in discretionary spending. My own budget reflected the cuts that needed to be made, and we've made those cuts.

Now, the challenge going forward is that we've now made some big cuts, and if we're going to do further deficit reduction, the only way to do it is in a balanced and responsible way.

The alternative is for us to go ahead and cut commitments that we've made on things like Medicare, or Social Security, or Medicaid, and for us to fundamentally change commitments that we've made to make sure that seniors don't go into poverty, or that children who are disabled are properly cared for. For us to change that contract we've made with the American people rather than look at options like closing loopholes for corporations that they don't need, that points to a long-term trend in which we have fundamentally, I think, undermined what people expect out of this government -- which is that parties sit down, they negotiate, they compromise, but they also reflect the will of the American people; that you don't have one narrow faction that is able to simply dictate 100 percent of what they want all the time or otherwise threaten that we destroy the American economy.

Another way of putting it is we've got to break the habit of negotiating through crisis over and over again. And now is as good of a time as any, at the start of my second term, because if we continue down this path, then there's really no stopping the principle. I mean, literally -- even in divided government, even where we've got a Democratic President and a Democratic Senate, that a small group in the House of Representatives could simply say every two months, every three months, every six months, every year, we are going to more and more change the economy in ways that we prefer, despite strong objections of Americans all across the country, or otherwise we're going to have America not pay its bills. And that is no way for us to do business.

And by the way, I would make the same argument if it was a Republican President and a Republican Senate and you had a handful of Democrats who were suggesting that we are going to hijack the process and make sure that either we get our way 100 percent of the time, or otherwise we are going to default on America’s obligations.

Question: [Inaudible] -- line in the sand negotiating, how is that [inaudible] to the economy?

President Obama: No, no, look, what I’ve said is that I’m happy to have a conversation about deficit reduction --

Question: So you technically are willing to negotiate?

President Obama: No, Julianna, look, this is pretty straightforward. Either Congress pays its bills or it doesn't. Now, if -- and they want to keep this responsibility; if John Boehner and Mitch McConnell think that they can come up with a plan that somehow meets their criteria that they’ve set for why they will -- when they will raise the debt ceiling, they're free to go ahead and try. But the proposals that they’ve put forward in order to accomplish that -- only by cutting spending -- means cuts to things like Medicare and education that the American people profoundly reject.

Now, if they think that they can get that through Congress, then they're free to try. But I think that a better way of doing this is go ahead and say, we’re going to pay our bills. The question now is how do we actually get our deficit in a manageable, sustainable way? And that's a conversation I’m happy to have.

All right. Matt Spetalnick.

Question: Thank you, sir. You’ve spoken extensively about the debt ceiling debate, but some Republicans have further said that they're willing to allow a government shutdown to take place rather than put off deep spending cuts. Are you prepared to allow the government to grind to a halt if you disagree with the spending cut proposals they put forth? And who do you think the American people would blame if that came to pass?

President Obama: Well, ultimately, Congress makes the decisions about whether or not we spend money and whether or not we keep this government open. And if the Republicans in Congress have made a decision that they want to shut down the government in order to get their way then they have the votes at least in the House of Representatives, probably, to do that.

I think that would be a mistake. I think it would be profoundly damaging to our economy. I think it would actually add to our deficit because it will impede growth. I think it’s shortsighted. But they’re elected representatives, and folks put them into those positions and they’re going to have to make a decision about that. And I don’t -- I suspect that the American people would blame all of Washington for not being able to get its act together.

But the larger issue here has to do with what is it that we’re trying to accomplish. Are we trying to reduce the deficit? Because if we’re trying to reduce the deficit, then we can shape a bipartisan plan to reduce the deficit. I mean, is that really our objective? Our concern is that we’re spending more than we take in, and if that’s the case, then there’s a way of balancing that out so that we take in more money in increasing revenue and we reduce spending. And there’s a recipe for getting that done.

And in the conversations that I had with Speaker Boehner before the end of the year, we came pretty close -- a few hundred billion dollars separating us when stretched over a 10-year period, that’s not a lot.

But it seems as if what’s motivating and propelling at this point some of the House Republicans is more than simply deficit reduction. They have a particular vision about what government should and should not do. So they are suspicious about government’s commitments, for example, to make sure that seniors have decent health care as they get older. They have suspicions about Social Security. They have suspicions about whether government should make sure that kids in poverty are getting enough to eat, or whether we should be spending money on medical research. So they’ve got a particular view of what government should do and should be.

And that view was rejected by the American people when it was debated during the presidential campaign. I think every poll that’s out there indicates that the American people actually think our commitment to Medicare or to education is really important, and that’s something that we should look at as a last resort in terms of reducing the deficit, and it makes a lot more sense for us to close, for example, corporate loopholes before we go to putting a bigger burden on students or seniors.

But if the House Republicans disagree with that and they want to shut down the government to see if they can get their way on it, that’s their prerogative. That’s how the system is set up. It will damage our economy.

The government is a big part of this economy, and it’s interesting that a lot of times you have people who recognize that when it comes to defense spending -- some of the same folks who say we’ve got to cut spending, or complain that government jobs don’t do anything, when it comes to that defense contractor in their district, they think, wow, this is a pretty important part of the economy in my district and we shouldn’t stop spending on that. Let’s just make sure we’re not spending on those other folks.

Question: -- find agreement with Republicans on this and --

President Obama: Look, my hope is, is that common sense prevails. That’s always my preference. And I think that would the preference of the American people, and that’s what would be good for the economy.

So let me just repeat: If the issue is deficit reduction, getting our deficits sustainable over time, getting our debt in a sustainable place, then Democrats and Republicans in Congress will have a partner with me.

We can achieve that, and we can achieve it fairly quickly. I mean, we know what the numbers are. We know what needs to be done. We know what a balanced approach would take. We’ve already done probably more than half of the deficit reduction we need to stabilize the debt and the deficit. There’s probably been more pain and drama in getting there than we needed. And so finishing the job shouldn’t be that difficult -- if everybody comes to the conversation with an open mind, and if we recognize that there are some things, like not paying our bills, that should be out of bounds.

All right. I’m going to take one last question. Jackie Calmes.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President.

President Obama: Yes.

Question: I’d like to ask you, now that you’ve reached the end of your first term, starting your second, about a couple of criticisms -- one that’s longstanding, another more recent. The longstanding one seems to have become a truism of sorts that you’re -- you and your staff are too insular, that you don’t socialize enough. And the second, the more recent criticism is that your team taking shape isn’t diverse -- isn’t as diverse as it could be, or even was, in terms of getting additional voices, gender, race, ethnic diversity. So I’d like you to address both of those.

President Obama: Sure. Let me take the second one first. I’m very proud that in the first four years we had as diverse, if not more diverse, a White House and a Cabinet than any in history. And I intend to continue that, because it turns out that when you look for the very best people, given the incredible diversity of this country, you’re going to end up with a diverse staff and a diverse team. And that very diversity helps to create more effective policymaking and better decision-making for me, because it brings different perspectives to the table.

So if you think about my first four years, the person who probably had the most influence on my foreign policy was a woman. The people who were in charge of moving forward my most important domestic initiative, health care, were women. The person in charge of our homeland security was a woman. My two appointments to the Supreme Court were women, and 50 percent of my White House staff were women. So I think people should expect that that record will be built upon during the next four years.

Now, what, I’ve made four appointments so far? And one women -- admittedly, a high-profile one -- is leaving the -- has already left the administration, and I have made a replacement. But I would just suggest that everybody kind of wait until they’ve seen all my appointments, who’s in the White House staff and who’s in my Cabinet before they rush to judgment.

Question: [Inaudible] -- the big three.

President Obama: Yes, but I guess what I’m saying, Jackie, is that I think until you’ve seen what my overall team looks like, it’s premature to assume that somehow we’re going backwards. We’re not going backwards, we’re going forward.

With respect to this “truism” about me not socializing enough and patting folks on the back and all that stuff, most people who know me know I’m a pretty friendly guy. And I like a good party. And the truth is that when I was in the Senate, I had great relationships over there, and up until the point that I became President this was not an accusation that you heard very frequently.

I think that really what’s gone on in terms of some of the paralysis here in Washington or difficulties in negotiations just have to do with some very stark differences in terms of policy, some very sharp differences in terms of where we stand on issues. And if you think about, let's say, myself and Speaker Boehner, I like Speaker Boehner personally, and when we went out and played golf we had a great time. But that didn't get a deal done in 2011. When I'm over here at the congressional picnic and folks are coming up and taking pictures with their family, I promise you, Michelle and I are very nice to them and we have a wonderful time. But it doesn't prevent them from going onto the floor of the House and blasting me for being a big-spending socialist.

And the reason that, in many cases, Congress votes the way they do, or talks the way they talk, or takes positions in negotiations that they take doesn't have to do with me. It has to do with the imperatives that they feel in terms of their own politics -- right? They're worried about their district. They're worried about what's going on back home.

I think there are a lot of Republicans at this point that feel that given how much energy has been devoted in some of the media that's preferred by Republican constituencies to demonize me, that it doesn't look real good socializing with me. Charlie Crist down in Florida I think testifies to that. And I think a lot of folks say, well, if we look like we're being too cooperative or too chummy with the President that might cause us problems. That might be an excuse for us to get a challenge from somebody in a primary.

So that tends to be the challenge. I promise you, we invite folks from Congress over here all the time. And when they choose to come, I enjoy their company. Sometimes they don't choose to come, and that has to do with the fact that I think they don't consider the optics useful for them politically. And, ultimately, the way we're going to get stuff done -- personal relationships are important, and obviously I can always do a better job, and the nice thing is, is that now that my girls are getting older, they don't want to spend that much time with me anyway, so I'll be probably calling around, looking for somebody to play cards with me or something, because I'm getting kind of lonely in this big house. So maybe a whole bunch of members of the House Republican caucus want to come over and socialize more.

But my suspicion is getting the issues resolved that we just talked about, the big stuff -- whether or not we get sensible laws passed to prevent gun violence, whether or not America is paying its bills, whether or not we get immigration reform done -- all that's going to be determined largely by where the respective parties stand on policy, and maybe most importantly, the attitude of the American people.

If the American people feel strongly about these issues and they push hard, and they reward or don't reward members of Congress with their votes, if they reject sort of uncompromising positions or sharp partisanship or always looking out for the next election, and they reward folks who are trying to find common ground, then I think you'll see behavior in Congress change. And that will be true whether I'm the life of the party or a stick in the mud.

Thank you very much, everybody.

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# Remarks On Signing 23 Executive Actions to Reduce Gun Violence

Thank you, everybody. Please -- Please have a seat. Good afternoon, everybody.

Let me begin by thanking our Vice President, Joe Biden, for your dedication, Joe, to this issue, for bringing so many different voices to the table. Because while reducing gun violence is a complicated challenge, protecting our children from harm shouldn’t be a divisive one.

Over the month since the tragedy in Newtown, we’ve heard from so many, and, obviously, none have affected us more than the families of those gorgeous children and their teachers and guardians who were lost. And so we’re grateful to all of you for taking the time to be here, and recognizing that we honor their memories in part by doing everything we can to prevent this from happening again.

But we also heard from some unexpected people. In particular, I started getting a lot of letters from kids. Four of them are here today -- Grant Fritz, Julia Stokes, Hinna Zeejah, and Teja Goode. They’re pretty representative of some of the messages that I got. These are some pretty smart letters from some pretty smart young people.

Hinna, a third-grader -- you can go ahead and wave, Hinna. That’s you. Hinna wrote, “I feel terrible for the parents who lost their children…I love my country and [I] want everybody to be happy and safe.”

And then, Grant -- go ahead and wave, Grant. Grant said, “I think there should be some changes. We should learn from what happened at Sandy Hook…I feel really bad.”

And then, Julia said -- Julia, where are you? There you go -- “I’m not scared for my safety, I’m scared for others. I have four brothers and sisters and I know I would not be able to bear the thought of losing any of them.”

These are our kids. This is what they’re thinking about. And so what we should be thinking about is our responsibility to care for them, and shield them from harm, and give them the tools they need to grow up and do everything that they’re capable of doing -- not just to pursue their own dreams, but to help build this country. This is our first task as a society, keeping our children safe. This is how we will be judged. And their voices should compel us to change.

And that’s why, last month, I asked Joe to lead an effort, along with members of my Cabinet, to come up with some concrete steps we can take right now to keep our children safe, to help prevent mass shootings, to reduce the broader epidemic of gun violence in this country.

And we can't put this off any longer. Just last Thursday, as TV networks were covering one of Joe’s meetings on this topic, news broke of another school shooting, this one in California. In the month since 20 precious children and six brave adults were violently taken from us at Sandy Hook Elementary, more than 900 of our fellow Americans have reportedly died at the end of a gun -- 900 in the past month. And every day we wait, that number will keep growing.

So I’m putting forward a specific set of proposals based on the work of Joe’s task force. And in the days ahead, I intend to use whatever weight this office holds to make them a reality. Because while there is no law or set of laws that can prevent every senseless act of violence completely, no piece of legislation that will prevent every tragedy, every act of evil, if there is even one thing we can do to reduce this violence, if there is even one life that can be saved, then we've got an obligation to try.

And I’m going to do my part. As soon as I'm finished speaking here, I will sit at that desk and I will sign a directive giving law enforcement, schools, mental health professionals and the public health community some of the tools they need to help reduce gun violence.

We will make it easier to keep guns out of the hands of criminals by strengthening the background check system. We will help schools hire more resource officers if they want them and develop emergency preparedness plans. We will make sure mental health professionals know their options for reporting threats of violence -- even as we acknowledge that someone with a mental illness is far more likely to be a victim of violent crime than the perpetrator.

And while year after year, those who oppose even modest gun safety measures have threatened to defund scientific or medical research into the causes of gun violence, I will direct the Centers for Disease Control to go ahead and study the best ways to reduce it -- and Congress should fund research into the effects that violent video games have on young minds. We don't benefit from ignorance. We don't benefit from not knowing the science of this epidemic of violence.

These are a few of the 23 executive actions that I’m announcing today. But as important as these steps are, they are in no way a substitute for action from members of Congress. To make a real and lasting difference, Congress, too, must act -- and Congress must act soon. And I’m calling on Congress to pass some very specific proposals right away.

First: It’s time for Congress to require a universal background check for anyone trying to buy a gun. The law already requires licensed gun dealers to run background checks, and over the last 14 years that’s kept 1.5 million of the wrong people from getting their hands on a gun. But it’s hard to enforce that law when as many as 40 percent of all gun purchases are conducted without a background check. That’s not safe. That's not smart. It’s not fair to responsible gun buyers or sellers.

If you want to buy a gun -- whether it’s from a licensed dealer or a private seller -- you should at least have to show you are not a felon or somebody legally prohibited from buying one. This is common sense. And an overwhelming majority of Americans agree with us on the need for universal background checks -- including more than 70 percent of the National Rifle Association’s members, according to one survey. So there’s no reason we can’t do this.

Second: Congress should restore a ban on military-style assault weapons, and a 10-round limit for magazines. The type of assault rifle used in Aurora, for example, when paired with high-capacity magazines, has one purpose -- to pump out as many bullets as possible, as quickly as possible; to do as much damage, using bullets often designed to inflict maximum damage.

And that's what allowed the gunman in Aurora to shoot 70 people -- 70 people -- killing 12 in a matter of minutes. Weapons designed for the theater of war have no place in a movie theater. A majority of Americans agree with us on this.

And, by the way, so did Ronald Reagan, one of the staunchest defenders of the Second Amendment, who wrote to Congress in 1994, urging them -- this is Ronald Reagan speaking -- urging them to “listen to the American public and to the law enforcement community and support a ban on the further manufacture of [military-style assault] weapons.”

And finally, Congress needs to help, rather than hinder, law enforcement as it does its job. We should get tougher on people who buy guns with the express purpose of turning around and selling them to criminals. And we should severely punish anybody who helps them do this. Since Congress hasn’t confirmed a director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms in six years, they should confirm Todd Jones, who will be -- who has been Acting, and I will be nominating for the post.

And at a time when budget cuts are forcing many communities to reduce their police force, we should put more cops back on the job and back on our streets.

Let me be absolutely clear. Like most Americans, I believe the Second Amendment guarantees an individual right to bear arms. I respect our strong tradition of gun ownership and the rights of hunters and sportsmen. There are millions of responsible, law-abiding gun owners in America who cherish their right to bear arms for hunting, or sport, or protection, or collection.

I also believe most gun owners agree that we can respect the Second Amendment while keeping an irresponsible, law-breaking few from inflicting harm on a massive scale. I believe most of them agree that if America worked harder to keep guns out of the hands of dangerous people, there would be fewer atrocities like the one that occurred in Newtown. That’s what these reforms are designed to do. They’re common-sense measures. They have the support of the majority of the American people.

And yet, that doesn’t mean any of this is going to be easy to enact or implement. If it were, we’d already have universal background checks. The ban on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines never would have been allowed to expire. More of our fellow Americans might still be alive, celebrating birthdays and anniversaries and graduations.

This will be difficult. There will be pundits and politicians and special interest lobbyists publicly warning of a tyrannical, all-out assault on liberty -- not because that’s true, but because they want to gin up fear or higher ratings or revenue for themselves. And behind the scenes, they’ll do everything they can to block any common-sense reform and make sure nothing changes whatsoever.

The only way we will be able to change is if their audience, their constituents, their membership says this time must be different -- that this time, we must do something to protect our communities and our kids.

I will put everything I've got into this, and so will Joe. But I tell you, the only way we can change is if the American people demand it. And by the way, that doesn’t just mean from certain parts of the country. We're going to need voices in those areas, in those congressional districts, where the tradition of gun ownership is strong to speak up and to say this is important. It can't just be the usual suspects. We have to examine ourselves and our hearts, and ask ourselves what is important.

This will not happen unless the American people demand it. If parents and teachers, police officers and pastors, if hunters and sportsmen, if responsible gun owners, if Americans of every background stand up and say, enough; we’ve suffered too much pain and care too much about our children to allow this to continue -- then change will come. That's what it's going to take.

In the letter that Julia wrote me, she said, “I know that laws have to be passed by Congress, but I beg you to try very hard.” Julia, I will try very hard. But she’s right. The most important changes we can make depend on congressional action. They need to bring these proposals up for a vote, and the American people need to make sure that they do.

Get them on record. Ask your member of Congress if they support universal background checks to keep guns out of the wrong hands. Ask them if they support renewing a ban on military-style assault weapons and high-capacity magazines. And if they say no, ask them why not. Ask them what’s more important -- doing whatever it takes to get a A grade from the gun lobby that funds their campaigns, or giving parents some peace of mind when they drop their child off for first grade?

This is the land of the free, and it always will be. As Americans, we are endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights that no man or government can take away from us. But we've also long recognized, as our Founders recognized, that with rights come responsibilities. Along with our freedom to live our lives as we will comes an obligation to allow others to do the same. We don’t live in isolation. We live in a society, a government of, and by, and for the people. We are responsible for each other.

The right to worship freely and safely, that right was denied to Sikhs in Oak Creek, Wisconsin. The right to assemble peaceably, that right was denied shoppers in Clackamas, Oregon, and moviegoers in Aurora, Colorado. That most fundamental set of rights to life and liberty and the pursuit of happiness -- fundamental rights that were denied to college students at Virginia Tech, and high school students at Columbine, and elementary school students in Newtown, and kids on street corners in Chicago on too frequent a basis to tolerate, and all the families who’ve never imagined that they’d lose a loved one to a bullet -- those rights are at stake. We’re responsible.

When I visited Newtown last month, I spent some private time with many of the families who lost their children that day. And one was the family of Grace McDonald. Grace’s parents are here. Grace was seven years old when she was struck down -- just a gorgeous, caring, joyful little girl. I’m told she loved pink. She loved the beach. She dreamed of becoming a painter.

And so just before I left, Chris, her father, gave me one of her paintings, and I hung it in my private study just off the Oval Office. And every time I look at that painting, I think about Grace. And I think about the life that she lived and the life that lay ahead of her, and most of all, I think about how, when it comes to protecting the most vulnerable among us, we must act now -- for Grace.

For the 25 other innocent children and devoted educators who had so much left to give. For the men and women in big cities and small towns who fall victim to senseless violence each and every day. For all the Americans who are counting on us to keep them safe from harm. Let’s do the right thing. Let’s do the right thing for them, and for this country that we love so much.

Thank you. Let’s sign these orders.

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# Second Presidential Inaugural Address

Thank you, so much.

Vice President Biden, Mr. Chief Justice, members of the United States Congress, distinguished guests, and fellow citizens, each time we gather to inaugurate a president, we bear witness to the enduring strength of our Constitution. We affirm the promise of our democracy. We recall that what binds this nation together is not the colors of our skin or the tenets of our faith or the origins of our names.

What makes us exceptional, what makes us America is our allegiance to an idea articulated in a declaration made more than two centuries ago:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

Today we continue a never ending journey to bridge the meaning of those words with the realities of our time. For history tells us that while these truths may be self-evident, they’ve never been self-executing. That while freedom is a gift from God, it must be secured by his people here on earth.

The patriots of 1776 did not fight to replace the tyranny of a king with the privileges of a few, or the rule of a mob. They gave to us a republic, a government of, and by, and for the people. Entrusting each generation to keep safe our founding creed. And for more than 200 years we have. Through blood drawn by lash, and blood drawn by sword, we noted that no union founded on the principles of liberty and equality could survive half slave, and half free. We made ourselves anew, and vowed to move forward together.

Together we determined that a modern economy requires railroads and highways to speed travel and commerce, schools and colleges to train our workers. Together we discovered that a free market only thrives when there are rules to ensure competition and fair play. Together we resolve that a great nation must care for the vulnerable and protect its people from life’s worst hazards and misfortune.

Through it all, we have never relinquished our skepticism of central authority, nor have we succumbed to the fiction that all societies ills can be cured through government alone. Our celebration of initiative and enterprise, our insistence on hard work and personal responsibility, these are constants in our character.

But we have always understood that when times change, so must we; that fidelity to our founding principles requires new responses to new challenges; that preserving our individual freedoms ultimately requires collective action. For the American people can no more meet the demands of today’s world by acting alone than American soldiers could have met the forces of fascism or communism with muskets and militias. No single person can train all the math and science teachers we’ll need to equip our children for the future, or build the roads and networks and research labs that will bring new jobs and businesses to our shores. Now, more than ever, we must do these things together, as one nation and one people.

This generation of Americans has been tested by crises that steeled our resolve and proved our resilience. A decade of war is now ending. An economic recovery has begun. America’s possibilities are limitless, for we possess all the qualities that this world without boundaries demands: youth and drive; diversity and openness; an endless capacity for risk and a gift for reinvention. My fellow Americans, we are made for this moment, and we will seize it -- so long as we seize it together.

For we, the people, understand that our country cannot succeed when a shrinking few do very well and a growing many barely make it. We believe that America’s prosperity must rest upon the broad shoulders of a rising middle class. We know that America thrives when every person can find independence and pride in their work; when the wages of honest labor liberate families from the brink of hardship. We are true to our creed when a little girl born into the bleakest poverty knows that she has the same chance to succeed as anybody else, because she is an American; she is free, and she is equal, not just in the eyes of God but also in our own.

We understand that outworn programs are inadequate to the needs of our time. So we must harness new ideas and technology to remake our government, revamp our tax code, reform our schools, and empower our citizens with the skills they need to work harder, learn more, reach higher. But while the means will change, our purpose endures. A nation that rewards the effort and determination of every single American. That is what this moment requires. That is what will give real meaning to our creed.

We, the people, still believe that every citizen deserves a basic measure of security and dignity. We must make the hard choices to reduce the cost of health care and the size of our deficit. But we reject the belief that America must choose between caring for the generation that built this country and investing in the generation that will build its future. For we remember the lessons of our past, when twilight years were spent in poverty and parents of a child with a disability had nowhere to turn.

We do not believe that in this country freedom is reserved for the lucky, or happiness for the few. We recognize that no matter how responsibly we live our lives, any one of us at any time may face a job loss, or a sudden illness, or a home swept away in a terrible storm. The commitments we make to each other through Medicare and Medicaid and Social Security, these things do not sap our initiative, they strengthen us. They do not make us a nation of takers; they free us to take the risks that make this country great.

We, the people, still believe that our obligations as Americans are not just to ourselves, but to all posterity. We will respond to the threat of climate change, knowing that the failure to do so would betray our children and future generations. Some may still deny the overwhelming judgment of science, but none can avoid the devastating impact of raging fires and crippling drought and more powerful storms.

The path towards sustainable energy sources will be long and sometimes difficult. But America cannot resist this transition, we must lead it. We cannot cede to other nations the technology that will power new jobs and new industries, we must claim its promise. That’s how we will maintain our economic vitality and our national treasure -- our forests and waterways, our crop lands, and snow-capped peaks. That is how we will preserve our planet, commanded to our care by God. That’s what will lend meaning to the creed our Fathers once declared.

We, the people, still believe that enduring security and lasting peace do not require perpetual war. Our brave men and women in uniform, tempered by the flames of battle, are unmatched in skill and courage. Our citizens, seared by the memory of those we have lost, know too well the price that is paid for liberty. The knowledge of their sacrifice will keep us forever vigilant against those who would do us harm. But we are also heirs to those who won the peace and not just the war; who turned sworn enemies into the surest of friends -- and we must carry those lessons into this time as well.

We will defend our people and uphold our values through strength of arms and rule of law. We will show the courage to try and resolve our differences with other nations peacefully -- not because we are naÃ¯ve about the dangers we face, but because engagement can more durably lift suspicion and fear.

America will remain the anchor of strong alliances in every corner of the globe. And we will renew those institutions that extend our capacity to manage crisis abroad, for no one has a greater stake in a peaceful world than its most powerful nation. We will support democracy from Asia to Africa, from the Americas to the Middle East, because our interests and our conscience compel us to act on behalf of those who long for freedom. And we must be a source of hope to the poor, the sick, the marginalized, the victims of prejudice -- not out of mere charity, but because peace in our time requires the constant advance of those principles that our common creed describes: tolerance and opportunity, human dignity, and justice.

We, the people, declare today that the most evident of truths -- that all of us are created equal -- is the star that guides us still; just as it guided our forebears through Seneca Falls, and Selma, and Stonewall; just as it guided all those men and women, sung and unsung, who left footprints along this great Mall, to hear a preacher say that we cannot walk alone; to hear a "King" proclaim that our individual freedom is inextricably bound to the freedom of every soul on Earth.

It is now our generation’s task to carry on what those pioneers began. For our journey is not complete until our wives, our mothers and daughters can earn a living equal to their efforts.

Our journey is not complete until our gay brothers and sisters are treated like anyone else under the law -- for if we are truly created equal, then surely the love we commit to one another must be equal as well.

Our journey is not complete until no citizen is forced to wait for hours to exercise the right to vote.

Our journey is not complete until we find a better way to welcome the striving, hopeful immigrants who still see America as a land of opportunity -- until bright young students and engineers are enlisted in our workforce rather than expelled from our country.

Our journey is not complete until all our children, from the streets of Detroit to the hills of Appalachia, to the quiet lanes of Newtown, know that they are cared for and cherished and always safe from harm.

That is our generation’s task: to make these words, these rights, these values of life and liberty and the pursuit of happiness real for every American. Being true to our founding documents does not require us to agree on every contour of life. It does not mean we all define liberty in exactly the same way or follow the same precise path to happiness. Progress does not compel us to settle centuries-long debates about the role of government for all time, but it does require us to act in our time.

For now decisions are upon us and we cannot afford delay. We cannot mistake absolutism for principle, or substitute spectacle for politics, or treat name-calling as reasoned debate. We must act, knowing that our work will be imperfect. We must act, knowing that today’s victories will be only partial and that it will be up to those who stand here in four years and 40 years and 400 years hence to advance the timeless spirit once conferred to us in a spare Philadelphia hall.

My fellow Americans, the oath I have sworn before you today, like the one recited by others who serve in this Capitol, was an oath to God and country, not party or faction. And we must faithfully execute that pledge during the duration of our service. But the words I spoke today are not so different from the oath that is taken each time a soldier signs up for duty or an immigrant realizes her dream. My oath is not so different from the pledge we all make to the flag that waves above and that fills our hearts with pride.

They are the words of citizens and they represent our greatest hope. You and I, as citizens, have the power to set this country’s course. You and I, as citizens, have the obligation to shape the debates of our time -- not only with the votes we cast, but with the voices we lift in defense of our most ancient values and enduring ideals.

Let us, each of us, now embrace with solemn duty and awesome joy what is our lasting birthright. With common effort and common purpose, with passion and dedication, let us answer the call of history and carry into an uncertain future that precious light of freedom.

Thank you.

God bless you.

And may He forever bless these United States of America.

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# Inaugural Luncheon Toast

Michelle and the Speaker of the House came to a meeting of the minds that I may be delaying the proceedings too much. And so I’m just going to be extraordinarily brief and say thank you -- to my Vice President, who has not only been an extraordinary partner but an extraordinary friend; and to Dr. Jill Biden, who has partnered with my wife with extraordinary generosity on behalf of our men and women in uniform.

To the entire Cabinet that is here, I am grateful to you. Some of you are staying and some of you are leaving, but I know the extraordinary sacrifices that you and my team have made to try to advance the cause of progress in this country, and I’m always going to be grateful to you for that.

To the Speaker of the House and Nancy Pelosi, to Democratic Leader Harry Reid, as well as Republican Leader Mitch McConnell, and to all the congressional leaders and all the members of Congress who are here -- I recognize that democracy is not always easy, and I recognize there are profound differences in this room, but I just want to say thank you for your service and I want to thank your families for their service, because regardless of our political persuasions and perspectives, I know that all of us serve because we believe that we can make America for future generations.

And I'm confident that we can act at this moment in a way that makes a difference for our children and our children's children. I know that former President Carter, President Clinton, they understand the irony of the presidential office, which is, the longer you're there the more humble you become and the more mindful you are that it is beyond your poor powers individually to move this great country. You can only do it because you have extraordinary partners and a spirit of good will, and most of all, because of the strength and resilience and fundamental goodness of the American people.

And so I would like to join all of you not only in toasting the extraordinary work that Chuck Schumer and Lamar Alexander and others have done to create this special day for us, but I also want to thank each and every one of you for not only your service in the past, but hopefully your service in the future as well.

And I would like to offer one last toast, and that is to my extraordinary wife, Michelle. There is controversy about the quality of the President -- no controversy about the quality of our current First Lady.

Thank you, everybody. God bless you, and God bless America.

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# Address on Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Well. It is good to be back in Las Vegas. And it is good to be among so many good friends. Let me start off by thanking everybody at Del Sol High School for hosting us. Go Dragons! Let me especially thank your outstanding principal, Lisa Primas.

There are all kinds of notable guests here, but I just want to mention a few. First of all, our outstanding Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, Janet Napolitano, is here. Our wonderful Secretary of the Interior, Ken Salazar. Former Secretary of Labor, Hilda Solis. Two of the outstanding members of the congressional delegation from Nevada, Steve Horsford and Dina Titus. Your own mayor, Carolyn Goodman.

But we also have some mayors that flew in because they know how important the issue we’re going to talk about today is. Marie Lopez Rogers from Avondale, Arizona. Kasim Reed from Atlanta, Georgia. Greg Stanton from Phoenix, Arizona. And Ashley Swearengin from Fresno, California. And all of you are here, as well as some of the top labor leaders in the country. And we are just so grateful. Some outstanding business leaders are here as well. And of course, we’ve got wonderful students here, so I could not be prouder of our students.

Now, those of you have a seat, feel free to take a seat. I don’t mind.

Audience Member: I love you, Mr. President!

President Obama: I love you back.

Now, last week, I had the honor of being sworn in for a second term as President of the United States. And during my inaugural address, I talked about how making progress on the defining challenges of our time doesn’t require us to settle every debate or ignore every difference that we may have, but it does require us to find common ground and move forward in common purpose. It requires us to act.

I know that some issues will be harder to lift than others. Some debates will be more contentious. That’s to be expected. But the reason I came here today is because of a challenge where the differences are dwindling; where a broad consensus is emerging; and where a call for action can now be heard coming from all across America. I’m here today because the time has come for common-sense, comprehensive immigration reform. The time is now. Now is the time. Now is the time. Now is the time.

Audience: SÃ­ se puede! SÃ­ se puede!

President Obama: Now is the time.

I’m here because most Americans agree that it’s time to fix a system that’s been broken for way too long. I’m here because business leaders, faith leaders, labor leaders, law enforcement, and leaders from both parties are coming together to say now is the time to find a better way to welcome the striving, hopeful immigrants who still see America as the land of opportunity. Now is the time to do this so we can strengthen our economy and strengthen our country’s future.

Think about it -- we define ourselves as a nation of immigrants. That’s who we are -- in our bones. The promise we see in those who come here from every corner of the globe, that’s always been one of our greatest strengths. It keeps our workforce young. It keeps our country on the cutting edge. And it’s helped build the greatest economic engine the world has ever known.

After all, immigrants helped start businesses like Google and Yahoo!. They created entire new industries that, in turn, created new jobs and new prosperity for our citizens. In recent years, one in four high-tech startups in America were founded by immigrants. One in four new small business owners were immigrants, including right here in Nevada -- folks who came here seeking opportunity and now want to share that opportunity with other Americans.

But we all know that today, we have an immigration system that’s out of date and badly broken; a system that’s holding us back instead of helping us grow our economy and strengthen our middle class.

Right now, we have 11 million undocumented immigrants in America; 11 million men and women from all over the world who live their lives in the shadows. Yes, they broke the rules. They crossed the border illegally. Maybe they overstayed their visas. Those are facts. Nobody disputes them. But these 11 million men and women are now here. Many of them have been here for years. And the overwhelming majority of these individuals aren’t looking for any trouble. They’re contributing members of the community. They're looking out for their families. They're looking out for their neighbors. They're woven into the fabric of our lives.

Every day, like the rest of us, they go out and try to earn a living. Often they do that in a shadow economy -- a place where employers may offer them less than the minimum wage or make them work overtime without extra pay. And when that happens, it’s not just bad for them, it’s bad for the entire economy. Because all the businesses that are trying to do the right thing -- that are hiring people legally, paying a decent wage, following the rules -- they’re the ones who suffer. They've got to compete against companies that are breaking the rules. And the wages and working conditions of American workers are threatened, too.

So if we're truly committed to strengthening our middle class and providing more ladders of opportunity to those who are willing to work hard to make it into the middle class, we've got to fix the system.

We have to make sure that every business and every worker in America is playing by the same set of rules. We have to bring this shadow economy into the light so that everybody is held accountable -- businesses for who they hire, and immigrants for getting on the right side of the law. That’s common sense. And that’s why we need comprehensive immigration reform.

There’s another economic reason why we need reform. It’s not just about the folks who come here illegally and have the effect they have on our economy. It’s also about the folks who try to come here legally but have a hard time doing so, and the effect that has on our economy.

Right now, there are brilliant students from all over the world sitting in classrooms at our top universities. They’re earning degrees in the fields of the future, like engineering and computer science. But once they finish school, once they earn that diploma, there’s a good chance they’ll have to leave our country. Think about that.

Intel was started with the help of an immigrant who studied here and then stayed here. Instagram was started with the help of an immigrant who studied here and then stayed here. Right now in one of those classrooms, there’s a student wrestling with how to turn their big idea -- their Intel or Instagram -- into a big business. We’re giving them all the skills they need to figure that out, but then we’re going to turn around and tell them to start that business and create those jobs in China or India or Mexico or someplace else? That’s not how you grow new industries in America. That’s how you give new industries to our competitors. That’s why we need comprehensive immigration reform.

Now, during my first term, we took steps to try and patch up some of the worst cracks in the system. First, we strengthened security at the borders so that we could finally stem the tide of illegal immigrants. We put more boots on the ground on the southern border than at any time in our history. And today, illegal crossings are down nearly 80 percent from their peak in 2000.

Second, we focused our enforcement efforts on criminals who are here illegally and who endanger our communities. And today, deportations of criminals is at its highest level ever.

And third, we took up the cause of the DREAMers -- the young people who were brought to this country as children, young people who have grown up here, built their lives here, have futures here. We said that if you’re able to meet some basic criteria like pursuing an education, then we’ll consider offering you the chance to come out of the shadows so that you can live here and work here legally, so that you can finally have the dignity of knowing you belong.

But because this change isn’t permanent, we need Congress to act -- and not just on the DREAM Act. We need Congress to act on a comprehensive approach that finally deals with the 11 million undocumented immigrants who are in the country right now. That's what we need.

Now, the good news is that for the first time in many years, Republicans and Democrats seem ready to tackle this problem together. Members of both parties, in both chambers, are actively working on a solution. Yesterday, a bipartisan group of senators announced their principles for comprehensive immigration reform, which are very much in line with the principles I’ve proposed and campaigned on for the last few years. So at this moment, it looks like there’s a genuine desire to get this done soon, and that’s very encouraging.

But this time, action must follow. We can't allow immigration reform to get bogged down in an endless debate. We've been debating this a very long time. So it's not as if we don't know technically what needs to get done. As a consequence, to help move this process along, today I’m laying out my ideas for immigration reform. And my hope is that this provides some key markers to members of Congress as they craft a bill, because the ideas I’m proposing have traditionally been supported by both Democrats like Ted Kennedy and Republicans like President George W. Bush. You don't get that matchup very often. So we know where the consensus should be.

Now, of course, there will be rigorous debate about many of the details, and every stakeholder should engage in real give and take in the process. But it’s important for us to recognize that the foundation for bipartisan action is already in place. And if Congress is unable to move forward in a timely fashion, I will send up a bill based on my proposal and insist that they vote on it right away.

So the principles are pretty straightforward. There are a lot of details behind it. We're going to hand out a bunch of paper so that everybody will know exactly what we're talking about. But the principles are pretty straightforward.

First, I believe we need to stay focused on enforcement. That means continuing to strengthen security at our borders. It means cracking down more forcefully on businesses that knowingly hire undocumented workers. To be fair, most businesses want to do the right thing, but a lot of them have a hard time figuring out who’s here legally, who’s not. So we need to implement a national system that allows businesses to quickly and accurately verify someone’s employment status. And if they still knowingly hire undocumented workers, then we need to ramp up the penalties.

Second, we have to deal with the 11 million individuals who are here illegally. We all agree that these men and women should have to earn their way to citizenship. But for comprehensive immigration reform to work, it must be clear from the outset that there is a pathway to citizenship.

We’ve got to lay out a path -- a process that includes passing a background check, paying taxes, paying a penalty, learning English, and then going to the back of the line, behind all the folks who are trying to come here legally. That's only fair, right?

So that means it won’t be a quick process but it will be a fair process. And it will lift these individuals out of the shadows and give them a chance to earn their way to a green card and eventually to citizenship.

And the third principle is we’ve got to bring our legal immigration system into the 21st century because it no longer reflects the realities of our time. For example, if you are a citizen, you shouldn’t have to wait years before your family is able to join you in America. You shouldn't have to wait years.

If you’re a foreign student who wants to pursue a career in science or technology, or a foreign entrepreneur who wants to start a business with the backing of American investors, we should help you do that here. Because if you succeed, you’ll create American businesses and American jobs. You’ll help us grow our economy. You’ll help us strengthen our middle class.

So that’s what comprehensive immigration reform looks like: smarter enforcement; a pathway to earned citizenship; improvements in the legal immigration system so that we continue to be a magnet for the best and the brightest all around the world. It’s pretty straightforward.

The question now is simple: Do we have the resolve as a people, as a country, as a government to finally put this issue behind us? I believe that we do. I believe that we do. I believe we are finally at a moment where comprehensive immigration reform is within our grasp.

But I promise you this: The closer we get, the more emotional this debate is going to become. Immigration has always been an issue that enflames passions. That’s not surprising. There are few things that are more important to us as a society than who gets to come here and call our country home; who gets the privilege of becoming a citizen of the United States of America. That's a big deal.

When we talk about that in the abstract, it’s easy sometimes for the discussion to take on a feeling of “us” versus “them.” And when that happens, a lot of folks forget that most of “us” used to be “them.” We forget that.

It’s really important for us to remember our history. Unless you’re one of the first Americans, a Native American, you came from someplace else. Somebody brought you.

Ken Salazar, he’s of Mexican American descent, but he points that his family has been living where he lives for 400 years, so he didn't immigrate anywhere.

The Irish who left behind a land of famine. The Germans who fled persecution. The Scandinavians who arrived eager to pioneer out west. The Polish. The Russians. The Italians. The Chinese. The Japanese. The West Indians. The huddled masses who came through Ellis Island on one coast and Angel Island on the other. All those folks, before they were “us,” they were “them.” And when each new wave of immigrants arrived, they faced resistance from those who were already here. They faced hardship. They faced racism. They faced ridicule. But over time, as they went about their daily lives, as they earned a living, as they raised a family, as they built a community, as their kids went to school here, they did their part to build a nation. They were the Einsteins and the Carnegies. But they were also the millions of women and men whose names history may not remember, but whose actions helped make us who we are; who built this country hand by hand, brick by brick. They all came here knowing that what makes somebody an American is not just blood or birth, but allegiance to our founding principles and the faith in the idea that anyone from anywhere can write the next great chapter of our story.

And that’s still true today. Just ask Alan Aleman. Alan is here this afternoon -- where is Alan? He's around here -- there he is right here. Alan was born in Mexico. He was brought to this country by his parents when he was a child. Growing up, Alan went to an American school, pledged allegiance to the American flag, felt American in every way -- and he was, except for one: on paper.

In high school, Alan watched his friends come of age -- driving around town with their new licenses, earning some extra cash from their summer jobs at the mall. He knew he couldn’t do those things. But it didn’t matter that much. What mattered to Alan was earning an education so that he could live up to his God-given potential.

Last year, when Alan heard the news that we were going to offer a chance for folks like him to emerge from the shadows -- even if it's just for two years at a time -- he was one of the first to sign up. And a few months ago he was one of the first people in Nevada to get approved. In that moment, Alan said, “I felt the fear vanish. I felt accepted.” So today, Alan is in his second year at the College of Southern Nevada. Alan is studying to become a doctor. He hopes to join the Air Force. He’s working hard every single day to build a better life for himself and his family. And all he wants is the opportunity to do his part to build a better America.

So in the coming weeks, as the idea of reform becomes more real and the debate becomes more heated, and there are folks who are trying to pull this thing apart, remember Alan and all those who share the same hopes and the same dreams. Remember that this is not just a debate about policy. It’s about people. It’s about men and women and young people who want nothing more than the chance to earn their way into the American story. Throughout our history, that has only made our nation stronger. And it’s how we will make sure that this century is the same as the last: an American century welcoming of everybody who aspires to do something more, and who is willing to work hard to do it, and is willing to pledge that allegiance to our flag. Thank you. God bless you. And God bless the United States of America.

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# Fourth Presidential State of the Union Address

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, members of Congress, fellow citizens:

Fifty-one years ago, John F. Kennedy declared to this chamber that “the Constitution makes us not rivals for power but partners for progress.” “It is my task,” he said, “to report the State of the Union -- to improve it is the task of us all.”

Tonight, thanks to the grit and determination of the American people, there is much progress to report. After a decade of grinding war, our brave men and women in uniform are coming home. After years of grueling recession, our businesses have created over six million new jobs. We buy more American cars than we have in five years, and less foreign oil than we have in 20. Our housing market is healing, our stock market is rebounding, and consumers, patients, and homeowners enjoy stronger protections than ever before.

So, together, we have cleared away the rubble of crisis, and we can say with renewed confidence that the State of our Union is stronger.

But we gather here knowing that there are millions of Americans whose hard work and dedication have not yet been rewarded. Our economy is adding jobs -- but too many people still can’t find full-time employment. Corporate profits have skyrocketed to all-time highs -- but for more than a decade, wages and incomes have barely budged.

It is our generation’s task, then, to reignite the true engine of America’s economic growth -- a rising, thriving middle class.

It is our unfinished task to restore the basic bargain that built this country -- the idea that if you work hard and meet your responsibilities, you can get ahead, no matter where you come from, no matter what you look like, or who you love.

It is our unfinished task to make sure that this government works on behalf of the many, and not just the few; that it encourages free enterprise, rewards individual initiative, and opens the doors of opportunity to every child across this great nation.

The American people don’t expect government to solve every problem. They don’t expect those of us in this chamber to agree on every issue. But they do expect us to put the nation’s interests before party. They do expect us to forge reasonable compromise where we can. For they know that America moves forward only when we do so together, and that the responsibility of improving this union remains the task of us all.

Our work must begin by making some basic decisions about our budget -- decisions that will have a huge impact on the strength of our recovery.

Over the last few years, both parties have worked together to reduce the deficit by more than $2.5 trillion -- mostly through spending cuts, but also by raising tax rates on the wealthiest 1 percent of Americans. As a result, we are more than halfway towards the goal of $4 trillion in deficit reduction that economists say we need to stabilize our finances.

Now we need to finish the job. And the question is, how?

In 2011, Congress passed a law saying that if both parties couldn’t agree on a plan to reach our deficit goal, about a trillion dollars’ worth of budget cuts would automatically go into effect this year. These sudden, harsh, arbitrary cuts would jeopardize our military readiness. They’d devastate priorities like education, and energy, and medical research. They would certainly slow our recovery, and cost us hundreds of thousands of jobs. That’s why Democrats, Republicans, business leaders, and economists have already said that these cuts, known here in Washington as the sequester, are a really bad idea.

Now, some in Congress have proposed preventing only the defense cuts by making even bigger cuts to things like education and job training, Medicare and Social Security benefits. That idea is even worse.

Yes, the biggest driver of our long-term debt is the rising cost of health care for an aging population. And those of us who care deeply about programs like Medicare must embrace the need for modest reforms -- otherwise, our retirement programs will crowd out the investments we need for our children, and jeopardize the promise of a secure retirement for future generations.

But we can’t ask senior citizens and working families to shoulder the entire burden of deficit reduction while asking nothing more from the wealthiest and the most powerful. We won’t grow the middle class simply by shifting the cost of health care or college onto families that are already struggling, or by forcing communities to lay off more teachers and more cops and more firefighters. Most Americans -- Democrats, Republicans, and independents -- understand that we can’t just cut our way to prosperity. They know that broad-based economic growth requires a balanced approach to deficit reduction, with spending cuts and revenue, and with everybody doing their fair share. And that’s the approach I offer tonight.

On Medicare, I’m prepared to enact reforms that will achieve the same amount of health care savings by the beginning of the next decade as the reforms proposed by the bipartisan Simpson-Bowles commission.

Already, the Affordable Care Act is helping to slow the growth of health care costs. And the reforms I’m proposing go even further. We’ll reduce taxpayer subsidies to prescription drug companies and ask more from the wealthiest seniors. We’ll bring down costs by changing the way our government pays for Medicare, because our medical bills shouldn’t be based on the number of tests ordered or days spent in the hospital; they should be based on the quality of care that our seniors receive. And I am open to additional reforms from both parties, so long as they don’t violate the guarantee of a secure retirement. Our government shouldn’t make promises we cannot keep -- but we must keep the promises we’ve already made.

To hit the rest of our deficit reduction target, we should do what leaders in both parties have already suggested, and save hundreds of billions of dollars by getting rid of tax loopholes and deductions for the well-off and the well-connected. After all, why would we choose to make deeper cuts to education and Medicare just to protect special interest tax breaks? How is that fair? Why is it that deficit reduction is a big emergency justifying making cuts in Social Security benefits but not closing some loopholes? How does that promote growth?

Now is our best chance for bipartisan, comprehensive tax reform that encourages job creation and helps bring down the deficit. We can get this done. The American people deserve a tax code that helps small businesses spend less time filling out complicated forms, and more time expanding and hiring -- a tax code that ensures billionaires with high-powered accountants can’t work the system and pay a lower rate than their hardworking secretaries; a tax code that lowers incentives to move jobs overseas, and lowers tax rates for businesses and manufacturers that are creating jobs right here in the United States of America. That’s what tax reform can deliver. That’s what we can do together.

I realize that tax reform and entitlement reform will not be easy. The politics will be hard for both sides. None of us will get 100 percent of what we want. But the alternative will cost us jobs, hurt our economy, visit hardship on millions of hardworking Americans. So let’s set party interests aside and work to pass a budget that replaces reckless cuts with smart savings and wise investments in our future. And let’s do it without the brinksmanship that stresses consumers and scares off investors. The greatest nation on Earth cannot keep conducting its business by drifting from one manufactured crisis to the next. We can't do it.

Let’s agree right here, right now to keep the people’s government open, and pay our bills on time, and always uphold the full faith and credit of the United States of America. The American people have worked too hard, for too long, rebuilding from one crisis to see their elected officials cause another.

Now, most of us agree that a plan to reduce the deficit must be part of our agenda. But let’s be clear, deficit reduction alone is not an economic plan. A growing economy that creates good, middle-class jobs -- that must be the North Star that guides our efforts. Every day, we should ask ourselves three questions as a nation: How do we attract more jobs to our shores? How do we equip our people with the skills they need to get those jobs? And how do we make sure that hard work leads to a decent living?

A year and a half ago, I put forward an American Jobs Act that independent economists said would create more than 1 million new jobs. And I thank the last Congress for passing some of that agenda. I urge this Congress to pass the rest. But tonight, I’ll lay out additional proposals that are fully paid for and fully consistent with the budget framework both parties agreed to just 18 months ago. Let me repeat -- nothing I’m proposing tonight should increase our deficit by a single dime. It is not a bigger government we need, but a smarter government that sets priorities and invests in broad-based growth. That's what we should be looking for.

Our first priority is making America a magnet for new jobs and manufacturing. After shedding jobs for more than 10 years, our manufacturers have added about 500,000 jobs over the past three. Caterpillar is bringing jobs back from Japan. Ford is bringing jobs back from Mexico. And this year, Apple will start making Macs in America again.

There are things we can do, right now, to accelerate this trend. Last year, we created our first manufacturing innovation institute in Youngstown, Ohio. A once-shuttered warehouse is now a state-of-the art lab where new workers are mastering the 3D printing that has the potential to revolutionize the way we make almost everything. There’s no reason this can’t happen in other towns.

So tonight, I’m announcing the launch of three more of these manufacturing hubs, where businesses will partner with the Department of Defense and Energy to turn regions left behind by globalization into global centers of high-tech jobs. And I ask this Congress to help create a network of 15 of these hubs and guarantee that the next revolution in manufacturing is made right here in America. We can get that done.

Now, if we want to make the best products, we also have to invest in the best ideas. Every dollar we invested to map the human genome returned $140 to our economy -- every dollar. Today, our scientists are mapping the human brain to unlock the answers to Alzheimer’s. They’re developing drugs to regenerate damaged organs; devising new material to make batteries 10 times more powerful. Now is not the time to gut these job-creating investments in science and innovation. Now is the time to reach a level of research and development not seen since the height of the Space Race. We need to make those investments.

Today, no area holds more promise than our investments in American energy. After years of talking about it, we’re finally poised to control our own energy future. We produce more oil at home than we have in 15 years. We have doubled the distance our cars will go on a gallon of gas, and the amount of renewable energy we generate from sources like wind and solar -- with tens of thousands of good American jobs to show for it. We produce more natural gas than ever before -- and nearly everyone’s energy bill is lower because of it. And over the last four years, our emissions of the dangerous carbon pollution that threatens our planet have actually fallen.

But for the sake of our children and our future, we must do more to combat climate change. Now, it’s true that no single event makes a trend. But the fact is the 12 hottest years on record have all come in the last 15. Heat waves, droughts, wildfires, floods -- all are now more frequent and more intense. We can choose to believe that Superstorm Sandy, and the most severe drought in decades, and the worst wildfires some states have ever seen were all just a freak coincidence. Or we can choose to believe in the overwhelming judgment of science -- and act before it’s too late.

Now, the good news is we can make meaningful progress on this issue while driving strong economic growth. I urge this Congress to get together, pursue a bipartisan, market-based solution to climate change, like the one John McCain and Joe Lieberman worked on together a few years ago. But if Congress won’t act soon to protect future generations, I will. I will direct my Cabinet to come up with executive actions we can take, now and in the future, to reduce pollution, prepare our communities for the consequences of climate change, and speed the transition to more sustainable sources of energy.

Four years ago, other countries dominated the clean energy market and the jobs that came with it. And we’ve begun to change that. Last year, wind energy added nearly half of all new power capacity in America. So let’s generate even more. Solar energy gets cheaper by the year -- let’s drive down costs even further. As long as countries like China keep going all in on clean energy, so must we.

Now, in the meantime, the natural gas boom has led to cleaner power and greater energy independence. We need to encourage that. And that’s why my administration will keep cutting red tape and speeding up new oil and gas permits. That’s got to be part of an all-of-the-above plan. But I also want to work with this Congress to encourage the research and technology that helps natural gas burn even cleaner and protects our air and our water.

In fact, much of our new-found energy is drawn from lands and waters that we, the public, own together. So tonight, I propose we use some of our oil and gas revenues to fund an Energy Security Trust that will drive new research and technology to shift our cars and trucks off oil for good. If a nonpartisan coalition of CEOs and retired generals and admirals can get behind this idea, then so can we. Let’s take their advice and free our families and businesses from the painful spikes in gas prices we’ve put up with for far too long.

I’m also issuing a new goal for America: Let’s cut in half the energy wasted by our homes and businesses over the next 20 years. We'll work with the states to do it. Those states with the best ideas to create jobs and lower energy bills by constructing more efficient buildings will receive federal support to help make that happen.

America’s energy sector is just one part of an aging infrastructure badly in need of repair. Ask any CEO where they’d rather locate and hire -- a country with deteriorating roads and bridges, or one with high-speed rail and Internet; high-tech schools, self-healing power grids. The CEO of Siemens America -- a company that brought hundreds of new jobs to North Carolina -- said that if we upgrade our infrastructure, they’ll bring even more jobs. And that’s the attitude of a lot of companies all around the world. And I know you want these job-creating projects in your district. I’ve seen all those ribbon-cuttings.

So tonight, I propose a “Fix-It-First” program to put people to work as soon as possible on our most urgent repairs, like the nearly 70,000 structurally deficient bridges across the country. And to make sure taxpayers don’t shoulder the whole burden, I’m also proposing a Partnership to Rebuild America that attracts private capital to upgrade what our businesses need most: modern ports to move our goods, modern pipelines to withstand a storm, modern schools worthy of our children. Let’s prove that there’s no better place to do business than here in the United States of America, and let’s start right away. We can get this done.

And part of our rebuilding effort must also involve our housing sector. The good news is our housing market is finally healing from the collapse of 2007. Home prices are rising at the fastest pace in six years. Home purchases are up nearly 50 percent, and construction is expanding again.

But even with mortgage rates near a 50-year low, too many families with solid credit who want to buy a home are being rejected. Too many families who never missed a payment and want to refinance are being told no. That’s holding our entire economy back. We need to fix it.

Right now, there’s a bill in this Congress that would give every responsible homeowner in America the chance to save $3,000 a year by refinancing at today’s rates. Democrats and Republicans have supported it before, so what are we waiting for? Take a vote, and send me that bill. Why would we be against that? Why would that be a partisan issue, helping folks refinance? Right now, overlapping regulations keep responsible young families from buying their first home. What’s holding us back? Let’s streamline the process, and help our economy grow.

These initiatives in manufacturing, energy, infrastructure, housing -- all these things will help entrepreneurs and small business owners expand and create new jobs. But none of it will matter unless we also equip our citizens with the skills and training to fill those jobs.

And that has to start at the earliest possible age. Study after study shows that the sooner a child begins learning, the better he or she does down the road. But today, fewer than 3 in 10 four year-olds are enrolled in a high-quality preschool program. Most middle-class parents can’t afford a few hundred bucks a week for a private preschool. And for poor kids who need help the most, this lack of access to preschool education can shadow them for the rest of their lives. So tonight, I propose working with states to make high-quality preschool available to every single child in America. That's something we should be able to do.

Every dollar we invest in high-quality early childhood education can save more than seven dollars later on -- by boosting graduation rates, reducing teen pregnancy, even reducing violent crime. In states that make it a priority to educate our youngest children, like Georgia or Oklahoma, studies show students grow up more likely to read and do math at grade level, graduate high school, hold a job, form more stable families of their own. We know this works. So let’s do what works and make sure none of our children start the race of life already behind. Let’s give our kids that chance.

Let’s also make sure that a high school diploma puts our kids on a path to a good job. Right now, countries like Germany focus on graduating their high school students with the equivalent of a technical degree from one of our community colleges. So those German kids, they're ready for a job when they graduate high school. They've been trained for the jobs that are there. Now at schools like P-Tech in Brooklyn, a collaboration between New York Public Schools and City University of New York and IBM, students will graduate with a high school diploma and an associate's degree in computers or engineering.

We need to give every American student opportunities like this.

And four years ago, we started Race to the Top -- a competition that convinced almost every state to develop smarter curricula and higher standards, all for about 1 percent of what we spend on education each year. Tonight, I’m announcing a new challenge to redesign America’s high schools so they better equip graduates for the demands of a high-tech economy. And we’ll reward schools that develop new partnerships with colleges and employers, and create classes that focus on science, technology, engineering and math -- the skills today’s employers are looking for to fill the jobs that are there right now and will be there in the future.

Now, even with better high schools, most young people will need some higher education. It’s a simple fact the more education you’ve got, the more likely you are to have a good job and work your way into the middle class. But today, skyrocketing costs price too many young people out of a higher education, or saddle them with unsustainable debt.

Through tax credits, grants and better loans, we’ve made college more affordable for millions of students and families over the last few years. But taxpayers can’t keep on subsidizing higher and higher and higher costs for higher education. Colleges must do their part to keep costs down, and it’s our job to make sure that they do.

So tonight, I ask Congress to change the Higher Education Act so that affordability and value are included in determining which colleges receive certain types of federal aid. And tomorrow, my administration will release a new “College Scorecard” that parents and students can use to compare schools based on a simple criteria -- where you can get the most bang for your educational buck.

Now, to grow our middle class, our citizens have to have access to the education and training that today’s jobs require. But we also have to make sure that America remains a place where everyone who’s willing to work -- everybody who’s willing to work hard has the chance to get ahead.

Our economy is stronger when we harness the talents and ingenuity of striving, hopeful immigrants. And right now, leaders from the business, labor, law enforcement, faith communities -- they all agree that the time has come to pass comprehensive immigration reform. Now is the time to do it. Now is the time to get it done. Now is the time to get it done.

Real reform means strong border security, and we can build on the progress my administration has already made -- putting more boots on the Southern border than at any time in our history and reducing illegal crossings to their lowest levels in 40 years.

Real reform means establishing a responsible pathway to earned citizenship -- a path that includes passing a background check, paying taxes and a meaningful penalty, learning English, and going to the back of the line behind the folks trying to come here legally.

And real reform means fixing the legal immigration system to cut waiting periods and attract the highly-skilled entrepreneurs and engineers that will help create jobs and grow our economy.

In other words, we know what needs to be done. And as we speak, bipartisan groups in both chambers are working diligently to draft a bill, and I applaud their efforts. So let’s get this done. Send me a comprehensive immigration reform bill in the next few months, and I will sign it right away. And America will be better for it. Let’s get it done. Let’s get it done.

But we can’t stop there. We know our economy is stronger when our wives, our mothers, our daughters can live their lives free from discrimination in the workplace, and free from the fear of domestic violence. Today, the Senate passed the Violence Against Women Act that Joe Biden originally wrote almost 20 years ago. And I now urge the House to do the same. Good job, Joe. And I ask this Congress to declare that women should earn a living equal to their efforts, and finally pass the Paycheck Fairness Act this year.

We know our economy is stronger when we reward an honest day’s work with honest wages. But today, a full-time worker making the minimum wage earns $14,500 a year. Even with the tax relief we put in place, a family with two kids that earns the minimum wage still lives below the poverty line. That’s wrong. That’s why, since the last time this Congress raised the minimum wage, 19 states have chosen to bump theirs even higher.

Tonight, let’s declare that in the wealthiest nation on Earth, no one who works full-time should have to live in poverty, and raise the federal minimum wage to $9.00 an hour. We should be able to get that done.

This single step would raise the incomes of millions of working families. It could mean the difference between groceries or the food bank; rent or eviction; scraping by or finally getting ahead. For businesses across the country, it would mean customers with more money in their pockets. And a whole lot of folks out there would probably need less help from government. In fact, working folks shouldn’t have to wait year after year for the minimum wage to go up while CEO pay has never been higher. So here’s an idea that Governor Romney and I actually agreed on last year -- let’s tie the minimum wage to the cost of living, so that it finally becomes a wage you can live on.

Tonight, let’s also recognize that there are communities in this country where no matter how hard you work, it is virtually impossible to get ahead. Factory towns decimated from years of plants packing up. Inescapable pockets of poverty, urban and rural, where young adults are still fighting for their first job. America is not a place where the chance of birth or circumstance should decide our destiny. And that’s why we need to build new ladders of opportunity into the middle class for all who are willing to climb them.

Let’s offer incentives to companies that hire Americans who’ve got what it takes to fill that job opening, but have been out of work so long that no one will give them a chance anymore. Let’s put people back to work rebuilding vacant homes in run-down neighborhoods. And this year, my administration will begin to partner with 20 of the hardest-hit towns in America to get these communities back on their feet. We’ll work with local leaders to target resources at public safety, and education, and housing.

We’ll give new tax credits to businesses that hire and invest. And we’ll work to strengthen families by removing the financial deterrents to marriage for low-income couples, and do more to encourage fatherhood -- because what makes you a man isn’t the ability to conceive a child; it’s having the courage to raise one. And we want to encourage that. We want to help that.

Stronger families. Stronger communities. A stronger America. It is this kind of prosperity -- broad, shared, built on a thriving middle class -- that has always been the source of our progress at home. It’s also the foundation of our power and influence throughout the world.

Tonight, we stand united in saluting the troops and civilians who sacrifice every day to protect us. Because of them, we can say with confidence that America will complete its mission in Afghanistan and achieve our objective of defeating the core of al Qaeda.

Already, we have brought home 33,000 of our brave servicemen and women. This spring, our forces will move into a support role, while Afghan security forces take the lead. Tonight, I can announce that over the next year, another 34,000 American troops will come home from Afghanistan. This drawdown will continue and by the end of next year, our war in Afghanistan will be over.

Beyond 2014, America’s commitment to a unified and sovereign Afghanistan will endure, but the nature of our commitment will change. We're negotiating an agreement with the Afghan government that focuses on two missions -- training and equipping Afghan forces so that the country does not again slip into chaos, and counterterrorism efforts that allow us to pursue the remnants of al Qaeda and their affiliates.

Today, the organization that attacked us on 9/11 is a shadow of its former self. It's true, different al Qaeda affiliates and extremist groups have emerged -- from the Arabian Peninsula to Africa. The threat these groups pose is evolving. But to meet this threat, we don’t need to send tens of thousands of our sons and daughters abroad or occupy other nations. Instead, we'll need to help countries like Yemen, and Libya, and Somalia provide for their own security, and help allies who take the fight to terrorists, as we have in Mali. And where necessary, through a range of capabilities, we will continue to take direct action against those terrorists who pose the gravest threat to Americans.

Now, as we do, we must enlist our values in the fight. That's why my administration has worked tirelessly to forge a durable legal and policy framework to guide our counterterrorism efforts. Throughout, we have kept Congress fully informed of our efforts. I recognize that in our democracy, no one should just take my word for it that we’re doing things the right way. So in the months ahead, I will continue to engage Congress to ensure not only that our targeting, detention and prosecution of terrorists remains consistent with our laws and system of checks and balances, but that our efforts are even more transparent to the American people and to the world.

Of course, our challenges don’t end with al Qaeda. America will continue to lead the effort to prevent the spread of the world’s most dangerous weapons. The regime in North Korea must know they will only achieve security and prosperity by meeting their international obligations. Provocations of the sort we saw last night will only further isolate them, as we stand by our allies, strengthen our own missile defense and lead the world in taking firm action in response to these threats.

Likewise, the leaders of Iran must recognize that now is the time for a diplomatic solution, because a coalition stands united in demanding that they meet their obligations, and we will do what is necessary to prevent them from getting a nuclear weapon.

At the same time, we’ll engage Russia to seek further reductions in our nuclear arsenals, and continue leading the global effort to secure nuclear materials that could fall into the wrong hands -- because our ability to influence others depends on our willingness to lead and meet our obligations.

America must also face the rapidly growing threat from cyber-attacks. Now, we know hackers steal people’s identities and infiltrate private emails. We know foreign countries and companies swipe our corporate secrets. Now our enemies are also seeking the ability to sabotage our power grid, our financial institutions, our air traffic control systems. We cannot look back years from now and wonder why we did nothing in the face of real threats to our security and our economy.

And that’s why, earlier today, I signed a new executive order that will strengthen our cyber defenses by increasing information sharing, and developing standards to protect our national security, our jobs, and our privacy.

But now Congress must act as well, by passing legislation to give our government a greater capacity to secure our networks and deter attacks. This is something we should be able to get done on a bipartisan basis.

Now, even as we protect our people, we should remember that today’s world presents not just dangers, not just threats, it presents opportunities. To boost American exports, support American jobs and level the playing field in the growing markets of Asia, we intend to complete negotiations on a Trans-Pacific Partnership. And tonight, I’m announcing that we will launch talks on a comprehensive Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership with the European Union -- because trade that is fair and free across the Atlantic supports millions of good-paying American jobs.

We also know that progress in the most impoverished parts of our world enriches us all -- not only because it creates new markets, more stable order in certain regions of the world, but also because it’s the right thing to do. In many places, people live on little more than a dollar a day. So the United States will join with our allies to eradicate such extreme poverty in the next two decades by connecting more people to the global economy; by empowering women; by giving our young and brightest minds new opportunities to serve, and helping communities to feed, and power, and educate themselves; by saving the world’s children from preventable deaths; and by realizing the promise of an AIDS-free generation, which is within our reach.

You see, America must remain a beacon to all who seek freedom during this period of historic change. I saw the power of hope last year in Rangoon, in Burma, when Aung San Suu Kyi welcomed an American President into the home where she had been imprisoned for years; when thousands of Burmese lined the streets, waving American flags, including a man who said, “There is justice and law in the United States. I want our country to be like that.”

In defense of freedom, we’ll remain the anchor of strong alliances from the Americas to Africa; from Europe to Asia. In the Middle East, we will stand with citizens as they demand their universal rights, and support stable transitions to democracy.

We know the process will be messy, and we cannot presume to dictate the course of change in countries like Egypt, but we can -- and will -- insist on respect for the fundamental rights of all people. We’ll keep the pressure on a Syrian regime that has murdered its own people, and support opposition leaders that respect the rights of every Syrian. And we will stand steadfast with Israel in pursuit of security and a lasting peace.

These are the messages I'll deliver when I travel to the Middle East next month. And all this work depends on the courage and sacrifice of those who serve in dangerous places at great personal risk –- our diplomats, our intelligence officers, and the men and women of the United States Armed Forces. As long as I’m Commander-in-Chief, we will do whatever we must to protect those who serve their country abroad, and we will maintain the best military the world has ever known.

We'll invest in new capabilities, even as we reduce waste and wartime spending. We will ensure equal treatment for all servicemembers, and equal benefits for their families -- gay and straight. We will draw upon the courage and skills of our sisters and daughters and moms, because women have proven under fire that they are ready for combat.

We will keep faith with our veterans, investing in world-class care, including mental health care, for our wounded warriors -- supporting our military families; giving our veterans the benefits and education and job opportunities that they have earned. And I want to thank my wife, Michelle, and Dr. Jill Biden for their continued dedication to serving our military families as well as they have served us. Thank you, honey. Thank you, Jill.

Defending our freedom, though, is not just the job of our military alone. We must all do our part to make sure our God-given rights are protected here at home. That includes one of the most fundamental right of a democracy: the right to vote. When any American, no matter where they live or what their party, are denied that right because they can’t afford to wait for five or six or seven hours just to cast their ballot, we are betraying our ideals.

So tonight, I’m announcing a nonpartisan commission to improve the voting experience in America. And it definitely needs improvement. I’m asking two long-time experts in the field -- who, by the way, recently served as the top attorneys for my campaign and for Governor Romney’s campaign -- to lead it. We can fix this, and we will. The American people demand it, and so does our democracy.

Of course, what I’ve said tonight matters little if we don’t come together to protect our most precious resource: our children. It has been two months since Newtown. I know this is not the first time this country has debated how to reduce gun violence. But this time is different. Overwhelming majorities of Americans -- Americans who believe in the Second Amendment -- have come together around common-sense reform, like background checks that will make it harder for criminals to get their hands on a gun. Senators of both parties are working together on tough new laws to prevent anyone from buying guns for resale to criminals. Police chiefs are asking our help to get weapons of war and massive ammunition magazines off our streets, because these police chiefs, they’re tired of seeing their guys and gals being outgunned.

Each of these proposals deserves a vote in Congress. Now, if you want to vote no, that’s your choice. But these proposals deserve a vote. Because in the two months since Newtown, more than a thousand birthdays, graduations, anniversaries have been stolen from our lives by a bullet from a gun -- more than a thousand.

One of those we lost was a young girl named Hadiya Pendleton. She was 15 years old. She loved Fig Newtons and lip gloss. She was a majorette. She was so good to her friends they all thought they were her best friend. Just three weeks ago, she was here, in Washington, with her classmates, performing for her country at my inauguration. And a week later, she was shot and killed in a Chicago park after school, just a mile away from my house.

Hadiya’s parents, Nate and Cleo, are in this chamber tonight, along with more than two dozen Americans whose lives have been torn apart by gun violence. They deserve a vote. They deserve a vote. Gabby Giffords deserves a vote. The families of Newtown deserve a vote. The families of Aurora deserve a vote. The families of Oak Creek and Tucson and Blacksburg, and the countless other communities ripped open by gun violence –- they deserve a simple vote. They deserve a simple vote.

Our actions will not prevent every senseless act of violence in this country. In fact, no laws, no initiatives, no administrative acts will perfectly solve all the challenges I’ve outlined tonight. But we were never sent here to be perfect. We were sent here to make what difference we can, to secure this nation, expand opportunity, uphold our ideals through the hard, often frustrating, but absolutely necessary work of self-government.

We were sent here to look out for our fellow Americans the same way they look out for one another, every single day, usually without fanfare, all across this country. We should follow their example.

We should follow the example of a New York City nurse named Menchu Sanchez. When Hurricane Sandy plunged her hospital into darkness, she wasn’t thinking about how her own home was faring. Her mind was on the 20 precious newborns in her care and the rescue plan she devised that kept them all safe.

We should follow the example of a North Miami woman named Desiline Victor. When Desiline arrived at her polling place, she was told the wait to vote might be six hours. And as time ticked by, her concern was not with her tired body or aching feet, but whether folks like her would get to have their say. And hour after hour, a throng of people stayed in line to support her -- because Desiline is 102 years old. And they erupted in cheers when she finally put on a sticker that read, “I voted.”

We should follow the example of a police officer named Brian Murphy. When a gunman opened fire on a Sikh temple in Wisconsin and Brian was the first to arrive, he did not consider his own safety. He fought back until help arrived and ordered his fellow officers to protect the safety of the Americans worshiping inside, even as he lay bleeding from 12 bullet wounds. And when asked how he did that, Brian said, “That’s just the way we’re made.”

That’s just the way we’re made. We may do different jobs and wear different uniforms, and hold different views than the person beside us. But as Americans, we all share the same proud title -- we are citizens. It’s a word that doesn’t just describe our nationality or legal status. It describes the way we’re made. It describes what we believe. It captures the enduring idea that this country only works when we accept certain obligations to one another and to future generations, that our rights are wrapped up in the rights of others; and that well into our third century as a nation, it remains the task of us all, as citizens of these United States, to be the authors of the next great chapter of our American story.

Thank you. God bless you, and God bless these United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# On Strengthening the Economy for the Middle Class

Hey, Chicago! Hello, Chicago! Hello, everybody. Hello, Hyde Park! It is good to be home! It is good to be home! Everybody have a seat. You all relax. It’s just me. You all know me. It is good to be back home.

A couple of people I want to acknowledge -- first of all, I want to thank your Mayor, my great friend, Rahm Emanuel for his outstanding leadership of the city and his kind introduction. I want to thank everybody here at Hyde Park Academy for welcoming me here today.

I want to acknowledge your principal and your assistant principal -- although, they really make me feel old, because when I saw them -- where are they? Where are they? Stand up. Stand up. They are doing outstanding work. We’re very, very proud them. But you do make me feel old. Sit down.

A couple other people I want to acknowledge -- Governor Pat Quinn is here doing great work down in Springfield. My great friend and senior Senator Dick Durbin is in the house. Congressman Bobby Rush is here. We’re in his district. Attorney General and former seatmate of mine when I was in the state senate, Lisa Madigan. County Board President -- used to be my alderwoman -- Tony Preckwinkle in the house.

And I’ve got -- I see a lot of reverend clergy here, but I’m not going to mention them, because if I miss one I’m in trouble. They’re all friends of mine. They’ve been knowing me.

Some people may not know this, but obviously, this is my old neighborhood. I used to teach right around the corner. This is where Michelle and I met, where we fell in love --

Audience: Aww --

President Obama: This is where we raised our daughters, in a house just about a mile away from here -- less than a mile. And that’s really what I’ve come here to talk about today -- raising our kids.

Audience: We love you!

President Obama: I love you, too. I love you, too.

I’m here to make sure that we talk about and then work towards giving every child every chance in life; building stronger communities and new ladders of opportunity that they can climb into the middle class and beyond; and, most importantly, keeping them safe from harm.

Michelle was born and raised here -- a proud daughter of the South Side. Last weekend, she came home, but it was to attend the funeral of Hadiya Pendleton. And Hadiya’s parents, by the way, are here -- and I want to just acknowledge them. They are just wonderful, wonderful people.

And as you know, this week, in my State of the Union, I talked about Hadiya on Tuesday night and the fact that unfortunately what happened to Hadiya is not unique. It's not unique to Chicago. It's not unique to this country. Too many of our children are being taken away from us.

Two months ago, America mourned 26 innocent first-graders and their educators in Newtown. And today, I had the high honor of giving the highest civilian award I can give to the parent -- or the families of the educators who had been killed in Newtown. And there was something profound and uniquely heartbreaking and tragic, obviously, about a group of 6-year-olds being killed. But last year, there were 443 murders with a firearm on the streets of this city, and 65 of those victims were 18 and under. So that’s the equivalent of a Newtown every four months.

And that’s precisely why the overwhelming majority of Americans are asking for some common-sense proposals to make it harder for criminals to get their hands on a gun. And as I said on Tuesday night, I recognize not everybody agrees with every issue. There are regional differences. The experience of gun ownership is different in urban areas than it is in rural areas, different from upstate and downstate Illinois. But these proposals deserve a vote in Congress. They deserve a vote. They deserve a vote. And I want to thank those members of Congress who are working together in a serious way to try to address this issue.

But I’ve also said no law or set of laws can prevent every senseless act of violence in this country. When a child opens fire on another child, there’s a hole in that child’s heart that government can't fill -- only community and parents and teachers and clergy can fill that hole. In too many neighborhoods today -- whether here in Chicago or the farthest reaches of rural America -- it can feel like for a lot of young people the future only extends to the next street corner or the outskirts of town; that no matter how much you work or how hard you try, your destiny was determined the moment you were born. There are entire neighborhoods where young people, they don’t see an example of somebody succeeding. And for a lot of young boys and young men, in particular, they don’t see an example of fathers or grandfathers, uncles, who are in a position to support families and be held up and respected.

And so that means that this is not just a gun issue. It’s also an issue of the kinds of communities that we’re building. And for that, we all share a responsibility, as citizens, to fix it. We all share a responsibility to move this country closer to our founding vision that no matter who you are, or where you come from, here in America, you can decide your own destiny. You can succeed if you work hard and fulfill your responsibilities.

Now, that means we’ve got to grow our economy and create more good jobs. It means we’ve got to equip every American with the skills and the training to fill those jobs. And it means we’ve got to rebuild ladders of opportunity for everybody willing to climb them.

Now, that starts at home. There’s no more important ingredient for success, nothing that would be more important for us reducing violence than strong, stable families -- which means we should do more to promote marriage and encourage fatherhood. Don’t get me wrong -- as the son of a single mom, who gave everything she had to raise me with the help of my grandparents, I turned out okay. But -- no, no, but I think it’s -- so we’ve got single moms out here, they’re heroic in what they’re doing and we are so proud of them. But at the same time, I wish I had had a father who was around and involved. Loving, supportive parents -- and, by the way, that’s all kinds of parents -- that includes foster parents, and that includes grandparents, and extended families; it includes gay or straight parents.

Those parents supporting kids -- that’s the single most important thing. Unconditional love for your child -- that makes a difference. If a child grows up with parents who have work, and have some education, and can be role models, and can teach integrity and responsibility, and discipline and delayed gratification -- all those things give a child the kind of foundation that allows them to say, my future, I can make it what I want. And we’ve got to make sure that every child has that, and in some cases, we may have to fill the gap and the void if children don’t have that.

So we should encourage marriage by removing the financial disincentives for couples who love one another but may find it financially disadvantageous if they get married. We should reform our child support laws to get more men working and engaged with their children. And my Administration will continue to work with the faith community and the private sector this year on a campaign to encourage strong parenting and fatherhood. Because what makes you a man is not the ability to make a child, it’s the courage to raise one.

We also know, though, that there is no surer path to success in the middle class than a good education. And what we now know is that that has to begin in the earliest years. Study after study shows that the earlier a child starts learning, the more likely they are to succeed -- the more likely they are to do well at Hyde Park Academy; the more likely they are to graduate; the more likely they are to get a good job; the more likely they are to form stable families and then be able to raise children themselves who get off to a good start.

Chicago already has a competition, thanks to what the Mayor is doing, that rewards the best preschools in the city -- so Rahm has already prioritized this. But what I’ve also done is say, let’s give every child across America access to high-quality, public preschool. Every child, not just some. Every dollar we put into early childhood education can save $7 down the road by boosting graduation rates, reducing teen pregnancy, reducing violent crime, reducing the welfare rolls, making sure that folks who have work, now they’re paying taxes. All this stuff pays back huge dividends if we make the investment. So let’s make this happen. Let’s make sure every child has the chance they deserve.

As kids go through school, we’ll recruit new math and science teachers to make sure that they’ve got the skills that the future demands. We’ll help more young people in low-income neighborhoods get summer jobs. We’ll redesign our high schools and encourage our kids to stay in high school, so that the diploma they get leads directly to a good job once they graduate.

Right here in Chicago, five new high schools have partnered with companies and community colleges to prepare our kids with the skills that businesses are looking for right now. And your College to Careers program helps community college students get access to the same kinds of real-world experiences. So we know what works. Let’s just do it in more places. Let’s reach more young people. Let’s give more kids a chance.

So we know how important families are. We know how important education is. We recognize that government alone can’t solve these problems of violence and poverty, that everybody has to be involved. But we also have to remember that the broader economic environment of communities is critical as well. For example, we need to make sure that folks who are working now, often in the hardest jobs, see their work rewarded with wages that allow them to raise a family without falling into poverty.

Today, a family with two kids that works hard and relies on a minimum wage salary still lives below the poverty line. That’s wrong, and we should fix it. We should reward an honest day’s work with honest wages. And that's why we should raise the minimum wage to $9 an hour and make it a wage you can live on.

And even though some cities have bounced back pretty quickly from the recession, we know that there are communities and neighborhoods within cities or in small towns that haven’t bounced back. Cities like Chicago are ringed with former factory towns that never came back all the way from plants packing up; there are pockets of poverty where young adults are still looking for their first job.

And that’s why on Tuesday I announced -- and that's part of what I want to focus on here in Chicago and across the country -- is my intention to partner with 20 of the hardest-hit communities in America to get them back in the game -- get them back in the game.

First, we’ll work with local leaders to cut through red tape and improve things like public safety and education and housing. And we’ll bring all the resources to bear in a coordinated fashion so that we can get that tipping point where suddenly a community starts feeling like things are changing and we can come back.

Second of all, if you’re willing to play a role in a child’s education, then we’ll help you reform your schools. We want to seed more and more partnerships of the kind that Rahm is trying to set up.

Third, we’re going to help bring jobs and growth to hard-hit neighborhoods by giving tax breaks to business owners who invest and hire in those neighborhoods.

Fourth, and specific to the issue of violence -- because it’s very hard to develop economically if people don't feel safe. If they don't feel like they can walk down the street and shop at a store without getting hit over head or worse, then commerce dries up, businesses don't want to locate, families move out, you get into the wrong cycle. So we’re going to target neighborhoods struggling to deal with violent crime and help them reduce that violence in ways that have been proven to work. And I know this is a priority of your Mayor’s; it’s going to be a priority of mine.

And finally, we’re going to keep working in communities all across the country, including here in Chicago, to replace run-down public housing that doesn’t offer much hope or safety with new, healthy homes for low- and moderate-income families.

And here in Woodlawn, you’ve seen some of the progress that we can make when we come together to rebuild our neighborhoods, and attract new businesses, and improve our schools. Woodlawn is not all the way where it needs to be, but thanks to wonderful institutions like Apostolic Church, we’ve made great progress.

So we want to help more communities follow your example. And let’s go even farther by offering incentives to companies that hire unemployed Americans who have got what it takes to fill a job opening, but they may have been out of work so long that nobody is willing to give them a chance right now. Let’s put our people back to work rebuilding vacant homes in need of repair. Young people can get experience -- apprenticeships, learn a trade. And we’re removing blight from our community.

If we gather together what works, we can extend more ladders of opportunity for anybody who’s working to build a strong, middle-class life for themselves. Because in America, your destiny shouldn’t be determined by where you live, where you were born. It should be determined by how big you’re willing to dream, how much effort and sweat and tears you’re willing to put in to realizing that dream.

When I first moved to Chicago -- before any of the students in this room were born -- and a whole lot of people who are in the audience remember me from those days, I lived in a community on the South Side right up the block, but I also worked further south where communities had been devastated by some of the steel plants closing. And my job was to work with churches and laypeople and local leaders to rebuild neighborhoods, and improve schools, and help young people who felt like they had nowhere to turn.

And those of you who worked with me, Reverend Love, you remember, it wasn’t easy. Progress didn’t come quickly. Sometimes I got so discouraged I thought about just giving up. But what kept me going was the belief that with enough determination and effort and persistence and perseverance, change is always possible; that we may not be able to help everybody, but if we help a few then that propels progress forward. We may not be able to save every child from gun violence, but if we save a few, that starts changing the atmosphere in our communities. We may not be able to get everybody a job right away, but if we get a few folks a job, then everybody starts feeling a little more hopeful and a little more encouraged. Neighborhood by neighborhood, one block by one block, one family at a time.

Now, this is what I had a chance to talk about when I met with some young men from Hyde Park Academy who were participating in this B.A.M. program. Where are the guys I talked to? Stand up you all, so we can all see you guys. So these are some -- these are all some exceptional young men, and I couldn't be prouder of them. And the reason I'm proud of them is because a lot of them have had some issues. That's part of the reason why you guys are in the program.

But what I explained to them was I had issues too when I was their age. I just had an environment that was a little more forgiving. So when I screwed up, the consequences weren't as high as when kids on the South Side screw up. So I had more of a safety net. But these guys are no different than me, and we had that conversation about what does it take to change. And the same thing that it takes for us individually to change, I said to them, well, that's what it takes for communities to change. That's what it takes for countries to change. It's not easy.

But it does require us, first of all, having a vision about where we want to be. It requires us recognizing that it will be hard work getting there. It requires us being able to overcome and persevere in the face of roadblocks and disappointments and failures. It requires us reflecting internally about who we are and what we believe in, and facing up to our own fears and insecurities, and admitting when we're wrong. And that same thing that we have to do in our individual lives that these guys talked about, that's what we have to do for our communities. And it will not be easy, but it can be done.

When Hadiya Pendleton and her classmates visited Washington three weeks ago, they spent time visiting the monuments -- including the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial just off the National Mall. And that memorial stands as a tribute to everything Dr. King achieved in his lifetime. But it also reminds us of how hard that work was and how many disappointments he experienced. He was here in Chicago fighting poverty, and just like a lot of us, there were times where he felt like he was losing hope. So in some ways, that memorial is a testament not to work that's completed, but it’s a testament to the work that remains unfinished.

His goal was to free us not only from the shackles of discrimination, but from the shadow of poverty that haunts too many of our communities, the self-destructive impulses, and the mindless violence that claims so many lives of so many innocent young people.

These are difficult challenges. No solution we offer will be perfect. But perfection has never been our goal. Our goal has been to try and make whatever difference we can. Our goal has been to engage in the hard but necessary work of bringing America one step closer to the nation we know we can be.

If we do that, if we’re striving with every fiber of our being to strengthen our middle class, to extend ladders of opportunity for everybody who is trying as hard as they can to create a better life for themselves; if we do everything in our power to keep our children safe from harm; if we’re fulfilling our obligations to one another and to future generations; if we make that effort, then I’m confident -- I’m confident that we will write the next great chapter in our American story. I’m not going to be able to do it by myself, though. Nobody can. We’re going to have to do it together.

Thank you, everybody.

God bless you.

God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Speech on Sequester Impact at Newport News Shipbuilding

Hello, Newport News! Well, it is good to see all of you here today.

I want to thank your CEO, Mike Petters, for showing me around. I usually don’t get a chance to hang out with nuclear submarines, especially submarines that my wife has sponsored. So right there, that was worth the trip.

But most importantly, it’s a great chance to see the incredible men and women who, every single day, are helping to keep America safe and are just the bedrock of this country’s manufacturing base. Thank you to all of you.

I want to thank our outstanding Secretary of the Navy, Ray Mabus, who’s here. There he is right there -- the good-looking guy over at the end. I want to thank your Mayor, McKinley Price, who served this nation bravely in the U.S. Army. I want to thank two outstanding Congressmen who care about this facility, care about Virginia and care about the country -- Congressman Bobby Scott is here -- and Congressman Scott Rigell is here as well.

Now, the reason I came here today, in addition to seeing just some incredible stuff -- it’s true, every time I come to these places, I don't know how you all do it. It is just amazing work. But the main reason I'm here is to call attention to the important work that you’re doing on behalf of the nation’s defense, and to let the American people know that this work, along with hundreds of thousands of jobs, are currently in jeopardy because of politics in Washington.

In a few days, Congress might allow a series of immediate, painful, arbitrary budget cuts to take place -- known in Washington as the sequester. Now, that's a pretty bad name -- sequester. But the effects are even worse than the name. Instead of cutting out the government spending we don’t need -- wasteful programs that don't work, special interest tax loopholes and tax breaks -- what the sequester does is it uses a meat cleaver approach to gut critical investments in things like education and national security and lifesaving medical research.

And the impact of this policy won’t be felt overnight, but it will be real. The sequester will weaken America’s economic recovery. It will weaken our military readiness. And it will weaken the basic services that the American people depend on every single day.

Already, the uncertainty around these cuts is having an effect. Companies are starting to prepare for layoff notices. Families are preparing to cut back on expenses. And the longer these cuts are in place, the greater the damage.

So here at Newport News Shipbuilding, you guys have made an enormous investment, because we've said in order to maintain the finest Navy that the world has ever known we've got to make sure that there is an orderly process whereby we are continually upgrading our ships, building new ships, maintaining our ships properly. And these are some big ships. So it’s expensive, and it’s complicated. And you’ve got 5,000 suppliers all across the country, and you've got to have some certainty and some knowledge about how things are going to proceed over the long term for Mike and others to plan properly. So you're rightly concerned. Mike is properly concerned about the impact that these cuts will have on not just this company, but companies and small businesses from all 50 states that supply you with parts and equipment.

Mike was telling me that you guys have already made a billion dollars’ worth of capital investment. You've got half a billion dollars in training costs as you recruit and hire new people. Well, those aren't commitments that you make lightly. You've got to have the capacity to plan and have some certainty in terms of what it is that we're going to be doing. And you know that if Congress can’t get together and plan our nation’s finances for the long term, that over time some of your jobs and businesses could be at risk.

Over at the Norfolk Naval Station, the threat of these cuts has already forced the Navy to cancel the deployment, or delay the repair of certain aircraft carriers. One that’s currently being built might not get finished. Another carrier might not get started at all. And that hurts your bottom line. That hurts this community. Because of these automatic cuts, about 90,000 Virginians who work for the Department of Defense would be forced to take unpaid leave from their jobs. So that’s money out of their pockets, money out of their paychecks. And then that means there’s going to be a ripple effect on thousands of other jobs and businesses and services throughout the Commonwealth, because if they don’t have money in their pockets or less money in their pockets, that means they're less able to afford to buy goods and services from other businesses. So it's not just restricted to the defense industry.

All told, the sequester could cost tens of thousands of jobs right here in Virginia. But it doesn’t just stop there. If the sequester goes into effect, more than 2,000 college students would lose their financial aid. Early education like Head Start and Early Start would be eliminated for nearly 1,000 children, and around 18,000 fewer Virginians would get the skills and training they need to find a job.

Across the country, these cuts will force federal prosecutors to close cases and potentially let criminals go. Air traffic controllers and airport security will see cutbacks, and that could cause delays at airports across the country. Tens of thousands of parents will have to scramble to find child care for their kids. Hundreds of thousands of Americans will lose access to primary care and preventive care like flu vaccinations and cancer screenings, including more than 3,500 children right here in Virginia.

So these cuts are wrong. They’re not smart. They’re not fair. They’re a self-inflicted wound that doesn’t have to happen.

Now, the reason that we're even thinking about the sequester is because people are rightly concerned about the deficit and the debt. But there is a sensible way of doing things and there is a dumb way of doing things. I mean, think about your own family. Let's say that suddenly you've got a little less money coming in. Are you going to say, well, we'll cut out college tuition for the kid, we'll stop feeding the little guy over here, we won't pay our car note even though that means we can't get to work -- that’s not what you do, right?

You step back and you say, what is it that's important -- our child's education, making sure they're healthy, making sure we can get to the job, keeping our house repaired? And then you say, here are the things that aren't so important and you cut those out. You prioritize, and you make smart decisions. Well, we should be doing the same thing.

Now, I’ve laid out a plan that details how we can pay down our deficit in a way that’s balanced and responsible. We have the plan right on a website, the White House website. Everybody can go see it. It details exactly how we can cut programs that don't work, how we can raise money by closing loopholes that are only serving a few, as opposed to the average American.

We detailed $930 billion in sensible spending cuts that we’re willing to make and $580 billion in wasteful tax loopholes and deductions that we’re willing to eliminate through tax reform.

And what I've said is if the Republicans in Congress don’t like every detail of my proposal, which I don't expect them to, I’ve told them my door is open. I am more than willing to negotiate. I want to compromise. There's no reason why we can't come together and find a sensible way to reduce the deficit over the long term without affecting vital services, without hurting families, without impacting outstanding facilities like this one and our national defense. There's a way of doing this.

And the fact is there are leaders in both parties throughout this country who want to do the same. I've got to give Scott Rigell credit. He is one of your Republican congressmen who’s with us here today -- and that's not always healthy for a Republican, being with me. But the reason he’s doing it is because he knows it's important to you. And he’s asked his colleagues in the House to consider closing tax loopholes instead of letting these automatic cuts go through. He’s concerned about the deficit, and he’s more than prepared to make some really tough cuts, but he wants to do it in a smart way.

Bobby Scott -- same thing. Some of the cuts we've proposed, Bobby might not think are perfect, but he knows that we've got to make some tough decisions. He just wants to make sure that you aren't the ones who are adversely impacted and that we're sharing the sacrifice in bringing down our deficit; we're not just dumping it on a few people and we're not doing it in a dumb way.

Senators like John McCain have made similar statements to what Scott said. Your Republican Governor along with other governors around the country have said they want Congress to stop the sequester, to stop these cuts.

But I just have to be honest with you. There are too many Republicans in Congress right now who refuse to compromise even an inch when it comes to closing tax loopholes and special interest tax breaks. And that's what's holding things up right now.

Keep in mind, nobody is asking them to raise income tax rates. All we’re asking is to consider closing tax loopholes and deductions that the Speaker of the House, John Boehner, said he was willing to do just a few months ago. He said there were a bunch of loopholes and deductions you could close. He said you could raise $800 billion, a trillion dollars by closing loopholes.

Well, we're not even asking for that much. All we're asking is that they close loopholes for the well-off and the well-connected -- for hedge fund managers, or oil companies, or corporate jet owners who are all doing very well and don’t need these tax loopholes -- so we can avoid laying off workers, or kicking kids off Head Start, or reducing financial aid for college students.

I don’t think that’s too much to ask. I do not think that is partisan. The majority of the American people agree with me. The majority of Newport News agrees with me. We need to get this done.

But the choice is up to Congress. Only Congress has the power to pass a law that stops these damaging cuts and replaces them with smart savings and tax reform. And the second I get that bill on my desk, I will sign it into law. But I've got to get Congress to pass it.

None of us will get 100 percent of what we want. Democrats, they've got to make some tough choices too. Democrats like me, we've said we're prepared to make some tough cuts and reforms, including to programs like Medicare. But if we're willing to compromise, then Republicans in the House have to compromise as well. That’s what democracy is about. That’s what this country needs right now.

So let me just make one last point, by the way, for those of you who are following this. Now, lately, some people have been saying, well, maybe we'll just give the President some flexibility. He could make the cuts the way he wants and that way it won't be as damaging. The problem is when you're cutting $85 billion in seven months, which represents over a 10-percent cut in the defense budget in seven months, there's no smart way to do that. There's no smart way to do that. You don't want to have to choose between, let's see, do I close funding for the disabled kid, or the poor kid? Do I close this Navy shipyard or some other one? When you're doing things in a way that's not smart, you can't gloss over the pain and the impact it's going to have on the economy.

And the broader point is, Virginia, we can’t just cut our way to prosperity. We can’t just cut our way to prosperity. We can't ask seniors and working families like yours to shoulder the entire burden of deficit reduction while asking nothing more from the wealthiest and the most powerful. We're not going to grow the middle class just by shifting the cost of health care or college onto families that are already struggling, or forcing communities to lay off more teachers or cops or firefighters or shipbuilders, and then folks who are doing really well don’t have to do anything more. That’s not fair, and it's not good for the economy.

And the other thing we've got to do is to stop having these crises manufactured every month. It seems like -- I know you guys must get tired of it. Didn’t we just solve this thing? Now we've got another thing coming up? I mean, think about if Mike Petters ran his business this way -- once every month or two there would be some crisis, and you wouldn’t be sure whether or not you were working or not. Even if it got solved eventually or ultimately, it would be pretty discouraging on people. You would be less productive. Ships wouldn’t get built as fast. You would waste money because you don’t know exactly what to expect. Folks aren't sure, am I showing up to work today, or not?

If it's not a good way to run a business, it's sure not a good way to run a country.

Now, all of you, the American people, you’ve worked too hard for too long rebuilding and digging our way out of the financial crisis back in 2007 and 2008 just to see Congress cause another one. The greatest nation on Earth can't keep on conducting its business drifting from one crisis to the next.

We've got to have a plan. We've got to invest in our common future. Our true north is a growing economy that creates good middle-class jobs; a country that provides its people with the skills they need to get those jobs and make sure that you're getting paid a decent wage for working hard so you can support your families. That’s what we should be focused on right now. Not weakening the economy. Not laying people off.

That’s what we should be talking about in Washington. And if you agree with me, I need you to make sure your voices are heard. Let your leaders know what you expect of them. Let them know what you believe. Let them know that what this country was built on was a sense of obligation to not just each other but to future generations; that we've got to shoulder those obligations as one nation, and as one people.

I was in a conversation with some of the governors from across the country yesterday and I told them, I said, I've run my last election. Michelle is very happy about that. I'm not interested in spin; I'm not interested in playing a blame game. At this point, all I'm interested in is just solving problems. All I'm interested in is making sure that when you get up early in the morning, and get to this ship at 5:30 in the morning, that you know if you do a good job and if you work hard and if you're making sure that all the parts to this incredible ship that you're building are where they need to be -- if you're doing what you do, then you can go home feeling satisfied, I did my job, I did my part, I can support my family, I can take pride in what I've done for this country.

That’s all I want. I want us to be able to look back five years from now, 10 years from now, and say we took care of our business and we put an end to some of these games that maybe, I guess, are entertaining for some but are hurting too many people.

But in order for us to make that happen I'm going to need you. The one thing about being President is, after four years you get pretty humble. You’d think maybe you wouldn't, but actually you become more humble. You realize what you don't know. You realize all the mistakes you’ve made. But you also realize you can't do things by yourself. That's not how our system works. You’ve got to have the help and the goodwill of Congress, and what that means is you’ve got to make sure that constituents of members of Congress are putting some pressure on them, making sure they’re doing the right thing, putting an end to some of these political games.

So I need you, Virginia, to keep up the pressure. I need you to keep up the effort. I need you to keep up the fight. If you do, Congress will listen. If you stand up and speak out, Congress will listen. And together, we will unleash our true potential, and we'll remind the world just why it is the United States builds the greatest ships on Earth and is the greatest nation on Earth.

Thank you. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address Dedicating Rosa Parks Statue

Mr. Speaker, Leader Reid, Leader McConnell, Leader Pelosi, Assistant Leader Clyburn; to the friends and family of Rosa Parks; to the distinguished guests who are gathered here today.

This morning, we celebrate a seamstress, slight in stature but mighty in courage. She defied the odds, and she defied injustice. She lived a life of activism, but also a life of dignity and grace. And in a single moment, with the simplest of gestures, she helped change America -- and change the world.

Rosa Parks held no elected office. She possessed no fortune; lived her life far from the formal seats of power. And yet today, she takes her rightful place among those who’ve shaped this nation’s course. I thank all those persons, in particular the members of the Congressional Black Caucus, both past and present, for making this moment possible.

A childhood friend once said about Mrs. Parks, “Nobody ever bossed Rosa around and got away with it.” That’s what an Alabama driver learned on December 1, 1955. Twelve years earlier, he had kicked Mrs. Parks off his bus simply because she entered through the front door when the back door was too crowded. He grabbed her sleeve and he pushed her off the bus. It made her mad enough, she would recall, that she avoided riding his bus for a while.

And when they met again that winter evening in 1955, Rosa Parks would not be pushed. When the driver got up from his seat to insist that she give up hers, she would not be pushed. When he threatened to have her arrested, she simply replied, “You may do that.” And he did.

A few days later, Rosa Parks challenged her arrest. A little-known pastor, new to town and only 26 years old, stood with her -- a man named Martin Luther King, Jr. So did thousands of Montgomery, Alabama commuters. They began a boycott -- teachers and laborers, clergy and domestics, through rain and cold and sweltering heat, day after day, week after week, month after month, walking miles if they had to, arranging carpools where they could, not thinking about the blisters on their feet, the weariness after a full day of work -- walking for respect, walking for freedom, driven by a solemn determination to affirm their God-given dignity.

Three hundred and eighty-five days after Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat, the boycott ended. Black men and women and children re-boarded the buses of Montgomery, newly desegregated, and sat in whatever seat happen to be open. And with that victory, the entire edifice of segregation, like the ancient walls of Jericho, began to slowly come tumbling down.

It’s been often remarked that Rosa Parks’s activism didn’t begin on that bus. Long before she made headlines, she had stood up for freedom, stood up for equality -- fighting for voting rights, rallying against discrimination in the criminal justice system, serving in the local chapter of the NAACP. Her quiet leadership would continue long after she became an icon of the civil rights movement, working with Congressman Conyers to find homes for the homeless, preparing disadvantaged youth for a path to success, striving each day to right some wrong somewhere in this world.

And yet our minds fasten on that single moment on the bus -- Ms. Parks alone in that seat, clutching her purse, staring out a window, waiting to be arrested. That moment tells us something about how change happens, or doesn’t happen; the choices we make, or don’t make. “For now we see through a glass, darkly,” Scripture says, and it’s true. Whether out of inertia or selfishness, whether out of fear or a simple lack of moral imagination, we so often spend our lives as if in a fog, accepting injustice, rationalizing inequity, tolerating the intolerable.

Like the bus driver, but also like the passengers on the bus, we see the way things are -- children hungry in a land of plenty, entire neighborhoods ravaged by violence, families hobbled by job loss or illness -- and we make excuses for inaction, and we say to ourselves, that's not my responsibility, there’s nothing I can do.

Rosa Parks tell us there’s always something we can do. She tells us that we all have responsibilities, to ourselves and to one another. She reminds us that this is how change happens -- not mainly through the exploits of the famous and the powerful, but through the countless acts of often anonymous courage and kindness and fellow feeling and responsibility that continually, stubbornly, expand our conception of justice -- our conception of what is possible.

Rosa Parks’s singular act of disobedience launched a movement. The tired feet of those who walked the dusty roads of Montgomery helped a nation see that to which it had once been blind. It is because of these men and women that I stand here today. It is because of them that our children grow up in a land more free and more fair; a land truer to its founding creed.

And that is why this statue belongs in this hall -- to remind us, no matter how humble or lofty our positions, just what it is that leadership requires; just what it is that citizenship requires. Rosa Parks would have turned 100 years old this month. We do well by placing a statue of her here. But we can do no greater honor to her memory than to carry forward the power of her principle and a courage born of conviction.

May God bless the memory of Rosa Parks.

And may God bless these United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address at the Jerusalem International Convention Center

Shalom!

Thank you so much. Thank you very much. Thank you. Everybody, please have a seat. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you so much. Well, it is a great honor to be with you here in Jerusalem, and I’m so grateful for the welcome that I’ve received from the people of Israel. Thank you. I bring with me the support of the American people -- and the friendship that binds us together.

Over the last two days, I’ve reaffirmed the bonds between our countries with Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Peres. I’ve borne witness to the ancient history of the Jewish people at the Shrine of the Book, and I’ve seen Israel’s shining future in your scientists and your entrepreneurs. This is a nation of museums and patents, timeless holy sites and ground-breaking innovation. Only in Israel could you see the Dead Sea Scrolls and the place where the technology on board the Mars Rover originated at the same time.

But what I’ve most looked forward to is the ability to speak directly to you, the Israeli people -- especially so many young people who are here today -- to talk about the history that brought us here today, and the future that you will make in the years to come.

Now, I know that in Israel’s vibrant democracy, every word, every gesture is carefully scrutinized. But I want to clear something up just so you know -- any drama between me and my friend, Bibi, over the years was just a plot to create material for Eretz Nehederet. That’s the only thing that was going on. We just wanted to make sure the writers had good material.

I also know that I come to Israel on the eve of a sacred holiday -- the celebration of Passover. And that is where I would like to begin today.

Just a few days from now, Jews here in Israel and around the world will sit with family and friends at the Seder table, and celebrate with songs, wine and symbolic foods. After enjoying Seders with family and friends in Chicago and on the campaign trail, I’m proud that I've now brought this tradition into the White House. I did so because I wanted my daughters to experience the Haggadah, and the story at the center of Passover that makes this time of year so powerful. It’s a story of centuries of slavery, and years of wandering in the desert; a story of perseverance amidst persecution, and faith in God and the Torah. It’s a story about finding freedom in your own land. And for the Jewish people, this story is central to who you’ve become. But it’s also a story that holds within it the universal human experience, with all of its suffering, but also all of its salvation.

It’s a part of the three great religions -- Judaism, Christianity, and Islam -- that trace their origins to Abraham, and see Jerusalem as sacred. And it’s a story that’s inspired communities across the globe, including me and my fellow Americans. In the United States -- a nation made up of people who crossed oceans to start anew -- we’re naturally drawn to the idea of finding freedom in our land. To African Americans, the story of the Exodus was perhaps the central story, the most powerful image about emerging from the grip of bondage to reach for liberty and human dignity -- a tale that was carried from slavery through the Civil Rights Movement into today.

For generations, this promise helped people weather poverty and persecution, while holding on to the hope that a better day was on the horizon. For me, personally, growing up in far-flung parts of the world and without firm roots, the story spoke to a yearning within every human being for a home.

Of course, even as we draw strength from the story of God’s will and His gift of freedom expressed on Passover, we also know that here on Earth we must bear our responsibilities in an imperfect world. That means accepting our measure of sacrifice and struggle, just like previous generations. It means us working through generation after generation on behalf of that ideal of freedom.

As Dr. Martin Luther King said on the day before he was killed, “I may not get there with you. But I want you to know that we, as a people, will get to the promised land.” So just as Joshua carried on after Moses, the work goes on for all of you, the Joshua Generation, for justice and dignity; for opportunity and freedom. For the Jewish people, the journey to the promise of the State of Israel wound through countless generations. It involved centuries of suffering and exile, prejudice and pogroms and even genocide. Through it all, the Jewish people sustained their unique identity and traditions, as well as a longing to return home. And while Jews achieved extraordinary success in many parts of the world, the dream of true freedom finally found its full expression in the Zionist idea -- to be a free people in your homeland. That’s why I believe that Israel is rooted not just in history and tradition, but also in a simple and profound idea -- the idea that people deserve to be free in a land of their own.

Over the last 65 years, when Israel has been at its best, Israelis have demonstrated that responsibility does not end when you reach the promised land, it only begins. And so Israel has been a refuge for the Diaspora -- welcoming Jews from Europe, from the former Soviet Union, from Ethiopia, from North Africa.

Israel has built a prosperous nation -- through kibbutzim that made the desert bloom, business that broadened the middle class, innovators who reached new frontiers, from the smallest microchip to the orbits of space. Israel has established a thriving democracy, with a spirited civil society and proud political parties, and a tireless free press, and a lively public debate -- “lively” may even be an understatement.

And Israel has achieved all this even as it’s overcome relentless threats to its security -- through the courage of the Israel Defense Forces, and the citizenry that is so resilient in the face of terror. This is the story of Israel. This is the work that has brought the dreams of so many generations to life. And every step of the way, Israel has built unbreakable bonds of friendship with my country, the United States of America.

Those ties began only 11 minutes after Israeli independence, when the United States was the first nation to recognize the State of Israel. As President Truman said in explaining his decision to recognize Israel, he said, “I believe it has a glorious future before it not just as another sovereign nation, but as an embodiment of the great ideals of our civilization.” And since then, we’ve built a friendship that advances our shared interests.

Together, we share a commitment to security for our citizens and the stability of the Middle East and North Africa. Together, we share a focus on advancing economic growth around the globe, and strengthening the middle class within our own countries. Together, we share a stake in the success of democracy. But the source of our friendship extends beyond mere interests, just as it has transcended political parties and individual leaders. America is a nation of immigrants. America is strengthened by diversity. America is enriched by faith. We are governed not simply by men and women, but by laws. We're fueled by entrepreneurship and innovation, and we are defined by a democratic discourse that allows each generation to reimagine and renew our union once more. So in Israel, we see values that we share, even as we recognize what makes us different. That is an essential part of our bond. Now, I stand here today mindful that for both our nations, these are some complicated times. We have difficult issues to work through within our own countries, and we face dangers and upheaval around the world. And when I look at young people within the United States, I think about the choices that they must make in their lives to define who we'll be as a nation in this 21st century, particularly as we emerge from two wars and the worst recession since the Great Depression. But part of the reason I like talking to young people is because no matter how great the challenges are, their idealism, their energy, their ambition always gives me hope.

And I see the same spirit in the young people here today. I believe that you will shape our future. And given the ties between our countries, I believe your future is bound to ours.

No, no -- this is part of the lively debate that we talked about. This is good. You know, I have to say we actually arranged for that, because it made me feel at home. I wouldn’t feel comfortable if I didn't have at least one heckler.

I’d like to focus on how we -- and when I say "we," in particular young people -- can work together to make progress in three areas that will define our times -- security, peace and prosperity.

Let me begin with security. I'm proud that the security relationship between the United States and Israel has never been stronger. Never. More exercises between our militaries; more exchanges among our political and military and intelligence officials than ever before; the largest program to date to help you retain your qualitative military edge. These are the facts. These aren't my opinions, these are facts. But, to me, this is not simply measured on a balance sheet. I know that here, in Israel, security is something personal.

Here's what I think about when I consider these issues. When I consider Israel’s security, I think about children like Osher Twito, who I met in Sderot -- children the same age as my own daughters who went to bed at night fearful that a rocket would land in their bedroom simply because of who they are and where they live.

That reality is why we’ve invested in the Iron Dome system to save countless lives -- because those children deserve to sleep better at night. That’s why we’ve made it clear, time and again, that Israel cannot accept rocket attacks from Gaza, and we have stood up for Israel’s right to defend itself. And that’s why Israel has a right to expect Hamas to renounce violence and recognize Israel’s right to exist.

When I think about Israel’s security, I think about five Israelis who boarded a bus in Bulgaria, who were blown up because of where they came from; robbed of the ability to live, and love, and raise families. That’s why every country that values justice should call Hizbollah what it truly is -- a terrorist organization. Because the world cannot tolerate an organization that murders innocent civilians, stockpiles rockets to shoot at cities, and supports the massacre of men and women and children in Syria right now.

The fact that Hizbollah’s ally -- the Assad regime -- has stockpiles of chemical weapons only heightens the urgency. We will continue to cooperate closely to guard against that danger. I’ve made it clear to Bashar al-Assad and all who follow his orders: We will not tolerate the use of chemical weapons against the Syrian people, or the transfer of those weapons to terrorists. The world is watching; we will hold you accountable.

The Syrian people have the right to be freed from the grip of a dictator who would rather kill his own people than relinquish power. Assad must go so that Syria’s future can begin. Because true stability in Syria depends upon establishing a government that is responsible to its people -- one that protects all communities within its borders, while making peace with countries beyond them.

These are the things I think about when I think about Israel’s security. When I consider Israel’s security, I also think about a people who have a living memory of the Holocaust, faced with the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iranian government that has called for Israel’s destruction. It’s no wonder Israelis view this as an existential threat. But this is not simply a challenge for Israel -- it is a danger for the entire world, including the United States. A nuclear-armed Iran would raise the risk of nuclear terrorism. It would undermine the non-proliferation regime. It would spark an arms race in a volatile region. And it would embolden a government that has shown no respect for the rights of its own people or the responsibilities of nations. That’s why America has built a coalition to increase the cost to Iran of failing to meet their obligations. The Iranian government is now under more pressure than ever before, and that pressure is increasing. It is isolated. Its economy is in dire straits. Its leadership is divided. And its position -- in the region, and the world -- has only grown weaker.

I do believe that all of us have an interest in resolving this issue peacefully. Strong and principled diplomacy is the best way to ensure that the Iranian government forsakes nuclear weapons. Peace is far more preferable to war. And the inevitable costs, the unintended consequences that would come with war means that we have to do everything we can to try to resolve this diplomatically. Because of the cooperation between our governments, we know that there remains time to pursue a diplomatic resolution. That’s what America will do, with clear eyes -- working with a world that’s united, and with the sense of urgency that’s required.

But Iran must know this time is not unlimited. And I’ve made the position of the United States of America clear: Iran must not get a nuclear weapon. This is not a danger that can be contained, and as President, I’ve said all options are on the table for achieving our objectives. America will do what we must to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran.

For young Israelis, I know that these issues of security are rooted in an experience that is even more fundamental than the pressing threat of the day. You live in a neighborhood where many of your neighbors have rejected the right of your nation to exist. Your grandparents had to risk their lives and all that they had to make a place for themselves in this world. Your parents lived through war after war to ensure the survival of the Jewish state. Your children grow up knowing that people they’ve never met may hate them because of who they are, in a region that is full of turmoil and changing underneath your feet. So that’s what I think about when Israel is faced with these challenges -- that sense of an Israel that is surrounded by many in this region who still reject it, and many in the world who refuse to accept it. And that’s why the security of the Jewish people in Israel is so important. It cannot be taken for granted.

But make no mistake -- those who adhere to the ideology of rejecting Israel’s right to exist, they might as well reject the earth beneath them or the sky above, because Israel is not going anywhere. And today, I want to tell you -- particularly the young people -- so that there's no mistake here, so long as there is a United States of America -- Atem lo levad. You are not alone.

The question is what kind of future Israel will look forward to. Israel is not going anywhere -- but especially for the young people in this audience, the question is what does its future hold? And that brings me to the subject of peace.

I know Israel has taken risks for peace. Brave leaders -- Menachem Begin, Yitzhak Rabin -- reached treaties with two of your neighbors. You made credible proposals to the Palestinians at Annapolis. You withdrew from Gaza and Lebanon, and then faced terror and rockets. Across the region, you’ve extended a hand of friendship and all too often you’ve been confronted with rejection and, in some cases, the ugly reality of anti-Semitism. So I believe that the Israeli people do want peace, and I also understand why too many Israelis -- maybe an increasing number, maybe a lot of young people here today -- are skeptical that it can be achieved.

But today, Israel is at a crossroads. It can be tempting to put aside the frustrations and sacrifices that come with the pursuit of peace, particularly when Iron Dome repels rockets, barriers keep out suicide bombers. There's so many other pressing issues that demand your attention. And I know that only Israelis can make the fundamental decisions about your country’s future. I recognize that.

I also know, by the way, that not everyone in this hall will agree with what I have to say about peace. I recognize that there are those who are not simply skeptical about peace, but question its underlying premise, have a different vision for Israel's future. And that’s part of a democracy. That's part of the discourse between our two countries. I recognize that. But I also believe it's important to be open and honest, especially with your friends. I also believe that.

Politically, given the strong bipartisan support for Israel in America, the easiest thing for me to do would be to put this issue aside -- just express unconditional support for whatever Israel decides to do -- that would be the easiest political path. But I want you to know that I speak to you as a friend who is deeply concerned and committed to your future, and I ask you to consider three points.

First, peace is necessary. I believe that. I believe that peace is the only path to true security. You have the opportunity to be the generation that permanently secures the Zionist dream, or you can face a growing challenge to its future. Given the demographics west of the Jordan River, the only way for Israel to endure and thrive as a Jewish and democratic state is through the realization of an independent and viable Palestine. That is true.

There are other factors involved. Given the frustration in the international community about this conflict, Israel needs to reverse an undertow of isolation. And given the march of technology, the only way to truly protect the Israeli people over the long term is through the absence of war. Because no wall is high enough and no Iron Dome is strong enough or perfect enough to stop every enemy that is intent on doing so from inflicting harm.

And this truth is more pronounced given the changes sweeping the Arab world. I understand that with the uncertainty in the region -- people in the streets, changes in leadership, the rise of non-secular parties in politics -- it's tempting to turn inward, because the situation outside of Israel seems so chaotic. But this is precisely the time to respond to the wave of revolution with a resolve and commitment for peace. Because as more governments respond to popular will, the days when Israel could seek peace simply with a handful of autocratic leaders, those days are over. Peace will have to be made among peoples, not just governments.

No one -- no single step can change overnight what lies in the hearts and minds of millions. No single step is going to erase years of history and propaganda. But progress with the Palestinians is a powerful way to begin, while sidelining extremists who thrive on conflict and thrive on division. It would make a difference.

So peace is necessary. But peace is also just. Peace is also just. There is no question that Israel has faced Palestinian factions who turned to terror, leaders who missed historic opportunities. That is all true. And that’s why security must be at the center of any agreement. And there is no question that the only path to peace is through negotiations -- which is why, despite the criticism we’ve received, the United States will oppose unilateral efforts to bypass negotiations through the United Nations. It has to be done by the parties. But the Palestinian people’s right to self-determination, their right to justice, must also be recognized.

Put yourself in their shoes. Look at the world through their eyes. It is not fair that a Palestinian child cannot grow up in a state of their own. Living their entire lives with the presence of a foreign army that controls the movements not just of those young people but their parents, their grandparents, every single day. It’s not just when settler violence against Palestinians goes unpunished. It’s not right to prevent Palestinians from farming their lands; or restricting a student’s ability to move around the West Bank; or displace Palestinian families from their homes. Neither occupation nor expulsion is the answer. Just as Israelis built a state in their homeland, Palestinians have a right to be a free people in their own land.

I’m going off script here for a second, but before I came here, I met with a group of young Palestinians from the age of 15 to 22. And talking to them, they weren’t that different from my daughters. They weren’t that different from your daughters or sons. I honestly believe that if any Israeli parent sat down with those kids, they’d say, I want these kids to succeed; I want them to prosper. I want them to have opportunities just like my kids do. I believe that’s what Israeli parents would want for these kids if they had a chance to listen to them and talk to them. I believe that.

Now, only you can determine what kind of democracy you will have. But remember that as you make these decisions, you will define not simply the future of your relationship with the Palestinians -- you will define the future of Israel as well.

As Ariel Sharon said -- I'm quoting him -- “It is impossible to have a Jewish democratic state, at the same time to control all of Eretz Israel. If we insist on fulfilling the dream in its entirety, we are liable to lose it all.” Or, from a different perspective, I think of what the novelist David Grossman said shortly after losing his son, as he described the necessity of peace -- “A peace of no choice” he said, “must be approached with the same determination and creativity as one approaches a war of no choice.”

Now, Israel cannot be expected to negotiate with anyone who is dedicated to its destruction. But while I know you have had differences with the Palestinian Authority, I genuinely believe that you do have a true partner in President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad. I believe that. And they have a track record to prove it. Over the last few years, they have built institutions and maintained security on the West Bank in ways that few could have imagined just a few years ago. So many Palestinians -- including young people -- have rejected violence as a means of achieving their aspirations.

There is an opportunity there, there’s a window -- which brings me to my third point: Peace is possible. It is possible. I'm not saying it's guaranteed. I can't even say that it is more likely than not. But it is possible. I know it doesn’t seem that way. There are always going to be reasons to avoid risk. There are costs for failure. There will always be extremists who provide an excuse not to act.

I know there must be something exhausting about endless talks about talks, and daily controversies, and just the grinding status quo. And I'm sure there's a temptation just to say, “Ah, enough. Let me focus on my small corner of the world and my family and my job and what I can control.” But it's possible.

Negotiations will be necessary, but there's little secret about where they must lead -- two states for two peoples. Two states for two peoples.

There will be differences about how to get there. There are going to be hard choices along the way. Arab states must adapt to a world that has changed. The days when they could condemn Israel to distract their people from a lack of opportunity, or government corruption or mismanagement -- those days need to be over. Now is the time for the Arab world to take steps toward normalizing relations with Israel.

Meanwhile, Palestinians must recognize that Israel will be a Jewish state and that Israelis have the right to insist upon their security. Israelis must recognize that continued settlement activity is counterproductive to the cause of peace, and that an independent Palestine must be viable with real borders that have to be drawn.

I’ve suggested principles on territory and security that I believe can be the basis for these talks. But for the moment, put aside the plans and the process. I ask you, instead, to think about what can be done to build trust between people. Four years ago, I stood in Cairo in front of an audience of young people -- politically, religiously, they must seem a world away. But the things they want, they’re not so different from what the young people here want. They want the ability to make their own decisions and to get an education, get a good job; to worship God in their own way; to get married; to raise a family. The same is true of those young Palestinians that I met with this morning. The same is true for young Palestinians who yearn for a better life in Gaza. That's where peace begins -- not just in the plans of leaders, but in the hearts of people. Not just in some carefully designed process, but in the daily connections -- that sense of empathy that takes place among those who live together in this land and in this sacred city of Jerusalem.

And let me say this as a politician -- I can promise you this, political leaders will never take risks if the people do not push them to take some risks. You must create the change that you want to see. Ordinary people can accomplish extraordinary things.

I know this is possible. Look to the bridges being built in business and civil society by some of you here today. Look at the young people who’ve not yet learned a reason to mistrust, or those young people who’ve learned to overcome a legacy of mistrust that they inherited from their parents, because they simply recognize that we hold more hopes in common than fears that drive us apart. Your voices must be louder than those who would drown out hope. Your hopes must light the way forward.

Look to a future in which Jews and Muslims and Christians can all live in peace and greater prosperity in this Holy Land. Believe in that. And most of all, look to the future that you want for your own children -- a future in which a Jewish, democratic, vibrant state is protected and accepted for this time and for all time.

There will be many who say this change is not possible, but remember this -- Israel is the most powerful country in this region. Israel has the unshakeable support of the most powerful country in the world. Israel is not going anywhere. Israel has the wisdom to see the world as it is, but -- this is in your nature -- Israel also has the courage to see the world as it should be.

Ben Gurion once said, “In Israel, in order to be a realist you must believe in miracles.” Sometimes, the greatest miracle is recognizing that the world can change. That's a lesson that the world has learned from the Jewish people. And that brings me to the final area that I'll focus on: prosperity, and Israel’s broader role in the world. I know that all the talk about security and peace can sometimes seem to dominate the headlines, but that's not where people live. And every day, even amidst the threats that you face, Israelis are defining themselves by the opportunities that you're creating.

Through talent and hard work, Israelis have put this small country at the forefront of the global economy.

Israelis understand the value of education and have produced 10 Nobel laureates.Israelis understand the power of invention, and your universities educate engineers and inventors. And that spirit has led to economic growth and human progress -- solar power and electric cars, bandages and prosthetic limbs that save lives, stem cell research and new drugs that treat disease, cell phones and computer technology that changed the way people around the world live.

So if people want to see the future of the world economy, they should look at Tel Aviv, home to hundreds of start-ups and research centers. Israelis are so active on social media that every day seemed to bring a different Facebook campaign about where I should give this speech.

That innovation is just as important to the relationship between the United States and Israel as our security cooperation. Our first free trade agreement in the world was reached with Israel, nearly three decades ago. Today the trade between our two countries is at $40 billion every year. More importantly, that partnership is creating new products and medical treatments; it’s pushing new frontiers of science and exploration.

That’s the kind of relationship that Israel should have -- and could have -- with every country in the world. Already, we see how that innovation could reshape this region. There’s a program here in Jerusalem that brings together young Israelis and Palestinians to learn vital skills in technology and business. An Israeli and Palestinian have started a venture capital fund to finance Palestinian start-ups. Over 100 high-tech companies have found a home on the West Bank -- which speaks to the talent and entrepreneurial spirit of the Palestinian people.

One of the great ironies of what’s happening in the broader region is that so much of what people are yearning for -- education, entrepreneurship, the ability to start a business without paying a bribe, the ability to connect to the global economy -- those are things that can be found here in Israel. This should be a hub for thriving regional trade, and an engine for opportunity.

Israel is already a center for innovation that helps power the global economy. And I believe that all of that potential for prosperity can be enhanced with greater security, enhanced with lasting peace.

Here, in this small strip of land that has been the center of so much of the world’s history, so much triumph and so much tragedy, Israelis have built something that few could have imagined 65 years ago. Tomorrow, I will pay tribute to that history -- at the grave of Herzl, a man who had the foresight to see the future of the Jewish people had to be reconnected to their past; at the grave of Rabin, who understood that Israel’s victories in war had to be followed by the battles for peace; at Yad Vashem, where the world is reminded of the cloud of evil that can descend on the Jewish people and all of humanity if we ever fail to be vigilant.

We bear all that history on our shoulders. We carry all that history in our hearts. Today, as we face the twilight of Israel’s founding generation, you -- the young people of Israel -- must now claim its future. It falls to you to write the next chapter in the great story of this great nation.

And as the President of a country that you can count on as your greatest friend -- I am confident that you can help us find the promise in the days that lie ahead. And as a man who’s been inspired in my own life by that timeless calling within the Jewish experience -- tikkun olam -- I am hopeful that we can draw upon what’s best in ourselves to meet the challenges that will come; to win the battles for peace in the wake of so much war; and to do the work of repairing this world. That’s your job. That’s my job. That’s the task of all of us.

May God bless you. May God bless Israel. May God bless the United States of America.

Todah rabah.

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תּוֹדָה רַבָּה

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Thank you.

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# Remarks at the Children's Memorial at Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum

Unto them I will give my house and within my walls a memorial and a name…an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.

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President Peres, Prime Minister Netanyahu, Chairman Shalev, Rabbi Lau -- thank you for sharing this house, this memorial, with me today. And thank you to the people of Israel for preserving the names of the millions taken from us, of blessed memory -- names that shall never be forgotten.

This is my second visit to this living memorial. Since then, I’ve walked among the barbed wire and guard towers of Buchenwald. Rabbi Lau told me of his time there, and we reminisced about our good friend, Elie Wiesel, and the memories that he shared with me. I have stood in the old Warsaw ghetto, with survivors who would not go quietly. But nothing equals the wrenching power of this sacred place, where the totality of the Shoah is told. We could come here a thousand times, and each time our hearts would break.

For here we see the depravity to which man can sink; the barbarism that unfolds when we begin to see our fellow human beings as somehow less than us, less worthy of dignity and of life. We see how evil can, for a moment in time, triumph when good people do nothing, and how silence abetted a crime unique in human history.

Here we see their faces and we hear their voices. We look upon the objects of their lives -- the art that they created, the prayer books that they carried. We see that even as they had hate etched into their arms, they were not numbers. They were men and women and children -- so many children -- sent to their deaths because of who they were, how they prayed, or who they loved.

And yet, here, alongside man’s capacity for evil, we also are reminded of man’s capacity for good -- the rescuers, the Righteous Among the Nations who refused to be bystanders. And in their noble acts of courage, we see how this place, this accounting of horror, is, in the end, a source of hope.

For here we learn that we are never powerless. In our lives we always have choices. To succumb to our worst instincts or to summon the better angels of our nature. To be indifferent to suffering to wherever it may be, whoever it may be visited upon, or to display the empathy that is at the core of our humanity. We have the choice to acquiesce to evil or make real our solemn vow -- "Never Again." We have the choice to ignore what happens to others, or to act on behalf of others and to continually examine in ourselves whatever dark places there may be that might lead to such actions or inactions. This is our obligation -- not simply to bear witness, but to act.

For us, in our time, this means confronting bigotry and hatred in all of its forms, racism, especially anti-Semitism. None of that has a place in the civilized world -- not in the classrooms of children; not in the corridors of power. And let us never forget the link between the two. For our sons and daughters are not born to hate, they are taught to hate. So let us fill their young hearts with the same understanding and compassion that we hope others have for them.

Here we hope. Because after you walk through these halls, after you pass through the darkness, there is light -- a glorious view of the Jerusalem Forest, with the sun shining over the historic homeland of the Jewish people; a fulfillment of the prophecy: "you shall live again…upon your own soil." Here, on your ancient land, let it be said for all the world to hear: The State of Israel does not exist because of the Holocaust. But with the survival of a strong Jewish State of Israel, such a Holocaust will never happen again.

Here we pray that we all can be better; that we can all grow, like the sapling near the Children’s Memorial -- a sapling from a chestnut tree that Anne Frank could see from her window. The last time she described it in her diary, she wrote: "Our chestnut tree is in full bloom. It’s covered with leaves and is even more beautiful than last year." That’s a reminder of who we can be. But we have to work for it. We have to work for it here in Israel. We have to work for it in America. We have to work for it around the world -- to tend the light and the brightness as opposed to our worst instincts.

So may God bless the memory of the millions. May their souls be bound up in the bond of eternal life. And may each spring bring a full bloom even more beautiful than the last.

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# BRAIN Initiative Announcement

First of all, let me thank Dr. [Francis] Collins not just for the introduction but for his incredible leadership at NIH. Those of you who know Francis also know that he’s quite a gifted singer and musician. So I was asking whether he was going to be willing to sing the introduction -- and he declined.

But his leadership has been extraordinary. And I’m glad I’ve been promoted Scientist-in-Chief. Given my grades in physics, I’m not sure it’s deserving. But I hold science in proper esteem, so maybe that gives me a little credit.

Today I’ve invited some of the smartest people in the country, some of the most imaginative and effective researchers in the country -- some very smart people to talk about the challenge that I issued in my State of the Union address: to grow our economy, to create new jobs, to reignite a rising, thriving middle class by investing in one of our core strengths, and that’s American innovation.

Ideas are what power our economy. It’s what sets us apart. It’s what America has been all about. We have been a nation of dreamers and risk-takers; people who see what nobody else sees sooner than anybody else sees it. We do innovation better than anybody else -- and that makes our economy stronger. When we invest in the best ideas before anybody else does, our businesses and our workers can make the best products and deliver the best services before anybody else.

And because of that incredible dynamism, we don’t just attract the best scientists or the best entrepreneurs -- we also continually invest in their success. We support labs and universities to help them learn and explore. And we fund grants to help them turn a dream into a reality. And we have a patent system to protect their inventions. And we offer loans to help them turn those inventions into successful businesses.

And the investments don’t always pay off. But when they do, they change our lives in ways that we could never have imagined. Computer chips and GPS technology, the Internet -- all these things grew out of government investments in basic research. And sometimes, in fact, some of the best products and services spin off completely from unintended research that nobody expected to have certain applications. Businesses then used that technology to create countless new jobs.

So the founders of Google got their early support from the National Science Foundation. The Apollo project that put a man on the moon also gave us eventually CAT scans. And every dollar we spent to map the human genome has returned $140.00 to our economy -- $1.00 of investment, $140.00 in return. Dr. Collins helped lead that genome effort, and that’s why we thought it was appropriate to have him here to announce the next great American project, and that’s what we're calling the BRAIN Initiative.

As humans, we can identify galaxies light years away, we can study particles smaller than an atom. But we still haven’t unlocked the mystery of the three pounds of matter that sits between our ears. But today, scientists possess the capability to study individual neurons and figure out the main functions of certain areas of the brain. But a human brain contains almost 100 billion neurons making trillions of connections. So Dr. Collins says it’s like listening to the strings section and trying to figure out what the whole orchestra sounds like. So as a result, we’re still unable to cure diseases like Alzheimer’s or autism, or fully reverse the effects of a stroke. And the most powerful computer in the world isn’t nearly as intuitive as the one we’re born with.

So there is this enormous mystery waiting to be unlocked, and the BRAIN Initiative will change that by giving scientists the tools they need to get a dynamic picture of the brain in action and better understand how we think and how we learn and how we remember. And that knowledge could be -- will be -- transformative.

In the budget I will send to Congress next week, I will propose a significant investment by the National Institutes of Health, DARPA, and the National Science Foundation to help get this project off the ground. I’m directing my Bioethics Commission to make sure all of the research is being done in a responsible way. And we’re also partnering with the private sector, including leading companies and foundations and research institutions, to tap the nation’s brightest minds to help us reach our goal.

And of course, none of this will be easy. If it was, we would already know everything there was about how the brain works, and presumably my life would be simpler here. It could explain all kinds of things that go on in Washington. We could prescribe something.

So it won't be easy. But think about what we could do once we do crack this code. Imagine if no family had to feel helpless watching a loved one disappear behind the mask of Parkinson’s or struggle in the grip of epilepsy. Imagine if we could reverse traumatic brain injury or PTSD for our veterans who are coming home. Imagine if someone with a prosthetic limb can now play the piano or throw a baseball as well as anybody else, because the wiring from the brain to that prosthetic is direct and triggered by what's already happening in the patient's mind. What if computers could respond to our thoughts or our language barriers could come tumbling down. Or if millions of Americans were suddenly finding new jobs in these fields -- jobs we haven’t even dreamt up yet -- because we chose to invest in this project.

That's the future we're imagining. That's what we're hoping for. That’s why the BRAIN Initiative is so absolutely important. And that’s why it’s so important that we think about basic research generally as a driver of growth and that we replace the across-the-board budget cuts that are threatening to set us back before we even get started. A few weeks ago, the directors of some of our national laboratories said that the sequester -- these arbitrary, across-the-board cuts that have gone into place -- are so severe, so poorly designed that they will hold back a generation of young scientists.

When our leading thinkers wonder if it still makes sense to encourage young people to get involved in science in the first place because they're not sure whether the research funding and the grants will be there to cultivate an entire new generation of scientists, that's something we should worry about. We can’t afford to miss these opportunities while the rest of the world races ahead. We have to seize them. I don’t want the next job-creating discoveries to happen in China or India or Germany. I want them to happen right here, in the United States of America.

And that's part of what this BRAIN Initiative is about. That’s why we’re pursuing other “grand challenges” like making solar energy as cheap as coal or making electric vehicles as affordable as the ones that run on gas. They’re ambitious goals, but they’re achievable. And we’re encouraging companies and research universities and other organizations to get involved and help us make progress.

We have a chance to improve the lives of not just millions, but billions of people on this planet through the research that's done in this BRAIN Initiative alone. But it's going to require a serious effort, a sustained effort. And it’s going to require us as a country to embody and embrace that spirit of discovery that is what made America, America.

They year before I was born, an American company came out with one of the earliest mini-computers. It was a revolutionary machine, didn't require its own air conditioning system.1 That was a big deal. It took only one person to operate, but each computer was eight feet tall, weighed 1,200 pounds, and cost more than $100,000. And today, most of the people in this room, including the person whose cell phone just rang -- have a far more powerful computer in their pocket. Computers have become so small, so universal, so ubiquitous, most of us can't imagine life without them -- certainly, my kids can't.

And, as a consequence, millions of Americans work in fields that didn't exist before their parents were born. Watson, the computer that won “Jeopardy,” is now being used in hospitals across the country to diagnose diseases like cancer. That's how much progress has been made in my lifetime and in many of yours. That's how fast we can move when we make the investments.

But we can't predict what that next big thing will be. We don't know what life will be like 20 years from now, or 50 years, or 100 years down the road. What we do know is if we keep investing in the most prominent, promising solutions to our toughest problems, then things will get better.

I don't want our children or grandchildren to look back on this day and wish we had done more to keep America at the cutting edge. I want them to look back and be proud that we took some risks, that we seized this opportunity. That's what the American story is about. That's who we are. That's why this BRAIN Initiative is so important. And if we keep taking bold steps like the one we’re talking about to learn about the brain, then I’m confident America will continue to lead the world in the next frontiers of human understanding. And all of you are going to help us get there.

So I’m very excited about this project. Francis, let’s get to work.

God bless you and God bless the United States of America.

Thank you.

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# Address on Gun Violence Reduction in Colorado

Well, it is wonderful to be back in Colorado. It is wonderful to be back in Denver. I want to thank Chief White for that introduction. You’ve got some outstanding elected officials who are here today, and I want to acknowledge them. First of all, a wonderful governor -- John Hickenlooper is here. He’s here somewhere. I know, because I just talked to him. There he is. Next to him an outstanding lieutenant governor, Joe Garcia. One of the finest young senators in the country -- Michael Bennet is here. Terrific members of the House of Representatives -- Ed Perlmutter -- and Dianna Degette. And your own mayor, Michael Hancock, is here.

I want to say thank you to the Denver Police for having me here, and more importantly, for the outstanding work that all of you do each and every day to serve your communities and protect your citizens.

Before I came out here, I had a chance to sit down with some local law enforcement, Attorney General Holder, and some of the leaders I just mentioned, the wonderful mayor of Aurora who’s here, sportsmen, parents, loved ones of the victims of the shootings in Columbine and Aurora. And we talked about what we can do to protect more of our citizens from gun violence.

And from the beginning of this effort, we’ve wanted law enforcement front and center in shaping this discussion and the reforms that emerge from it -- because law enforcement lives this every day. Law enforcement are the first to see the terrible consequences of any kind of violence, certainly gun violence -- lives lost, families broken, communities that are changed forever. They’re very often in the line of fire. The law enforcement knows what works and what doesn’t, and so we wanted that experience and that advice.

And it was also important for us to hear from mayors like Steve Hogan, because he’s been on the front lines having to deal with these issues under incredibly sad circumstances. And I’ve come to Denver today in particular because Colorado is proving a model of what’s possible.

It’s now been just over 100 days since the murder of 20 innocent children and six brave educators in Newtown, Connecticut -- an event that shocked this country and I think galvanized parents all across the country to say, we’ve got to do something more to protect our kids. But consider this: Over those 100 days or so, more than 100 times as many Americans have fallen victim to gun violence. More than 2,000 of our fellow citizens, struck down, often because they were just going about their daily round. They weren’t doing anything special. Just doing what folks do every day -- shopping, going to school. Every day that we wait to do something about it, even more of our fellow citizens are stolen from our lives by a bullet from a gun.

Now, the good news is Colorado has already chosen to do something about it. Look, this is a state that has suffered the tragedy of two of the worst mass shootings in our history -- 14 years ago this month in Columbine, and just last year in Aurora. But this is also a state that treasures its Second Amendment rights -- the state of proud hunters and sportsmen. And, by the way, the Governor wanted me to remind everybody that there is outstanding elk hunting here in Colorado. There’s a strong tradition of gun ownership that’s handed down from generation to generation, and it’s part of the fabric of people’s lives. And they treat gun ownership with reverence and respect.

And so I’m here because I believe there doesn't have to be a conflict in reconciling these realities. There doesn’t have to be a conflict between protecting our citizens and protecting our Second Amendment rights. I’ve got stacks of letters in my office from proud gun owners, whether they’re for sport, or protection, or collection, who tell me how deeply they cherish their rights, don’t want them infringed upon, but they still want us to do something to stop the epidemic of gun violence. And I appreciate every one of those letters. And I’ve learned from them.

And I think that Colorado has shown that practical progress is possible thanks to the leadership of Governor Hickenlooper and some of the state legislators who are here today. When I was talking to Steve, he mentioned that Aurora is very much a purple city. It’s got a majority Republican city council; a majority of the state legislators are Democrat. But they came together understanding that out of this tragedy there had to be something that made sense. And so we’ve seen enacted tougher background checks that won’t infringe on the rights of responsible gun owners, but will help keep guns out of the hands of dangerous people.

Now, in January, just a few weeks after Newtown, I put forward a series of common-sense proposals along the same lines as what’s passed here in Colorado, to reduce gun violence and keep our kids safe. In my State of the Union address, I urged Congress to give these proposals a vote. And, by the way, before we even asked for a vote, I had already signed numerous executive orders doing what we could administratively to make sure that guns don't fall into the hands of the wrong people.

But what I said then is still true: If we're really going to tackle this problem seriously, then we've got to get Congress to take the next step. And as soon as next week, they will be voting. As soon as next week, every senator will get to vote on whether or not we should require background checks for anyone who wants to purchase a gun.

Now, some say, well, we already have background checks. And they're right. Over the past 20 years, those background checks have kept more than 2 million dangerous people from buying a gun. But the loopholes that currently exist in the law have allowed way too many criminals and folks who shouldn’t be getting guns -- it has allowed them to avoid background checks entirely. That makes it harder for law enforcement to do its job. It's not safe. It's not smart. And, by the way, it's not fair to responsible gun owners who are playing by the rules.

Now, understand, nobody is talking about creating an entirely new system. We are simply talking about plugging holes, sealing a porous system that isn't working as well as it should. If you want to buy a gun, whether it's from a licensed dealer or a private seller, you should at least have to pass a background check to show you're not a criminal or someone legally prohibited from buying on. And that’s just common sense.

During our roundtable discussion with Governor Hickenlooper, who I know was in the midst of this passionate debate about the legislation here in Colorado, and some people said, well, background checks aren't going to stop everybody. And the Governor was the first one to acknowledge, yes, they won't stop everybody, but as he pointed out, statistically, there are a whole bunch of folks who have been stopped.

As a consequence of background checks, law enforcement has been able to stop people who have been convicted of murder from getting a gun, people who are under restraining orders for having committed violent domestic abuse from getting a gun. In a couple of cases the governor mentioned to me, law enforcement has actually been able to arrest people who came to pick up their gun -- because they were criminals, wanted.

So this does work. And, by the way, if you’re selling a gun, wouldn’t you want to know who you’re selling it to? Wouldn’t you want to know? Wouldn’t you want in your conscience to know that the person you’re selling to isn’t going to commit a crime?

So these enhanced background checks won’t stop all gun crimes, but they will certainly help prevent some. This is common sense. And, by the way, most gun owners -- more than 80 percent -- agree this makes sense. More than 70 percent of NRA members agree. Ninety percent of the American people agree. So there’s no reason we can’t do this unless politics is getting in the way. There’s no reason we can’t do this.

As soon as next week, every senator will get a chance to vote on a proposal to help strengthen school safety and help people struggling with mental health problems get the treatment that they need.

As soon as next week, every senator will get to vote on whether or not we should crack down on folks who buy guns as part of a scheme to arm criminals. That would keep more guns off the streets and out of the hands of people who are intent on doing harm. And it would make life a whole lot easier and safer for the people behind me -- police officers.

Every senator will get a say on whether or not we should keep weapons of war and high-capacity ammunition magazines that facilitate mass killings off our streets. The type of assault rifle used in Aurora, for example, when paired with a high-capacity magazine, has one purpose: to pump out as many bullets as possible, as fast as possible. It’s what allowed that gunman to shoot 70 people and kill 12 in a matter of a few minutes. I don’t believe that weapons designed for theaters of war have a place in movie theaters. Most Americans agree with that.

Most of these ideas are not controversial. Right now, 90 percent of Americans -- 90 percent -- support background checks that will keep criminals and people who have been found to be a danger to themselves or others from buying a gun. More than 80 percent of Republicans agree. Most gun owners agree. Think about it: How often do 90 percent of Americans agree on anything?

And yet, there are already some senators back in Washington floating the idea that they might use obscure procedural stunts to prevent or delay any of these votes on reform. Think about that. They’re not just saying they’ll vote “no” on the proposal that most Americans support. They’re saying they’ll do everything they can to avoid even allowing a vote on a proposal that the overwhelming majority of the American people support. They’re saying your opinion doesn’t matter.

We knew from the beginning that change wouldn’t be easy. And we knew that there would be powerful voices that would do everything they could to run out the clock, change the subject, ignore the majority of the American people. We knew they’d try to make any progress collapse under the weight of fear and frustration, or maybe people would just stop paying attention.

The only way this time will be different is if the American people demand that this time it must be different -- that this time, we must do something to protect our communities and our kids. We need parents, we need teachers, we need police officers, we need pastors, we need hunters and sportsmen, Americans of every background to say, we’ve suffered too much pain and care too much about our children to allow this to continue. We’re not going to just wait for the next Newtown or the next Aurora before we act. And I genuinely believe that’s what the overwhelming majority of Americans -- I don’t care what party they belong to -- that’s what they want. They just want to see some progress.

It was interesting, during the conversation, a number of people talked about the trust issue. Part of the reason it's so hard to get this done is because both sides of the debate sometimes don't listen to each other. The people who take absolute positions on these issues, on both sides, sometimes aren't willing to concede even an inch of ground.

And so one of the questions we talked about was, how do you build trust? How do you rebuild some trust? And I told the story about two conversations I had. The first conversation was when Michelle came back from doing some campaigning out in rural Iowa. And we were sitting at dinner, and she had been to like a big county, a lot of driving out there, a lot of farmland. And she said, if I was living out in a farm in Iowa, I'd probably want a gun, too. If somebody just drives up into your driveway and you're not home -- you don't know who these people are and you don't know how long it's going to take for the sheriffs to respond. I can see why you'd want some guns for protection. That's one conversation.

I had another conversation just a couple of months ago with a mom from Chicago -- actually, Evanston, Illinois -- whose son had been killed in a random shooting. And she said, you know, I hate it when people tell me that my son was shot because he was in the wrong place at the wrong time. He was in the right place. He was on his way to school. He wasn't in the wrong place. He was exactly where he was supposed to be.

Now, both those things are true. And sometimes we're so divided between rural and urban, and folks whose hunting is part of their lives and folks whose only experience with guns is street crime. And the two sides just talk past one another. And more than anything, what I want to just emphasize is there are good people on both sides of this thing, but we have to be able to put ourselves in the other person's shoes. If you're a hunter, if you're a sportsman -- if you have a gun in your house for protection -- you've got to understand what it feels like for that mom whose son was randomly shot.

And if you live in an urban area and you're worried about street crime, you've got to understand what it might be like if you grew out on a ranch and your dad had been taking you hunting all your life. And we had a couple of sportsmen in our conversation today, and I thought one of them said something very important. He said, all my experiences with guns have been positive, but I realize that for others, all their experiences about guns have been negative. Well, that's a start, right? If we start listening to each other, then we should be able to get something done that's constructive. We should be able to get that done.

One last thing I’m going to mention is that during this conversation -- I hope you don't mind me quoting you, Joe. Joe Garcia, I thought, also made an important point, and that is that the opponents of some of these common-sense laws have ginned up fears among responsible gun owners that have nothing to do with what’s being proposed and nothing to do with the facts, but feeds into this suspicion about government.

You hear some of these quotes: “I need a gun to protect myself from the government.” “We can't do background checks because the government is going to come take my guns away.”

Well, the government is us. These officials are elected by you. They are elected by you. I am elected by you. I am constrained, as they are constrained, by a system that our Founders put in place. It’s a government of and by and for the people.

And so, surely, we can have a debate that's not based on the notion somehow that your elected representatives are trying to do something to you other than potentially prevent another group of families from grieving the way the families of Aurora or Newtown or Columbine have grieved. We’ve got to get past some of the rhetoric that gets perpetuated that breaks down trust and is so over the top that it just shuts down all discussion. And it’s important for all of us when we hear that kind of talk to say, hold on a second. If there are any folks who are out there right now who are gun owners, and you’ve been hearing that somehow somebody is taking away your guns, get the facts. We’re not proposing a gun registration system, we’re proposing background checks for criminals.

Don't just listen to what some advocates or folks who have an interest in this thing are saying. Look at the actual legislation. That's what happened here in Colorado. And hopefully, if we know the facts and we’re listening to each other, then we can actually move forward.

And that’s what members of Congress need to hear from you. Right now, members of Congress are at home in their districts. Many of them are holding events where they can hear from their constituents. So I'm asking anyone out there who is listening today, find out where your member of Congress stands on these issues. If they're not part of the 90 percent of Americans who agree on background checks, then ask them why not. Why wouldn’t you want to make it more difficult for a dangerous criminal to get his or her hands on a gun? Why wouldn’t you want to close the loophole that allows too many criminals to buy a gun without even the simplest of background checks? Why on Earth wouldn’t you want to make it easier rather than harder for law enforcement to do their job?

I know that some of the officers here today know what it's like to look into the eyes of a parent or a grandparent, a brother or a sister, or a spouse who has just lost a loved one to an act of violence. Some of those families, by the way, are here today. And as police officers, you know as well as anybody, there is no magic solution to prevent every bad thing from happening in the world. You still suit up, you put on your badge, put yourself at risk every single day. Every single day, you go to work and you try to do the best you can to protect the people you're sworn to protect and serve. Well, how can the rest of us as citizens do anything less?

If there is just one step we can take to prevent more Americans from knowing the pain that some of the families who are here have known, don’t we have an obligation to try? Don’t we have an obligation to try? If these reforms keep one person from murdering dozens of innocent children or worshippers or moviegoers in a span of minutes, isn't it worth fighting for? I believe it is. That’s why I'm going to keep on working. I'm going to keep on giving it my best efforts. But I'm going to need your help.

This is not easy. And I'll be blunt -- a lot of members of Congress, this is tough for them. Because those who are opposed to any form of legislation affecting guns, they're very well-organized and they're very well-financed. But it can be done if enough voices are heard.

So I want to thank all the police officers who are here for giving their best efforts every single day. I want to thank Governor Hickenlooper for his outstanding leadership. I want to thank all the families who are here for your courage in being willing to take out of this tragedy something positive. I want to thank the people of Colorado for coming together in sensible ways. Let's see if we can get the whole country to do so.

Thank you, Denver. God bless you. And God bless the United States of America.

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# Address on Gun Violence in Connecticut

Hello, Connecticut. Thank you. Well, thank you so much, everybody. Let me begin by thanking Nicole, and Ian, for your brave words. I want to thank them and all the Newtown families who have come here today, including your First Selectman, Pat Llodra. Nobody could be more eloquent than Nicole and the other families on this issue. And we are so grateful for their courage and willingness to share their stories again and again, understanding that nothing is going to be more important in making sure the Congress moves forward this week than hearing from them. I want to thank all the educators from Sandy Hook Elementary who have come here as well the survivors --

Audience Members: We love you, Obama!

President Obama: I love you back. I do.

-- the survivors who still mourn and grieve, but are still going to work every day to love and raise those precious children in their care as fiercely as ever.

I want to thank Governor Malloy for his leadership. Very proud of him. I want to thank the University of Hartford for hosting us this afternoon. Thank you, Hawks. And I want to thank the people of Connecticut for everything you've done to honor the memories of the victims -- because you're part of their family as well.

One of your recent alumni, Rachel D'Avino, was a behavioral therapist at Sandy Hook. Two alumni of your performing arts school, Jimmy Greene and Nelba Marquez-Greene, lost their daughter, Ana -- an incredible, vibrant young girl who looked up to them, and learned from them, and inherited their talents by singing before she could talk.

So every family in this state was shaken by the tragedy of that morning. Every family in this country was shaken. We hugged our kids more tightly. We asked what could we do, as a society, to help prevent a tragedy like that from happening again.

And as a society, we decided that we have to change. We must. We must change.

I noticed that Nicole and others refer to that day as "12/14." For these families, it was a day that changed everything. And I know many of you in Newtown wondered if the rest of us would live up to the promise we made in those dark days -- if we'd change, too; or if once the television trucks left, once the candles flickered out, once the teddy bears were carefully gathered up, that the country would somehow move on to other things.

Over the weekend, I heard Francine Wheeler, who lost her son Ben that day, say that the four months since the tragedy might feel like a brief moment for some, but for her, it feels like it's been years since she saw Ben. And she's determined not to let what happened that day just fade away. "We're not going anywhere," she said. "We are here. And we are going to be here." And I know that she speaks for everybody in Newtown, everybody who was impacted.

And, Newtown, we want you to know that we're here with you. We will not walk away from the promises we've made. We are as determined as ever to do what must be done. In fact, I'm here to ask you to help me show that we can get it done. We're not forgetting.

We can't forget. Your families still grieve in ways most of us can't comprehend. But so many of you have used that grief to make a difference -- not just to honor your own children, but to protect the lives of all of our children. So many of you have mobilized, and organized, and petitioned your elected officials "with love and logic," as Nicole put it -- as citizens determined to right something gone wrong.

And last week, here in Connecticut, your elected leaders responded. The Connecticut legislature, led by many of the legislators here today, passed new measures to protect more of our children and our communities from gun violence. And Governor Malloy signed that legislation into law.

So I want to be clear. You, the families of Newtown, people across Connecticut, you helped make that happen. Your voices, your determination made that happen. Obviously, the elected leaders did an extraordinary job moving it forward, but it couldn't have happened if they weren't hearing from people in their respective districts, people all across the state. That's the power of your voice.

And, by the way, Connecticut is not alone. In the past few months, New York, Colorado, Maryland have all passed new, common-sense gun safety reforms as well.

These are all states that share an awful familiarity with gun violence, whether it's the horror of mass killings, or the street crime that's too common in too many neighborhoods. All of these states also share a strong tradition of hunting, and sport shooting, and gun ownership. It's been a part of the fabric of people's lives for generations. And every single one of those states -- including here in Connecticut -- decided that, yes, we can protect more of our citizens from gun violence while still protecting our Second Amendment rights. Those two things don't contradict each other. We can pass common-sense laws that protect our kids and protect our rights.

So Connecticut has shown the way. And now is the time for Congress to do the same. Now is the time for Congress to do the same. This week is the time for Congress to do the same.

Now, back in January, just a few months after the tragedy in Newtown, I announced a series of executive actions to reduce gun violence and keep our kids safe. And I put forward common-sense proposals -- much like those that passed here in Connecticut -- for Congress to consider. And you'll remember in my State of the Union address, I urged Congress to give those proposals a vote. And that moment is now.

As soon as this week, Congress will begin debating these common-sense proposals to reduce gun violence. Your senators, Dick Blumenthal and Chris Murphy -- they're here -- your Representatives, John Larson, Rosa DeLauro, Elizabeth Esty, Jim Hines, Joe Courtney, they are all pushing to pass this legislation. But much of Congress is going to only act if they hear from you, the American people. So here's what we have to do.

Audience Member: I love you, Mr. President.

President Obama: I appreciate that. Here's what we've got to do. We have to tell Congress it's time to require a background check for anyone who wants to buy a gun so that people who are dangerous to themselves and others cannot get their hands on a gun. Let's make that happen.

We have to tell Congress it's time to crack down on gun trafficking so that folks will think twice before buying a gun as part of a scheme to arm someone who won't pass a background check. Let's get that done.

We have to tell Congress it's time to restore the ban on military-style assault weapons, and a 10-round limit for magazines, to make it harder for a gunman to fire 154 bullets into his victims in less than five minutes. Let's put that to a vote.

We have to tell Congress it's time to strengthen school safety and help people struggling with mental health problems get the treatment they need before it's too late. Let's do that for our kids and for our communities.

Now, I know that some of these proposals inspire more debate than others, but each of them has the support of the majority of the American people. All of them are common sense. All of them deserve a vote. All of them deserve a vote.

Consider background checks. Over the past 20 years, background checks have kept more than 2 million dangerous people from getting their hands on a gun. A group of police officers in Colorado told me last week that, thanks to background checks, they've been able to stop convicted murderers, folks under restraining orders for committing violent domestic abuse from buying a gun. In some cases, they've actually arrested the person as they were coming to purchase the gun.

So we know that background checks can work. But the problem is loopholes in the current law let so many people avoid background checks altogether. That's not safe. It doesn't make sense. If you're a law-abiding citizen and you go through a background check to buy a gun, wouldn't you expect other people to play by the same rules?

If you're a law-abiding gun seller, wouldn't you want to know you're not selling your gun to someone who's likely to commit a crime? Shouldn't we make it harder, not easier for somebody who is convicted of domestic abuse to get his hands on a gun?

It turns out 90 percent of Americans think so. Ninety percent of Americans support universal background checks. Think about that. How often do 90 percent of Americans agree on anything? And yet, 90 percent agree on this -- Republicans, Democrats, folks who own guns, folks who don't own guns; 80 percent of Republicans, more than 80 percent of gun owners, more than 70 percent of NRA households. It is common sense.

And yet, there is only one thing that can stand in the way of change that just about everybody agrees on, and that's politics in Washington. You would think that with those numbers Congress would rush to make this happen. That's what you would think. If our democracy is working the way it's supposed to, and 90 percent of the American people agree on something, in the wake of a tragedy you'd think this would not be a heavy lift.

And yet, some folks back in Washington are already floating the idea that they may use political stunts to prevent votes on any of these reforms. Think about that. They're not just saying they'll vote "no" on ideas that almost all Americans support. They're saying they'll do everything they can to even prevent any votes on these provisions. They're saying your opinion doesn't matter. And that's not right.

Audience: Booo --

President Obama: That is not right.

Audience: We want a vote!

President Obama: We need a vote.

Audience: We want a vote! We want a vote!

President Obama: We need a vote.

Audience: We want a vote!

President Obama: Now, I've also heard some in the Washington press suggest that what happens to gun violence legislation in Congress this week will either be a political victory or defeat for me. Connecticut, this is not about me. This is not about politics. This is about doing the right thing for all the families who are here that have been torn apart by gun violence. It's about them and all the families going forward, so we can prevent this from happening again. That's what it's about. It's about the law enforcement officials putting their lives at risk. That's what this is about. This is not about politics. This is not about politics.

This is about these families and families all across the country who are saying let's make it a little harder for our kids to get gunned down.

When I said in my State of the Union address that these proposals deserve a vote -- that families of Newtown, and Aurora, and Tucson, and a former member of Congress, Gabby Giffords, that they all deserved a vote -– virtually every member of that chamber stood up and applauded. And now they're going to start denying your families a vote when the cameras are off and when the lobbyists have worked what they do? You deserve better than that. You deserve a vote.

Now, look, we knew from the beginning of this debate that change would not be easy. We knew that there would be powerful interests that are very good at confusing the subject, that are good at amplifying conflict and extremes, that are good at drowning out rational debate, good at ginning up irrational fears, all of which stands in the way of progress.

But if our history teaches us anything, then it's up to us –- the people -– to stand up to those who say we can't, or we won't; stand up for the change that we need. And I believe that that's what the American people are looking for.

When I first ran for this office, I said that I did not believe the country was as divided as our politics would suggest, and I still believe that. I know sometimes, when you watch cable news or talk radio, or you browse the Internet, you'd think, man, everybody just hates each other, everybody is just at each other's throats. But that's not how most Americans think about these issues. There are good people on both sides of every issue.

So if we're going to move forward, we can't just talk past one another. We've got to listen to one another. That's what Governor Malloy and all these legislative leaders did. That's why they were able to pass bipartisan legislation.

I've got stacks of letters from gun owners who want me to know that they care passionately about their right to bear arms, don't want them infringed upon, and I appreciate every one of those letters. I've learned from them. But a lot of those letters, what they've also said is they're not just gun owners; they're also parents or police officers or veterans, and they agree that we can't stand by and keep letting these tragedies happen; that with our rights come some responsibilities and obligations to our communities and ourselves, and most of all to our children. We can't just think about "us" -- we've got to think about "we, the people."

I was in Colorado. I told a story about Michelle. She came back from a trip to rural Iowa; we were out there campaigning. Sometimes it would be miles between farms, let alone towns. And she said, you know, coming back, I can understand why somebody would want a gun for protection. If somebody drove up into the driveway and, Barack, you weren't home, the sheriff lived miles away, I might want that security. So she can understand what it might be like in terms of somebody wanting that kind of security.

On the other hand, I also talked to a hunter last week who said, all my experiences with guns have been positive, but I also realize that for others, all their experiences with guns have been negative.

And when he said that, I thought about the mom I met from suburban Chicago whose son was killed in a random shooting. And this mom told me, I hate it when people tell me that my son was in the wrong place at the wrong time. He was on his way to school. He was exactly where he was supposed to be. He was in the right place at the right time, and he still got shot.

The kids at Sandy Hook were where they were supposed to be. So were those moviegoers in Aurora. So were those worshippers in Oak Creek. So was Gabby Giffords. She was at a supermarket, listening to the concerns of her constituents. They were exactly where they were supposed to be. They were also exercising their rights -- to assemble peaceably; to worship freely and safely. They were exercising the rights of life and liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. So surely, we can reconcile those two things. Surely, America doesn't have to be divided between rural and urban, and Democrat and Republican when it comes to something like this.

If you're an American who wants to do something to prevent more families from knowing the immeasurable anguish that these families here have known, then we have to act. Now is the time to get engaged. Now is the time to get involved. Now is the time to push back on fear, and frustration, and misinformation. Now is the time for everybody to make their voices heard from every state house to the corridors of Congress.

And I'm asking everyone listening today, find out where your member of Congress stands on this. If they're not part of the 90 percent of Americans who agree on background checks, then ask them, why not? Why wouldn't you want to make it easier for law enforcement to do their job? Why wouldn't you want to make it harder for a dangerous person to get his or her hands on a gun? What's more important to you: our children, or an A-grade from the gun lobby?

I've heard Nicole talk about what her life has been like since Dylan was taken from her in December. And one thing she said struck me. She said, "Every night, I beg for him to come to me in my dreams so that I can see him again. And during the day, I just focus on what I need to do to honor him and make change." Now, if Nicole can summon the courage to do that, how can the rest of us do any less? How can we do any less?

If there is even one thing we can do to protect our kids, don't we have an obligation to try? If there is even one step we can take to keep somebody from murdering dozens of innocents in the span of minutes, shouldn't we be taking that step? If there is just one thing we can do to keep one father from having to bury his child, isn't that worth fighting for?

I've got to tell you, I've had tough days in the presidency -- I've said this before. The day Newtown happened was the toughest day of my presidency. But I've got to tell you, if we don't respond to this, that will be a tough day for me, too. Because we've got to expect more from ourselves, and we've got to expect more from Congress. We've got to believe that every once in a while, we set politics aside and we just do what's right. We've got to believe that.

And if you believe that, I'm asking you to stand up. If you believe in the right to bears arms, like I do, but think we should prevent an irresponsible few from inflicting harm -- stand up. Stand up.

If you believe that the families of Newtown and Aurora and Tucson and Virginia Tech and the thousands of Americans who have been gunned down in the last four months deserve a vote, we all have to stand up.

If you want the people you send to Washington to have just an iota of the courage that the educators at Sandy Hook showed when danger arrived on their doorstep, then we're all going to have to stand up.

And if we do, if we come together and raise our voices together and demand this change together, I'm convinced cooperation and common sense will prevail. We will find sensible, intelligent ways to make this country stronger and safer for our children.

So let's do the right thing. Let's do right by our kids. Let's do right by these families. Let's get this done. Connecticut, thank you. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Medal of Honor Award Ceremony for Chaplain Emil Kapaun

Chaplain Rutherford:

[Opening Prayer]

President Obama:

Good afternoon, everybody. Please have a seat. On behalf of Michelle and myself, welcome to the White House. Thank you, Chaplain.

You know, this year we mark the 60th anniversary of the end of the Korean War -- a time when thousands of our prisoners of war finally came home after years of starvation and hardship and, in some cases, torture. And among the homecomings, one stood out.

A group of our POWs emerged carrying a large wooden crucifix, nearly four feet tall. They had spent months on it, secretly collecting firewood, carving it -- the cross and the body -- using radio wire for a crown of thorns. It was a tribute to their friend, their chaplain, their fellow prisoner who had touched their souls and saved their lives -- Father Emil Kapaun.

This is an amazing story. Father Kapaun has been called a shepherd in combat boots. His fellow soldiers who felt his grace and his mercy called him a saint, a blessing from God. Today, we bestow another title on him -- recipient of our nation’s highest military decoration, the Medal of Honor. After more than six decades of working to make this Medal a reality, I know one of Father Kapaun’s comrades spoke for a lot of folks here when he said, "It’s about time."

Father, as they called him, was just 35 years old when he died in that hellish prison camp. His parents and his only sibling, his brother, are no longer with us. But we are extremely proud to welcome members of the Kapaun family -- his nephews, his niece, their children -- two of whom currently serve in this country's National Guard. And we are very proud of them.

We're also joined by members of the Kansas congressional delegation, leaders from across our armed forces, and representatives from the Catholic Church, which recognizes Father Kapaun as a "Servant of God." And we are truly humbled to be joined by men who served alongside him -- veterans and former POWs from the Korean War.

Now, I obviously never met Father Kapaun. But I have a sense of the man he was, because in his story I see reflections of my own grandparents and their values, the people who helped to raise me. Emil and my grandfather were both born in Kansas about the same time, both were raised in small towns outside of Wichita. They were part of that Greatest Generation -- surviving the Depression, joining the Army, serving in World War II. And they embodied those heartland values of honesty and hard work, decency and humility -- quiet heroes determined to do their part.

For Father Kapaun, this meant becoming an Army chaplain -- serving God and country. After the Communist invasion of South Korea, he was among the first American troops that hit the beaches and pushed their way north through hard mountains and bitter cold. In his understated Midwestern way, he wrote home, saying, "this outdoor life is quite the thing" -- and "I prefer to live in a house once in a while." But he had hope, saying, "It looks like the war will end soon."

That’s when Chinese forces entered the war with a massive surprise attack -- perhaps 20,000 soldiers pouring down on a few thousand Americans. In the chaos, dodging bullets and explosions, Father Kapaun raced between foxholes, out past the front lines and into no-man’s land -- dragging the wounded to safety.

When his commanders ordered an evacuation, he chose to stay -- gathering the injured, tending to their wounds. When the enemy broke through and the combat was hand-to-hand, he carried on -- comforting the injured and the dying, offering some measure of peace as they left this Earth.

When enemy forces bore down, it seemed like the end -- that these wounded Americans, more than a dozen of them, would be gunned down. But Father Kapaun spotted a wounded Chinese officer. He pleaded with this Chinese officer and convinced him to call out to his fellow Chinese. The shooting stopped and they negotiated a safe surrender, saving those American lives.

Then, as Father Kapaun was being led away, he saw another American -- wounded, unable to walk, laying in a ditch, defenseless. An enemy soldier was standing over him, rifle aimed at his head, ready to shoot. And Father Kapaun marched over and pushed the enemy soldier aside. And then as the soldier watched, stunned, Father Kapaun carried that wounded American away.

This is the valor we honor today -- an American soldier who didn’t fire a gun, but who wielded the mightiest weapon of all, a love for his brothers so pure that he was willing to die so that they might live. And yet, the incredible story of Father Kapaun does not end there.

He carried that injured American, for miles, as their captors forced them on a death march. When Father Kapaun grew tired, he’d help the wounded soldier hop on one leg. When other prisoners stumbled, he picked them up. When they wanted to quit -- knowing that stragglers would be shot -- he begged them to keep walking.

In the camps that winter, deep in a valley, men could freeze to death in their sleep. Father Kapaun offered them his own clothes. They starved on tiny rations of millet and corn and birdseed. He somehow snuck past the guards, foraged in nearby fields, and returned with rice and potatoes. In desperation, some men hoarded food. He convinced them to share. Their bodies were ravaged by dysentery. He grabbed some rocks, pounded metal into pots and boiled clean water. They lived in filth. He washed their clothes and he cleansed their wounds.

The guards ridiculed his devotion to his Savior and the Almighty. They took his clothes and made him stand in the freezing cold for hours. Yet, he never lost his faith. If anything, it only grew stronger. At night, he slipped into huts to lead prisoners in prayer, saying the Rosary, administering the sacraments, offering three simple words: "God bless you." One of them later said that with his very presence he could just for a moment turn a mud hut into a cathedral.

That spring, he went further -- he held an Easter service. I just met with the Kapaun family. They showed me something extraordinary -- the actual stole, the purple vestment that Father Kapaun wore when he celebrated Mass inside that prison camp.

As the sun rose that Easter Sunday, he put on that purple stole and led dozens of prisoners to the ruins of an old church in the camp. And he read from a prayer missal that they had kept hidden. He held up a small crucifix that he had made from sticks. And as the guards watched, Father Kapaun and all those prisoners -- men of different faith, perhaps some men of no faith -- sang the Lord’s Prayer and "America the Beautiful." They sang so loud that other prisoners across the camp not only heard them, they joined in, too -- filling that valley with song and with prayer.

That faith -- that they might be delivered from evil, that they could make it home -- was perhaps the greatest gift to those men; that even amidst such hardship and despair, there could be hope; amid their misery in the temporal they could see those truths that are eternal; that even in such hell, there could be a touch of the divine. Looking back, one of them said that that is what "kept a lot of us alive."

Yet, for Father Kapaun, the horrific conditions took their toll. Thin, frail, he began to limp, with a blood clot in his leg. And then came dysentery, then pneumonia. That’s when the guards saw their chance to finally rid themselves of this priest and the hope he inspired. They came for him. And over the protests and tears of the men who loved him, the guards sent him to a death house -- a hellhole with no food or water -- to be left to die.

And yet, even then, his faith held firm. "I’m going to where I’ve always wanted to go," he told his brothers. "And when I get up there, I’ll say a prayer for all of you." And then, as was taken away, he did something remarkable -- he blessed the guards. "Forgive them," he said, "for they know not what they do." Two days later, in that house of death, Father Kapaun breathed his last breath. His body was taken away, his grave unmarked, his remains unrecovered to this day.

The war and the awful captivity would drag on for another two years, but these men held on -- steeled by the memory and moral example of the man they called Father. And on their first day of freedom, in his honor, they carried that beautiful wooden crucifix with them.

Some of these men are here today -- including Herb Miller, the soldier that Father Kapaun saved in that ditch and then carried all those miles. Many are now in their 80s, but make no mistake, they are among the strongest men that America has ever produced. And I would ask all of our courageous POWs from the Korean War to stand if they're able and accept the gratitude of a grateful nation.

I’m told that in their darkest hours in the camp, in that valley, these men turned to a Psalm. As we prepare for the presentation of the Medal of Honor to Father Kapaun’s nephew, Ray, I want to leave you with the words of that Psalm, which sustained these men all those years ago:

Even though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death,I will fear no evil, for you are with me;Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies.You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.Surely, your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life.And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

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Ray, would you please join me on stage for the reading of the citation?

Military Aide:

The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, March 3, 1863, has awarded in the name of Congress the Medal of Honor to Chaplain Emil J. Kapaun, United States Army, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the all of duty.

Chaplain Emil J. Kapaun distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty while serving with the 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Calvary Division during combat operations against an armed enemy at Unsan, Korea, from November 1st to 2nd, 1950.

On November 1st, as Chinese Communist Forces viciously attacked friendly elements, Chaplain Kapaun calmly walked through withering enemy fire in order to provide comfort and medical aid to his comrades and rescue friendly wounded from no-man’s land.

Though the Americans successfully repelled the assault, they found themselves surrounded by the enemy. Facing annihilation, the able-bodied men were ordered to evacuate. However, Chaplain Kapaun, fully aware of his certain capture, elected to stay behind with the wounded.

After the enemy succeeded in breaking through the defense in the early morning hours of November 2nd, Chaplain Kapaun continually made rounds as hand-to-hand combat ensued. As Chinese Communist Forces approached the American position, Chaplain Kapaun noticed an injured Chinese officer amongst the wounded and convinced him to negotiate the safe surrender of the American forces.

Shortly after his capture, Chaplain Kapaun, with complete disregard for his personal safety and unwavering resolve, bravely pushed aside an enemy soldier preparing to execute Sergeant First Class Herbert A. Miller. Not only did Chaplain Kapaun’s gallantry save the life of Sergeant Miller, but also his unparalleled courage and leadership inspired all those present, including those who might have otherwise fled in panic to remain and fight the enemy until captured.

Chaplain Kapaun’s extraordinary heroism and selflessness above and beyond the call of duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, the 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, the 1st Calvary Division and the United States Army.

[The Medal of Honor is presented.]

Chaplain Rutherford:

And let us pray together:

Lord, God, let us go forth into the world in peace and dedication to your service. Let us follow Chaplain Kapaun’s example and hold fast to that which is good; render to no person evil for evil; strengthen the faint-hearted. May we support the weary, encourage the tired, and honor all peoples. Let us love and serve, and may God’s blessing be upon us, pray with us today and always, as we ask and pray in your Holy Name. Amen.

President Obama:

Well, I can't imagine a -- a better example for all of us -- whether in uniform or not in uniform, a better example to follow. Father Kapaun’s life I think is a testimony to the human spirit, the power of faith, and reminds us of the good that we can do each and every day regardless of the most difficult of circumstances. We can always be an instrument of his will.

So I hope all of you have enjoyed this ceremony. I certainly have been extremely touched by it.

To the Kapaun family, God bless you.

To all our veterans, we’re so proud of you.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# First Statement on the Boston Marathon Explosions

Good afternoon, everybody. Earlier today, I was briefed by my homeland security team on the events in Boston. We’re continuing to monitor and respond to the situation as it unfolds. And I’ve directed the full resources of the federal government

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to help state and local authorities protect our people, increase security around the United States as necessary, and investigate what happened.

The American people will say a prayer for Boston tonight. And Michelle and I send our deepest thoughts and prayers to the families of the victims in the wake of this senseless loss.

We don’t yet have all the answers. But we do know that multiple people have been wounded, some gravely, in explosions at the Boston Marathon.

I’ve spoken to FBI Director Mueller and Secretary of Homeland Security Napolitano, and they’re mobilizing the appropriate resources to investigate and to respond.

I’ve updated leaders of Congress in both parties, and we reaffirmed that on days like this there are no Republicans or Democrats -- we are Americans, united in concern for our fellow citizens.

I’ve also spoken with Governor Patrick and Mayor Menino, and made it clear that they have every single federal resource necessary to care for the victims and counsel the families. And above all, I made clear to them that all Americans stand with the people of Boston.

Boston police, firefighters, and first responders as well as the National Guard responded heroically, and continue to do so as we speak. It’s a reminder that so many Americans serve and sacrifice on our behalf every single day, without regard to their own safety, in dangerous and difficult circumstances. And we salute all those who assisted in responding so quickly and professionally to this tragedy.

We still do not know who did this or why. And people shouldn’t jump to conclusions before we have all the facts. But make no mistake -- we will get to the bottom of this. And we will find out who did this; we'll find out why they did this. Any responsible individuals, any responsible groups will feel the full weight of justice.

Today is a holiday in Massachusetts -- Patriots’ Day. It’s a day that celebrates the free and fiercely independent spirit that this great American city of Boston has reflected from the earliest days of our nation. And it’s a day that draws the world to Boston’s streets in a spirit of friendly competition. Boston is a tough and resilient town. So are its people. I'm supremely confident that Bostonians will pull together, take care of each other, and move forward as one proud city. And as they do, the American people will be with them every single step of the way.

You should anticipate that as we get more information, our teams will provide you briefings. We're still in the investigation stage at this point. But I just want to reiterate we will find out who did this and we will hold them accountable.

Thank you very much.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

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# Second Statement on the Boston Marathon Bombings

Good morning, everybody. I've just been briefed by my national security team, including FBI Director Mueller, Attorney General Holder, Secretary Napolitano, and my Counterterrorism and Homeland Security Advisor Lisa Monaco, on the attacks in Boston. We continue to mobilize and deploy all appropriate law enforcement resources to protect our citizens, and to investigate and to respond to this attack.

Obviously our first thoughts this morning are with the victims, their families, and the city of Boston. We know that two explosions gravely wounded dozens of Americans, and took the lives of others, including a 8-year-old boy.

This was a heinous and cowardly act. And given what we now know about what took place, the FBI is investigating it as an act of terrorism. Any time bombs are used to target innocent civilians it is an act of terror. What we don’t yet know, however, is who carried out this attack, or why; whether it was planned and executed by a terrorist organization, foreign or domestic, or was the act of a malevolent individual. That's what we don't yet know. And clearly, we’re at the beginning of our investigation.

It will take time to follow every lead and determine what happened. But we will find out. We will find whoever harmed our citizens and we will bring them to justice.

We also know this -- the American people refuse to be terrorized. Because what the world saw yesterday in the aftermath of the explosions were stories of heroism and kindness, and generosity and love: Exhausted runners who kept running to the nearest hospital to give blood, and those who stayed to tend to the wounded, some tearing off their own clothes to make tourniquets. The first responders who ran into the chaos to save lives. The men and women who are still treating the wounded at some of the best hospitals in the world, and the medical students who hurried to help, saying “When we heard, we all came in.” The priests who opened their churches and ministered to the hurt and the fearful. And the good people of Boston who opened their homes to the victims of this attack and those shaken by it.

So if you want to know who we are, what America is, how we respond to evil -- that’s it. Selflessly. Compassionately. Unafraid.

In the coming days, we will pursue every effort to get to the bottom of what happened. And we will continue to remain vigilant. I’ve directed my administration to take appropriate security measures to protect the American people. And this is a good time for all of us to remember that we all have a part to play in alerting authorities -- if you see something suspicious, speak up.

I have extraordinary confidence in the men and women of the FBI, the Boston Police Department, and the other agencies that responded so heroically and effectively in the aftermath of yesterday’s events. I’m very grateful for the leadership of Governor Patrick and Mayor Menino. And I know that even as we protect our people and aggressively pursue this investigation, the people of Boston will continue to respond in the same proud and heroic way that they have thus far -- and their fellow Americans will be right there with them.

Thank you very much. And you can expect further briefings from our law enforcement officials as the day goes on. When we have more details, they will be disclosed. What I’ve indicated to you is what we know now. We know it was bombs that were set off. We know that obviously they did some severe damage. We do not know who did them. We do not know whether this was an act of an organization or an individual or individuals. We don’t have a sense of motive yet. So everything else at this point is speculation. But as we receive more information, as the FBI has more information, as our out counterterrorism teams have more information, we will make sure to keep you and the American people posted.

Thank you very much, everybody.

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# Statement On the Senate Vote Against Background Check Gun Bill Amendment

A few months ago, in response to too many tragedies -- including the shootings of a United States Congresswoman, Gabby Giffords, who’s here today, and the murder of 20 innocent schoolchildren and their teachers -- this country took up the cause of protecting more of our people from gun violence.

Families that know unspeakable grief summoned the courage to petition their elected leaders -- not just to honor the memory of their children, but to protect the lives of all our children. And a few minutes ago, a minority in the United States Senate decided it wasn’t worth it. They blocked common-sense gun reforms even while these families looked on from the Senate gallery.

By now, it’s well known that 90 percent of the American people support universal background checks that make it harder for a dangerous person to buy a gun. We’re talking about convicted felons, people convicted of domestic violence, people with a severe mental illness. Ninety percent of Americans support that idea. Most Americans think that's already the law.

And a few minutes ago, 90 percent of Democrats in the Senate just voted for that idea. But it’s not going to happen because 90 percent of Republicans in the Senate just voted against that idea.

A majority of senators voted "yes" to protecting more of our citizens with smarter background checks. But by this continuing distortion of Senate rules, a minority was able to block it from moving forward.

I’m going to speak plainly and honestly about what’s happened here because the American people are trying to figure out how can something have 90 percent support and yet not happen. We had a Democrat and a Republican -- both gun owners, both fierce defenders of our Second Amendment, with “A” grades from the NRA -- come together and worked together to write a common-sense compromise on background checks. And I want to thank Joe Manchin and Pat Toomey for their courage in doing that. That was not easy given their traditional strong support for Second Amendment rights.

As they said, nobody could honestly claim that the package they put together infringed on our Second Amendment rights. All it did was extend the same background check rules that already apply to guns purchased from a dealer to guns purchased at gun shows or over the Internet. So 60 percent of guns are already purchased through a background check system; this would have covered a lot of the guns that are currently outside that system.

Their legislation showed respect for gun owners, and it showed respect for the victims of gun violence. And Gabby Giffords, by the way, is both -- she’s a gun owner and a victim of gun violence. She is a Westerner and a moderate. And she supports these background checks.

In fact, even the NRA used to support expanded background checks. The current leader of the NRA used to support these background checks. So while this compromise didn’t contain everything I wanted or everything that these families wanted, it did represent progress. It represented moderation and common sense. That’s why 90 percent of the American people supported it.

But instead of supporting this compromise, the gun lobby and its allies willfully lied about the bill. They claimed that it would create some sort of "big brother" gun registry, even though the bill did the opposite. This legislation, in fact, outlawed any registry. Plain and simple, right there in the text. But that didn’t matter.

And unfortunately, this pattern of spreading untruths about this legislation served a purpose, because those lies upset an intense minority of gun owners, and that in turn intimidated a lot of senators. And I talked to several of these senators over the past few weeks, and they’re all good people. I know all of them were shocked by tragedies like Newtown. And I also understand that they come from states that are strongly pro-gun. And I have consistently said that there are regional differences when it comes to guns, and that both sides have to listen to each other.

But the fact is most of these senators could not offer any good reason why we wouldn’t want to make it harder for criminals and those with severe mental illnesses to buy a gun. There were no coherent arguments as to why we wouldn’t do this. It came down to politics -- the worry that that vocal minority of gun owners would come after them in future elections. They worried that the gun lobby would spend a lot of money and paint them as anti-Second Amendment.

And obviously, a lot of Republicans had that fear, but Democrats had that fear, too. And so they caved to the pressure, and they started looking for an excuse -- any excuse -- to vote "no."

One common argument I heard was that this legislation wouldn’t prevent all future massacres. And that’s true. As I said from the start, no single piece of legislation can stop every act of violence and evil. We learned that tragically just two days ago. But if action by Congress could have saved one person, one child, a few hundred, a few thousand -- if it could have prevented those people from losing their lives to gun violence in the future while preserving our Second Amendment rights, we had an obligation to try.

And this legislation met that test. And too many senators failed theirs.

I've heard some say that blocking this step would be a victory. And my question is, a victory for who? A victory for what? All that happened today was the preservation of the loophole that lets dangerous criminals buy guns without a background check. That didn’t make our kids safer. Victory for not doing something that 90 percent of Americans, 80 percent of Republicans, the vast majority of your constituents wanted to get done? It begs the question, who are we here to represent?

I've heard folks say that having the families of victims lobby for this legislation was somehow misplaced. "A prop," somebody called them. "Emotional blackmail," some outlet said. Are they serious? Do we really think that thousands of families whose lives have been shattered by gun violence don’t have a right to weigh in on this issue? Do we think their emotions, their loss is not relevant to this debate?

So all in all, this was a pretty shameful day for Washington.

But this effort is not over. I want to make it clear to the American people we can still bring about meaningful changes that reduce gun violence, so long as the American people don’t give up on it. Even without Congress, my administration will keep doing everything it can to protect more of our communities. We’re going to address the barriers that prevent states from participating in the existing background check system. We’re going to give law enforcement more information about lost and stolen guns so it can do its job. We’re going to help to put in place emergency plans to protect our children in their schools.

But we can do more if Congress gets its act together. And if this Congress refuses to listen to the American people and pass common-sense gun legislation, then the real impact is going to have to come from the voters.

To all the people who supported this legislation -- law enforcement and responsible gun owners, Democrats and Republicans, urban moms, rural hunters, whoever you are -- you need to let your representatives in Congress know that you are disappointed, and that if they don’t act this time, you will remember come election time.

To the wide majority of NRA households who supported this legislation, you need to let your leadership and lobbyists in Washington know they didn’t represent your views on this one.

The point is those who care deeply about preventing more and more gun violence will have to be as passionate, and as organized, and as vocal as those who blocked these common-sense steps to help keep our kids safe. Ultimately, you outnumber those who argued the other way. But they're better organized. They're better financed. They’ve been at it longer. And they make sure to stay focused on this one issue during election time. And that's the reason why you can have something that 90 percent of Americans support and you can't get it through the Senate or the House of Representatives.

So to change Washington, you, the American people, are going to have to sustain some passion about this. And when necessary, you’ve got to send the right people to Washington. And that requires strength, and it requires persistence.

And that's the one thing that these families should have inspired in all of us. I still don't know how they have been able to muster up the strength to do what they’ve doing over the last several weeks, last several months.

And I see this as just round one. When Newtown happened, I met with these families and I spoke to the community, and I said, something must be different right now. We’re going to have to change. That's what the whole country said. Everybody talked about how we were going to change something to make sure this didn't happen again, just like everybody talked about how we needed to do something after Aurora. Everybody talked about we needed change something after Tucson.

And I’m assuming that the emotions that we’ve all felt since Newtown, the emotions that we’ve all felt since Tucson and Aurora and Chicago -- the pain we share with these families and families all across the country who’ve lost a loved one to gun violence -- I’m assuming that's not a temporary thing. I’m assuming our expressions of grief and our commitment to do something different to prevent these things from happening are not empty words.

I believe we’re going to be able to get this done. Sooner or later, we are going to get this right. The memories of these children demand it. And so do the American people.

Thank you very much, everybody.

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# Interfaith Prayer Service Address at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross

Hello, Boston!

Scripture tells us to “run with endurance the race that is set before us.” Run with endurance the race that is set before us.

On Monday morning, the sun rose over Boston. The sunlight glistened off the Statehouse dome. In the Common and the Public Garden, spring was in bloom. On this Patriot’s Day, like so many before, fans jumped onto the T to see the Sox at Fenway. In Hopkinton, runners laced up their shoes and set out on a 26.2-mile test of dedication and grit and the human spirit. And across this city, hundreds of thousands of Bostonians lined the streets -- to hand the runners cups of water and to cheer them on.

It was a beautiful day to be in Boston -- a day that explains why a poet once wrote that this town is not just a capital, not just a place. Boston, he said, “is the perfect state of grace.”

And then, in an instant, the day’s beauty was shattered. A celebration became a tragedy. And so we come together to pray, and mourn, and measure our loss. But we also come together today to reclaim that state of grace -- to reaffirm that the spirit of this city is undaunted, and the spirit of this country shall remain undimmed.

To Governor Patrick; Mayor Menino; Cardinal O’Malley and all the faith leaders who are here; Governors Romney, Swift, Weld and Dukakis; members of Congress; and most of all, the people of Boston and the families who’ve lost a piece of your heart. We thank you for your leadership. We thank you for your courage. We thank you for your grace.

I’m here today on behalf of the American people with a simple message: Every one of us has been touched by this attack on your beloved city. Every one of us stands with you.

Because, after all, it’s our beloved city, too. Boston may be your hometown, but we claim it, too. It’s one of America’s iconic cities. It’s one of the world’s great cities. And one of the reasons the world knows Boston so well is that Boston opens its heart to the world.

Over successive generations, you’ve welcomed again and again new arrivals to our shores -- immigrants who constantly reinvigorated this city and this commonwealth and our nation. Every fall, you welcome students from all across America and all across the globe, and every spring you graduate them back into the world -- a Boston diaspora that excels in every field of human endeavor. Year after year, you welcome the greatest talents in the arts and science, research -- you welcome them to your concert halls and your hospitals and your laboratories to exchange ideas and insights that draw this world together.

And every third Monday in April, you welcome people from all around the world to the Hub for friendship and fellowship and healthy competition -- a gathering of men and women of every race and every religion, every shape and every size; a multitude represented by all those flags that flew over the finish line.

So whether folks come here to Boston for just a day, or they stay here for years, they leave with a piece of this town tucked firmly into their hearts. So Boston is your hometown, but we claim it a little bit, too.

I know this because there’s a piece of Boston in me. You welcomed me as a young law student across the river; welcomed Michelle, too. You welcomed me during a convention when I was still a state senator and very few people could pronounce my name right.

Like you, Michelle and I have walked these streets. Like you, we know these neighborhoods. And like you, in this moment of grief, we join you in saying -- “Boston, you’re my home.” For millions of us, what happened on Monday is personal. It’s personal.

Today our prayers are with the Campbell family of Medford. They're here today. Their daughter, Krystle, was always smiling. Those who knew her said that with her red hair and her freckles and her ever-eager willingness to speak her mind, she was beautiful, sometimes she could be a little noisy, and everybody loved her for it. She would have turned 30 next month. As her mother said through her tears, “This doesn’t make any sense.”

Our prayers are with the Lu family of China, who sent their daughter, Lingzi, to BU so that she could experience all this city has to offer. She was a 23-year-old student, far from home. And in the heartache of her family and friends on both sides of a great ocean, we’re reminded of the humanity that we all share.

Our prayers are with the Richard family of Dorchester -- to Denise and their young daughter, Jane, as they fight to recover. And our hearts are broken for 8-year-old Martin -- with his big smile and bright eyes. His last hours were as perfect as an 8-year-old boy could hope for -- with his family, eating ice cream at a sporting event. And we’re left with two enduring images of this little boy -- forever smiling for his beloved Bruins, and forever expressing a wish he made on a blue poster board: “No more hurting people. Peace.”

No more hurting people. Peace.

Our prayers are with the injured -- so many wounded, some gravely. From their beds, some are surely watching us gather here today. And if you are, know this: As you begin this long journey of recovery, your city is with you. Your commonwealth is with you. Your country is with you. We will all be with you as you learn to stand and walk and, yes, run again. Of that I have no doubt. You will run again. You will run again.

Because that’s what the people of Boston are made of. Your resolve is the greatest rebuke to whoever committed this heinous act. If they sought to intimidate us, to terrorize us, to shake us from those values that Deval described, the values that make us who we are, as Americans -- well, it should be pretty clear by now that they picked the wrong city to do it. Not here in Boston. Not here in Boston.

You’ve shown us, Boston, that in the face of evil, Americans will lift up what’s good. In the face of cruelty, we will choose compassion. In the face of those who would visit death upon innocents, we will choose to save and to comfort and to heal. We’ll choose friendship. We’ll choose love.

Scripture teaches us, “God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.” And that’s the spirit you’ve displayed in recent days.

When doctors and nurses, police and firefighters and EMTs and Guardsmen run towards explosions to treat the wounded -- that’s discipline.

When exhausted runners, including our troops and veterans -- who never expected to see such carnage on the streets back home -- become first responders themselves, tending to the injured -- that’s real power.

When Bostonians carry victims in their arms, deliver water and blankets, line up to give blood, open their homes to total strangers, give them rides back to reunite with their families -- that’s love.

That’s the message we send to those who carried this out and anyone who would do harm to our people. Yes, we will find you. And, yes, you will face justice. We will find you. We will hold you accountable. But more than that; our fidelity to our way of life -- to our free and open society -- will only grow stronger. For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but one of power and love and self-discipline.

Like Bill Iffrig, 78 years old -- the runner in the orange tank top who we all saw get knocked down by the blast -- we may be momentarily knocked off our feet, but we’ll pick ourselves up. We’ll keep going. We will finish the race. In the words of Dick Hoyt, who’s pushed his disabled son, Rick, in 31 Boston Marathons -- “We can’t let something like this stop us.” This doesn’t stop us.

And that’s what you’ve taught us, Boston. That’s what you’ve reminded us -- to push on. To persevere. To not grow weary. To not get faint. Even when it hurts. Even when our heart aches. We summon the strength that maybe we didn’t even know we had, and we carry on. We finish the race. We finish the race.

And we do that because of who we are. And we do that because we know that somewhere around the bend a stranger has a cup of water. Around the bend, somebody is there to boost our spirits. On that toughest mile, just when we think that we’ve hit a wall, someone will be there to cheer us on and pick us up if we fall. We know that.

And that’s what the perpetrators of such senseless violence -- these small, stunted individuals who would destroy instead of build, and think somehow that makes them important -- that’s what they don’t understand. Our faith in each other, our love for each other, our love for country, our common creed that cuts across whatever superficial differences there may be -- that is our power. That’s our strength.

That’s why a bomb can’t beat us. That’s why we don’t hunker down. That’s why we don’t cower in fear. We carry on. We race. We strive. We build, and we work, and we love -- and we raise our kids to do the same. And we come together to celebrate life, and to walk our cities, and to cheer for our teams. When the Sox and Celtics and Patriots or Bruins are champions again -- to the chagrin of New York and Chicago fans -- the crowds will gather and watch a parade go down Boylston Street.

And this time next year, on the third Monday in April, the world will return to this great American city to run harder than ever, and to cheer even louder, for the 118th Boston Marathon. Bet on it.

Tomorrow, the sun will rise over Boston. Tomorrow, the sun will rise over this country that we love. This special place. This state of grace.

Scripture tells us to "run with endurance the race that is set before us." As we do, may God hold close those who’ve been taken from us too soon. May He comfort their families. And may He continue to watch over these United States of America.

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# Third Statement on the Boston Marathon Bombings

Good evening, everybody. Tonight our nation is in debt to the people of Boston and the people of Massachusetts. After a vicious attack on their city, Bostonians responded with resolve and determination. They did their part as citizens and partners in this investigation.

Boston police and state police and local police across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts responded with professionalism and bravery over five long days. And tonight, because of their determined efforts, we've closed an important chapter in this tragedy.

I've been briefed earlier this evening by FBI Director Mueller. After the attacks on Monday, I directed the full resources of the federal government to be made available to help state and local authorities in the investigation and to increase security as needed. Over the past week, close coordination among federal, state, and local officials -- sharing information, moving swiftly to track down leads -- has been critical to this effort.

They all worked as they should, as a team. And we are extremely grateful for that. We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to all our outstanding law enforcement professionals. These men and women get up every day, they put on that uniform; they risk their lives to keep us safe -- and as this week showed, they don't always know what to expect. So our thoughts are with those who were wounded in pursuit of the suspects and we pray for their full recovery.

We also send our prayers to the Collier family who grieve the loss of their son and brother, Sean. "He was born to be a police officer," said his chief at MIT. He was just 26 years old. And as his family has said, he died bravely in the line of duty, doing what he committed his life to doing -- serving and protecting others. So we're grateful to him.

Obviously, tonight there are still many unanswered questions. Among them, why did young men who grew up and studied here, as part of our communities and our country, resort to such violence? How did they plan and carry out these attacks, and did they receive any help? The families of those killed so senselessly deserve answers. The wounded, some of whom now have to learn how to stand and walk and live again, deserve answers.

And so I've instructed the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security and our intelligence community to continue to deploy all the necessary resources to support the investigation, to collect intelligence, and to protect our citizens. We will determine what happened. We will investigate any associations that these terrorists may have had. And we'll continue to do whatever we have to do to keep our people safe.

One thing we do know is that whatever hateful agenda drove these men to such heinous acts will not -- cannot -- prevail. Whatever they thought they could ultimately achieve, they've already failed. They failed because the people of Boston refused to be intimidated. They failed because, as Americans, we refused to be terrorized. They failed because we will not waver from the character and the compassion and the values that define us as a country. Nor will we break the bonds that hold us together as Americans.

That American spirit includes staying true to the unity and diversity that makes us strong -- like no other nation in the world. In this age of instant reporting and tweets and blogs, there's a temptation to latch on to any bit of information, sometimes to jump to conclusions. But when a tragedy like this happens, with public safety at risk and the stakes so high, it's important that we do this right. That's why we have investigations. That's why we relentlessly gather the facts. That's why we have courts. And that's why we take care not to rush to judgment -- not about the motivations of these individuals; certainly not about entire groups of people.

After all, one of the things that makes America the greatest nation on Earth, but also, one of the things that makes Boston such a great city, is that we welcome people from all around the world -- people of every faith, every ethnicity, from every corner of the globe. So as we continue to learn more about why and how this tragedy happened, let's make sure that we sustain that spirit.

Tonight we think of all the wounded, still struggling to recover. Certainly we think of Krystle Campbell. We think of Lingzi Lu. And we think of little Martin Richard. Their lives reflected all the diversity and beauty of our country, and they were sharing the great American experience together.

Finally, let me say that even as so much attention has been focused on the tragic events in Boston, understandably, we've also seen a tight-knit community in Texas devastated by a terrible explosion. And I want them to know that they are not forgotten. Our thoughts, our prayers are with the people of West, Texas, where so many good people lost their lives; some lost their homes; many are injured; many are still missing.

I've talked to Governor Perry and Mayor Muska and I've pledged that the people of West will have the resources that they need to recover and rebuild. And I want everybody in Texas to know that we will follow through with those commitments.

All in all, this has been a tough week. But we've seen the character of our country once more. And as President, I'm confident that we have the courage and the resilience and the spirit to overcome these challenges -- and to go forward, as one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Thank you very much, everybody.

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# George W. Bush Library Dedication Address

To President and Mrs. Bush; to President Clinton and now-former Secretary Clinton; to President George H.W. Bush and Mrs. Bush; to President and Mrs. Carter; to current and former world leaders and all the distinguished guests here today: Michelle and I are honored to be with you to mark this historic occasion.

This is a Texas-sized party. And that’s worthy of what we’re here to do today: honor the life and legacy of the 43rd President of the United States, George W. Bush.

When all the living former Presidents are together, it’s also a -- a special day for our democracy. We’ve been called "the world’s most exclusive club" -- and we do have a pretty nice clubhouse. But the truth is, our club is more like a support group.

The last time we all got together was just before I took office -- and I needed that. Because as each of these leaders will tell you, no matter how much you may think you’re ready to assume the office of the presidency, it’s impossible to truly understand the nature of the job until it’s yours, until you’re sitting at that desk.

And that’s why every President gains a greater appreciation for all of those who served before them; for the leaders from both parties who've taken on the momentous challenges and felt the enormous weight of the nation on their shoulders. And for me, that appreciation very much extends to President Bush.

The first thing I found in that desk the day I took office was a -- a letter from George, and one that demonstrated his compassion and his generosity. For he knew that I would come to learn what he had learned -- that being President, above all, is a humbling job. There are moments where you make mistakes.

There are times where you wish you could turn back the clock. And what I know is true about President Bush, and I hope my successor will say about me, is that we love this country and we do our best.

Now, in the past, President Bush has said it’s impossible to pass judgment on his presidency while he’s still alive. So maybe this is a little bit premature. But even now, there are certain things that we know for certain.

We know about the son who was raised by two strong, loving parents in Midland, famous -- famously inheriting, as he says, "my daddy’s eyes and my mother’s mouth"; the young boy who once came home after a trip to a museum and proudly presented his horrified mother with a small dinosaur tailbone he had smuggled home in his pocket.

I’ll bet that went over great with Barbara.

We know about the young man who met the love of his life at a dinner party, ditching his plans to go to bed early and instead talking with the brilliant and charming Laura Welch late into the night.

We know about the father who raised two remarkable, caring, beautiful daughters, even after they tried to discourage him from running for President, saying, "Dad, you’re not as cool as you think you are." Mr. President, I can relate. And now we see President Bush, the grandfather, just beginning to spoil his brand-new granddaughter.

So we know President Bush the man. And what President Clinton said is absolutely true -- to know the man is to like the man, because he’s comfortable in his own skin. He knows who he is. He doesn’t put on any pretenses. He takes his job seriously, but he doesn’t take himself too seriously. He is a good man.

But we also know something about George Bush the leader. As we walk through this library, obviously we’re reminded of the incredible strength and resolve that came through that bullhorn as he stood amid the rubble and the ruins of Ground Zero, promising to deliver justice to those who had sought to destroy our way of life.

We remember the compassion that he showed by leading the global fight against HIV/AIDS and malaria, helping to save millions of lives and reminding people in some of the poorest corners of the globe that America cares and that we’re here to help.

We remember his commitment to reaching across the aisle to unlikely allies like Ted Kennedy, because he believed that we had to reform our schools in ways that help every child learn, not just some; that we have to repair a broken immigration system; and that this progress is only possible when we do it together.

Seven years ago, President Bush restarted an important conversation by speaking with the American people about our history as a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants. And even though comprehensive immigration reform has taken a little longer than any of us expected, I am hopeful that this year, with the help of Speaker Boehner and some of the senators and members of Congress who are here today, that we bring it home -- for our families, and our economy, and our security, and for this incredible country that we love. And if we do that, it will be in large part thanks to all the hard work of President George W. Bush.

And finally, a President bears no greater decision and no more solemn burden than serving as Commander-in-Chief of the greatest military that the world has ever known. As President Bush himself has said, "America must and will keep its word to the men and women who have given us so much." So even as we Americans may at times disagree on matters of foreign policy, we share a profound respect and reverence for the men and women of our military and their families. And we are united in our determination to comfort the families of the fallen and to care for those who wear the uniform of the United States.

On the flight back from Russia, after negotiating with Nikita Khrushchev at the height of the Cold War, President Kennedy's secretary found a small slip of paper on which the President had written a favorite saying: "I know there is a God. And I see a storm coming. If he has a place for me, I believe I am ready."

No one can be completely ready for this office. But America needs leaders who are willing to face the storm head on, even as they pray for God's strength and wisdom so that they can do what they believe is right. And that’s what the leaders with whom I share this stage have all done. That’s what President George W. Bush chose to do. That’s why I'm honored to be part of today's celebration.

Mr. President, for your service, for your courage, for your sense of humor, and, most of all, for your love of country: Thank you very much.

From all the citizens of the United States of America, God bless you.

And God bless these United States.

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# Memorial Address for the Victims of the West Fertilizer Plant Explosions

Well thank you, Senator Cornyn, Governor Perry, President Starr, gathered dignitaries, the community of Baylor and Waco -- most of all, the family and the friends and neighbors of West, Texas.

I cannot match the power of the voices you just heard on that video. And no words adequately describe the courage that was displayed on that deadly night. What I can do is offer the love and support and prayers of the nation.

The Book of Psalms tells us:

For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us. We went through fire and through water; yet you have brought us out to a place of abundance.

We went through fire and through water; yet you have brought us out to a place of abundance.1

For this state, and for our country, these have been trying and difficult days. We gather here in Texas to mourn the brave men who went through fire and all those who have been taken from us. We remain mindful of our fellow Americans in flooded states to the north who endure the high waters. We pray for those in Boston who have been tested, and the wounded whose greatest tests still lie ahead.

But know this: While the eyes of the world may have been fixed on places far away, our hearts have also been here in your time of tribulation. And even amidst such sorrow and so much pain, we recognize God’s abundance. We give thanks for the courage and the compassion and the incredible grace of the people of West.

We're grateful for Mayor Muska and Mayor Duncan, and all those who have shown such leadership during this tragedy. And to the families and neighbors grappling with unbearable loss, we are here to say, you are not alone. You are not forgotten. We may not all live here in Texas, but we're neighbors, too. We're Americans, too, and we stand with you, and we do not forget. And we'll be there even after the cameras leave and after the attention turns elsewhere. Your country will remain ever ready to help you recover and rebuild and reclaim your community.

Now until last week, I think it’s fair to say that few outside this state had ever heard of West. And I suspect that’s the way most people in West like it. Now, it is true that weary travelers, and now the wider world, know they can rely on the Czech Stop for a brief respite in the middle of a long stretch of highway. I want to say, by the way, all the former Presidents in Dallas send their thoughts and prayers, George W. and Laura Bush spoke longingly about the kolaches -- and the even better company, as they’ve driven through West. And what -- what they understood, and what all of you understand, is what makes West special is not the attention coming from far-flung places. What makes West special, what -- what puts it on the map is what makes it familiar: the people who live there; neighbors you can count on; places that haven’t changed; things that are solid and true and lasting.

Most of the people in West know everybody in West. Many of you are probably descended from some of those first settlers -- hardy immigrants who crossed an ocean and kept on going. So for you, there’s no such thing as a stranger. When someone's in need, you reach out to them and you support them and you do what it takes to help them carry on.

And that’s what happened last Wednesday, when a fire alarm sounded across a quiet Texas evening. As we’ve heard, the call went out to volunteers -- not professionals -- people who just love to serve, people who want to help their neighbors. A call went out to farmers and car salesmen and welders and funeral home directors; the city secretary and the mayor. It went out to folks who are tough enough and selfless enough to put in a full day’s work and then be ready for more.

And together, you answered the call. You dropped your schoolwork, left your families, jumped in fire trucks, and rushed to the flames. And when you got to the scene, you forgot fear and you fought that blaze as hard as you could, knowing the danger, buying time so others could escape. And then, about 20 minutes after the first alarm, the earth shook, and the sky went dark -- and West changed forever.

Today our prayers are with the families of all who we’ve lost -- the proud sons and daughters of West whose memories will live on in our hearts. Parents who loved their kids, and leaders who served their communities. They were young and old, from different backgrounds and different walks of life. A few were just going about their business. An awful lot ran towards the scene of disaster trying to help. One was described as the kind of guy whose phone was always ringing with folks in need of help -- help he always provided. That’s just who these folks were.

Our thoughts are with those who face a long road -- the wounded, the heartbroken, the families who lost their homes and possessions in an instant. They’re going to need their friends in West, but they’re also going to need their friends in Texas, and their friends all across this country. They’ll still need you to answer that call. They will need those things that are lasting and true. For, as Scripture teaches us, "a friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity."

To the people of West, just as we’ve seen the love you share in better times, as friends and brothers and sisters, these hard days have shown your ability to stand tall in times of unimaginable adversity.

You saw it in leaders like Mayor Muska, who lost close friends. And you saw it in the hospital staff who spent the night treating people that they knew -- toiling through their tears as they did what had to be done.

We saw it in the folks who helped evacuate an entire nursing home, including one man who drove an elderly resident to safety and then came back to do it again, twice.

We saw it in the people so generous that when the Red Cross set up a shelter for folks who couldn’t go back to their homes, not that many people showed up, because most had already been offered a place to stay with their friends and family and neighbors.

Complete strangers drove from hundreds of miles to donate supplies. Firefighters from surrounding communities manned the stations so surviving volunteers could recover from their wounds. Right here at Baylor, students stood in line for hours to give blood. And a nearby school district opened its doors to the students who can’t go back to their classrooms, putting welcome signs on lockers and in the hallways.

So that's the thing about this tragedy. This small town’s family is bigger now. It extends beyond the boundaries of West. And in the days ahead, this love and support will be more important than ever, because there will be moments of doubt and pain and the temptation to wonder how this community will ever fully recover. And the families who have lost such remarkable men of the sort that we saw in that video, there are going to be times where they simply don't understand how this could have happened.

But today I see in the people of West, in your eyes, that what makes West special isn't going to go away. And instead of changing who you are, this tragedy has simply revealed who you’ve always been.

It’s the courage of Deborah Sulak, who works as a cashier just around the corner from the fire station. She said, “It’s going to be tough for the families. But we’re going to rebound because we’re fighters.” And that courage will bring West back.

It’s the love of Carla Ruiz, who used to live in West but now lives in Austin. And last week, she drove all the way back. “I had to be here,” she said. “You have to be here for family.” That love will keep West going.

It’s the faith of someone like Pastor John Crowder that will sustain the good people of West for as long as it takes. His church was damaged in the explosion. So on Sunday, the congregation assembled outside. "What happened Wednesday was awful,” he told them. “But God is bigger than all of this." God is bigger than all of this and he is here with you in West. He is bigger than all of this and he is here with you.

Going forward, it’s not just your town that needs your courage and your love and your faith. America does, too. We need towns where if you don’t know what your kids are up to, then chances are your neighbors do too, and they'll tell on those kids in a second. America needs towns that holds fundraisers to help folks pay the medical bills and then take the time to drop off a home-cooked meal, because they know a family is under stress. America needs communities where there’s always somebody to call if your car gets stuck or your house gets flooded. We need people who so love their neighbors as themselves that they’re willing to lay down their lives for them.

America needs towns like West. That’s what makes this country great, is towns like West. "For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us. We went through fire and through water; yet you have brought us out to a place of abundance."

You have been tested, West. You have been tried. You have gone through fire. But you are and always will be surrounded by an abundance of love. You saw it in the voices on those videos. You see it in the firefighters and first responders who are here. All across America, people are praying for you and thinking of you. And when they see the faces of those families, they understand that these are not strangers -- these are neighbors. And that’s why we know that we will get through this.

God bless West.

May God grant His peace on those that we’ve lost, His comfort to their families.

May He continue to bless this great state of Texas, and may He continue to bless these United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# White House Correspondents' Dinner Address 2013

Thank you. Thank you, everybody. How do you like my new entrance music? Rush Limbaugh warned you about this -- second term, baby. We’re changing things around here a little bit.

Actually, my advisors were a little worried about the new rap entrance music. They are a little more traditional. They suggested that I should start with some jokes at my own expense, just take myself down a peg. I was like, guys, after four and a half years, how many pegs are there left?

I want to thank the White House Correspondents. Ed, you’re doing an outstanding job. We are grateful for -- the great work you’ve done. To all the dignitaries who are here, everybody on the dais -- I especially want to say thank you to [General] Ray Odierno, who does outstanding service on behalf of our country, and all our men and women in uniform every single day.

And of course, our extraordinary First Lady, Michelle Obama. Everybody loves Michelle. She’s on the cover of Vogue, high poll numbers. But don’t worry -- I recently got my own magazine cover.

Now, look, I get it. These days, I look in the mirror and I have to admit, I’m not the strapping young Muslim socialist that I used to be. Time passes. You get a little gray.

And yet, even after all this time, I still make rookie mistakes. Like, I’m out in California, we’re at a fundraiser; we’re having a nice time. I happen to mention that Kamala Harris is the best-looking attorney general in the country. As you might imagine, I got trouble when I got back home. Who knew Eric Holder was so sensitive?

And then there’s the Easter Egg Roll, which is supposed to be just a nice, fun event with the kids. I go out on the basketball court, took 22 shots -- made two of them. That’s right: two hits, 20 misses. The executives at NBC asked, “What’s your secret?”

So, yes, maybe I have lost a step. But some things are beyond my control. For example, this whole controversy about Jaz-Z going to Cuba -- it’s unbelievable. I’ve got 99 problems and now Jay-Z is one. That’s another rap reference, Bill. I’ll let you know.

Of course, everybody has got plenty of advice. Maureen Dowd said I could solve all my problems if I were just more like Michael Douglas in “The American President.” And I know Michael is here tonight. Michael, what’s your secret, man? Could it be that you were an actor in an Aaron Sorkin liberal fantasy? Might that have something to do with it? I don’t know. Check in with me. Maybe it’s something else.

Anyway, I recognize that this job can take a toll on you. I understand -- second term, you need a burst of new energy, try some new things. And my team and I talked about it. We were willing to try anything. So we borrowed one of Michelle’s tricks. I thought this looked pretty good, but no bounce.

I want to give a shout-out to our headliner, Conan O’Brien. I was just talking to Ed, and I understand that when the Correspondents’ Association was considering Conan for this gig, they were faced with that age-old dilemma: Do you offer it to him now, or wait for five years and then give it to Jimmy Fallon? That was a little harsh. I love Conan.

And of course, the White House press corps is here. I know CNN has taken some knocks lately, but the fact is I admire their commitment to cover all sides of a story, just in case one of them happens to be accurate.

Some of my former advisors have switched over to the dark side. For example, David Axelrod now works for MSNBC, which is a nice change of pace since MSNBC used to work for David Axelrod.

The History Channel is not here. I guess they were embarrassed about the whole Obama-is-a-devil thing. Of course, that never kept Fox News from showing up. They actually thought the comparison was not fair -- to Satan.

But the problem is, is that the media landscape is changing so rapidly. You can’t keep up with it. I mean, I remember when BuzzFeed was just something I did in college around 2:00 a.m. It’s true.

Recently, though, I found a new favorite source for political news -- these guys are great. I think everybody here should check it out, they tell it like it is. It’s called WhiteHouse.gov. I cannot get enough of it.

The fact is I really do respect the press. I recognize that the press and I have different jobs to do. My job is to be President; your job is to keep me humble. Frankly, I think I’m doing my job better.

But part of the problem is everybody is so cynical. I mean, we’re constantly feeding cynicism, suspicion, conspiracies. You remember a few months ago, my Administration put out a photograph of me going skeet shooting at Camp David?

You remember that? And quite a number of people insisted that this had been photoshopped. But tonight I have something to confess: You were right. Guys, can we show them the actual photo?

We were just trying to tone it down a little bit. That was an awesome day.

There are other new players in the media landscape as well, like super PACs. Did you know that Sheldon Adelson spent 100 million dollars of his own money last year on negative ads? You’ve got to really dislike me -- to spend that kind of money. I mean, that’s Oprah money. You could buy an island and call it “Nobama” for that kind of money. Sheldon would have been better off offering me 100 million dollar to drop out of the race. I probably wouldn’t have taken it, but I'd have thought about it. Michelle would have taken it. You think I’m joking?

I know Republicans are still sorting out what happened in 2012, but one thing they all agree on is they need to do a better job reaching out to minorities. And look, call me self-centered, but I can think of one minority they could start with. Hello? Think of me as a trial run, you know? See how it goes.

If they won’t come to me, I will come to them. Recently, I had dinner -- it’s been well publicized -- I had dinner with a number of the Republican senators. And I’ll admit it wasn’t easy. I proposed a toast -- it died in committee.

Of course, even after I've done all this, some folks still don’t think I spend enough time with Congress. "Why don’t you get a drink with Mitch McConnell?" they ask. Really? Why don’t you get a drink with Mitch McConnell? I'm sorry. I get frustrated sometimes.

I am not giving up. In fact, I'm taking my charm offensive on the road -- a Texas barbeque with Ted Cruz, a Kentucky bluegrass concert with Rand Paul, and a book-burning with Michele Bachmann.

My charm offensive has helped me learn some interesting things about what's going on in Congress -- it turns out, absolutely nothing. But the point of my charm offensive is simple: We need to make progress on some important issues. Take the sequester. Republicans fell in love with this thing, and now they can't stop talking about how much they hate it. It's like we're trapped in a Taylor Swift album.

One senator who has reached across the aisle recently is Marco Rubio, but I don’t know about 2016. I mean, the guy has not even finished a single term in the Senate and he thinks he's ready to be President. Kids these days.

I, on the other hand, have run my last campaign. On Thursday, as Ed mentioned, I went to the opening of the Bush Presidential Library in Dallas. It was a wonderful event, and that inspired me to get started on my own legacy, which will actually begin by building another edifice right next to the Bush Library -- can we show that, please?

I'm also hard at work on plans for the Obama Library. And some have suggested that we put it in my birthplace, but I'd rather keep it in the United States. Did anybody not see that joke coming? Show of hands. Only Gallup? Maybe Dick Morris?

Now, speaking of presidents and their legacies, I want to acknowledge a wonderful friend, Steven Spielberg, and Daniel Day-Lewis, who are here tonight. We had a screening of their most recent film, Lincoln, which was an extraordinary film. I am a little nervous, though, about Steven's next project. I saw a behind-the-scenes look on HBO -- well, let's just check it out. Roll the tape.

[tape rolls]

It's a remarkable transformation. Do I really sound like that, though, honey?

Groucho Marx once said -- and, Senator Cruz, that’s Groucho Marx, not Karl. That’s the other guy. Groucho Marx once told an audience, "Before I speak, I have something important to say." And along those same lines, I want to close on a more serious note.

Obviously, there has been no shortage of news to cover over these past few weeks. And these have been some very hard days for too many of our citizens. Even as we gather here tonight, our thoughts are not far from the people of Boston and the people of West, Texas. There are families in the Midwest who are coping with some terrible floods. So we've had some difficult days.

But even when the days seemed darkest, we have seen humanity shine at its brightest. We've seen first responders and National Guardsmen who have dashed into danger, law enforcement officers who lived their oath to serve and to protect, and everyday Americans who are opening their homes and their hearts to perfect strangers.

And we also saw journalists at their best -- especially those who took the time to wade upstream through the torrent of digital rumors to chase down leads and verify facts and painstakingly put the pieces together to inform, and to educate, and to tell stories that demanded to be told.

If anyone wonders, for example, whether newspapers are a thing of the past, all you needed to do was to pick up or log on to papers like the Boston Globe. When their communities and the wider world needed them most, they were there making sense of events that might at first blush seem beyond our comprehension. And that’s what great journalism is, and that’s what great journalists do. And that’s why, for example, Pete Williams' new nickname around the NBC newsroom is "Big Papi."

And in these past few weeks, as I've gotten a chance to meet many of the first responders and the police officers and volunteers who raced to help when hardship hits, I was reminded, as I'm always reminded when I meet our men and women in uniform, whether they're in war theater, or here back home, or at Walter Reed in Bethesda -- I'm reminded that all these folks, they don’t do it to be honored, they don’t do it to be celebrated. They do it because they love their families and they love their neighborhoods and they love their country.

And so, these men and women should inspire all of us in this room to live up to those same standards; to be worthy of their trust; to do our jobs with the same fidelity, and the same integrity, and the same sense of purpose, and the same love of country. Because if we're only focused on profits or ratings or polls, then we're contributing to the cynicism that so many people feel right now.

And so, those of us in this room tonight, we are incredibly lucky. And the fact is, we can do better -- all of us. Those of us in public office, those of us in the press, those who produce entertainment for our kids, those with power, those with influence -- all of us, including myself, we can strive to value those things that I suspect led most of us to do the work that we do in the first place -- because we believed in something that was true, and we believed in service, and the idea that we can have a lasting, positive impact on the lives of the people around us.

And that’s our obligation. That’s a task we should gladly embrace on behalf of all of those folks who are counting on us; on behalf of this country that’s given us so much.

So thank you all, to the White House Correspondents for the great work you do.

God bless you all.

May God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Press Conference on Syria and Sundry Topics

Good afternoon every -- or good morning, everybody. I am here to answer questions in honor of Ed Henry, as he wraps up his tenure as president of the White House Correspondents Association.

Ed, because of that, you get the first question. Congratulations.

Question: Thank you, sir, I really appreciate that. And I hope we can go back to business and being mad at each other a little bit.

President Obama: I'm not mad at you.

Question: Okay, good. Thank you, I appreciate that.

President Obama: You may be mad at me.

Question: I'm not. A couple of questions on national security. On Syria, you said that the red line was not just about chemical weapons being used but being spread, and it was a game-changer -- it seemed cut and dry. And now your administration seems to be suggesting that line is not clear. Do you risk U.S. credibility if you don't take military action?

And then on Benghazi, there are some survivors of that terror attack who say they want to come forward and testify -- some in your State Department -- and they say they’ve been blocked. Will you allow them to testify?

President Obama: Well, first of all, on Syria, I think it’s important to understand that for several years now what we've been seeing is a slowly unfolding disaster for the Syrian people. And this is not a situation in which we've been simply bystanders to what’s been happening. My policy from the beginning has been that President Assad had lost credibility, that he attacked his own people, has killed his own people, unleashed a military against innocent civilians, and that the only way to bring stability and peace to Syria is going to be for Assad to step down and to move forward on a political transition.

In pursuit of that strategy we've organized the international community. We are the largest humanitarian donor. We have worked to strengthen the opposition. We have provided nonlethal assistance to the opposition. We have applied sanctions on Syria. So there are a whole host of steps that we've been taking precisely because, even separate from the chemical weapons issue, what’s happening in Syria is a blemish on the international community generally, and we've got to make sure that we're doing everything we can to protect the Syrian people.

In that context, what I've also said is that the use of chemical weapons would be a game-changer not simply for the United States but for the international community. And the reason for that is that we have established international law and international norms that say when you use these kinds of weapons you have the potential of killing massive numbers of people in the most inhumane way possible, and the proliferation risks are so significant that we don't want that genie out of the bottle. So when I said that the use of chemical weapons would be a game-changer, that wasn’t unique to -- that wasn’t a position unique to the United States and it shouldn’t have been a surprise.

And what we now have is evidence that chemical weapons have been used inside of Syria, but we don't know how they were used, when they were used, who used them. We don't have a chain of custody that establishes what exactly happened. And when I am making decisions about America’s national security and the potential for taking additional action in response to chemical weapon use, I've got to make sure I've got the facts. That's what the American people would expect.

And if we end up rushing to judgment without hard, effective evidence, then we can find ourselves in a position where we can't mobilize the international community to support what we do. There may be objections even among some people in the region who are sympathetic with the opposition if we take action. So it’s important for us to do this in a prudent way.

And what I've said to my team is we've got to do everything we can to investigate and establish with some certainty what exactly has happened in Syria, what is happening in Syria. We will use all the assets and resources that we have at our disposal. We'll work with the neighboring countries to see whether we can establish a clear baseline of facts. And we've also called on the United Nations to investigate.

But the important point I want to make here is that we already are deeply engaged in trying to bring about a solution in Syria. It is a difficult problem. But even if chemical weapons were not being used in Syria, we’d still be thinking about tens of thousands of people, innocent civilians -- women, children -- who’ve been killed by a regime that’s more concerned about staying in power than it is about the well-being of its people. And so we are already deeply invested in trying to find a solution here.

What is true, though, is, is that if I can establish in a way that not only the United States but also the international community feel confident is the use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime, then that is a game-changer because what that portends is potentially even more devastating attacks on civilians, and it raises the strong possibility that those chemical weapons can fall into the wrong hands and get disseminated in ways that would threaten U.S. security or the security of our allies.

Question: By game-changer you mean U.S. military action?

President Obama: By game-changer I mean that we would have to rethink the range of options that are available to us. Now, we’re already, as I’ve said, invested in trying to bring about a solution inside of Syria. Obviously, there are options that are available to me that are on the shelf right now that we have not deployed. And that’s a spectrum of options. As early as last year, I asked the Pentagon, our military, our intelligence officials to prepare for me what options might be available. And I won’t go into the details of what those options might be, but clearly that would be an escalation, in our view, of the threat to the security of the international community, our allies, and the United States, and that means that there are some options that we might not otherwise exercise that we would strongly consider.

Question: And on the Benghazi portion, I know pieces of this story have been litigated, you’ve been asked about it. But there are people in your own State Department saying they’ve been blocked from coming forward, that they survived the terror attack and they want to tell their story. Will you help them come forward and just say it once and for all?

President Obama: Ed, I’m not familiar with this notion that anybody has been blocked from testifying. So what I’ll do is I will find out what exactly you’re referring to. What I’ve been very clear about from the start is that our job with respect to Benghazi has been to find out exactly what happened, to make sure that U.S. embassies not just in the Middle East but around the world are safe and secure, and to bring those who carried it out to justice. But I'll find out what exactly you're referring to.

Question: They've hired an attorney because they're saying that they've been blocked from coming forward.

President Obama: I'm not familiar with it.

Jessica.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. There's a report that your Director of National Intelligence has ordered a broad review -- this is regards to the Boston Marathon bombing -- that your DNI has ordered a broad review of all the intelligence-gathering prior to the attack. There is also a series of senators -- Susan Collins, Saxby Chambliss, Lindsey Graham -- who allege that all these years after 9/11, there still wasn't enough intelligence shared prior to the attack. And now, Lindsey Graham, who is a senior member of the Armed Services Committee, has said that Benghazi and Boston are both examples of the U.S. going backwards on national security. Is he right? And did our intelligence miss something?

President Obama: No, Mr. Graham is not right on this issue, although I'm sure generated some headlines. I think that what we saw in Boston was state, local, federal officials, every agency rallying around a city that had been attacked -- identifying the perpetrators just hours after the scene had been examined. We now have one individual deceased, one in custody. Charges have been brought.

I think that all our law enforcement officials performed in an exemplary fashion after the bombing had taken place. And we should be very proud of their work, as obviously we're proud of the people of Boston and all the first responders and the medical personnel that helped save lives.

What we also know is that the Russian intelligence services had alerted U.S. intelligence about the older brother, as well as the mother, indicating that they might be sympathizers to extremists. The FBI investigated that older brother. It's not as if the FBI did nothing. They not only investigated the older brother, they interviewed the older brother. They concluded that there were no signs that he was engaging in extremist activity. So that much we know.

And the question then is was there something that happened that triggered radicalization and an actual decision by the brother to engage in the tragic attack we actually saw in Boston, and are there additional things that could have been done in that interim that might have prevented it.

Now, what Director Clapper is doing is standard procedure around here, which is when an event like this happens we want to go back and we want to review every step that was taken. We want to leave no stone unturned. We want to see, is there, in fact, additional protocols and procedures that could be put in place that would further improve and enhance our ability to detect a potential attack? And we won't know that until that review is completed. We won't know that until the investigation of the actual crime is fully completed. And that's still ongoing.

But what I can say is that based on what I've seen so far, the FBI performed its duties, the Department of Homeland Security did what it was supposed to be doing.

But this is hard stuff. And I’ve said for quite some time that because of the pressure that we put on al Qaeda core, because of the pressure that we’ve put on these networks that are well-financed and more sophisticated and can engage in and project transnational threats against the United States, one of the dangers that we now face are self-radicalized individuals who are already here in the United States -- in some cases, may not be part of any kind of network, but because of whatever warped, twisted ideas they may have, may decide to carry out an attack. And those are in some ways more difficult to prevent.

And so what I’ve done for months now is to indicate to our entire counterterrorism team, what more can we do on that threat that is looming on the horizon? Are there more things that we can do, whether it’s engaging with communities where there’s a potential for self-radicalization of this sort? Is there work that can be done in terms of detection? But all of this has to be done in the context of our laws, due process. And so part of what Director Clapper is doing, then, is going to be to see if we can determine any lessons learned from what happened.

Question: Are you getting all the intelligence and information you need from the Russians? And should Americans be worried when they go to big, public events now?

President Obama: The Russians have been very cooperative with us since the Boston bombing. Obviously, old habits die hard; there are still suspicions sometimes between our intelligence and law enforcement agencies that date back 10, 20, 30 years, back to the Cold War. But they’re continually improving. I’ve spoken to President Putin directly. He’s committed to working with me to make sure that those who report to us are cooperating fully in not only this investigation, but how do we work on counterterrorism issues generally.

In terms of the response of the American people, I think everybody can take a cue from Boston. You don’t get a sense that anybody is intimidated when they go to Fenway Park a couple days after the bombing. There are joggers right now, I guarantee you, all throughout Boston and Cambridge and Watertown. And I think one of the things that I’ve been most proud of in watching the country’s response to the terrible tragedy there, is a sense of resilience and toughness, and we’re not going to be intimidated. We are going to live our lives.

And people, I think, understand that we’ve got to do everything we can to prevent these kinds of attacks from taking place, but people also understand -- in the same way they understand after a shooting in Aurora or Newtown or Virginia Tech, or after the foiled attempts in Times Square or in Detroit -- that we’re not going to stop living our lives because warped, twisted individuals try to intimidate us. We’re going to do what we do -- which is go to work, raise our kids, go to ball games, run in marathons. And at the same time, we’re going to make sure that everybody is cooperating and is vigilant in doing everything we can, without being naÃ¯ve, to try to prevent these attacks from happening in the future.

Jonathan Karl.

Question: Mr. President, you are a hundred days into your second term. On the gun bill, you put, it seems, everything into it to try to get it passed. Obviously, it didn’t. Congress has ignored your efforts to try to get them to undo these sequester cuts. There’s even a bill that you threatened to veto that got 92 Democrats in the House voting yes. So my question to you is do you still have the juice to get the rest of your agenda through this Congress?

President Obama: If you put it that way, Jonathan -- maybe I should just pack up and go home. Golly. I think it’s a little -- as Mark Twain said, rumors of my demise may be a little exaggerated at this point.

We understand that we’re in a divided government right now. The Republicans control the House of Representatives. In the Senate, this habit of requiring 60 votes for even the most modest piece of legislation has gummed up the works there. And I think it comes as no surprise not even to the American people, but even members of Congress themselves that right now things are pretty dysfunctional up on Capitol Hill.

Despite that, I’m actually confident that there are a range of things that we’re going to be able to get done. I feel confident that the bipartisan work that’s been done on immigration reform will result in a bill that passes the Senate, passes the House, and gets on my desk. And that’s going to be a historic achievement. And I’ve been very complimentary of the efforts of both Republicans and Democrats in those efforts.

It is true that the sequester is in place right now. It’s damaging our economy. It’s hurting our people. And we need to lift it. What’s clear is, is that the only way we’re going to lift it is if we do a bigger deal that meets the test of lowering our deficit and growing our economy at the same time. And that’s going to require some compromises on the part of both Democrats and Republicans.

I’ve had some good conversations with Republican senators so far. Those conversations are continuing. I think there’s a genuine desire on many of their parts to move past not only sequester but Washington dysfunction. Whether we can get it done or not, we’ll see.

But I think the sequester is a good example -- or this recent FAA issue is a good example. You will recall that even as recently as my campaign, Republicans we’re saying, sequester is terrible, this is a disaster, it’s going to ruin our military, it’s going to be disastrous for the economy -- we've got to do something about it. Then, when it was determined that doing something about it might mean that we close some tax loopholes for the wealthy and the well-connected, suddenly, well, you know what, we’ll take the sequester. And the notion was somehow that we had exaggerated the effects of the sequester -- remember? The President is crying wolf. He’s Chicken Little. The sequester -- no problem.

And then in rapid succession, suddenly White House tours -- this is terrible! How can we let that happen? Meat inspectors -- we’ve got to fix that. And, most recently, what are we going to do about potential delays at airports?

So despite the fact that a lot of members of Congress were suggesting that somehow the sequester was a victory for them and this wouldn’t hurt the economy, what we now know is what I warned earlier, what Jay stood up here and warned repeatedly, is happening. It’s slowed our growth. It’s resulting in people being thrown out of work. And it’s hurting folks all across the country.

And the fact that Congress responded to the short-term problem of flight delays by giving us the option of shifting money that’s designed to repair and improve airports over the long term to fix the short-term problem -- well, that’s not a solution. And essentially what we’ve done is we’ve said, in order to avoid delays this summer, we’re going to ensure delays for the next two or three decades.

Question: Why’d you go along with it?

President Obama: Hold on a second. So the alternative, of course, is either to go ahead and impose a whole bunch of delays on passengers now -- which also does not fix the problem -- or the third alternative is to actually fix the problem by coming up with a broader, larger deal.

But, Jonathon, you seem to suggest that somehow these folks over there have no responsibilities and that my job is to somehow get them to behave. That’s their job. They’re elected -- members of Congress are elected in order to do what’s right for their constituencies and for the American people.

So if, in fact, they are seriously concerned about passenger convenience and safety, then they shouldn’t just be thinking about tomorrow or next week or the week after that; they should be thinking about what’s going to happen five years from now, 10 years from now, or 15 years from now. The only way to do that is for them to engage with me on coming up with a broader deal. And that’s exactly what I’m trying to do -- is to continue to talk to them about are there ways for us to fix this.

Frankly, I don’t think that if I were to veto, for example, this FAA bill, that that somehow would lead to the broader fix. It just means that there would be pain now, which they would try to blame on me, as opposed to pain five years from now. But either way, the problem is not getting fixed.

The only way the problem does get fixed is if both parties sit down and they say: How are we going to make sure that we're reducing our deficit sensibly? How are we making sure that we're investing in things like rebuilding our airports and our roads and our bridges, and investing in early childhood education, basic research -- all the things that are going to help us grow? And that's what the American people want.

Just one interesting statistic when it comes to airports. There was a recent survey of the top airports in the country -- in the world, and there was not a single U.S. airport that came in the top 25. Not one. Not one U.S. airport was considered by the experts and consumers who use these airports to be in the top 25 in the world. I think Cincinnati Airport came in around 30th.

What does that say about our long-term competitiveness and future? And so when folks say, well, there was some money in the FAA to deal with these furloughs -- well, yeah, the money is this pool of funds that are supposed to try to upgrade our airports so we don't rank in the bottom of industrialized countries when it comes to our infrastructure.

And that's what we're doing -- we're using our seed corn short term. And the only reason we're doing it is because right now we've got folks who are unwilling to make some simple changes to our tax code, for example, to close loopholes that aren't adding to our competitiveness and aren't helping middle-class families.

So that's a long way of answering your question, but the point is that there are common-sense solutions to our problems right now. I cannot force Republicans to embrace those common-sense solutions. I can urge them to. I can put pressure on them. I can rally the American people around those common-sense solutions. But ultimately, they, themselves, are going to have to say, we want to do the right thing.

And I think there are members certainly in the Senate right now, and I suspect members in the House as well, who understand that deep down. But they're worried about their politics. It’s tough. Their base thinks that compromise with me is somehow a betrayal. They’re worried about primaries. And I understand all that. And we're going to try to do everything we can to create a permission structure for them to be able to do what’s going to be best for the country. But it’s going to take some time.

Bill Plante.

Question: Mr. President, as you’re probably aware, there’s a growing hunger strike on Guantanamo Bay among prisoners there. Is it any surprise really that they would prefer death rather than have no end in sight to their confinement?

President Obama: Well, it is not a surprise to me that we've got problems in Guantanamo, which is why when I was campaigning in 2007 and 2008, and when I was elected in 2008, I said we need to close Guantanamo. I continue to believe that we've got to close Guantanamo.

Question: -- can do it?

President Obama: Well, I think it is critical for us to understand that Guantanamo is not necessary to keep America safe. It is expensive. It is inefficient. It hurts us in terms of our international standing. It lessens cooperation with our allies on counterterrorism efforts. It is a recruitment tool for extremists. It needs to be closed.

Now, Congress determined that they would not let us close it -- and despite the fact that there are a number of the folks who are currently in Guantanamo who the courts have said could be returned to their country of origin or potentially a third country.

I'm going to go back at this. I've asked my team to review everything that's currently being done in Guantanamo, everything that we can do administratively. And I'm going to reengage with Congress to try to make the case that this is not something that's in the best interest of the American people. And it's not sustainable.

The notion that we're going to continue to keep over a hundred individuals in a no-man's land in perpetuity, even at a time when we've wound down the war in Iraq, we're winding down the war in Afghanistan, we're having success defeating al Qaeda core, we've kept the pressure up on all these transnational terrorist networks, when we've transferred detention authority in Afghanistan -- the idea that we would still maintain forever a group of individuals who have not been tried, that is contrary to who we are, it is contrary to our interests, and it needs to stop.

Now, it's a hard case to make because I think for a lot of Americans the notion is out of sight, out of mind. And it's easy to demagogue the issue. That's what happened the first time this came up. I'm going to go back at it because I think it's important.

Question: Meanwhile we continue to force-feed these folks --

President Obama: I don't want these individuals to die. Obviously, the Pentagon is trying to manage the situation as best as they can. But I think all of us should reflect on why exactly are we doing this? Why are we doing this? We've got a whole bunch of individuals who have been tried who are currently in maximum security prisons around the country. Nothing has happened to them. Justice has been served. It's been done in a way that's consistent with our Constitution, consistent with due process, consistent with rule of law, consistent with our traditions.

The individual who attempted to bomb Times Square -- in prison, serving a life sentence. The individual who tried to bomb a plane in Detroit -- in prison, serving a life sentence. A Somali who was part of Al-Shabaab, who we captured -- in prison. So we can handle this.

And I understand that in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, with the traumas that had taken place, why, for a lot of Americans, the notion was somehow that we had to create a special facility like Guantanamo and we couldn’t handle this in a normal, conventional fashion. I understand that reaction. But we’re now over a decade out. We should be wiser. We should have more experience in how we prosecute terrorists.

And this is a lingering problem that is not going to get better. It’s going to get worse. It’s going to fester. And so I’m going to, as I said before, examine every option that we have administratively to try to deal with this issue, but ultimately we’re also going to need some help from Congress, and I’m going to ask some folks over there who care about fighting terrorism but also care about who we are as a people to step up and help me on it.

Chuck Todd.

Question: Mr. President, thank you. Max Baucus, Democratic Senator, referred to the implementation as your health care law as a potential train wreck. And other Democrats have been whispering nervousness about the implementation and the impact -- and it’s all self-centered a little bit -- the impact that it might have on their own political campaigns in 2014. Why do you think -- just curious -- why does Senator Baucus, somebody who ostensibly helped write your bill, believe that this is going to be a train wreck? And why do you believe he’s wrong?

President Obama: Well, I think that any time you’re implementing something big, there’s going to be people who are nervous and anxious about is it going to get done, until it’s actually done.

But let’s just step back for a second and make sure the American people understand what it is that we’re doing. The Affordable Care Act -- Obamacare -- has now been with us for three years. It’s gone through Supreme Court tests. It’s gone through efforts to repeal. A huge chunk of it has already been implemented. And for the 85 to 90 percent of Americans who already have health insurance, they’re already experiencing most of the benefits of the Affordable Care Act even if they don’t know it. Their insurance is more secure. Insurance companies can’t drop them for bad reasons. Their kids are able to stay on their health insurance until they’re 26 years old. They’re getting free preventive care.

So there are a whole host of benefits that, for the average American out there, for the 85 to 90 percent of Americans who already have health insurance, this thing has already happened. And their only impact is that their insurance is stronger, better, more secure than it was before. Full stop. That’s it. They don’t have to worry about anything else.

The implementation issues come in for those who don’t have health insurance -- maybe because they have a preexisting condition and the only way they can get health insurance is to go out on the individual market, and they’re paying 50 percent or 100 percent more than those of us who are lucky enough to have group plans; people who are too poor to get health insurance and the employers don’t offer them. Maybe they work for a small business and this small business can’t afford right now to provide health insurance.

So all the implementation issues that are coming up are implementation issues related to that small group of people, 10 to 15 percent of Americans -- now, it’s still 30 million Americans, but a relatively narrow group -- who don’t have health insurance right now, or are on the individual market and are paying exorbitant amounts for coverage that isn’t that great.

And what we’re doing is we’re setting up a pool so that they can all pool together and get a better deal from insurance companies. And those who can’t afford it, we’re going to provide them with some subsidies. That’s it. I mean, that’s what’s left to implement, because the other stuff has been implemented and it’s working fine.

The challenge is that setting up a market-based system, basically an online marketplace where you can go on and sign up and figure out what kind of insurance you can afford and figuring out how to get the subsidies -- that’s still a big, complicated piece of business. And when you’re doing it nationwide, relatively fast, and you’ve got half of Congress who is determined to try to block implementation and not adequately funding implementation, and then you’ve got a number of members of -- or governors -- Republican governors -- who know that it’s bad politics for them to try to implement this effectively, and some even who have decided to implement it and then their Republican-controlled state legislatures say, don’t implement, and won’t pass enabling legislation -- when you have that kind of situation, that makes it harder.

But having said all that, we’ve got a great team in place. We are pushing very hard to make sure that we’re hitting all the deadlines and the benchmarks. I’ll give you an example, a recent example. We put together, initially, an application form for signing up for participation in the exchanges that was initially about 21 pages long, and immediately everybody sat around the table and said, well, this is too long. Especially in this age of the Internet, people aren’t going to have the patience to sit there for hours on end. Let’s streamline this thing. So we cut what was a 21-page form now down to a form that’s about three pages for an individual, a little more than that for a family -- well below the industry average. So those kinds of refinements we’re going to continue to be working on.

But I think the main message I want to give to the American people here is, despite all the hue and cry and “sky is falling” predictions about this stuff, if you’ve already got health insurance, then that part of Obamacare that affects you, it’s pretty much already in place. And that’s about 85 percent of the country.

What is left to be implemented is those provisions to help the 10 to 15 percent of the American public that is unlucky enough that they don’t have health insurance. And by the way, some of you who have health insurance right now, at some point you may lose your health insurance, and if you’ve got a preexisting condition, this structure will make sure that you are not left vulnerable.

But it’s still a big undertaking. And what we’re doing is making sure that every single day we are constantly trying to hit our marks so that it will be in place.

And the last point I’ll make -- even if we do everything perfectly, there will still be glitches and bumps, and there will be stories that can be written that say, oh, look, this thing is not working the way it’s supposed to, and this happened and that happened. And that’s pretty much true of every government program that’s ever been set up. But if we stay with it and we understand what our long-term objective is -- which is making sure that in a country as wealthy as ours, nobody should go bankrupt if they get sick, and that we would rather have people getting regular checkups than going to the emergency room because they don’t have health care -- if we keep that in mind, then we’re going to be able to drive down costs; we’re going to be able to improve efficiencies in the system; we’re going to be able to see people benefit from better health care. And that will save the country money as a whole over the long term.

Question: Do you believe, without the cooperation of a handful of governors, particularly large states like Florida and Texas, that you can fully implement this?

President Obama:: I think it’s harder. There’s no doubt about it.

Question: But can you do it without them?

President Obama: We will implement it. There will be -- we have a backup federal exchange. If states aren’t cooperating, we set up a federal exchange so that people can access that federal exchange. But, yes, it puts more of a burden on us. And it’s ironic, since all these folks say that they believe in empowering states, that they’re going to end up having the federal government do something that we’d actually prefer states to do if they were properly cooperating. Let’s see how we’re doing on time here. Last question. Antonieta Cadiz -- where’s Antonieta? There you are. Tell those big guys to get out of your way.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Two questions. There are concerns about how the immigration bill from the House has complicated chances for immigration reform in the Senate. It seems to be a more conservative proposal. Is there room for a more conservative proposal than the one presented in the Senate? That’s immigration.

Second, on Mexico -- yesterday, the Mexican government said all contact with the U.S. law enforcement will now go through a single door, the Federal Interior Ministry. Is this change good for the U.S. relationship with Mexico? Do you think the level of security and cooperation can be maintained?

President Obama: On immigration reform, I’ve been impressed by the work that was done by the Gang of Eight in the Senate. The bill that they produced is not the bill that I would have written, there are elements of it that I would change, but I do think that it meets the basic criteria that I laid out from the start, which is: We’ve got to have more effective border security -- although it should build on the great improvements that have been made on border security over the last four to five years. We should make sure that we are cracking down on employers that are gaming the system. We should make the legal immigration system work more effectively so that the waits are not as burdensome, the bureaucracy is not as complicated, so that we can continue to attract the best and the brightest from around the world to our shores in a legal fashion. And we want to make sure that we’ve got a pathway to citizenship that is tough, but allows people to earn over time their legal status here in this country.

And the Senate bill meets those criteria -- in some cases not in the way that I would, but it meets those basic criteria. And I think it’s a testament to the senators that were involved that they made some tough choices and made some tough compromises in order to hammer out that bill.

Now, I haven’t seen what members of the House are yet proposing. And maybe they think that they can answer some of those questions differently or better. And I think we’ve got to be open-minded in seeing what they come up with. The bottom line, though, is, is that they’ve still got to meet those basic criteria: Is it making the border safer? Is it dealing with employers in how they work with the government to make sure that people are not being taken advantage of, or taking advantage of the system? Are we improving our legal immigration system? And are we creating a pathway for citizenship for the 11 million or so who are undocumented in this country?

And if they meet those criteria but they’re slightly different than the Senate bill, then I think that we should be able to come up with an appropriate compromise. If it doesn’t meet those criteria, then I will not support such a bill. So we’ll have to wait and see.

When it comes to Mexico, I’m very much looking forward to taking the trip down to Mexico to see the new President, PeÃ±a Nieto. I had a chance to meet him here, but this will be the first, more extensive consultations and it will be an opportunity for his ministers, my Cabinet members who are participating to really hammer out some of these issues.

A lot of the focus is going to be on economics. We’ve spent so much time on security issues between the United States and Mexico that sometimes I think we forget this is a massive trading partner responsible for huge amounts of commerce and huge numbers of jobs on both sides of the border. We want to see how we can deepen that, how we can improve that and maintain that economic dialogue over a long period of time.

That doesn’t mean that we’re not going to be talking about security. I think that in my first conversation with the President, he indicated to me that he very much continues to be concerned about how we can work together to deal with transnational drug cartels. We’ve made great strides in the coordination and cooperation between our two governments over the last several years. But my suspicion is, is that things can be improved.

And some of the issues that he’s talking about really had to do with refinements and improvements in terms of how Mexican authorities work with each other, how they coordinate more effectively, and it has less to do with how they're dealing with us, per se. So I’m not going to yet judge how this will alter the relationship between the United States and Mexico until I’ve heard directly from them to see what exactly are they trying to accomplish.

But, overall, what I can say is that my impression is, is that the new President is serious about reform. He’s already made some tough decisions. I think he’s going to make more that will improve the economy and security of Mexican citizens, and that will improve the bilateral relationship as well.

And I don't want to leave out that we’re also going to be talking to, during my visit to Costa Rica, Presidents of Central American countries, many of whom are struggling with both economic issues and security issues, but are important partners for us -- because I think that the vision here is that we want to make sure that our hemisphere is more effectively integrated to improve the economy and security of all people. That's good for the United States. That will enhance our economy. That can improve our energy independence.

There are a whole range of opportunities, and that's going to be the purpose of this trip. And I’m sure that those of you who will have the chance to travel with me we’ll have a chance to discuss this further.

All right? Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you, guys.

Question: Jason Collins? Do you want to say anything about it?

President Obama: Yes, I’ll say something about Jason Collins. I had a chance to talk to him yesterday. He seems like a terrific young man. And I told him I couldn’t be prouder of him. One of the extraordinary measures of progress that we’ve seen in this country has been the recognition that the LGBT community deserves full equality -- not just partial equality, not just tolerance, but a recognition that they're fully a part of the American family.

And given the importance of sports in our society, for an individual who has excelled at the highest levels in one of the major sports to go ahead and say, this is who I am, I’m proud of it, I’m still a great competitor, I’m still seven foot tall and can bang with Shaq -- and deliver a hard foul -- and for I think a lot of young people out there who are gay or lesbian who are struggling with these issues, to see a role model like that who is unafraid, I think it’s a great thing.

And I think America should be proud that this is just one more step in this ongoing recognition that we treat everybody fairly, and everybody is part of a family, and we judge people on the basis of their character and their performance and not their sexual orientation. So I’m very proud of him.

All right?

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# Address to the People of Mexico

Hola! Buenos dias! Please, please, everybody have a seat. It is wonderful to be back in MÃ©xico -- lindo y querido ["lovely and beloved"]. I bring with me the greetings and friendship of the people of the United States, including tens of millions of proud Mexican Americans.

This is my fourth visit to Mexico as President. This is my second visit to this museum. And each time that I've come I’ve been inspired by your culture and by the beauty of this land, and most of all, by the Mexican people. You’ve been so kind and gracious to me. You’ve welcomed my wife, Michelle, here. You’ve welcomed our daughter, Malia, and her classmates to Oaxaca. And as a proud father, I have to say that Malia’s Spanish is getting very good. It helps that she’s smarter than I am. And it’s an honor to be back in Mexico City -- one of the world’s great cities. Es un placer estar entre amigos. ["It's a pleasure to be among friends."]

And it’s fitting that we gather at this great museum, which celebrates Mexico’s ancient civilizations and their achievements in arts and architecture, medicine and mathematics. In modern times, Mexico’s blend of cultures and traditions found its expression in the murals of Rivera and the paintings of Frida, and the poetry of Sor Juana and the essays of Octavio Paz. And Paz once spoke words that capture the spirit of our gathering here today -- in this place that celebrates your past, but which this morning is filled with so many young people who will shape Mexico’s future. Octavio Paz said,

Modernity is not outside us, it is within us. It is today and the most ancient antiquity; it is tomorrow and the beginning of the world; it is a thousand years old and yet newborn.

And that’s why I wanted this opportunity to speak with all of you today, because you live at the intersection of history that Octavio Paz was referring to. The young people of Mexico, you honor your heritage, thousands of years old, but you’re also part of something new, a nation that’s in the process of remaking itself. And as our modern world changes around us, it’s the spirit of young people, your optimism and your idealism, and your willingness to discard old habits that are no longer working that will drive the world forward. You see the difference between the world as it is and the world as it could to be; between old attitudes that stifle progress and the new thinking that allows us to connect and collaborate across cultures. And by the way, that includes how we think about the relationship between Mexico and the United States. Despite all the bonds and the values that we share, despite all the people who claim heritage on both sides, our attitudes sometimes are trapped in old stereotypes. Some Americans only see the Mexico that is depicted in sensational headlines of violence and border crossings. And let’s admit it, some Mexicans think that America disrespects Mexico, or thinks that America is trying to impose itself on Mexican sovereignty, or just wants to wall ourselves off. And in both countries such distortions create misunderstandings that make it harder for us to move forward together. So I've come to Mexico because I think it’s time for us to put the old mind-sets aside. It’s time to recognize new realities -- including the impressive progress of today’s Mexico.

It is true that there are Mexicans all across this country who are making courageous sacrifices for the security of your country; that in the countryside and the neighborhoods not far from here, there are those who are still struggling to give their children a better life. But what’s also clear is that a new Mexico is emerging.

I see it in the deepening of Mexico’s democracy, citizens who are standing up and saying that violence and impunity is not acceptable; a courageous press that’s working to hold leaders accountable; a robust civil society, including brave defenders of human rights who demand dignity and rule of law. You have political parties that are competing vigorously, but also transferring power peacefully, and forging compromise. And that's all a sign of the extraordinary progress that's taken place here in Mexico.

And even though we know the work of perfecting democracy is never finished -- that's true in America, that's true here in Mexico -- you go forward knowing the truth that Benito Juarez once spoke -- “democracy is the destiny of humanity.” And we are seeing that here in Mexico. We're seeing that here in Mexico. We're also seeing a Mexico that’s creating new prosperity: Trading with the world. Becoming a manufacturing powerhouse -- from Tijuana to Monterrey to Guadalajara and across the central highlands -- a global leader in automobiles and appliances and electronics, but also a center of high-tech innovation, producing the software and the hardware of our digital age. One man in QuerÃ©taro spoke for an increasing number of Mexicans. “There’s no reason to go abroad in search of a better life. There are good opportunities here.” That's what he said, and you are an example of that. And, in fact, I see a Mexico that’s lifted millions of people from poverty. Because of the sacrifices of generations, a majority of Mexicans now call themselves middle class, with a quality of life that your parents and grandparents could only dream of. This includes, by the way, opportunities for women, who are proving that when you give women a chance, they will shape our destiny just as well as men, if not better.

I also see in Mexico’s youth an empowered generation because of technology. I think I see some of you tweeting right now -- what’s happening. And whether it’s harnessing social media to preserve indigenous languages, or speaking up for the future that you want, you’re making it clear that you want your voice heard.

And because of all the dynamic progress that's taking place here in Mexico, Mexico is also taking its rightful place in the world, on the world stage. Mexico is standing up for democracy not just here in Mexico but throughout the hemisphere. Mexico is sharing expertise with neighbors across the Americas. When they face earthquakes or threats to their citizens, or go to the polls to cast their votes, Mexico is there, helping its neighbors. Mexico has joined the ranks of the world’s largest economies. It became the first Latin American nation to host the G20. Just as Mexico is being transformed, so are the ties between our two countries. As President, I’ve been guided by a basic proposition -- in this relationship there’s no senior partner or junior partner; we are two equal partners, two sovereign nations. We must work together in mutual interest and mutual respect. And if we do that both Mexico and the United States will prosper.

And just as I worked with President CalderÃ³n, I’ve reaffirmed with President PeÃ±a Nieto that the great partnership between our two countries will not simply continue, it’s going to grow stronger and become broader. In my time with President PeÃ±a Nieto, I’ve come to see his deep commitment to Mexico and its future. And we share the belief that as leaders our guiding mission is to improve the lives of our people. And so we agree that the relationship between our nations must be defined not by the threats that we face but by the prosperity and the opportunity that we can create together.

Now, as equal partners, both our nations must recognize our mutual responsibilities. So here in Mexico, you’ve embarked on an ambitious reform agenda to make your economy more competitive and your institutions more accountable to you, the Mexican people. As you pursue these reforms, I want you to know that you have strong support in the United States. Because we believe, I believe, that people all around the world deserve the best from their government. And whether you’re looking for basic services, or trying to start a new business, we share your belief that you should be able to make it through your day without paying a bribe. And when talented Mexicans like you imagine your future, you should have every opportunity to succeed right here in the country you love. And in the United States, we recognize our responsibilities. We understand that much of the root cause of violence that's been happening here in Mexico, for which many so Mexicans have suffered, is the demand for illegal drugs in the United States. And so we’ve got to continue to make progress on that front.

I’ve been asked, and I honestly do not believe that legalizing drugs is the answer. But I do believe that a comprehensive approach -- not just law enforcement, but education and prevention and treatment -- that's what we have to do. And we’re going to stay at it because the lives of our children and the future of our nations depend on it. And we also recognize that most of the guns used to commit violence here in Mexico come from the United States. I think many of you know that in America, our Constitution guarantees our individual right to bear arms, and as President I swore an oath to uphold that right and I always will. But at the same time, as I’ve said in the United States, I will continue to do everything in my power to pass common-sense reforms that keep guns out of the hands of criminals and dangerous people. That can save lives here in Mexico and back home in the United States. It’s the right thing to do. So we’ll keep increasing the pressure on gun traffickers who bring illegal guns into Mexico. We’ll keep putting these criminals where they belong -- behind bars.

We recognize we’ve got work to do on security issues, but we also recognize our responsibility -- as a nation that believes that all people are created equal -- we believe it’s our responsibility to make sure that we treat one another with dignity and respect. And this includes recognizing how the United States has been strengthened by the extraordinary contributions of immigrants from Mexico and by Americans of Mexican heritage.

Mexican Americans enrich our communities, including my hometown of Chicago, where you can walk through neighborhoods like Pilsen, Little Village -- La Villita -- dotted with murals of Mexican patriots. You can stop at a fonda, you can hear some mariachis, where we are inspired by the deep faith of our peoples at churches like Our Lady of Guadalupe. We’ve got a Chicagoan in here somewhere.

And we’re so grateful to Mexican Americans in every segment of our society -- for teaching our children, and running our companies, and serving with honor in our military, and making breakthroughs in science, standing up for social justice. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. told Cesar Chavez once, we are “brothers in the fight for equality.”

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And, in fact, without the strong support of Latinos, including so many Mexican Americans, I would not be standing today as President of the United States. That's the truth. And so given that is Americas heritage, given that we share a border with Mexico, given ties that run back generations, it is critical that the United States recognize the need to reform our immigration system -- because we are a nation of laws, but we're also a nation of immigrants. Like every nation we have a responsibility to ensure that our laws are upheld. But we also know that, as a nation of immigrants, the immigration system we have in the United States right now doesn’t reflect our values. It separates families when we should be reuniting them. It’s led to millions of people to live in the shadows. It deprives us of the talents of so many young people -- even though we know that immigrants have always been the engine of our economy, starting some of our greatest companies and pioneering new industries. That’s one of the reasons I acted to lift the shadow of deportation from what we call the DREAMers -- young people brought to the United States as children. And that’s why I’m working with our Congress to pass common-sense immigration reform this year. I'm convinced we can get it done. Reform that continues to strengthen border security and strengthen legal immigration, so citizens don’t have to wait years to bring their families to the United States. Reform that holds everyone accountable -- so immigrants get on the right side of the law and so immigrants are not exploited and abused. And most of all, reform that gives millions of undocumented individuals a pathway to earn their citizenship. And I’m optimistic that -- after years of trying -- we are going to get it done this year. I'm absolutely convinced of it.

Obviously, we’re going to have to work with the Mexican government to make sure that we've got a well-regulated border. But I also want to work with the Mexican government because I believe that the long-term solution to the challenge of illegal immigration is a growing and prosperous Mexico that creates more jobs and opportunities for young people here. I agree with the Mexican student who said, “I feel like we can reach the same level as anyone in the world.” That's absolutely true. And so I firmly believe -- juntos, podemos lograr mÃ¡s -- "together, we can achieve more." So with the remainder of my time today, I want to focus on five areas where we can do more. Number one, let’s do more to expand trade and commerce that creates good jobs for our people. We already buy more of your exports than any country in the world. We sell more of our exports to Mexico than we do to Brazil, Russia, India and China combined. Mexican companies are investing more in the United States, and we’re the largest foreign investor in Mexico -- because we believe in Mexico and want to be a partner in your success. So guided by the new economic dialogue that President PeÃ±a Nieto and I announced yesterday, let’s do more to unlock the true potential of our relationship. Let’s keep investing in our roads and our bridges and our border crossings so we can trade faster and cheaper. Let’s help our smaller businesses, which employ most of our workers, access new markets and new capital -- the big markets right across the border. Let’s empower our young entrepreneurs as they create startup companies that can transform how we live. And let’s realize the Trans-Pacific Partnership this year, so our two nations can compete and win in the fast-growing markets of the Asia Pacific. If the United States and Mexico are working together, we can sell a whole lot of things on the other side of the Pacific Ocean where the fastest-growing economies are taking off right now. That's number one. Number two, let’s not just sell more things to each other, let’s build more things together. With many of our companies operating in both countries, parts are now being shipped back and forth across the border as they’re assembled. So every day, U.S. and Mexican workers are building things together -- whether it’s crafts -- or whether it’s cars, or aircraft, or computers, or satellites. I think this is only the beginning. Given the skills of our workers, it makes even more sense for companies around the world to set up shop in the United States and set up shop in Mexico. And as Mexico reforms, we’re going to be able to do more business together and sell more goods around the world. And the more that our companies collaborate, the more competitive they’ll be. And the entire hemisphere will benefit because of those links and chains that have been created between our two countries.

Number three, as we secure our economic future, let’s secure our energy future, including the clean energy that we need to combat climate change. Our nations are blessed with boundless natural beauty -- from our coastlines and farmlands to your tropical forests. But climate change is happening. The science is undeniable. And so is the fact that our economies must become greener. In the United States, we’ve made historic commitments to clean and renewable energy like solar and wind power. We've made a commitment to reduce the emissions of harmful carbon pollution. And here in Mexico, you’re a leader in cutting carbon emissions and helping developing countries do the same. So, together, let’s keep building new energy partnerships by harnessing all these new sources, and, by the way, creating the good jobs that come with these new technologies. And let’s keep investing in green buildings and technologies that make our entire economy more efficient, but also make our planet cleaner and safer for future generations.

Number four -- and this is part of staying competitive -- let’s do more together in education so our young people have the knowledge and skills to succeed. Here in Mexico you’ve made important progress, with more children staying in school longer, and record numbers of students like you getting a university education. Just imagine how much the students of our two countries could do together, how much we could learn from each other.

And that’s why President PeÃ±a Nieto and I announced a new partnership in higher education -- to encourage more collaboration between our universities and our university students. We’re going to focus on science and technology, on engineering and mathematics. And this is part of my broader initiative called 100,000 Strong in the Americas. We want 100,000 students from the United States studying in Latin America, including Mexico. And we want 100,000 Latin American students, including Mexican students, to come to study in the United States of America. Because when we study together, and we learn together, we work together, and we prosper together -- that's what I believe.

And finally, to help spark prosperity in both out countries, let’s truly invest in innovation, and research and development together. Here in Mexico, you’re now a global leader in graduating engineers and technicians. One of Mexico’s leading scientists, Rafael Navarro-GonzÃ¡lez, is helping analyze data from the rover that we landed on Mars. So, together, let’s remember that every dollar, every peso that we invest in research and development returns so much more to our economies in jobs and opportunity, new products, new services. That's why I'm calling for us to forge new partnerships in aerospace, and IT, and nanotechnology and biotechnology and robotics. Let’s answer the hope of a young woman -- a student at the National Polytechnic Institute -- who spoke for many in your generation, so eager to make your mark. She said, “Give us jobs as creators.” Give us jobs as creators.

Sometimes young people are known as just consumers of goods, but we want young people creating the new products, the next big thing that will change how we live our lives. That's the agenda that I want to pursue.

And I understand that there are those both here in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America, but also back home in the United States, who are skeptical of your progress, who maybe doubt the capacity for us to make the most of this moment. There are always cynics who say, aw, this is too hard, the headwinds you face are too stiff. They say Mexico has been here before we look like we're making progress, we're looking at a bright horizon, on the verge of great possibility, but then we get blown off course.

And it’s true that nothing is inevitable. Progress and success is never guaranteed. The future that you dream of, the Mexico you imagine -- it must be built, it must be earned. Nobody else can do it for you. Only you can earn it. You are the future. As Nervo wrote in “La Raza de Bronce,” tu eres el sueÃ±o -- you are the dream.

For just as it was patriots who answered the call when Father Hidalgo rang the church bell two centuries ago, you -- your lives, in a free Mexico -- are the dream that they imagined. And now it falls to you to keep alive those virtues for which so many generations of Mexicans struggled. You are the dream that can stand up for justice and human rights and human dignity, here at home and around the world. You’re the creators and the builders and the climbers and the strivers who can deliver progress and prosperity that will lift up not just the Mexican people for generations to come, but the entire world. You’re the men and women who will push this nation upwards as Mexico assumes its rightful place, as you proudly sing: “in heaven your eternal destiny was written by the finger of God.” You are the dream. This is your moment. And as you reach for the future, always remember that you have the greatest of partners, the greatest if friends -- the nation that is rooting for your success more than anybody else -- your neighbor, the United States of America.

Viva MÃ©xico! Viva los Estados Unidos! Que Dios los bendiga! Thank you very much.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Remarks on IG Audit of IRS

Good afternoon, everybody. I just finished speaking with Secretary Lew and senior officials at the Treasury Department to discuss the investigation into IRS personnel who improperly screened conservative groups applying for tax-exempt status. And I look forward to taking some questions at tomorrow’s press conference; but today I wanted to make sure to get out to all of you some information about what we’re doing about this, and where we go from here.

I’ve reviewed the Treasury Department watchdog’s report, and the misconduct that it uncovered is inexcusable. It’s inexcusable and Americans are right to be angry about it, and I am angry about it. I will not tolerate this kind of behavior in any agency, but especially in the IRS, given the power that it has and the reach that it has into all of our lives. And as I said earlier, it should not matter what political stripe you’re from; the fact of the matter is, is that the IRS has to operate with absolute integrity. The government generally has to conduct itself in a way that is true to the public trust. That’s especially true for the IRS.

So here’s what we’re going to do. First, we’re going to hold the responsible parties accountable. Yesterday I directed Secretary Lew to follow up on the IG audit to see how this happened and who is responsible, and to make sure that we understand all the facts. Today, Secretary Lew took the first step by requesting and accepting the resignation of the acting commissioner of the IRS, because given the controversy surrounding this audit, it’s important to institute new leadership that can help restore confidence going forward.

Second, we’re going to put in place new safeguards to make sure this kind of behavior cannot happen again. And I’ve directed Secretary Lew to ensure the IRS begins implementing the IG's recommendations right away.

Third, we will work with Congress as it performs its oversight role. And our Administration has to make sure that we are working hand in hand with Congress to get this thing fixed. Congress, Democrats, and Republicans owe it to the American people to treat that authority with the responsibility it deserves and in a way that doesn’t smack of politics or partisan agendas -- because I think one thing that you’ve seen is, across the board, everybody believes what happened in...as reported in the IG report is an outrage. The good news is it’s fixable; and it’s in everyone’s best interest to work together to fix it.

I’ll do everything in my power to make sure nothing like this happens again by holding the responsible parties accountable, by putting in place new checks and new safeguards, and going forward, by making sure that the law is applied as it should be -- in a fair and impartial way. And we’re going to have to make sure that the laws are clear so that we can have confidence that they are enforced in a fair and impartial way, and that there is not too much ambiguity surrounding these laws.

So that’s what I expect. That’s what the American people deserve. And that’s what we’re going to do.

Thank you very much.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Morehouse College Commencement Address

President Obama: Hello, Morehouse! Thank you, everybody. Please be seated.

Audience Member: I love you!

President Obama: I love you back. That is why I am here.

I have to say that it is one of the great honors of my life to be able to address this gathering here today. I want to thank Dr. Wilson for his outstanding leadership, and the Board of Trustees. We have Congressman Cedric Richmond and Sanford Bishop -- both proud alumni of this school, as well as Congressman Hank Johnson. And one of my dear friends and a great inspiration to us all -- the great John Lewis is here. We have your outstanding Mayor, Mr. Kasim Reed, in the house.

To all the members of the Morehouse family. And most of all, congratulations to this distinguished group of Morehouse Men -- the Class of 2013.

I have to say that it’s a little hard to follow -- not Dr. Wilson, but a skinny guy with a funny name. Betsegaw Tadele -- he’s going to be doing something.

I also have to say that you all are going to get wet. And I'd be out there with you if I could. But Secret Service gets nervous. So I'm going to have to stay here, dry. But know that I'm there with you in spirit.

Some of you are graduating summa cum laude. Some of you are graduating magna cum laude. I know some of you are just graduating, “thank you, Lordy.” That's appropriate because it’s a Sunday.

I see some moms and grandmas here, aunts, in their Sunday best -- although they are upset about their hair getting messed up. Michelle would not be sitting in the rain. She has taught me about hair.

I want to congratulate all of you -- the parents, the grandparents, the brothers and sisters, the family and friends who supported these young men in so many ways. This is your day, as well. Just think about it -- your sons, your brothers, your nephews -- they spent the last four years far from home and close to Spelman, and yet they are still here today. So you’ve done something right. Graduates, give a big round of applause to your family for everything that they’ve done for you.

I know that some of you had to wait in long lines to get into today’s ceremony. And I would apologize, but it did not have anything to do with security. Those graduates just wanted you to know what it’s like to register for classes here. And this time of year brings a different kind of stress -- every senior stopping by Gloster Hall over the past week making sure your name was actually on the list of students who met all the graduation requirements. If it wasn't on the list, you had to figure out why. Was it that library book you lent to that trifling roommate who didn’t return it? Was it Dr. Johnson’s policy class? Did you get enough Crown Forum credits?

On that last point, I’m going to exercise my power as President to declare this speech sufficient Crown Forum credits for any otherwise eligible student to graduate. That is my graduation gift to you. You have a special dispensation.

Now, graduates, I am humbled to stand here with all of you as an honorary Morehouse Man. I finally made it. And as I do, I’m mindful of an old saying: “You can always tell a Morehouse Man -- but you can’t tell him much.” And that makes my task a little more difficult, I suppose. But I think it also reflects the sense of pride that’s always been part of this school’s tradition.

Benjamin Mays, who served as the president of Morehouse for almost 30 years, understood that tradition better than anybody. He said -- and I quote -- “It will not be sufficient for Morehouse College, for any college, for that matter, to produce clever graduates… but rather honest men, men who can be trusted in public and private life -- men who are sensitive to the wrongs, the sufferings, and the injustices of society and who are willing to accept responsibility for correcting [those] ills.”

It was that mission -- not just to educate men, but to cultivate good men, strong men, upright men -- that brought community leaders together just two years after the end of the Civil War. They assembled a list of 37 men, free blacks and freed slaves, who would make up the first prospective class of what later became Morehouse College. Most of those first students had a desire to become teachers and preachers -- to better themselves so they could help others do the same.

A century and a half later, times have changed. But the “Morehouse Mystique” still endures. Some of you probably came here from communities where everybody looked like you. Others may have come here in search of a community. And I suspect that some of you probably felt a little bit of culture shock the first time you came together as a class in King’s Chapel. All of a sudden, you weren’t the only high school sports captain, you weren’t the only student council president. You were suddenly in a group of high achievers, and that meant you were expected to do something more.

That’s the unique sense of purpose that this place has always infused -- the conviction that this is a training ground not only for individual success, but for leadership that can change the world.

Dr. King was just 15 years old when he enrolled here at Morehouse. He was an unknown, undersized, unassuming young freshman who lived at home with his parents. And I think it’s fair to say he wasn’t the coolest kid on campus -- for the suits he wore, his classmates called him “Tweed.” But his education at Morehouse helped to forge the intellect, the discipline, the compassion, the soul force that would transform America. It was here that he was introduced to the writings of Gandhi and Thoreau, and the theory of civil disobedience. It was here that professors encouraged him to look past the world as it was and fight for the world as it should be. And it was here, at Morehouse, as Dr. King later wrote, where “I realized that nobody…was afraid.”

Not even of some bad weather. I added on that part. I know it’s wet out there. But Dr. Wilson told me you all had a choice and decided to do it out here anyway. That's a Morehouse Man talking.

Now, think about it. For black men in the ‘40s and the ‘50s, the threat of violence, the constant humiliations, large and small, the uncertainty that you could support a family, the gnawing doubts born of the Jim Crow culture that told you every day that somehow you were inferior, the temptation to shrink from the world, to accept your place, to avoid risks, to be afraid -- that temptation was necessarily strong.

And yet, here, under the tutelage of men like Dr. Mays, young Martin learned to be unafraid. And he, in turn, taught others to be unafraid. And over time, he taught a nation to be unafraid. And over the last 50 years, thanks to the moral force of Dr. King and a Moses generation that overcame their fear and their cynicism and their despair, barriers have come tumbling down, and new doors of opportunity have swung open, and laws and hearts and minds have been changed to the point where someone who looks just like you can somehow come to serve as President of these United States of America.

So the history we share should give you hope. The future we share should give you hope. You’re graduating into an improving job market. You’re living in a time when advances in technology and communication put the world at your fingertips. Your generation is uniquely poised for success unlike any generation of African Americans that came before it.

But that doesn’t mean we don’t have work -- because if we’re honest with ourselves, we know that too few of our brothers have the opportunities that you’ve had here at Morehouse. In troubled neighborhoods all across this country -- many of them heavily African American -- too few of our citizens have role models to guide them. Communities just a couple miles from my house in Chicago, communities just a couple miles from here -- they’re places where jobs are still too scarce and wages are still too low; where schools are underfunded and violence is pervasive; where too many of our men spend their youth not behind a desk in a classroom, but hanging out on the streets or brooding behind a jail cell.

My job, as President, is to advocate for policies that generate more opportunity for everybody -- policies that strengthen the middle class and give more people the chance to climb their way into the middle class. Policies that create more good jobs and reduce poverty, and educate more children, and give more families the security of health care, and protect more of our children from the horrors of gun violence. That's my job. Those are matters of public policy, and it is important for all of us -- black, white and brown -- to advocate for an America where everybody has got a fair shot in life. Not just some. Not just a few.

But along with collective responsibilities, we have individual responsibilities. There are some things, as black men, we can only do for ourselves. There are some things, as Morehouse Men, that you are obliged to do for those still left behind. As Morehouse Men, you now wield something even more powerful than the diploma you’re about to collect -- and that’s the power of your example.

So what I ask of you today is the same thing I ask of every graduating class I address: Use that power for something larger than yourself. Live up to President Mays’s challenge. Be “sensitive to the wrongs, the sufferings, and the injustices of society.” And be “willing to accept responsibility for correcting [those] ills.”

I know that some of you came to Morehouse from communities where life was about keeping your head down and looking out for yourself. Maybe you feel like you escaped, and now you can take your degree and get that fancy job and the nice house and the nice car -- and never look back. And don’t get me wrong -- with all those student loans you’ve had to take out, I know you’ve got to earn some money. With doors open to you that your parents and grandparents could not even imagine, no one expects you to take a vow of poverty. But I will say it betrays a poverty of ambition if all you think about is what goods you can buy instead of what good you can do.

So, yes, go get that law degree. But if you do, ask yourself if the only option is to defend the rich and the powerful, or if you can also find some time to defend the powerless. Sure, go get your MBA, or start that business. We need black businesses out there. But ask yourselves what broader purpose your business might serve, in putting people to work, or transforming a neighborhood. The most successful CEOs I know didn’t start out intent just on making money -- rather, they had a vision of how their product or service would change things, and the money followed.

Some of you may be headed to medical school to become doctors. But make sure you heal folks in underserved communities who really need it, too. For generations, certain groups in this country -- especially African Americans -- have been desperate in need of access to quality, affordable health care. And as a society, we’re finally beginning to change that. Those of you who are under the age of 26 already have the option to stay on your parent’s health care plan. But all of you are heading into an economy where many young people expect not only to have multiple jobs, but multiple careers.

So starting October 1st, because of the Affordable Care Act -- otherwise known as Obamacare -- you’ll be able to shop for a quality, affordable plan that’s yours and travels with you -- a plan that will insure not only your health, but your dreams if you are sick or get in an accident. But we're going to need some doctors to make sure it works, too. We've got to make sure everybody has good health in this country. It’s not just good for you, it’s good for this country. So you're going to have to spread the word to your fellow young people.

Which brings me to a second point: Just as Morehouse has taught you to expect more of yourselves, inspire those who look up to you to expect more of themselves. We know that too many young men in our community continue to make bad choices. And I have to say, growing up, I made quite a few myself. Sometimes I wrote off my own failings as just another example of the world trying to keep a black man down. I had a tendency sometimes to make excuses for me not doing the right thing. But one of the things that all of you have learned over the last four years is there’s no longer any room for excuses.

I understand there’s a common fraternity creed here at Morehouse: “Excuses are tools of the incompetent used to build bridges to nowhere and monuments of nothingness.” Well, we’ve got no time for excuses. Not because the bitter legacy of slavery and segregation have vanished entirely; they have not. Not because racism and discrimination no longer exist; we know those are still out there. It’s just that in today’s hyperconnected, hypercompetitive world, with millions of young people from China and India and Brazil -- many of whom started with a whole lot less than all of you did -- all of them entering the global workforce alongside you, nobody is going to give you anything that you have not earned.

Nobody cares how tough your upbringing was. Nobody cares if you suffered some discrimination. And moreover, you have to remember that whatever you’ve gone through, it pales in comparison to the hardships previous generations endured -- and they overcame them. And if they overcame them, you can overcome them, too.

You now hail from a lineage and legacy of immeasurably strong men -- men who bore tremendous burdens and still laid the stones for the path on which we now walk. You wear the mantle of Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington, and Ralph Bunche and Langston Hughes, and George Washington Carver and Ralph Abernathy and Thurgood Marshall, and, yes, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. These men were many things to many people. And they knew full well the role that racism played in their lives. But when it came to their own accomplishments and sense of purpose, they had no time for excuses.

Every one of you have a grandma or an uncle or a parent who’s told you that at some point in life, as an African American, you have to work twice as hard as anyone else if you want to get by. I think President Mays put it even better: He said, “Whatever you do, strive to do it so well that no man living and no man dead, and no man yet to be born can do it any better.”

And I promise you, what was needed in Dr. Mays’s time, that spirit of excellence, and hard work, and dedication, and no excuses is needed now more than ever. If you think you can just get over in this economy just because you have a Morehouse degree, you’re in for a rude awakening. But if you stay hungry, if you keep hustling, if you keep on your grind and get other folks to do the same -- nobody can stop you.

And when I talk about pursuing excellence and setting an example, I’m not just talking about in your professional life. One of today’s graduates, Frederick Anderson -- where’s Frederick? Frederick, right here. I know it’s raining, but I'm going to tell about Frederick. Frederick started his college career in Ohio, only to find out that his high school sweetheart back in Georgia was pregnant. So he came back and enrolled in Morehouse to be closer to her. Pretty soon, helping raise a newborn and working night shifts became too much, so he started taking business classes at a technical college instead -- doing everything from delivering newspapers to buffing hospital floors to support his family.

And then he enrolled at Morehouse a second time. But even with a job, he couldn’t keep up with the cost of tuition. So after getting his degree from that technical school, this father of three decided to come back to Morehouse for a third time. As Frederick says, “God has a plan for my life, and He’s not done with me yet.”

And today, Frederick is a family man, and a working man, and a Morehouse Man. And that’s what I’m asking all of you to do: Keep setting an example for what it means to be a man. Be the best husband to your wife, or you’re your boyfriend, or your partner. Be the best father you can be to your children. Because nothing is more important.

I was raised by a heroic single mom, wonderful grandparents -- made incredible sacrifices for me. And I know there are moms and grandparents here today who did the same thing for all of you. But I sure wish I had had a father who was not only present, but involved. Didn’t know my dad. And so my whole life, I’ve tried to be for Michelle and my girls what my father was not for my mother and me. I want to break that cycle where a father is not at home -- where a father is not helping to raise that son or daughter. I want to be a better father, a better husband, a better man.

It’s hard work that demands your constant attention and frequent sacrifice. And I promise you, Michelle will tell you I’m not perfect. She’s got a long list of my imperfections. Even now, I’m still practicing, I'm still learning, still getting corrected in terms of how to be a fine husband and a good father. But I will tell you this: Everything else is unfulfilled if we fail at family, if we fail at that responsibility.

I know that when I am on my deathbed someday, I will not be thinking about any particular legislation I passed; I will not be thinking about a policy I promoted; I will not be thinking about the speech I gave, I will not be thinking the Nobel Prize I received. I will be thinking about that walk I took with my daughters. I'll be thinking about a lazy afternoon with my wife. I'll be thinking about sitting around the dinner table and seeing them happy and healthy and knowing that they were loved. And I'll be thinking about whether I did right by all of them.

So be a good role model, set a good example for that young brother coming up. If you know somebody who’s not on point, go back and bring that brother along -- those who’ve been left behind, who haven’t had the same opportunities we have -- they need to hear from you. You’ve got to be engaged on the barbershops, on the basketball court, at church, spend time and energy and presence to give people opportunities and a chance. Pull them up, expose them, support their dreams. Don't put them down.

We’ve got to teach them just like what we have to learn, what it means to be a man -- to serve your city like Maynard Jackson; to shape the culture like Spike Lee; to be like Chester Davenport, one of the first people to integrate the University of Georgia Law School. When he got there, nobody would sit next to him in class. But Chester didn’t mind. Later on, he said, “It was the thing for me to do. Someone needed to be the first.” And today, Chester is here celebrating his 50th reunion. Where is Chester Davenport? He’s here.

So if you’ve had role models, fathers, brothers like that -- thank them today. And if you haven’t, commit yourself to being that man to somebody else.

And finally, as you do these things, do them not just for yourself, but don't even do them just for the African American community. I want you to set your sights higher. At the turn of the last century, W.E.B. DuBois spoke about the “talented tenth” -- a class of highly educated, socially conscious leaders in the black community. But it’s not just the African American community that needs you. The country needs you. The world needs you.

As Morehouse Men, many of you know what it’s like to be an outsider; know what it’s like to be marginalized; know what it’s like to feel the sting of discrimination. And that’s an experience that a lot of Americans share. Hispanic Americans know that feeling when somebody asks them where they come from or tell them to go back. Gay and lesbian Americans feel it when a stranger passes judgment on their parenting skills or the love that they share. Muslim Americans feel it when they’re stared at with suspicion because of their faith. Any woman who knows the injustice of earning less pay for doing the same work -- she knows what it’s like to be on the outside looking in.

So your experiences give you special insight that today’s leaders need. If you tap into that experience, it should endow you with empathy -- the understanding of what it’s like to walk in somebody else’s shoes, to see through their eyes, to know what it’s like when you're not born on 3rd base, thinking you hit a triple. It should give you the ability to connect. It should give you a sense of compassion and what it means to overcome barriers.

And I will tell you, Class of 2013, whatever success I have achieved, whatever positions of leadership I have held have depended less on Ivy League degrees or SAT scores or GPAs, and have instead been due to that sense of connection and empathy -- the special obligation I felt, as a black man like you, to help those who need it most, people who didn’t have the opportunities that I had -- because there but for the grace of God, go I -- I might have been in their shoes. I might have been in prison. I might have been unemployed. I might not have been able to support a family. And that motivates me.

So it’s up to you to widen your circle of concern -- to care about justice for everybody, white, black and brown. Everybody. Not just in your own community, but also across this country and around the world. To make sure everyone has a voice, and everybody gets a seat at the table; that everybody, no matter what you look like or where you come from, what your last name is -- it doesn’t matter, everybody gets a chance to walk through those doors of opportunity if they are willing to work hard enough.

When Leland Shelton was four years old -- where’s Leland? Stand up, Leland. When Leland Shelton was four years old, social services took him away from his mama, put him in the care of his grandparents. By age 14, he was in the foster care system. Three years after that, Leland enrolled in Morehouse. And today he is graduating Phi Beta Kappa on his way to Harvard Law School. But he’s not stopping there. As a member of the National Foster Care Youth and Alumni Policy Council, he plans to use his law degree to make sure kids like him don’t fall through the cracks. And it won’t matter whether they’re black kids or brown kids or white kids or Native American kids, because he’ll understand what they’re going through. And he'll be fighting for them. He'll be in their corner. That's leadership. That's a Morehouse Man right there.

That’s what we’ve come to expect from you, Morehouse -- a legacy of leaders -- not just in our black community, but for the entire American community. To recognize the burdens you carry with you, but to resist the temptation to use them as excuses. To transform the way we think about manhood, and set higher standards for ourselves and for others. To be successful, but also to understand that each of us has responsibilities not just to ourselves, but to one another and to future generations. Men who refuse to be afraid. Men who refuse to be afraid.

Members of the Class of 2013, you are heirs to a great legacy. You have within you that same courage and that same strength, the same resolve as the men who came before you. That’s what being a Morehouse Man is all about. That’s what being an American is all about.

Success may not come quickly or easily. But if you strive to do what’s right, if you work harder and dream bigger, if you set an example in your own lives and do your part to help meet the challenges of our time, then I’m confident that, together, we will continue the never-ending task of perfecting our union.

Congratulations, Class of 2013. God bless you. God bless Morehouse. And God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address on Drones and Terrorism at the National Defense University

It is a great honor to return to the National Defense University. Here, at Fort McNair, Americans have served in uniform since 1791 -- standing guard in the earliest days of the Republic, and contemplating the future of warfare here in the 21st century.

For over two centuries, the United States has been bound together by founding documents that defined who we are as Americans, and served as our compass through every type of change. Matters of war and peace are no different. Americans are deeply ambivalent about war, but having fought for our independence, we know a price must be paid for freedom. From the Civil War to our struggle against fascism, on through the long twilight struggle of the Cold War, battlefields have changed and technology has evolved. But our commitment to constitutional principles has weathered every war, and every war has come to an end.

With the collapse of the Berlin Wall, a new dawn of democracy took hold abroad, and a decade of peace and prosperity arrived here at home. And for a moment, it seemed the 21st century would be a tranquil time. And then, on September 11, 2001, we were shaken out of complacency. Thousands were taken from us, as clouds of fire and metal and ash descended upon a sun-filled morning. This was a different kind of war. No armies came to our shores, and our military was not the principal target. Instead, a group of terrorists came to kill as many civilians as they could.

And so our nation went to war. We have now been at war for well over a decade. I won’t review the full history. What is clear is that we quickly drove al Qaeda out of Afghanistan, but then shifted our focus and began a new war in Iraq. And this carried significant consequences for our fight against al Qaeda, our standing in the world, and -- to this day -- our interests in a vital region.

Meanwhile, we strengthened our defenses -- hardening targets, tightening transportation security, giving law enforcement new tools to prevent terror. Most of these changes were sound. Some caused inconvenience. But some, like expanded surveillance, raised difficult questions about the balance that we strike between our interests in security and our values of privacy. And in some cases, I believe we compromised our basic values -- by using torture to interrogate our enemies, and detaining individuals in a way that ran counter to the rule of law.

So after I took office, we stepped up the war against al Qaeda but we also sought to change its course. We relentlessly targeted al Qaeda’s leadership. We ended the war in Iraq, and brought nearly 150,000 troops home. We pursued a new strategy in Afghanistan, and increased our training of Afghan forces. We unequivocally banned torture, affirmed our commitment to civilian courts, worked to align our policies with the rule of law, and expanded our consultations with Congress.

Today, Osama bin Laden is dead, and so are most of his top lieutenants. There have been no large-scale attacks on the United States, and our homeland is more secure. Fewer of our troops are in harm’s way, and over the next 19 months they will continue to come home. Our alliances are strong, and so is our standing in the world. In sum, we are safer because of our efforts.

Now, make no mistake, our nation is still threatened by terrorists. From Benghazi to Boston, we have been tragically reminded of that truth. But we have to recognize that the threat has shifted and evolved from the one that came to our shores on 9/11. With a decade of experience now to draw from, this is the moment to ask ourselves hard questions -- about the nature of today’s threats and how we should confront them.

And these questions matter to every American.

For over the last decade, our nation has spent well over a trillion dollars on war, helping to explode our deficits and constraining our ability to nation-build here at home. Our servicemembers and their families have sacrificed far more on our behalf. Nearly 7,000 Americans have made the ultimate sacrifice. Many more have left a part of themselves on the battlefield, or brought the shadows of battle back home. From our use of drones to the detention of terrorist suspects, the decisions that we are making now will define the type of nation -- and world -- that we leave to our children.

So America is at a crossroads. We must define the nature and scope of this struggle, or else it will define us. We have to be mindful of James Madison’s warning that “No nation could preserve its freedom in the midst of continual warfare.” Neither I, nor any President, can promise the total defeat of terror. We will never erase the evil that lies in the hearts of some human beings, nor stamp out every danger to our open society. But what we can do -- what we must do -- is dismantle networks that pose a direct danger to us, and make it less likely for new groups to gain a foothold, all the while maintaining the freedoms and ideals that we defend. And to define that strategy, we have to make decisions based not on fear, but on hard-earned wisdom. That begins with understanding the current threat that we face.

Today, the core of al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan is on the path to defeat. Their remaining operatives spend more time thinking about their own safety than plotting against us. They did not direct the attacks in Benghazi or Boston. They’ve not carried out a successful attack on our homeland since 9/11.

Instead, what we’ve seen is the emergence of various al Qaeda affiliates. From Yemen to Iraq, from Somalia to North Africa, the threat today is more diffuse, with Al Qaeda’s affiliates in the Arabian Peninsula -- AQAP -- the most active in plotting against our homeland. And while none of AQAP’s efforts approach the scale of 9/11, they have continued to plot acts of terror, like the attempt to blow up an airplane on Christmas Day in 2009.

Unrest in the Arab world has also allowed extremists to gain a foothold in countries like Libya and Syria. But here, too, there are differences from 9/11. In some cases, we continue to confront state-sponsored networks like Hezbollah that engage in acts of terror to achieve political goals. Other of these groups are simply collections of local militias or extremists interested in seizing territory. And while we are vigilant for signs that these groups may pose a transnational threat, most are focused on operating in the countries and regions where they are based. And that means we'll face more localized threats like what we saw in Benghazi, or the BP oil facility in Algeria, in which local operatives -- perhaps in loose affiliation with regional networks -- launch periodic attacks against Western diplomats, companies, and other soft targets, or resort to kidnapping and other criminal enterprises to fund their operations.

And finally, we face a real threat from radicalized individuals here in the United States. Whether it’s a shooter at a Sikh Temple in Wisconsin, a plane flying into a building in Texas, or the extremists who killed 168 people at the Federal Building in Oklahoma City, America has confronted many forms of violent extremism in our history. Deranged or alienated individuals -- often U.S. citizens or legal residents -- can do enormous damage, particularly when inspired by larger notions of violent jihad. And that pull towards extremism appears to have led to the shooting at Fort Hood and the bombing of the Boston Marathon.

So that’s the current threat -- lethal yet less capable al Qaeda affiliates; threats to diplomatic facilities and businesses abroad; homegrown extremists. This is the future of terrorism. We have to take these threats seriously, and do all that we can to confront them. But as we shape our response, we have to recognize that the scale of this threat closely resembles the types of attacks we faced before 9/11.

In the 1980s, we lost Americans to terrorism at our Embassy in Beirut; at our Marine Barracks in Lebanon; on a cruise ship at sea; at a disco in Berlin; and on a Pan Am flight -- Flight 103 -- over Lockerbie. In the 1990s, we lost Americans to terrorism at the World Trade Center; at our military facilities in Saudi Arabia; and at our Embassy in Kenya. These attacks were all brutal; they were all deadly; and we learned that left unchecked, these threats can grow. But if dealt with smartly and proportionally, these threats need not rise to the level that we saw on the eve of 9/11.

Moreover, we have to recognize that these threats don’t arise in a vacuum. Most, though not all, of the terrorism we faced is fueled by a common ideology -- a belief by some extremists that Islam is in conflict with the United States and the West, and that violence against Western targets, including civilians, is justified in pursuit of a larger cause. Of course, this ideology is based on a lie, for the United States is not at war with Islam. And this ideology is rejected by the vast majority of Muslims, who are the most frequent victims of terrorist attacks.

Nevertheless, this ideology persists, and in an age when ideas and images can travel the globe in an instant, our response to terrorism can’t depend on military or law enforcement alone. We need all elements of national power to win a battle of wills, a battle of ideas. So what I want to discuss here today is the components of such a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy.

First, we must finish the work of defeating al Qaeda and its associated forces.

In Afghanistan, we will complete our transition to Afghan responsibility for that country’s security. Our troops will come home. Our combat mission will come to an end. And we will work with the Afghan government to train security forces, and sustain a counterterrorism force, which ensures that al Qaeda can never again establish a safe haven to launch attacks against us or our allies.

Beyond Afghanistan, we must define our effort not as a boundless “global war on terror,” but rather as a series of persistent, targeted efforts to dismantle specific networks of violent extremists that threaten America. In many cases, this will involve partnerships with other countries. Already, thousands of Pakistani soldiers have lost their lives fighting extremists. In Yemen, we are supporting security forces that have reclaimed territory from AQAP. In Somalia, we helped a coalition of African nations push al-Shabaab out of its strongholds. In Mali, we’re providing military aid to French-led intervention to push back al Qaeda in the Maghreb, and help the people of Mali reclaim their future.

Much of our best counterterrorism cooperation results in the gathering and sharing of intelligence, the arrest and prosecution of terrorists. And that’s how a Somali terrorist apprehended off the coast of Yemen is now in a prison in New York. That’s how we worked with European allies to disrupt plots from Denmark to Germany to the United Kingdom. That’s how intelligence collected with Saudi Arabia helped us stop a cargo plane from being blown up over the Atlantic. These partnerships work.

But despite our strong preference for the detention and prosecution of terrorists, sometimes this approach is foreclosed. Al Qaeda and its affiliates try to gain foothold in some of the most distant and unforgiving places on Earth. They take refuge in remote tribal regions. They hide in caves and walled compounds. They train in empty deserts and rugged mountains.

In some of these places -- such as parts of Somalia and Yemen -- the state only has the most tenuous reach into the territory. In other cases, the state lacks the capacity or will to take action. And it’s also not possible for America to simply deploy a team of Special Forces to capture every terrorist. Even when such an approach may be possible, there are places where it would pose profound risks to our troops and local civilians -- where a terrorist compound cannot be breached without triggering a firefight with surrounding tribal communities, for example, that pose no threat to us; times when putting U.S. boots on the ground may trigger a major international crisis.

To put it another way, our operation in Pakistan against Osama bin Laden cannot be the norm. The risks in that case were immense. The likelihood of capture, although that was our preference, was remote given the certainty that our folks would confront resistance. The fact that we did not find ourselves confronted with civilian casualties, or embroiled in an extended firefight, was a testament to the meticulous planning and professionalism of our Special Forces, but it also depended on some luck. And it was supported by massive infrastructure in Afghanistan.

And even then, the cost to our relationship with Pakistan -- and the backlash among the Pakistani public over encroachment on their territory -- was so severe that we are just now beginning to rebuild this important partnership.

So it is in this context that the United States has taken lethal, targeted action against al Qaeda and its associated forces, including with remotely piloted aircraft commonly referred to as drones.

As was true in previous armed conflicts, this new technology raises profound questions -- about who is targeted, and why; about civilian casualties, and the risk of creating new enemies; about the legality of such strikes under U.S. and international law; about accountability and morality. So let me address these questions.

To begin with, our actions are effective. Don’t take my word for it. In the intelligence gathered at bin Laden’s compound, we found that he wrote, “We could lose the reserves to enemy’s air strikes. We cannot fight air strikes with explosives.” Other communications from al Qaeda operatives confirm this as well. Dozens of highly skilled al Qaeda commanders, trainers, bomb makers and operatives have been taken off the battlefield. Plots have been disrupted that would have targeted international aviation, U.S. transit systems, European cities and our troops in Afghanistan. Simply put, these strikes have saved lives.

Moreover, America’s actions are legal. We were attacked on 9/11. Within a week, Congress overwhelmingly authorized the use of force. Under domestic law, and international law, the United States is at war with al Qaeda, the Taliban, and their associated forces. We are at war with an organization that right now would kill as many Americans as they could if we did not stop them first. So this is a just war -- a war waged proportionally, in last resort, and in self-defense.

And yet, as our fight enters a new phase, America’s legitimate claim of self-defense cannot be the end of the discussion. To say a military tactic is legal, or even effective, is not to say it is wise or moral in every instance. For the same human progress that gives us the technology to strike half a world away also demands the discipline to constrain that power -- or risk abusing it. And that’s why, over the last four years, my administration has worked vigorously to establish a framework that governs our use of force against terrorists –- insisting upon clear guidelines, oversight and accountability that is now codified in Presidential Policy Guidance that I signed yesterday.

In the Afghan war theater, we must -- and will -- continue to support our troops until the transition is complete at the end of 2014. And that means we will continue to take strikes against high value al Qaeda targets, but also against forces that are massing to support attacks on coalition forces. But by the end of 2014, we will no longer have the same need for force protection, and the progress we’ve made against core al Qaeda will reduce the need for unmanned strikes.

Beyond the Afghan theater, we only target al Qaeda and its associated forces. And even then, the use of drones is heavily constrained. America does not take strikes when we have the ability to capture individual terrorists; our preference is always to detain, interrogate, and prosecute. America cannot take strikes wherever we choose; our actions are bound by consultations with partners, and respect for state sovereignty.

America does not take strikes to punish individuals; we act against terrorists who pose a continuing and imminent threat to the American people, and when there are no other governments capable of effectively addressing the threat. And before any strike is taken, there must be near-certainty that no civilians will be killed or injured -- the highest standard we can set.

Now, this last point is critical, because much of the criticism about drone strikes -- both here at home and abroad -- understandably centers on reports of civilian casualties. There’s a wide gap between U.S. assessments of such casualties and nongovernmental reports. Nevertheless, it is a hard fact that U.S. strikes have resulted in civilian casualties, a risk that exists in every war. And for the families of those civilians, no words or legal construct can justify their loss. For me, and those in my chain of command, those deaths will haunt us as long as we live, just as we are haunted by the civilian casualties that have occurred throughout conventional fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq.

But as Commander-in-Chief, I must weigh these heartbreaking tragedies against the alternatives. To do nothing in the face of terrorist networks would invite far more civilian casualties -- not just in our cities at home and our facilities abroad, but also in the very places like Sana’a and Kabul and Mogadishu where terrorists seek a foothold. Remember that the terrorists we are after target civilians, and the death toll from their acts of terrorism against Muslims dwarfs any estimate of civilian casualties from drone strikes. So doing nothing is not an option.

Where foreign governments cannot or will not effectively stop terrorism in their territory, the primary alternative to targeted lethal action would be the use of conventional military options. As I’ve already said, even small special operations carry enormous risks. Conventional airpower or missiles are far less precise than drones, and are likely to cause more civilian casualties and more local outrage. And invasions of these territories lead us to be viewed as occupying armies, unleash a torrent of unintended consequences, are difficult to contain, result in large numbers of civilian casualties and ultimately empower those who thrive on violent conflict.

So it is false to assert that putting boots on the ground is less likely to result in civilian deaths or less likely to create enemies in the Muslim world. The results would be more U.S. deaths, more Black Hawks down, more confrontations with local populations, and an inevitable mission creep in support of such raids that could easily escalate into new wars.

Yes, the conflict with al Qaeda, like all armed conflict, invites tragedy. But by narrowly targeting our action against those who want to kill us and not the people they hide among, we are choosing the course of action least likely to result in the loss of innocent life.

Our efforts must be measured against the history of putting American troops in distant lands among hostile populations. In Vietnam, hundreds of thousands of civilians died in a war where the boundaries of battle were blurred. In Iraq and Afghanistan, despite the extraordinary courage and discipline of our troops, thousands of civilians have been killed. So neither conventional military action nor waiting for attacks to occur offers moral safe harbor, and neither does a sole reliance on law enforcement in territories that have no functioning police or security services -- and indeed, have no functioning law.

Now, this is not to say that the risks are not real. Any U.S. military action in foreign lands risks creating more enemies and impacts public opinion overseas. Moreover, our laws constrain the power of the President even during wartime, and I have taken an oath to defend the Constitution of the United States. The very precision of drone strikes and the necessary secrecy often involved in such actions can end up shielding our government from the public scrutiny that a troop deployment invites. It can also lead a President and his team to view drone strikes as a cure-all for terrorism.

And for this reason, I’ve insisted on strong oversight of all lethal action. After I took office, my administration began briefing all strikes outside of Iraq and Afghanistan to the appropriate committees of Congress. Let me repeat that: Not only did Congress authorize the use of force, it is briefed on every strike that America takes. Every strike. That includes the one instance when we targeted an American citizen -- Anwar Awlaki, the chief of external operations for AQAP.

This week, I authorized the declassification of this action, and the deaths of three other Americans in drone strikes, to facilitate transparency and debate on this issue and to dismiss some of the more outlandish claims that have been made. For the record, I do not believe it would be constitutional for the government to target and kill any U.S. citizen -- with a drone, or with a shotgun -- without due process, nor should any President deploy armed drones over U.S. soil.

But when a U.S. citizen goes abroad to wage war against America and is actively plotting to kill U.S. citizens, and when neither the United States, nor our partners are in a position to capture him before he carries out a plot, his citizenship should no more serve as a shield than a sniper shooting down on an innocent crowd should be protected from a SWAT team.

That’s who Anwar Awlaki was -- he was continuously trying to kill people. He helped oversee the 2010 plot to detonate explosive devices on two U.S.-bound cargo planes. He was involved in planning to blow up an airliner in 2009. When Farouk Abdulmutallab -- the Christmas Day bomber -- went to Yemen in 2009, Awlaki hosted him, approved his suicide operation, helped him tape a martyrdom video to be shown after the attack, and his last instructions were to blow up the airplane when it was over American soil. I would have detained and prosecuted Awlaki if we captured him before he carried out a plot, but we couldn’t. And as President, I would have been derelict in my duty had I not authorized the strike that took him out.

Of course, the targeting of any American raises constitutional issues that are not present in other strikes -- which is why my administration submitted information about Awlaki to the Department of Justice months before Awlaki was killed, and briefed the Congress before this strike as well. But the high threshold that we’ve set for taking lethal action applies to all potential terrorist targets, regardless of whether or not they are American citizens. This threshold respects the inherent dignity of every human life. Alongside the decision to put our men and women in uniform in harm’s way, the decision to use force against individuals or groups -- even against a sworn enemy of the United States -- is the hardest thing I do as President. But these decisions must be made, given my responsibility to protect the American people.

Going forward, I’ve asked my administration to review proposals to extend oversight of lethal actions outside of warzones that go beyond our reporting to Congress. Each option has virtues in theory, but poses difficulties in practice. For example, the establishment of a special court to evaluate and authorize lethal action has the benefit of bringing a third branch of government into the process, but raises serious constitutional issues about presidential and judicial authority. Another idea that’s been suggested -- the establishment of an independent oversight board in the executive branch -- avoids those problems, but may introduce a layer of bureaucracy into national security decision-making, without inspiring additional public confidence in the process. But despite these challenges, I look forward to actively engaging Congress to explore these and other options for increased oversight.

I believe, however, that the use of force must be seen as part of a larger discussion we need to have about a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy -- because for all the focus on the use of force, force alone cannot make us safe. We cannot use force everywhere that a radical ideology takes root; and in the absence of a strategy that reduces the wellspring of extremism, a perpetual war -- through drones or Special Forces or troop deployments -- will prove self-defeating, and alter our country in troubling ways.

So the next element of our strategy involves addressing the underlying grievances and conflicts that feed extremism -- from North Africa to South Asia. As we’ve learned this past decade, this is a vast and complex undertaking. We must be humble in our expectation that we can quickly resolve deep-rooted problems like poverty and sectarian hatred. Moreover, no two countries are alike, and some will undergo chaotic change before things get better. But our security and our values demand that we make the effort.

This means patiently supporting transitions to democracy in places like Egypt and Tunisia and Libya -- because the peaceful realization of individual aspirations will serve as a rebuke to violent extremists. We must strengthen the opposition in Syria, while isolating extremist elements -- because the end of a tyrant must not give way to the tyranny of terrorism. We are actively working to promote peace between Israelis and Palestinians -- because it is right and because such a peace could help reshape attitudes in the region. And we must help countries modernize economies, upgrade education, and encourage entrepreneurship -- because American leadership has always been elevated by our ability to connect with people’s hopes, and not simply their fears.

And success on all these fronts requires sustained engagement, but it will also require resources. I know that foreign aid is one of the least popular expenditures that there is. That’s true for Democrats and Republicans -- I’ve seen the polling -- even though it amounts to less than one percent of the federal budget. In fact, a lot of folks think it’s 25 percent, if you ask people on the streets. Less than one percent -- still wildly unpopular. But foreign assistance cannot be viewed as charity. It is fundamental to our national security. And it’s fundamental to any sensible long-term strategy to battle extremism.

Moreover, foreign assistance is a tiny fraction of what we spend fighting wars that our assistance might ultimately prevent. For what we spent in a month in Iraq at the height of the war, we could be training security forces in Libya, maintaining peace agreements between Israel and its neighbors, feeding the hungry in Yemen, building schools in Pakistan, and creating reservoirs of goodwill that marginalize extremists. That has to be part of our strategy.

Moreover, America cannot carry out this work if we don’t have diplomats serving in some very dangerous places. Over the past decade, we have strengthened security at our embassies, and I am implementing every recommendation of the Accountability Review Board, which found unacceptable failures in Benghazi. I’ve called on Congress to fully fund these efforts to bolster security and harden facilities, improve intelligence, and facilitate a quicker response time from our military if a crisis emerges.

But even after we take these steps, some irreducible risks to our diplomats will remain. This is the price of being the world’s most powerful nation, particularly as a wave of change washes over the Arab World. And in balancing the trade4offs between security and active diplomacy, I firmly believe that any retreat from challenging regions will only increase the dangers that we face in the long run. And that's why we should be grateful to those diplomats who are willing to serve.

Targeted action against terrorists, effective partnerships, diplomatic engagement and assistance -- through such a comprehensive strategy we can significantly reduce the chances of large-scale attacks on the homeland and mitigate threats to Americans overseas. But as we guard against dangers from abroad, we cannot neglect the daunting challenge of terrorism from within our borders.

As I said earlier, this threat is not new. But technology and the Internet increase its frequency and in some cases its lethality. Today, a person can consume hateful propaganda, commit themselves to a violent agenda, and learn how to kill without leaving their home. To address this threat, two years ago my administration did a comprehensive review and engaged with law enforcement.

And the best way to prevent violent extremism inspired by violent jihadists is to work with the Muslim American community -- which has consistently rejected terrorism -- to identify signs of radicalization and partner with law enforcement when an individual is drifting towards violence. And these partnerships can only work when we recognize that Muslims are a fundamental part of the American family. In fact, the success of American Muslims and our determination to guard against any encroachments on their civil liberties is the ultimate rebuke to those who say that we’re at war with Islam.

Thwarting homegrown plots presents particular challenges in part because of our proud commitment to civil liberties for all who call America home. That’s why, in the years to come, we will have to keep working hard to strike the appropriate balance between our need for security and preserving those freedoms that make us who we are. That means reviewing the authorities of law enforcement, so we can intercept new types of communication, but also build in privacy protections to prevent abuse.

That means that -- even after Boston -- we do not deport someone or throw somebody in prison in the absence of evidence. That means putting careful constraints on the tools the government uses to protect sensitive information, such as the state secrets doctrine. And that means finally having a strong Privacy and Civil Liberties Board to review those issues where our counterterrorism efforts and our values may come into tension.

The Justice Department’s investigation of national security leaks offers a recent example of the challenges involved in striking the right balance between our security and our open society. As Commander-in-Chief, I believe we must keep information secret that protects our operations and our people in the field. To do so, we must enforce consequences for those who break the law and breach their commitment to protect classified information. But a free press is also essential for our democracy. That’s who we are. And I’m troubled by the possibility that leak investigations may chill the investigative journalism that holds government accountable.

Journalists should not be at legal risk for doing their jobs. Our focus must be on those who break the law. And that’s why I’ve called on Congress to pass a media shield law to guard against government overreach. And I’ve raised these issues with the Attorney General, who shares my concerns. So he has agreed to review existing Department of Justice guidelines governing investigations that involve reporters, and he’ll convene a group of media organizations to hear their concerns as part of that review. And I’ve directed the Attorney General to report back to me by July 12th.

Now, all these issues remind us that the choices we make about war can impact -- in sometimes unintended ways -- the openness and freedom on which our way of life depends. And that is why I intend to engage Congress about the existing Authorization to Use Military Force, or AUMF, to determine how we can continue to fight terrorism without keeping America on a perpetual wartime footing.

The AUMF is now nearly 12 years old. The Afghan war is coming to an end. Core al Qaeda is a shell of its former self. Groups like AQAP must be dealt with, but in the years to come, not every collection of thugs that labels themselves al Qaeda will pose a credible threat to the United States. Unless we discipline our thinking, our definitions, our actions, we may be drawn into more wars we don’t need to fight, or continue to grant Presidents unbound powers more suited for traditional armed conflicts between nation states.

So I look forward to engaging Congress and the American people in efforts to refine, and ultimately repeal, the AUMF’s mandate. And I will not sign laws designed to expand this mandate further. Our systematic effort to dismantle terrorist organizations must continue. But this war, like all wars, must end. That’s what history advises. That’s what our democracy demands.

And that brings me to my final topic: the detention of terrorist suspects. I’m going to repeat one more time: As a matter of policy, the preference of the United States is to capture terrorist suspects. When we do detain a suspect, we interrogate them. And if the suspect can be prosecuted, we decide whether to try him in a civilian court or a military commission.

During the past decade, the vast majority of those detained by our military were captured on the battlefield. In Iraq, we turned over thousands of prisoners as we ended the war. In Afghanistan, we have transitioned detention facilities to the Afghans, as part of the process of restoring Afghan sovereignty. So we bring law of war detention to an end, and we are committed to prosecuting terrorists wherever we can.

The glaring exception to this time-tested approach is the detention center at Guantanamo Bay. The original premise for opening GTMO -- that detainees would not be able to challenge their detention -- was found unconstitutional five years ago. In the meantime, GTMO has become a symbol around the world for an America that flouts the rule of law. Our allies won’t cooperate with us if they think a terrorist will end up at GTMO.

During a time of budget cuts, we spend $150 million each year to imprison 166 people -- almost $1 million per prisoner. And the Department of Defense estimates that we must spend another $200 million to keep GTMO open at a time when we’re cutting investments in education and research here at home, and when the Pentagon is struggling with sequester and budget cuts.

As President, I have tried to close GTMO. I transferred 67 detainees to other countries before Congress imposed restrictions to effectively prevent us from either transferring detainees to other countries or imprisoning them here in the United States.

These restrictions make no sense. After all, under President Bush, some 530 detainees were transferred from GTMO with Congress’s support. When I ran for President the first time, John McCain supported closing GTMO -- this was a bipartisan issue. No person has ever escaped one of our super-max or military prisons here in the United States -- ever. Our courts have convicted hundreds of people for terrorism or terrorism-related offenses, including some folks who are more dangerous than most GTMO detainees. They're in our prisons.

And given my administration’s relentless pursuit of al Qaeda’s leadership, there is no justification beyond politics for Congress to prevent us from closing a facility that should have never have been opened.

Audience Member: Excuse me, President Obama --

President Obama: So -- let me finish, ma'am. So today, once again --

Audience Member: There are 102 people on a hunger strike. These are desperate people.

President Obama: I'm about to address it, ma'am, but you've got to let me speak. I'm about to address it.

Audience Member: You're our Commander-In-Chief --

President Obama: Let me address it.

Audience Member: -- you an close Guantanamo Bay.

President Obama: Why don’t you let me address it, ma'am.

Audience Member: There’s still prisoners --

President Obama: Why don’t you sit down and I will tell you exactly what I'm going to do.

Audience Member: That includes 57 Yemenis.

President Obama: Thank you, ma'am. Thank you. Ma'am, thank you. You should let me finish my sentence. Today, I once again call on Congress to lift the restrictions on detainee transfers from GTMO.

I have asked the Department of Defense to designate a site in the United States where we can hold military commissions. I’m appointing a new senior envoy at the State Department and Defense Department whose sole responsibility will be to achieve the transfer of detainees to third countries.

I am lifting the moratorium on detainee transfers to Yemen so we can review them on a case-by-case basis. To the greatest extent possible, we will transfer detainees who have been cleared to go to other countries.

Audience Member: -- prisoners already. Release them today.

President Obama: Where appropriate, we will bring terrorists to justice in our courts and our military justice system. And we will insist that judicial review be available for every detainee.

Audience Member: It needs to be --

President Obama: Now, ma'am, let me finish. Let me finish, ma'am. Part of free speech is you being able to speak, but also, you listening and me being able to speak.

Now, even after we take these steps one issue will remain -- just how to deal with those GTMO detainees who we know have participated in dangerous plots or attacks but who cannot be prosecuted, for example, because the evidence against them has been compromised or is inadmissible in a court of law. But once we commit to a process of closing GTMO, I am confident that this legacy problem can be resolved, consistent with our commitment to the rule of law.

I know the politics are hard. But history will cast a harsh judgment on this aspect of our fight against terrorism and those of us who fail to end it. Imagine a future -- 10 years from now or 20 years from now -- when the United States of America is still holding people who have been charged with no crime on a piece of land that is not part of our country. Look at the current situation, where we are force-feeding detainees who are being held on a hunger strike. I'm willing to cut the young lady who interrupted me some slack because it's worth being passionate about. Is this who we are? Is that something our Founders foresaw? Is that the America we want to leave our children? Our sense of justice is stronger than that.

We have prosecuted scores of terrorists in our courts. That includes Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, who tried to blow up an airplane over Detroit; and Faisal Shahzad, who put a car bomb in Times Square. It's in a court of law that we will try Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, who is accused of bombing the Boston Marathon. Richard Reid, the shoe bomber, is, as we speak, serving a life sentence in a maximum security prison here in the United States. In sentencing Reid, Judge William Young told him, “The way we treat you…is the measure of our own liberties.”

Audience Member: How about Abdulmutallab -- locking up a 16-year-old -- is that the way we treat a 16-year old? [Inaudible] -- can you take the drones out of the hands of the CIA? Can you stop the signature strikes killing people on the basis of suspicious activities?

President Obama: We’re addressing that, ma’am.

Audience Member: -- thousands of Muslims that got killed -- will you compensate the innocent families -- that will make us safer here at home. I love my country. I love [inaudible] --

President Obama: I think that -- and I’m going off script, as you might expect here. The voice of that woman is worth paying attention to. Obviously, I do not agree with much of what she said, and obviously she wasn’t listening to me in much of what I said. But these are tough issues, and the suggestion that we can gloss over them is wrong.

When that judge sentenced Mr. Reid, the shoe bomber, he went on to point to the American flag that flew in the courtroom. “That flag,” he said, “will fly there long after this is all forgotten. That flag still stands for freedom.”

So, America, we’ve faced down dangers far greater than al Qaeda. By staying true to the values of our founding, and by using our constitutional compass, we have overcome slavery and Civil War and fascism and communism. In just these last few years as President, I’ve watched the American people bounce back from painful recession, mass shootings, natural disasters like the recent tornados that devastated Oklahoma. These events were heartbreaking; they shook our communities to the core. But because of the resilience of the American people, these events could not come close to breaking us.

I think of Lauren Manning, the 9/11 survivor who had severe burns over 80 percent of her body, who said, “That’s my reality. I put a Band-Aid on it, literally, and I move on.”

I think of the New Yorkers who filled Times Square the day after an attempted car bomb as if nothing had happened.

I think of the proud Pakistani parents who, after their daughter was invited to the White House, wrote to us, “We have raised an American Muslim daughter to dream big and never give up because it does pay off.”

I think of all the wounded warriors rebuilding their lives, and helping other vets to find jobs.

I think of the runner planning to do the 2014 Boston Marathon, who said, “Next year, you’re going to have more people than ever. Determination is not something to be messed with.”

That’s who the American people are -- determined, and not to be messed with. And now we need a strategy and a politics that reflects this resilient spirit.

Our victory against terrorism won’t be measured in a surrender ceremony at a battleship, or a statue being pulled to the ground. Victory will be measured in parents taking their kids to school; immigrants coming to our shores; fans taking in a ballgame; a veteran starting a business; a bustling city street; a citizen shouting her concerns at a President.

The quiet determination; that strength of character and bond of fellowship; that refutation of fear -- that is both our sword and our shield. And long after the current messengers of hate have faded from the world’s memory, alongside the brutal despots, and deranged madmen, and ruthless demagogues who litter history -- the flag of the United States will still wave from small-town cemeteries to national monuments, to distant outposts abroad. And that flag will still stand for freedom.

Thank you very, everybody. God bless you. May God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Naval Academy Commencement Address

Hello, Midshipmen! Well, thank you, Governor O’Malley, for your kind introduction and the great support that Maryland gives this Academy. To Secretary Mabus, Admiral Greenert, General Paxton -- thank you all for your incredible leadership of our extraordinary Navy and Marine Corps teams.

To Vice Admiral Miller, thank you for the outstanding work that you do. To Captain Clark and all the faculty and staff; to the moms and dads who raised your sons and daughters to seek this life of service; to the local sponsor families who cared for them far from home; the members of the Class of 1963 -- veterans who’ve guided these midshipmen along the way -- today is also a tribute to your support and your patriotism. And I know that the Class of 2013 joins me in saluting your service as well.

To the entire Brigade of Midshipmen -- you embody the highest virtues of this venerable institution. And yet, I know that some of you at times have enjoyed yourselves at other local institutions like McGarvey’s and Armadillo’s. But today is a day of celebration -- and also forgiveness. And so, in keeping with tradition, I declare all midshipmen on restriction for minor conduct offenses are hereby absolved. As always, Admiral Miller gets to decide what’s “minor.” Some of these guys are laughing a little nervously about that.

Now, obviously, most of all, it is wonderful to be able to celebrate this incredible Class of 2013. This has special meaning for me as well, because the United States Naval Academy was the very first service academy that I had the privilege to address as President. On that spring day four years ago, most of you were still in high school, finishing your senior year, or at NAPS, finishing up prep school. You were a little younger -- and I was, too. You had your entire Naval Academy experience ahead of you; I was already getting chest bumps from the graduates of 2009.

Soon after, you came to the Yard -- and you got quite a welcome. The joy of I-Day. Wonderful haircuts. Stylish eyeglasses. And all that Plebe Year, if you got something wrong, your upperclassmen kindly corrected you -- at high volume, at very close range. When Michelle brought our daughter Sasha here for a visit, she got a somewhat different reception. She was just in elementary school, but it seemed like the Navy was already doing some recruiting -- because as she went through Bancroft Hall she came to one room and saw the name on the door -- “Sasha Obama, Class of 2023.” So you never know.

Today, each of you can take enormous pride, for you’ve met the mission of this Academy. You’ve proven yourselves morally, living a concept of honor and integrity -- and this includes treating one another with respect and recognizing the strength of every member of your team. You’re the most diverse class to graduate in Naval Academy history. And among the many proud young women graduating today, 13 will serve on submarines.

You’ve proven yourselves mentally. Now, I know that some think of this as just a small engineering school on the Severn. You’ve not only met its rigorous standards, you’ve helped this Academy earn a new distinction -- the number-one public liberal arts school in America.

And you’ve proven yourselves physically -- a Herndon Climb of two minutes, five seconds. Now that they put the grease back on, no one will ever match your time. More importantly, last month I welcomed Coach Ken and the team back to the White House because you beat Air Force, you beat Army, and you brought the Commander-in-Chief’s trophy back to Annapolis.

So, Class of 2013, in your four years by the Bay, you’ve met every test before you. And today is the day that you’ve been counting down to for so long. You will take your oath. Those boards and gold bars will be placed on your shoulders. And as your Commander-in-Chief, I congratulate each of you on becoming our newest officers -- ensigns in the United States Navy, second lieutenants in the United States Marine Corps.

And soon you will join the fleet. You’ll lead Marines. And just as you’ve changed over the past four years, so, too, have the challenges facing our military. Before you arrived here, our nation was engaged in two wars, al Qaeda’s leadership was entrenched in their safe havens, many of our alliances were strained, and our nation’s standing in the world had suffered. And over the past four years, we’ve strengthened our alliances and restored America’s image in the world.

The war in Iraq is over and we welcomed our troops home. Thanks to our brave personnel -- including our incredible Navy SEALs -- we delivered justice to Osama bin Laden. In Afghanistan, the transition is underway, our troops are coming home, and by the end of next year our war in Afghanistan will come to an end.

And today, we salute all the Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice in these wars, including 18 graduates of this Academy. We honor them all, now and forever.

Yesterday, I spoke about the way forward in the fight to keep our country secure -- for even as we've decimated the al Qaeda leadership, we still face threats from al Qaeda affiliates and from individuals caught up in its ideology. Even as we move beyond deploying large ground armies abroad, we still need to conduct precise, targeted strikes against terrorists before they kill our citizens. And even as we stay vigilant in the face of terrorism and stay true to our Constitution and our values, we need to stay ready for the full range of threats -- from nations seeking weapons of mass destruction to cyber criminals seeking to unleash weapons of mass destruction.

In these tough fiscal times, we also have to make hard choices at home, including in our Armed Forces. But I want you all to know as you enter in what I know will be extraordinary years of service, let me say as clearly as I can -- the United States of America will always maintain our military superiority. And as your Commander-in-Chief, I’m going to keep fighting to give you the equipment and support required to meet the missions we ask of you, and also to make sure that you are getting the pay and the benefits and the support that you deserve.

I’ll keep fighting for the capabilities and technologies you need to prevail, and a shipbuilding plan that puts us on track to achieve a 300-ship fleet, with capabilities that exceed the power of the next dozen navies combined.

And I’ll keep fighting to end those foolish across-the-board budget cuts known as the sequester, which is threatening our readiness. With deficits falling at the fastest rate in decades, it’s time for Congress to budget in a smarter way that protects middle-class priorities, preserves investments in our future, and keeps our military strong -- because we have the best-trained, best-led, best-equipped military in history, and I am determined to keep it that way, and Congress should be, too.

We need you to project power across the oceans, from the Pacific to the Persian Gulf -- 100 percent on watch. We need you to partner with other navies and militaries, from Africa to the Americas. We need you to respond with compassion in times of disaster, as when you helped respond to Hurricane Sandy. And in all your work -- in your lifetime of service -- we need you to uphold the highest standards of integrity and character.

With the time I have left -- and I know it’s a little wet, but the Superintendent told me that Marines and folks in the Navy don't mind a little water.

With the time I have left, that’s what I want to discuss today. It’s no secret that in recent decades many Americans have lost confidence in many of the institutions that help shape our society and our democracy. But I suggest to you today that institutions do not fail in a vacuum. Institutions are made up of people, individuals. And we’ve seen how the actions of a few can undermine the integrity of those institutions.

Every day, men and women of talent and skill work in the financial institutions that fund new businesses, and put new families -- put families in new homes and help students go to college. But we’ve also seen how the misdeeds of some -- wild risk-taking or putting profits before people -- sparked a financial crisis and deepened the recession that cost millions of Americans their jobs.

Every day, elected officials like those on this stage, but also all across the nation, devote themselves to improving our communities and our country. But all too often we’ve seen a politics where compromise is rejected as a dirty word, and policies are driven by special interests rather than the national interest. And that breeds a cynicism that threatens our democracy.

Every day, our civil servants do their jobs with professionalism -- protecting our national security and delivering the services that so many Americans expect. But as we’ve seen again in recent days, it only takes the misconduct of a few to further erode the people’s trust in their government. That’s unacceptable to me, and I know it’s unacceptable to you. And against this backdrop, what I said here four years ago remains true today: Our military remains the most trusted institution in America. When others have shirked their responsibilities, our Armed Forces have met every mission we’ve given them. When others have been distracted by petty arguments, our men and women in uniform come together as one American team.

And yet, we must acknowledge that even here, even in our military, we’ve seen how the misconduct of some can have effects that ripple far and wide. In our digital age, a single image from the battlefield of troops falling short of their standards can go viral and endanger our forces and undermine our efforts to achieve security and peace. Likewise, those who commit sexual assault are not only committing a crime, they threaten the trust and discipline that make our military strong. That’s why we have to be determined to stop these crimes, because they’ve got no place in the greatest military on Earth.

So, Class of 2013, I say all this because you’re about to assume the burden of leadership. As officers, you will be trusted with the most awesome of responsibilities -- the lives of the men and women under your command. And when your service is complete, many of you will go on to help lead your communities, America’s companies. You will lead this country. And if we want to restore the trust that the American people deserve to have in their institutions, all of us have to do our part. And those of us in leadership -- myself included -- have to constantly strive to remain worthy of the public trust.

As you go forward in your careers, we need you to carry forth the values that you’ve learned at this institution, because our nation needs them now more than ever.

We need your Honor -- that inner compass that guides you, not when the path is easy and obvious, but when it’s hard and uncertain; that tells you the difference between that which is right and that which is wrong. Perhaps it will be a moment when you think nobody is watching. But never forget that honor, like character, is what you do when nobody is looking. More likely it will be when you’re in the spotlight, leading others --the men and women who are looking up to you to set an example. Never ask them to do what you don’t ask of yourself. Live with integrity and speak with honesty and take responsibility and demand accountability. We need your Honor and we need your Courage -- yes, the daring that tells you to move toward danger when every fiber of your being says to turn the other way. But even more than physical courage, we need your moral courage -- the strength to do what’s right, especially when it’s unpopular. Because at the end of the day and at the end of your career, you want to look in the mirror and say with confidence and with pride, I fulfilled my oath; I did my duty; I stayed true to my values.

We need your Honor and Courage, and we need your Commitment -- that sense of purpose that says I will try even harder, I will do even better in what I expect of myself, in the way I interact with others, including those of different backgrounds. It's no accident that our military is the most respected institution in America -- and one of the most diverse institutions in America. So recognize the dignity in every human being. Treat one another with respect. Remember that when we harness the talents of every man and every woman from every race and every religion and every creed, no nation can ever match us.

And, finally, we need your Resolve -- the same spirit reflected in your class motto: “Surrender to Nothing.” If you seek an example, you don't need to look far, because not long ago, two midshipmen sat where you sat -- from the Class of 2006 -- and they inspire us today.

Here at the Academy, Brad Snyder was the captain of the swim team. He deployed to Afghanistan, and while rushing to the aid of his teammates, he stepped on an IED and lost both his eyes. With the support of family and friends, Brad learned to feel his way and move again. And before long, he was back in the swimming pool, where he said “I’m free.” Then, just one year later, Brad competed at the London Paralympics and won three medals, including two golds.

And when Michelle and I welcomed our U.S. Olympians to the White House, Brad joined us -- standing tall, right in front. And, he said, “Overcoming adversity is a decision. You can let that beat you, or you can make the decision to move forward.”

Here at the Academy, Matt Lampert was on the rowing team. He deployed to Afghanistan with his Marine special ops team. And as they entered a compound, an IED exploded and Matt lost both his legs. He endured a long and painful recovery. But with his new legs, he learned to walk again. He practiced, he trained, and then he passed his physical tests and deployed to Afghanistan again -- a double amputee, back in the fight.

And Matt recently completed his tour. He is back home and is looking ahead to many years of service. Reflecting on his journey -- his mission to return to his unit -- he said he was determined, “however long it was going to take.”

So Class of 2013, I cannot promise you a life of comfort and ease, for you have chosen an ancient path -- the profession of arms -- which carries all the perils of our modern world. And just as classes before you could not know that they would find themselves at Coral Sea or Midway or Fallujah or Helmand, we cannot know sitting here today where your service will carry you.

But I do know this. As you say farewell to Bancroft Hall, as you make your way down Stribling Walk one last time, you’re becoming the newest link in a storied chain. As I look into your eyes today, I see the same confidence and the same professionalism, the same fidelity to our values of those who’ve served before you -- the Jones and Nimitz and Lejeune and Burke, and, yes, the Snyder and the Lampert -- Americans who surrendered to nothing.

And I'm absolutely confident that you will uphold the highest of standards, and that your courage and honor and your commitment will see us through, and that you will always prove yourselves worthy of the trust our nation is placing in you today.

So, congratulations, Class of 2013. God bless our Navy, and God bless our Marine Corps. God bless our Armed Services. God bless these United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address on the Affordable Care Act's Impact in California and Q&A on the U.S. Government's Domestic Surveillance Programs

Good morning, everybody. It -- It is wonderful to see all of you, and I want to thank everybody who is here. I think there's only one problem, and that is that my remarks are not sitting here.

People! Things...by Friday afternoon, things get a little challenged.

Question: Will you answer a question in the --

President Obama: I'm going to have a -- I'm going to answer a question at the end of the remarks, but I want to make sure that we get the remarks out. People! Oh, goodness. Oh, somebody is tripping. Folks are sweating back there right now.

Well, good morning everybody. This afternoon, I'm going to be in Southern California to meet with President Xi of China. But before I leave Northern California, I wanted to take a minute to address something that’s happening with the Affordable Care Act in this state, and I wanted to meet with a group of people who are doing some very important work on behalf of California’s middle-class families.

These leaders from California’s government, the California Endowment, and major Spanish language media outlets have joined together to help implement the Affordable Care Act here in California and to educate folks about how to sign up and shop for quality, affordable plans. And their efforts have already shown some excellent results in the biggest insurance market in the country.

There are two main things that Americans need to know when it comes to the Affordable Care Act and what it means for you.

First of all, if you’re one of the nearly 85 percent of Americans who already have insurance, either through Medicare or Medicaid or your employer, you don’t have to do a thing. You’ve just got a wide array of new benefits, better protections and stronger cost controls that you didn’t have before, and that will, over time, improve the quality of the insurance that you've got; benefits like free preventive care -- checkups, flu shots, mammograms and contraception.

You are now going to be able to get those things through your insurance where they previously were not -- didn’t have to be provided. Protections like allowing people up to the age of 26 to stay on their parent's health care plans, which has already helped 6 million Americans, including [1 million] young Latino Americans.

Cost controls like requiring insurance companies to spend at least 80 percent of the money that you pay in premiums in your actual health care costs, as opposed to administrative costs or CEO pay -- not overhead, but that money has to be spent on you. And if they don’t meet that target, they actually have to reimburse you. So in California, we’re already getting reports that insurers are giving rebates to consumers and small business owners to the tune of $45 million this year. So already we're seeing millions of dollars of rebates sent back to consumers by insurance companies as a consequence of this law.

All of that is happening because of the Affordable Care Act. All of this is in place right now, already, for 85 percent of Americans who have health insurance. By the way, all of this is what the Republican Party has now voted 37 times to repeal, at least in the House of Representatives. And my suggestion to them has been, let's stop refighting the old battles and start working with people like the leaders who are on stage here today to make this law work the way it’s supposed to.

We’re focused on moving forward and making sure that this law works for middle-class families. And that brings me to the second thing that people need to know about the Affordable Care Act.

If you’re one of nearly 6 million Californians or tens of millions of Americans who don’t currently have health insurance, you’ll soon be able to buy quality, affordable care just like everybody else.

And here’s how. States like California are setting up new, online marketplaces where, beginning on October 1st of this year, you can comparison shop an array of private health insurance plans side-by-side, just like you were going online to compare cars or airline tickets. And that means insurance companies will actually have to compete with each other for your business. And that means new choices.

See, right now, most states don’t have a lot of competition. In nearly every state, more than half of all consumers are covered by only two insurers. So there’s no incentive to provide you a lot of choices or to keep costs down. The Affordable Care Act changes that.

Beginning next year, once these marketplaces are open, most states will offer new private insurance choices that don’t exist today. And based on early reports, about 9 in 10 Americans expected to enroll in these marketplaces live in states where they’ll be able to choose between five or more different insurers. So for example, here in California, 33 insurers applied to join the marketplace. Covered California then selected 13 based on access, quality, and affordability, four of which are brand new to your individual market.

So what’s happening is through the Affordable Care Act, we’re creating these marketplaces with more competition, more choice, and so the question is, what happens to cost?

Now, a lot of the opponents of the Affordable Care Act, they had all kinds of sky-is-falling, doom-and-gloom predictions that not only would the law fail, but what we’d also is costs would skyrocket for everybody. Well, it turns out we’re actually seeing that in the states that have committed themselves to implementing this law correctly, we’re seeing some good news. Competition and choice are pushing down costs in the individual market just like the law was designed to do.

The 13 insurance companies that were chosen by Covered California have unveiled premiums that were lower than anybody expected. And those who can’t afford to buy private insurance will get help reducing their out-of-pocket premiums even further with the largest health care tax cut for working families and small businesses in our history. So about 2.6 million Californians -- nearly half of whom are Latinos -- will qualify for tax credits that will, in some cases, lower their premiums a significant amount.

Now, none of this is a surprise. This is the way that the law was designed to work. But since everybody has been saying how it's not going to happen, I think it's important for us to recognize and acknowledge this is working the way it's supposed to. We've seen similar good news, by the way, not just here in California but in Oregon and Washington. In states that are working hard to implement this law properly, we're seeing it work for people -- for middle-class families, for consumers.

Now, that's not to say that everything is going to go perfectly right away. When you're implementing a program this large, there will be some glitches. There are going to be some hiccups. But no matter what, every single consumer will be covered by the new benefits and protections under this law permanently.

So the bottom line is you can listen to a bunch of political talk out there -- negative ads and fear mongering geared towards the next election -- or alternatively you can actually look at what’s happening in states like California right now. And the fact of the matter is through these exchanges, not only are the 85 percent of people who already have health insurance getting better protections, and receiving rebates, and being able to keep their kids on their health insurance until they're 26, and getting free preventive care, but if you don't have health insurance and you're trying to get it through the individual market and it's too expensive or it's too restricted, you now have these marketplaces where they're going to offer you a better deal because of choice and competition.

And if even at those lower rates and better insurance that you're getting through these marketplaces you still can't afford it, you're going to be getting tax cuts and tax credits through the Affordable Care Act that will help you afford it. And that's how we're going to make sure that millions of people who don't currently have health insurance or are getting a really bad deal on their health insurance are finally going to get it.

But -- and here's my final point -- to take advantage of these marketplaces, folks are going to need to sign up. So you can find out how to sign up at HealthCare.gov, or here in California you can sign up at CoveredCA.com. Because quality care is not something that should be a privilege, it should be a right. In the greatest country on Earth, we've got to make sure that every single person that needs health care can get it. And we've got to make sure that we do it in the most efficient way possible.

One last point I'm going to make on this, because there are a lot of people who currently get health insurance through their employers -- the 85 percent who are already out there -- and they may be saying, well, if this law is so great, why is it that my premium still went up? Well, part of what's happening across the country is in some cases, for example, employers may be shifting more costs through higher premiums or higher deductibles or higher copays, and so there may still be folks who are out there feeling increased costs not because of the Affordable Care Act but because those costs are being passed on to workers or insurance companies, in some cases. Even with these laws in place, they're still jacking up prices unnecessarily.

So this doesn't solve the whole problem, but it moves us in the right direction. It’s also the reason why we have to keep on implementing changes in how our health care system works to continually drive better efficiency, higher quality, lower cost. We’re starting to do that. Health care cost inflation has gone up at the lowest rate over the last three years that we’ve seen in many, many years. So we’re making progress in actually reducing overall health care costs while improving quality, but we’re going to have to continue to push on that front as well. That's also part of what we’re doing in the Affordable Care Act.

But the main message I want for Californians and people all across the country -- starting on October 1st, if you’re in the individual market, you can get a better deal. If you’re a small business that's providing health insurance to your employees, you can get a better deal through these exchanges. You’ve got to sign up: HealthCare.gov, or here in California at CoveredCA.com.

All right? So thank you very much.

Question: Mr. President?

President Obama: I’m going to take one question. And then, remember, people are going to have opportunities to also -- answer questions when I’m with the Chinese President today. So I don't want the whole day to just be a bleeding press conference. But I’m going to take Jackie Calmes’ question.

Question: Mr. President, could you please react to the reports of secret government surveillance of phones and Internet? And can you also assure Americans that the government -- your government doesn't have some massive secret database of all their personal online information and activities?

President Obama: Yes. When I came into this office, I made two commitments that are more important than any commitment I made: Number one, to keep the American people safe; and number two, to uphold the Constitution. And that includes what I consider to be a constitutional right to privacy and an observance of civil liberties.

Now, the programs that have been discussed over the last couple days in the press are secret in the sense that they're classified. But they're not secret in the sense that when it comes to telephone calls, every member of Congress has been briefed on this program. With respect to all these programs, the relevant intelligence committees are fully briefed on these programs. These are programs that have been authorized by broad bipartisan majorities repeatedly since 2006.

And so, I think at the outset, it's important to understand that your duly elected representatives have been consistently informed on exactly what we're doing. Now, let me take the two issues separately.

When it comes to telephone calls, nobody is listening to your telephone calls. That’s not what this program is about. As was indicated, what the intelligence community is doing is looking at phone numbers and durations of calls. They are not looking at people's names, and they're not looking at content. But by sifting through this so-called metadata, they may identify potential leads with respect to folks who might engage in terrorism. If these folks -- if the intelligence community then actually wants to listen to a phone call, they've got to go back to a federal judge, just like they would in a criminal investigation.

So I want to be very clear -- some of the hype that we've been hearing over the last day or so -- nobody is listening to the content of people's phone calls. This program, by the way, is fully overseen not just by Congress, but by the FISA Court -- a court specially put together to evaluate classified programs to make sure that the executive branch, or government generally, is not abusing them, and that it's being carried out consistent with the Constitution and rule of law.

And so, not only does that court authorize the initial gathering of data, but -- I want to repeat -- if anybody in government wanted to go further than just that top-line data and want to, for example, listen to Jackie Calmes' phone call, they would have to go back to a federal judge and indicate why, in fact, they were doing further probing.

Now, with respect to the Internet and emails -- this does not apply to U.S. citizens and it does not apply to people living in the United States. And again, in this instance, not only is Congress fully apprised of it, but what is also true is that the FISA Court has to authorize it.

So in summary, what you've got is two programs that were originally authorized by Congress, have been repeatedly authorized by Congress, bipartisan majorities have approved on them, Congress is continually briefed on how these are conducted. There are a whole range of safeguards involved, and federal judges are overseeing the entire program throughout. We're also setting up -- We've also set up an audit process, when I came into office, to make sure that we're, after the fact, making absolutely certain that all the safeguards are being properly observed.

Now, having said all that, you'll remember when I made that speech a couple of weeks ago about the need for us to shift out of a perpetual war mindset, I specifically said that one of the things that we're going to have to discuss and debate is how are we striking this balance between the need to keep the American people safe and our concerns about privacy? Because there are some tradeoffs involved.

I welcome this debate. And I think it's healthy for our democracy. I think it's a sign of maturity, because probably five years ago, six years ago, we might not have been having this debate. And I think it's interesting that there are some folks on the left but also some folks on the right who are now worried about it who weren't very worried about it when there was a Republican President. I think that's good that we're having this discussion.

But I think it's important for everybody to understand -- and I think the American people understand -- that there are some tradeoffs involved. I came in with a healthy skepticism about these programs. My team evaluated them. We scrubbed them thoroughly. We actually expanded some of the oversight, increased some of safeguards. But my assessment and my team's assessment was that they help us prevent terrorist attacks. And the modest encroachments on the privacy that are involved in getting phone numbers or duration without a name attached and not looking at content, that on net, it was worth us doing. Some other folks may have a different assessment on that.

But I think it's important to recognize that you can't have 100 percent security and also then have 100 percent privacy and zero inconvenience. We're going to have to make some choices as a society. And what I can say is that in evaluating these programs, they make a difference in our capacity to anticipate and prevent possible terrorist activity. And the fact that they’re under very strict supervision by all three branches of government and that they do not involve listening to people's phone calls, do not involve reading the emails of U.S. citizens or U.S. residents absent further action by a federal court that is entirely consistent with what we would do, for example, in a criminal investigation -- I think on balance, we have established a process and a procedure that the American people should feel comfortable about.

But, again, these programs are subject to congressional oversight and congressional reauthorization and congressional debate. And if there are members of Congress who feel differently, then they should speak up. And we're happy to have that debate.

Okay? All right. And we'll have a chance to talk further over the course of the next couple of days.

Question: Do you welcome the leaks, sir? Do you welcome the leaks? Do you welcome the debate?

President Obama: I don't welcome leaks, because there's a reason why these programs are classified. I think that there is a suggestion that somehow any classified program is a "secret" program, which means it's somehow suspicious.

The fact of the matter is in our modern history, there are a whole range of programs that have been classified because -- when it comes to, for example, fighting terror, our goal is to stop folks from doing us harm. And if every step that we’re taking to try to prevent a terrorist act is on the front page of the newspapers or on television, then presumably the people who are trying to do us harm are going to be able to get around our preventive measures. That's why these things are classified.

But that's also why we set up congressional oversight. These are the folks you all vote for as your representatives in Congress, and they're being fully briefed on these programs. And if, in fact, there was -- there were abuses taking place, presumably those members of Congress could raise those issues very aggressively. They're empowered to do so.

We also have federal judges that we put in place who are not subject to political pressure. They’ve got lifetime tenure as federal judges, and they're empowered to look over our shoulder at the executive branch to make sure that these programs aren’t being abused.

So we have a system in which some information is classified, and we have a system of checks and balances to make sure that it’s not abused. And if, in fact, this information ends up just being dumped out willy-nilly without regard to risks to the program, risks to the people involved -- in some cases, on other leaks, risks to personnel in a very dangerous situation -- then it’s very hard for us to be as effective in protecting the American people.

That's not to suggest that you just say, trust me; we’re doing the right thing; we know who the bad guys are. And the reason that's not how it works is because we’ve got congressional oversight and judicial oversight. And if people can't trust not only the executive branch but also don't trust Congress and don't trust federal judges to make sure that we’re abiding by the Constitution, due process and rule of law, then we’re going to have some problems here.

But my observation is, is that the people who are involved in America’s national security, they take this work very seriously. They cherish our Constitution. The last thing they’d be doing is taking programs like this to listen to somebody’s phone calls.

And by the way, with respect to my concerns about privacy issues, I will leave this office at some point, sometime in the last -- next three and a half years, and after that, I will be a private citizen. And I suspect that, on a list of people who might be targeted so that somebody could read their emails or listen to their phone calls, I'd probably be pretty high on that list. It's not as if I don't have a personal interest in making sure my privacy is protected.

But I know that the people who are involved in these programs, they operate like professionals. And these things are very narrowly circumscribed. They're very focused. And in the abstract, you can complain about Big Brother and how this is a potential program run amuck, but when you actually look at the details, then I think we've struck the right balance.

Thank you very much, guys. That's it. I -- Thank you.

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# U.S. Senate Call on Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Well, good morning, everybody. Welcome to the White House. It is a pleasure to have so many distinguished Americans today from so many different walks of life. We’ve got Democrats and Republicans; we've got labor and business leaders up on stage; we have law enforcement and clergy -- Americans who don’t see eye-to-eye on every issue, in fact, in some cases, don't see eye-to-eye on just about any issue -- but who are today standing united in support of the legislation that is front and center in Congress this week -- a bipartisan bill to fix our broken immigration system.

And I have to say -- please give Tolu another round of applause. It takes a lot of courage to do what Tolu did -- to step out of the shadows, to share her story, and to hope that, despite the risks, she could make a difference. But Tolu I think is representative of so many DREAMers out there who have worked so hard -- and I've had a chance to meet so many of them who’ve been willing to give a face to the undocumented and have inspired a movement across America. And with each step, they’ve reminded us -- time and again -- what this debate is all about. This is not an abstract debate. This is about incredible young people who understand themselves to be Americans, who have done everything right but have still been hampered in achieving their American Dream.

And they remind us that we're a nation of immigrants. Throughout our history, the promise we found in those who come from every corner of the globe has always been one of our greatest strengths. It’s kept our workforce vibrant and dynamic. It’s kept our businesses on the cutting edge. It’s helped build the greatest economic engine that the world has ever known.

When I speak to other world leaders, one of the biggest advantages we have economically is our demographics. We're constantly replenishing ourselves with talent from across the globe. No other country can match that history. And what was true years ago is still true today -- who’s beeping over there? You’re feeling kind of self-conscious, aren’t you? It’s okay.

In recent years, one in four of America’s new small business owners were immigrants. One in four high-tech startups in America were founded by immigrants. Forty percent of Fortune 500 companies were started by a first- or second-generation American. Think about that -- almost half of the Fortune 500 companies when they were started were started by first- or second-generation immigrants. So immigration isn’t just part of our national character. It is a driving force in our economy that creates jobs and prosperity for all of our citizens.

Now, here’s the thing. Over the past two decades, our immigration system hasn’t kept pace with changing times and hasn’t matched up with our most cherished values.

Right now, our immigration system invites the best and the brightest from all over the world to come and study at our top universities, and then once they finish -- once they’ve gotten the training they need to build a new invention or create a new business -- our system too often tells them to go back home so that other countries can reap the benefits, the new jobs, the new businesses, the new industries. That’s not smart. But that’s the broken system we have today.

Right now, our immigration system keeps families apart for years at a time. Even for folks who, technically, under the legal immigration system, should be eligible to become citizens but it is so long and so cumbersome, so byzantine, that families end up being separated for years. Because of a backlog in visas, people who come here legally -- who are ready to give it their all to earn their place in America -- end up waiting for years to join their loved ones here in the United States. It’s not right. But that’s the broken system we have today.

Right now, our immigration system has no credible way of dealing with the 11 million men and women who are in this country illegally. And, yes, they broke the rules; they didn’t wait their turn. They shouldn’t be let off easy. They shouldn’t be allowed to game the system. But at the same time, the vast majority of these individuals aren’t looking for any trouble. They’re just looking to provide for their families, contribute to their communities.

They’re our neighbors. We know their kids. Too often, they’re forced to do what they do in a shadow economy where shady employers can exploit them by paying less than the minimum wage, making them work without overtime, not giving them any benefits. That pushes down standards for all workers. It’s bad for everybody. Because all the businesses that do play by the rules, that hire people legally, that pay them fairly -- they’re at a competitive disadvantage. American workers end up being at a competitive disadvantage. It’s not fair. But that’s the broken system that we have today.

Now, over the past four years, we’ve tried to patch up some of the worst cracks in the system. We made border security a top priority. Today, we have twice as many border patrol agents as we did in 2004. We have more boots on the ground along our southern border than at any time in our history. And in part, by using technology more effectively, illegal crossings are near their lowest level in decades.

We focused our enforcement efforts on criminals who are here illegally and who are endangering our communities. And today, deportation of criminals is at its highest level ever.

And having put border security in place, having refocused on those who could do our communities harm, we also then took up the cause of the DREAMers, young people like Tolu who were brought to this country as children. We said that if you’re able to meet some basic criteria, like pursuing a higher education, then we’ll consider offering you the chance to come out of the shadows so you can continue to work here, and study here, and contribute to our communities legally.

So my administration has done what we can on our own. And we’ve got members of my administration here who’ve done outstanding work over the past few years to try to close up some of the gaps that exist in the system. But the system is still broken. And to truly deal with this issue, Congress needs to act. And that moment is now.

This week, the Senate will consider a common-sense, bipartisan bill that is the best chance we’ve had in years to fix our broken immigration system. It will build on what we’ve done and continue to strengthen our borders. It will make sure that businesses and workers are all playing by the same set of rules, and it includes tough penalties for those who don’t. It’s fair for middle-class families, by making sure that those who are brought into the system pay their fair share in taxes and for services. And it’s fair for those who try to immigrate legally by stopping those who try to skip the line. It’s the right thing to do.

Now, this bill isn’t perfect. It’s a compromise. And going forward, nobody is going to get everything that they want -- not Democrats, not Republicans, not me. But this is a bill that’s largely consistent with the principles that I and the people on this stage have laid out for common-sense reform.

First of all, if passed, this bill would be the biggest commitment to border security in our nation’s history. It would put another $6.5 billion -- on top of what we’re already spending -- towards stronger, smarter security along our borders. It would increase criminal penalties against smugglers and traffickers. It would finally give every employer a reliable way to check that every person they’re hiring is here legally. And it would hold employers more accountable if they knowingly hire undocumented workers. So it strengthens border security, but also enforcement within our borders.

I know there’s a lot of talk right now about border security, so let me repeat -- today, illegal crossings are near their lowest level in decades. And if passed, the Senate bill as currently written and as hitting the floor would put in place the toughest border enforcement plan that America has ever seen. So nobody is taking border enforcement lightly. That’s part of this bill.

Number two, this bill would provide a pathway to earned citizenship for the 11 million individuals who are in this country illegally. So that pathway is arduous. You've got to pass background checks. You've got to learn English. You've got to pay taxes and a penalty. And then you've got to go to the back of the line behind everybody who’s done things the right way and have tried to come here legally.

So this won’t be a quick process. It will take at least 13 years before the vast majority of these individuals are able to even apply for citizenship. So this is no cakewalk. But it’s the only way we can make sure that everyone who’s here is playing by the same rules as ordinary families -- paying taxes and getting their own health insurance.

That’s why, for immigration reform to work, it must be clear from the outset that there is a pathway to citizenship. If we’re asking everybody to play by the same rules, you got to give people a sense of certainty that they go through all these sacrifices, do all this, that there’s at the end of the horizon, the opportunity -- not the guarantee, but the opportunity -- to be part of this American family. And by the way, a majority of Americans support this idea.

Number three, this bill would modernize the legal immigration system so that, alongside training American workers for the jobs of tomorrow, we’re also attracting the highly skilled entrepreneurs and engineers from around the world who will ultimately grow our economy. And this bill would help make sure that our people don’t have to wait years before their loved ones are able to join them here in America.

So that’s what immigration reform looks like: Smarter enforcement; a pathway to earned citizenship; improvements to our legal system. They’re all common-sense steps. They’ve got bipartisan support. They’ve got the support of a broad cross-section of leaders from every walk of life. So there’s no reason Congress can’t get this done by the end of the summer.

Remember, the process that led to this bill was open and inclusive. For months, the bipartisan Gang of Eight looked at every issue, reconciled competing ideas, built a compromise that works. Then the Judiciary Committee held numerous hearings. More than a hundred amendments were added, often with bipartisan support. The good news is every day that goes by, more and more Republicans and Democrats are coming out to support this common-sense immigration reform bill.

And I’m sure the bill will go through a few more changes in the weeks to come. But this much is clear: If you genuinely believe we need to fix our broken immigration system, there’s no good reason to stand in the way of this bill. A lot of people -- Democrats and Republicans -- have done a lot of good work on this bill. So if you’re serious about actually fixing the system, then this is the vehicle to do it.

If you’re not serious about it, if you think that a broken system is the best America can do, then I guess it might make sense to try to block it. But if you're actually serious and sincere about fixing a broken system, this is the vehicle to do it. And now is the time to get it done. There is no good reason to play procedural games or engage in obstruction just to block the best chance we’ve had in years to address this problem in a way that’s fair to middle-class families, to business owners, to legal immigrants.

And there’s no good reason to undo the progress we’ve already made -- especially when it comes to extreme steps like stripping protections from DREAMers that my administration has provided, or asking law enforcement to treat them the same way they treat violent criminals. That’s not who we are.

We owe it to America to do better. We owe it to the DREAMers to do better. We owe it to the young people like Tolu and Diego Sanchez, who’s with us here today. Where's Diego? Right here. Diego came here from Argentina with his parents when he was just a kid, and growing up, America was his home. This is where he went to school. This is where he made friends. This is where he built a life. You ask Diego and he’ll tell you he feels American in every way -- except one; on paper.

In high school, Diego found out that he was undocumented. Think about that. With all the stuff you're already dealing with in high school -- and suddenly, oh, man, really? So he had done everything right -- stayed out of trouble, excelled in class, contributed to his community -- feeling hopeful about his future, and suddenly he finds out he's got to live in fear of deportation. Watching his friends get their licenses knowing he couldn’t get one himself. Seeing his classmates apply for summer jobs knowing he couldn’t do that either.

When Diego heard that we were going to offer a chance for folks like him to emerge from the shadows, he went and signed up. All he wanted, he said, was a chance to, “live a normal life” and to “contribute to the country I love.” And Diego, this year, was approved for deferred action. A few weeks ago, he graduated from St. Thomas University, where he was student body president and “Student of the Year.”

So now he’s set his sights higher -- master's degree and then law school so he can pursue a career in public policy, help America shape its future. Why wouldn’t we want to do the right thing by Diego? What rationale is there out there that wouldn’t want to make sure Diego achieves his dreams? Because if he does, that helps us all achieve our dreams.

So in the weeks to come, you'll hear some opponents of immigration reform try to gin up fear and create division and spread the same old rumors and untruths that we’ve heard before. And when that happens, I want you to think about Tolu. I want you to think about Diego. And I want you to think about your own parents and your own grandparents and your own great grandparents, and all the men and women and children who came here. The notion that somehow those who came through Ellis Island had all their papers right -- had checked every box and followed procedures as they were getting on that boat -- they were looking for a better life just like these families. And they want to earn their way into the American story.

And if you’re willing to stand with them -- and if you’re willing to stand with all these outstanding leaders up here -- then now is the time to make your voice heard. You need to call and email and tweet your senators and tell them, don't kick this problem down the road. Come together. Work together. Do your job not only to fix a broken immigration system once and for all, but to leave something better for all the generations to come, to make sure we continue to be a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants. Do the right thing.

Thanks. God bless you. God bless America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address to the People of Northern Ireland

Thank you. Thank you so much. Thank you very much. Please be seated.

Well, hello, Belfast! Hello, Northern Ireland! You now know why it’s so difficult to speak after Michelle -- she’s better than me. But on behalf of both of us, thank you so much for this extraordinarily warm welcome.

And I want to thank Hannah for introducing my wife. We had a chance to speak with Hannah backstage and she’s an extraordinary young woman, who I know is going to do even greater things in years to come.

I want to thank two men, who I’ve hosted at the White House on many a St. Patrick’s Day, for their warm welcome -- First Minister Peter Robinson -- and Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness. I spend the whole year trying to unite Washington around things, and they come to visit on St. Patrick’s Day and they do it in a single afternoon.

I want to thank the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Teresa Villiers. To all the Ministers in the audience; to Lord Mayor MÃ¡irtÃ­n Ã“ Muilleoir. And I want to thank all the citizens of Belfast and Northern Ireland for your hospitality.

As our daughters pointed out as we were driving in, I cause a big fuss wherever I go. So traffic and barricades and police officers, and it’s all a big production, a lot of people are involved -- and I’m very, very grateful for accommodating us.

The first time Michelle and I visited this island was about two years ago. We were honored to join tens of thousands on College Green in Dublin. We traveled to the little village of Moneygall, where, as it turned out, my great-great-great grandfather was born. And I actually identified this individual in this place only a few years ago. When I was first running for office in Chicago, I didn’t know this, but I wish I had. When I was in Chicago, as I was campaigning, they’d look at my last name and they’d say, “Oh, there’s an O’Bama from the homeland running on the South Side, so he must be Irish -- but I've never heard the Gaelic name, Barack” But it pays to be Irish in Chicago.

So while we were in Moneygall, I had a chance to meet my eighth cousin, Henry -- who’s also known as Henry the Eighth. We knew he was my cousin because his ears flapped out just like mine. I leafed through the parish logs where the names of my ancestors are recorded. I even watched Michelle learn how to pull a proper pint of “black.”

Audience Member: Whoop!

President Obama: Who’s cheering for that? So it was a magical visit. But the only problem was it was far too short. A volcano in Iceland forced us to leave before we could even spend the night. So we’ve been eager for a chance to return to the Emerald Isle ever since -- and this time, we brought our daughters, too.

In particular, we wanted to come here, to Northern Ireland, a place of remarkable beauty and extraordinary history; part of an island with which tens of millions of Americans share an eternal relationship. America’s story, in part, began right outside the doors of this gleaming hall. Three hundred and twenty-five years ago, a ship set sail from the River Lagan for the Chesapeake Bay, filled with men and women who dreamed of building a new life in a new land.

They, followed by hundreds of thousands more, helped America write those early chapters. They helped us win our independence. They helped us draft our Constitution. Soon after, America returned to Belfast, opening one of our very first consulates here in 1796, when George Washington was still President.

Today, names familiar to many of you are etched on schools and courthouses and solemn memorials of war across the United States -- names like Wilson and Kelly, Campbell and O’Neill. So many of the qualities that we Americans hold dear we imported from this land -- perseverance, faith, an unbending belief that we make our own destiny, and an unshakable dream that if we work hard and we live responsibly, something better lies just around the bend.

So our histories are bound by blood and belief, by culture and by commerce. And our futures are equally, inextricably linked. And that’s why I’ve come to Belfast today -- to talk about the future we can build together.

Your generation, a young generation, has come of age in a world with fewer walls. You’ve been educated in an era of instant information. You’ve been tempered by some very difficult times around the globe. And as I travel, what I’ve seen of young people like you -- around the world, they show me these currents have conspired to make you a generation possessed by both a clear-eyed realism, but also an optimistic idealism; a generation keenly aware of the world as it is, but eager to forge the world as it should be. And when it comes to the future we share, that fills me with hope. Young people fill me with hope.

Here, in Northern Ireland, this generation has known even more rapid change than many young people have seen around the world. And while you have unique challenges of your own, you also have unique reasons to be hopeful. For you are the first generation in this land to inherit more than just the hardened attitudes and the bitter prejudices of the past. You’re an inheritor of a just and hard-earned peace. You now live in a thoroughly modern Northern Ireland.

Of course, the recessions that spread through nearly every country in recent years have inflicted hardship here, too, and there are communities that still endure real pain. But, day to day, life is changing throughout the North. There was a time people couldn’t have imagined Northern Ireland hosting a gathering of world leaders, as you are today. And I want to thank Chief Constable Matt Baggott for working to keep everyone safe this week.

Northern Ireland is hosting the World Police and Fire Games later this year -- which Dame Mary Peters is helping to organize. Golf fans like me had to wait a long six decades for the Irish Open to return to the North last year. I am unhappy that I will not get a few rounds in while I'm here. I did meet Rory McIlroy last year -- and Rory offered to get my swing “sorted," -- which was a polite way of saying, “Mr. President, you need help.”

None of that would have been imaginable a generation ago. And Belfast is a different city. Once-abandoned factories are rebuilt. Former industrial sites are reborn. Visitors come from all over to see an exhibit at the MAC, a play at the Lyric, a concert here at Waterfront Hall. Families crowd into pubs in the Cathedral Quarter to hear “trad.” Students lounge at cafÃ©s, asking each other, “What’s the craic?” So to paraphrase Seamus Heaney, it’s the manifestation of sheer, bloody genius. This island is now chic.

And these daily moments of life in a bustling city and a changing country, it may seem ordinary to many of you -- and that’s what makes it so extraordinary. That’s what your parents and grandparents dreamt for all of you -- to travel without the burden of checkpoints, or roadblocks, or seeing soldiers on patrol. To enjoy a sunny day free from the ever-present awareness that violence could blacken it at any moment. To befriend or fall in love with whomever you want. They hoped for a day when the world would think something different when they heard the word “Belfast.” Because of their effort, because of their courage that day has come. Because of their work, those dreams they had for you became the most incredible thing of all -- they became a reality.

It's been 15 years now since the Good Friday Agreement; since clenched fists gave way to outstretched hands. The people of this island voted in overwhelming numbers to see beyond the scars of violence and mistrust, and to choose to wage peace. Over the years, other breakthroughs and agreements have followed. That’s extraordinary, because for years, few conflicts in the world seemed more intractable than the one here in Northern Ireland. And when peace was achieved here, it gave the entire world hope.

The world rejoiced in your achievement -- especially in America. Pubs from Chicago to Boston were scenes of revelry, folks celebrating the hard work of Hume and Trimble and Adams and Paisley, and so many others. In America, you helped us transcend our differences -- because if there’s one thing on which Democrats and Republicans in America wholeheartedly agree, it’s that we strongly support a peaceful and prosperous Northern Ireland.

But as all of you know all too well, for all the strides that you’ve made, there’s still much work to do. There are still people who haven’t reaped the rewards of peace. There are those who aren’t convinced that the effort is worth it. There are still wounds that haven’t healed, and communities where tensions and mistrust hangs in the air. There are walls that still stand; there are still many miles to go.

From the start, no one was naÃ¯ve enough to believe that peace would be anything but a long journey. Yeats once wrote “Peace comes dropping slow.” But that doesn’t mean our efforts to forge a real and lasting peace should come dropping slow. This work is as urgent now as it has ever been, because there’s more to lose now than there has ever been.

In today’s hyper-connected world, what happens here has an impact on lives far from these green shores. If you continue your courageous path toward a permanent peace, and all the social and economic benefits that have come with it, that won’t just be good for you, it will be good for this entire island. It will be good for the United Kingdom. It will be good for Europe. It will be good for the world.

We need you to get this right. And what’s more, you set an example for those who seek a peace of their own. Because beyond these shores, right now, in scattered corners of the world, there are people living in the grip of conflict -- ethnic conflict, religious conflict, tribal conflicts -- and they know something better is out there. And they’re groping to find a way to discover how to move beyond the heavy hand of history, to put aside the violence. They’re studying what you’re doing. And they’re wondering, perhaps if Northern Ireland can achieve peace, we can, too. You’re their blueprint to follow. You’re their proof of what is possible -- because hope is contagious. They’re watching to see what you do next.

Now, some of that is up to your leaders. As someone who knows firsthand how politics can encourage division and discourage cooperation, I admire the Northern Ireland Executive and the Northern Ireland Assembly all the more for making power-sharing work. That’s not easy to do. It requires compromise, and it requires absorbing some pain from your own side. I applaud them for taking responsibility for law enforcement and for justice, and I commend their effort to “Building a United Community” -- important next steps along your transformational journey.

Because issues like segregated schools and housing, lack of jobs and opportunity -- symbols of history that are a source of pride for some and pain for others -- these are not tangential to peace; they’re essential to it. If towns remain divided -- if Catholics have their schools and buildings, and Protestants have theirs -- if we can’t see ourselves in one another, if fear or resentment are allowed to harden, that encourages division. It discourages cooperation.

Ultimately, peace is just not about politics. It’s about attitudes; about a sense of empathy; about breaking down the divisions that we create for ourselves in our own minds and our own hearts that don’t exist in any objective reality, but that we carry with us generation after generation.

And I know, because America, we, too, have had to work hard over the decades, slowly, gradually, sometimes painfully, in fits and starts, to keep perfecting our union. A hundred and fifty years ago, we were torn open by a terrible conflict. Our Civil War was far shorter than The Troubles, but it killed hundreds of thousands of our people. And, of course, the legacy of slavery endured for generations.

Even a century after we achieved our own peace, we were not fully united. When I was a boy, many cities still had separate drinking fountains and lunch counters and washrooms for blacks and whites. My own parents’ marriage would have been illegal in certain states. And someone who looked like me often had a hard time casting a ballot, much less being on a ballot.

But over time, laws changed, and hearts and minds changed, sometimes driven by courageous lawmakers, but more often driven by committed citizens. Politicians oftentimes follow rather than lead. And so, especially young people helped to push and to prod and to protest, and to make common cause with those who did not look like them. And that transformed America -- so that Malia and Sasha’s generation, they have different attitudes about differences and race than mine and certainly different from the generation before that. And each successive generation creates a new space for peace and tolerance and justice and fairness.

And while we have work to do in many ways, we have surely become more tolerant and more just, more accepting, more willing to see our diversity in America not as something to fear, but as something to welcome because it's a source of our national strength.

So as your leaders step forward to address your challenges through talks by all parties, they’ll need you young people to keep pushing them, to create a space for them, to change attitudes. Because ultimately, whether your communities deal with the past and face the future united together isn’t something you have to wait for somebody else to do –- that’s a choice you have to make right now.

It's within your power to bring about change. Whether you are a good neighbor to someone from the other side of past battles -- that’s up to you. Whether you treat them with the dignity and respect they deserve -- that’s up to you. Whether you let your kids play with kids who attend a different church -– that’s your decision. Whether you take a stand against violence and hatred, and tell extremists on both sides that no matter how many times they attack the peace, they will not succeed –- that is in your hands. And whether you reach your own outstretched hand across dividing lines, across peace walls, to build trust in a spirit of respect –- that’s up to you. The terms of peace may be negotiated by political leaders, but the fate of peace is up to each of us.

This peace in Northern Ireland has been tested over the past 15 years. It's been tested over the past year. It will be tested again. But remember something that President Clinton said when he spoke here in Belfast just a few weeks after the horrors of Omagh. That bomb, he said, “was not the last bomb of The Troubles; it was the opening shot of a vicious attack on the peace.” And whenever your peace is attacked, you will have to choose whether to respond with the same bravery that you’ve summoned so far, or whether you succumb to the worst instincts. those impulses that kept this great land divided for too long. You'll have to choose whether to keep going forward, not backwards.

And you should know that so long as you are moving forward, America will always stand by you as you do. We will keep working closely with leaders in Stormont, Dublin and Westminster to support your political progress. We’ll keep working to strengthen our economies, including through efforts like the broad economic initiative announced on Friday to unlock new opportunities for growth and investment between our two countries’ businesses -- because jobs and opportunity are essential to peace.

Our scientists will keep collaborating with yours in fields like nanotechnology and clean energy and health care that make our lives better and fuel economic growth on both sides of the Atlantic -- because progress is essential to peace. And because knowledge and understanding is essential to peace, we will keep investing in programs that enrich both of us -- programs like the one at Belfast Metropolitan College, which teaches students from West and North Belfast the skills they need for new jobs, and exchange programs that have given thousands in Northern Ireland and the United States the chance to travel to each other’s communities and learn from one another.

Now, one of those young people is here today. Sylvia Gordon is the director of an organization called Groundwork Northern Ireland, which aims to bring about change from the ground up. Where’s Sylvia? Where’s Sylvia? Is Sylvia here somewhere? Where is she? She’s here somewhere. You’re here, too, yes. Some guy just waved, he said, “I’m here.” Which is good, I appreciate you being here.

As someone who got my start as a community organizer, I was so impressed with what Sylvia has done, because a few years ago, Sylvia visited the United States to learn more about how Americans organize to improve their communities. So after she came home, Sylvia rolled up her sleeves here in Belfast and decided to do something about Alexandra Park. Some of you may know this park. For years, it was thought to be the only park in Europe still divided by a wall. Think about that. In all of Europe, that one park has got a wall in the middle of it.

Sylvia and her colleagues knew how hard it would be to do anything about a peace wall, but they reached out to the police, they reached out to the Department of Justice. They brought together people from across the communities. They knew it was going to be hard, but they tried anyway. And together, they all decided to build a gate to open that wall. And now, people can walk freely through the park and enjoy the sun -- when it comes out -- just like people do every day in parks all around the world.

A small bit of progress. But the fact that so far we’ve only got a gate open and the wall is still up means there’s more work to do. And that’s the work of your generation. As long as more walls still stand, we will need more people like Sylvia. We’ll need more of you, young people, who imagine the world as it should be; who knock down walls; who knock down barriers; who imagine something different and have the courage to make it happen. The courage to bring communities together, to make even the small impossibilities a shining example of what is possible. And that, more than anything, will shape what Northern Ireland looks like 15 years from now and beyond.

All of you -- every single young person here today -- possess something the generation before yours did not, and that is an example to follow. When those who took a chance on peace got started, they didn’t have a successful model to emulate. They didn’t know how it would work. But they took a chance. And so far, it has succeeded. And the first steps are the hardest and requires the most courage. The rest, now, is up to you.

“Peace is indeed harder than war,” the Irish author Colum McCann recently wrote. “And its constant fragility is part of its beauty. A bullet need happen only once, but for peace to work we need to be reminded of its existence again and again and again.”

And that’s what we need from you. That’s what we need from every young person in Northern Ireland, and that’s what we need from every young person around the world. You must remind us of the existence of peace -- the possibility of peace. You have to remind us of hope again and again and again. Despite resistance, despite setbacks, despite hardship, despite tragedy, you have to remind us of the future again and again and again.

I have confidence you will choose that path; you will embrace that task. And to those who choose the path of peace, I promise you the United States of America will support you every step of the way. We will always be a wind at your back. And as I said when I visited two years ago, I am convinced that this little island that inspires the biggest of things -- this little island, its best days are yet ahead.

Good luck.

God bless you.

And God bless all the people of Northern Ireland.

Thank you.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Brandenburg Gate Address

Thank you, Chancellor Merkel, for your leadership, your friendship, and the example of your life -- from a child of the East to the leader of a free and united Germany. As I’ve said, Angela and I don’t exactly look like previous German and American leaders. But the fact that we can stand here today, along the fault line where a city was divided, speaks to an eternal truth: No wall can stand against the yearning of justice, the yearnings for freedom, the yearnings for peace that burns in the human heart.

Mayor Wowereit, distinguished guests, and especially the people of Berlin and of Germany -- thank you for this extraordinarily warm welcome. In fact, it's so warm and I feel so good that I'm actually going to take off my jacket, and anybody else who wants to, feel free to. We can be a little more informal among friends.

As your Chancellor mentioned, five years ago I had the privilege to address this city as senator. Today, I'm proud to return as President of the United States. And I bring with me the enduring friendship of the American people, as well as my wife, Michelle, and Malia and Sasha. You may notice that they're not here. The last thing they want to do is to listen to another speech from me. So they're out experiencing the beauty and the history of Berlin. And this history speaks to us today. Here, for thousands of years, the people of this land have journeyed from tribe to principality to nation-state; through Reformation and Enlightenment, renowned as a “land of poets and thinkers,” among them Immanuel Kant, who taught us that freedom is the “unoriginated birthright of man, and it belongs to him by force of his humanity.” Here, for two centuries, this gate stood tall as the world around it convulsed -- through the rise and fall of empires; through revolutions and republics; art and music and science that reflected the height of human endeavor, but also war and carnage that exposed the depths of man’s cruelty to man. It was here that Berliners carved out an island of democracy against the greatest of odds. As has already been mentioned, they were supported by an airlift of hope, and we are so honored to be joined by Colonel Halvorsen, 92 years old -- the original “candy bomber.” We could not be prouder of him. I hope I look that good, by the way, when I'm 92.

During that time, a Marshall Plan seeded a miracle, and a North Atlantic Alliance protected our people. And those in the neighborhoods and nations to the East drew strength from the knowledge that freedom was possible here, in Berlin -- that the waves of crackdowns and suppressions might therefore someday be overcome. Today, 60 years after they rose up against oppression, we remember the East German heroes of June 17th. When the wall finally came down, it was their dreams that were fulfilled. Their strength and their passion, their enduring example remind us that for all the power of militaries, for all the authority of governments, it is citizens who choose whether to be defined by a wall, or whether to tear it down.

And we’re now surrounded by the symbols of a Germany reborn. A rebuilt Reichstag and its glistening glass dome. An American embassy back at its historic home on Pariser Platz. And this square itself, once a desolate no man’s land, is now open to all. So while I am not the first American President to come to this gate, I am proud to stand on its Eastern side to pay tribute to the past.

For throughout all this history, the fate of this city came down to a simple question: Will we live free or in chains? Under governments that uphold our universal rights, or regimes that suppress them? In open societies that respect the sanctity of the individual and our free will, or in closed societies that suffocate the soul? As free peoples, we stated our convictions long ago. As Americans, we believe that “all men are created equal” with the right to life and liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And as Germans, you declared in your Basic Law that “the dignity of man is inviolable.” Around the world, nations have pledged themselves to a Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which recognizes the inherent dignity and rights of all members of our human family. And this is what was at stake here in Berlin all those years. And because courageous crowds climbed atop that wall, because corrupt dictatorships gave way to new democracies, because millions across this continent now breathe the fresh air of freedom, we can say, here in Berlin, here in Europe -- our values won. Openness won. Tolerance won. And freedom won here in Berlin.

And yet, more than two decades after that triumph, we must acknowledge that there can, at times, be a complacency among our Western democracies. Today, people often come together in places like this to remember history -- not to make it. After all, we face no concrete walls, no barbed wire. There are no tanks poised across a border. There are no visits to fallout shelters. And so sometimes there can be a sense that the great challenges have somehow passed. And that brings with it a temptation to turn inward -- to think of our own pursuits, and not the sweep of history; to believe that we’ve settled history’s accounts, that we can simply enjoy the fruits won by our forebears. But I come here today, Berlin, to say complacency is not the character of great nations. Today’s threats are not as stark as they were half a century ago, but the struggle for freedom and security and human dignity -- that struggle goes on. And I’ve come here, to this city of hope, because the tests of our time demand the same fighting spirit that defined Berlin a half-century ago. Chancellor Merkel mentioned that we mark the anniversary of President John F. Kennedy’s stirring defense of freedom, embodied in the people of this great city. His pledge of solidarity -- “Ich bin ein Berliner” -- echoes through the ages. But that’s not all that he said that day. Less remembered is the challenge that he issued to the crowd before him: “Let me ask you,” he said to those Berliners, “let me ask you to lift your eyes beyond the dangers of today” and “beyond the freedom of merely this city.” Look, he said, “to the day of peace with justice, beyond yourselves and ourselves to all mankind.” President Kennedy was taken from us less than six months after he spoke those words. And like so many who died in those decades of division, he did not live to see Berlin united and free. Instead, he lives forever as a young man in our memory. But his words are timeless because they call upon us to care more about things than just our own self-comfort, about our own city, about our own country. They demand that we embrace the common endeavor of all humanity. And if we lift our eyes, as President Kennedy called us to do, then we’ll recognize that our work is not yet done. For we are not only citizens of America or Germany -- we are also citizens of the world. And our fates and fortunes are linked like never before. We may no longer live in fear of global annihilation, but so long as nuclear weapons exist, we are not truly safe. We may strike blows against terrorist networks, but if we ignore the instability and intolerance that fuels extremism, our own freedom will eventually be endangered. We may enjoy a standard of living that is the envy of the world, but so long as hundreds of millions endure the agony of an empty stomach or the anguish of unemployment, we’re not truly prosperous.

I say all this here, in the heart of Europe, because our shared past shows that none of these challenges can be met unless we see ourselves as part of something bigger than our own experience. Our alliance is the foundation of global security. Our trade and our commerce is the engine of our global economy. Our values call upon us to care about the lives of people we will never meet. When Europe and America lead with our hopes instead of our fears, we do things that no other nations can do, no other nations will do. So we have to lift up our eyes today and consider the day of peace with justice that our generation wants for this world. I'd suggest that peace with justice begins with the example we set here at home, for we know from our own histories that intolerance breeds injustice. Whether it's based on race, or religion, gender or sexual orientation, we are stronger when all our people -- no matter who they are or what they look like -- are granted opportunity, and when our wives and our daughters have the same opportunities as our husbands and our sons.

When we respect the faiths practiced in our churches and synagogues, our mosques and our temples, we're more secure. When we welcome the immigrant with his talents or her dreams, we are renewed. When we stand up for our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters and treat their love and their rights equally under the law, we defend our own liberty as well. We are more free when all people can pursue their own happiness. And as long as walls exist in our hearts to separate us from those who don’t look like us, or think like us, or worship as we do, then we're going to have to work harder, together, to bring those walls of division down. Peace with justice means free enterprise that unleashes the talents and creativity that reside in each of us; in other models, direct economic growth from the top down or relies solely on the resources extracted from the earth. But we believe that real prosperity comes from our most precious resource -- our people. And that’s why we choose to invest in education, and science and research.

And now, as we emerge from recession, we must not avert our eyes from the insult of widening inequality, or the pain of youth who are unemployed. We have to build new ladders of opportunity in our own societies that -- even as we pursue new trade and investment that fuels growth across the Atlantic. America will stand with Europe as you strengthen your union. And we want to work with you to make sure that every person can enjoy the dignity that comes from work -- whether they live in Chicago or Cleveland or Belfast or Berlin, in Athens or Madrid, everybody deserves opportunity. We have to have economies that are working for all people, not just those at the very top.

Peace with justice means extending a hand to those who reach for freedom, wherever they live. Different peoples and cultures will follow their own path, but we must reject the lie that those who live in distant places don’t yearn for freedom and self-determination just like we do; that they don’t somehow yearn for dignity and rule of law just like we do. We cannot dictate the pace of change in places like the Arab world, but we must reject the excuse that we can do nothing to support it.

We cannot shrink from our role of advancing the values we believe in -- whether it's supporting Afghans as they take responsibility for their future, or working for an Israeli-Palestinian peace -- or engaging as we've done in Burma to help create space for brave people to emerge from decades of dictatorship. In this century, these are the citizens who long to join the free world. They are who you were. They deserve our support, for they too, in their own way, are citizens of Berlin. And we have to help them every day.

Peace with justice means pursuing the security of a world without nuclear weapons -- no matter how distant that dream may be. And so, as President, I've strengthened our efforts to stop the spread of nuclear weapons, and reduced the number and role of America’s nuclear weapons. Because of the New START Treaty, we’re on track to cut American and Russian deployed nuclear warheads to their lowest levels since the 1950s.

But we have more work to do. So today, I’m announcing additional steps forward. After a comprehensive review, I’ve determined that we can ensure the security of America and our allies, and maintain a strong and credible strategic deterrent, while reducing our deployed strategic nuclear weapons by up to one-third. And I intend to seek negotiated cuts with Russia to move beyond Cold War nuclear postures.

At the same time, we’ll work with our NATO allies to seek bold reductions in U.S. and Russian tactical weapons in Europe. And we can forge a new international framework for peaceful nuclear power, and reject the nuclear weaponization that North Korea and Iran may be seeking. America will host a summit in 2016 to continue our efforts to secure nuclear materials around the world, and we will work to build support in the United States to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, and call on all nations to begin negotiations on a treaty that ends the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons. These are steps we can take to create a world of peace with justice.

Peace with justice means refusing to condemn our children to a harsher, less hospitable planet. The effort to slow climate change requires bold action. And on this, Germany and Europe have led.

In the United States, we have recently doubled our renewable energy from clean sources like wind and solar power. We’re doubling fuel efficiency on our cars. Our dangerous carbon emissions have come down. But we know we have to do more -- and we will do more.

With a global middle class consuming more energy every day, this must now be an effort of all nations, not just some. For the grim alternative affects all nations -- more severe storms, more famine and floods, new waves of refugees, coastlines that vanish, oceans that rise. This is the future we must avert. This is the global threat of our time. And for the sake of future generations, our generation must move toward a global compact to confront a changing climate before it is too late. That is our job. That is our task. We have to get to work.

Peace with justice means meeting our moral obligations. And we have a moral obligation and a profound interest in helping lift the impoverished corners of the world. By promoting growth so we spare a child born today a lifetime of extreme poverty. By investing in agriculture, so we aren’t just sending food, but also teaching farmers to grow food. By strengthening public health, so we’re not just sending medicine, but training doctors and nurses who will help end the outrage of children dying from preventable diseases. Making sure that we do everything we can to realize the promise -- an achievable promise -- of the first AIDS-free generation. That is something that is possible if we feel a sufficient sense of urgency.

Our efforts have to be about more than just charity. They’re about new models of empowering people -- to build institutions; to abandon the rot of corruption; to create ties of trade, not just aid, both with the West and among the nations they’re seeking to rise and increase their capacity. Because when they succeed, we will be more successful as well. Our fates are linked, and we cannot ignore those who are yearning not only for freedom but also prosperity. And finally, let’s remember that peace with justice depends on our ability to sustain both the security of our societies and the openness that defines them. Threats to freedom don’t merely come from the outside. They can emerge from within -- from our own fears, from the disengagement of our citizens. For over a decade, America has been at war. Yet much has now changed over the five years since I last spoke here in Berlin. The Iraq war is now over. The Afghan war is coming to an end. Osama bin Laden is no more. Our efforts against al Qaeda are evolving. And given these changes, last month, I spoke about America’s efforts against terrorism. And I drew inspiration from one of our founding fathers, James Madison, who wrote, “No nation could preserve its freedom in the midst of continual warfare.” James Madison is right -- which is why, even as we remain vigilant about the threat of terrorism, we must move beyond a mindset of perpetual war. And in America, that means redoubling our efforts to close the prison at Guantanamo. It means tightly controlling our use of new technologies like drones. It means balancing the pursuit of security with the protection of privacy.

And I'm confident that that balance can be struck. I'm confident of that, and I'm confident that working with Germany, we can keep each other safe while at the same time maintaining those essential values for which we fought for. Our current programs are bound by the rule of law, and they're focused on threats to our security -- not the communications of ordinary persons. They help confront real dangers, and they keep people safe here in the United States and here in Europe. But we must accept the challenge that all of us in democratic governments face: to listen to the voices who disagree with us; to have an open debate about how we use our powers and how we must constrain them; and to always remember that government exists to serve the power of the individual, and not the other way around. That’s what makes us who we are, and that’s what makes us different from those on the other side of the wall.

That is how we'll stay true to our better history while reaching for the day of peace and justice that is to come. These are the beliefs that guide us, the values that inspire us, the principles that bind us together as free peoples who still believe the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. -- that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

And we should ask, should anyone ask if our generation has the courage to meet these tests? If anybody asks if President Kennedy's words ring true today, let them come to Berlin, for here they will find the people who emerged from the ruins of war to reap the blessings of peace; from the pain of division to the joy of reunification. And here, they will recall how people trapped behind a wall braved bullets, and jumped barbed wire, and dashed across minefields, and dug through tunnels, and leapt from buildings, and swam across the Spree to claim their most basic right of freedom.

The wall belongs to history. But we have history to make as well. And the heroes that came before us now call to us to live up to those highest ideals -- to care for the young people who can't find a job in our own countries, and the girls who aren't allowed to go to school overseas; to be vigilant in safeguarding our own freedoms, but also to extend a hand to those who are reaching for freedom abroad. This is the lesson of the ages. This is the spirit of Berlin. And the greatest tribute that we can pay to those who came before us is by carrying on their work to pursue peace and justice not only in our countries but for all mankind. Vielen Dank. God bless you. God bless the peoples of Germany. And God bless the United States of America.

Thank you very much.

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# University of Cape Town Address

President Obama: Hello Cape Town!

Audience: Hello!

President Obama: Thobela. Molweni. Sanibona. Dumelang. Ndaa. Reperile.

Audience: Reperile!

President Obama: See, I’ve been practicing. How-zit? Did I leave anybody out? All right, well, I didn’t want to leave anybody out here.

I want to thank Vice Chancellor Max Price, who’s here, as well as Archbishop Njongonkulu. It’s wonderful to have them in attendance.

I am so happy to be here today. It is wonderful to see all of these outstanding young people. I just had the honor of going to Robben Island with Michelle and our two daughters this afternoon. And this was my second time; I had the chance to visit back in 2006. But there was something different about bringing my children. And Malia is now 15, Sasha is 12 -- and seeing them stand within the walls that once surrounded Nelson Mandela, I knew this was an experience that they would never forget. I knew that they now appreciated a little bit more the sacrifices that Madiba and others had made for freedom.

But what I also know is that because they’ve had a chance to visit South Africa for a second time now, they also understand that Mandela’s spirit could never be imprisoned -- for his legacy is here for all to see. It’s in this auditorium: young people, black, white, Indian, everything in between -- living and learning together in a South Africa that is free and at peace.

Now, obviously, today Madiba’s health weighs heavily on our hearts. And like billions all over the world, I -- and the American people -- have drawn strength from the example of this extraordinary leader, and the nation that he changed. Nelson Mandela showed us that one man’s courage can move the world. And he calls on us to make choices that reflects not our fears, but our hopes -- in our own lives, and in the lives of our communities and our countries. And that’s what I want to speak to all of you about today.

Some of you may be aware of this, but I actually took my first step into political life because of South Africa. This is true. I was the same age as some of you -- 19 years old, my whole life ahead of me. I was going to school on a campus in California -- not quite as pretty as this one -- but similar. And I must confess I was not always focused on my studies. There were a lot of distractions. And I enjoyed those distractions.

And as the son of an African father and a white American mother, the diversity of America was in my blood, but I had never cared much for politics. I didn’t think it mattered to me. I didn’t think I could make a difference. And like many young people, I thought that cynicism -- a certain ironic detachment -- was a sign of wisdom and sophistication.

But then I learned what was happening here in South Africa. And two young men, ANC representatives, came to our college and spoke, and I spent time hearing their stories. And I learned about the courage of those who waged the Defiance Campaign, and the brutality leveled against innocent men, women and children from Sharpeville to Soweto. And I studied the leadership of Luthuli, and the words of Biko, and the example of Madiba, and I knew that while brave people were imprisoned just off these shores on Robben Island, my own government in the United States was not standing on their side. That’s why I got involved in what was known as the divestment movement in the United States.

It was the first time I ever attached myself to a cause. It was the first time also that I ever gave a speech. It was only two minutes long -- and I was really just a warm-up act at a rally that we were holding demanding that our college divest from Apartheid South Africa. So I got up on stage, I started making my speech, and then, as a bit of political theater, some people came out with glasses that looked like security officers and they dragged me off the stage. Fortunately, there are no records of this speech. But I remember struggling to express the anger and the passion that I was feeling, and to echo in some small way the moral clarity of freedom fighters an ocean away.

And I’ll be honest with you, when I was done, I did not think I’d made any difference -- I was even a little embarrassed. And I thought to myself -- what’s a bunch of university kids doing in California that is somehow going to make a difference? It felt too distant from what people were going through in places like Soweto. But looking back, as I look at that 19-year old young man, I'm more forgiving of the fact that the speech might not have been that great, because I knew -- I know now that something inside me was stirring at that time, something important. And that was the belief that I could be part of something bigger than myself; that my own salvation was bound up with those of others.

That’s what Bobby Kennedy expressed, far better than I ever could, when he spoke here at the University of Cape Town in 1966. He said, “Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”

Now, the world was very different on that June day in 1966 when Bobby Kennedy spoke those words. Mandela faced many more years as a prisoner. Apartheid was entrenched in this land. In the United States, the victories of the Civil Rights Movement were still uncertain. In fact, on the very day that Kennedy spoke here, the American civil rights leader, James Meredith, was shot in Mississippi, where he was marching to inspire blacks to register to vote.

Those were difficult, troubled, trying times. The idea of hope might have seemed misplaced. It would have seemed inconceivable to people at that time -- that less than 50 years later, an African American President might address an integrated audience, at South Africa’s oldest university, and that this same university would have conferred an honorary degree to a President, Nelson Mandela. It would have seemed impossible.

That’s the power that comes from acting on our ideals. That’s what Mandela understood. But it wasn’t just the giants of history who brought about this change. Think of the many millions of acts of conscience that were part of that effort. Think about how many voices were raised against injustice over the years -- in this country, in the United States, around the world. Think of how many times ordinary people pushed against those walls of oppression and resistance, and the violence and the indignities that they suffered; the quiet courage that they sustained. Think of how many ripples of hope it took to build a wave that would eventually come crashing down like a mighty stream.

So Mandela’s life, like Kennedy’s life, like Gandhi's life, like the life of all those who fought to bring about a new South Africa or a more just America -- they stand as a challenge to me. But more importantly, they stand as a challenge to your generation, because they tell you that your voice matters -- your ideals, your willingness to act on those ideals, your choices can make a difference. And if there’s any country in the world that shows the power of human beings to affect change, this is the one. You’ve shown us how a prisoner can become a President. You've shown us how bitter adversaries can reconcile. You've confronted crimes of hatred and intolerance with truth and love, and you wrote into your constitution the human rights that sustain freedom.

And those are only the most publicized aspects of South Africa’s transformation, because alongside South Africa’s political struggle, other battles have been waged as well to improve the lives of those who for far too long have been denied economic opportunity and social justice.

During my last journey here in 2006, what impressed me so much was the good works of people on the ground teaching children, caring for the sick, bringing jobs to those in need. In Khayelitsha Township -- I'm still working on some of these -- I met women who were living with HIV. And this is at a time back in 2006, where there were still some challenges in terms of the policies around HIV and AIDS here in South Africa. But they were on the ground, struggling to keep their families together -- helping each other, working on behalf of each other. In Soweto, I met people who were striving to carry forward the legacy of Hector Pieterson. At the Rosa Parks Library in Pretoria, I was struck by the energy of students who -- they wanted to capture this moment of promise for South Africa.

And this is a moment of great promise. South Africa is one of the world’s economic centers. Obviously, you can see it here in Cape Town. In the country that saw the first human heart transplant, new breakthroughs are being made in the treatment of HIV/AIDS. I was just talking to your Vice Chancellor. People come to this University from over 100 countries to study and teach. In America, we see the reach of your culture from “Freshly Ground” concerts to the -- we've got the Nando’s just a couple of blocks from the White House. And thanks to the first World Cup ever held on this continent, the world now knows the sound of the vuvuzela. I'm not sure that's like the greatest gift that South Africa ever gave.

But progress has also rippled across the African continent. From Senegal to Cote D’Ivoire to Malawi, democracy has weathered strong challenges.

Many of the fastest-growing economies in the world are here in Africa, where there is an historic shift taking place from poverty to a growing, nascent middle class. Fewer people are dying of preventable disease. More people have access to health care. More farmers are getting their products to market at fair prices. From micro-finance projects in Kampala, to stock traders in Lagos, to cell phone entrepreneurs in Nairobi, there is an energy here that can't be denied -- Africa rising.

We know this progress, though, rests on a fragile foundation. We know that progress is uneven. Across Africa, the same institutions that should be the backbone of democracy can all too often be infected with the rot of corruption. The same technology that enables record profits sometimes means widening a canyon of inequality. The same interconnection that binds our fates makes all of Africa vulnerable to the undertow of conflict.

So there is no question that Africa is on the move, but it's not moving fast enough for the child still languishing in poverty in forgotten townships. It's not moving fast enough for the protester who is beaten in Harare, or the woman who is raped in Eastern Congo. We've got more work to do, because these Africans must not be left behind.

And that’s where you come in –- the young people of Africa. Just like previous generations, you've got choices to make. You get to decide where the future lies. Think about it -- over 60 percent of Africans are under 35 years old. So demographics means young people are going to be determining the fate of this continent and this country. You’ve got time and numbers on your side, and you’ll be making decisions long after politicians like me have left the scene.

And I can promise you this: The world will be watching what decisions you make. The world will be watching what you do. Because one of the wonderful things that’s happening is, where people used to only see suffering and conflict in Africa, suddenly, now they're seeing opportunity for resources, for investment, for partnership, for influence. Governments and businesses from around the world are sizing up the continent, and they're making decisions themselves about where to invest their own time and their own energy. And as I said yesterday at a town hall meeting up in Johannesburg, that’s a good thing. We want all countries -- China, India, Brazil, Turkey, Europe, America -- we want everybody paying attention to what's going on here, because it speaks to your progress.

And I've traveled to Africa on this trip because my bet is on the young people who are the heartbeat of Africa’s story. I'm betting on all of you. As President of the United States, I believe that my own nation will benefit enormously if you reach your full potential.

If prosperity is broadly shared here in Africa, that middle class will be an enormous market for our goods. If strong democracies take root, that will enable our people and businesses to draw closer to yours. If peace prevails over war, we will all be more secure. And if the dignity of the individual is upheld across Africa, then I believe Americans will be more free as well, because I believe that none of us are fully free when others in the human family remain shackled by poverty or disease or oppression.

Now, America has been involved in Africa for decades. But we are moving beyond the simple provision of assistance, foreign aid, to a new model of partnership between America and Africa -– a partnership of equals that focuses on your capacity to solve problems, and your capacity to grow. Our efforts focus on three areas that shape our lives: opportunity, democracy, and peace.

So first off, we want a partnership that empowers Africans to access greater opportunity in their own lives, in their communities, and for their countries.

As the largest economy on the continent, South Africa is part of a trend that extends from south to north, east to west -- more and more African economies are poised to take off. And increased trade and investment from the United States has the potential to accelerate these trends –- creating new jobs and opportunities on both sides of the Atlantic.

So I’m calling for America to up our game when it comes to Africa. We’re bringing together business leaders from America and Africa to deepen our engagement. We’re going to launch new trade missions, and promote investment from companies back home. We’ll launch an effort in Addis to renew the African Growth and Opportunity Act to break down barriers to trade, and tomorrow I’ll discuss a new Trade Africa initiative to expand our ties across the continent, because we want to unleash the power of entrepreneurship and markets to create opportunity here i Africa.

It was interesting -- yesterday at the town hall meeting I had with a number of young people, the first three questions had to do with trade, because there was a recognition -- these young people said, I want to start a -- I want to start something. I want to build something, and then I want to sell something. Now, to succeed, these efforts have to connect to something bigger.

And for America, this isn’t just about numbers on a balance sheet or the resources that can be taken out of the ground. We believe that societies and economies only advance as far as individuals are free to carry them forward. And just as freedom cannot exist when people are imprisoned for their political views, true opportunity cannot exist when people are imprisoned by sickness, or hunger, or darkness.

And so, the question we've been asking ourselves is what will it take to empower individual Africans?

For one thing, we believe that countries have to have the power to feed themselves, so instead of shipping food to Africa, we’re now helping millions of small farmers in Africa make use of new technologies and farm more land. And through a new alliance of governments and the private sector, we’re investing billions of dollars in agriculture that grows more crops, brings more food to market, give farmers better prices and helps lift 50 million people out of poverty in a decade. An end to famine, a thriving African agricultural industry –- that’s what opportunity looks like. That’s what we want to build with you.

We believe that countries have to have the power to prevent illness and care for the sick. And our efforts to combat malaria and tropical illness can lead to an achievable goal: ending child and maternal deaths from preventable disease. Already, our commitment to fight HIV/AIDS has saved millions, and allows us to imagine what was once unthinkable: an AIDS-free generation. And while America will continue to provide billions of dollars in support, we can’t make progress without African partners. So I’m proud that by the end of my presidency, South Africa has determined it will be the first African country to fully manage its HIV care and treatment program. That’s an enormous achievement. Healthy mothers and healthy children; strong public health systems -- that’s what opportunity looks like.

And we believe that nations must have the power to connect their people to the promise of the 21st century. Access to electricity is fundamental to opportunity in this age. It’s the light that children study by; the energy that allows an idea to be transformed into a real business. It’s the lifeline for families to meet their most basic needs. And it’s the connection that’s needed to plug Africa into the grid of the global economy. You’ve got to have power. And yet two-thirds of the population in sub-Saharan Africa lacks access to power -- and the percentage is much higher for those who don’t live in cities.

So today, I am proud to announce a new initiative. We’ve been dealing with agriculture, we’ve been dealing with health. Now we’re going to talk about power -- Power Africa -- a new initiative that will double access to power in sub-Saharan Africa. Double it. We’re going to start by investing $7 billion in U.S. government resources. We’re going to partner with the private sector, who themselves have committed more than $9 billion in investment. And in partnership with African nations, we’re going to develop new sources of energy. We’ll reach more households not just in cities, but in villages and on farms. We’ll expand access for those who live currently off the power grid. And we’ll support clean energy to protect our planet and combat climate change. So, a light where currently there is darkness; the energy needed to lift people out of poverty -- that’s what opportunity looks like.

So this is America’s vision: a partnership with Africa that unleashes growth, and the potential of every citizen, not just a few at the very top. And this is achievable. There’s nothing that I’ve outlined that cannot happen. But history tells us that true progress is only possible where governments exist to serve their people, and not the other way around.

If anyone wants to see the difference between freedom and tyranny, let them come here, to South Africa. Here, citizens braved bullets and beatings to claim that most basic right: the ability to be free, to determine your own fate, in your own land. And Madiba’s example extended far beyond that victory. Now, I mentioned yesterday at the town hall -- like America’s first President, George Washington, he understood that democracy can only endure when it’s bigger than just one person. So his willingness to leave power was as profound as his ability to claim power.

The good news is that this example is getting attention across the continent. We see it in free and fair elections from Ghana to Zambia. We hear it in the voices of civil society. I was in Senegal and met with some civil society groups, including a group called Y’en Marre, which meant “fed up” -- that helped to defend the will of the people after elections in Senegal. We recognize it in places like Tanzania, where text messages connect citizens to their representatives. And we strengthen it when organizations stand up for democratic principles, like ECOWAS did in Cote d’Ivoire.

But this work is not complete -- we all know that. Not in those countries where leaders enrich themselves with impunity; not in communities where you can’t start a business, or go to school, or get a house without paying a bribe to somebody. These things have to change. And they have to chance not just because such corruption is immoral, but it’s also a matter of self-interest and economics. Governments that respect the rights of their citizens and abide by the rule of law do better, grow faster, draw more investment than those who don’t. That’s just a fact.

Just look at your neighbor, Zimbabwe, where the promise of liberation gave way to the corruption of power and then the collapse of the economy. Now, after the leaders of this region -- led by South Africa -- brokered an end to what has been a long-running crisis, Zimbabweans have a new constitution, the economy is beginning to recover. So there is an opportunity to move forward -- but only if there is an election that is free, and fair, and peaceful, so that Zimbabweans can determine their future without fear of intimidation and retribution. And after elections, there must be respect for the universal rights upon which democracy depends.

These are things that America stands for -- not perfectly -- but that’s what we stand for, and that’s what my administration stands for. We don’t tell people who their leaders should be, but we do stand up with those who support the principles that lead to a better life. And that’s why we’re interested in investing not in strongmen, but in strong institutions: independent judiciaries that can enforce the rule of law; honest police forces that can protect the peoples’ interests instead of their own; an open government that can bring transparency and accountability. And, yes, that’s why we stand up for civil society -- for journalists and NGOs, and community organizers and activists -- who give people a voice. And that’s why we support societies that empower women -- because no country will reach its potential unless it draws on the talents of our wives and our mothers, and our sisters and our daughters.

Just to editorialize here for a second, because my father's home country of Kenya -- like much of Africa -- you see women doing work and not getting respect. I tell you, you can measure how well a country does by how it treats its women. And all across this continent, and all around the world, we've got more work to do on that front. We've got some sisters saying, "Amen."

Now, I know that there are some in Africa who hear me say these things -- who see America's support for these values -- and say that's intrusive. Why are you meddling? I know there are those who argue that ideas like democracy and transparency are somehow Western exports. I disagree. Those in power who make those arguments are usually trying to distract people from their own abuses. Sometimes, they are the same people who behind closed doors are willing to sell out their own country’s resource to foreign interests, just so long as they get a cut. I'm just telling the truth.

Now ultimately, I believe that Africans should make up their own minds about what serves African interests. We trust your judgment, the judgment of ordinary people. We believe that when you control your destiny, if you've got a handle on your governments, then governments will promote freedom and opportunity, because that will serve you. And it shouldn’t just be America that stands up for democracy -- it should be Africans as well. So here in South Africa, your democratic story has inspired the world. And through the power of your example, and through your position in organizations like SADC and the African Union, you can be a voice for the human progress that you’ve written into your own Constitution. You shouldn't assume that that's unique to South Africa. People have aspirations like that everywhere.

And this brings me to the final area where our partnership can empower people -- the pursuit and protection of peace in Africa. So long as parts of Africa continue to be ravaged by war and mayhem, opportunity and democracy cannot take root. Across the continent, there are places where too often fear prevails. From Mali to Mogadishu, senseless terrorism all too often perverts the meaning of Islam -- one of the world’s great religions -- and takes the lives of countless innocent Africans. From Congo to Sudan, conflicts fester -- robbing men, women and children of the lives that they deserve. In too many countries, the actions of thugs and warlords and drug cartels and human traffickers hold back the promise of Africa, enslaving others for their own purposes.

America cannot put a stop to these tragedies alone, and you don’t expect us to. That’s a job for Africans. But we can help, and we will help. I know there's a lot of talk of America’s military presence in Africa. But if you look at what we’re actually doing, time and again, we're putting muscle behind African efforts. That’s what we’re doing in the Sahel, where the nations of West Africa have stepped forward to keep the peace as Mali now begins to rebuild. That’s what we’re doing in Central Africa, where a coalition of countries is closing the space where the Lord’s Resistance Army can operate. That’s what we’re doing in Somalia, where an African Union force, AMISOM, is helping a new government to stand on its own two feet.

These efforts have to lead to lasting peace, not just words on a paper or promises that fade away. Peace between and within Sudan and South Sudan, so that these governments get on with the work of investing in their deeply impoverished peoples. Peace in the Congo with nations keeping their commitments, so rights are at last claimed by the people of this war-torn country, and women and children no longer live in fear. Peace in Mali, where people will make their voices heard in new elections this summer. In each of these cases, Africa must lead and America will help. And America will make no apology for supporting African efforts to end conflict and stand up for human dignity.

And this year marks the 50th anniversary of the OAU, now the African Union -- an occasion that is more historic, because the AU is taking on these challenges. And I want America to take our engagement not just on security issues, but on environmental issues -- and economic issues and social issues, education issues -- I want to take that engagement to a whole new level. So I’m proud to announce that next year, I'm going to invite heads of state from across sub-Saharan Africa to a summit in the United States to help launch a new chapter in U.S.-African relations. And as I mentioned yesterday, I'm also going to hold a summit with the next class of our Young African Leaders Initiative, because we want to engage leaders and tomorrow's leaders in figuring out how we can best work together.

So let me close by saying this. Governments matter. Political leadership matters. And I do hope that some of you here today decide to follow the path of public service. It can sometimes be thankless, but I believe it can also be a noble life. But we also have to recognize that the choices we make are not limited to the policies and programs of government. Peace and prosperity in Africa, and around the world, also depends on the attitudes of people.

Too often, the source of tragedy, the source of conflict involves the choices ordinary people make that divide us from one another -- black from white, Christian from Muslim, tribe from tribe. Africa contains a multitude of identities, but the nations and people of Africa will not fulfill their promise so long as some use these identities to justify subjugation –- an excuse to steal or kill or disenfranchise others.

And ultimately, that’s the most important lesson that the world learned right here in South Africa. Mandela once wrote, “No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.”

I believe that to be true. I believe that’s always been true -- from the dawn of the first man to the youth today, and all that came in between here in Africa -- kingdoms come and gone; the crucible of slavery and the emergence from colonialism; senseless war, but also iconic movements for social justice; squandered wealth, but also soaring promise.

Madiba’s words give us a compass in a sea of change, firm ground amidst swirling currents. We always have the opportunity to choose our better history. We can always understand that most important decision -- the decision we make when we find our common humanity in one another. That’s always available to us, that choice.

And I've seen that spirit in the welcoming smiles of children on GorÃ©e Island, and the children of Mombasa on Kenya’s Indian Ocean coast. That spirit exists in the mother in the Sahel who wants a life of dignity for her daughters; and in the South African student who braves danger and distance just to get to school. It can be heard in the songs that rise from villages and city streets, and it can be heard in the confident voices of young people like you.

It is that spirit, that innate longing for justice and equality, for freedom and solidarity -- that’s the spirit that can light the way forward. It's in you. And as you guide Africa down that long and difficult road, I want you to know that you will always find the extended hand of a friend in the United States of America.

Thank you very much. God bless you.

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# Remarks on Trayvon Martin

Well, I - I wanted to come out here, first of all, to tell you that Jay is prepared for all your questions and is very much looking forward to the session. The second thing is I want to let you know that over the next couple of weeks, there’s going to obviously be a whole range of issues -- immigration, economics, et cetera -- we'll try to arrange a fuller press conference to address your questions.

The reason I actually wanted to come out today is not to take questions, but to speak to an issue that obviously has gotten a lot of attention over the course of the last week -- the issue of the Trayvon Martin ruling. I gave a preliminary statement right after the ruling on Sunday. But watching the debate over the course of the last week, I thought it might be useful for me to expand on my thoughts a little bit.

First of all, I want to make sure that, once again, I send my thoughts and prayers, as well as Michelle’s, to the family of Trayvon Martin, and to remark on the incredible grace and dignity with which they’ve dealt with the entire situation. I can only imagine what they’re going through, and it’s remarkable how they’ve handled it.

The second thing I want to say is to reiterate what I said on Sunday, which is there’s going to be a lot of arguments about the legal issues in the case -- I'll let all the legal analysts and talking heads address those issues. The judge conducted the trial in a professional manner. The prosecution and the defense made their arguments. The juries were properly instructed that in a case such as this reasonable doubt was relevant, and they rendered a verdict. And once the jury has spoken, that's how our system works. But I did want to just talk a little bit about context and how people have responded to it and how people are feeling.

You know, when Trayvon Martin was first shot I said that this could have been my son. Another way of saying that is Trayvon Martin could have been me 35 years ago. And when you think about why, in the African American community at least, there’s a lot of pain around what happened here, I think it’s important to recognize that the African American community is looking at this issue through a set of experiences and a history that doesn’t go away.

There are very few African American men in this country who haven't had the experience of being followed when they were shopping in a department store. That includes me. There are very few African American men who haven't had the experience of walking across the street and hearing the locks click on the doors of cars. That happens to me -- at least before I was a senator. There are very few African Americans who haven't had the experience of getting on an elevator and a woman clutching her purse nervously and holding her breath until she had a chance to get off. That happens often.

And I don't want to exaggerate this, but those sets of experiences inform how the African American community interprets what happened one night in Florida. And it’s inescapable for people to bring those experiences to bear. The African American community is also knowledgeable that there is a history of racial disparities in the application of our criminal laws -- everything from the death penalty to enforcement of our drug laws. And that ends up having an impact in terms of how people interpret the case.

Now, this isn't to say that the African American community is naÃ¯ve about the fact that African American young men are disproportionately involved in the criminal justice system; that they’re disproportionately both victims and perpetrators of violence. It’s not to make excuses for that fact -- although black folks do interpret the reasons for that in a historical context. They understand that some of the violence that takes place in poor black neighborhoods around the country is born out of a very violent past in this country, and that the poverty and dysfunction that we see in those communities can be traced to a very difficult history.

And so the fact that sometimes that’s unacknowledged adds to the frustration. And the fact that a lot of African American boys are painted with a broad brush and the excuse is given, well, there are these statistics out there that show that African American boys are more violent -- using that as an excuse to then see sons treated differently causes pain.

I think the African American community is also not naÃ¯ve in understanding that, statistically, somebody like Trayvon Martin was statistically more likely to be shot by a peer than he was by somebody else. So folks understand the challenges that exist for African American boys. But they get frustrated, I think, if they feel that there’s no context for it and that context is being denied. And that all contributes I think to a sense that if a white male teen was involved in the same kind of scenario, that, from top to bottom, both the outcome and the aftermath might have been different.

Now, the question for me at least, and I think for a lot of folks, is where do we take this? How do we learn some lessons from this and move in a positive direction? I think it’s understandable that there have been demonstrations and vigils and protests, and some of that stuff is just going to have to work its way through, as long as it remains nonviolent. If I see any violence, then I will remind folks that that dishonors what happened to Trayvon Martin and his family. But beyond protests or vigils, the question is, are there some concrete things that we might be able to do.

I know that Eric Holder is reviewing what happened down there, but I think it’s important for people to have some clear expectations here. Traditionally, these are issues of state and local government, the criminal code. And law enforcement is traditionally done at the state and local levels, not at the federal levels.

That doesn’t mean, though, that as a nation we can’t do some things that I think would be productive. So let me just give a couple of specifics that I’m still bouncing around with my staff, so we’re not rolling out some five-point plan, but some areas where I think all of us could potentially focus.

Number one, precisely because law enforcement is often determined at the state and local level, I think it would be productive for the Justice Department, governors, mayors to work with law enforcement about training at the state and local levels in order to reduce the kind of mistrust in the system that sometimes currently exists.

When I was in Illinois, I passed racial profiling legislation, and it actually did just two simple things. One, it collected data on traffic stops and the race of the person who was stopped. But the other thing was it resourced us training police departments across the state on how to think about potential racial bias and ways to further professionalize what they were doing.

And initially, the police departments across the state were resistant, but actually they came to recognize that if it was done in a fair, straightforward way that it would allow them to do their jobs better and communities would have more confidence in them and, in turn, be more helpful in applying the law. And obviously, law enforcement has got a very tough job.

So that’s one area where I think there are a lot of resources and best practices that could be brought to bear if state and local governments are receptive. And I think a lot of them would be. And let's figure out are there ways for us to push out that kind of training.

Along the same lines, I think it would be useful for us to examine some state and local laws to see if it -- if they are designed in such a way that they may encourage the kinds of altercations and confrontations and tragedies that we saw in the Florida case, rather than diffuse potential altercations.

I know that there's been commentary about the fact that the "stand your ground" laws in Florida were not used as a defense in the case. On the other hand, if we're sending a message as a society in our communities that someone who is armed potentially has the right to use those firearms even if there's a way for them to exit from a situation, is that really going to be contributing to the kind of peace and security and order that we'd like to see?

And for those who resist that idea that we should think about something like these "stand your ground" laws, I'd just ask people to consider, if Trayvon Martin was of age and armed, could he have stood his ground on that sidewalk? And do we actually think that he would have been justified in shooting Mr. Zimmerman who had followed him in a car because he felt threatened? And if the answer to that question is at least ambiguous, then it seems to me that we might want to examine those kinds of laws.

Number three -- and this is a long-term project -- we need to spend some time in thinking about how do we bolster and reinforce our African American boys. And this is something that Michelle and I talk a lot about. There are a lot of kids out there who need help who are getting a lot of negative reinforcement. And is there more that we can do to give them the sense that their country cares about them and values them and is willing to invest in them?

I'm not naÃ¯ve about the prospects of some grand, new federal program. I'm not sure that that’s what we're talking about here. But I do recognize that as President, I've got some convening power, and there are a lot of good programs that are being done across the country on this front. And for us to be able to gather together business leaders and local elected officials and clergy and celebrities and athletes, and figure out how are we doing a better job helping young African American men feel that they're a full part of this society and that they've got pathways and avenues to succeed -- I think that would be a pretty good outcome from what was obviously a tragic situation. And we're going to spend some time working on that and thinking about that.

And then, finally, I think it's going to be important for all of us to do some soul-searching. There has been talk about should we convene a conversation on race. I haven't seen that be particularly productive when politicians try to organize conversations. They end up being stilted and politicized, and folks are locked into the positions they already have. On the other hand, in families and churches and workplaces, there's the possibility that people are a little bit more honest, and at least you ask yourself your own questions about, am I wringing as much bias out of myself as I can? Am I judging people as much as I can, based on not the color of their skin, but the content of their character? That would, I think, be an appropriate exercise in the wake of this tragedy.

And let me just leave you with a final thought that, as difficult and challenging as this whole episode has been for a lot of people, I don’t want us to lose sight that things are getting better. Each successive generation seems to be making progress in changing attitudes when it comes to race. It doesn’t mean we’re in a post-racial society. It doesn’t mean that racism is eliminated. But when I talk to Malia and Sasha, and I listen to their friends and I seem them interact, they’re better than we are -- they’re better than we were -- on these issues. And that’s true in every community that I’ve visited all across the country.

And so we have to be vigilant and we have to work on these issues. And those of us in authority should be doing everything we can to encourage the better angels of our nature, as opposed to using these episodes to heighten divisions. But we should also have confidence that kids these days, I think, have more sense than we did back then, and certainly more than our parents did or our grandparents did; and that along this long, difficult journey, we’re becoming a more perfect union -- not a perfect union, but a more perfect union.

Thank you, guys.

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# Address on the Economy at Knox College

Hello, Galesburg! Well, it’s good to be home in Illinois! It is good to be back. It’s good to be back. Thank you. Thank you so much, everybody. Thank you. Everybody, have a seat, have a seat. Well, it is good to be back. I want to, first of all, thank Knox College -- I want to thank Knox College and your president, Teresa Amott, for having me here today. Give Teresa a big round of applause. I want to thank your Congresswoman, Cheri Bustos, who’s here. We've got Governor Quinn here. I'm told we've got your Lieutenant Governor, Sheila Simon, is here. There she is. Attorney General Lisa Madigan is here.

I see a bunch of my former colleagues, some folks who I haven't seen in years and I'm looking forward to saying hi to. One in particular I've got to mention, one of my favorites from the Illinois Senate -- John Sullivan is in the house. John was one of my earliest supporters when I was running for the U.S. Senate, and it came in really handy because he’s got, like, 10 brothers and sisters, and his wife has got 10 brothers and sisters -- so they’ve got this entire precinct just in their family. And they all look like John -- the brothers do -- so he doesn’t have to go to every event. He can just send one of his brothers out. It is good to see him. Dick Durbin couldn’t make it today, but he sends his best. And we love Dick. He’s doing a great job. And we’ve got one of my favorite neighbors, the Senator from Missouri, Claire McCaskill, in the house, because we’re going to Missouri later this afternoon.

And all of you are here, and it’s great to see you. And I hope everybody is having a wonderful summer. The weather is perfect. Whoever was in charge of that, good job.

So, eight years ago, I came here to deliver the commencement address for the class of 2005. Things were a little different back then. For example, I had no gray hair -- or a motorcade. Didn’t even have a prompter. In fact, there was a problem in terms of printing out the speech because the printer didn’t work here and we had to drive it in from somewhere. But it was my first big speech as your newest senator. And on the way here I was telling Cheri and Claire about how important this area was, one of the areas that I spent the most time in outside of Chicago, and how much it represented what’s best in America and folks who were willing to work hard and do right by their families. And I came here to talk about what a changing economy was doing to the middle class -- and what we, as a country, needed to do to give every American a chance to get ahead in the 21st century. See, I had just spent a year traveling the state and listening to your stories -- of proud Maytag workers losing their jobs when the plant moved down to Mexico. A lot of folks here remember that. Of teachers whose salaries weren’t keeping up with the rising cost of groceries. Of young people who had the drive and the energy, but not the money to afford a college education.

So these were stories of families who had worked hard, believed in the American Dream, but they felt like the odds were increasingly stacked against them. And they were right. Things had changed. In the period after World War II, a growing middle class was the engine of our prosperity. Whether you owned a company, or swept its floors, or worked anywhere in between, this country offered you a basic bargain -- a sense that your hard work would be rewarded with fair wages and decent benefits, the chance to buy a home, to save for retirement, and most of all, a chance to hand down a better life for your kids. But over time, that engine began to stall -- and a lot of folks here saw it -- that bargain began to fray. Technology made some jobs obsolete. Global competition sent a lot of jobs overseas. It became harder for unions to fight for the middle class. Washington doled out bigger tax cuts to the very wealthy and smaller minimum wage increases for the working poor. And so what happened was that the link between higher productivity and people’s wages and salaries was broken. It used to be that, as companies did better, as profits went higher, workers also got a better deal. And that started changing. So the income of the top 1 percent nearly quadrupled from 1979 to 2007, but the typical family’s incomes barely budged. And towards the end of those three decades, a housing bubble, credit cards, a churning financial sector was keeping the economy artificially juiced up, so sometimes it papered over some of these long-term trends. But by the time I took office in 2009 as your President, we all know the bubble had burst, and it cost millions of Americans their jobs, and their homes, and their savings. And I know a lot of folks in this area were hurt pretty bad. And the decades-long erosion that had been taking place -- the erosion of middle-class security -- was suddenly laid bare for everybody to see. Now, today, five years after the start of that Great Recession, America has fought its way back. We fought our way back. Together, we saved the auto industry; took on a broken health care system. We invested in new American technologies to reverse our addiction to foreign oil. We doubled wind and solar power. Together, we put in place tough new rules on the big banks, and protections to crack down on the worst practices of mortgage lenders and credit card companies. We changed a tax code too skewed in favor of the wealthiest at the expense of working families -- so we changed that, and we locked in tax cuts for 98 percent of Americans, and we asked those at the top to pay a little bit more.

So you add it all up, and over the past 40 months, our businesses have created 7.2 million new jobs. This year, we’re off to our strongest private sector job growth since 1999. And because we bet on this country, suddenly foreign companies are, too. Right now, more of Honda’s cars are made in America than anyplace else on Earth. Airbus, the European aircraft company, they’re building new planes in Alabama. And American companies like Ford are replacing outsourcing with insourcing -- they’re bringing jobs back home.

We sell more products made in America to the rest of the world than ever before. We produce more natural gas than any country on Earth. We’re about to produce more of our own oil than we buy from abroad for the first time in nearly 20 years. The cost of health care is growing at its slowest rate in 50 years. And our deficits are falling at the fastest rate in 60 years.

So thanks to the grit and resilience and determination of the American people -- of folks like you -- we’ve been able to clear away the rubble from the financial crisis. We started to lay a new foundation for stronger, more durable economic growth. And it's happening in our own personal lives as well, right? A lot of us tightened our belts, shed debt, maybe cut up a couple of credit cards, refocused on those things that really matter. As a country, we’ve recovered faster and gone further than most other advanced nations in the world. With new American revolutions in energy and technology and manufacturing and health care, we're actually poised to reverse the forces that battered the middle class for so long, and start building an economy where everyone who works hard can get ahead. But -- and here's the big “but” -- I’m here to tell you today that we're not there yet. We all know that. We're not there yet. We've got more work to do. Even though our businesses are creating new jobs and have broken record profits, nearly all the income gains of the past 10 years have continued to flow to the top 1 percent. The average CEO has gotten a raise of nearly 40 percent since 2009. The average American earns less than he or she did in 1999. And companies continue to hold back on hiring those who’ve been out of work for some time. Today, more students are earning their degree, but soaring costs saddle them with unsustainable debt. Health care costs are slowing down, but a lot of working families haven’t seen any of those savings yet. The stock market rebound helped a lot of families get back much of what they had lost in their 401(k)s, but millions of Americans still have no idea how they’re going to be able to retire. So in many ways, the trends that I spoke about here in 2005 -- eight years ago -- the trend of a winner-take-all economy where a few are doing better and better and better, while everybody else just treads water -- those trends have been made worse by the recession. And that's a problem. This growing inequality not just of result, inequality of opportunity -- this growing inequality is not just morally wrong, it’s bad economics. Because when middle-class families have less to spend, guess what, businesses have fewer consumers. When wealth concentrates at the very top, it can inflate unstable bubbles that threaten the economy. When the rungs on the ladder of opportunity grow farther and farther apart, it undermines the very essence of America -- that idea that if you work hard you can make it here. And that’s why reversing these trends has to be Washington’s highest priority. It has to be Washington's highest priority. It’s certainly my highest priority.

Unfortunately, over the past couple of years, in particular, Washington hasn’t just ignored this problem; too often, Washington has made things worse.

And I have to say that -- because I'm looking around the room -- I've got some friends here not just who are Democrats, I've got some friends here who are Republicans -- and I worked with in the state legislature and they did great work. But right now, what we’ve got in Washington, we've seen a sizable group of Republican lawmakers suggest that they wouldn’t vote to pay the very bills that Congress rang up. And that fiasco harmed a fragile recovery in 2011 and we can't afford to repeat that. Then, rather than reduce our deficits with a scalpel -- by cutting out programs we don’t need, fixing ones that we do need that maybe are in need of reform, making government more efficient -- instead of doing that, we've got folks who’ve insisted on leaving in place a meat cleaver called the sequester that's cost jobs. It's harmed growth. It's hurt our military. It's gutted investments in education and science and medical research.

Almost every credible economist will tell you it's been a huge drag on this recovery. And it means that we're underinvesting in the things that this country needs to make it a magnet for good jobs. Then, over the last six months, this gridlock has gotten worse. I didn't think that was possible. The good news is a growing number of Republican senators are looking to join their Democratic counterparts and try to get things done in the Senate. So that's good news. For example, they worked together on an immigration bill that economists say will boost our economy by more than a trillion dollars, strengthen border security, make the system work. But you've got a faction of Republicans in the House who won’t even give that bill a vote. And that same group gutted a farm bill that America’s farmers depend on, but also America's most vulnerable children depend on. And if you ask some of these folks, some of these folks mostly in the House, about their economic agenda how it is that they'll strengthen the middle class, they’ll shift the topic to “out-of-control government spending” -- despite the fact that we've cut the deficit by nearly half as a share of the economy since I took office.

Or they’ll talk about government assistance for the poor, despite the fact that they’ve already cut early education for vulnerable kids. They've already cut insurance for people who’ve lost their jobs through no fault of their own. Or they’ll bring up Obamacare -- this is tried and true -- despite the fact that our businesses have created nearly twice as many jobs in this recovery as businesses had at the same point in the last recovery when there was no Obamacare.

Audience Member: My daughter has insurance now! President Obama: I appreciate that. That’s what this is about. That’s what this is about. That’s what we've been fighting for. But with this endless parade of distractions and political posturing and phony scandals, Washington has taken its eye off the ball. And I am here to say this needs to stop. This needs to stop. This moment does not require short-term thinking. It does not require having the same old stale debates. Our focus has to be on the basic economic issues that matter most to you, the people we represent. That’s what we have to spend our time on and our energy on and our focus on.

And as Washington prepares to enter another budget debate, the stakes for our middle class and everybody who is fighting to get into the middle class could not be higher. The countries that are passive in the face of a global economy, those countries will lose the competition for good jobs. They will lose the competition for high living standards. That’s why America has to make the investments necessary to promote long-term growth and shared prosperity -- rebuilding our manufacturing base, educating our workforce, upgrading our transportation systems, upgrading our information networks. That’s what we need to be talking about. That’s what Washington needs to be focused on. And that’s why, over the next several weeks, in towns across this country, I will be engaging the American people in this debate. I'll lay out my ideas for how we build on the cornerstones of what it means to be middle class in America, and what it takes to work your way into the middle class in America: Job security, with good wages and durable industries. A good education. A home to call your own. Affordable health care when you get sick. A secure retirement even if you’re not rich. Reducing poverty. Reducing inequality. Growing opportunity. That’s what we need. That’s what we need. That’s what we need right now. That’s what we need to be focused on.

Now, some of these ideas I’ve talked about before. Some of the ideas I offer will be new. Some will require Congress. Some I will pursue on my own. Some ideas will benefit folks right away. Some will take years to fully implement. But the key is to break through the tendency in Washington to just bounce from crisis to crisis. What we need is not a three-month plan, or even a three-year plan; we need a long-term American strategy, based on steady, persistent effort, to reverse the forces that have conspired against the middle class for decades. That has to be our project.

Now, of course, we’ll keep pressing on other key priorities. I want to get this immigration bill done. We still need to work on reducing gun violence. We’ve got to continue to end the war in Afghanistan, rebalance our fight against al Qaeda. We need to combat climate change. We’ve got to standing up for civil rights. We’ve got to stand up for women’s rights.

So all those issues are important, and we’ll be fighting on every one of those issues. But if we don’t have a growing, thriving middle class then we won’t have the resources to solve a lot of these problems. We won’t have the resolve, the optimism, the sense of unity that we need to solve many of these other issues. Now, in this effort, I will look to work with Republicans as well as Democrats wherever I can. And I sincerely believe that there are members of both parties who understand this moment, understand what’s at stake, and I will welcome ideas from anybody across the political spectrum. But I will not allow gridlock, or inaction, or willful indifference to get in our way.

That means whatever executive authority I have to help the middle class, I’ll use it. Where I can’t act on my own and Congress isn’t cooperating, I’ll pick up the phone -- I’ll call CEOs; I’ll call philanthropists; I’ll call college presidents; I’ll call labor leaders. I’ll call anybody who can help -- and enlist them in our efforts.

Because the choices that we, the people, make right now will determine whether or not every American has a fighting chance in the 21st century. And it will lay the foundation for our children’s future, our grandchildren’s future, for all Americans. So let me give you a quick preview of what I’ll be fighting for and why. The first cornerstone of a strong, growing middle class has to be, as I said before, an economy that generates more good jobs in durable, growing industries. That's how this area was built. That's how America prospered. Because anybody who was willing to work, they could go out there and they could find themselves a job, and they could build a life for themselves and their family. Now, over the past four years, for the first time since the 1990s, the number of American manufacturing jobs has actually gone up instead of down. That's the good news. But we can do more. So I’m going to push new initiatives to help more manufacturers bring more jobs back to the United States. We’re going to continue to focus on strategies to make sure our tax code rewards companies that are not shipping jobs overseas, but creating jobs right here in the United States of America.

We want to make sure that -- we’re going to create strategies to make sure that good jobs in wind and solar and natural gas that are lowering costs and, at the same time, reducing dangerous carbon pollution happen right here in the United States.

And something that Cheri and I were talking about on the way over here -- I’m going to be pushing to open more manufacturing innovation institutes that turn regions left behind by global competition into global centers of cutting-edge jobs. So let’s tell the world that America is open for business. I know there’s an old site right here in Galesburg, over on Monmouth Boulevard -- let’s put some folks to work. Tomorrow, I’ll also visit the Port of Jacksonville, Florida to offer new ideas for doing what America has always done best, which is building things. Pat and I were talking before I came -- backstage -- Pat Quinn -- he was talking about how I came over the Don Moffitt Bridge. But we’ve got work to do all across the country. We’ve got ports that aren’t ready for the new supertankers that are going to begin passing through the new Panama Canal in two years’ time. If we don’t get that done, those tankers are going to go someplace else. We’ve got more than 100,000 bridges that are old enough to qualify for Medicare.

Businesses depend on our transportation systems, on our power grids, on our communications networks. And rebuilding them creates good-paying jobs right now that can’t be outsourced.

And by the way, this isn’t a Democratic idea. Republicans built a lot of stuff. This is the Land of Lincoln. Lincoln was all about building stuff -- first Republican President. And yet, as a share of our economy, we invest less in our infrastructure than we did two decades ago. And that’s inefficient at a time when it’s as cheap as it’s been since the 1950s to build things. It’s inexcusable at a time when so many of the workers who build stuff for a living are sitting at home waiting for a call. The longer we put this off, the more expensive it will be and the less competitive we will be. Businesses of tomorrow will not locate near old roads and outdated ports. They’ll relocate to places with high-speed Internet, and high-tech schools, and systems that move air and auto traffic faster, and not to mention will get parents home quicker from work because we’ll be eliminating some of these traffic jams. And we can watch all of that happen in other countries, and start falling behind, or we can choose to make it happen right here, in the United States.

In an age when jobs know no borders, companies are also going to seek out the countries that boast the most talented citizens, and they’ll reward folks who have the skills and the talents they need -- they’ll reward those folks with good pay. The days when the wages for a worker with a high school degree could keep pace with the earnings of somebody who got some sort of higher education -- those days are over. Everybody here knows that. There are a whole bunch of folks here whose dads or grandpas worked at a plant, didn’t need a high school education. You could just go there. If you were willing to work hard, you might be able to get two jobs. And you could support your family, have a vacation, own your home. But technology and global competition, they’re not going away. Those old days aren’t coming back. So we can either throw up our hands and resign ourselves to diminishing living standards, or we can do what America has always done, which is adapt, and pull together, and fight back, and win. That’s what we have to do.

And that brings me to the second cornerstone of a strong middle class -- and everybody here knows it -- an education that prepares our children and our workers for the global competition that they’re going to face. And if you think education is expensive, wait until you see how much ignorance costs in the 21st century.

If we don’t make this investment, we’re going to put our kids, our workers, and our country at a competitive disadvantage for decades. So we have to begin in the earliest years. And that’s why I’m going to keep pushing to make high-quality preschool available for every 4-year-old in America. Not just because we know it works for our kids, but because it provides a vital support system for working parents. And I’m going to take action in the education area to spur innovation that don’t require Congress. So, today, for example, as we speak, federal agencies are moving on my plan to connect 99 percent of America’s students to high-speed Internet over the next five years. We’re making that happen right now. We’ve already begun meeting with business leaders and tech entrepreneurs and innovative educators to identify the best ideas for redesigning our high schools so that they teach the skills required for a high-tech economy. And we’re also going to keep pushing new efforts to train workers for changing jobs. So here in Galesburg, for example, a lot of the workers that were laid off at Maytag chose to enroll in retraining programs like the one at Carl Sandburg College. And while it didn’t pay off for everyone, a lot of the folks who were retrained found jobs that suited them even better and paid even more than the ones they had lost. And that’s why I’ve asked Congress to start a Community College to Career initiative, so that workers can earn the skills that high-tech jobs demand without leaving their hometown. And I’m going to challenge CEOs from some of America’s best companies to hire more Americans who’ve got what it takes to fill that job opening but have been laid off for so long that nobody is giving their rÃ©sumÃ© an honest look. Audience Member: More talent! President Obama: That, too. I’m also going to use the power of my office over the next few months to highlight a topic that’s straining the budgets of just about every American family -- and that’s the soaring cost of higher education. Everybody is touched by this, including your President, who had a whole bunch of loans he had to pay off.

Three years ago, I worked with Democrats to reform the student loan system so that taxpayer dollars stopped padding the pockets of big banks, and instead helped more kids afford college. Then, I capped loan repayments at 10 percent of monthly incomes for responsible borrowers, so that if somebody graduated and they decided to take a teaching job, for example, that didn’t pay a lot of money, they knew that they were never going to have to pay more than 10 percent of their income and they could afford to go into a profession that they loved. That’s in place right now. And this week, we’re working with both parties to reverse the doubling of student loan rates that happened a few weeks ago because of congressional inaction.

So this is all a good start -- but it isn’t enough. Families and taxpayers can’t just keep paying more and more and more into an undisciplined system where costs just keep on going up and up and up. We’ll never have enough loan money, we’ll never have enough grant money, to keep up with costs that are going up 5, 6, 7 percent a year. We’ve got to get more out of what we pay for. Now, some colleges are testing new approaches to shorten the path to a degree, or blending teaching with online learning to help students master material and earn credits in less time. In some states, they’re testing new ways to fund college based not just on how many students enroll, but how many of them graduate, how well did they do. So this afternoon, I’ll visit the University of Central Missouri to highlight their efforts to deliver more bang for the buck to their students. And in the coming months, I will lay out an aggressive strategy to shake up the system, tackle rising costs, and improve value for middle-class students and their families. It is critical that we make sure that college is affordable for every single American who’s willing to work for it.

Now, so you’ve got a good job; you get a good education -- those have always been the key stepping stones into the middle class. But a home of your own has always been the clearest expression of middle-class security. For most families, that’s your biggest asset. For most families, that’s where your life’s work has been invested. And that changed during the crisis, when we saw millions of middle-class families experience their home values plummeting. The good news is over the past four years, we’ve helped more responsible homeowners stay in their homes. And today, sales are up and prices are up, and fewer Americans see their homes underwater. But we’re not done yet. The key now is to encourage homeownership that isn’t based on unrealistic bubbles, but instead is based on a solid foundation, where buyers and lenders play by the same set of rules, rules that are clear and transparent and fair. So already, I’ve asked Congress to pass a really good, bipartisan idea -- one that was championed, by the way, by Mitt Romney’s economic advisor -- and this is the idea to give every homeowner the chance to refinance their mortgage while rates are still low so they can save thousands of dollars a year. It will be like a tax cut for families who can refinance. I’m also acting on my own to cut red tape for responsible families who want to get a mortgage but the bank is saying no. We’ll work with both parties to turn the page on Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, and build a housing finance system that’s rock-solid for future generations. So we’ve got more work to do to strengthen homeownership in this country. But along with homeownership, the fourth cornerstone of what it means to be middle class in this country is a secure retirement. I hear from too many people across the country, face to face or in letters that they send me, that they feel as if retirement is just receding from their grasp. It’s getting farther and farther away. They can't see it. Now, today, a rising stock market has millions of retirement balances going up, and some of the losses that had taken place during the financial crisis have been recovered. But we still live with an upside-down system where those at the top, folks like me, get generous tax incentives to save, while tens of millions of hardworking Americans who are struggling, they get none of those breaks at all. So as we work to reform our tax code, we should find new ways to make it easier for workers to put away money, and free middle-class families from the fear that they won't be able to retire.

And if Congress is looking for a bipartisan place to get started, I should just say they don’t have to look far. We mentioned immigration reform before. Economists show that immigration reform makes undocumented workers pay their full share of taxes, and that actually shores up the Social Security system for years. So we should get that done. Good job; good education for your kids; home of your own; secure retirement. Fifth, I'm going to keep focusing on health care -- because middle-class families and small business owners deserve the security of knowing that neither an accident or an illness is going to threaten the dreams that you’ve worked a lifetime to build. As we speak, we're well on our way to fully implementing the Affordable Care Act. We're going to implement it. Now, if you’re one of the 85 percent of Americans who already have health insurance either through the job or Medicare or Medicaid, you don’t have to do anything, but you do have new benefits and better protections than you did before. You may not know it, but you do. Free checkups, mammograms, discounted medicines if you're on Medicare -- that’s what the Affordable Care Act means. You're already getting a better deal. No lifetime limits. If you don’t have health insurance, then starting on October 1st, private plans will actually compete for your business, and you'll be able to comparison-shop online. There will be a marketplace online, just like you’d buy a flat-screen TV or plane tickets or anything else you're doing online, and you'll be able to buy an insurance package that fits your budget and is right for you. And if you're one of the up to half of all Americans who’ve been sick or have a preexisting condition -- if you look at this auditorium, about half of you probably have a preexisting condition that insurance companies could use to not give you insurance if you lost your job or lost your insurance -- well, this law means that beginning January 1st, insurance companies will finally have to cover you and charge you the same rates as everybody else, even if you have a preexisting condition. That’s what the Affordable Care Act does. That’s what it does.

Now, look, I know because I've been living it that there are folks out there who are actively working to make this law fail. And I don’t always understand exactly what their logic is here, why they think giving insurance to folks who don’t have it and making folks with insurance a little more secure, why they think that’s a bad thing. But despite the politically motivated misinformation campaign, the states that have committed themselves to making this law work are finding that competition and choice are actually pushing costs down. So just last week, New York announced that premiums for consumers who buy their insurance in these online marketplaces will be at least 50 percent lower than what they're paying today -- 50 percent lower. So folks' premiums in the individual market will drop by 50 percent. And for them and for the millions of Americans who’ve been able to cover their sick kids for the first time -- like this gentlemen who just said his daughter has got health insurance -- or have been able to cover their employees more cheaply, or are able to have their kids who are younger than -- who are 25 or 26 stay on their parents' plan -- for all those folks, you'll have the security of knowing that everything you’ve worked hard for is no longer one illness away from being wiped out.

Finally, as we work to strengthen these cornerstones of middle-class security -- good job with decent wages and benefits, a good education, home of your own, retirement security, health care security -- I’m going to make the case for why we've got to rebuild ladders of opportunity for all those Americans who haven't quite made it yet -- who are working hard but are still suffering poverty wages, who are struggling to get full-time work.

There are a lot of folks who are still struggling out here, too many people in poverty. Here in America, we’ve never guaranteed success -- that's not what we do. More than some other countries, we expect people to be self-reliant. Nobody is going to do something for you. We've tolerated a little more inequality for the sake of a more dynamic, more adaptable economy. That's all for the good. But that idea has always been combined with a commitment to equality of opportunity to upward mobility -- the idea that no matter how poor you started, if you're willing to work hard and discipline yourself and defer gratification, you can make it, too. That's the American idea.

Unfortunately, opportunities for upward mobility in America have gotten harder to find over the past 30 years. And that’s a betrayal of the American idea. And that’s why we have to do a lot more to give every American the chance to work their way into the middle class. The best defense against all of these forces -- global competition, economic polarization -- is the strength of the community. So we need a new push to rebuild rundown neighborhoods. We need new partnerships with some of the hardest-hit towns in America to get them back on their feet. And because no one who works full-time in America should have to live in poverty, I am going to keep making the case that we need to raise the minimum wage -- because it's lower right now than it was when Ronald Reagan took office. It's time for the minimum wage to go up.

We're not a people who allow chance of birth to decide life’s biggest winners or losers. And after years in which we’ve seen how easy it can be for any of us to fall on hard times -- folks in Galesburg, folks in the Quad Cities, you know there are good people who work hard and sometimes they get a bad break. A plant leaves. Somebody gets sick. Somebody loses a home. We've seen it in our family, in our friends and our neighbors. We've seen it happen. And that means we cannot turn our backs when bad breaks hit any of our fellow citizens. So good jobs; a better bargain for the middle class and the folks who are working to get into the middle class; an economy that grows from the middle out, not the top down -- that's where I will focus my energies. That's where I will focus my energies not just for the next few months, but for the remainder of my presidency. These are the plans that I'll lay out across this country. But I won’t be able to do it alone, so I'm going to be calling on all of us to take up this cause. We’ll need our businesses, who are some of the best in the world, to pressure Congress to invest in our future. And I’ll be asking our businesses to set an example by providing decent wages and salaries to their own employees. And I’m going to highlight the ones that do just that. There are companies like Costco, which pays good wages and offers good benefits. Companies like -- there are companies like the Container Store, that prides itself on training its employees and on employee satisfaction -- because these companies prove that it’s not just good for the employees, it’s good for their businesses to treat workers well. It’s good for America.

So I’m going to be calling on the private sector to step up. I will be saying to Democrats we’ve got to question some of our old assumptions. We’ve got to be willing to redesign or get rid of programs that don't work as well as they should. We’ve got to be willing to -- we’ve got to embrace changes to cherished priorities so that they work better in this new age. We can't just -- Democrats can't just stand pat and just defend whatever government is doing. If we believe that government can give the middle class a fair shot in this new century -- and I believe that -- we’ve an obligation to prove it. And that means that we’ve got to be open to new ways of doing things. And we’ll need Republicans in Congress to set aside short-term politics and work with me to find common ground.

It’s interesting, in the run-up to this speech, a lot of reporters say that, well, Mr. President, these are all good ideas, but some of you’ve said before; some of them sound great, but you can't get those through Congress. Republicans won’t agree with you. And I say, look, the fact is there are Republicans in Congress right now who privately agree with me on a lot of the ideas I’ll be proposing. I know because they’ve said so. But they worry they’ll face swift political retaliation for cooperating with me. Now, there are others who will dismiss every idea I put forward either because they’re playing to their most strident supporters, or in some cases because, sincerely, they have a fundamentally different vision for America -- one that says inequality is both inevitable and just; one that says an unfettered free market without any restraints inevitably produces the best outcomes, regardless of the pain and uncertainty imposed on ordinary families; and government is the problem and we should just shrink it as small as we can. In either case, I say to these members of Congress: I’m laying out my ideas to give the middle class a better shot. So now it’s time for you to lay out your ideas. You can't just be against something. You got to be for something.

Even if you think I’ve done everything wrong, the trends I just talked about were happening well before I took office. So it’s not enough for you just to oppose me. You got to be for something. What are your ideas? If you’re willing to work with me to strengthen American manufacturing and rebuild this country’s infrastructure, let’s go. If you’ve got better ideas to bring down the cost of college for working families, let’s hear them. If you think you have a better plan for making sure that every American has the security of quality, affordable health care, then stop taking meaningless repeal votes, and share your concrete ideas with the country.

Repealing Obamacare and cutting spending is not an economic plan. It’s not. If you’re serious about a balanced, long-term fiscal plan that replaces the mindless cuts currently in place, or if you’re interested in tax reform that closes corporate loopholes and gives working families a better deal, I’m ready to work. But you should know that I will not accept deals that don’t meet the basic test of strengthening the prospects of hardworking families. This is the agenda we have to be working on.

We’ve come a long way since I first took office. As a country, we’re older and wiser. I don’t know if I’m wiser, but I’m certainly older. And as long as Congress doesn’t manufacture another crisis -- as long as we don’t shut down the government just because I’m for keeping it open -- as long as we don’t risk a U.S. default over paying bills that we’ve already racked up, something that we’ve never done -- we can probably muddle along without taking bold action. If we stand pat and we don’t do any of the things I talked about, our economy will grow, although slower than it should. New businesses will form. The unemployment rate will probably tick down a little bit. Just by virtue of our size and our natural resources and, most of all, because of the talent of our people, America will remain a world power, and the majority of us will figure out how to get by. But you know what, that’s our choice. If we just stand by and do nothing in the face of immense change, understand that part of our character will be lost. Our founding precepts about wide-open opportunity, each generation doing better than the last -- that will be a myth, not reality. The position of the middle class will erode further. Inequality will continue to increase. Money’s power will distort our politics even more. Social tensions will rise, as various groups fight to hold on to what they have, or start blaming somebody else for why their position isn’t improving. And the fundamental optimism that’s always propelled us forward will give way to cynicism or nostalgia. And that’s not the vision I have for this country. It’s not the vision you have for this country. That’s not the America we know. That’s not the vision we should be settling for. That’s not a vision we should be passing on to our children. I have now run my last campaign. I do not intend to wait until the next campaign or the next President before tackling the issues that matter. I care about one thing and one thing only, and that’s how to use every minute -- the only thing I care about is how to use every minute of the remaining 1,276 days of my term -- to make this country work for working Americans again. That’s all I care about. I don’t have another election.

Because I’ll tell you, Galesburg, that’s where I believe America needs to go. I believe that’s where the American people want to go. And it may seem hard today, but if we’re willing to take a few bold steps -- if Washington will just shake off its complacency and set aside the kind of slash-and-burn partisanship that we’ve just seen for way too long -- if we just make some common-sense decisions, our economy will be stronger a year from now. It will be stronger five years from now. It will be stronger 10 years from now.

If we focus on what matters, then more Americans will know the pride of that first paycheck. More Americans will have the satisfaction of flipping the sign to “Open” on their own business. More Americans will have the joy of scratching the height of their kid on that door of their brand-new home.

And in the end, isn't that what makes us special? It's not the ability to generate incredible wealth for the few; it's our ability to give everybody a chance to pursue their own true measure of happiness. We haven’t just wanted success for ourselves -- we want it for our neighbors, too.

When we think about our own communities -- we're not a mean people; we're not a selfish people; we're not a people that just looks out for “number one.” Why should our politics reflect those kinds of values? That’s why we don’t call it John’s dream or Susie’s dream or Barack’s dream or Pat's dream -- we call it the American Dream. And that’s what makes this country special -- the idea that no matter who you are or what you look like or where you come from or who you love, you can make it if you try. That’s what we're fighting for.

So, yes, Congress is tough right now, but that’s not going to stop me. We're going to do everything we can, wherever we can, with or without Congress, to make things happen. We're going to go on the road and talk to you, and you'll have ideas, and we want to see which ones we can implement. But we're going to focus on this thing that matters. One of America’s greatest writers, Carl Sandburg, born right here in Galesburg over a century ago -- he saw the railroads bring the world to the prairie, and then the prairie sent out its bounty to the world. And he saw the advent of new industries, new technologies, and he watched populations shift. He saw fortunes made and lost. And he saw how change could be painful -- how a new age could unsettle long-held customs and ways of life. But he had that frontier optimism, and so he saw something more on the horizon. And he wrote, “I speak of new cities and new people. The past is a bucket of ashes. Yesterday is a wind gone down, a sun dropped in the west. There is only an ocean of tomorrows, a sky of tomorrows.” Well, America, we’ve made it through the worst of yesterday’s winds. We just have to have the courage to keep moving forward. We've got to set our eyes on the horizon. We will find an ocean of tomorrows. We will find a sky of tomorrows for the American people and for this great country that we love. So thank you. God bless you. And God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# 60th Anniversary Celebration of the Korean War Armistice

Good morning. Annyong haseyo.

Secretaries Hagel, Jewell and Shinseki; Admiral Winnefeld; General Jung; all our friends from the Republic of Korea, including the legendary General Paik Sun Yup; distinguished guests; and most of all, veterans of the Korean War and your families. To our veterans -- many in your 80s, a few in your old uniforms -- which still fit -- let me just say you look outstanding. And I would ask that all United States, Republic of Korea, and other veterans who fought -- I would ask those who can stand to please stand so that we can properly honor you here today.

July 27th, 1953 -- 60 years ago today, in the village of Panmunjom, in a barren room, the generals picked up their pens and signed their names to the agreement spread before them. That night, as the armistice took hold, the guns of war thundered no more. Along the jagged front, men emerged from their muddy trenches. A Marine raised his bugle and played taps. And a soldier spoke for millions when he said, “Thank God it is over.”

In the days that followed, both sides pulled back, leaving a demilitarized zone between them. Soldiers emptied their sandbags and tore down their bunkers. Our POWs emerged from the camps. Our troops boarded ships and steamed back across the ocean. And describing the moment he passed under the Golden Gate Bridge, one of those soldiers wrote, “We suddenly knew we had survived the war, and we were home.”

Yet ask these veterans here today and many will tell you, compared to other wars, theirs was a different kind of homecoming. Unlike the Second World War, Korea did not galvanize our country. These veterans did not return to parades. Unlike Vietnam, Korea did not tear at our country. These veterans did not return to protests. Among many Americans, tired of war, there was, it seemed, a desire to forget, to move on. As one of these veterans recalls, “We just came home and took off our uniforms and went to work. That was about it.”

You, our veterans of Korea, deserved better. And down the decades, our nation has worked to right that wrong, including here, with this eternal memorial, where the measure of your sacrifice is enshrined for all time. Because here in America, no war should ever be forgotten, and no veteran should ever be overlooked. And after the armistice, a reporter wrote, “When men talk in some distant time with faint remembrance of the Korean War, the shining deeds will live.” The shining deeds will live.

On this 60th anniversary, perhaps the highest tribute we can offer our veterans of Korea is to do what should have been done the day you come home. In our hurried lives, let us pause. Let us listen. Let these veterans carry us back to the days of their youth, and let us be awed by their shining deeds.

Listen closely and hear the story of a generation -- veterans of World War II recalled to duty. Husbands kissing their wives goodbye yet again. Young men -- some just boys, 18, 19, 20 years old -- leaving behind everyone they loved “to defend a country they never knew and a people they never met.” Let’s never forget all the daughters who left home, especially our heroic nurses who saved so many. Our women in Korea also served with honor. They also gave their lives.

Listen, and hear how these Americans faced down their fears and did their duty. Clutching their rifles; hearing the bugles in the distance; knowing that waves of enemy fighters would soon be upon them. In ships offshore, climbing down the ropes into the landing craft, knowing some of them would not leave that beach. On the tarmacs and flight decks, taking off in their Corsairs and Sabres, knowing that they might not return to this earth.

Listen, and hear of their gallantry -- often outnumbered and outgunned -- in some of the most brutal combat in modern history. How they held the line at the Pusan Perimeter. How they landed at Inchon and turned the tide of the war. How, surrounded and freezing, they battled their way out of Chosin Reservoir. And how they fought -- foxhole by foxhole, mountain after mountain, day and night -- at the Punchbowl and Heartbreak Ridge, Old Baldy and Pork Chop Hill.

Listen, and hear how perhaps the only thing worse than the enemy was the weather. The searing heat, the choking dust of summer. The deep snow and bitter cold of winter -- so cold their weapons could jam; so cold their food would turn to ice. And surely no one endured more than our POWs in those hellish camps, where the torment was unimaginable. Our POWs from Korea are some of the strongest men our nation has ever produced, and today we honor them all -- those who never came home and those who are here today.

Listen to these veterans and you’ll also hear of the resilience of the human spirit. There was compassion -- starving prisoners who shared their food. There was love -- men who charged machine guns, and reached for grenades, so their brothers might live. There was the dark humor of war -- as when someone misunderstood the code name for mortar rounds -- “Tootsie Rolls” -- and then shipped our troops thousands of Tootsie Rolls -- candies.

And there was hope -- as told in a letter home written by a soldier in the 7th Cavalry. Marching through the snow and ice, something caught his eye -- a young lieutenant up ahead, and from the muzzle of his rifle hung a pair of tiny baby booties, “swinging silently in the wind…like tiny bells.” They were sent by the lieutenant’s wife, pregnant with their first child, and she promised to send ribbons -- blue if a boy, pink if a girl. But as the war ground on, those soldiers were scattered. Until one day, on a Korean road, he spotted the lieutenant again. “Swinging gaily in the first rays of the morning sun,” the soldier wrote, were those booties, “and fluttering below them was the brightest, bluest piece of ribbon I have ever seen.”

Six decades on, these moments may seem like faint remembrances of a distant time. But for you -- our Korea veterans and your families -- I know it must feel sometimes just like just yesterday. And on days such as this, you’re back there once more. For Korea was the fire that helped to forge you.

As we listen to the story of your service, I say let us also learn, because your lives hold lessons for us today. Korea taught us the perils when we fail to prepare. After the Second World War, a rapid drawdown left our troops underequipped, so that in the early days of Korea, their rockets literally bounced off enemy tanks. Today, as we end a decade of war and reorient our forces for the future, as we make hard choices at home, our allies and adversaries must know the United States of America will maintain the strongest military the world has ever known, bar none, always. That is what we do.

Korea taught us that, as a people, we are stronger when we stand as one. On President Truman’s orders, our troops served together in integrated units. And the heroism of African Americans in Korea -- and Latinos and Asian Americans and Native Americans -- advanced the idea: If these Americans could live and work together over there, surely we could do the same thing here at home.

Change came slowly. And we continue our long journey toward a more perfect union. But for the great strides we have made toward the ideals of equality and opportunity, we must give thanks to our Korean War veterans who helped point the way.

Korea reminds us that when we send our troops into battle, they deserve the support and gratitude of the American people -- especially when they come home. Today, let us remember that -- right now -- our sons and daughters continue to risk their lives, give their lives, in Afghanistan. And as this war ends and we welcome them home, we will make it our mission to give them the respect and the care and the opportunities that they have earned.

And Korea reminds us that our obligations to our fallen and their families endure long after the battle ends. To this day, 7,910 Americans are still missing from the Korean War. And we will not stop working until we give these families a full accounting of their loved ones. Like Sergeant First Class William Robinson -- 26 years old -- missing for 63 years. This week, in Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania, the Robinsons will welcome their uncle home and finally lay him to rest -- with full military honors.

Freedom is not free. And in Korea, no one paid a heavier price than those who gave all -- 36,574 American patriots, and, among our allies, more than one million of our South Korean friends -- soldiers and civilians. That July day, when the fighting finally ended, not far from where it began, some suggested this sacrifice had been for naught, and they summed it up with a phrase -- “die for a tie.”

It took many decades for this memorial to gain its rightful place on this great Mall where we tell our American story. It has, perhaps, taken even longer to see clearly, and understand fully, the true legacy of your service. But here, today, we can say with confidence that war was no tie. Korea was a victory. When 50 million South Koreans live in freedom -- a vibrant democracy, one of the world’s most dynamic economies, in stark contrast to the repression and poverty of the North -- that’s a victory; that’s your legacy.

When our soldiers stand firm along the DMZ; when our South Korean friends can go about their lives, knowing that the commitment of the United States to the security of the Republic of Korea will never waver -- that is a victory, and that is your legacy.

When our allies across the Asia Pacific know -- as we have proven in Korea for 60 straight years -- that the United States will remain a force for peace and security and prosperity --that’s a victory; that’s your legacy.

And for generations to come, when history recalls how free nations banded together in a long Cold War, and how we won that war, let it be said that Korea was the first battle -- where freedom held its ground and free peoples refused to yield, that, too, is your victory, your legacy.

Most of all, your legacy burns brightest right here, in a grateful nation that reveres you; in the loving families that cherish you -- like that young soldier with those baby booties swinging from his rifle. Ever since the war, the story of that soldier has been passed among our Korean War vets. Some of you may have heard it before. And many may have wondered what became of that soldier. Today, six decades later, we now know -- because we found him. His was Richard Shank, from St. Louis, Missouri. For his valor in Korea he earned the Silver Star. Yes, Dick survived the war. He returned home. He held his baby boy in his arms. He was able to be a father to his son.

But this story doesn’t end there -- because like so many of you, Dick continued to serve in uniform. His son grew into a man, got married, had children of his own. Those children are now adults themselves, scattered across the country. And like so many American families, they still speak with pride of their grandfather’s service in Korea.

Today, Dick Shank lives in Gainesville, Florida, and I believe he’s watching us this morning. He’s 84 years old, recovering from a recent fall while roller skating. “Life is short,” he says, “and I just keep on living it.” And one of the ways he keeps living it is by meeting up every year with his buddies from Korea, and recalling the time they shared together in that fight which ended 60 years ago today.

Veterans of the Korean War -- in the spring of your youth you learned how short and precious life can be. And because of you, millions of people can keep on living it, in freedom and in peace. Your lives are an inspiration. Your service will never be forgotten. You have the thanks of a grateful nation. And your shining deeds will live -- now and forever.

May God bless those who gave all in Korea. May God bless you and your families. May God bless the alliances that helped secure our prosperity and our security. And may God continue to bless these United States of America.

Thank you very much.

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# Press Conference on Intelligence Gathering Reform

Good afternoon, everybody. Please have a seat.

Over the past few weeks, I’ve been talking about what I believe should be our number-one priority as a country -- building a better bargain for the middle class and for Americans who want to work their way into the middle class. At the same time, I’m focused on my number-one responsibility as Commander-in-Chief, and that's keeping the American people safe. And in recent days, we’ve been reminded once again about the threats to our nation.

As I said at the National Defense University back in May, in meeting those threats we have to strike the right balance between protecting our security and preserving our freedoms. And as part of this rebalancing, I called for a review of our surveillance programs. Unfortunately, rather than an orderly and lawful process to debate these issues and come up with appropriate reforms, repeated leaks of classified information have initiated the debate in a very passionate, but not always fully informed way.

Now, keep in mind that as a senator, I expressed a healthy skepticism about these programs, and as President, I’ve taken steps to make sure they have strong oversight by all three branches of government and clear safeguards to prevent abuse and protect the rights of the American people. But given the history of abuse by governments, it’s right to ask questions about surveillance -- particularly as technology is reshaping every aspect of our lives.

I’m also mindful of how these issues are viewed overseas, because American leadership around the world depends upon the example of American democracy and American openness -- because what makes us different from other countries is not simply our ability to secure our nation, it’s the way we do it -- with open debate and democratic process.

In other words, it’s not enough for me, as President, to have confidence in these programs. The American people need to have confidence in them as well. And that's why, over the last few weeks, I’ve consulted members of Congress who come at this issue from many different perspectives. I’ve asked the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board to review where our counterterrorism efforts and our values come into tension, and I directed my national security team to be more transparent and to pursue reforms of our laws and practices.

And so, today, I’d like to discuss four specific steps -- not all inclusive, but some specific steps that we’re going to be taking very shortly to move the debate forward.

First, I will work with Congress to pursue appropriate reforms to Section 215 of the Patriot Act -- the program that collects telephone records. As I’ve said, this program is an important tool in our effort to disrupt terrorist plots. And it does not allow the government to listen to any phone calls without a warrant. But given the scale of this program, I understand the concerns of those who would worry that it could be subject to abuse. So after having a dialogue with members of Congress and civil libertarians, I believe that there are steps we can take to give the American people additional confidence that there are additional safeguards against abuse.

For instance, we can take steps to put in place greater oversight, greater transparency, and constraints on the use of this authority. So I look forward to working with Congress to meet those objectives.

Second, I’ll work with Congress to improve the public’s confidence in the oversight conducted by the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, known as the FISC. The FISC was created by Congress to provide judicial review of certain intelligence activities so that a federal judge must find that our actions are consistent with the Constitution. However, to build greater confidence, I think we should consider some additional changes to the FISC.

One of the concerns that people raise is that a judge reviewing a request from the government to conduct programmatic surveillance only hears one side of the story -- may tilt it too far in favor of security, may not pay enough attention to liberty. And while I’ve got confidence in the court and I think they’ve done a fine job, I think we can provide greater assurances that the court is looking at these issues from both perspectives -- security and privacy.

So, specifically, we can take steps to make sure civil liberties concerns have an independent voice in appropriate cases by ensuring that the government’s position is challenged by an adversary.

Number three, we can, and must, be more transparent. So I’ve directed the intelligence community to make public as much information about these programs as possible. We’ve already declassified unprecedented information about the NSA, but we can go further. So at my direction, the Department of Justice will make public the legal rationale for the government’s collection activities under Section 215 of the Patriot Act. The NSA is taking steps to put in place a full-time civil liberties and privacy officer, and released information that details its mission, authorities, and oversight. And finally, the intelligence community is creating a website that will serve as a hub for further transparency, and this will give Americans and the world the ability to learn more about what our intelligence community does and what it doesn’t do, how it carries out its mission, and why it does so.

Fourth, we’re forming a high-level group of outside experts to review our entire intelligence and communications technologies. We need new thinking for a new era. We now have to unravel terrorist plots by finding a needle in the haystack of global telecommunications. And meanwhile, technology has given governments -- including our own -- unprecedented capability to monitor communications.

So I am tasking this independent group to step back and review our capabilities -- particularly our surveillance technologies. And they’ll consider how we can maintain the trust of the people, how we can make sure that there absolutely is no abuse in terms of how these surveillance technologies are used, ask how surveillance impacts our foreign policy -- particularly in an age when more and more information is becoming public. And they will provide an interim report in 60 days and a final report by the end of this year, so that we can move forward with a better understanding of how these programs impact our security, our privacy, and our foreign policy.

So all these steps are designed to ensure that the American people can trust that our efforts are in line with our interests and our values. And to others around the world, I want to make clear once again that America is not interested in spying on ordinary people. Our intelligence is focused, above all, on finding the information that’s necessary to protect our people, and -- in many cases -- protect our allies.

It’s true we have significant capabilities. What’s also true is we show a restraint that many governments around the world don't even think to do, refuse to show -- and that includes, by the way, some of America’s most vocal critics. We shouldn’t forget the difference between the ability of our government to collect information online under strict guidelines and for narrow purposes, and the willingness of some other governments to throw their own citizens in prison for what they say online.

And let me close with one additional thought. The men and women of our intelligence community work every single day to keep us safe because they love this country and believe in our values. They're patriots. And I believe that those who have lawfully raised their voices on behalf of privacy and civil liberties are also patriots who love our country and want it to live up to our highest ideals. So this is how we’re going to resolve our differences in the United States -- through vigorous public debate, guided by our Constitution, with reverence for our history as a nation of laws, and with respect for the facts.

So, with that, I’m going to take some questions. And let’s see who we’ve got here. We’re going to start with Julie Pace of AP.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. I wanted to ask about some of the foreign policy fallout from the disclosure of the NSA programs that you discussed. Your spokesman said yesterday that there’s no question that the U.S. relationship with Russia has gotten worse since Vladimir Putin took office. How much of that decline do you attribute directly to Mr. Putin, given that you seem to have had a good working relationship with his predecessor? Also will there be any additional punitive measures taken against Russia for granting asylum to Edward Snowden? Or is canceling the September summit really all you can do given the host of issues the U.S. needs Russian cooperation for? Thank you.

President Obama: Good. I think there’s always been some tension in the U.S.-Russian relationship after the fall of the Soviet Union. There’s been cooperation in some areas; there’s been competition in others.

It is true that in my first four years, in working with President Medvedev, we made a lot of progress. We got START done -- or START II done. We were able to cooperate together on Iran sanctions. They provided us help in terms of supplying our troops in Afghanistan. We were able to get Russia into the WTO -- which is not just good for Russia, it’s good for our companies and businesses because they're more likely then to follow international norms and rules. So there's been a lot of good work that has been done and that is going to continue to be done. What's also true is, is that when President Putin -- who was prime minister when Medvedev was president -- came back into power I think we saw more rhetoric on the Russian side that was anti-American, that played into some of the old stereotypes about the Cold War contests between the United States and Russia. And I've encouraged Mr. Putin to think forward as opposed to backwards on those issues -- with mixed success.

And I think the latest episode is just one more in a number of emerging differences that we've seen over the last several months around Syria, around human rights issues, where it is probably appropriate for us to take a pause, reassess where it is that Russia is going, what our core interests are, and calibrate the relationship so that we're doing things that are good for the United States and hopefully good for Russia as well, but recognizing that there just are going to be some differences and we're not going to be able to completely disguise them.

And that's okay. Keep in mind that although I'm not attending the summit, I'll still be going to St. Petersburg because Russia is hosting the G20. That's important business in terms of our economy and our jobs and all the issues that are of concern to Americans.

I know that one question that's been raised is how do we approach the Olympics. I want to just make very clear right now I do not think it's appropriate to boycott the Olympics. We've got a bunch of Americans out there who are training hard, who are doing everything they can to succeed. Nobody is more offended than me by some of the anti-gay and lesbian legislation that you've been seeing in Russia. But as I said just this week, I've spoken out against that not just with respect to Russia but a number of other countries where we continue to do work with them, but we have a strong disagreement on this issue.

And one of the things I'm really looking forward to is maybe some gay and lesbian athletes bringing home the gold or silver or bronze, which I think would go a long way in rejecting the kind of attitudes that we're seeing there. And if Russia doesn't have gay or lesbian athletes, then it probably makes their team weaker.

Question: Are there going to be any additional punitive measures for Russia, beyond canceling the summit?

President Obama: Keep in mind that our decision to not participate in the summit was not simply around Mr. Snowden. It had to do with the fact that, frankly, on a whole range of issues where we think we can make some progress, Russia has not moved. And so we don't consider that strictly punitive.

We're going to assess where the relationship can advance U.S. interests and increase peace and stability and prosperity around the world. Where it can, we’re going to keep on working with them. Where we have differences, we’re going to say so clearly. And my hope is, is that over time, Mr. Putin and Russia recognize that rather than a zero-sum competition, in fact, if the two countries are working together we can probably advance the betterment of both peoples.

Chuck Todd.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Given that you just announced a whole bunch of reforms based on essentially the leaks that Edward Snowden made on all of these surveillance programs, is that change -- is your mindset changed about him? Is he now more a whistle-blower than he is a hacker, as you called him at one point, or somebody that shouldn’t be filed charges? And should he be provided more protection? Is he a patriot? You just used those words. And then just to follow up on the personal -- I want to follow up on a personal --

President Obama: Okay, I want to make sure -- everybody is asking one question it would be helpful.

Question: No, I understand. It was a part of a question that you didn’t answer. Can you get stuff done with Russia, big stuff done, without having a good personal relationship with Putin?

President Obama: I don’t have a bad personal relationship with Putin. When we have conversations, they’re candid, they’re blunt; oftentimes, they’re constructive. I know the press likes to focus on body language and he’s got that kind of slouch, looking like the bored kid in the back of the classroom. But the truth is, is that when we’re in conversations together, oftentimes it’s very productive.

So the issue here really has to do with where do they want to take Russia -- it’s substantive on a policy front. And --

Question: [Inaudible]

President Obama: No. Right now, this is just a matter of where Mr. Putin and the Russian people want to go. I think if they are looking forward into the 21st century and how they can advance their economy, and make sure that some of our joint concerns around counterterrorism are managed effectively, then I think we can work together. If issues are framed as if the U.S. is for it then Russia should be against it, or we’re going to be finding ways where we can poke each other at every opportunity, then probably we don’t get as much stuff done.

See, now I’ve forgotten your first question, which presumably was the more important one. No, I don’t think Mr. Snowden was a patriot. As I said in my opening remarks, I called for a thorough review of our surveillance operations before Mr. Snowden made these leaks.

My preference -- and I think the American people’s preference -- would have been for a lawful, orderly examination of these laws, a thoughtful fact-based debate that would then lead us to a better place. Because I never made claims that all the surveillance technologies that have developed since the time some of these laws had been put in place somehow didn't require potentially some additional reforms. That's exactly what I called for.

So the fact is, is that Mr. Snowden has been charged with three felonies. If, in fact, he believes that what he did was right, then, like every American citizen, he can come here, appear before the court with a lawyer and make his case. If the concern was that somehow this was the only way to get this information out to the public, I signed an executive order well before Mr. Snowden leaked this information that provided whistleblower protection to the intelligence community -- for the first time. So there were other avenues available for somebody whose conscience was stirred and thought that they needed to question government actions.

But having said that, once the leaks have happened, what we’ve seen is information come out in dribs and in drabs, sometimes coming out sideways. Once the information is out, the administration comes in, tries to correct the record. But by that time, it’s too late or we’ve moved on, and a general impression has, I think, taken hold not only among the American public but also around the world that somehow we’re out there willy-nilly just sucking in information on everybody and doing what we please with it.

That's not the case. Our laws specifically prohibit us from surveilling U.S. persons without a warrant. And there are a whole range of safeguards that have been put in place to make sure that that basic principle is abided by.

But what is clear is that whether, because of the instinctive bias of the intelligence community to keep everything very close -- and probably what’s a fair criticism is my assumption that if we had checks and balances from the courts and Congress, that that traditional system of checks and balances would be enough to give people assurance that these programs were run probably -- that assumption I think proved to be undermined by what happened after the leaks. I think people have questions about this program.

And so, as a consequence, I think it is important for us to go ahead and answer these questions. What I’m going to be pushing the IC to do is rather than have a trunk come out here and leg come out there and a tail come out there, let’s just put the whole elephant out there so people know exactly what they're looking at. Let’s examine what is working, what’s not, are there additional protections that can be put in place, and let’s move forward.

And there’s no doubt that Mr. Snowden’s leaks triggered a much more rapid and passionate response than would have been the case if I had simply appointed this review board to go through, and I had sat down with Congress and we had worked this thing through. It would have been less exciting. It would not have generated as much press. I actually think we would have gotten to the same place, and we would have done so without putting at risk our national security and some very vital ways that we are able to get intelligence that we need to secure the country.

Major Garrett.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. I’d like to ask you about this debate that's playing itself out in editorial pages, in the blogosphere, even in the Senate Democratic caucus, about the choice you eventually will make for the next Federal Reserve chairman. There is a perception among Democrats that Larry Summers has the inside track, and perhaps you’ve made some assurances to him about that. Janet Yellen is the vice chair of the Federal Reserve. There are many women in the Senate who are Democrats who believe that breaking the glass ceiling there would be historic and important.

President Obama: Right.

Question: Are you annoyed by this sort of roiling debate? Do you find it any way unseemly? And do you believe this will be one of the most important -- if not the most important -- economic decisions you’ll make in the remainder of your presidency?

President Obama: It is definitely one of the most important economic decisions that I’ll make in the remainder of my presidency. The Federal Reserve chairman is not just one of the most important economic policymakers in America, he or she is one of the most important policymakers in the world. And that person presumably will stay on after I’m President. So this, along with Supreme Court appointments, is probably as important a decision as I make as President.

I have a range of outstanding candidates. You’ve mentioned two of them -- Mr. Summers and Mr. Yellen -- Ms. Yellen. And they're both terrific people.

I think the perception that Mr. Summers might have an inside track simply had to do with a bunch of attacks that I was hearing on Mr. Summers preemptively, which is sort of a standard Washington exercise, that I don't like. Because when somebody has worked hard for me and worked hard on behalf of the American people, and I know the quality of those people, and I see them getting slapped around in the press for no reason -- before they’ve even been nominated for anything -- then I want to make sure that somebody is standing up for them. I felt the same way when people were attacking Susan Rice before she was nominated for anything. So I tend to defend folks who I think have done a good job and don't deserve attacks.

But I consider them both outstanding candidates. My main criteria -- I’ve stated this before, but I want to repeat it -- my main criteria for the Fed Reserve chairman is somebody who understands they’ve got a dual mandate. A critical part of the job is making sure that we keep inflation in check, that our monetary policy is sound, that the dollar is sound. Those are all critical components of the job. And we’ve seen what happens when the Fed is not paying attention. We saw, prior to Paul Volcker coming into place, inflation shooting up in ways that really damaged the real economy.

But the other mandate is full employment. And right now, if you look at the biggest challenges we have, the challenge is not inflation; the challenge is we’ve still got too many people out of work, too many long-term unemployed, too much slack in the economy, and we’re not growing as fast as we should. And so I want a Fed chairman who’s able to look at those issues and have a perspective that keeps an eye on inflation, makes sure that we’re not seeing artificial bubbles in place, but also recognizing, you know what, a big part of my job right now is to make sure the economy is growing quickly and robustly, and is sustained and durable, so that people who work hard in this country are able to find a job.

And, frankly, I think both Larry Summers and Janet Yellen are highly qualified candidates. There are a couple of other candidates who are highly qualified as well. I’ll make the decision in the fall.

Question: Can you see how the perception of you defending Larry Summers as vigorously as you just did and in other quarters lead some to believe you’ve already made up your mind?

President Obama: Well, except I just told you I haven’t. Major, I’d defend you if somebody was saying something that wasn’t true about you. I really would. In fact, I’ve done that in the White House some times.

Carol Lee. And, Carol, congratulations on Hudson.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President.

President Obama: Do you have pictures?

Question: I do. I’ll have to show you --

President Obama: Okay, I’m going to have to see them.

Question: I appreciate you making it a slow news week.

I wanted to ask you about your evolution on the surveillance issues. I mean, part of what you’re talking about today is restoring the public trust. And the public has seen you evolve from when you were in the U.S. Senate to now. And even as recently as June, you said that the process was such that people should be comfortable with it, and now you’re saying you’re making these reforms and people should be comfortable with those. So why should the public trust you on this issue, and why did you change your position multiple times?

President Obama: Well, I think it’s important to say, Carol, first of all, I haven’t evolved in my assessment of the actual programs. I consistently have said that when I came into office I evaluated them. Some of these programs I had been critical of when I was in the Senate. When I looked through specifically what was being done, my determination was that the two programs in particular that had been at issue, 215 and 702, offered valuable intelligence that helps us protect the American people and they're worth preserving. What we also saw was that some bolts needed to be tightened up on some of the programs, so we initiated some additional oversight, reforms, compliance officers, audits and so forth.

And if you look at the reports -- even the disclosures that Mr. Snowden has put forward -- all the stories that have been written, what you're not reading about is the government actually abusing these programs and listening in on people's phone calls or inappropriately reading people's emails. What you're hearing about is the prospect that these could be abused. Now, part of the reason they're not abused is because these checks are in place, and those abuses would be against the law and would be against the orders of the FISC.

Having said that, though, if you are outside of the intelligence community, if you are the ordinary person and you start seeing a bunch of headlines saying, U.S.-Big Brother looking down on you, collecting telephone records, et cetera, well, understandably, people would be concerned. I would be, too, if I wasn't inside the government.

And so in light of the changed environment where a whole set of questions have been raised, some in the most sensationalized manner possible, where these leaks are released drip by drip, one a week, to kind of maximize attention and see if they can catch us at some imprecision on something -- in light of that, it makes sense for us to go ahead, lay out what exactly we're doing, have a discussion with Congress, have a discussion with industry -- which is also impacted by this -- have a discussion with civil libertarians, and see can we do this better.

I think the main thing I want to emphasize is I don't have an interest and the people at the NSA don't have an interest in doing anything other than making sure that where we can prevent a terrorist attack, where we can get information ahead of time, that we're able to carry out that critical task. We do not have an interest in doing anything other than that. And we've tried to set up a system that is as failsafe as so far at least we've been able to think of to make sure that these programs are not abused.

But people may have better ideas and people may want to jigger slightly sort of the balance between the information that we can get versus the incremental encroachments on privacy that if haven't already taken place might take place in a future administration, or as technologies develop further.

And the other thing that’s happening is, is that as technology develops further, technology itself may provide us some additional safeguards. So, for example, if people don’t have confidence that the law, the checks and balances of the court and Congress are sufficient to give us confidence that government is not snooping, well, maybe we can embed technologies in there that prevent the snooping regardless of what government wants to do. I mean, there may be some technological fixes that provide another layer of assurance.

And so those are the kinds of things that I’m looking forward to having a conversation about.

Question: Can you understand, though, why some people might not trust what you're saying right now about wanting to --

President Obama: No, I can’t.

Question: -- that they should be comfortable with the process?

President Obama: Well, the fact that I said that the programs are operating in a way that prevents abuse, that continues to be true, without the reforms. The question is how do I make the American people more comfortable.

If I tell Michelle that I did the dishes -- now, granted, in the White House I don’t do the dishes that much -- but back in the day -- and she’s a little skeptical, well, I’d like her to trust me, but maybe I need to bring her back and show her the dishes and not just have her take my word for it.

And so the program is -- I am comfortable that the program currently is not being abused. I’m comfortable that if the American people examined exactly what was taking place, how it was being used, what the safeguards were, that they would say, you know what, these folks are following the law and doing what they say they’re doing.

But it is absolutely true that with the expansion of technology -- this is an area that’s moving very quickly -- with the revelations that have depleted public trust, that if there are some additional things that we can do to build that trust back up, then we should do them.

Jonathan Karl.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. You have said that core al Qaeda has been decimated, that its leaders are on the run. Now that we’ve seen this terror threat that has resulted in embassies closed throughout the Arab world, much of Africa, do you still believe that al Qaeda has been decimated? And if I can ask in the interest of transparency, can you tell us about these drone strikes that we’ve seen over the last couple of weeks in Yemen?

President Obama: What I said in the same National Defense University speech back in May that I referred to earlier is that core al Qaeda is on its heels, has been decimated. But what I also said was that al Qaeda and other extremists have metastasized into regional groups that can pose significant dangers.

And I’d refer you back to that speech just back in May where I said specifically that although they are less likely to be able to carry out spectacular homeland attacks like 9/11, they have the capacity to go after our embassies. They have the capacity, potentially, to go after our businesses. They have the capacity to be destabilizing and disruptive in countries where the security apparatus is weak. And that’s exactly what we are seeing right now.

So it’s entirely consistent to say that this tightly organized and relatively centralized al Qaeda that attacked us on 9/11 has been broken apart and is very weak and does not have a lot of operational capacity, and to say we still have these regional organizations like AQAP that can pose a threat, that can drive potentially a truck bomb into an embassy wall and can kill some people.

And so that requires us, then, to make sure that we have a strategy that is strengthening those partners so that they’ve got their own capacity to deal with what are potentially manageable regional threats if these countries are a little bit stronger and have more effective CT and so forth. It means that we’ve got to continue to be vigilant and go after known terrorists who are potentially carrying out plots or are going to strengthen their capacity over time -- because they’re always testing the boundaries of, well, maybe we can try this, maybe we can do that. So this is a ongoing process. We are not going to completely eliminate terrorism. What we can do is to weaken it and to strengthen our partnerships in such a way that it does not pose the kind of horrible threat that we saw on 9/11.

And I’m not going to discuss specific operations that have taken place. Again, in my speech in May, I was very specific about how we make these determinations about potential lethal strikes, so I would refer you to that speech.

Question: So you won’t even confirm that we carried out drone strikes in Yemen?

President Obama: I will not have a discussion about operational issues.

Ed Henry.

Question: I hope you would defend me as well.

President Obama: I would.

Question: Okay, thank you. I want to ask you about two important dates that are coming up. October 1st you’ve got to implement your signature health care law. You recently decided on your own to delay a key part of that. And I wonder, if you pick and choose what parts of the law to implement, couldn’t your successor down the road pick and choose whether they’ll implement your law and keep it in place?

And on September 11th we’ll have the first anniversary of Benghazi. And you said on September 12th, “Make no mistake, we’ll bring to justice the killers who attacked our people.” Eleven months later, where are they, sir?

President Obama: Well, I also said that we’d get bin Laden, and I didn’t get him in 11 months. So we have informed, I think, the public that there’s a sealed indictment. It’s sealed for a reason. But we are intent on capturing those who carried out this attack, and we’re going to stay on it until we get them.

Question: And you’re close to having suspects in custody?

President Obama: I will leave it at that. But this remains a top priority for us. Anybody who attacks Americans, anybody who kills, tragically, four Americans who were serving us in a very dangerous place, we’re going to do everything we can to get those who carried out those attacks.

With respect to health care, I didn’t simply choose to delay this on my own. This was in consultation with businesses all across the country, many of whom are supportive of the Affordable Care Act, but -- and many of whom, by the way, are already providing health insurance to their employees but were concerned about the operational details of changing their HR operations, if they’ve got a lot of employees, which could be costly for them, and them suggesting that there may be easier ways to do this.

Now, what’s true, Ed, is, is that in a normal political environment, it would have been easier for me to simply call up the Speaker and say, you know what, this is a tweak that doesn’t go to the essence of the law -- it has to do with, for example, are we able to simplify the attestation of employers as to whether they’re already providing health insurance or not -- it looks like there may be some better ways to do this; let's make a technical change to the law. That would be the normal thing that I would prefer to do.

But we're not in a normal atmosphere around here when it comes to "Obamacare." We did have the executive authority to do so, and we did so. But this doesn't go to the core of implementation. Let me tell you what is the core of implementation that's already taken place. As we speak, right now, for the 85 percent of Americans who already have health insurance, they are benefiting from being able to keep their kid on their plan if their kid is 26 or younger. That's benefiting millions of young people around the country, which is why lack of insurance among young people has actually gone down. That's in large part attributable to the steps that we've taken.

You've got millions of people who have received rebates, because part of the Affordable Care Act was to say that if an insurance company isn't spending 80 percent of your premium on your health care, you get some money back. And, lo and behold, people have been getting their money back. It means that folks who have been bumping up with lifetime limits on their insurance, that it leaves them vulnerable. That doesn't exist.

Seniors have been getting discounts on their prescription drugs. That's happening right now. Free preventive care -- mammograms, contraception. That's happening right now. I met a young man today on a bill signing I was doing with the student loan bill who came up to me and said thank you -- he couldn't have been more than 25, 26 years old -- thank you; I have cancer, thanks to the Affordable Care Act working with the California program, I was able to get health care and I'm now in remission. And so right now people are already benefiting.

Now, what happens on October 1st, in 53 days, is for the remaining 15 percent of the population that doesn’t have health insurance, they're going to be able to go on a website or call up a call center and sign up for affordable quality health insurance at a significantly cheaper rate than what they can get right now on the individual market. And if even with lower premiums they still can't afford it, we're going to be able to provide them with a tax credit to help them buy it. And between October 1st into March there will be an open enrollment period in which millions of Americans for the first time are going to be able to get affordable health care.

Now, I think the really interesting question is why it is that my friends in the other party have made the idea of preventing these people from getting health care their holy grail, their number-one priority. The one unifying principle in the Republican Party at the moment is making sure that 30 million people don't have health care and, presumably, repealing all those benefits I just mentioned -- kids staying on their parents' plan; seniors getting discounts on their prescription drugs; I guess a return to lifetime limits on insurance; people with preexisting conditions continuing to be blocked from being able to get health insurance.

That's hard to understand as an agenda that is going to strengthen our middle class. At least they used to say, well, we're going to replace it with something better. There’s not even a pretense now that they're going to replace it with something better.

The notion is simply that those 30 million people, or the 150 million who are benefiting from the other aspects of Affordable Care, will be better off without it. That's their assertion -- not backed by fact, not backed by any evidence. It’s just become an ideological fixation.

Well, I tell you what, they're wrong about that. There is no doubt that in implementing the Affordable Care Act, a program of this significance, there are going to be some glitches. No doubt about it. There are going to be things where we say, you know what, we should have thought of that earlier. Or this would work a little bit better. Or this needs an adjustment. That was true of Social Security. That was true of Medicare. That was true of the Children’s Health Insurance Program. That was true of the prescription drug program, Part D, that was rolled out by a Republican President and supported by Republicans who are still in the House of Representatives. That's true, by the way, of a car company rolling out a new car. It’s true of Apple rolling out the new iPad.

So you will be able to, whenever you want during the course of the next six months and probably the next year, find occasions where you say, ah-ha, you know what, that could have been done a little bit better. Or that thing, they're kind of making an administrative change; that's now how it was originally thought this thing was going to work. Yes, exactly. Because our goal is to actually deliver high-quality, affordable health care for people and to reform the system so costs start going down and people start getting a better bang for the buck. And I make no apologies for that.

And let me just make one last point about this. The idea that you would shut down the government unless you prevent 30 million people from getting health care is a bad idea. What you should be thinking about is how can we advance and improve ways for middle-class families to have some security so that if they work hard, they can get ahead and their kids can get ahead.

Jessica Yellin.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. And following on what you just said, Republicans in the House might give you that choice soon to either allow the government to shut down or see Obamacare defunded. Would you choose to let the government shut down to ensure that Obamacare remains funded?

President Obama: Well, I’m not going to engage in hypotheticals. I can tell you that the American people would have difficulty understanding why we would weaken our economy, shut down our government, shut down vital services, have people who are not getting paid who then can't go to restaurants or shop for clothes, or all the other things that we’re doing here because Republicans have determined that they don't want to see these folks get health care.

Again, they used to say they had a replacement. That never actually arrived, right? I mean, I’ve been hearing about this whole replacement thing for two years -- now I just don’t hear about it, because basically they don’t have an agenda to provide health insurance to people at affordable rates. And the idea that you would shut down the government at a time when the recovery is getting some traction; where we’re growing, although not as fast as we need to; where the housing market is recovering, although not as fast as we would like; that we would precipitate another crisis here in Washington that no economist thinks is a good idea -- I’m assuming that they will not take that path. I have confidence that common sense, in the end, will prevail.

Question: And if they do, sir, you will have to make that choice?

President Obama: We’ll see what happens. We’ve got a couple of months.

Question: When’s the last time you spoke to Speaker Boehner about the budget?

President Obama: Fairly recently, yes. Probably right before they left.

Okay. Scott Horseley.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Part of the political logic behind immigration reform was the strong showing by Latino voters last November. That doesn’t seem to resonate with a lot of House Republicans who represent overwhelmingly white districts. What other political leverage can you bring to bear to help move a bill in the House?

President Obama: Well, we’ve got an economic report that shows that our economy would be a trillion dollars stronger if we get immigration reform done. We’ve got evidence that our housing market would be stronger if immigrants are in a situation in which, having paid a fine, having paid back taxes, that they now have the ability to actually enter into the housing market. We’ve got strong evidence that our technological and research edge would be better if we get immigration reform done.

We know that the Senate bill strengthens border security, puts unprecedented resources on top of the unprecedented resources I’ve already put into border security. So if your main priority is border security, I’d think you’d want to vote for this bill. We know that the Senate bill creates a system in which employers are held accountable for when they hire undocumented workers. This is something that people say is a bad thing. I agree. Let’s make sure that that system for holding employers accountable is in place.

So when I hear the opposition to immigration reform, I just run through the list of things they’re concerned about, I look at what the Senate bill does, and I say to myself, you know what, the Senate bill actually improves the situation on every issue that they say they’re concerned about.

Now, what they may argue is it doesn’t solve the problem 100 percent. I don’t know a law that solves a problem 100 percent. Social Security lifted millions of seniors out of poverty, but there are still some poor seniors. The Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act drastically reduced discrimination in America, but there’s still discrimination. That doesn’t make them bad laws, it just means that there are very few human problems that are 100 percent solvable.

So what I see right now is a strong bipartisan vote coming out of the Senate. I think that the Speaker and others have said they need to do something, and I’d urge, when they get back, to do something -- put forward a bill that has an opportunity to actually pass. It may not be precisely what’s in the Senate bill. My preference would be for them to go ahead and call the Senate bill. But if they’ve got some additional ideas, I think the Senate is happy to consider them. And get that bill on the floor, put it up for a vote.

I am absolutely certain that the votes for the Senate bill -- which strengthens border security; demands responsibility from undocumented workers to pay a fine, pay a penalty and get to the back of the line; reforms our legal immigration system; holds employers accountable -- I am absolutely confident that if that bill was on the floor of the House, it would pass.

So the challenge right now is not that there aren’t a majority of House members, just like a majority of Senate members, who aren’t prepared to support this bill. The problem is internal Republican caucus politics. And that’s what the American people don’t want us to be worrying about. Don’t worry about your Washington politics. Solve problems.

And this is one where you’ve actually got some pretty broad consensus. I don’t know an issue where you’ve got labor, the Chamber of Commerce, evangelicals, student groups -- you name it -- supportive of a bill. Let’s get it done.

Thank you very much, everybody.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address at the 'Let Freedom Ring' Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the March on Washington, D.C.

To the King family, who have sacrificed and inspired so much; to President Clinton; President Carter; Vice President Biden and Jill; fellow Americans.

Five decades ago today, Americans came to this honored place to lay claim to a promise made at our founding:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

In 1963, almost 200 years after those words were set to paper, a full century after a great war was fought and emancipation proclaimed, that promise -- those truths -- remained unmet. And so they came by the thousands from every corner of our country, men and women, young and old, blacks who longed for freedom and whites who could no longer accept freedom for themselves while witnessing the subjugation of others.

Across the land, congregations sent them off with food and with prayer. In the middle of the night, entire blocks of Harlem came out to wish them well. With the few dollars they scrimped from their labor, some bought tickets and boarded buses, even if they couldn’t always sit where they wanted to sit. Those with less money hitchhiked or walked. They were seamstresses and steelworkers, students and teachers, maids and Pullman porters. They shared simple meals and bunked together on floors. And then, on a hot summer day, they assembled here, in our nation’s capital, under the shadow of the Great Emancipator -- to offer testimony of injustice, to petition their government for redress, and to awaken America’s long-slumbering conscience.

We rightly and best remember Dr. King’s soaring oratory that day, how he gave mighty voice to the quiet hopes of millions; how he offered a salvation path for oppressed and oppressors alike. His words belong to the ages, possessing a power and prophecy unmatched in our time.

But we would do well to recall that day itself also belonged to those ordinary people whose names never appeared in the history books, never got on TV. Many had gone to segregated schools and sat at segregated lunch counters. They lived in towns where they couldn’t vote and cities where their votes didn’t matter. They were couples in love who couldn’t marry, soldiers who fought for freedom abroad that they found denied to them at home. They had seen loved ones beaten, and children fire-hosed, and they had every reason to lash out in anger, or resign themselves to a bitter fate.

And yet they chose a different path. In the face of hatred, they prayed for their tormentors. In the face of violence, they stood up and sat in, with the moral force of nonviolence. Willingly, they went to jail to protest unjust laws, their cells swelling with the sound of freedom songs. A lifetime of indignities had taught them that no man can take away the dignity and grace that God grants us. They had learned through hard experience what Frederick Douglass once taught -- that freedom is not given, it must be won, through struggle and discipline, persistence and faith.

That was the spirit they brought here that day. That was the spirit young people like John Lewis brought to that day. That was the spirit that they carried with them, like a torch, back to their cities and their neighborhoods. That steady flame of conscience and courage that would sustain them through the campaigns to come -- through boycotts and voter registration drives and smaller marches far from the spotlight; through the loss of four little girls in Birmingham, and the carnage of the Edmund Pettus Bridge, and the agony of Dallas and California and Memphis. Through setbacks and heartbreaks and gnawing doubt, that flame of justice flickered; it never died.

And because they kept marching, America changed. Because they marched, a Civil Rights law was passed. Because they marched, a Voting Rights law was signed. Because they marched, doors of opportunity and education swung open so their daughters and sons could finally imagine a life for themselves beyond washing somebody else’s laundry or shining somebody else’s shoes. Because they marched, city councils changed and state legislatures changed, and Congress changed, and, yes, eventually, the White House changed.

Because they marched, America became more free and more fair -- not just for African Americans, but for women and Latinos, Asians and Native Americans; for Catholics, Jews, and Muslims; for gays, for Americans with a disability. America changed for you and for me. and the entire world drew strength from that example, whether the young people who watched from the other side of an Iron Curtain and would eventually tear down that wall, or the young people inside South Africa who would eventually end the scourge of apartheid.

Those are the victories they won, with iron wills and hope in their hearts. That is the transformation that they wrought, with each step of their well-worn shoes. That’s the debt that I and millions of Americans owe those maids, those laborers, those porters, those secretaries; folks who could have run a company maybe if they had ever had a chance; those white students who put themselves in harm’s way, even though they didn't have; those Japanese Americans who recalled their own internment; those Jewish Americans who had survived the Holocaust; people who could have given up and given in, but kept on keeping on, knowing that “weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.”

On the battlefield of justice, men and women without rank or wealth or title or fame would liberate us all in ways that our children now take for granted, as people of all colors and creeds live together and learn together and walk together, and fight alongside one another, and love one another, and judge one another by the content of our character in this greatest nation on Earth.

To dismiss the magnitude of this progress -- to suggest, as some sometimes do, that little has changed -- that dishonors the courage and the sacrifice of those who paid the price to march in those years. Medgar Evers, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner, Martin Luther King Jr. -- they did not die in vain. Their victory was great.

But we would dishonor those heroes as well to suggest that the work of this nation is somehow complete. The arc of the moral universe may bend towards justice, but it doesn’t bend on its own. To secure the gains this country has made requires constant vigilance, not complacency. Whether by challenging those who erect new barriers to the vote, or ensuring that the scales of justice work equally for all, and the criminal justice system is not simply a pipeline from underfunded schools to overcrowded jails, it requires vigilance.

And we'll suffer the occasional setback. But we will win these fights. This country has changed too much. People of goodwill, regardless of party, are too plentiful for those with ill will to change history’s currents.

In some ways, though, the securing of civil rights, voting rights, the eradication of legalized discrimination -- the very significance of these victories may have obscured a second goal of the March. For the men and women who gathered 50 years ago were not there in search of some abstract ideal. They were there seeking jobs as well as justice -- not just the absence of oppression but the presence of economic opportunity.

For what does it profit a man, Dr. King would ask, to sit at an integrated lunch counter if he can’t afford the meal? This idea -- that one’s liberty is linked to one’s livelihood; that the pursuit of happiness requires the dignity of work, the skills to find work, decent pay, some measure of material security -- this idea was not new. Lincoln himself understood the Declaration of Independence in such terms -- as a promise that in due time, “the weights should be lifted from the shoulders of all men, and that all should have an equal chance.”

And Dr. King explained that the goals of African Americans were identical to working people of all races: “Decent wages, fair working conditions, livable housing, old-age security, health and welfare measures, conditions in which families can grow, have education for their children, and respect in the community.”

What King was describing has been the dream of every American. It's what's lured for centuries new arrivals to our shores. And it’s along this second dimension -- of economic opportunity, the chance through honest toil to advance one’s station in life -- where the goals of 50 years ago have fallen most short.

Yes, there have been examples of success within black America that would have been unimaginable a half century ago. But as has already been noted, black unemployment has remained almost twice as high as white unemployment, Latino unemployment close behind. The gap in wealth between races has not lessened, it's grown. And as President Clinton indicated, the position of all working Americans, regardless of color, has eroded, making the dream Dr. King described even more elusive.

For over a decade, working Americans of all races have seen their wages and incomes stagnate, even as corporate profits soar, even as the pay of a fortunate few explodes. Inequality has steadily risen over the decades. Upward mobility has become harder. In too many communities across this country, in cities and suburbs and rural hamlets, the shadow of poverty casts a pall over our youth, their lives a fortress of substandard schools and diminished prospects, inadequate health care and perennial violence.

And so as we mark this anniversary, we must remind ourselves that the measure of progress for those who marched 50 years ago was not merely how many blacks could join the ranks of millionaires. It was whether this country would admit all people who are willing to work hard regardless of race into the ranks of a middle-class life.

The test was not, and never has been, whether the doors of opportunity are cracked a bit wider for a few. It was whether our economic system provides a fair shot for the many -- for the black custodian and the white steelworker, the immigrant dishwasher and the Native American veteran. To win that battle, to answer that call -- this remains our great unfinished business.

We shouldn’t fool ourselves. The task will not be easy. Since 1963, the economy has changed. The twin forces of technology and global competition have subtracted those jobs that once provided a foothold into the middle class -- reduced the bargaining power of American workers. And our politics has suffered. Entrenched interests, those who benefit from an unjust status quo, resisted any government efforts to give working families a fair deal -- marshaling an army of lobbyists and opinion makers to argue that minimum wage increases or stronger labor laws or taxes on the wealthy who could afford it just to fund crumbling schools, that all these things violated sound economic principles. We'd be told that growing inequality was a price for a growing economy, a measure of this free market; that greed was good and compassion ineffective, and those without jobs or health care had only themselves to blame.

And then, there were those elected officials who found it useful to practice the old politics of division, doing their best to convince middle-class Americans of a great untruth -- that government was somehow itself to blame for their growing economic insecurity; that distant bureaucrats were taking their hard-earned dollars to benefit the welfare cheat or the illegal immigrant.

And then, if we're honest with ourselves, we'll admit that during the course of 50 years, there were times when some of us claiming to push for change lost our way. The anguish of assassinations set off self-defeating riots. Legitimate grievances against police brutality tipped into excuse-making for criminal behavior. Racial politics could cut both ways, as the transformative message of unity and brotherhood was drowned out by the language of recrimination. And what had once been a call for equality of opportunity, the chance for all Americans to work hard and get ahead was too often framed as a mere desire for government support -- as if we had no agency in our own liberation, as if poverty was an excuse for not raising your child, and the bigotry of others was reason to give up on yourself.

All of that history is how progress stalled. That's how hope was diverted. It's how our country remained divided. But the good news is, just as was true in 1963, we now have a choice. We can continue down our current path, in which the gears of this great democracy grind to a halt and our children accept a life of lower expectations; where politics is a zero-sum game where a few do very well while struggling families of every race fight over a shrinking economic pie -- that’s one path. Or we can have the courage to change.

The March on Washington teaches us that we are not trapped by the mistakes of history; that we are masters of our fate. But it also teaches us that the promise of this nation will only be kept when we work together. We’ll have to reignite the embers of empathy and fellow feeling, the coalition of conscience that found expression in this place 50 years ago.

And I believe that spirit is there, that truth force inside each of us. I see it when a white mother recognizes her own daughter in the face of a poor black child. I see it when the black youth thinks of his own grandfather in the dignified steps of an elderly white man. It’s there when the native-born recognizing that striving spirit of the new immigrant; when the interracial couple connects the pain of a gay couple who are discriminated against and understands it as their own.

That’s where courage comes from -- when we turn not from each other, or on each other, but towards one another, and we find that we do not walk alone. That’s where courage comes from.

And with that courage, we can stand together for good jobs and just wages. With that courage, we can stand together for the right to health care in the richest nation on Earth for every person. With that courage, we can stand together for the right of every child, from the corners of Anacostia to the hills of Appalachia, to get an education that stirs the mind and captures the spirit, and prepares them for the world that awaits them.

With that courage, we can feed the hungry, and house the homeless, and transform bleak wastelands of poverty into fields of commerce and promise.

America, I know the road will be long, but I know we can get there. Yes, we will stumble, but I know we’ll get back up. That’s how a movement happens. That’s how history bends. That's how when somebody is faint of heart, somebody else brings them along and says, come on, we’re marching.

There’s a reason why so many who marched that day, and in the days to come, were young -- for the young are unconstrained by habits of fear, unconstrained by the conventions of what is. They dared to dream differently, to imagine something better. And I am convinced that same imagination, the same hunger of purpose stirs in this generation.

We might not face the same dangers of 1963, but the fierce urgency of now remains. We may never duplicate the swelling crowds and dazzling procession of that day so long ago -- no one can match King’s brilliance -- but the same flame that lit the heart of all who are willing to take a first step for justice, I know that flame remains.

That tireless teacher who gets to class early and stays late and dips into her own pocket to buy supplies because she believes that every child is her charge -- she’s marching.

That successful businessman who doesn't have to but pays his workers a fair wage and then offers a shot to a man, maybe an ex-con who is down on his luck -- he’s marching.

The mother who pours her love into her daughter so that she grows up with the confidence to walk through the same door as anybody’s son -- she’s marching.

The father who realizes the most important job he’ll ever have is raising his boy right, even if he didn't have a father -- especially if he didn't have a father at home -- he’s marching.

The battle-scarred veterans who devote themselves not only to helping their fellow warriors stand again, and walk again, and run again, but to keep serving their country when they come home -- they are marching.

Everyone who realizes what those glorious patriots knew on that day -- that change does not come from Washington, but to Washington; that change has always been built on our willingness, We The People, to take on the mantle of citizenship -- you are marching.

And that’s the lesson of our past. That's the promise of tomorrow -- that in the face of impossible odds, people who love their country can change it. That when millions of Americans of every race and every region, every faith and every station, can join together in a spirit of brotherhood, then those mountains will be made low, and those rough places will be made plain, and those crooked places, they straighten out towards grace, and we will vindicate the faith of those who sacrificed so much and live up to the true meaning of our creed, as one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

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# On The Use of Chemical Weapons by Syrian Government

Ten days ago, the world watched in horror as men, women and children were massacred in Syria in the worst chemical weapons attack of the 21st century. Yesterday the United States presented a powerful case that the Syrian government was responsible for this attack on its own people.

Our intelligence shows the Assad regime and its forces preparing to use chemical weapons, launching rockets in the highly populated suburbs of Damascus, and acknowledging that a chemical weapons attack took place. And all of this corroborates what the world can plainly see -- hospitals overflowing with victims; terrible images of the dead. All told, well over 1,000 people were murdered. Several hundred of them were children -- young girls and boys gassed to death by their own government.

This attack is an assault on human dignity. It also presents a serious danger to our national security. It risks making a mockery of the global prohibition on the use of chemical weapons. It endangers our friends and our partners along Syria's borders, including Israel, Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon and Iraq. It could lead to escalating use of chemical weapons, or their proliferation to terrorist groups who would do our people harm.

In a world with many dangers, this menace must be confronted.

Now, after careful deliberation, I have decided that the United States should take military action against Syrian regime targets. This would not be an open-ended intervention. We would not put boots on the ground. Instead, our action would be designed to be limited in duration and scope. But I'm confident we can hold the Assad regime accountable for their use of chemical weapons, deter this kind of behavior, and degrade their capacity to carry it out.

Our military has positioned assets in the region. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs has informed me that we are prepared to strike whenever we choose. Moreover, the Chairman has indicated to me that our capacity to execute this mission is not time-sensitive; it will be effective tomorrow, or next week, or one month from now. And I'm prepared to give that order.

But having made my decision as Commander-in-Chief based on what I am convinced is our national security interests, I'm also mindful that I'm the President of the world's oldest constitutional democracy. I've long believed that our power is rooted not just in our military might, but in our example as a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. And that's why I've made a second decision: I will seek authorization for the use of force from the American people's representatives in Congress.

Over the last several days, we've heard from members of Congress who want their voices to be heard. I absolutely agree. So this morning, I spoke with all four congressional leaders, and they've agreed to schedule a debate and then a vote as soon as Congress comes back into session.

In the coming days, my administration stands ready to provide every member with the information they need to understand what happened in Syria and why it has such profound implications for America's national security. And all of us should be accountable as we move forward, and that can only be accomplished with a vote.

I'm confident in the case our government has made without waiting for U.N. inspectors. I'm comfortable going forward without the approval of a United Nations Security Council that, so far, has been completely paralyzed and unwilling to hold Assad accountable. As a consequence, many people have advised against taking this decision to Congress, and undoubtedly, they were impacted by what we saw happen in the United Kingdom this week when the Parliament of our closest ally failed to pass a resolution with a similar goal, even as the Prime Minister supported taking action.

Yet, while I believe I have the authority to carry out this military action without specific congressional authorization, I know that the country will be stronger if we take this course, and our actions will be even more effective. We should have this debate, because the issues are too big for business as usual. And this morning, John Boehner, Harry Reid, Nancy Pelosi and Mitch McConnell agreed that this is the right thing to do for our democracy.

A country faces few decisions as grave as using military force, even when that force is limited. I respect the views of those who call for caution, particularly as our country emerges from a time of war that I was elected in part to end. But if we really do want to turn away from taking appropriate action in the face of such an unspeakable outrage, then we must acknowledge the costs of doing nothing.

Here's my question for every member of Congress and every member of the global community: What message will we send if a dictator can gas hundreds of children to death in plain sight and pay no price? What's the purpose of the international system that we've built if a prohibition on the use of chemical weapons that has been agreed to by the governments of 98 percent of the world's people and approved overwhelmingly by the Congress of the United States is not enforced?

Make no mistake -- this has implications beyond chemical warfare. If we won't enforce accountability in the face of this heinous act, what does it say about our resolve to stand up to others who flout fundamental international rules? To governments who would choose to build nuclear arms? To terrorist who would spread biological weapons? To armies who carry out genocide?

We cannot raise our children in a world where we will not follow through on the things we say, the accords we sign, the values that define us.

So just as I will take this case to Congress, I will also deliver this message to the world. While the U.N. investigation has some time to report on its findings, we will insist that an atrocity committed with chemical weapons is not simply investigated, it must be confronted.

I don't expect every nation to agree with the decision we have made. Privately we've heard many expressions of support from our friends. But I will ask those who care about the writ of the international community to stand publicly behind our action.

And finally, let me say this to the American people: I know well that we are weary of war. We've ended one war in Iraq. We're ending another in Afghanistan. And the American people have the good sense to know we cannot resolve the underlying conflict in Syria with our military. In that part of the world, there are ancient sectarian differences, and the hopes of the Arab Spring have unleashed forces of change that are going to take many years to resolve. And that's why we're not contemplating putting our troops in the middle of someone else's war.

Instead, we'll continue to support the Syrian people through our pressure on the Assad regime, our commitment to the opposition, our care for the displaced, and our pursuit of a political resolution that achieves a government that respects the dignity of its people.

But we are the United States of America, and we cannot and must not turn a blind eye to what happened in Damascus. Out of the ashes of world war, we built an international order and enforced the rules that gave it meaning. And we did so because we believe that the rights of individuals to live in peace and dignity depends on the responsibilities of nations. We aren't perfect, but this nation more than any other has been willing to meet those responsibilities.

So to all members of Congress of both parties, I ask you to take this vote for our national security. I am looking forward to the debate. And in doing so, I ask you, members of Congress, to consider that some things are more important than partisan differences or the politics of the moment.

Ultimately, this is not about who occupies this office at any given time; it's about who we are as a country. I believe that the people's representatives must be invested in what America does abroad, and now is the time to show the world that America keeps our commitments. We do what we say. And we lead with the belief that right makes might -- not the other way around.

We all know there are no easy options. But I wasn't elected to avoid hard decisions. And neither were the members of the House and the Senate. I've told you what I believe, that our security and our values demand that we cannot turn away from the massacre of countless civilians with chemical weapons. And our democracy is stronger when the President and the people's representatives stand together.

I'm ready to act in the face of this outrage. Today I'm asking Congress to send a message to the world that we are ready to move forward together as one nation.

Thanks very much.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address to the Nation on U.S. Military Action in Syria

My fellow Americans, tonight I want to talk to you about Syria -- why it matters, and where we go from here.

Over the past two years, what began as a series of peaceful protests against the repressive regime of Bashar al-Assad has turned into a brutal civil war. Over 100,000 people have been killed. Millions have fled the country. In that time, America has worked with allies to provide humanitarian support, to help the moderate opposition, and to shape a political settlement. But I have resisted calls for military action, because we cannot resolve someone else’s civil war through force, particularly after a decade of war in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The situation profoundly changed, though, on August 21st, when Assad’s government gassed to death over a thousand people, including hundreds of children. The images from this massacre are sickening: Men, women, children lying in rows, killed by poison gas. Others foaming at the mouth, gasping for breath. A father clutching his dead children, imploring them to get up and walk. On that terrible night, the world saw in gruesome detail the terrible nature of chemical weapons, and why the overwhelming majority of humanity has declared them off-limits -- a crime against humanity, and a violation of the laws of war.

This was not always the case. In World War I, American GIs were among the many thousands killed by deadly gas in the trenches of Europe. In World War II, the Nazis used gas to inflict the horror of the Holocaust. Because these weapons can kill on a mass scale, with no distinction between soldier and infant, the civilized world has spent a century working to ban them. And in 1997, the United States Senate overwhelmingly approved an international agreement prohibiting the use of chemical weapons, now joined by 189 governments that represent 98 percent of humanity.

On August 21st, these basic rules were violated, along with our sense of common humanity. No one disputes that chemical weapons were used in Syria. The world saw thousands of videos, cell phone pictures, and social media accounts from the attack, and humanitarian organizations told stories of hospitals packed with people who had symptoms of poison gas.

Moreover, we know the Assad regime was responsible. In the days leading up to August 21st, we know that Assad’s chemical weapons personnel prepared for an attack near an area where they mix sarin gas. They distributed gasmasks to their troops. Then they fired rockets from a regime-controlled area into 11 neighborhoods that the regime has been trying to wipe clear of opposition forces. Shortly after those rockets landed, the gas spread, and hospitals filled with the dying and the wounded. We know senior figures in Assad’s military machine reviewed the results of the attack, and the regime increased their shelling of the same neighborhoods in the days that followed. We’ve also studied samples of blood and hair from people at the site that tested positive for sarin.

When dictators commit atrocities, they depend upon the world to look the other way until those horrifying pictures fade from memory. But these things happened. The facts cannot be denied. The question now is what the United States of America, and the international community, is prepared to do about it. Because what happened to those people -- to those children -- is not only a violation of international law, it’s also a danger to our security.

Let me explain why. If we fail to act, the Assad regime will see no reason to stop using chemical weapons. As the ban against these weapons erodes, other tyrants will have no reason to think twice about acquiring poison gas, and using them. Over time, our troops would again face the prospect of chemical warfare on the battlefield. And it could be easier for terrorist organizations to obtain these weapons, and to use them to attack civilians.

If fighting spills beyond Syria’s borders, these weapons could threaten allies like Turkey, Jordan, and Israel. And a failure to stand against the use of chemical weapons would weaken prohibitions against other weapons of mass destruction, and embolden Assad’s ally, Iran -- which must decide whether to ignore international law by building a nuclear weapon, or to take a more peaceful path.

This is not a world we should accept. This is what’s at stake. And that is why, after careful deliberation, I determined that it is in the national security interests of the United States to respond to the Assad regime’s use of chemical weapons through a targeted military strike. The purpose of this strike would be to deter Assad from using chemical weapons, to degrade his regime’s ability to use them, and to make clear to the world that we will not tolerate their use.

That's my judgment as Commander-in-Chief. But I’m also the President of the world’s oldest constitutional democracy. So even though I possess the authority to order military strikes, I believed it was right, in the absence of a direct or imminent threat to our security, to take this debate to Congress. I believe our democracy is stronger when the President acts with the support of Congress. And I believe that America acts more effectively abroad when we stand together.

This is especially true after a decade that put more and more war-making power in the hands of the President, and more and more burdens on the shoulders of our troops, while sidelining the people’s representatives from the critical decisions about when we use force.

Now, I know that after the terrible toll of Iraq and Afghanistan, the idea of any military action, no matter how limited, is not going to be popular. After all, I've spent four and a half years working to end wars, not to start them. Our troops are out of Iraq. Our troops are coming home from Afghanistan. And I know Americans want all of us in Washington -- especially me -- to concentrate on the task of building our nation here at home: putting people back to work, educating our kids, growing our middle class.

It’s no wonder, then, that you're asking hard questions. So let me answer some of the most important questions that I've heard from members of Congress, and that I've read in letters that you've sent to me.

First, many of you have asked, won’t this put us on a slippery slope to another war? One man wrote to me that we are “still recovering from our involvement in Iraq.” A veteran put it more bluntly: “This nation is sick and tired of war.”

My answer is simple: I will not put American boots on the ground in Syria. I will not pursue an open-ended action like Iraq or Afghanistan. I will not pursue a prolonged air campaign like Libya or Kosovo. This would be a targeted strike to achieve a clear objective: deterring the use of chemical weapons, and degrading Assad’s capabilities.

Others have asked whether it's worth acting if we don’t take out Assad. As some members of Congress have said, there’s no point in simply doing a “pinprick” strike in Syria.

Let me make something clear: The United States military doesn’t do pinpricks. Even a limited strike will send a message to Assad that no other nation can deliver. I don't think we should remove another dictator with force -- we learned from Iraq that doing so makes us responsible for all that comes next. But a targeted strike can make Assad, or any other dictator, think twice before using chemical weapons.

Other questions involve the dangers of retaliation. We don’t dismiss any threats, but the Assad regime does not have the ability to seriously threaten our military. Any other retaliation they might seek is in line with threats that we face every day. Neither Assad nor his allies have any interest in escalation that would lead to his demise. And our ally, Israel, can defend itself with overwhelming force, as well as the unshakeable support of the United States of America.

Many of you have asked a broader question: Why should we get involved at all in a place that's so complicated, and where -- as one person wrote to me -- “those who come after Assad may be enemies of human rights?”

It’s true that some of Assad’s opponents are extremists. But al Qaeda will only draw strength in a more chaotic Syria if people there see the world doing nothing to prevent innocent civilians from being gassed to death. The majority of the Syrian people -- and the Syrian opposition we work with -- just want to live in peace, with dignity and freedom. And the day after any military action, we would redouble our efforts to achieve a political solution that strengthens those who reject the forces of tyranny and extremism.

Finally, many of you have asked: Why not leave this to other countries, or seek solutions short of force? As several people wrote to me, “We should not be the world’s policeman.”

I agree, and I have a deeply held preference for peaceful solutions. Over the last two years, my administration has tried diplomacy and sanctions, warning and negotiations -- but chemical weapons were still used by the Assad regime.

However, over the last few days, we’ve seen some encouraging signs. In part because of the credible threat of U.S. military action, as well as constructive talks that I had with President Putin, the Russian government has indicated a willingness to join with the international community in pushing Assad to give up his chemical weapons. The Assad regime has now admitted that it has these weapons, and even said they’d join the Chemical Weapons Convention, which prohibits their use.

It’s too early to tell whether this offer will succeed, and any agreement must verify that the Assad regime keeps its commitments. But this initiative has the potential to remove the threat of chemical weapons without the use of force, particularly because Russia is one of Assad’s strongest allies.

I have, therefore, asked the leaders of Congress to postpone a vote to authorize the use of force while we pursue this diplomatic path. I’m sending Secretary of State John Kerry to meet his Russian counterpart on Thursday, and I will continue my own discussions with President Putin. I’ve spoken to the leaders of two of our closest allies, France and the United Kingdom, and we will work together in consultation with Russia and China to put forward a resolution at the U.N. Security Council requiring Assad to give up his chemical weapons, and to ultimately destroy them under international control. We’ll also give U.N. inspectors the opportunity to report their findings about what happened on August 21st. And we will continue to rally support from allies from Europe to the Americas -- from Asia to the Middle East -- who agree on the need for action.

Meanwhile, I’ve ordered our military to maintain their current posture to keep the pressure on Assad, and to be in a position to respond if diplomacy fails. And tonight, I give thanks again to our military and their families for their incredible strength and sacrifices.

My fellow Americans, for nearly seven decades, the United States has been the anchor of global security. This has meant doing more than forging international agreements -- it has meant enforcing them. The burdens of leadership are often heavy, but the world is a better place because we have borne them.

And so, to my friends on the right, I ask you to reconcile your commitment to America’s military might with a failure to act when a cause is so plainly just. To my friends on the left, I ask you to reconcile your belief in freedom and dignity for all people with those images of children writhing in pain, and going still on a cold hospital floor. For sometimes resolutions and statements of condemnation are simply not enough.

Indeed, I’d ask every member of Congress, and those of you watching at home tonight, to view those videos of the attack, and then ask: What kind of world will we live in if the United States of America sees a dictator brazenly violate international law with poison gas, and we choose to look the other way?

Franklin Roosevelt once said, “Our national determination to keep free of foreign wars and foreign entanglements cannot prevent us from feeling deep concern when ideals and principles that we have cherished are challenged.” Our ideals and principles, as well as our national security, are at stake in Syria, along with our leadership of a world where we seek to ensure that the worst weapons will never be used.

America is not the world’s policeman. Terrible things happen across the globe, and it is beyond our means to right every wrong. But when, with modest effort and risk, we can stop children from being gassed to death, and thereby make our own children safer over the long run, I believe we should act. That’s what makes America different. That’s what makes us exceptional. With humility, but with resolve, let us never lose sight of that essential truth.

Thank you. God bless you. And God bless the United States of America.

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# Navy Yard Shooting Memorial Address

Secretary Hagel, Secretary Mabus, Admirals Greenert and Hilarides, Mayor Gray, leaders from across this city and our Armed Forces, to all the outstanding first responders, and, most of all, the families whose hearts have been broken:

We cannot begin to comprehend your loss. We know that no words we offer today are equal to the magnitude, to the depths of that loss. But we come together as a grateful nation to honor your loved ones, to grieve with you, and to offer, as best we can, some solace and comfort.

On the night that we lost Martin Luther King Jr. to a gunman's bullet, Robert Kennedy stood before a stunned and angry crowd in Indianapolis and he broke the terrible news. And in the anguish of that moment, he turned to the words of an ancient Greek poet, Aeschylus:

Even in our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart, until, in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God.

Pain which cannot forget -- drop by drop upon the heart.

The tragedy and the pain that brings us here today is extraordinary. It is unique. The lives that were taken from us were unique. The memories their loved ones carry are unique, and they will carry them and endure long after the news cameras are gone. But part of what wears on as well is the sense that this has happened before. Part of what wears on us, what troubles us so deeply as we gather here today, is how this senseless violence that took place in the Navy Yard echoes other recent tragedies.

As President, I have now grieved with five American communities ripped apart by mass violence: Fort Hood. Tucson. Aurora. Sandy Hook. And now, the Washington Navy Yard. And these mass shootings occur against a backdrop of daily tragedies, as an epidemic of gun violence tears apart communities across America -- from the streets of Chicago to neighborhoods not far from here.

And so, once again, we remember our fellow Americans who were just going about their day doing their jobs, doing what they loved -- in this case, the unheralded work that keeps our country strong and our Navy the finest fleet in the world. These patriots doing their work that they were so proud of, and who have now been taken away from us by unspeakable violence.

Once more we come together to mourn the lives of beauty and to comfort the wonderful families who cherished them. Once more we pay tribute to all who rushed towards the danger, who risked their lives so others might live, and who are in our prayers today, including Officer Scott Williams. Once more our hearts are broken. Once more we ask why. Once more we seek strength and wisdom through God's grace.

You and your families, this Navy family, are still in the early hour of your grief. And I'm here today to say that there is nothing routine about this tragedy. There is nothing routine about your loss. Your loved ones will not be forgotten. They will endure in the hearts of the American people and in the hearts of the Navy that they helped to keep strong, and the hearts of their coworkers and their friends and their neighbors. "I want them to know how she lived," Jessica Gaarde said of her mother Kathy. "She is not a number, or some statistic." None of these 12 fellow Americans are statistics. Today, I want every American to see how these men and women lived. You may have never met them, but you know them. They're your neighbors -- like Arthur Daniels, out there on the weekend, polishing his white Crown Victoria; and Kenneth Proctor, with his beloved yellow Mustang, who, if you asked, would fix your car, too.

She was the friendly face at the store. Sylvia Frasier, with her unforgettable gold hair, who took a second job at Walmart because, she said, she just loved working with people. She was the diehard fan you sat next to at the game. Kathy Gaarde loved her hockey and her Caps, a season ticket holder for 25 years.

They were the volunteers who made your community better. Frank Kohler, giving dictionaries to every third-grader in his county; Marty Bodrog, leading the children's Bible study at church. They lived the American Dream -- like Kisan Pandit, who left everything he knew in India for this land of opportunity, and raised a wonderful family and dedicated himself to the United States Navy. They were proud veterans -- like Gerald Read, who wore the Army uniform for more than 25 years; and Michael Arnold, who became one of the Navy's leading architects, of whom a colleague said, "nobody knew those ships like him."

They were dedicated fathers -- like Mike Ridgell, coaching his daughter's softball teams, joining Facebook just to keep up with his girls, one of whom said, "he was always the cool dad." They were loving mothers -- like Mary Francis Knight, devoted to her daughters, and who had just recently watched with joy as her older daughter got married. They were doting grandparents -- like John Johnson, always smiling, giving bear hugs to his 10 grandchildren, and who would have welcomed his 11th grandchild this fall.

These are not statistics. They are the lives that have been taken from us. This is how far a single act of violence can ripple. A husband has lost his wife. Wives have lost their husbands. Sons and daughters have lost their moms and their dads. Little children have lost their grandparents. Hundreds in our communities have lost a neighbor, and thousands here have lost a friend.

As has been mentioned, for one family, the Daniels family, old wounds are ripped open again. Priscilla has lost Arthur, her husband of 30 years. Only a few years ago, as Mayor Gray indicated, another shooting took the life of their son, just 14 years old. "I can't believe this is happening again," Priscilla says.

So these families have endured a shattering tragedy. It ought to be a shock to us all as a nation and as a people. It ought to obsess us. It ought to lead to some sort of transformation. That's what happened in other countries when they experienced similar tragedies. In the United Kingdom, in Australia, when just a single mass shooting occurred in those countries, they understood that there was nothing ordinary about this kind of carnage. They endured great heartbreak, but they also mobilized and they changed, and mass shootings became a great rarity.

And yet, here in the United States, after the round-of-clock coverage on cable news, after the heartbreaking interviews with families, after all the speeches and all the punditry and all the commentary, nothing happens. Alongside the anguish of these American families, alongside the accumulated outrage so many of us feel, sometimes I fear there's a creeping resignation that these tragedies are just somehow the way it is, that this is somehow the new normal.

We can't accept this. As Americans bound in grief and love, we must insist here today there is nothing normal about innocent men and women being gunned down where they work. There is nothing normal about our children being gunned down in their classrooms. There is nothing normal about children dying in our streets from stray bullets.

No other advanced nation endures this kind of violence -- none. Here in America, the murder rate is three times what it is in other developed nations. The murder rate with guns is ten times what it is in other developed nations. And there is nothing inevitable about it. It comes about because of decisions we make or fail to make. And it falls upon us to make it different.

Sometimes it takes an unexpected voice to break through, to help remind us what we know to be true. And we heard one of those voices last week. Dr. Janis Orlowski's team at Medstar Washington Hospital Center treated the wounded. And in the midst of one of her briefings, she spoke with heartbreaking honesty as somebody who sees, daily and nightly, the awful carnage of so much violence. We are a great country, she said, but "there's something wrong." All these shootings, all these victims, she said, "this is not America." "It is a challenge to all of us," she said, and "we have to work together to get rid of this."

And that's the wisdom we should be taking away from this tragedy and so many others -- not accepting these shootings as inevitable, but asking what can we do to prevent them from happening again and again and again. I've said before, we cannot stop every act of senseless violence. We cannot know every evil that lurks in troubled minds. But if we can prevent even one tragedy like this, save even one life, spare other families what these families are going through, surely we've got an obligation to try.

It's true that each of the tragedies I've mentioned is different. And in this case, it's clear we need to do a better job of securing our military facilities and deciding who gets access to them. And as Commander in Chief, I have ordered a review of procedures up and down the chain, and I know that Secretary Hagel is moving aggressively on that. As a society, it's clear we've got to do a better job of ensuring that those who need mental health care actually get it, and that in those efforts we don't stigmatize those who need help. Those things are clear, and we've got to move to address them.

But we Americans are not an inherently more violent people than folks in other countries. We're not inherently more prone to mental health problems. The main difference that sets our nation apart, what makes us so susceptible to so many mass shootings, is that we don't do enough -- we don't take the basic, common-sense actions to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and dangerous people. What's different in America is it's easy to get your hands on gun -- and a lot of us know this. But the politics are difficult, as we saw again this spring. And that's sometimes where the resignation comes from -- the sense that our politics are frozen and that nothing will change.

Well, I cannot accept that. I do not accept that we cannot find a common-sense way to preserve our traditions, including our basic Second Amendment freedoms and the rights of law-abiding gun owners, while at the same time reducing the gun violence that unleashes so much mayhem on a regular basis. And it may not happen tomorrow and it may not happen next week, it may not happen next month -- but it will happen. Because it's the change that we need, and it's a change overwhelmingly supported by the majority of Americans.

By now, though, it should be clear that the change we need will not come from Washington, even when tragedy strikes Washington. Change will come the only way it ever has come, and that's from the American people. So the question now is not whether, as Americans, we care in moments of tragedy. Clearly, we care. Our hearts are broken -- again. And we care so deeply about these families. But the question is, do we care enough?

Do we care enough to keep standing up for the country that we know is possible, even if it's hard, and even if it's politically uncomfortable? Do we care enough to sustain the passion and the pressure to make our communities safer and our country safer? Do we care enough to do everything we can to spare other families the pain that is felt here today?

Our tears are not enough. Our words and our prayers are not enough. If we really want to honor these 12 men and women, if we really want to be a country where we can go to work, and go to school, and walk our streets free from senseless violence, without so many lives being stolen by a bullet from a gun, then we're going to have to change. We're going to have to change.

On Monday morning, these 12 men and women woke up like they did every day. They left home and they headed off to work. Gerald Read's wife Cathy said, "See you tonight for dinner." And John Johnson looked at his wife Judy and said what he always said whenever they parted, "Goodbye beautiful. I love you so much."

"Even in our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart, until in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God."

What Robert Kennedy understood, what Dr. King understood, what all our great leaders have always understood, is that wisdom does not come from tragedy alone or from some sense of resignation in the fallibility of man. Wisdom comes through the recognition that tragedies such as this are not inevitable, and that we possess the ability to act and to change, and to spare others the pain that drops upon our hearts. So in our grief, let us seek that grace. Let us find that wisdom. And in doing so, let us truly honor these 12 American patriots.

May God hold close the souls taken from us and grant them eternal peace. May He comfort and watch over these families. And may God grant us the strength and the wisdom to keep safe our United States of America.

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# 68th Session of the United Nations General Assembly Address

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary General, fellow delegates, ladies and gentlemen: Each year we come together to reaffirm the founding vision of this institution. For most of recorded history, individual aspirations were subject to the whims of tyrants and empires. Divisions of race and religion and tribe were settled through the sword and the clash of armies. The idea that nations and peoples could come together in peace to solve their disputes and advance a common prosperity seemed unimaginable.

It took the awful carnage of two world wars to shift our thinking. The leaders who built the United Nations were not naÃ¯ve; they did not think this body could eradicate all wars. But in the wake of millions dead and continents in rubble, and with the development of nuclear weapons that could annihilate a planet, they understood that humanity could not survive the course it was on. And so they gave us this institution, believing that it could allow us to resolve conflicts, enforce rules of behavior, and build habits of cooperation that would grow stronger over time.

For decades, the United Nations has in fact made a difference -- from helping to eradicate disease, to educating children, to brokering peace. But like every generation of leaders, we face new and profound challenges, and this body continues to be tested. The question is whether we possess the wisdom and the courage, as nation-states and members of an international community, to squarely meet those challenges; whether the United Nations can meet the tests of our time.

For much of my tenure as President, some of our most urgent challenges have revolved around an increasingly integrated global economy, and our efforts to recover from the worst economic crisis of our lifetime. Now, five years after the global economy collapsed, and thanks to coordinated efforts by the countries here today, jobs are being created, global financial systems have stabilized, and people are once again being lifted out of poverty. But this progress is fragile and unequal, and we still have work to do together to assure that our citizens can access the opportunities that they need to thrive in the 21st century.

Together, we’ve also worked to end a decade of war. Five years ago, nearly 180,000 Americans were serving in harm’s way, and the war in Iraq was the dominant issue in our relationship with the rest of the world. Today, all of our troops have left Iraq. Next year, an international coalition will end its war in Afghanistan, having achieved its mission of dismantling the core of al Qaeda that attacked us on 9/11.

For the United States, these new circumstances have also meant shifting away from a perpetual war footing. Beyond bringing our troops home, we have limited the use of drones so they target only those who pose a continuing, imminent threat to the United States where capture is not feasible, and there is a near certainty of no civilian casualties. We’re transferring detainees to other countries and trying terrorists in courts of law, while working diligently to close the prison at Guantanamo Bay. And just as we reviewed how we deploy our extraordinary military capabilities in a way that lives up to our ideals, we’ve begun to review the way that we gather intelligence, so that we properly balance the legitimate security concerns of our citizens and allies with the privacy concerns that all people share.

As a result of this work, and cooperation with allies and partners, the world is more stable than it was five years ago. But even a glance at today’s headlines indicates that dangers remain. In Kenya, we’ve seen terrorists target innocent civilians in a crowded shopping mall, and our hearts go out to the families of those who have been affected. In Pakistan, nearly 100 people were recently killed by suicide bombers outside a church. In Iraq, killings and car bombs continue to be a terrible part of life. And meanwhile, al Qaeda has splintered into regional networks and militias, which doesn't give them the capacity at this point to carry out attacks like 9/11, but does pose serious threats to governments and diplomats, businesses and civilians all across the globe.

Just as significantly, the convulsions in the Middle East and North Africa have laid bare deep divisions within societies, as an old order is upended and people grapple with what comes next. Peaceful movements have too often been answered by violence -- from those resisting change and from extremists trying to hijack change. Sectarian conflict has reemerged. And the potential spread of weapons of mass destruction continues to cast a shadow over the pursuit of peace.

Nowhere have we seen these trends converge more powerfully than in Syria. There, peaceful protests against an authoritarian regime were met with repression and slaughter. In the face of such carnage, many retreated to their sectarian identity -- Alawite and Sunni; Christian and Kurd -- and the situation spiraled into civil war.

The international community recognized the stakes early on, but our response has not matched the scale of the challenge. Aid cannot keep pace with the suffering of the wounded and displaced. A peace process is stillborn. America and others have worked to bolster the moderate opposition, but extremist groups have still taken root to exploit the crisis. Assad’s traditional allies have propped him up, citing principles of sovereignty to shield his regime. And on August 21st, the regime used chemical weapons in an attack that killed more than 1,000 people, including hundreds of children.

Now, the crisis in Syria, and the destabilization of the region, goes to the heart of broader challenges that the international community must now confront. How should we respond to conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa -- conflicts between countries, but also conflicts within them? How do we address the choice of standing callously by while children are subjected to nerve gas, or embroiling ourselves in someone else’s civil war? What is the role of force in resolving disputes that threaten the stability of the region and undermine all basic standards of civilized conduct? What is the role of the United Nations and international law in meeting cries for justice?

Today, I want to outline where the United States of America stands on these issues. With respect to Syria, we believe that as a starting point, the international community must enforce the ban on chemical weapons. When I stated my willingness to order a limited strike against the Assad regime in response to the brazen use of chemical weapons, I did not do so lightly. I did so because I believe it is in the security interest of the United States and in the interest of the world to meaningfully enforce a prohibition whose origins are older than the United Nations itself. The ban against the use of chemical weapons, even in war, has been agreed to by 98 percent of humanity. It is strengthened by the searing memories of soldiers suffocating in the trenches; Jews slaughtered in gas chambers; Iranians poisoned in the many tens of thousands.

The evidence is overwhelming that the Assad regime used such weapons on August 21st. U.N. inspectors gave a clear accounting that advanced rockets fired large quantities of sarin gas at civilians. These rockets were fired from a regime-controlled neighborhood, and landed in opposition neighborhoods. It’s an insult to human reason -- and to the legitimacy of this institution -- to suggest that anyone other than the regime carried out this attack.

Now, I know that in the immediate aftermath of the attack there were those who questioned the legitimacy of even a limited strike in the absence of a clear mandate from the Security Council. But without a credible military threat, the Security Council had demonstrated no inclination to act at all. However, as I’ve discussed with President Putin for over a year, most recently in St. Petersburg, my preference has always been a diplomatic resolution to this issue. And in the past several weeks, the United States, Russia and our allies have reached an agreement to place Syria’s chemical weapons under international control, and then to destroy them.

The Syrian government took a first step by giving an accounting of its stockpiles. Now there must be a strong Security Council resolution to verify that the Assad regime is keeping its commitments, and there must be consequences if they fail to do so. If we cannot agree even on this, then it will show that the United Nations is incapable of enforcing the most basic of international laws. On the other hand, if we succeed, it will send a powerful message that the use of chemical weapons has no place in the 21st century, and that this body means what it says.

Agreement on chemical weapons should energize a larger diplomatic effort to reach a political settlement within Syria. I do not believe that military action -- by those within Syria, or by external powers -- can achieve a lasting peace. Nor do I believe that America or any nation should determine who will lead Syria; that is for the Syrian people to decide. Nevertheless, a leader who slaughtered his citizens and gassed children to death cannot regain the legitimacy to lead a badly fractured country. The notion that Syria can somehow return to a pre-war status quo is a fantasy.

It’s time for Russia and Iran to realize that insisting on Assad’s rule will lead directly to the outcome that they fear: an increasingly violent space for extremists to operate. In turn, those of us who continue to support the moderate opposition must persuade them that the Syrian people cannot afford a collapse of state institutions, and that a political settlement cannot be reached without addressing the legitimate fears and concerns of Alawites and other minorities.

We are committed to working this political track. And as we pursue a settlement, let’s remember this is not a zero-sum endeavor. We’re no longer in a Cold War. There’s no Great Game to be won, nor does America have any interest in Syria beyond the wellbeing of its people, the stability of its neighbors, the elimination of chemical weapons, and ensuring that it does not become a safe haven for terrorists.

I welcome the influence of all nations that can help bring about a peaceful resolution of Syria’s civil war. And as we move the Geneva process forward, I urge all nations here to step up to meet humanitarian needs in Syria and surrounding countries. America has committed over a billion dollars to this effort, and today I can announce that we will be providing an additional $340 million. No aid can take the place of a political resolution that gives the Syrian people the chance to rebuild their country, but it can help desperate people to survive.

What broader conclusions can be drawn from America’s policy toward Syria? I know there are those who have been frustrated by our unwillingness to use our military might to depose Assad, and believe that a failure to do so indicates a weakening of American resolve in the region. Others have suggested that my willingness to direct even limited military strikes to deter the further use of chemical weapons shows we’ve learned nothing from Iraq, and that America continues to seek control over the Middle East for our own purposes. In this way, the situation in Syria mirrors a contradiction that has persisted in the region for decades: the United States is chastised for meddling in the region, accused of having a hand in all manner of conspiracy; at the same time, the United States is blamed for failing to do enough to solve the region’s problems and for showing indifference toward suffering Muslim populations.

I realize some of this is inevitable, given America’s role in the world. But these contradictory attitudes have a practical impact on the American people’s support for our involvement in the region, and allow leaders in the region -- as well as the international community sometimes -- to avoid addressing difficult problems themselves.

So let me take this opportunity to outline what has been U.S. policy towards the Middle East and North Africa, and what will be my policy during the remainder of my presidency.

The United States of America is prepared to use all elements of our power, including military force, to secure our core interests in the region.

We will confront external aggression against our allies and partners, as we did in the Gulf War.

We will ensure the free flow of energy from the region to the world. Although America is steadily reducing our own dependence on imported oil, the world still depends on the region’s energy supply, and a severe disruption could destabilize the entire global economy.

We will dismantle terrorist networks that threaten our people. Wherever possible, we will build the capacity of our partners, respect the sovereignty of nations, and work to address the root causes of terror. But when it’s necessary to defend the United States against terrorist attack, we will take direct action.

And finally, we will not tolerate the development or use of weapons of mass destruction. Just as we consider the use of chemical weapons in Syria to be a threat to our own national security, we reject the development of nuclear weapons that could trigger a nuclear arms race in the region, and undermine the global nonproliferation regime.

Now, to say that these are America’s core interests is not to say that they are our only interests. We deeply believe it is in our interests to see a Middle East and North Africa that is peaceful and prosperous, and will continue to promote democracy and human rights and open markets, because we believe these practices achieve peace and prosperity. But I also believe that we can rarely achieve these objectives through unilateral American action, particularly through military action. Iraq shows us that democracy cannot simply be imposed by force. Rather, these objectives are best achieved when we partner with the international community and with the countries and peoples of the region.

So what does this mean going forward? In the near term, America’s diplomatic efforts will focus on two particular issues: Iran’s pursuit of nuclear weapons, and the Arab-Israeli conflict. While these issues are not the cause of all the region’s problems, they have been a major source of instability for far too long, and resolving them can help serve as a foundation for a broader peace.

The United States and Iran have been isolated from one another since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. This mistrust has deep roots. Iranians have long complained of a history of U.S. interference in their affairs and of America’s role in overthrowing an Iranian government during the Cold War. On the other hand, Americans see an Iranian government that has declared the United States an enemy and directly -- or through proxies -- taken American hostages, killed U.S. troops and civilians, and threatened our ally Israel with destruction.

I don’t believe this difficult history can be overcome overnight -- the suspicions run too deep. But I do believe that if we can resolve the issue of Iran’s nuclear program, that can serve as a major step down a long road towards a different relationship, one based on mutual interests and mutual respect.

Since I took office, I’ve made it clear in letters to the Supreme Leader in Iran and more recently to President Rouhani that America prefers to resolve our concerns over Iran’s nuclear program peacefully, although we are determined to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. We are not seeking regime change and we respect the right of the Iranian people to access peaceful nuclear energy. Instead, we insist that the Iranian government meet its responsibilities under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and U.N. Security Council resolutions.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Leader has issued a fatwa against the development of nuclear weapons, and President Rouhani has just recently reiterated that the Islamic Republic will never develop a nuclear weapon.

So these statements made by our respective governments should offer the basis for a meaningful agreement. We should be able to achieve a resolution that respects the rights of the Iranian people, while giving the world confidence that the Iranian program is peaceful. But to succeed, conciliatory words will have to be matched by actions that are transparent and verifiable. After all, it's the Iranian government’s choices that have led to the comprehensive sanctions that are currently in place. And this is not simply an issue between the United States and Iran. The world has seen Iran evade its responsibilities in the past and has an abiding interest in making sure that Iran meets its obligations in the future.

But I want to be clear we are encouraged that President Rouhani received from the Iranian people a mandate to pursue a more moderate course. And given President Rouhani’s stated commitment to reach an agreement, I am directing John Kerry to pursue this effort with the Iranian government in close cooperation with the European Union -- the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia and China.

The roadblocks may prove to be too great, but I firmly believe the diplomatic path must be tested. For while the status quo will only deepen Iran’s isolation, Iran’s genuine commitment to go down a different path will be good for the region and the world, and will help the Iranian people meet their extraordinary potential -- in commerce and culture; in science and education.

We are also determined to resolve a conflict that goes back even further than our differences with Iran, and that is the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis. I’ve made it clear that the United States will never compromise our commitment to Israel’s security, nor our support for its existence as a Jewish state. Earlier this year, in Jerusalem, I was inspired by young Israelis who stood up for the belief that peace was necessary, just, and possible. And I believe there’s a growing recognition within Israel that the occupation of the West Bank is tearing at the democratic fabric of the Jewish state. But the children of Israel have the right to live in a world where the nations assembled in this body fully recognize their country, and where we unequivocally reject those who fire rockets at their homes or incite others to hate them.

Likewise, the United States remains committed to the belief that the Palestinian people have a right to live with security and dignity in their own sovereign state. On the same trip, I had the opportunity to meet with young Palestinians in Ramallah whose ambition and incredible potential are matched by the pain they feel in having no firm place in the community of nations. They are understandably cynical that real progress will ever be made, and they’re frustrated by their families enduring the daily indignity of occupation. But they too recognize that two states is the only real path to peace -- because just as the Palestinian people must not be displaced, the state of Israel is here to stay.

So the time is now ripe for the entire international community to get behind the pursuit of peace. Already, Israeli and Palestinian leaders have demonstrated a willingness to take significant political risks. President Abbas has put aside efforts to short-cut the pursuit of peace and come to the negotiating table. Prime Minister Netanyahu has released Palestinian prisoners and reaffirmed his commitment to a Palestinian state. Current talks are focused on final status issues of borders and security, refugees and Jerusalem.

So now the rest of us must be willing to take risks as well. Friends of Israel, including the United States, must recognize that Israel’s security as a Jewish and democratic state depends upon the realization of a Palestinian state, and we should say so clearly. Arab states, and those who supported the Palestinians, must recognize that stability will only be served through a two-state solution and a secure Israel.

All of us must recognize that peace will be a powerful tool to defeat extremists throughout the region, and embolden those who are prepared to build a better future. And moreover, ties of trade and commerce between Israelis and Arabs could be an engine of growth and opportunity at a time when too many young people in the region are languishing without work. So let’s emerge from the familiar corners of blame and prejudice. Let’s support Israeli and Palestinian leaders who are prepared to walk the difficult road to peace.

Real breakthroughs on these two issues -- Iran’s nuclear program, and Israeli-Palestinian peace -- would have a profound and positive impact on the entire Middle East and North Africa. But the current convulsions arising out of the Arab Spring remind us that a just and lasting peace cannot be measured only by agreements between nations. It must also be measured by our ability to resolve conflict and promote justice within nations. And by that measure, it’s clear that all of us have a lot more work to do.

When peaceful transitions began in Tunisia and Egypt, the entire world was filled with hope. And although the United States -- like others -- was struck by the speed of transition, and although we did not -- and in fact could not -- dictate events, we chose to support those who called for change. And we did so based on the belief that while these transitions will be hard and take time, societies based upon democracy and openness and the dignity of the individual will ultimately be more stable, more prosperous, and more peaceful.

Over the last few years, particularly in Egypt, we’ve seen just how hard this transition will be. Mohamed Morsi was democratically elected, but proved unwilling or unable to govern in a way that was fully inclusive. The interim government that replaced him responded to the desires of millions of Egyptians who believed the revolution had taken a wrong turn, but it, too, has made decisions inconsistent with inclusive democracy -- through an emergency law, and restrictions on the press and civil society and opposition parties.

Of course, America has been attacked by all sides of this internal conflict, simultaneously accused of supporting the Muslim Brotherhood, and engineering their removal of power. In fact, the United States has purposely avoided choosing sides. Our overriding interest throughout these past few years has been to encourage a government that legitimately reflects the will of the Egyptian people, and recognizes true democracy as requiring a respect for minority rights and the rule of law, freedom of speech and assembly, and a strong civil society.

That remains our interest today. And so, going forward, the United States will maintain a constructive relationship with the interim government that promotes core interests like the Camp David Accords and counterterrorism. We’ll continue support in areas like education that directly benefit the Egyptian people. But we have not proceeded with the delivery of certain military systems, and our support will depend upon Egypt’s progress in pursuing a more democratic path.

And our approach to Egypt reflects a larger point: The United States will at times work with governments that do not meet, at least in our view, the highest international expectations, but who work with us on our core interests. Nevertheless, we will not stop asserting principles that are consistent with our ideals, whether that means opposing the use of violence as a means of suppressing dissent, or supporting the principles embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We will reject the notion that these principles are simply Western exports, incompatible with Islam or the Arab World. We believe they are the birthright of every person. And while we recognize that our influence will at times be limited, although we will be wary of efforts to impose democracy through military force, and although we will at times be accused of hypocrisy and inconsistency, we will be engaged in the region for the long haul. For the hard work of forging freedom and democracy is the task of a generation.

And this includes efforts to resolve sectarian tensions that continue to surface in places like Iraq, Bahrain and Syria. We understand such longstanding issues cannot be solved by outsiders; they must be addressed by Muslim communities themselves. But we’ve seen grinding conflicts come to an end before -- most recently in Northern Ireland, where Catholics and Protestants finally recognized that an endless cycle of conflict was causing both communities to fall behind a fast-moving world. And so we believe those same sectarian conflicts can be overcome in the Middle East and North Africa.

To summarize, the United States has a hard-earned humility when it comes to our ability to determine events inside other countries. The notion of American empire may be useful propaganda, but it isn’t borne out by America’s current policy or by public opinion. Indeed, as recent debates within the United States over Syria clearly show, the danger for the world is not an America that is too eager to immerse itself in the affairs of other countries or to take on every problem in the region as its own. The danger for the world is that the United States, after a decade of war -- rightly concerned about issues back home, aware of the hostility that our engagement in the region has engendered throughout the Muslim world -- may disengage, creating a vacuum of leadership that no other nation is ready to fill.

I believe such disengagement would be a mistake. I believe America must remain engaged for our own security. But I also believe the world is better for it. Some may disagree, but I believe America is exceptional -- in part because we have shown a willingness through the sacrifice of blood and treasure to stand up not only for our own narrow self-interests, but for the interests of all.

I must be honest, though. We're far more likely to invest our energy in those countries that want to work with us, that invest in their people instead of a corrupt few; that embrace a vision of society where everyone can contribute -- men and women, Shia or Sunni, Muslim, Christian or Jew. Because from Europe to Asia, from Africa to the Americas, nations that have persevered on a democratic path have emerged more prosperous, more peaceful, and more invested in upholding our common security and our common humanity. And I believe that the same will hold true for the Arab world.

This leads me to a final point. There will be times when the breakdown of societies is so great, the violence against civilians so substantial that the international community will be called upon to act. This will require new thinking and some very tough choices. While the United Nations was designed to prevent wars between states, increasingly we face the challenge of preventing slaughter within states. And these challenges will grow more pronounced as we are confronted with states that are fragile or failing -- places where horrendous violence can put innocent men, women and children at risk, with no hope of protection from their national institutions.

I have made it clear that even when America’s core interests are not directly threatened, we stand ready to do our part to prevent mass atrocities and protect basic human rights. But we cannot and should not bear that burden alone. In Mali, we supported both the French intervention that successfully pushed back al Qaeda, and the African forces who are keeping the peace. In Eastern Africa, we are working with partners to bring the Lord’s Resistance Army to an end. And in Libya, when the Security Council provided a mandate to protect civilians, America joined a coalition that took action. Because of what we did there, countless lives were saved, and a tyrant could not kill his way back to power.

I know that some now criticize the action in Libya as an object lesson. They point to the problems that the country now confronts -- a democratically elected government struggling to provide security; armed groups, in some places extremists, ruling parts of a fractured land. And so these critics argue that any intervention to protect civilians is doomed to fail -- look at Libya. No one is more mindful of these problems than I am, for they resulted in the death of four outstanding U.S. citizens who were committed to the Libyan people, including Ambassador Chris Stevens -- a man whose courageous efforts helped save the city of Benghazi. But does anyone truly believe that the situation in Libya would be better if Qaddafi had been allowed to kill, imprison, or brutalize his people into submission? It’s far more likely that without international action, Libya would now be engulfed in civil war and bloodshed.

We live in a world of imperfect choices. Different nations will not agree on the need for action in every instance, and the principle of sovereignty is at the center of our international order. But sovereignty cannot be a shield for tyrants to commit wanton murder, or an excuse for the international community to turn a blind eye. While we need to be modest in our belief that we can remedy every evil, while we need to be mindful that the world is full of unintended consequences, should we really accept the notion that the world is powerless in the face of a Rwanda or Srebrenica? If that’s the world that people want to live in, they should say so and reckon with the cold logic of mass graves.

But I believe we can embrace a different future. And if we don’t want to choose between inaction and war, we must get better -- all of us -- at the policies that prevent the breakdown of basic order. Through respect for the responsibilities of nations and the rights of individuals. Through meaningful sanctions for those who break the rules. Through dogged diplomacy that resolves the root causes of conflict, not merely its aftermath. Through development assistance that brings hope to the marginalized. And yes, sometimes -- although this will not be enough -- there are going to be moments where the international community will need to acknowledge that the multilateral use of military force may be required to prevent the very worst from occurring.

Ultimately, this is the international community that America seeks -- one where nations do not covet the land or resources of other nations, but one in which we carry out the founding purpose of this institution and where we all take responsibility. A world in which the rules established out of the horrors of war can help us resolve conflicts peacefully, and prevent the kinds of wars that our forefathers fought. A world where human beings can live with dignity and meet their basic needs, whether they live in New York or Nairobi; in Peshawar or Damascus.

These are extraordinary times, with extraordinary opportunities. Thanks to human progress, a child born anywhere on Earth today can do things today that 60 years ago would have been out of reach for the mass of humanity. I saw this in Africa, where nations moving beyond conflict are now poised to take off. And America is with them, partnering to feed the hungry and care for the sick, and to bring power to places off the grid.

I see it across the Pacific region, where hundreds of millions have been lifted out of poverty in a single generation. I see it in the faces of young people everywhere who can access the entire world with the click of a button, and who are eager to join the cause of eradicating extreme poverty, and combating climate change, starting businesses, expanding freedom, and leaving behind the old ideological battles of the past. That’s what’s happening in Asia and Africa. It’s happening in Europe and across the Americas. That’s the future that the people of the Middle East and North Africa deserve as well -- one where they can focus on opportunity, instead of whether they’ll be killed or repressed because of who they are or what they believe.

Time and again, nations and people have shown our capacity to change -- to live up to humanity’s highest ideals, to choose our better history. Last month, I stood where 50 years ago Martin Luther King Jr. told America about his dream, at a time when many people of my race could not even vote for President. Earlier this year, I stood in the small cell where Nelson Mandela endured decades cut off from his own people and the world. Who are we to believe that today’s challenges cannot be overcome, when we have seen what changes the human spirit can bring? Who in this hall can argue that the future belongs to those who seek to repress that spirit, rather than those who seek to liberate it?

I know what side of history I want to the United States of America to be on. We're ready to meet tomorrow’s challenges with you -- firm in the belief that all men and women are in fact created equal, each individual possessed with a dignity and inalienable rights that cannot be denied. That is why we look to the future not with fear, but with hope. And that’s why we remain convinced that this community of nations can deliver a more peaceful, prosperous and just world to the next generation.

Thank you very much.

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# Health Care Discussion with William J. Clinton at a Clinton Global Initiative Health Care Forum

Hillary Clinton: Thank you very much. I have the great pleasure to introduce our next two speakers, who are about to have a conversation concerning health care. And I thought hard about how to introduce these two men.

And the more I thought about it, the more I realized how much they have in common. They are both left-handed. They both love golf, a game that does not often reciprocate the love they put into it. They both are fanatic sports fans and go to great lengths to be in front of the TV or on the side of the court or the field. They both are master politicians. Each of them has only lost one election. They are both Democrats. They have fabulous daughters. They each married far above themselves. And they each love our country.

And so please join me in welcoming "Number 42" and "Number 44" -- Bill Clinton and President Barack Obama.

President Obama: Mr. President.

WJClinton: Are you interviewing me?

President Obama: That would be bad. I've been talking a lot today.

WJClinton: I want to thank you for giving Hillary a job. That was a good thing you did. Thank you for coming.

President Obama: Well, it is wonderful to be back. And let me start just by saying to all the people who have for years now supported the incredible efforts of CGI, thank you. Because wherever we travel, all across the globe, we see the impact that it's making every single day. And we're very proud of what you all do.

And let me say that we still miss our former Secretary of State. And I should add that there's nothing she said that was not true, particularly the part about us marrying up.

WJClinton: Well, that brings me to my first health care comment. This is going to be a conversation about domestic and international health, and America's role in it. But I want to begin by telling you that I think the First Lady has done a great job in this fight against childhood obesity.

We have been honored at our foundation to be asked to represent her effort in 18,000 schools where we've lowered the calories in drinks being served in schools by 90 percent. But she has been great on that one. The other thing I think is that I was a little upset -- and, as you know, called one of your administration members when you got to Africa -- when I read an article that said that you didn't have a big initiative in Africa. And I said -- I can't say exactly what I said -- but I said that is inaccurate. That's the sanitized version of what I said.

Because when the President took office, our program, begun under President Bush, PEPFAR, was giving antiretroviral medicine to 1.7 million people. Because of an agreement that I made with President Bush to use generic drugs that were approved by the FDA, about half our drugs were being purchased in that way. Under President Obama, we've gone to 99 percent. We are treating more than 5.1 million, three times as many for less money.

That is a stunning legacy -- so that more money has been put into malaria medicine, bed nets, so you saved a lot of money and saved more lives while doing it. And I'm very proud of that. And I want to thank you for it. It's important.

Now, maybe at the end of this conversation we can get back to some of your current global health initiatives. But let's talk a little about the health care law, because we're about to begin on October 1st open enrollment for six months. And I'd like to give you a chance, first of all, to tell them why -- when you took office, we were teetering on the brink of a depression. You had to avert it. You had to start the recovery again. Why in the midst of all this grief did you also take on this complex issue? Many people were saying, why doesn't he just focus on the economy and leave this alone? So tell us why you did it.

President Obama: Well, first of all, I think it's important to remember that health care is the economy -- a massive part of our economy. And so the idea that somehow we can separate out the two is a fallacy.

Second of all, the effort for us to deal with a multifaceted health care crisis has been going on for decades. And the person who just introduced us, as well as you, early in your presidency, had as much to do with helping to shape the conversation as anybody.

The fact is that we have been, up until recently, the only advanced industrialized nation on Earth that permits large numbers of its people to languish without health insurance. Not only is there the cruelty of people who are unable to get health insurance having to use the emergency room as their doctor or their health service, but -- we’re also more efficient than anybody else and so when we talk about, for example, our deficit -- you know this better than anybody -- the reason that we have not only current deficits but also projected long-term deficits -- the structural deficit that we have is primarily based on the fact that we have a hugely inefficient, wildly expensive health care system that does not produce better outcomes.

And if we spent the same amount of money on health care that Canada or France or Great Britain did, or Japan, or any other industrialized country, with the same outcomes or better outcomes, that essentially would remove our structural deficit, which would then free up dollars for us to invest in early-childhood education and infrastructure and medical research and all the other things that can make sure that we’re competitive and growing rapidly over the long term.

So my view when I came into office was we’ve got an immediate crisis -- we’ve got to get the economy growing. But what we also have to do is to start tackling some of these structural problems that had been building up for years. And one of the biggest structural problems was health care. It’s what accounts for our deficit. It’s what accounts for our debt. It causes pain and misery to millions of people all across the country. It is a huge burden on our businesses.

I was out at a Ford plant out in Missouri -- making the F series out there -- and this is a big stamping plant. Ford is now the biggest seller in the United States. We took that lead back from the Japanese automakers. But we are still burdened by the fact that every U.S. automobile that is manufactured requires a couple of thousand dollars in added health care costs that our foreign competitors don’t have to pay.

So this has everything to do with the economy, in addition to what I consider to be the moral imperative that a mom should not have to go bankrupt if her son or daughter gets sick; that a family who’s dealing with a layoff and is already struggling to pay the bills shouldn’t also be wondering whether they’re one illness away from losing their home. And I think most Americans agree with that.

WJClinton: So first of all, folks, for those of you who are from the United States, that’s about as good an overview as you’re ever going to hear of what this economic issue is. But you remember the President said our structural deficit would disappear if we had a comparable health care system in terms of cost to the French and Germans that are consistently rated the highest. It’s about a trillion dollars a year, and somewhere around 44 percent of that money is government-funded money. So you just run the numbers. Think -- over half of our deficit has already disappeared because of economic growth and the revenues you raised and the spending we cut. And you pretty much get rid of the rest of it if we just had a comparably expensive system to any other country.

Before you took office, we lost a car company that wanted to locate in Michigan that went instead to Canada, and they announced -- they said, look, we’re a car company that provides health care benefits to an employee; we're not a health care company that sells cars to cover our bills. We have to go to Canada. And it was one of the few companies willing to go on record and say this. So thank you for doing it.

So let’s talk about this. What does this open enrollment mean? How are people going to get involved? When you have universal enrollment you can manage your costs better and cut inflation down.

I'll give the President a chance to talk about all the good stuff that's happened, but I just want you to know one thing. In the last three years, just as we started doing this, inflation in health care costs has dropped to 4 percent for three years in a row for the first time in 50 years. Fifty years. Before that, the costs were going up at three times the rate of inflation for a decade.

So now what? What are you going to do on October 1st? Tell them how this has got to work.

President Obama: Well, let me give folks just a little bit of background about what’s already in place and then what happens on October 1st.

When we passed the Affordable Care Act, there were a number of components to it. A big part of it was essentially providing a Patient’s Bill of Rights that Americans and advocates have been fighting for for decades. So what we wanted to do was make sure if you already have health insurance that you get a fair deal, that you're being treated well by your insurers.

So we eliminated, prohibited insurance companies from imposing lifetime limits, which oftentimes if a family member really got sick, they thought they were covered until suddenly they hit that limit and now they’re out hundreds of thousands of dollars with no way of paying.

We said to insurance companies, you’ve got to use at least 80 percent of your premium that you're receiving on actual health care -- not on administrative costs and CEO bonuses. And if you don't, you’ve got to rebate anything that you spent back to the consumer. So there are millions of Americans who’ve received rebates. They may not know that they got it because of the Affordable Care Act -- or “ObamaCare” -- but they’re pretty happy to get those rebates back, because it made sure that the insurance companies were treating folks fairly.

We said that any young person who doesn’t have health insurance can stay on their parent’s health insurance until they’re 26 years old. And as a consequence, what we’ve seen is steadily the rate of uninsured for young people dropping over the last three years since the bill passed and obviously providing a lot of relief to a lot of parents out there because a lot of young people, as they’ve been entering into the job market at a time when jobs are tough to get and oftentimes benefits are slim, this is providing enormous security until they get more firmly established in the labor market.

We provided additional discounts for prescription drugs for seniors under the Medicare program. And so seniors have saved billions of dollars when it comes to their prescription drugs.

So there have been over the last three years a whole array of consumer protections and savings for consumers that result directly from the law that we passed. And for those who say that they want to repeal it, typically when you ask them about, what are all these various benefits, they say, well, that one is good, and that one is pretty good, and we’d keep that. And you pretty much go down the list, and there’s not too much people object to.

You will recall also at the time that part of the way that we paid for the health care bill was we said Medicare is wasting a lot of money without making seniors healthier. And there was a lot of hue and cry about how we were taking money out of Medicare -- well, it turns out that we were right, that we could change how doctors and hospitals and providers were operating, rewarding them for outcomes, as opposed to simply how many procedures that they did. You started seeing practices change among millions of providers across the country. Medicare rates have actually slowed in terms of inflation. Seniors have saved money. Folks are healthier. And some of those savings we’ve been able to use to make sure that people who don't have health insurance get health insurance.

Now, this brings me to October 1st. The one part of the Affordable Care Act that required several years to set up, but a critical part, was how do we provide health insurance for individuals who don't get health insurance through the job? It’s a historical accident that in this country health care is attached to employers. And part of the problem is if you’re out there shopping for health insurance on your own, you're not part of a big pool, well, there’s no aggregation of risk taking place for the insurers. So they're basically going to say, let’s see, you're 50 years old. You got high blood pressure. And we just look at the actuarial tables and we figure you’re going to get sick, so we’re going to charge you $1,500 a month for health insurance, which the average person has no way of affording -- because there’s no pooling of risk.

So what we said was we need to set up a mechanism to pool people who currently don't have health insurance so that they have the same purchasing power, the same leverage that a big companies does when they're negotiating with the insurance company.

And essentially what we’ve done is we’ve created what we’re calling marketplaces in every state across the country where consumers are now able to be part of a big pool. Insurers have to bid, essentially compete for the business of that pool. And what we now have set up are these marketplaces that provide high-quality health care at affordable prices, giving people choices so that they can get the health insurance that they need and they want. And the premiums are significantly lower than what they were able to previously get.

I’ll take the example of New York State. The insurers put in their bids to participate in these marketplaces. It turns out that their rates are up to 50 percent lower than what was available previously if you just went on the open market and you tried to get health insurance. Fifty percent lower in this state. California -- it’s about 33 percent lower. In my home state of Illinois, they just announced it’s about 25 percent lower.

So just by pooling and creating competition so that insurers have to go after people’s business the way they go after a group plan, we have drastically reduced premiums and costs. On top of that, what we’re now doing is we’re saying if with the better deal that you got you still can’t afford it, we’re going to give you tax credits to essentially subsidize your purchase of health insurance.

And here’s the net result. We’ll be continuing to roll out what the actual prices are going to end up being, but I can tell you right now that in many states across the country, if you’re, say, a 27-year-old young woman, don’t have health insurance, you get on that exchange, you’re going to be able to purchase high-quality health insurance for less than the cost of your cellphone bill. And because all the insurers who participate are required to, for example, provide free preventive care, free contraceptive care, that young woman, she may make up what she’s spending on premiums just on her monthly use of health care.

So this is going to be a good deal for those who don’t have health insurance. Those who already have health insurance get better health insurance. And the best part of the whole thing is, because of these changes we initiated in terms of how we’re paying providers, health care costs have grown, as you pointed out, Mr. President, at the slowest rate in 50 years. We are bending the cost curve and getting at the problems that are creating our deficits in Medicare and Medicaid.

WJClinton: I should point out that, so far, in most states, one of the good things that at least I didn’t know whether it would happen is when we began this in the United States, more than 80 percent of the American states had only one or two companies providing health insurance who had more than 80 percent of the market. So there was, in effect, no price competition. So what I was terrified of was we’d open these things and there would only be one company show up and bid, and this whole thing, we’d be having an academic conversation. Instead, it’s actually led to the establishment of more companies doing more bidding.

And I think part of it is they have greater confidence that they can deliver health care at a more modest cost. So, so far, it’s good. But I think it’s important for you to the tell the people why we’re doing all this outreach -- because this only works, for example, if young people show up. And even if they buy their cheapest plan, then they claim their tax credits, so it won’t cost them much -- 100 bucks a month or so. We got to have them in the pools, because otherwise all these projected low costs cannot be held if older people with preexisting conditions are disproportionately represented in any given state. You've got to have everybody lined up.

So explain what kind of -- all the work you've been doing on the outreach for the opening on October.

President Obama: I think President Clinton makes a really important point. And the way pools work, any pool, is essentially those of us who are healthy subsidize somebody who is sick at any given time. We do that because we anticipate, well, at some point we'll get sick and hope the healthy person is in our pool so those costs and those risks get spread. That's what insurance is all about.

And what happens is if you don't have pools that are a cross-section of society, then people who are already sick or more likely to get sick, they'll all rush out and buy insurance. People who are healthy, they say, you know what, I won't bother. And you get what's called adverse selection. Essentially what happens is that the premiums start going higher and higher because the risks aren't spread broadly enough across the population.

So you want to get a good cross-section in every pool. That's why big companies have an easier time getting good rates for their employees than small companies, because if you only have five employees and one person is stricken with breast cancer, let's say, your rates potentially shoot up. But if it's a thousand employees, then it gets spread out.

So on October 1st, open enrollment begins. All these folks can start signing up for the marketplace. And what we want to make sure of is that everybody, in every category, in every age group, understands why health insurance is important, understands why they should sign up, understands the choices that are going to be available to them. They're going to be able to go to a computer, tap on the web page and they're going to be able to shop just like you shopped for an airline ticket or a flat-screen TV, and see what's the best price for you, what's the plan that's best suited for you, and go ahead and sign up right there and then.

And that the open enrollment period will last from October 1st until the end of March and so there will be six months for folks to sign up. Normally, this would be pretty straightforward. A lot of people don't have health insurance. A lot of people realize they should get health insurance. But let's face it, it's been a little political, this whole ObamaCare thing. And so what you’ve had is an unprecedented effort that you’ve seen ramp up over the last month or so in which those who have opposed the idea of universal health care in the first place and have fought this thing tooth and nail through Congress and through the courts and so forth have been trying to scare and discourage people from getting a good deal. And some of you may have seen some of the commercials out there that are a little whacky.

And the main message we have -- and we’re using social media, we’re talking to churches, we’re talking to various civic groups -- and what we’re saying to people is, look, just go to the website yourself. Go to healthcare.gov; take a look at whether this is a good deal or not and make your own decision about whether this is good for you. Because what we are confident about is that when people look and see that they can get high-quality, affordable health care for less than their cell phone bill, they’re going to sign up. They are going to sign up.

And part of what I think the resistance that we’ve seen ramp up particularly over the last couple of months is all about is the opponents of health care reform know they’re going to sign up. In fact, one of the major opponents, when asked, well, why is it that you’d potentially shut down the government at this point just to block ObamaCare, he basically fessed up. He said, well, once consumers get hooked on having health insurance and subsidies, then they won’t want to give it up. I mean, that’s -- you can look at the transcript. This is one of the major opponents of health care reform. It is an odd logic. Essentially they’re saying people will like this thing too much and then it will be really hard to roll back.

So it is very important that people just know what’s out there, what’s available to them, and let people make up their own minds as to whether it makes sense or not.

Now, one last thing I want to say, because I do think sometimes -- people come up to me and they say, well, if this is such a good deal, how come the polls show that it’s not popular? Well, one of the things you and I both know is that when you come to health care, there’s no more personal and intimate decision for people. I mean, this is something that people really care about. And frankly, the devil you know is always better than the devil you don’t know. And that’s what “Harry and Louise” was all about back in the ‘90s, right? It was scaring people with the prospect of change.

And so part of our goal here is just to make sure people have good information. And there has been billions of dollars spent making people scared and worried about this stuff. And rather than trying to disabuse people of every single bit of misinformation that’s been out there, what we’re saying is just look for yourself. Take a look at it and you will discover that this is a good deal for you.

WJClinton: Well, first of all, I completely agree with that. I think we’ve got to just drive people to the websites. The states that are participating -- the Supreme Court decision that upheld the health care law said that states didn’t have to set up these marketplaces if they didn’t want to, but if they didn’t the federal government would set it up. They also said that states didn’t have to expand Medicaid coverage to help people whose incomes are up to 138 percent of the federal poverty level buy health insurance.

There are some states, believe it or not, that want the marketplace but don't want the Medicaid. And that's going to lead to a cruel result, and there’s nothing the President can do and it’s not his fault. That's what the Supreme Court said. So we can have this bizarre situation where, let’s say, a business with 60 employees can -- or an individual going into the individual market will get the benefit of tax credits for everybody with incomes of 138 percent of the federal poverty level or above, but they won't get it for people who are between 100 and 138 percent. So lower-income people who desperately need the health insurance -- we would have the cruelest of all situations in those states. And there’s nothing the President can do about it because of the Supreme Court decision. So we have to persuade the states to come on. But more and more states with Republican governors, Republican legislatures are doing it.

Tell them about Arkansas, because we're doing well down there.

President Obama: A little hometown bias, there’s nothing wrong with that. A couple of things that are happening that I think are very interesting. First of all, look, I'm sympathetic to some of these Republican governors who are under a lot of pressure because the whole issue of whether you're for ObamaCare or not has become a litmus test in the other party. So some of them, politically it’s been tough; sometimes state legislatures that refuse to allow governors to go ahead and implement.

But as you indicated, what we've seen is that when Republican governors take a look at the deal they’re getting where, in addition to these exchanges, we're also providing a much more significant match, much more federal money to provide health insurance -- from the state’s perspective, they’re not paying; the federal government is picking up the tab -- and this is helping them because people are no longer going to the emergency room and they now have good health care, they’re now getting preventive care. You're seeing some Republican governors step up and saying, I may not like ObamaCare, but I’m going to go ahead and make sure that my people are benefiting from this plan. So that's one good thing that's happening.

The second thing that's happening is there are a couple of states -- Arkansas is a good example; Kentucky is another good example; Idaho, interesting example -- these are states where I just got beat. I mean, I do not have a big constituency in these states. Well, I take that back. You know what, 40 percent is still a lot of people -- but I’m losing by 20 percent in these states. But the governors were still able to say we’re going to set up our own state exchanges, their own marketplaces. And each state is just using their own name for it.

So I had a meet -- I had a conference, a video conference with all the state directors of all the marketplaces, and I’m talking to the director in Kentucky and Idaho. And in Kentucky, it’s called like, Kentucky Connect. And in Idaho, it’s called the Idaho Health Care Exchange. And there’s a story that came out of Kentucky where some folks were signing people up at a county fair somewhere. Some guy goes up and he starts looking at the rates and decides he’s going to sign up. And he turns to his friend and said, this is a great deal. This is a lot better than ObamaCare. Right? Which is fine. Because we -- I don't have pride of authorship on this thing. I just want the thing to work.

And Arkansas just came out with its rates, and as has been true in virtually every single state, not only are premiums lower than they were, they're a lot lower than even the most optimistic predictions were about how low they would be.

And once these marketplaces are up and running, it turns out that what has traditionally been a pretty conservative principle, which is competition and choice work, well, in the insurance market, competition and choice work. And what we’re seeing is that people are going to be able to get the kind of health care that they have never been able to get before. States are going to benefit from it because they're going to save money.

And one thing that all of you -- there are probably very few people in this room who don't have health insurance, although if you don't, you should sign up starting on October 1st. One of the things that many people don't realize is that the subsidy that all of you provide for the uninsured is about $1,000 per family. You pay $1,000 -- everybody here who has got health insurance pays about $1,000 more for your families' insurance than you otherwise would have, because hospitals are mandated, they are required to provide service to anybody who shows up. And so what happens is when you've got 15 percent of the population without health insurance, they end up showing up at the emergency room typically at a point when they're much sicker than if they had been getting regular checkups and preventive care. So you pay for the most expensive care there is, because hospitals have got to recoup that money somewhere.

And the way they do it is to charge higher prices. And people who have health insurance end up picking it up. So part of what will help reduce the increase in health care costs is making sure that that hidden subsidy no longer exists.

WJClinton: Let's talk a little bit about business, because we're out of time, but I think it's really important. As you pointed out, most people who have insurance work for a living, or somebody in their family does, and they get their insurance through their workplace. The law says that all employers have to participate if they have 50 employees or more. Many employers with fewer than 50 employees already voluntarily provide some health insurance.

Both the companies with 50 or more and the companies with fewer than 50 are somewhat concerned. And the employees that have to be insured are those who work 30 hours a week or more. So there were many people who speculated that when this law came into place that it would add to the cost and there would be a lot more part-time workers instead of full-time workers. I'll save the President the time in the interview on this -- so far, that's not true. The overwhelming number of people who have been hired coming out of this recession have been -- they have been hired at lower wages, but they have been full-time employees.

There has not been an increase in the percentage of our employment in part-time work. There has been an increase in relatively lower-wage new jobs. But that means they need health insurance even more. So explain very briefly to them how this is going to work, how private employers are helped to buy their insurance and the requirements.

President Obama: Well, first of all, if you're a large employer or an employer with more than 50 employees, you’re already providing health insurance, you don’t have to do anything other than just make sure that you can show that you’re providing health insurance.

And there was a lot of news recently about how we delayed the so-called employer mandate for a year -- because under the law, what it says is if you have more than 50 employees, you’re not providing health insurance to your employees, then you’re going to pay a penalty to help pay for the fact that we, the taxpayers, are going to have to provide your employees with health insurance -- which, by the way, is only fair.

A lot of the controversy around the Affordable Care Act had to do with these so-called mandates, both an employer mandate and an individual mandate. And the employer mandate says, if you don’t meet your responsibilities by your employees, and they end up getting Medicaid or they’re ending up in the emergency room, you’re basically dumping those costs onto society. That’s not fair. So we’re going to charge you a couple thousand dollars to help pay for health care for those employees.

To the individuals, what we said was we’re going to make health insurance so affordable, so cheap for you, so heavily subsidized if you’re not making a lot of money, that if you’re not getting health insurance then it’s because you just decided you don’t want to, you don’t need to. And in that circumstance, what happens when you get hit by a bus, heaven forbid, or somebody in your family gets sick, and you hadn’t had them covered? Well, we’re going to end up having to pay for you anyway because we’re not going to just let somebody bleed in front of the emergency room. So what we’ve said is you’ve got to take responsibility, and so there’s a small penalty if you don’t get health insurance.

This is where a lot of the controversy and unpopularity came in, because people generally don’t like to be told, “you’ve got to get health insurance,” and employers don’t like be told, “you’ve got to give your employees health insurance.” But, as a society, what we cannot do is to say, you have no responsibilities whatsoever, but you’ve got guaranteed coverage.

And this raises the whole issue of preexisting conditions, which we haven’t talked a lot about but is really important. One of the central components of this law, one of the main perversities of the health care system before this law passed was there were millions of people around the country who, if you had gotten sick before, if you had had a heart attack, if you had had cancer, if you had diabetes; let’s say, when it first happened you had a job, you got cured; then you lose your job or you’re trying to change jobs or you’re trying to start a business, you try to go out and get health insurance, the health insurance company not only could deny you but had every incentive to deny you. Because, basically, they’d rather have healthy people who are paying premiums and never asking for a payout. They don’t want somebody who actuarially they can anticipate might get sick.

And so, keep in mind that a huge percentage of our society has some sort of preexisting condition, and they can be locked out. You can do everything right, work hard, build a strong middle-class life, but if you’ve been sick and then you lose your job or something happens, you may suddenly be locked out of the insurance market, or the premiums may be so high that only somebody fabulously rich could afford it.

So what we said is, all right, you know what, insurance companies, you can no longer bar somebody from getting health insurance just because they’ve got a preexisting condition. But the only way that works is if everybody had a requirement to get health insurance. Because think about what happens if you don’t have that rule. Well, all of us -- not all of us, but a lot of us who were trying to figure out how to save some money would say, well, I’m not going to worry about it until I get sick, and then right when I’m diagnosed with something that’s going to be expensive I’ll go to the insurance company and say, you can’t prevent me from getting health insurance just because I’ve got a preexisting condition. So they could potentially game the system and it wouldn’t work.

So now what we’ve done is said you’ve got to provide health insurance to anybody, all comers -- that’s the deal. The flipside of it is everybody has got some responsibility and we’ll help you pay for it to get health insurance. And that's where a lot of the misunderstandings, the frustrations about health care reform came in.

I should add, by the way, that this was the same proposition that was set up in Massachusetts under a governor named Mitt Romney that's working really well. Ninety-nine percent of the people in Massachusetts have coverage. And that same principle was, ironically, considered a very smart Republican conservative principle. But it was the right one. The economics of it are true.

So, just to finish up the question, when it comes to businesses, if you're already providing health insurance for your employees, that's great. You don't have do much other than just make sure that you show us that you’ve got health insurance for your employees.

If you have more than 50 employees, and you’re not providing health insurance for them, you now have the opportunity to join a pool of small businesses to get a better price and a better deal on health insurance. You're eligible for tax credits in providing health insurance to your employees. Up to 35 percent of the premiums for each employee will be a tax benefit -- a tax credit from the federal government. But if you still aren’t providing health insurance for your employees after that, then we’re going to go ahead and penalize you for it.

And I can understand why some businesses wouldn’t want to pay for it. If they're not currently providing health insurance for their employees, what that means is that they’d rather have those additional profits than make sure that their employees are getting a fair deal.

In some cases, they may be operating under some very small margins. But keep in mind, since people are -- companies are exempted, the average small business with five employees, mom-and-pop shop, 10 employees, they're not under that requirement. So I’m not that sympathetic to a company, typically, if it’s got more than 50 employees and generating some significant revenue, we’re making it affordable for them to provide health insurance for their employees. They should do the right thing.

WJClinton: I agree with that. We have to close, but I think there’s one last issue we ought to deal with. The most important thing obviously is just to get people enrolled in this. We’ll work through it as we go along.

But you just heard the President say that so far in virtually every state, the actual prices of the insurance are coming in quite a bit lower than they were originally estimated to. With the original price estimates and with the government obligated to provide subsidies -- which costs money on the budget, right? -- it was, nonetheless, estimated that in the first 10 years, this would keep the national debt $110 billion lower than it otherwise would have been, which means if we come in at even less, we can bring the debt down more, or we can subsidize more small businesses and get more small businesses into this loop.

A lot of people come up to me and say, now, you sound like the people you used to criticize who say we could cut taxes all day long, increase spending and balance the budget. Don't give me that; this sounds too good to be true. So I think before you leave, you should tell people how we can spend more -- not so much in direct spending, but in tax credits -- and still wind up reducing overall federal spending by $110 billion during this decade.

President Obama: Well, a couple of things just in terms of how this whole thing got paid for. First of all, I think it’s really important to point out here that the total cost of the Affordable Care Act to provide health insurance for every American out there at an affordable rate is costing about the same amount over the course of 10 years as the cost of the prescription drug bill that President Bush passed -- except that wasn’t paid for. We felt obliged to actually pay for it and not just add to the deficit.

So what we did -- it’s paid for by a combination of things. We did raise taxes on some things. We, for example, said that for high-end income individuals, you can pay a slightly higher Medicare rate -- Medicare tax. So we bumped that up a little bit. We said that for employers who are currently providing a so-called Cadillac health care plan, where there are so many bells and whistles, there’s no incentive to actually spend wisely when it comes to health care -- we’re actually going to penalize you for that -- not only to raise a little bit of money, but also to say you're encouraging the worst aspects of a health care system where you spend a lot of money, you don't get better outcomes.

I mentioned to you Medicare. We basically said -- there’s a program in Medicare called Medicare Advantage that provides some additional options for Medicare recipients above and beyond standard Medicare. And it’s very popular with a lot of seniors. You get eyeglasses and other benefits. But it turned out that it was so uncompetitive that we were providing tens of billions of dollars of subsidies to the insurance companies under this Medicare Advantage Plan without getting better outcomes, health outcomes for seniors.

So what we said was we'll keep Medicare Advantage and we'll give them a small premium if they're providing better services for seniors, but we're going to make you compete for it a little bit. And we're going to save tens of billions of dollars in the process, and that will go into paying for the Affordable Care Act.

So the bottom line is, through these various mechanisms we raised enough money to pay for providing health insurance for those who don't have it, to provide these tax credits in the marketplace, and at the same time, because we're driving down costs, we actually end up saving a little money. It is a net reduction of our deficit.

The irony of those who are talking about repealing ObamaCare because it's so wildly expensive is if they actually repealed the law, it would add to the deficit. It would add to the deficit.

Now, there have been a couple of Republicans in the House who have been smart enough to say, we're going to repeal all the benefits so that 25, 30 million people don't get health insurance, but we're going to keep the taxes that Obama raised, we just won't talk about that. And then, that way we can say we reduced the deficit. But obviously, you're doing some funny business there with the budget.

But, look, nothing is free. The bottom line, though, is do we want to continue to live in a society where we've got the most inefficient health care system on Earth, leaving millions of people exposed to the possibilities that they could lose everything because they get sick? Or we've got little children and families going to the emergency room once a week because they've got asthma and other preventable diseases, because their families aren't linked up with a primary care physician who is providing them regular care? Where the costs to society for reduced productivity, illnesses, et cetera, all burden our businesses? Is that the kind of society we aspire to?

And I think the answer is no. And the notion that we would resist, or at least some would resist as fiercely as they have, make this their number-one agenda, perpetuating a system in which millions of people across the country, hardworking Americans don't have access to health care I think is wrong.

WJClinton: We have to close. But I will close with a story. I told you all this morning that the employee that our health access program lost in the Kenya mall shooting was a Dutch nurse. And we spend a lot of time in the Netherlands; we get a lot of support there. Oxi is one of the biggest insurance companies in Europe. They're one of our partners here. I went to celebrate their 200th anniversary with them. They started as a fire insurance company with 39 farmers, 200 years ago.

And we were out there in this big farm field in a tent in the shadow of a 13th century church and a big Dutch windmill. And I asked the chairman of the company, I said, do you write health insurance? Because in the Netherlands there's no Medicare and no Medicaid, everybody is on an individual mandate and you just subsidize people based on their incomes.

He said, yes, I write it; we all do. And he looked at me and he said, but we don't make any money on it. And he said, we shouldn't. This guy is running a huge -- can you imagine somebody saying that in America? He said, we shouldn't. If I can't make money on this business doing traditional insurance business, I've got no business in the work. He said, look, health care is a public good and you've got to find a way to finance it for everybody. And he said, it's just an intermediary function that somebody has to handle. But in the end, it's how it's delivered, how it's priced, and how healthy you can keep your people.

So the First Lady is trying to keep us all healthier, and you're trying to change the delivery and the pricing. And you have to cover everybody to do it. I think this is a big step forward for America. This will, over the next decade, not only make us healthier, but it will free up in the private sector largely funds that can then be reinvested in other areas of economic growth, and give us a much more well-balanced economy. But, first, we've got to get everybody to sign up.

President Obama: Everybody, sign up. Go to healthcare.gov. Thank you very much.

WJClinton: Thank you.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Statement on the U.S. Government Shutdown

Good morning, everybody. At midnight last night, for the first time in 17 years, Republicans in Congress chose to shut down the federal government. Let me be more specific: One faction, of one party, in one house of Congress, in one branch of government, shut down major parts of the government -- all because they didn’t like one law.

This Republican shutdown did not have to happen. But I want every American to understand why it did happen. Republicans in the House of Representatives refused to fund the government unless we defunded or dismantled the Affordable Care Act. They’ve shut down the government over an ideological crusade to deny affordable health insurance to millions of Americans. In other words, they demanded ransom just for doing their job.

And many representatives, including an increasing number of Republicans, have made it clear that had they been allowed by Speaker Boehner to take a simple up or down vote on keeping the government open, with no partisan strings attached, enough votes from both parties would have kept the American people’s government open and operating.

We may not know the full impact of this Republican shutdown for some time. It will depend on how long it lasts. But we do know a couple of things. We know that the last time Republicans shut down the government in 1996, it hurt our economy. And unlike 1996, our economy is still recovering from the worst recession in generations.

We know that certain services and benefits that America’s seniors and veterans and business owners depend on must be put on hold. Certain offices, along with every national park and monument, must be closed. And while last night, I signed legislation to make sure our 1.4 million active-duty military are paid through the shutdown, hundreds of thousands of civilian workers -- many still on the job, many forced to stay home -- aren’t being paid, even if they have families to support and local businesses that rely on them. And we know that the longer this shutdown continues, the worse the effects will be. More families will be hurt. More businesses will be harmed.

So, once again, I urge House Republicans to reopen the government, restart the services Americans depend on, and allow the public servants who have been sent home to return to work. This is only going to happen when Republicans realize they don’t get to hold the entire economy hostage over ideological demands.

As I’ve said repeatedly, I am prepared to work with Democrats and Republicans to do the things we need to do to grow the economy and create jobs, and get our fiscal house in order over the long run. Although I should add this shutdown isn’t about deficits, or spending, or budgets. After all, our deficits are falling at the fastest pace in 50 years. We’ve cut them in half since I took office. In fact, many of the demands the Republicans are now making would actually raise our deficits.

No, this shutdown is not about deficits, it’s not about budgets. This shutdown is about rolling back our efforts to provide health insurance to folks who don’t have it. It’s all about rolling back the Affordable Care Act. This, more than anything else, seems to be what the Republican Party stands for these days. I know it’s strange that one party would make keeping people uninsured the centerpiece of their agenda, but that apparently is what it is.

And of course, what’s stranger still is that shutting down our government doesn’t accomplish their stated goal. The Affordable Care Act is a law that passed the House; it passed the Senate. The Supreme Court ruled it constitutional. It was a central issue in last year’s election. It is settled, and it is here to stay. And because of its funding sources, it’s not impacted by a government shutdown.

And these Americans are here with me today because, even though the government is closed, a big part of the Affordable Care Act is now open for business. And for them, and millions like them, this is a historic day for a good reason. It’s been a long time coming, but today, Americans who have been forced to go without insurance can now visit healthcare.gov and enroll in affordable new plans that offer quality coverage. That starts today.

And people will have six months to sign up. So over the next six months, people are going to have the opportunity -- in many cases, for the first time in their lives -- to get affordable coverage that they desperately need.

Now, of course, if you’re one of the 85 percent of Americans who already have health insurance, you don’t need to do a thing. You’re already benefiting from new benefits and protections that have been in place for some time under this law. But for the 15 percent of Americans who don't have health insurance, this opportunity is life-changing.

Let me just tell folks a few stories that are represented here today. A few years ago, Amanda Barrett left her job in New York to take care of her parents. And for a while, she had temporary insurance that covered her multiple sclerosis. But when it expired, many insurers wouldn’t cover her because of her MS. And she ended up paying $1,200 a month. That’s nowhere near affordable. So starting today, she can get covered for much less, because today’s new plan can’t use your medical history to charge you more than anybody else.

Sky-high premiums once forced Nancy Beigel to choose between paying her rent or paying for health insurance. She’s been uninsured ever since. So she pays all of her medical bills out of pocket, puts some on her credit card, making them even harder to pay. Nancy says, “They talk about those who fall through the cracks. I fell through the cracks 10 years ago and I’ve been stuck there ever since.” Well, starting today, Nancy can get covered just like everybody else.

Trinace Edwards was laid off from her job a year ago today. Six months ago, she was diagnosed with a brain tumor. She couldn’t afford insurance on the individual market, so she hasn’t received treatment yet. Her daughter Lenace, a student at the University of Maryland, is considering dropping out of school to help pay her mom’s bills. Well, starting today, thanks to the Affordable Care Act, Trinace can get covered without forcing her daughter to give up on her dreams.

So if these stories of hardworking Americans sound familiar to you, well, starting today, you and your friends and your family and your coworkers can get covered, too. Just visit healthcare.gov, and there you can compare insurance plans, side by side, the same way you’d shop for a plane ticket on Kayak or a TV on Amazon. You enter some basic information, you’ll be presented with a list of quality, affordable plans that are available in your area, with clear descriptions of what each plan covers, and what it will cost. You’ll find more choices, more competition, and in many cases, lower prices -- most uninsured Americans will find that they can get covered for $100 or less.

And you don't have to take my word for it. Go on the website, healthcare.gov, check it out for yourself. And then show it to your family and your friends and help them get covered, just like mayors and churches and community groups and companies are already fanning out to do across the country.

And there’s a hotline where you can apply over the phone and get help with the application, or just get questions that you have answered by real people, in 150 different languages. So let me give you that number. The number is 1-800-318-2596 -- 1-800-318-2596. Check out healthcare.gov. Call that number. Show your family and friends how to use it. And we can get America covered, once and for all, so that the struggles that these folks have gone through and millions around the country have gone through for years finally get addressed.

And let me just remind people why I think this is so important. I heard a striking statistic yesterday -- if you get cancer, you are 70 percent more likely to live another five years if you have insurance than if you don’t. Think about that. That is what it means to have health insurance.

Set aside the issues of security and finances and how you’re impacted by that, the stress involved in not knowing whether or not you’re going to have health care. This is life-or-death stuff. Tens of thousands of Americans die each year just because they don’t have health insurance. Millions more live with the fear that they’ll go broke if they get sick. And today, we begin to free millions of our fellow Americans from that fear.

Already, millions of young adults have been able to stay on their parents’ plans until they turn 26. Millions of seniors already have gotten a discount on their prescription medicines. Already millions of families have actually received rebates from insurance companies that didn’t spend enough on their health care. So this law means more choice, more competition, lower costs for millions of Americans.

And this law doesn’t just mean economic security for our families. It means we’re finally addressing the biggest drivers of our long-term deficits. It means a stronger economy.

Remember most Republicans have made a whole bunch of predictions about this law that haven’t come true. There are no “death panels.” Costs haven’t skyrocketed; they’re growing at the slowest rate in 50 years. The last three years since I signed the Affordable Care Act into law are the three slowest rates of health spending growth on record. And contrary to Republican claims, this law hasn’t “destroyed” our economy. Over the past three and a half years, our businesses have created 7.5 million new jobs. Just today, we learned that our manufacturers are growing at the fastest rate in two and a half years. They have factored in the Affordable Care Act. They don't think it’s a problem. What’s weighing on the economy is not the Affordable Care Act, but the constant series of crises and the unwillingness to pass a reasonable budget by a faction of the Republican Party.

Now, like every new law, every new product rollout, there are going to be some glitches in the signup process along the way that we will fix. I’ve been saying this from the start. For example, we found out that there have been times this morning where the site has been running more slowly than it normally will. The reason is because more than one million people visited healthcare.gov before 7:00 in the morning.

To put that in context, there were five times more users in the marketplace this morning than have ever been on Medicare.gov at one time. That gives you a sense of how important this is to millions of Americans around the country, and that’s a good thing. And we're going to be speeding things up in the next few hours to handle all this demand that exceeds anything that we had expected.

Consider that just a couple of weeks ago, Apple rolled out a new mobile operating system. And within days, they found a glitch, so they fixed it. I don’t remember anybody suggesting Apple should stop selling iPhones or iPads -- or threatening to shut down the company if they didn’t. That’s not how we do things in America. We don’t actively root for failure. We get to work, we make things happen, we make them better, we keep going.

So in that context, I'll work with anybody who’s got a serious idea to make the Affordable Care Act work better. I've said that repeatedly. But as long as I am President, I will not give in to reckless demands by some in the Republican Party to deny affordable health insurance to millions of hardworking Americans.

I want Republicans in Congress to know these are the Americans you’d hurt if you were allowed to dismantle this law. Americans like Amanda, Nancy, and Trinace, who now finally have the opportunity for basic security and peace of mind of health care just like everybody else -- including members of Congress. The notion that you’d make a condition for reopening the government that I make sure these folks don’t have health care -- that doesn’t make any sense. It doesn’t make any sense.

Now, let me make one closing point: This Republican shutdown threatens our economy at a time when millions of Americans are still looking for work, and businesses are starting to get some traction. So the timing is not good. Of course, a lot of the Republicans in the House ran for office two years ago promising to shut down the government, and so, apparently, they've now gotten their wish. But as I've said before, the irony that the House Republicans have to contend with is they've shut down a whole bunch of parts of the government, but the Affordable Care Act is still open for business.

And this may be why you've got many Republican governors and senators and even a growing number of reasonable Republican congressmen who are telling the extreme right of their party to knock it off, pass a budget, move on.

And I want to underscore the fact that Congress doesn’t just have to end this shutdown and reopen the government -- Congress generally has to stop governing by crisis. They have to break this habit. It is a drag on the economy. It is not worthy of this country.

For example, one of the most important things Congress has to do in the next couple weeks is to raise what's called the debt ceiling. And it's important to understand what this is. This is a routine vote. Congress has taken this vote 45 times to raise the debt ceiling since Ronald Reagan took office. It does not cost taxpayers a single dime. It does not grow our deficits by a single dime. It does not authorize anybody to spend any new money whatsoever. All it does is authorize the Treasury to pay the bills on what Congress has already spent.

Think about that. If you buy a car and you’ve got a car note, you do not save money by not paying your car note. You’re just a deadbeat. If you buy a house, you don’t save money by not authorizing yourself to pay the mortgage. You’re just going to be foreclosed on your home. That’s what this is about.

It is routine. It is what they’re supposed to do. This is not a concession to me. It is not some demand that’s unreasonable that I’m making. This is what Congress is supposed to do as a routine matter. And they shouldn’t wait until the last minute to do it. The last time Republicans even threatened this course of action -- many of you remember, back in 2011 -- our economy staggered, our credit rating was downgraded for the first time. If they go through with it this time and force the United States to default on its obligations for the first time in history, it would be far more dangerous than a government shutdown -- as bad as a shutdown is. It would be an economic shutdown.

So I’ll speak more on this in the coming days, but let me repeat: I will not negotiate over Congress’s responsibility to pay bills it’s already racked up. I’m not going to allow anybody to drag the good name of the United States of America through the mud just to refight a settled election or extract ideological demands. Nobody gets to hurt our economy and millions of hardworking families over a law you don’t like.

There are a whole bunch of things that I’d like to see passed through Congress that the House Republicans haven’t passed yet, and I’m not out there saying, well, I’m not -- I’m going to let America default unless Congress does something that they don’t want to do. That’s not how adults operate. Certainly that’s not how our government should operate. And that’s true whether there’s a Democrat in this office or a Republican in this office. Doesn’t matter whether it’s a Democratic House of Representatives or a Republican-controlled House of Representatives -- there are certain rules that everybody abides by because we don’t want to hurt other people just because we have a political disagreement.

So my basic message to Congress is this: Pass a budget. End the government shutdown. Pay your bills. Prevent an economic shutdown. Don’t wait. Don’t delay. Don’t put our economy or our people through this any longer.

I am more than happy to work with them on all kinds of issues. I want to get back to work on the things that the American people sent us here to work on -- creating new jobs, new growth, new security for our middle class.

We’re better than this. Certainly the American people are a lot better than this. And I believe that what we’ve accomplished for Amanda, and Nancy, and Trinace, and tens of millions of their fellow citizens- on this day proves that even when the odds are long and the obstacles are many, we are and always will be a country that can do great things together.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you. Thank you, all of you, for the great work that you’re doing. And thank you, Kathleen Sebelius, for the outstanding work that she’s doing making sure that millions of Americans can get health insurance.

Thank you.

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# On the Affordable Care Act Benefits and Website Logistical Challenges

Thank you. Thank you, everybody. Well, thank you, Janice. And thanks to everybody here for coming on this beautiful day. Welcome to the White House.

About three weeks ago, as the federal government shut down, the Affordable Care Act’s health insurance marketplaces opened for business across the country. Well, we’ve now gotten the government back open for the American people, and today I want to talk about how we’re going to get the marketplaces running at full steam, as well. And I’m joined today by folks who have either benefited from the Affordable Care Act already, or who are helping their fellow citizens learn about what this law means for them and how they can get covered.

Of course, you’ve probably heard that HealthCare.gov -- the new website where people can apply for health insurance, and browse and buy affordable plans in most states -- hasn't worked as smoothly as it was supposed to work. And the number of people who have visited the site has been overwhelming, which has aggravated some of these underlying problems.

Despite all that, thousands of people are signing up and saving money as we speak. Many Americans with a preexisting condition, like Janice, are discovering that they can finally get health insurance like everybody else.

So today, I want to speak to every American who’s looking to get affordable health insurance. I want you to know what’s available to you and why it may be a good deal for you. And for those who’ve had some problems with the website, I want to tell you what we’re doing to make it work better and how you can sign up to get covered in other ways.

But before I do that, let me remind everybody that the Affordable Care Act is not just a website. It's much more. For the vast majority of Americans -- for 85 percent of Americans who already have health insurance through your employer or Medicare or Medicaid -- you don’t need to sign up for coverage through a website at all. You've already got coverage. What the Affordable Care Act does for you is to provide you with new benefits and protections that have been in place for some time. You may not know it, but you're already benefiting from these provisions in the law.

For example, because of the Affordable Care Act, young people like Jasmine Jennings, and Jessica Ugalde, and Ezra Salop, all of whom are here today, they’ve been able to stay on their parents’ plans until they’re 26. Millions of other young people are currently benefiting from that part of the law. Another part of the Affordable Care Act is providing seniors with deeper discounts on their prescription medicine. Billions of dollars have been saved by seniors already. That’s part of the law. It’s already in place. It’s happening right now.

Already, because of the Affordable Care Act, preventive care like mammograms and birth control are free through your employers. That’s part of this law. So there are a wide range of consumer protections and benefits that you already have if you’ve got health insurance. You may not have noticed them, but you’ve got them, and they’re not going anywhere. And they’re not dependent on a website.

Here’s another thing that the Affordable Care Act does. In states where governors and legislatures have wisely allowed it, the Affordable Care Act provides the opportunity for many Americans to get covered under Medicaid for the first time. So in Oregon, for example, that’s helped cut the number of uninsured people by 10 percent just in the last three weeks. Think about that. That’s 56,000 more Americans who now have health care. That doesn’t depend on a website.

Now, if you’re one of the 15 percent of Americans who don’t have health insurance -- either because you can’t afford it or because your employer doesn’t offer it, or because you’re a small businessperson and you have to go out on the individual market and buy it on your own and it’s just too expensive -- October 1st was an important date. That’s when we opened the new marketplaces where people without health insurance, or who can’t afford health insurance, or who aren’t part of a group plan, can finally start getting affordable coverage.

And the idea is simple. By enrolling in what we’re calling these marketplaces, you become part of a big group plan -- as if you were working for a big employer -- a statewide group plan that spreads risk between sick people and healthy people, between young and old, and then bargains on your behalf for the best deal on health care. What we’ve done is essentially create a competition where there wasn’t competition before. We created these big group plans, and now insurers are really interested in getting your business. And so insurers have created new health care plans with more choices to be made available through these marketplaces.

And as a result of this choice and this competition, prices have come down. When you add the new tax credits that many people are eligible for through the law, then the prices come down even further. So one study shows that through new options created by the Affordable Care Act, nearly 6 in 10 uninsured Americans will find that they can get covered for less than $100 a month. Think about that.

Through the marketplaces, you can get health insurance for what may be the equivalent of your cell phone bill or your cable bill, and that’s a good deal.

So the fact is the product of the Affordable Care Act for people without health insurance is quality health insurance that’s affordable. And that product is working. It’s really good. And it turns out there’s a massive demand for it. So far, the national website, HealthCare.gov, has been visited nearly 20 million times. Twenty million times. And there’s great demand at the state level as well, because there are a bunch of states that are running their own marketplaces.

We know that nearly one-third of the people applying in Connecticut and Maryland, for example, are under 35 years old. They understand that they can get a good deal at low costs, have the security of health care, and this is not just for old folks like me -- that everybody needs good quality health insurance. And all told, more than half a million consumers across the country have successfully submitted applications through federal and state marketplaces. And many of those applications aren’t just for individuals, it’s for their entire families. So even more people are already looking to potentially take advantage of the high quality, affordable insurance that is provided through the Affordable Care Act.

So let me just recap here. The product is good. The health insurance that’s being provided is good. It’s high quality and it’s affordable. People can save money, significant money, by getting insurance that’s being provided through these marketplaces. And we know that the demand is there. People are rushing to see what’s available. And those who have already had a chance to enroll are thrilled with the result. Every day, people who were stuck with sky-high premiums because of preexisting conditions are getting affordable insurance for the first time, or finding, like Janice did, that they’re saving a lot of money. Every day, women are finally buying coverage that doesn’t charge them higher premiums than men for the same care. Every day, people are discovering that new health insurance plans have to cover maternity care, mental health care, free preventive care.

So you just heard Janice’s story -- she owns her own small business. She recently became the first woman to enroll in coverage through Delaware’s exchange. And it’s true, it took her a few tries, but it was worth it after being turned down for insurance three times due to minor preexisting conditions. So now she’ll be covered, she’ll save 150 bucks a month, and she won’t have to worry that one illness or accident will cost her her business that she’s worked so hard to build.

And Janice is not alone. I recently received a letter from a woman named Jessica Sanford in Washington State. And here’s what she wrote: “I am a single mom, no child support, self-employed, and I haven’t had insurance for 15 years because it’s too expensive. My son has ADHD and requires regular doctor visits and his meds alone cost $250 per month. I have had an ongoing tendinitis problem due to my line of work that I haven’t had treated. Now, finally, we get to have coverage because of the ACA for $169 per month. I was crying the other day when I signed up. So much stress lifted.”

Now, that is not untypical for a lot of folks like Jessica who have been struggling without health insurance. That’s what the Affordable Care Act is all about. The point is, the essence of the law -- the health insurance that’s available to people -- is working just fine. In some cases, actually, it’s exceeding expectations -- the prices are lower than we expected, the choice is greater than we expected.

But the problem has been that the website that’s supposed to make it easy to apply for and purchase the insurance is not working the way it should for everybody. And there’s no sugarcoating it. The website has been too slow, people have been getting stuck during the application process. And I think it’s fair to say that nobody is more frustrated by that than I am -- precisely because the product is good, I want the cash registers to work. I want the checkout lines to be smooth. So I want people to be able to get this great product. And there’s no excuse for the problems, and these problems are getting fixed.

But while we’re working out the kinks in the system, I want everybody to understand the nature of the problem. First of all, even with all the problems at HealthCare.gov, the website is still working for a lot of people -- just not as quick or efficient or consistent as we want. And although many of these folks have found that they had to wait longer than they wanted, once they complete the process they’re very happy with the deal that’s available to them, just like Janice’s.

Second, I want everybody to remember that we’re only three weeks into a six-month open enrollment period, when you can buy these new plans. Keep in mind the insurance doesn’t start until January 1st; that’s the earliest that the insurance can kick in. No one who decides to purchase a plan has to pay their first premium until December 15th. And unlike the day after Thanksgiving sales for the latest Playstation or flat-screen TVs, the insurance plans don’t run out. They’re not going to sell out. They’ll be available through the marketplace -- throughout the open enrollment period. The prices that insurers have set will not change. So everybody who wants insurance through the marketplace will get insurance, period. Everybody who wants insurance through the marketplace will get insurance.

Third, we are doing everything we can possibly do to get the websites working better, faster, sooner. We’ve got people working overtime, 24/7, to boost capacity and address the problems. Experts from some of America’s top private-sector tech companies who, by the way, have seen things like this happen before, they want it to work. They're reaching out. They're offering to send help. We’ve had some of the best IT talent in the entire country join the team. And we’re well into a “tech surge” to fix the problem. And we are confident that we will get all the problems fixed.

Number four -- while the website will ultimately be the easiest way to buy insurance through the marketplace, it isn’t the only way. And I want to emphasize this. Even as we redouble our efforts to get the site working as well as it’s supposed to, we’re also redoubling our efforts to make sure you can still buy the same quality, affordable insurance plans available on the marketplace the old-fashioned way -- offline, either over the phone or in person.

And, by the way, there are a lot of people who want to take advantage of this who are more comfortable working on the phone anyway or in person. So let me go through the specifics as to how you can do that if you’re having problems with the website or you just prefer dealing with a person.

Yesterday, we updated the website’s home page to offer more information about the other avenues to enroll in affordable health care until the online option works for everybody. So you’ll find information about how to talk to a specialist who can help you apply over the phone or to receive a downloadable application you can fill out yourself and mail in.

We’ve also added more staff to the call centers where you can apply for insurance over the phone. Those are already -- they've been working. But a lot of people have decided first to go to the website. But keep in mind, these call centers are already up and running. And you can get your questions answered by real people, 24 hours a day, in 150 different languages. The phone number for these call centers is 1-800-318-2596. I want to repeat that -- 1-800-318-2596. Wait times have averaged less than one minute so far on the call centers, although I admit that the wait times probably might go up a little bit now that I've read the number out loud on national television.

But the point is the call centers are available. You can talk to somebody directly and they can walk you through the application process. And I guarantee you, if one thing is worth the wait, it’s the safety and security of health care that you can afford, or the amount of money that you can save by buying health insurance through the marketplaces.

Once you get on the phone with a trained representative, it usually takes about 25 minutes for an individual to apply for coverage, about 45 minutes for a family. Once you apply for coverage, you will be contacted by email or postal mail about your coverage status.

But you don't have to just go through the phone. You can also apply in person with the help of local navigators -– these are people specially trained to help you sign up for health care, and they exist all across the country, or you can go to community health centers and hospitals. Just visit LocalHelp.HealthCare.gov to find out where in your area you can get help and apply for insurance in person.

And finally, if you’ve already tried to apply through the website and you’ve been stuck somewhere along the way, do not worry. In the coming weeks, we will contact you directly, personally, with a concrete recommendation for how you can complete your application, shop for coverage, pick a plan that meets your needs, and get covered once and for all.

So here’s the bottom line. The product, the health insurance is good. The prices are good. It is a good deal. People don’t just want it; they’re showing up to buy it. Nobody is madder than me about the fact that the website isn’t working as well as it should, which means it’s going to get fixed.

And in the meantime, you can bypass the website and apply by phone or in person. So don’t let problems with the website deter you from signing up, or signing your family up, or showing your friends how to sign up, because it is worth it. It will save you money. If you don't have health insurance, if you’ve got a preexisting condition, it will save you money and it will give you the security that your family needs.

In fact, even with the website issues, we’ve actually made the overall process of buying insurance through the marketplace a lot smoother and easier than the old way of buying insurance on your own. Part of the challenge here is that a lot of people may not remember what it’s like to buy insurance the traditional way.

The way we’ve set it up, there are no more absurdly long application forms. There’s no medical history questionnaire that goes on for pages and pages. There’s no more getting denied because you’ve had a preexisting condition. Instead of contacting a bunch of different insurers one at a time, which is what Janice and a lot of people who are shopping on the individual market for health insurance had to do, there’s one single place you can go shop and compare plans that have to compete for your business. There’s one single phone number you can call for help. And once the kinks in the website have been ironed out, it will be an even smoother and even easier. But in the meantime, we will help you sign up -- because consumers want to buy this product and insurance companies want to sell it to you.

Now, let me close by addressing some of the politics that have swirled around the Affordable Care Act. I recognize that the Republican Party has made blocking the Affordable Care Act its signature policy idea. Sometimes it seems to be the one thing that unifies the party these days. In fact, they were willing to shut down the government and potentially harm the global economy to try to get it repealed. And I’m sure that given the problems with the website so far, they’re going to be looking to go after it even harder. And let's admit it -- with the website not working as well as it needs to work, that makes a lot of supporters nervous because they know how it's been subject to so much attack, the Affordable Care Act generally.

But I just want to remind everybody, we did not wage this long and contentious battle just around a website. That’s not what this was about. We waged this battle to make sure that millions of Americans in the wealthiest nation on Earth finally have the same chance to get the same security of affordable quality health care as anybody else. That’s what this is about. And the Affordable Care Act has done that.

People can now get good insurance. People with preexisting conditions can now afford insurance. And if the launch of this website proves anything, it’s that people across the country don’t just need that security, they want that security. They want it. And in the meantime -- I’ve said many times -- I’m willing to work with anyone on any idea to make this law perform even better. But it’s time for folks to stop rooting for its failure, because hardworking, middle-class families are rooting for its success. And if the product is good, they're willing to be patient.

I got a letter last week from a self-employed man named John Mier in Leetsdale, Pennsylvania. He used the new marketplace to get himself and his wife covered and save a lot of money. And here’s what he said, because it pretty much sums up my message today: “Yes, the website really stank for the first week.” “But instead of paying $1,600 per month for a group insurance plan, we have a plan that will only cost us $692 a month -- a savings of $900 per month.” John said that while he saw -- when he saw what they’d be paying, he turned to his wife and told her, "We might just pull through. We can afford this." And John eventually predicted that "the website will work like a champ."

So John, he was frustrated by the website, but he's feeling a little less frustrated once he found out that he was saving 900 bucks a month on his health insurance. And John is right, the website is going to get fixed and the law works. That's why we fought so hard to pass this law -- to save folks like John money; to give people who don't have health insurance the chance to get it for the first time; to lift from the American people the crushing burden of unaffordable health care; to free families from the pervasive fear that one illness -- [on-stage female audience member appears to losing consciousness]

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-- there you go, you are ok. I'm right here. I got you. No, no -- you're okay. This happens when I talk too long. You'll be okay. Here, why don't you go.

Good catch, by the way, whoever was here.

But that's always our goal, to free families from the pervasive fear that one illness or one injury might cost you everything that you dedicated a lifetime to build. Our goal has always been to declare that in this country the security of health care is not a privilege for a fortunate few. It's a right for all to enjoy. That's what the Affordable Care Act is all about. That's its promise. And I intend to deliver on that promise.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you.

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# Veterans Day Address

Good morning, everyone.

Thank you, Secretary Shinseki, for your lifetime of service to our nation, and for being a tireless advocate on behalf of America's veterans, including your fellow Vietnam veterans. To Vice President Biden and Dr. Jill Biden; Secretaries Hagel and Perez; Admiral Winnefeld; Major General Buchanan; most of all, to our outstanding veteran service organizations; our men and women in uniform; and to the proud veterans and family members joining us in this sacred place -- Michelle and I are incredibly honored to be with you all here today again.

To the Gold Star families, and the brothers- and sisters-in-arms who walk the paths of these hallowed grounds and the cemeteries around the world, we join you as you remember your loved ones who wore America's uniform. And here at Arlington, and Section 60, we've ensured that you can continue to bring the small mementos of your love and affection to the final resting place of these American heroes.

Today, we gather once more to honor patriots who have rendered the highest service any American can offer this nation -- those who fought for our freedom and stood sentry for our security. On this hillside of solemn remembrance and in veterans' halls and in proud parades across America, we join as one people to honor a debt we can never fully repay.

In the life of our nation, across every generation, there are those who stand apart. They step up, they raise their hands, they take that oath. They put on the uniform and they put their lives on the line. They do this so that the rest of us might live in a country and a world that is safer, freer, and more just. This is the gift they've given us. This is the debt that we owe them.

They fought on a green at Lexington so that we could make independent the country they imagined. They fought on the fields of Gettysburg so that we could make whole a nation torn asunder. They fought on the beaches of Europe and across Pacific islands. And from their sacrifice we emerged the strongest and most prosperous nation in the history of the world. And this year, as we mark the 60th anniversary of the end of the fighting in Korea, we pay special tribute to all those who served in the Korean War.

From the jungles of Vietnam to Desert Storm to the mountains of the Balkans, they have answered America's call. And since America was attacked on that clear September morning, millions more have assumed that mantle, defining one of the greatest generations of military service this country has ever produced.

On tour after tour after tour, in Iraq and Afghanistan, this generation -- the 9/11 Generation -- has met every mission we have asked of them. And today we can say that because of their heroic service, the core of al Qaeda is on the path to defeat, our nation is more secure, and our homeland is safer.

They're men and women like the soldier -- and soon to be veteran -- I met a few months ago, Jacare Hogan. Jacare deployed to Iraq twice, and she survived not one, but two -- excuse me, three separate IED explosions. And when she was well enough, she deployed again, this time to Afghanistan, where she was often the only woman at our forward operating bases. She proudly wears the Combat Action Badge. And today, Jacare is committed to helping other wounded warriors recover from the trials of war. "Helping the troops," she says, "is what I'm all about." My fellow Americans, that's what we should be all about.

Our work is more urgent than ever, because this chapter of war is coming to an end. Soon, one of the first Marines to arrive in Afghanistan 12 years ago -- Brigadier General Daniel Yoo -- will lead his Camp Pendleton Marines as they become one of the last major groups of Marines to deploy in this war. And over the coming months, more of our troops will come home. This winter, our troop levels in Afghanistan will be down to 34,000. And by this time next year, the transition to Afghan-led security will be nearly complete. The longest war in American history will end.

As is true after every conflict, there is a risk that the devoted service of our veterans could fade from the forefront of our minds; that we might turn to other things. But part of the reason we're here today is to pledge that we will never forget the profound sacrifices that are made in our name. Today reminds us of our sacred obligations. For even though this time of war is coming to a close, our time of service to our newest veterans has only just begun.

Think about it: Our troops wear the uniform for a time, yet they wear another proud title, the title of "veteran," for decades -- for the rest of their lives. As a nation, we make sure we have the best-led, best-trained, best-equipped military in the world. We have to devote just as much energy and passion to making sure we have the best-cared for, best-treated, best-respected veterans in the world.

So when we talk about fulfilling our promises to our veterans, we don't just mean for a few years; we mean now, tomorrow, and forever -- and not just for generations past, but for this generation of veterans and all who will follow.

And that's why, as Commander-in-Chief, I'm going to keep making sure we're providing unprecedented support to our veterans. Even as we make difficult fiscal choices as a nation, we're going to keep making vital investments in our veterans. We're going to keep improving veterans' health care, including mental health care so you can stay strong. We're making sure that veterans not covered by the VA can secure quality, affordable health insurance.

We're going to keep reducing the claims backlog. We've slashed it by a third since March, and we're going to keep at it so you can get the benefits that you have earned and that you need, when you need them. We're going to keep helping our newest veterans and their families pursue their education under the Post-9/11 GI Bill. We just welcomed our one millionth student veteran, and we're ready for all those who come next.

And we're going to keep demanding that the rights and dignity of every veteran are upheld, including by pushing for the Disabilities Treaty so that our disabled veterans enjoy the same opportunities to travel and work and study around the world as everybody else. And with the help of Michelle and Dr. Jill Biden and Joining Forces, we're going to keep fighting to give every veteran who has fought for America the chance to pursue the American Dream -- a fair shot at the jobs and opportunity you need to help us rebuild and grow here at home. Because you're bringing home the skills and the work ethic and leadership necessary to start companies and serve your communities and take care of your fellow veterans.

And that's our promise to you and all who have served: to be there, to support you, when you come home -- every step of the way. And as a nation, we will strive to be worthy of the sacrifices that you've made. That's what we owe all our veterans. That's what we owe veterans like Richard Overton, who served in the Army in World War II. He was there, at -- now, everybody, I want you to know a little something about Mr. Overton here. He was there at Pearl Harbor, when the battleships were still smoldering. He was there at Okinawa. He was there at Iwo Jima, where he said, "I only got out of there by the grace of God."

When the war ended, Richard headed home to Texas to a nation bitterly divided by race. And his service on the battlefield was not always matched by the respect that he deserved at home. But this veteran held his head high. He carried on and lived his life with honor and dignity. He built his wife a house with his own two hands. He went back to work in the furniture business. In time, he served as a courier in the Texas State Capitol, where he worked for four governors, and made more friends than most of us do in a lifetime.

And today, Richard still lives in the house that he built all those years ago. He rakes his own lawn. And every Sunday he hops in his 1971 Ford truck and drives one of the nice ladies in his neighborhood to church. This is the life of one American veteran -- living proud and strong in the land he helped keep free.

And earlier this year, the great folks at Honor Flight Austin brought Richard to Washington, D.C. for the first time. And he and his fellow veterans paid their respects at the World War II Memorial. And then they visited the memorial to Martin Luther King, Jr. And as Richard sat in a wheelchair beneath that great marble statue, he wept. And the crowd that gathered around him wept, too, to see one of the oldest living veterans of World War II bear witness to a day -- to the progress of a nation -- he thought might never come.

Richard Overton, this American veteran, is 107 years old. And we are honored that he's here with us today. So let's ask Richard to stand again -- because he can stand.

And this is how we'll be judged. Not just by how well we care for our troops in battle, but how we treat them when they come home -- and by the America we build together; by what we do with the security and peace that they have helped grant us; by the progress that allows citizens from Richard Overton to Jacare Hogan to play their part in the American story.

Today, our message to all those who have ever worn the uniform of this nation is this: We will stand by your side, whether you're seven days out or, like Richard, seventy years out. Because here in America, we take care of our own. We honor the sacrifice that has been made in our name, for this nation that we love. And we commit ourselves to standing by these veterans and their families, for as long as we're blessed to walk this Earth.

God bless you all. God bless our veterans. God bless our men and women in uniform. And God bless these United States of America. Thank you.

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# Press Conference on Modifications to the Affordable Act

Good morning, everybody. (Good afternoon.)

Today I want to update the American people on our efforts to implement and improve the Affordable Care Act, and I’ll take a couple of your questions. But before I do, I just want to say a few words about the tragedy that's unfolded in the Philippines.

Over the past few days, I think all of us have been shaken by the images of the devastation wrought by Typhoon Haiyan. It’s a heartbreaking reminder of how fragile life is, and among the dead are several Americans. So our prayers are with the Filipino people, and with Filipino Americans across our country who are anxious about their family and friends back home.

One of our core principles is, when friends are in trouble, America helps. As I told President Aquino earlier this week, the United States will continue to offer whatever assistance we can. Our military personnel and USAID team do this better than anybody in the world, and they’ve been already on the ground working tirelessly to deliver food, water, medicine, shelter, and to help with airlift. Today, the aircraft carrier USS George Washington and other ships arrived to help with search- and-rescue, as well as supplies, medical care and logistical support. And more help is on the way.

America’s strength, of course, has always been more than just about what our government can do –- it’s also about what our citizens can do. It’s about the big-heartedness of the American people when they see other folks in trouble. So today, I would encourage everybody who wants to help, to visit WhiteHouse.gov/typhoon -- that's WhiteHouse.gov/typhoon -- and that will offer you links to organizations that are working on the ground and ways that you can support their efforts. Our friends in the Philippines will face a long, hard road ahead, but they’ll continue to have a friend and partner in the United States of America.

Now, switching gears, it has now been six weeks since the Affordable Care Act’s new marketplace has opened for business. I think it's fair to say that the rollout has been rough so far. And I think everybody understands that I'm not happy about the fact that the rollout has been wrought with a whole range of problems that I've been deeply concerned about. But today I want to talk about what we know after these first few weeks and what we're doing to implement and improve the law.

Yesterday, the White House announced that in the first month, more than 100,000 Americans successfully enrolled in new insurance plans. Is that as high a number as we’d like? Absolutely not. But it does mean that people want affordable health care. The problems of the website have prevented too many Americans from completing the enrollment process. And that’s on us, not on them. But there is no question that there’s real demand for quality, affordable health insurance.

In the first month, nearly a million people successfully completed an application for themselves or their families. Those applications represent more than 1.5 million people. Of those 1.5 million people, 106,000 of them have successfully signed up to get covered.

Another 396,000 have the ability to gain access to Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act. That’s been less reported on, but it shouldn’t be. Americans who are having a difficult time, who are poor, many of them working, may have a disability; they're Americans like everybody else, and the fact that they are now able to get insurance is going to be critically important.

Later today, I’ll be in Ohio, where Governor Kasich, a Republican, has expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act. And as many as 275,000 Ohioans will ultimately be better off because of it. And if every governor followed suit, another 5.4 million Americans could gain access to health care next year.

So bottom line is, in just one month, despite all the problems that we've seen with the website, more than 500,000 Americans could know the security of health care by January 1st -- many of them for the first time in their lives. And that’s life-changing and it's significant.

That still leaves about 1 million Americans who successfully made it through the website, and now qualify to buy insurance, but haven’t picked a plan yet. And there’s no question that if the website were working as it’s supposed to, that number would be much higher of people who have actually enrolled. So that’s problem number one –- making sure that the website works the way it's supposed to. It’s gotten a lot better over the last few weeks than it was on the first day, but we’re working 24/7 to get it working for the vast majority of Americans in a smooth, consistent way.

The other problem that has received a lot of attention concerns Americans who have received letters from their insurers that they may be losing the plans they bought in the old individual market, often because they no longer meet the law’s requirements to cover basic benefits like prescription drugs or doctors’ visits.

Now, as I indicated earlier, I completely get how upsetting this can be for a lot of Americans, particularly after assurances they heard from me that if they had a plan that they liked, they could keep it. And to those Americans, I hear you loud and clear. I said that I would do everything we can to fix this problem. And today I'm offering an idea that will help do it.

Already, people who have plans that predate the Affordable Care Act can keep those plans if they haven’t changed. That was already in the law. That's what's called a grandfather clause. It was included in the law. Today, we're going to extend that principle both to people whose plans have changed since the law took effect, and to people who bought plans since the law took effect.

So state insurance commissioners still have the power to decide what plans can and can’t be sold in their states. But the bottom line is, insurers can extend current plans that would otherwise be canceled into 2014, and Americans whose plans have been canceled can choose to re-enroll in the same kind of plan.

We’re also requiring insurers to extend current plans to inform their customers about two things. One, that protections -- what protections these renewed plans don’t include. And number two, that the marketplace offers new options with better coverage and tax credits that might help you bring down the cost.

So if you’ve received one of these letters, I’d encourage you to take a look at the marketplace. Even if the website isn’t working as smoothly as it should be for everybody yet, the plan comparison tool that lets you browse costs for new plans near you is working just fine.

Now, this fix won’t solve every problem for every person. But it’s going to help a lot of people. Doing more will require work with Congress. And I’ve said from the beginning, I’m willing to work with Democrats and Republicans to fix problems as they arise. This is an example of what I was talking about. We can always make this law work better.

It is important to understand, though, that the old individual market was not working well. And it’s important that we don’t pretend that somehow that’s a place worth going back to. Too often, it works fine as long as you stay healthy; it doesn’t work well when you’re sick. So year after year, Americans were routinely exposed to financial ruin, or denied coverage due to minor preexisting conditions, or dropped from coverage altogether -- even if they paid their premiums on time.

That’s one of the reasons we pursued this reform in the first place. And that’s why I will not accept proposals that are just another brazen attempt to undermine or repeal the overall law and drag us back into a broken system. We will continue to make the case, even to folks who choose to keep their own plans, that they should shop around in the new marketplace because there’s a good chance that they’ll be able to buy better insurance at lower cost.

So we’re going to do everything we can to help the Americans who have received these cancellation notices. But I also want everybody to remember there are still 40 million Americans who don’t have health insurance at all. I’m not going to walk away from 40 million people who have the chance to get health insurance for the first time. And I’m not going to walk away from something that has helped the cost of health care grow at its slowest rate in 50 years.

So we’re at the opening weeks of the project to build a better health care system for everybody -- a system that will offer real financial security and peace of mind to millions of Americans. It is a complex process. There are all kinds of challenges. I’m sure there will be additional challenges that come up. And it’s important that we’re honest and straightforward in terms of when we come up with a problem with these reforms and these laws, that we address them. But we’ve got to move forward on this.

It took 100 years for us to even get to the point where we could start talking about and implementing a law to make sure everybody has got health insurance. And my pledge to the American people is, is that we’re going to solve the problems that are there, we’re going to get it right, and the Affordable Care Act is going to work for the American people.

So with that, I’m going to take your questions, and I’m going to start with Julie Pace of AP.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. The combination of the website problems and the concerns over the policy cancellations has sparked a lot of worry within your own party, and polls also show that you’re taking some hits with the public on both your overall job approval rating and also on factors like trust and honesty. Do you feel as though the flawed health care rollout has led to a breach in the public trust and confidence in government? And if so, how do you plan to resolve that?

President Obama: There is no doubt that people are frustrated. We just came out of a shutdown and the possibility that for the first time in over 200 years, we wouldn’t pay our bills. And people breathed a sigh of relief when that finally got done, and the next thing they know is, is that the President’s health care reform can’t get the website to work and that there are these other problems with respect to cancellation notices.

And I understand why folks are frustrated. I would be, too. Because sometimes people look at what’s taking place in Washington and they say, not enough is getting done that helps me with my life. And regardless of what Congress does, ultimately I’m the President of the United States and they expect me to do something about it.

So in terms of how I intend to approach it, I’m just going to keep on working as hard as I can around the priorities that the American people care about. And I think it’s legitimate for them to expect me to have to win back some credibility on this health care law in particular, and on a whole range of these issues in general.

And that’s on me. I mean, we fumbled the rollout on this health care law. There are a whole bunch of things about it that are working really well which people didn’t notice because they weren’t controversial -- so making sure kids could stay on their parents’ plans until they were -- through the age of 25, and making sure that seniors got more discounts on their prescription drugs. There were a whole bunch of stuff that we did well over the first three years.

But we always knew that these marketplaces, creating a place where people can shop and through competition get a better deal for the health insurance that their families need, we always knew that that was going to be complicated and everybody was going to be paying a lot of attention to it. And we should have done a better job getting that right on day one -- not on day 28 or on day 40.

I am confident that by the time we look back on this next year, that people are going to say this is working well, and it’s helping a lot of people. But my intention in terms of winning back the confidence of the American people is just to work as hard as I can; identify the problems that we’ve got, make sure that we’re fixing them. Whether it’s a website, whether it is making sure that folks who got these cancellation notices get help, we’re just going to keep on chipping away at this until the job is done.

Major Garrett.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. You said while the law was being debated, “if you like your plan, you can keep it.” You said after the law was implemented or signed, “if you like your plan, you can keep it.” Americans believed you, sir, when you said that to them over and over. Do you not believe, sir, the American people deserve a deeper, more transparent accountability from you as to why you said that over and over when your own statistic published in the Federal Register alerted your policy staff -- and I presume you -- to the fact that millions of Americans would, in fact, probably fall into the very gap you’re trying to administratively fix now?

That's one question. Second question. (Laughter.) You were informed, or several people in this building were informed two weeks before the launch of the website that it was failing the most basic tests internally, and yet a decision was made to launch the website on October 1st. Did you, sir, make that test? And if so, did you regret that?

President Obama: Okay, on the website, I was not informed directly that the website would not be working the way it was supposed to. Had I been informed, I wouldn’t be going out saying, boy, this is going to be great.

I’m accused of a lot of things, but I don't think I’m stupid enough to go around saying, this is going to be like shopping on Amazon or Travelocity a week before the website opens if I thought that it wasn’t going to work. So clearly, we and I did not have enough awareness about the problems in the website. Even a week into it, the thinking was that these were some glitches that would be fixed with patches, as opposed to some broader systemic problems that took much longer to fix and we’re still working on them.

So that doesn't excuse the fact that they just don't work. But I think it’s fair to say that, no, Garrett -- Major, we would not have rolled out something knowing very well that it wasn’t going to work the way it was supposed, given all the scrutiny that we knew was going to be on the website.

With respect to the pledge I made that if you like your plan, you can keep it, I think -- and I’ve said in interviews -- that there is no doubt that the way I put that forward unequivocally ended up not being accurate. It was not because of my intention not to deliver on that commitment and that promise. We put a grandfather clause into the law, but it was insufficient.

Keep in mind that the individual market accounts for 5 percent of the population. So when I said you can keep your health care, I’m looking at folks who’ve got employer-based health care; I’m looking at folks who’ve got Medicare and Medicaid -- and that accounts for the vast majority of Americans. And then for people who don't have any health insurance at all, obviously that didn't apply. My commitment to them was, you're going to be able to get affordable health care for the first time.

You have an individual market that accounts for about 5 percent of the population. And our working assumption was -- my working assumption was that the majority of those folks would find better policies at lower costs or the same costs in the marketplaces, and that the universe of folks who potentially would not find a better deal in the marketplaces, the grandfather clause would work sufficiently for them. And it didn't. And again, that's on us. Which is why we’re -- that's on me. And that's why I’m trying to fix it.

And as I said earlier, I guess last week, and I will repeat, that's something I deeply regret because it’s scary getting a cancellation notice.

Now, it is important to understand that out of that population, typically there is constant churn in that market. This market is not very stable and reliable for people. So people have a lot of complaints when they're in that marketplace. As long as you're healthy, things seem to be going pretty good. And so a lot of people think, I’ve got pretty good insurance -- until they get sick -- and then suddenly they look at the fine print, and they’ve got a $50,000 out-of-pocket expense that they can't pay.

We know that on average over the last decade, each year, premiums in that individual market would go up an average of 15 percent a year. I know that because when we were talking about health care reform, one of the complaints was: I bought health care in the individual market and I just got a notice from the insurer, they dropped me after I had an illness; or my premium skyrocketed by 20 or 30 percent, why aren’t we doing something about this?

So part of what our goal has been is to make sure that that individual market is stable and fair, and has the kind of consumer protections that make sure that people don’t get a rude surprise when they really need health insurance. But if you just got a cancellation notice, and so far you’re thinking, my prices are pretty good, you haven’t been sick, and it fits your budget, and now you get this notice -- you’re going to be worried about it. And if the insurer is saying the reason you’re getting this notice is because of the Affordable Care Act, then you’re going to be understandably aggravated about it.

Now, for a big portion of those people, the truth is they might have gotten a notice saying, we’re jacking up your rates by 30 percent. They might have said, from here on out, we’re not going to cover X, Y and Z illnesses, we’re changing the -- because these were all 12-month policies. The insurance companies were under no obligation to renew the exact same policies that you had before.

But, look, one of the things I understood when we decided to reform that health insurance market, part of the reason why it hasn’t been done before and it’s very difficult to do, is that anything that’s going on that’s tough in the health care market, if you initiated a reform, can be attributed to your law. And so what we want to do is to be able to say to these folks, you know what, the Affordable Care Act is not going to be the reason why insurers have to cancel your plan.

Now, what folks may find is the insurance companies may still come back and say, we want to charge you 20 percent more than we did last year; or we’re not going to cover prescription drugs now. But that’s in the nature of the market that existed earlier.

Question: Did you decide, sir, that the simple declaration was something the American people could handle, but this nuanced answer you just gave now was something that you couldn’t handle and you didn’t trust the American people with a fuller truth?

President Obama: No. I think, as I said earlier, Major, my expectation was that for 98 percent of the American people, either it genuinely wouldn't change at all, or they'd be pleasantly surprised with the options in the marketplace, and that the grandfather clause would cover the rest.

That proved not to be the case. And that's on me. And the American people -- those who got cancellation notices do deserve and have received an apology from me. But they don't want just words. What they want is whether we can make sure that they are in a better place, and that we meet that commitment.

And, by the way, I think it's very important for me to note that there are a whole bunch of folks up in Congress and others who made this statement, and they were entirely sincere about it. And the fact that you've got this percentage of people who have had this impact -- I want them to know that their senator or congressman, they were making representations based on what I told them and what this White House and our administrative staff told them. And so it's not on them. It's on us. But it is something that we intend to fix.

Steve Collinson.

Question: Do you have reason to believe that Iran would walk away from nuclear talks if Congress draws up new sanctions? And would a diplomatic breakdown at this stage leave you no option but military action? And how do you respond to your critics on the Hill who say that it was only tough sanctions that got Iran to the table, but only tougher sanctions will make it capitulate?

President Obama: Well, let me make a couple of points. Number one, I've said before and I will repeat: We do not want Iran having nuclear weapons. And it would be not only dangerous to us and our allies, but it would be destabilizing to the entire region, and could trigger a nuclear arms race that would make life much more dangerous for all of us. So our policy is Iran cannot have nuclear weapons. And I'm leaving all options on the table to make sure that we meet that goal.

Point number two: The reason we've got such vigorous sanctions is because I and my administration put in place, when I came into office, the international structure to have the most effective sanctions ever. And so I think it's fair to say that I know a little bit about sanctions, since we've set them up, and made sure that we mobilize the entire international community so that there weren't a lot of loopholes and they really had bite.

And the intention in setting up those sanctions always was to bring the Iranians to the table so that we could resolve this issue peacefully, because that is my preference. That's my preference because any armed conflict has cost to it, but it's also my preference because the best way to assure that a country does not have nuclear weapons is that they are making a decision not to have nuclear weapons, and we're in a position to verify that they don't have nuclear weapons.

So as a consequence of the sanctions that we put in place -- and I appreciate all the help, bipartisan help, that we received from Congress in making that happen -- Iran's economy has been crippled. They had a -5 percent growth rate last year. Their currency plummeted. They're having significant problems in just the day-to-day economy on the ground in Iran. And President Rouhani made a decision that he was prepared to come and have a conversation with the international community about what they could do to solve this problem with us.

We've now had a series of conversations, and it has never been realistic that we would resolve the entire problem all at once. What we have done is seen the possibility of an agreement in which Iran would halt advances on its program; that it would dilute some of the highly enriched uranium that makes it easier for them to potentially produce a weapon; that they are subjecting themselves to much more vigorous inspections so that we know exactly what they’re doing at all their various facilities; and that that would then provide time and space for us to test, over a certain period of months, whether or not they are prepared to actually resolve this issue to the satisfaction of the international community -- making us confident that, in fact, they’re not pursuing a nuclear weapons program.

In return, the basic structure of what’s been talked about, although not completed, is that we would provide very modest relief at the margins of the sanctions that we’ve set up. But importantly, we would leave in place the core sanctions that are most effective and have most impact on the Iranian economy, specifically oil sanctions and sanctions with respect to banks and financing. And what that gives us is the opportunity to test how serious are they, but it also gives us an assurance that if it turns out six months from now that they’re not serious, we can crank -- we can dial those sanctions right back up.

So my message to Congress has been that, let’s see if this short-term, phase-one deal can be completed to our satisfaction where we’re absolutely certain that while we’re talking with the Iranians, they’re not busy advancing their program. We can buy some additional months in terms of their breakout capacity. Let’s test how willing they are to actually resolve this diplomatically and peacefully.

We will have lost nothing if, at the end of the day, it turns out that they are not prepared to provide the international community the hard proof and assurances necessary for us to know that they’re not pursuing a nuclear weapon. And if that turns out to be the case, then not only is our entire sanctions infrastructure still in place, not only are they still losing money from the fact that they can’t sell their oil and get revenue from their oil as easily, even throughout these talks, but other options remain.

But what I’ve said to members of Congress is that if, in fact, we’re serious about trying to resolve this diplomatically -- because no matter how good our military is, military options are always messy, they’re always difficult, always have unintended consequences, and in this situation are never complete in terms of making us certain that they don’t then go out and pursue even more vigorously nuclear weapons in the future -- if we’re serious about pursuing diplomacy, then there’s no need for us to add new sanctions on top of the sanctions that are already very effective and that brought them to the table in the first place.

Now, if it turns out they can’t deliver, they can’t come to the table in a serious way and get this issue resolved, the sanctions can be ramped back up. And we’ve got that option.

All right. Roger Runningen. Roger, it’s his birthday, by the way. So that’s not the reason you got a question, but I thought it was important to note that.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President.

President Obama: Happy birthday.

Question: Back to health care. Can you guarantee for the American people that the health care website is going to be fully operational for all people, not just the vast majority, by November 30? And second, more broadly, this is your signature domestic piece of legislation. You hear criticism on the Hill that you and your White House team are too insular. Is that how this mess came to be?

President Obama: Well, I think there is going to be a lot of evaluation of how we got to this point. And I assure you that I’ve been asking a lot of questions about that. The truth is that this is, number one, very complicated. The website itself is doing a lot of stuff. There aren’t a lot of websites out there that have to help people compare their possible insurance options, verify income to find out what kind of tax credits they might get, communicate with those insurance companies so they can purchase, make sure that all of it’s verified. So there’s just a bunch of pieces to it that made it challenging.

And you combine that with the fact that the federal government does a lot of things really well. One of the things it does not do well is information technology procurement. This is kind of a systematic problem that we have across the board. And it is not surprising then that there were going to be some problems.

Now, I think we have to ask ourselves some hard questions inside the White House as opposed to why we didn't see more of these problems coming earlier on -- A, so we could set expectations; B, so that we could look for different ways for people to end up applying.

So ultimately, you’re right. This is something that's really important to me, and it’s really important to millions of Americans who have been waiting for a really long time to try to get health care because they don't have it. And I am very frustrated, but I’m also somebody who, if I fumbled the ball, I’m going to wait until I get the next play, and then I’m going to try to run as hard as I can and do right by the team. So ultimately, I’m the head of this team. We did fumble the ball on it, and what I’m going to do is make sure that we get it fixed.

In terms of what happens on November 30th or December 1st, I think it’s fair to say that the improvement will be marked and noticeable. The website will work much better on November 30th, December 1st than it worked certainly on October 1st. That's a pretty low bar. It will be working a lot better than it is -- it was last week, and it will be working better than it was this week, which means that the majority of people who go to the website will see a website that is working the way it’s supposed to.

I think it is not possible for me to guarantee that 100 percent of the people 100 percent of the time going on this website will have a perfectly seamless, smooth experience. We’re going to have to continue to improve it even after November 30th, December 1st. But the majority of people who use it will be able to see it operate the way it was supposed to.

One thing that we’ve discovered, though, that I think is worth noting: A lot of focus has been on the website and the technology, and that's partly because that's how we initially identified it -- these are glitches. What we’re discovering is that part of the problem has been technology -- hardware and software -- and that's being upgraded. But even if we get the hardware and software working exactly the way it’s supposed to with relatively minor glitches, what we’re also discovering is that insurance is complicated to buy.

And another mistake that we made I think was underestimating the difficulties of people purchasing insurance online and shopping for a lot of options with a lot of costs and a lot of different benefits and plans, and somehow expecting that that would be very smooth. And then they’ve also got to try apply for tax credits on the website.

So what we’re doing even as we’re trying to solve the technical problems is also what can we do to make the application a little bit simpler; what can we do to make it in English as opposed to bureaucratese; are there steps that we can skip while still getting the core information that people need

And part of what we’re realizing is that they are going to be a certain portion of people who are just going to need more help and more handholding in the application process. And so I guess part of the continuous improvement that I’m looking at is not just a technical issue. It’s also, can we streamline the application process; what are we doing to give people more assistance in the application process; how do the call centers and the people who are helping folks in-person; how are they trained so that things can go more smoothly.

Because the bottom line ultimately is, I just want people to know what their options are in a clear way. And buying health insurance is never going to be like buying a song on iTunes. It’s just a much more complicated transaction. But I think we can continue to make it better -- all of which is to say that on December 1st, November 30th, it will be a lot better, but there will still be some problems. Some of those will not be because of technological problems -- although I’m sure that there will still be some glitches that have to be smoothed out. Some of it’s going to be how are we making this application process more user-friendly for folks.

And one good example of this, by the way, just to use an analogy -- when we came into office, we heard a lot of complaints about the financial aid forms that families have to fill out to get federal financial aid. And I actually remember applying for some of that stuff and remember how difficult and confusing it was. And Arne Duncan over at Education worked with a team to see what we could do to simplify it, and it made a big difference.

And that's part of the process that we’ve got to go through. And in fact, if we can get some focus groups and we sit down with actual users and see how well is this working, what would improve it, what part of it didn't you understand -- that all I think is part of what we’re going to be working on in the weeks ahead.

Question: What about the insularity criticism that you hear on the Hill?

President Obama: I’ve got to say I meet with an awful lot of folks, and I talk to an awful lot of folks every day. And I have lunches with CEOs and IT venture capitalists and labor leaders and pretty much folks from all walks of life on a whole bunch of topics. And if you looked at my schedule on any given day, we’re interacting with a whole lot of people.

And I think it’s fair to say that we have a pretty good track record of working with folks on technology and IT from our campaign where, both in 2008 and 2012, we did a pretty darn good job on that. So it’s not -- the idea that somehow we didn't have access or were interested in people’s ideas, I think isn’t accurate. What is true is that, as I said before, our IT systems, how we purchase technology in the federal government is cumbersome, complicated, and outdated.

And so this isn’t a situation where on my campaign I could simply say, who are the best folks out there; let’s get them around a table, let’s figure out what we’re doing, and we’re just going to continue to improve it and refine it and work on our goals. If you're doing it at the federal government level, you're going through 40 pages of specs and this and that and the other, and there are all kinds of laws involved, and it makes it more difficult. It's part of the reason why, chronically, federal IT programs are over budget, behind schedule.

And one of the -- when I do some Monday morning quarterbacking on myself, one of the things that I do recognize is -- since I know that the federal government has not been good at this stuff in the past -- two years ago, as we were thinking about this, we might have done more to make sure that we were breaking the mold on how we were going to be setting this up. But that doesn't help us now. We've got to move forward.

Jeff Mason.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Today's fix that you just announced leaves it up to state insurance commissioners and insurance companies to ultimately decide whether to allow old policies to be renewed for a year. How confident are you that they will do that? And secondly, how concerned are you that this flawed rollout may hurt Democrats' chances in next year's midterm elections, and your ability to advance other priorities such as immigration reform?

President Obama: On the first question, traditionally, state insurance commissioners make decisions about what plans can be or cannot be sold, how they interact with insurers. What we're essentially saying is the Affordable Care Act is not going to be the factor in what happens with folks in the individual market. And my guess is right away you're going to see a number of state insurance commissioners exercise it.

Part of the challenge is the individual markets are different in different states. There are some states that have individual insurance markets that already have almost all the consumer protections that the Affordable Care Act does. They match up pretty good. It's not some big jump for folks to move into the marketplace. In others, they're pretty low standards, so you can sell pretty substandard plans in those markets. And that's where people might see a bigger jump in their premiums.

So I think there's going to be some state-by-state evaluation on how this is handled. But the key point is, is that it allows us to be able to say to the folks who received these notices: Look, I, the President of the United States and the insurance –- that the insurance model, the Affordable Care Act, is not going to be getting in the way of you shopping in the individual market that you used to have. As I said, there are still going to be some folks who over time, I think, are going to find that the marketplaces are better.

One way I described this to -- I met with a group of senators when this issue first came up -- and it's not a perfect analogy -- but we made a decision as a society that every car has to have a seatbelt or airbags. And so you pass a regulation. And there are some additional costs, particularly at the start of increasing the safety and protections, but we make a decision as a society that the costs are outweighed by the benefits of all the lives that are saved. So what we're saying now is if you're buying a new car, you got to have a seatbelt.

Well, the problem with the grandfather clause that we put in place is it's almost like we said to folks, you got to buy a new car, even if you can't afford it right now. And sooner or later, folks are going to start trading in their old cars. But we don't need -- if their life circumstance is such where, for now at least, they want to keep the old car, even if the new car is better, we should be able to give them that option. And that's what we want to do.

And, by the way, that's what we should have been able to do in drafting the rules in the first place. So, again, these are two fumbles on something that -- on a big game, which -- but the game is not over.

With respect to the politics of it, I'll let you guys do a lot of the work on projecting what this means for various political scenarios. There is no doubt that our failure to roll out the ACA smoothly has put a burden on Democrats, whether they're running or not, because they stood up and supported this effort through thick and thin. And I feel deeply responsible for making it harder for them rather than easier for them to continue to promote the core values that I think led them to support this thing in the first place -- which is, in this country, as wealthy as we are, everybody should be able to have the security of affordable health care. And that's why I feel so strongly about fixing it.

My first and foremost obligation is the American people, to make sure that they can get what's there -- if we can just get the darn website working and smooth this thing out -- which is plans that are affordable, and allow them to take advantage of tax credits and give them a better deal.

But I also do feel an obligation to everybody out there who supported this effort. When we don't do a good job on the rollout, we're letting them down. And I don't like doing that. So my commitment to them is, we're going to just keep on doing better every day until we get it done.

And in terms of the impact on me -- I think to some extent I addressed it when I talked to Julie -- there are going to be ups and downs during the course of my presidency. And I think I said early on when I was running -- I am not a perfect man, and I will not be a perfect President, but I'll wake up every single day working as hard as I can on behalf of Americans out there from every walk of life who are working hard, meeting their responsibilities, but sometimes are struggling because the way the system works isn't giving them a fair shot.

And that pledge I haven't broke. That commitment, that promise, continues to be -- continues to hold -- the promise that I wouldn't be perfect, number one, but also the promise that as long as I've got the honor of having this office, I'm just going to work as hard as I can to make things better for folks. And what that means specifically in this health care arena is we can't go back to the status quo.

I mean, right now everybody is properly focused on us not doing a good job on the rollout, and that’s legitimate and I get it. There have been times where I thought we were kind of slapped around a little bit unjustly. This one is deserved. Right? It’s on us.

But we can’t lose sight of the fact that the status quo before the Affordable Care Act was not working at all. If the health care system had been working fine, and everybody had high-quality health insurance at affordable prices, I wouldn’t have made it a priority; we wouldn’t have been fighting this hard to get it done -- which is why, when I see sometimes folks up on Capitol Hill, and Republicans in particular, who have been suggesting repeal, repeal, let’s get rid of this thing, I keep on asking what is it that you want to do? Are you suggesting that the status quo was working? Because it wasn’t, and everybody knows it. It wasn’t working in the individual market and it certainly wasn’t working for the 41 million people who didn’t have health insurance.

And so what we did was we chose a path that was the least disruptive, to try to finally make sure that health care is treated in this country like it is in every other advanced country -- that it’s not some privilege that just a certain portion of people can have, but it’s something that everybody has some confidence about. And we didn’t go far left and choose an approach that would have been much more disruptive. We didn’t adopt some more conservative proposals that would have been much more disruptive. We tried to choose a way that built off the existing system. But it is complicated, it is hard, but I make no apologies for us taking this on -- because somebody sooner or later had to do it. I do make apologies for not having executed better over the last several months.

Question: And do you think that execution and the flaws in the rollout will affect your ability to do other things, like immigration reform and other policy priorities?

President Obama: Well, look, if it comes to immigration reform, there is no reason for us not to do immigration reform. And we’ve already got strong bipartisan support for immigration reform out of the Senate. You’ve got -- I met with a number of traditionally very conservative clergy who are deeply committed to immigration reform. We’ve got the business community entirely behind immigration reform. So you’ve got a bunch of constituencies that are traditionally much more -- have leaned much more heavily towards the Republicans who are behind this.

So if people are looking for an excuse not to do the right thing on immigration reform, they can always find an excuse -- we’ve run out of time, or this is hard, or the list goes on and on. But my working assumption is people should want to do the right thing. And when you’ve got an issue that would strengthen borders, make sure that the legal immigration system works the way it’s supposed to, that would go after employers who have been doing the wrong thing when it comes to hiring undocumented workers, and would allow folks who are here illegally to get right with the law and pay a fine, and learn English and get to the back of the line, but ultimately join fully our American community -- when you’ve got a law that makes sense, you shouldn’t be looking for an excuse not to do it. And I’m going to keep on pushing to make sure it gets done.

Am I going to have to do some work to rebuild confidence around some of our initiatives? Yes. But part of this job is the things that go right, you guys aren’t going to write about; the things that go wrong get prominent attention. That’s how it has always been. That’s not unique to me as President. And I’m up to the challenge. We’re going to get this done.

All right? Thank you, everybody.

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# Statement on the Iran Accord

Good evening. Today, the United States -- together with our close allies and partners -- took an important first step toward a comprehensive solution that addresses our concerns with the Islamic Republic of Iran’s nuclear program.

Since I took office, I’ve made clear my determination to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. As I’ve said many times, my strong preference is to resolve this issue peacefully, and we’ve extended the hand of diplomacy. Yet for many years, Iran has been unwilling to meet its obligations to the international community. So my administration worked with Congress, the United Nations Security Council and countries around the world to impose unprecedented sanctions on the Iranian government.

These sanctions have had a substantial impact on the Iranian economy, and with the election of a new Iranian President earlier this year, an opening for diplomacy emerged. I spoke personally with President Rouhani of Iran earlier this fall. Secretary Kerry has met multiple times with Iran’s Foreign Minister. And we have pursued intensive diplomacy -- bilaterally with the Iranians, and together with our P5-plus-1 partners -- the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia, and China, as well as the European Union.

Today, that diplomacy opened up a new path toward a world that is more secure -- a future in which we can verify that Iran’s nuclear program is peaceful and that it cannot build a nuclear weapon.

While today’s announcement is just a first step, it achieves a great deal. For the first time in nearly a decade, we have halted the progress of the Iranian nuclear program, and key parts of the program will be rolled back. Iran has committed to halting certain levels of enrichment and neutralizing part of its stockpiles. Iran cannot use its next-generation centrifuges, which are used for enriching uranium. Iran cannot install or start up new centrifuges, and its production of centrifuges will be limited. Iran will halt work at its plutonium reactor. And new inspections will provide extensive access to Iran’s nuclear facilities and allow the international community to verify whether Iran is keeping its commitments.

These are substantial limitations which will help prevent Iran from building a nuclear weapon. Simply put, they cut off Iran’s most likely paths to a bomb. Meanwhile, this first step will create time and space over the next six months for more negotiations to fully address our comprehensive concerns about the Iranian program. And because of this agreement, Iran cannot use negotiations as cover to advance its program.

On our side, the United States and our friends and allies have agreed to provide Iran with modest relief, while continuing to apply our toughest sanctions. We will refrain from imposing new sanctions, and we will allow the Iranian government access to a portion of the revenue that they have been denied through sanctions. But the broader architecture of sanctions will remain in place and we will continue to enforce them vigorously. And if Iran does not fully meet its commitments during this six-month phase, we will turn off the relief and ratchet up the pressure.

Over the next six months, we will work to negotiate a comprehensive solution. We approach these negotiations with a basic understanding: Iran, like any nation, should be able to access peaceful nuclear energy. But because of its record of violating its obligations, Iran must accept strict limitations on its nuclear program that make it impossible to develop a nuclear weapon.

In these negotiations, nothing will be agreed to unless everything is agreed to. The burden is on Iran to prove to the world that its nuclear program will be exclusively for peaceful purposes.

If Iran seizes this opportunity, the Iranian people will benefit from rejoining the international community, and we can begin to chip away at the mistrust between our two nations. This would provide Iran with a dignified path to forge a new beginning with the wider world based on mutual respect. If, on the other hand, Iran refuses, it will face growing pressure and isolation.

Over the last few years, Congress has been a key partner in imposing sanctions on the Iranian government, and that bipartisan effort made possible the progress that was achieved today. Going forward, we will continue to work closely with Congress. However, now is not the time to move forward on new sanctions -– because doing so would derail this promising first step, alienate us from our allies and risk unraveling the coalition that enabled our sanctions to be enforced in the first place.

That international unity is on display today. The world is united in support of our determination to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. Iran must know that security and prosperity will never come through the pursuit of nuclear weapons -- it must be reached through fully verifiable agreements that make Iran’s pursuit of nuclear weapons impossible.

As we go forward, the resolve of the United States will remain firm, as will our commitments to our friends and allies –- particularly Israel and our Gulf partners, who have good reason to be skeptical about Iran’s intentions.

Ultimately, only diplomacy can bring about a durable solution to the challenge posed by Iran’s nuclear program. As President and Commander-in-Chief, I will do what is necessary to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. But I have a profound responsibility to try to resolve our differences peacefully, rather than rush towards conflict. Today, we have a real opportunity to achieve a comprehensive, peaceful settlement, and I believe we must test it.

The first step that we’ve taken today marks the most significant and tangible progress that we’ve made with Iran since I took office. And now we must use the months ahead to pursue a lasting and comprehensive settlement that would resolve an issue that has threatened our security -- and the security of our allies -- for decades. It won’t be easy, and huge challenges remain ahead. But through strong and principled diplomacy, the United States of America will do our part on behalf of a world of greater peace, security, and cooperation among nations.

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# On the Passing of Nelson Mandela

At his trial in 1964, Nelson Mandela closed his statement from the dock saying, “I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.”

And Nelson Mandela lived for that ideal, and he made it real. He achieved more than could be expected of any man. Today, he has gone home. And we have lost one of the most influential, courageous, and profoundly good human beings that any of us will share time with on this Earth. He no longer belongs to us -- he belongs to the ages.

Through his fierce dignity and unbending will to sacrifice his own freedom for the freedom of others, Madiba transformed South Africa -- and moved all of us. His journey from a prisoner to a President embodied the promise that human beings -- and countries -- can change for the better. His commitment to transfer power and reconcile with those who jailed him set an example that all humanity should aspire to, whether in the lives of nations or our own personal lives. And the fact that he did it all with grace and good humor, and an ability to acknowledge his own imperfections, only makes the man that much more remarkable. As he once said, “I am not a saint, unless you think of a saint as a sinner who keeps on trying.”

I am one of the countless millions who drew inspiration from Nelson Mandela's life. My very first political action, the first thing I ever did that involved an issue or a policy or politics, was a protest against apartheid. I studied his words and his writings. The day that he was released from prison gave me a sense of what human beings can do when they’re guided by their hopes and not by their fears. And like so many around the globe, I cannot fully imagine my own life without the example that Nelson Mandela set, and so long as I live I will do what I can to learn from him.

To GraÃ§a Machel and his family, Michelle and I extend our deepest sympathy and gratitude for sharing this extraordinary man with us. His life’s work meant long days away from those who loved him the most. And I only hope that the time spent with him these last few weeks brought peace and comfort to his family.

To the people of South Africa, we draw strength from the example of renewal, and reconciliation, and resilience that you made real. A free South Africa at peace with itself -- that’s an example to the world, and that’s Madiba’s legacy to the nation he loved.

We will not likely see the likes of Nelson Mandela again. So it falls to us as best we can to forward the example that he set: to make decisions guided not by hate, but by love; to never discount the difference that one person can make; to strive for a future that is worthy of his sacrifice.

For now, let us pause and give thanks for the fact that Nelson Mandela lived -- a man who took history in his hands, and bent the arc of the moral universe toward justice. May God Bless his memory and keep him in peace.

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# Memorial Address for Nelson Mandela

To GraÃ§a Machel and the Mandela family; to President Zuma and members of the government; to heads of states and government, past and present; distinguished guests -- it is a singular honor to be with you today, to celebrate a life like no other. To the people of South Africa -- people of every race and walk of life -- the world thanks you for sharing Nelson Mandela with us. His struggle was your struggle. His triumph was your triumph. Your dignity and your hope found expression in his life. And your freedom, your democracy is his cherished legacy.

It is hard to eulogize any man -- to capture in words not just the facts and the dates that make a life, but the essential truth of a person -- their private joys and sorrows; the quiet moments and unique qualities that illuminate someone’s soul. How much harder to do so for a giant of history, who moved a nation toward justice, and in the process moved billions around the world.

Born during World War I, far from the corridors of power, a boy raised herding cattle and tutored by the elders of his Thembu tribe, Madiba would emerge as the last great liberator of the 20th century. Like Gandhi, he would lead a resistance movement -- a movement that at its start had little prospect for success. Like Dr. King, he would give potent voice to the claims of the oppressed and the moral necessity of racial justice. He would endure a brutal imprisonment that began in the time of Kennedy and Khrushchev, and reached the final days of the Cold War. Emerging from prison, without the force of arms, he would -- like Abraham Lincoln -- hold his country together when it threatened to break apart. And like America’s Founding Fathers, he would erect a constitutional order to preserve freedom for future generations -- a commitment to democracy and rule of law ratified not only by his election, but by his willingness to step down from power after only one term.

Given the sweep of his life, the scope of his accomplishments, the adoration that he so rightly earned, it’s tempting I think to remember Nelson Mandela as an icon, smiling and serene, detached from the tawdry affairs of lesser men. But Madiba himself strongly resisted such a lifeless portrait. Instead, Madiba insisted on sharing with us his doubts and his fears; his miscalculations along with his victories. "I am not a saint," he said, "unless you think of a saint as a sinner who keeps on trying."

It was precisely because he could admit to imperfection -- because he could be so full of good humor, even mischief, despite the heavy burdens he carried -- that we loved him so. He was not a bust made of marble; he was a man of flesh and blood -- a son and a husband, a father and a friend. And that’s why we learned so much from him, and that’s why we can learn from him still. For nothing he achieved was inevitable. In the arc of his life, we see a man who earned his place in history through struggle and shrewdness, and persistence and faith. He tells us what is possible not just in the pages of history books, but in our own lives as well.

Mandela showed us the power of action; of taking risks on behalf of our ideals. Perhaps Madiba was right that he inherited, "a proud rebelliousness, a stubborn sense of fairness" from his father. And we know he shared with millions of black and colored South Africans the anger born of, "a thousand slights, a thousand indignities, a thousand unremembered moments…a desire to fight the system that imprisoned my people," he said.

But like other early giants of the ANC -- the Sisulus and Tambos -- Madiba disciplined his anger and channeled his desire to fight into organization, and platforms, and strategies for action, so men and women could stand up for their God-given dignity. Moreover, he accepted the consequences of his actions, knowing that standing up to powerful interests and injustice carries a price:

I have fought against white domination and I have fought against black domination. I’ve cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and [with] equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.1

Mandela taught us the power of action, but he also taught us the power of ideas; the importance of reason and arguments; the need to study not only those who you agree with, but also those who you don’t agree with. He understood that ideas cannot be contained by prison walls, or extinguished by a sniper’s bullet. He turned his trial into an indictment of apartheid because of his eloquence and his passion, but also because of his training as an advocate. He used decades in prison to sharpen his arguments, but also to spread his thirst for knowledge to others in the movement. And he learned the language and the customs of his oppressor so that one day he might better convey to them how their own freedom depend upon his.

Mandela demonstrated that action and ideas are not enough. No matter how right, they must be chiseled into law and institutions. He was practical, testing his beliefs against the hard surface of circumstance and history. On core principles he was unyielding, which is why he could rebuff offers of unconditional release, reminding the Apartheid regime that "prisoners cannot enter into contracts."

But as he showed in painstaking negotiations to transfer power and draft new laws, he was not afraid to compromise for the sake of a larger goal. And because he was not only a leader of a movement but a skillful politician, the Constitution that emerged was worthy of this multiracial democracy, true to his vision of laws that protect minority as well as majority rights, and the precious freedoms of every South African.

And finally, Mandela understood the ties that bind the human spirit. There is a word in South Africa -- Ubuntu -- a word that captures Mandela’s greatest gift: his recognition that we are all bound together in ways that are invisible to the eye; that there is a oneness to humanity; that we achieve ourselves by sharing ourselves with others, and caring for those around us.

We can never know how much of this sense was innate in him, or how much was shaped in a dark and solitary cell. But we remember the gestures, large and small -- introducing his jailers as honored guests at his inauguration; taking a pitch in a Springbok uniform; turning his family’s heartbreak into a call to confront HIV/AIDS -- that revealed the depth of his empathy and his understanding. He not only embodied Ubuntu, he taught millions to find that truth within themselves.

It took a man like Madiba to free not just the prisoner, but the jailer as well -- to show that you must trust others so that they may trust you; to teach that reconciliation is not a matter of ignoring a cruel past, but a means of confronting it with inclusion and generosity and truth. He changed laws, but he also changed hearts.

For the people of South Africa, for those he inspired around the globe, Madiba’s passing is rightly a time of mourning, and a time to celebrate a heroic life. But I believe it should also prompt in each of us a time for self-reflection. With honesty, regardless of our station or our circumstance, we must ask: How well have I applied his lessons in my own life? It’s a question I ask myself, as a man and as a President.

We know that, like South Africa, the United States had to overcome centuries of racial subjugation. As was true here, it took sacrifice -- the sacrifice of countless people, known and unknown, to see the dawn of a new day. Michelle and I are beneficiaries of that struggle. But in America, and in South Africa, and in countries all around the globe, we cannot allow our progress to cloud the fact that our work is not yet done.

The struggles that follow the victory of formal equality or universal franchise may not be as filled with drama and moral clarity as those that came before, but they are no less important. For around the world today, we still see children suffering from hunger and disease. We still see run-down schools. We still see young people without prospects for the future. Around the world today, men and women are still imprisoned for their political beliefs, and are still persecuted for what they look like, and how they worship, and who they love. That is happening today.

And so we, too, must act on behalf of justice. We, too, must act on behalf of peace. There are too many people who happily embrace Madiba’s legacy of racial reconciliation, but passionately resist even modest reforms that would challenge chronic poverty and growing inequality. There are too many leaders who claim solidarity with Madiba’s struggle for freedom, but do not tolerate dissent from their own people. And there are too many of us on the sidelines, comfortable in complacency or cynicism when our voices must be heard.

The questions we face today -- how to promote equality and justice; how to uphold freedom and human rights; how to end conflict and sectarian war -- these things do not have easy answers. But there were no easy answers in front of that child born in World War I. Nelson Mandela reminds us that it always seems impossible until it is done. South Africa shows that is true. South Africa shows we can change, that we can choose a world defined not by our differences, but by our common hopes. We can choose a world defined not by conflict, but by peace and justice and opportunity.

We will never see the likes of Nelson Mandela again. But let me say to the young people of Africa and the young people around the world -- you, too, can make his life’s work your own. Over 30 years ago, while still a student, I learned of Nelson Mandela and the struggles taking place in this beautiful land, and it stirred something in me. It woke me up to my responsibilities to others and to myself, and it set me on an improbable journey that finds me here today. And while I will always fall short of Madiba’s example, he makes me want to be a better man. He speaks to what’s best inside us.

After this great liberator is laid to rest, and when we have returned to our cities and villages and rejoined our daily routines, let us search for his strength. Let us search for his largeness of spirit somewhere inside of ourselves. And when the night grows dark, when injustice weighs heavy on our hearts, when our best-laid plans seem beyond our reach, let us think of Madiba and the words that brought him comfort within the four walls of his cell: "It matters not how strait the gate, how charged with punishments the scroll, I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul."

What a magnificent soul it was. We will miss him deeply. May God bless the memory of Nelson Mandela. May God bless the people of South Africa.

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# Final Press Conference of 2013

Good afternoon, everybody. I know you are all eager to skip town and spend some time with your families. Not surprisingly, I am, too. But you know what they say -- it's the most wonderful press conference of the year -- right now. I am eager to take your questions, but first, I just want to say a few words about our economy.

In 2013, our businesses created another 2 million jobs, adding up to more than 8 million in just over the past 45 months. This morning, we learned that over the summer, our economy grew at its strongest pace in nearly two years. The unemployment rate has steadily fallen to its lowest point in five years. Our tax code is fairer, and our fiscal situation is firmer, with deficits that are now less than half of what they were when I took office.

For the first time in nearly two decades, we now produce more oil here at home than we buy from the rest of the world, and our all-of-the-above strategy for new American energy means lower energy costs. The Affordable Care Act has helped keep health care costs growing at their slowest rate in 50 years. Combined, that means bigger paychecks for middle-class families and bigger savings for businesses looking to invest and hire here in America.

And for all the challenges we've had and all the challenges that we've been working on diligently in dealing with both the ACA and the website these past couple months, more than half a million Americans have enrolled through healthcare.gov in the first three weeks of December alone. In California, for example, a state operating its own marketplace, more than 15,000 Americans are enrolling every single day. And in the federal website, tens of thousands are enrolling every single day. Since October 1st, more than one million Americans have selected new health insurance plans through the federal and state marketplaces. So, all told, millions of Americans, despite the problems with the website, are now poised to be covered by quality, affordable health insurance come New Year's Day. Now, this holiday season, there are mothers and fathers and entrepreneurs and workers who have something new to celebrate -- the security of knowing that when the unexpected or misfortune strikes, hardship no longer has to.

And you add that all up and what it means is we head into next year with an economy that's stronger than it was when we started the year. More Americans are finding work and experiencing the pride of a paycheck. Our businesses are positioned for new growth and new jobs. And I firmly believe that 2014 can be a breakthrough year for America. But as I outlined in detail earlier this month, we all know there's a lot more that we're going to have to do to restore opportunity and broad-based growth for every American. And that's going to require some action.

It's a good start that earlier this week, for the first time in years, both parties in both houses of Congress came together to pass a budget. That unwinds some of the damaging sequester cuts that created headwinds for our economy. It clears the path for businesses and for investments that we need to strengthen our middle class, like education and scientific research. And it means that the American people won't be exposed to the threat of another reckless shutdown every few months. So that's a good thing.

It's probably too early to declare an outbreak of bipartisanship. But it's also fair to say that we're not condemned to endless gridlock. There are areas where we can work together.

I believe that work should begin with something that Republicans in Congress should have done before leaving town this week, and that's restoring the temporary insurance that helps folks make ends meet when they are looking for a job. Because Congress didn't act, more than one million of their constituents will lose a vital economic lifeline at Christmastime, leaving a lot of job-seekers without any source of income at all.

I think we're a better country than that. We don't abandon each other when times are tough. Keep in mind unemployment insurance only goes to folks who are actively looking for work -- a mom who needs help feeding her kids when she sends out her resumes, or a dad who needs help paying the rent while working part-time and still earning the skills he needs for that new job. So when Congress comes back to work, their first order of business should be making this right. I know a bipartisan group is working on a three-month extension of this insurance. They should pass it, and I'll sign it right away.

Let me repeat: I think 2014 needs to be a year of action. We've got work to do to create more good jobs, to help more Americans earn the skills and education they need to do those jobs and to make sure that those jobs offer the wages and benefits that let families build a little bit of financial security. We still have the task of finishing the fix on our broken immigration system. We've got to build on the progress we've painstakingly made over these last five years with respect to our economy and offer the middle class and all those who are looking to join the middle class a better opportunity, and that's going to be where I focus all of my efforts in the year ahead.

And let me conclude by saying just as we're strengthening our position here at home, we're also standing up for our interests around the world. This year, we've demonstrated that with clear-eyed, principled diplomacy, we can pursue new paths to a world that's more secure -- a future where Iran does not build a nuclear weapon; a future where Syria's chemical weapons stockpiles are destroyed. By the end of next year, the war in Afghanistan will be over, just as we've ended our war in Iraq, and we'll continue to bring our troops home. And, as always, we will remain vigilant to protect our homeland and our personnel overseas from terrorist attacks.

Of course, a lot of our men and women in uniform are still overseas, and a lot of them are still spending their Christmas far away from their family and their friends, and in some cases, are still in harm's way. So I want to close by saying to them and their families back home, we want to thank you. Your country stands united in supporting you and being grateful for your service and your sacrifice. We will keep you in our thoughts and in our prayers during this season of hope.

So, before I wish a Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night, I will take some questions. Jay prepared a list of who's naughty and nice -- so we'll see who made it.

Julie must be nice. Julie Pace.

Q: Thank you, Mr. President. Despite all of the data points that you cited in your opening statement, when you look back at this year, very little of the domestic agenda that you outlined in your inaugural address and your State of the Union have been achieved. Health care rollout obviously had huge problems and your ratings from the public are near historic lows for you. When you take this altogether, has this been the worst year of your presidency?

President Obama: I've got to tell you, Julie, that's not how I think about it. I have now been in office five years -- close to five years -- was running for President for two years before that, and for those of you who've covered me during that time, we have had ups and we have had downs. I think this room has probably recorded at least 15 near-death experiences. And what I've been focused on each and every day is are we moving the ball in helping the American people -- families -- have more opportunity, have a little more security to feel as if, if they work hard, they can get ahead.

And if I look at this past year, there are areas where there obviously have been some frustrations, where I wish Congress had moved more aggressively. Not passing background checks in the wake of Newtown is something that I continue to believe was a mistake. But then I also look at because of the debate that occurred, all the work that's been done at state levels to increase gun safety and to make sure that we don't see tragedies like that happen again.

There's a lot of focus on legislative activity at the congressional level, but even when Congress doesn't move on things they should move on, there are a whole bunch of things that we're still doing. So we don't always get attention for it, but the ConnectEd program that we announced where we're going to be initiating wireless capacity in every classroom in America will make a huge difference for kids all across this country, and for teachers.

A manufacturing hub that we set up in Youngstown, something that I talked about during the State of the Union, is going to create innovation and connect universities, manufacturers, job training to help create a renaissance -- build on the renaissance that we're seeing in manufacturing.

When it comes to energy, this year is going to be the first year in a very long time where we're producing more oil and natural gas here in this country than we're importing. That's a big deal.

So I understand the point that you're getting at, Julie, which is that a lot of our legislative initiatives in Congress have not moved forward as rapidly as I'd like. I completely understand that, which means that I'm going to keep at it. And if you look at, for example, immigration reform, probably the biggest thing that I wanted to get done this year, we saw progress. It passed the Senate with a strong bipartisan vote. There are indications in the House that even though it did not get completed this year that there is a commitment on the part of the Speaker to try to move forward legislation early next year. And the fact that it didn't hit the timeline that I'd prefer is obviously frustrating but it's not something that I end up brooding a lot about.

Q: But, sir, it's not just your legislative agenda. When you look at polling and you talk to Americans, they seem to have lost confidence in you, trust in you. Your credibility has taken a hit. Obviously the health care law was a big part of that. So do you understand that the public has changed in some way their view of you over this year?

President Obama: But, Julie, I guess what I'm saying is if you're measuring this by polls, my polls have gone up and down a lot through the course of my career. I mean, if I was interested in polling, I wouldn't have run for President. I was polling at 70 percent when I was in the U.S. Senate. I took this job to deliver for the American people. And I knew and will continue to know that there are going to be ups and downs on it.

You're right, the health care website problems were a source of great frustration. I think in the last press conference I adequately discussed my frustrations on those. On the other hand, since that time I now have a couple million people, maybe more, who are going to have health care on January 1st. And that is a big deal. That's why I ran for this office.

And as long as I've got an opportunity every single day to make sure that in ways large and small I'm creating greater opportunity for people -- more kids are able to go to school, get the education they need; more families are able to stabilize their finances; the housing market is continuing to improve; people feel like their wages maybe are inching up a little bit -- if those things are happening, I'll take it. And I've said before, I've run my last political race. So at this point, my goal every single day is just to make sure that I can look back and say we're delivering something -- not everything, because this is a long haul.

Mark Felsenthal.

Q: Thank you, Mr. President. One of the most significant events of this year was the revelation of the surveillance by the National Security Agency. As you review how to rein in the National Security Agency, a federal judge said that, for example, the government had failed to cite a single instance in which analysis of the NSA's bulk metadata actually stopped an imminent attack. Are you able to identify any specific examples when it did so? Are you convinced that the collection of that data is useful to national security and should continue as it is?

President Obama: Let me talk more broadly, and then I'll talk specifically about the program you're referring to.

As you know, the independent panel that I put together came back with a series of recommendations, 46 in total. I had an extensive meeting with them down in the Situation Room to review all the recommendations that they had made. I want to thank them publicly, because I think they did an excellent job and took my charge very seriously, which is I told them I want you to look from top to bottom at what we're doing and evaluate whether or not the current structures that we have and the current programs that we have are properly addressing both our continuing need to keep ourselves secure and to prevent terrorist attacks, or proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or other threats to the homeland, and are we also making sure that we're taking seriously rule of law and our concerns about privacy and civil liberties.

So what we're doing now is evaluating all the recommendations that have been made. Over the next several weeks, I'm going to assess based on conversations not just with the intelligence community but others in government and outside of government how we might apply and incorporate their recommendations. And I'm going to make a pretty definitive statement about all of this in January where I'll be able to say, here are the recommendations that we think make sense; here are ones that we think are promising but still need to be refined further; here's how it relates to the work we're doing not just internally but also in partnership with other countries. And so I'm taking this very seriously because I think, as I've said before, this is a debate that needed to be had.

One specific program, the 215 program, is the metadata, the bulk collection of phone numbers and exchanges that have taken place that has probably gotten the most attention, at least with respect to domestic audiences. And what I've said in the past continues to be the case, which is that the NSA, in executing this program, believed, based on experiences from 9/11, that it was important for us to be able to track if there was a phone number of a known terrorist outside of the United States calling into the United States, where that call might have gone, and that having that data in one place and retained for a certain period of time allowed them to be confident in pursuing various investigations of terrorist threats.

And I think it's important to note that in all the reviews of this program that have been done, in fact, there have not been actual instances where it's been alleged that the NSA in some ways acted inappropriately in the use of this data. But what is also clear is from the public debate, people are concerned about the prospect, the possibility of abuse. And I think that's what the judge and the district court suggested. And although his opinion obviously differs from rulings on the FISA Court, we're taking those into account.

The question we're going to have to ask is can we accomplish the same goals that this program is intended to accomplish in ways that give the public more confidence that, in fact, the NSA is doing what it's supposed to be doing. I have confidence in the fact that the NSA is not engaging in domestic surveillance or snooping around, but I also recognize that as technologies change and people can start running algorithms and programs that map out all the information that we're downloading on a daily basis into our telephones and our computers, that we may have to refine this further to give people more confidence. And I'm going to be working very hard on doing that.

And we've got to provide more confidence to the international community. In some ways, what has been more challenging is the fact that we do have a lot of laws and checks and balances and safeguards and audits when it comes to making sure that the NSA and other intelligence agencies are not spying on Americans. We've had less legal constraint in terms of what we're doing internationally. But I think part of what's been interesting about this whole exercise is recognizing that in a virtual world, some of these boundaries don't matter anymore, and just because we can do something doesn't mean we necessarily should. And the values that we've got as Americans are ones that we have to be willing to apply beyond our borders I think perhaps more systematically than we've done in the past.

Okay? Ed Henry.

Q: Thank you, Mr. President. I want to follow up on that because -- and merry Christmas, by the way.

President Obama: Merry Christmas to you.

Q: When Edward Snowden first started leaking the information, you made a statement on June 7th in California, and you claimed to the American people that you had already reformed many of these surveillance programs. You said you came into office -- "my team evaluated them, we scrubbed them thoroughly, we actually expanded some of the oversight," and you did expand some of it.

President Obama: Yes.

Q: You also said we may have to rebalance some, there may be changes. But you concluded with, "You can complain about Big Brother and how this is a potential program run amok. But when you actually look at the details, then I think we've struck the right balance." That was only six months ago. Now this judge is saying no, your own panel is saying no, even you're saying no, we haven't really struck the right balance perhaps, that changes have to be made. My question is: Were you wrong then because you were not fully read in not just on these programs but on other programs outside of the ones you just talked about, where we were potentially listening in on the German leaders, the Brazilian leaders and others, that suggest there were abuses? Number one.

And number two, if you were fully read in on these programs, is it another example of what Julie was getting at with this question of credibility with the American people, that just like on health care, "you like your plan, you can keep it"? On surveillance, you looked the American people in the eye six months ago and said, "We've got the right balance," and six months later you're saying maybe not.

President Obama: Well, hold on a second, Ed. I think it's important to note that when it comes to the right balance on surveillance, these are a series of judgment calls that we're making every single day, because we've got a whole bunch of folks whose job it is to make sure that the American people are protected. And that's a hard job, because if something slips, then the question that's coming from you the next day at a press conference is, "Mr. President, why didn't you catch that? Why did the intelligence people allow that to slip? Isn't there a way that we could have found out that in fact this terrorist attack took place?"

Q: So why were you so -- why did you say we struck the right balance?

President Obama: So the point is, Ed, not that my assessment of the 215 program has changed in terms of technically how it works. What is absolutely clear to me is that given the public debate that's taken place and the disclosures that have taken place over the last several months, that this is only going to work if the American people have confidence and trust.

Now, part of the challenge is, is that because of the manner in which these disclosures took place, in dribs and drabs, oftentimes shaded in a particular way, and because of some of the constraints that we've had in terms of declassifying information and getting it out there, that that trust in how many safeguards exist and how these programs are run has been diminished. So what's going to be important is to build that back up. And I take that into account in weighing how we structure these programs.

So let me just be very specific on the 215 program. It is possible, for example, that some of the same information that the intelligence community feels is required to keep people safe can be obtained by having the private phone companies keep these records longer and to create some mechanism where they can be accessed in an effective fashion.

That might cost more. There might need to be different checks on how those requests are made. There may be technological solutions that have to be found to do that. And the question that we're asking ourselves now is, does that make sense not only because of the fact that there are concerns about potential abuse down the road with the metadata that's being kept by a government rather than private companies, but also does it make sense to do it because people right now are concerned that maybe their phone calls are being listened to, even if they're not? And we've got to factor that in.

So my point is, is that the environment has changed in ways that I think require us to take that into account. But the analysis that I've been doing throughout has always been periodically looking at what we're doing and asking ourselves, are we doing this in the right way? Are we making sure that we're keeping the American people safe, number one? Are we also being true to our civil liberties and our privacy and our values?

Q: I understand it's a tough job, and, God forbid, there's another terror attack, every one of us is going to be second-guessing you, and that is extremely difficult to be in the Oval Office.

President Obama: That's okay. I volunteered.

Q: But as you said, you took that on.

President Obama: Yes.

Q: You put it on your back. And so my question is do you have any personal regrets? You're not addressing the fact the public statements you've made to reassure the public -- your Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper, months ago went up, got a question from a Democrat, not a Republican, about whether some of this was going on, and he denied it. Doesn't that undermine the public trust?

President Obama: Ed, you're conflating, first of all, me and Mr. Clapper --

Q: He's the Director of National -- he's still on the job.

President Obama: I understand. But what I'm saying is this, that, yes, these are tough problems that I am glad to have the privilege of tackling. Your initial question was whether the statements that I made six months ago are ones that I don't stand by. And what I'm saying is, is that the statements I made then are entirely consistent with the statements that I make now, which is that we believed that we had scrubbed these programs and struck an appropriate balance, and there had not been evidence and there continues not to be evidence that the particular program had been abused in how it was used, and that it was a useful tool, working with other tools that the intelligence community has, to ensure that if we have a thread on a potential terrorist threat, that that can be followed effectively.

What I've also said, though, is that in light of the disclosures that have taken place, it is clear that whatever benefits the configuration of this particular program may have may be outweighed by the concerns that people have on its potential abuse. And if that's the case, there may be another way of skinning the cat.

So we just keep on going at this stuff and saying, can we do this better? Can we do this more effectively? I think that the panel's recommendations are consistent with that. So if you had a chance to read the overall recommendations, what they were very clear about is we need this intelligence. We can't unilaterally disarm. There are ways we can do it potentially that gives people greater assurance that there are checks and balances, that there's sufficient oversight, sufficient transparency. Programs like 215 could be redesigned in ways that give you the same information when you need it without creating these potentials for abuse.

And that's exactly what we should be doing, is to evaluate all these things in a very clear, specific way, and moving forward on changes. And that's what I intend to do.

Q: So you have no regrets? You have no regrets?

President Obama: That's what I intend to do.

Jon Karl.

Q: Thank you, Mr. President. It's been a tough year. You may not want to call it the worst year of your presidency, but it's clearly been a tough year. The polls have gone up and down, but they are at a low point right now. So what I'm asking you -- you've acknowledged the difficulties with the health care rollout. But when you look back and you look at the decisions that you have made and what you did, what you didn't do, for you personally, what do you think has been your biggest mistake?

President Obama: With respect to health care, specifically, or just generally?

Q: The whole thing, back at this tough year.

President Obama: Well, there's no doubt that when it came to the health care rollout, even though I was meeting every other week or every three weeks with folks and emphasizing how important it was that consumers had a good experience, an easy experience in getting the information they need, and knowing what the choices and options were for them to be able to get high-quality, affordable health care, the fact is it didn't happen in the first month, the first six weeks, in a way that was at all acceptable. And since I'm in charge, obviously we screwed it up.

Part of it, as I've said before, had to do with how IT procurement generally is done, and it almost predates this year. Part of it, obviously, has to do with the fact that there were not clear enough lines of authority in terms of who was in charge of the technology and cracking the whip on a whole bunch of contractors. So there were a whole bunch of things that we've been taking a look at, and I'm going to be making appropriate adjustments once we get through this year and we've gotten through the initial surge of people who've been signing up.

But having said all that, bottom line also is, is that we've got several million people who are going to have health care that works. And it's not that I don't engage in a lot of self-reflection here. I promise you, I probably beat myself up even worse than you or Ed Henry does on any given day. But I've also got to wake up in the morning and make sure that I do better the next day, and that we keep moving forward.

And when I look at the landscape for next year, what I say to myself is, we're poised to do really good things. The economy is stronger than it has been in a very long time. Our next challenge then is to make sure that everybody benefits from that, not just a few folks. And there are still too many people who haven't seen a raise and are still feeling financially insecure. We can get immigration reform done. We've got a concept that has bipartisan support. Let's see if we can break through the politics on this.

I think that, hopefully, folks have learned their lesson in terms of brinksmanship, coming out of the government shutdown. There have been times where I thought about, were there other ways that I could have prevented those three, four weeks that hampered the economy and hurt individual families who were not getting a paycheck during that time -- absolutely. But I also think that, in some ways, given the pattern that we had been going through with House Republicans for a while, we might have needed just a little bit of a bracing sort of recognition that this is not what the American people think is acceptable. They want us to try to solve problems and be practical, even if we can't get everything done.

So the end of the year is always a good time to reflect and see what can you do better next year. That's how I intend to approach it. I'm sure that I will have even better ideas after a couple days of sleep and sun.

Brianna.

Q: Thank you, Mr. President. On the debt ceiling, your Treasury Secretary has estimated that the U.S. government will lose its ability to pay its bills come late February or early March. House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan has said that "Republicans are going to decide what it is they can accomplish on this debt limit fight" -- his words. Will you negotiate with House Republicans on the debt ceiling?

President Obama: Oh, Brianna, you know the answer to this question. No, we're not going to negotiate for Congress to pay bills that it has accrued.

Here's the good news -- I want to emphasize the positive as we enter into this holiday season. I think Congressman Ryan and Senator Murray did a good job in trying to narrow the differences and actually pass a budget that I can sign. It's not everything that I would like, obviously. It buys back part of these across-the-board cuts, the so-called sequester, but not all of them. So we're still underfunding research; we're still underfunding education; we're still underfunding transportation and other initiatives that would create jobs right now.

But it was an honest conversation. They operated in good faith. And given how far apart the parties have been on fiscal issues, they should take pride in what they did. And I actually called them after they struck the deal and I said congratulations, and I hope that creates a good pattern for next year, where we work on at least the things we agree to, even if we agree to disagree on some of the other big-ticket items.

I think immigration potentially falls in that category, where let's -- here's an area where we've got bipartisan agreement. There are a few differences here and there, but the truth of the matter is, is that the Senate bill has the main components of comprehensive immigration reform that would boost our economy, give us an opportunity to attract more investment and high-skilled workers who are doing great things in places like Silicon Valley and around the country. So let's go ahead and get that done.

Now, I can't imagine that having seen this possible daylight breaking when it comes to cooperation in Congress that folks are thinking actually about plunging us back into the kinds of brinksmanship and governance by crisis that has done us so much harm over the last couple of years.

To repeat: The debt ceiling is raised simply to pay bills that we have already accrued. It is not something that is a negotiating tool. It's not leverage. It's the responsibility of Congress. It's part of doing their job. I expect them to do their job. Although I'm happy to talk to them about any of the issues that they actually want to get done. So if Congressman Ryan is interested in tax reform, let's go. I've got some proposals on it. If he's interested in any issue out there, I'm willing to have a constructive conversation of the sort that we just had in resolving the budget issues. But I've got to assume folks aren't crazy enough to start that thing all over again.

Q: If I may just quickly, on a more personal note, what is your New Year's resolution?

President Obama: My New Year's resolution is to be nicer to the White House Press Corps. You know? Absolutely.

Q: All right.

President Obama: Major Garrett.

Q: That's quite a lead-in, Mr. President, thank you. Rick Leggett, who is the head of the NSA task force on Edward Snowden, told "60 Minutes" that it was, "worth having a conversation about granting Edward Snowden amnesty." To what degree, sir, were you pleased that he floated this trial balloon? And under what circumstances would you consider either a plea agreement or amnesty for Edward Snowden? And what do you say to Americans, sir, who after possibly being alerted to Judge Leon's decision earlier this week, reading the panel recommendations, do you believe Edward Snowden set in motion something that is proper and just in this country about the scope of surveillance and should not be considered by this government a criminal?

President Obama: I've got to be careful here, Major, because Mr. Snowden is under indictment, he's been charged with crimes. And that's the province of the Attorney General and, ultimately, a judge and a jury. So I can't weigh in specifically on this case at this point. I'll make -- I'll try to see if I can get at the spirit of the question, even if I can't talk about the specifics.

I've said before and I believe that this is an important conversation that we needed to have. I've also said before that the way in which these disclosures happened have been damaging to the United States and damaging to our intelligence capabilities. And I think that there was a way for us to have this conversation without that damage.

I'll give you just one specific example. The fact of the matter is that the United States, for all our warts, is a country that abides by rule of law, that cares deeply about privacy, that cares about civil liberties, that cares about our Constitution. And as a consequence of these disclosures, we've got countries who actually do the things that Mr. Snowden says he's worried about very explicitly -- engaging in surveillance of their own citizens, targeting political dissidents, targeting and suppressing the press -- who somehow are able to sit on the sidelines and act as if it's the United States that has problems when it comes to surveillance and intelligence operations. And that's a pretty distorted view of what's going on out there.

So I think that as important and as necessary as this debate has been, it is also important to keep in mind that this has done unnecessary damage to U.S. intelligence capabilities and U.S. diplomacy. But I will leave it up to the courts and the Attorney General to weigh in publicly on the specifics of Mr. Snowden's case.

Q: Sir, if I could follow up, Mr. Leggett is setting this in motion, at least raising this as a topic of conversation. You, sir, would I'm certain be consulted if there was ever going to be a conversation about amnesty or a plea bargain with Edward Snowden.

President Obama: I think that's true, Major, and I guess what I'm saying is there's a --

Q: Would you rule it out forever that you would never consider it?

President Obama: What I'm saying is, is that there's a difference between Mr. Leggett saying something and President Obama of the United States saying something.

Q: That's why I'm trying to get at you.

President Obama: That's exactly right.

Chuck Todd.

Q: Thank you, Mr. President, and Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. You talk about the issues with health care and the website rollout, but there have been other issues -- the misinformation about people keeping their policies, the extended deadlines, some postponements. We have a new waiver that HHS announced last night. How do you expect Americans to have confidence and certainty in this law if you keep changing it? This one here, this new waiver last night, you could argue you might as well have just delayed the mandate.

President Obama: Well, no, that's not true, because what we're talking about is a very specific population that received cancellation notices from insurance companies. The majority of them are either keeping their old plan because the grandfather clause has been extended further, or they're finding a better deal in the marketplace with better insurance for cheaper costs.

But there may still be a subset -- a significantly smaller subset than some of the numbers that have been advertised -- that are still looking for options, are still concerned about what they're going to be doing next year. And we just wanted to make sure that the hardship provision that was already existing in the law would also potentially apply to somebody who had problems during this transition period. So that's the specifics of this latest change.

You're making a broader point that I think is fair and that is that in a big project like this, that what we are constantly doing is looking, is this working the way it's supposed to, and if there are adjustments that can be made to smooth out the transition, we should make them. But they don't go to the core of the law.

First of all, the core of the law is, is that for 85 percent of the population, all they've been getting is free preventive care, better consumer protections, and ability to keep their kids on their insurance plan until they're 26, thousand-dollar or five hundred-dollar discounts on prescription drugs for seniors on Medicare. So 85 percent of the population, whether they know it or not, over the last three years have benefited from a whole set of the provisions of the law. And, by the way, if it were to be repealed, you would be taking away all those benefits from folks who already are enjoying them.

You had this sub-portion of the population, 15 percent, who either don't have health insurance or are buying it on the individual market. And that's still millions of people. And what we're doing is creating a marketplace where they can buy insurance and we can provide them some tax credits to help them afford it.

The basic structure of that law is working despite all the problems -- despite the website problems, despite the messaging problems. Despite all that, it's working. And again, you don't have to take my word for it. We've got a couple million people who are going to have health insurance just in the first three months, despite the fact that probably the first month and a half was lost because of problems with the website and about as bad a bunch of publicity as you could imagine. And yet you've still got 2 million people who signed up, or more.

And so what that means then is that the demand is there and, as I said before, the product is good. Now, in putting something like this together, there are going to be all kinds of problems that crop up, some of which may have been unanticipated. And what we've been trying to do is just respond to them in a common-sense way. And we're going to continue to try to do that. But that doesn't negate the fact that a year from now or two years from now, when we look back, we're going to be able to say that even more people have health insurance who didn't have it before. And that's not a bad thing, that's a good thing. That is part of the reason why I pushed so hard to get this law done in the first place.

And I've said before this is a messy process, and I think sometimes when I say that people say, well, A, yes, it's real messy; and B, isn't the fact that it's been so messy some indication that there are more fundamental problems with the law? And I guess what I'd say to that, Chuck, is when you try to do something this big, affecting this many people, it's going to be hard. And every instance -- whether it's Social Security, Medicare, the prescription drug plan under President Bush -- there hasn't been an instance where you tried to really have an impact on the American people's lives and wellbeing, particularly in the health care arena, where you don't end up having some of these challenges. The question is going to be ultimately, do we make good decisions trying to help as many people as possible in as efficient a way as possible. And I think that's what we're doing.

Q: But with 72 hours to go, you make this change where people are buying the junk -- frankly, a junk-type policy that you weren't -- you were trying to get people away from.

President Obama: Well, keep in mind, Chuck, first of all, that the majority of folks are going to have different options. This is essentially a additional net in case folks might have slipped through the cracks. We don't have precision on those numbers, but we expect it's going to be a relatively small number, because these are folks who want insurance and the vast majority of them have good options. And in a state like North Carolina, for example, the overwhelming majority of them have just kept their own plans -- the ones that they had previously.

But we thought and continue to think that it makes sense that as we are transitioning to a system in which insurance standards are higher, people don't have unpleasant surprises because they thought they had insurance until they hit a limit, and next thing you know they still owe $100,000 or $200,000 or $300,000 for a hospital visit -- that as we transition to higher standards, better insurance, that we also address folks who get caught in that transition and there are unintended consequences.

And I'll be -- that was the original intent of the grandfather clause that was in the law. Obviously, the problem was it didn't catch enough people. And we learned from that, and we're trying not to repeat those mistakes.

Q: So does the mandate need to be enforced?

President Obama: Absolutely. Yes.

Let's see, Phil Mattingly.

Q: Thank you, Mr. President. What was the message you were trying to send with not only your decision not to attend the Sochi Games, but also with the people you named to the delegation to represent the United States at those games?

President Obama: Well, first of all, I haven't attended Olympics in the past, and I suspect that me attending the Olympics, particularly at a time when we've got all the other stuff that people have been talking about, is going to be tough, although I would love to do it. I'll be going to a lot of Olympic Games post-presidency. I think the delegation speaks for itself. You've got outstanding Americans, outstanding athletes, people who will represent us extraordinarily well.

And the fact that we've got folks like Billie Jean King or Brian Boitano, who themselves have been world-class athletes that everybody acknowledges for their excellence but also for their character, who also happen to be members of the LGBT community, you should take that for what it's worth -- that when it comes to the Olympics and athletic performance, we don't make distinctions on the basis of sexual orientation. We judge people on how they perform, both on the court and off the court -- on the field and off the field. And that's a value that I think is at the heart of not just America, but American sports.

I'm going to just roll down these last few, real quickly. Ari Shapiro. Last day at the White House. He deserves a question.

Q: Thank you very much, Mr. President. Senator Max Baucus was widely seen as the best hope for a large-scale deal to overhaul the tax code. What does your decision to nominate him as ambassador to China say about your hopes for major tax bill in your second term?

President Obama: It says that Max Baucus is going to be an outstanding ambassador to China, and I'd like a swift confirmation. And my expectation and hope is, is that if both the Senate Democrats -- or if Democrats and Republicans in the House and the Senate are serious about tax reform, then it's not going to depend on one guy, it's going to depend on all of us working together. And my office is ready, willing, and eager to engage both parties and having a conversation about how we can simplify the tax code, make it fairer, make it work to create more jobs and do right by middle-class Americans.

Jackie Calmes.

Q: Thank you, Mr. President. And how do you say it in Hawaii? Mele Kalikimaka?

President Obama: Mele Kalikimaka.

Q: Since we've been looking back at the year, I'd like to ask you what your reaction was to the nonpartisan truth-telling group, PolitiFact, when it said that the lie of the year was your statement that if you like your health care plan, you can keep it.

And related to the health care problems that we've seen over the past year, the fallout from that seems to be making Democrats, particularly in the Senate, a little rambunctious and independent of you, which is evidenced most clearly in the debate over the Iran sanctions. It looks like Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid has expedited consideration of an Iran sanctions bill for January, even as your Administration -- and you have been trying to get them to lay off sanctions while your --

President Obama: Jackie, I've got to say, you're stringing a bunch of things along here. Let's see if we can hone in on a question. I mean, I --

Q: Two questions. That's a lot less than Ed Henry had.

Q: Oh! I thought we were trying to get along for Christmas.

President Obama: How about I separate out the Iran question from the health care question? On the health care question, look, I think I've answered several times -- this is a new iteration of it -- but bottom line is that we are going to continue to work every single day to make sure that implementation of the health care law and the website and all elements of it, including the grandfather clause, work better every single day. And as I've said in previous press conferences, we're going to make mistakes, and we're going to have problems, but my intentions have been clear throughout, which is, I just want to help as many people as possible feel secure and make sure that they don't go broke when they get sick. And we're going to just keep on doing that.

On Iran, there is the possibility of a resolution to a problem that has been a challenge for American national security for over a decade now, and that is getting Iran to, in a verifiable fashion, not pursue a nuclear weapon. Already, even with the interim deal that we struck in Geneva, we had the first halt and, in some cases, some rollback of Iran's nuclear capabilities -- the first time that we've seen that in almost a decade. And we now have a structure in which we can have a very serious conversation to see is it possible for Iran to get right with the international community in a verifiable fashion to give us all confidence that any peaceful nuclear program that they have is not going to be weaponized in a way that threatens us or allies in the region, including Israel.

And as I've said before and I will repeat, it is very important for us to test whether that's possible, not because it's guaranteed, but because the alternative is possibly us having to engage in some sort of conflict to resolve the problem with all kinds of unintended consequences.

Now, I've been very clear from the start, I mean what I say: It is my goal to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. But I sure would rather do it diplomatically. I'm keeping all options on the table, but if I can do it diplomatically, that's how we should do it. And I would think that would be the preference of everybody up on Capitol Hill because that sure is the preference of the American people.

And we lose nothing during this negotiation period. Precisely because there are verification provisions in place, we will have more insight into Iran's nuclear program over the next six months than we have previously. We'll know if they are violating the terms of the agreement. They're not allowed to accelerate their stockpile of enriched uranium -- in fact, they have to reduce their stockpile of highly enriched uranium.

Ironically, if we did not have this six-month period in which we're testing whether we can get a comprehensive solution to this problem, they'd be advancing even further on their nuclear program. And in light of all that, what I've said to members of Congress -- Democrats and Republicans -- is there is no need for new sanctions legislation. Not yet.

Now, if Iran comes back and says, we can't give you assurances that we're not going to weaponize, if they're not willing to address some of their capabilities that we know could end up resulting in them having breakout capacity, it's not going to be hard for us to turn the dials back, strengthen sanctions even further. I'll work with members of Congress to put even more pressure on Iran. But there's no reason to do it right now.

And so I'm not surprised that there's been some talk from some members of Congress about new sanctions -- I think the politics of trying to look tough on Iran are often good when you're running for office or if you're in office. But as President of the United States right now, who's been responsible over the last four years, with the help of Congress, in putting together a comprehensive sanctions regime that was specifically designed to put pressure on them and bring them to the table to negotiate -- what I'm saying to them, what I've said to the international community, and what I've said to the American people is let's test it. Now is the time to try to see if we can get this thing done.

And I've heard some logic that says, well, Mr. President, we're supportive of the negotiations, but we think it's really useful to have this club hanging over Iran's head. Well, first of all, we still have the existing sanctions already in place that are resulting in Iran losing billions of dollars every month in lost oil sales. We already have banking and financial sanctions that are still being applied even as the negotiations are taking place. It's not as if we're letting up on that.

I've heard arguments, well, but this way we can be assured and the Iranians will know that if negotiations fail even new and harsher sanctions will be put into place. Listen, I don't think the Iranians have any doubt that Congress would be more than happy to pass more sanctions legislation. We can do that in a day, on a dime. But if we're serious about negotiations, we've got to create an atmosphere in which Iran is willing to move in ways that are uncomfortable for them and contrary to their ideology and rhetoric and their instincts and their suspicions of us. And we don't help get them to a position where we can actually resolve this by engaging in this kind of action.

Okay, everybody, I think I'm going to take one more question. Colleen McCain Nelson. And that is it.

Q: Thank you, Mr. President.

President Obama: There you are.

Q: Some of your longtime advisors are leaving the White House and new folks are coming in. Others are taking on new roles in the West Wing. As you reshape your team a bit, how does that change the dynamic here and how does it impact what you think you can accomplish going forward?

President Obama: I just had lunch with Pete Rouse, who is leaving me. And that's tough.

Q: He says so.

President Obama: He says so right now at least. I love that guy and that will be a significant loss, although he'll still be in town and, hopefully, I'll be able to consult with him on an ongoing basis.

I think the fact that John Podesta is coming in will be terrific. He may deny it, but I've been trying to get him in here for quite some time. He ran my transition office. I asked him when he was running the transition office if he would be willing to join us, and at that time I think he was still feeling that he wanted to develop CAP and other organizations. But John is a great strategist, as good as anybody on domestic policy. And I think he'll be a huge boost to us and give us more bandwidth to deal with more issues.

I suspect that we may have additional announcements in the New Year. There's a natural turnover that takes place. People get tired. People get worn out. Sometimes, you need fresh legs.

But what I can tell you is that the team I have now is tireless and shares my values, and believes the thing that I think I've repeated probably four or five times in this press conference, which is we get this incredible privilege for a pretty short period of time to do as much as we can for as many people as we can to help them live better lives. And that's what drives them. That's the sacrifice they make being away from families and soccer games and birthdays, and some of them will end up working over Christmas on issues like Iran. And the fact that they make those kinds of sacrifices I'm always grateful for. And if they then say to me after making those sacrifices for three, four, five years, I need a break, then I completely understand.

All right? Have a great holiday, everybody. Appreciate you.

Q: Merry Christmas.

President Obama: Merry Christmas. Happy New Year.

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# On the Outcome of U.S. Intelligence Programs Review

At the dawn of our Republic, a small, secret surveillance committee borne out of the "The Sons of Liberty" was established in Boston. And the group’s members included Paul Revere. At night, they would patrol the streets, reporting back any signs that the British were preparing raids against America’s early Patriots.

Throughout American history, intelligence has helped secure our country and our freedoms. In the Civil War, Union balloon reconnaissance tracked the size of Confederate armies by counting the number of campfires. In World War II, code-breakers gave us insights into Japanese war plans, and when Patton marched across Europe, intercepted communications helped save the lives of his troops. After the war, the rise of the Iron Curtain and nuclear weapons only increased the need for sustained intelligence gathering. And so, in the early days of the Cold War, President Truman created the National Security Agency, or NSA, to give us insights into the Soviet bloc, and provide our leaders with information they needed to confront aggression and avert catastrophe.

Throughout this evolution, we benefited from both our Constitution and our traditions of limited government. U.S. intelligence agencies were anchored in a system of checks and balances -- with oversight from elected leaders, and protections for ordinary citizens. Meanwhile, totalitarian states like East Germany offered a cautionary tale of what could happen when vast, unchecked surveillance turned citizens into informers, and persecuted people for what they said in the privacy of their own homes.

In fact, even the United States proved not to be immune to the abuse of surveillance. And in the 1960s, government spied on civil rights leaders and critics of the Vietnam War. And partly in response to these revelations, additional laws were established in the 1970s to ensure that our intelligence capabilities could not be misused against our citizens. In the long, twilight struggle against Communism, we had been reminded that the very liberties that we sought to preserve could not be sacrificed at the altar of national security.

If the fall of the Soviet Union left America without a competing superpower, emerging threats from terrorist groups, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction placed new and in some ways more complicated demands on our intelligence agencies. Globalization and the Internet made these threats more acute, as technology erased borders and empowered individuals to project great violence, as well as great good. Moreover, these new threats raised new legal and new policy questions. For while few doubted the legitimacy of spying on hostile states, our framework of laws was not fully adapted to prevent terrorist attacks by individuals acting on their own, or acting in small, ideologically driven groups on behalf of a foreign power.

The horror of September 11th brought all these issues to the fore. Across the political spectrum, Americans recognized that we had to adapt to a world in which a bomb could be built in a basement, and our electric grid could be shut down by operators an ocean away. We were shaken by the signs we had missed leading up to the attacks -- how the hijackers had made phone calls to known extremists and traveled to suspicious places. So we demanded that our intelligence community improve its capabilities, and that law enforcement change practices to focus more on preventing attacks before they happen than prosecuting terrorists after an attack.

It is hard to overstate the transformation America’s intelligence community had to go through after 9/11. Our agencies suddenly needed to do far more than the traditional mission of monitoring hostile powers and gathering information for policymakers. Instead, they were now asked to identify and target plotters in some of the most remote parts of the world, and to anticipate the actions of networks that, by their very nature, cannot be easily penetrated with spies or informants.

And it is a testimony to the hard work and dedication of the men and women of our intelligence community that over the past decade we’ve made enormous strides in fulfilling this mission. Today, new capabilities allow intelligence agencies to track who a terrorist is in contact with, and follow the trail of his travel or his funding. New laws allow information to be collected and shared more quickly and effectively between federal agencies, and state and local law enforcement. Relationships with foreign intelligence services have expanded, and our capacity to repel cyber-attacks have been strengthened. And taken together, these efforts have prevented multiple attacks and saved innocent lives -- not just here in the United States, but around the globe.

And yet, in our rush to respond to a very real and novel set of threats, the risk of government overreach -- the possibility that we lose some of our core liberties in pursuit of security -- also became more pronounced. We saw, in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, our government engaged in enhanced interrogation techniques that contradicted our values. As a Senator, I was critical of several practices, such as warrantless wiretaps. And all too often new authorities were instituted without adequate public debate.

Through a combination of action by the courts, increased congressional oversight, and adjustments by the previous administration, some of the worst excesses that emerged after 9/11 were curbed by the time I took office. But a variety of factors have continued to complicate America’s efforts to both defend our nation and uphold our civil liberties.

First, the same technological advances that allow U.S. intelligence agencies to pinpoint an al Qaeda cell in Yemen or an email between two terrorists in the Sahel also mean that many routine communications around the world are within our reach. And at a time when more and more of our lives are digital, that prospect is disquieting for all of us.

Second, the combination of increased digital information and powerful supercomputers offers intelligence agencies the possibility of sifting through massive amounts of bulk data to identify patterns or pursue leads that may thwart impending threats. It’s a powerful tool. But the government collection and storage of such bulk data also creates a potential for abuse.

Third, the legal safeguards that restrict surveillance against U.S. persons without a warrant do not apply to foreign persons overseas. This is not unique to America; few, if any, spy agencies around the world constrain their activities beyond their own borders. And the whole point of intelligence is to obtain information that is not publicly available. But America’s capabilities are unique, and the power of new technologies means that there are fewer and fewer technical constraints on what we can do. That places a special obligation on us to ask tough questions about what we should do.

And finally, intelligence agencies cannot function without secrecy, which makes their work less subject to public debate. Yet there is an inevitable bias not only within the intelligence community, but among all of us who are responsible for national security, to collect more information about the world, not less. So in the absence of institutional requirements for regular debate -- and oversight that is public, as well as private or classified -- the danger of government overreach becomes more acute. And this is particularly true when surveillance technology and our reliance on digital information is evolving much faster than our laws.

For all these reasons, I maintained a healthy skepticism toward our surveillance programs after I became President. I ordered that our programs be reviewed by my national security team and our lawyers, and in some cases I ordered changes in how we did business. We increased oversight and auditing, including new structures aimed at compliance. Improved rules were proposed by the government and approved by the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court. And we sought to keep Congress continually updated on these activities.

What I did not do is stop these programs wholesale -- not only because I felt that they made us more secure, but also because nothing in that initial review, and nothing that I have learned since, indicated that our intelligence community has sought to violate the law or is cavalier about the civil liberties of their fellow citizens.

To the contrary, in an extraordinarily difficult job -- one in which actions are second-guessed, success is unreported, and failure can be catastrophic -- the men and women of the intelligence community, including the NSA, consistently follow protocols designed to protect the privacy of ordinary people. They’re not abusing authorities in order to listen to your private phone calls or read your emails. When mistakes are made -- which is inevitable in any large and complicated human enterprise -- they correct those mistakes. Laboring in obscurity, often unable to discuss their work even with family and friends, the men and women at the NSA know that if another 9/11 or massive cyber-attack occurs, they will be asked, by Congress and the media, why they failed to connect the dots. What sustains those who work at NSA and our other intelligence agencies through all these pressures is the knowledge that their professionalism and dedication play a central role in the defense of our nation.

Now, to say that our intelligence community follows the law, and is staffed by patriots, is not to suggest that I or others in my administration felt complacent about the potential impact of these programs. Those of us who hold office in America have a responsibility to our Constitution, and while I was confident in the integrity of those who lead our intelligence community, it was clear to me in observing our intelligence operations on a regular basis that changes in our technological capabilities were raising new questions about the privacy safeguards currently in place.

Moreover, after an extended review of our use of drones in the fight against terrorist networks, I believed a fresh examination of our surveillance programs was a necessary next step in our effort to get off the open-ended war footing that we’ve maintained since 9/11. And for these reasons, I indicated in a speech at the National Defense University last May that we needed a more robust public discussion about the balance between security and liberty. Of course, what I did not know at the time is that within weeks of my speech, an avalanche of unauthorized disclosures would spark controversies at home and abroad that have continued to this day.

And given the fact of an open investigation, I’m not going to dwell on Mr. Snowden’s actions or his motivations; I will say that our nation’s defense depends in part on the fidelity of those entrusted with our nation’s secrets. If any individual who objects to government policy can take it into their own hands to publicly disclose classified information, then we will not be able to keep our people safe, or conduct foreign policy. Moreover, the sensational way in which these disclosures have come out has often shed more heat than light, while revealing methods to our adversaries that could impact our operations in ways that we may not fully understand for years to come.

Regardless of how we got here, though, the task before us now is greater than simply repairing the damage done to our operations or preventing more disclosures from taking place in the future. Instead, we have to make some important decisions about how to protect ourselves and sustain our leadership in the world, while upholding the civil liberties and privacy protections that our ideals and our Constitution require. We need to do so not only because it is right, but because the challenges posed by threats like terrorism and proliferation and cyber-attacks are not going away any time soon. They are going to continue to be a major problem. And for our intelligence community to be effective over the long haul, we must maintain the trust of the American people, and people around the world.

This effort will not be completed overnight, and given the pace of technological change, we shouldn’t expect this to be the last time America has this debate. But I want the American people to know that the work has begun. Over the last six months, I created an outside Review Group on Intelligence and Communications Technologies to make recommendations for reform. I consulted with the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board, created by Congress. I’ve listened to foreign partners, privacy advocates, and industry leaders. My administration has spent countless hours considering how to approach intelligence in this era of diffuse threats and technological revolution. So before outlining specific changes that I’ve ordered, let me make a few broad observations that have emerged from this process.

First, everyone who has looked at these problems, including skeptics of existing programs, recognizes that we have real enemies and threats, and that intelligence serves a vital role in confronting them. We cannot prevent terrorist attacks or cyber threats without some capability to penetrate digital communications -- whether it’s to unravel a terrorist plot; to intercept malware that targets a stock exchange; to make sure air traffic control systems are not compromised; or to ensure that hackers do not empty your bank accounts. We are expected to protect the American people; that requires us to have capabilities in this field.

Moreover, we cannot unilaterally disarm our intelligence agencies. There is a reason why BlackBerrys and iPhones are not allowed in the White House Situation Room. We know that the intelligence services of other countries -- including some who feign surprise over the Snowden disclosures -- are constantly probing our government and private sector networks, and accelerating programs to listen to our conversations, and intercept our emails, and compromise our systems. We know that.

Meanwhile, a number of countries, including some who have loudly criticized the NSA, privately acknowledge that America has special responsibilities as the world’s only superpower; that our intelligence capabilities are critical to meeting these responsibilities, and that they themselves have relied on the information we obtain to protect their own people.

Second, just as ardent civil libertarians recognize the need for robust intelligence capabilities, those with responsibilities for our national security readily acknowledge the potential for abuse as intelligence capabilities advance and more and more private information is digitized. After all, the folks at NSA and other intelligence agencies are our neighbors. They're our friends and family. They’ve got electronic bank and medical records like everybody else. They have kids on Facebook and Instagram, and they know, more than most of us, the vulnerabilities to privacy that exist in a world where transactions are recorded, and emails and text and messages are stored, and even our movements can increasingly be tracked through the GPS on our phones.

Third, there was a recognition by all who participated in these reviews that the challenges to our privacy do not come from government alone. Corporations of all shapes and sizes track what you buy, store and analyze our data, and use it for commercial purposes; that’s how those targeted ads pop up on your computer and your smartphone periodically. But all of us understand that the standards for government surveillance must be higher. Given the unique power of the state, it is not enough for leaders to say: Trust us, we won’t abuse the data we collect. For history has too many examples when that trust has been breached. Our system of government is built on the premise that our liberty cannot depend on the good intentions of those in power; it depends on the law to constrain those in power.

I make these observations to underscore that the basic values of most Americans when it comes to questions of surveillance and privacy converge a lot more than the crude characterizations that have emerged over the last several months. Those who are troubled by our existing programs are not interested in repeating the tragedy of 9/11, and those who defend these programs are not dismissive of civil liberties.

The challenge is getting the details right, and that is not simple. In fact, during the course of our review, I have often reminded myself I would not be where I am today were it not for the courage of dissidents like Dr. King, who were spied upon by their own government. And as President, a President who looks at intelligence every morning, I also can’t help but be reminded that America must be vigilant in the face of threats.

Fortunately, by focusing on facts and specifics rather than speculation and hypotheticals, this review process has given me -- and hopefully the American people -- some clear direction for change. And today, I can announce a series of concrete and substantial reforms that my administration intends to adopt administratively or will seek to codify with Congress.

First, I have approved a new presidential directive for our signals intelligence activities both at home and abroad. This guidance will strengthen executive branch oversight of our intelligence activities. It will ensure that we take into account our security requirements, but also our alliances; our trade and investment relationships, including the concerns of American companies; and our commitment to privacy and basic liberties. And we will review decisions about intelligence priorities and sensitive targets on an annual basis so that our actions are regularly scrutinized by my senior national security team.

Second, we will reform programs and procedures in place to provide greater transparency to our surveillance activities, and fortify the safeguards that protect the privacy of U.S. persons. Since we began this review, including information being released today, we have declassified over 40 opinions and orders of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, which provides judicial review of some of our most sensitive intelligence activities -- including the Section 702 program targeting foreign individuals overseas, and the Section 215 telephone metadata program.

And going forward, I’m directing the Director of National Intelligence, in consultation with the Attorney General, to annually review for the purposes of declassification any future opinions of the court with broad privacy implications, and to report to me and to Congress on these efforts. To ensure that the court hears a broader range of privacy perspectives, I am also calling on Congress to authorize the establishment of a panel of advocates from outside government to provide an independent voice in significant cases before the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court.

Third, we will provide additional protections for activities conducted under Section 702, which allows the government to intercept the communications of foreign targets overseas who have information that’s important for our national security. Specifically, I am asking the Attorney General and DNI to institute reforms that place additional restrictions on government’s ability to retain, search, and use in criminal cases communications between Americans and foreign citizens incidentally collected under Section 702.

Fourth, in investigating threats, the FBI also relies on what's called national security letters, which can require companies to provide specific and limited information to the government without disclosing the orders to the subject of the investigation. These are cases in which it's important that the subject of the investigation, such as a possible terrorist or spy, isn’t tipped off. But we can and should be more transparent in how government uses this authority.

I have therefore directed the Attorney General to amend how we use national security letters so that this secrecy will not be indefinite, so that it will terminate within a fixed time unless the government demonstrates a real need for further secrecy. We will also enable communications providers to make public more information than ever before about the orders that they have received to provide data to the government.

This brings me to the program that has generated the most controversy these past few months -- the bulk collection of telephone records under Section 215. Let me repeat what I said when this story first broke: This program does not involve the content of phone calls, or the names of people making calls. Instead, it provides a record of phone numbers and the times and lengths of calls -- metadata that can be queried if and when we have a reasonable suspicion that a particular number is linked to a terrorist organization.

Why is this necessary? The program grew out of a desire to address a gap identified after 9/11. One of the 9/11 hijackers -- Khalid al-Mihdhar -- made a phone call from San Diego to a known al Qaeda safe-house in Yemen. NSA saw that call, but it could not see that the call was coming from an individual already in the United States. The telephone metadata program under Section 215 was designed to map the communications of terrorists so we can see who they may be in contact with as quickly as possible. And this capability could also prove valuable in a crisis. For example, if a bomb goes off in one of our cities and law enforcement is racing to determine whether a network is poised to conduct additional attacks, time is of the essence. Being able to quickly review phone connections to assess whether a network exists is critical to that effort.

In sum, the program does not involve the NSA examining the phone records of ordinary Americans. Rather, it consolidates these records into a database that the government can query if it has a specific lead -- a consolidation of phone records that the companies already retained for business purposes. The review group turned up no indication that this database has been intentionally abused. And I believe it is important that the capability that this program is designed to meet is preserved.

Having said that, I believe critics are right to point out that without proper safeguards, this type of program could be used to yield more information about our private lives, and open the door to more intrusive bulk collection programs in the future. They’re also right to point out that although the telephone bulk collection program was subject to oversight by the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court and has been reauthorized repeatedly by Congress, it has never been subject to vigorous public debate.

For all these reasons, I believe we need a new approach. I am therefore ordering a transition that will end the Section 215 bulk metadata program as it currently exists, and establish a mechanism that preserves the capabilities we need without the government holding this bulk metadata.

This will not be simple. The review group recommended that our current approach be replaced by one in which the providers or a third party retain the bulk records, with government accessing information as needed. Both of these options pose difficult problems. Relying solely on the records of multiple providers, for example, could require companies to alter their procedures in ways that raise new privacy concerns. On the other hand, any third party maintaining a single, consolidated database would be carrying out what is essentially a government function but with more expense, more legal ambiguity, potentially less accountability -- all of which would have a doubtful impact on increasing public confidence that their privacy is being protected.

During the review process, some suggested that we may also be able to preserve the capabilities we need through a combination of existing authorities, better information sharing, and recent technological advances. But more work needs to be done to determine exactly how this system might work.

Because of the challenges involved, I’ve ordered that the transition away from the existing program will proceed in two steps. Effective immediately, we will only pursue phone calls that are two steps removed from a number associated with a terrorist organization instead of the current three. And I have directed the Attorney General to work with the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court so that during this transition period, the database can be queried only after a judicial finding or in the case of a true emergency.

Next, step two, I have instructed the intelligence community and the Attorney General to use this transition period to develop options for a new approach that can match the capabilities and fill the gaps that the Section 215 program was designed to address without the government holding this metadata itself. They will report back to me with options for alternative approaches before the program comes up for reauthorization on March 28th. And during this period, I will consult with the relevant committees in Congress to seek their views, and then seek congressional authorization for the new program as needed.

Now, the reforms I’m proposing today should give the American people greater confidence that their rights are being protected, even as our intelligence and law enforcement agencies maintain the tools they need to keep us safe. And I recognize that there are additional issues that require further debate. For example, some who participated in our review, as well as some members of Congress, would like to see more sweeping reforms to the use of national security letters so that we have to go to a judge each time before issuing these requests. Here, I have concerns that we should not set a standard for terrorism investigations that is higher than those involved in investigating an ordinary crime. But I agree that greater oversight on the use of these letters may be appropriate, and I’m prepared to work with Congress on this issue.

There are also those who would like to see different changes to the FISA Court than the ones I’ve proposed. On all these issues, I am open to working with Congress to ensure that we build a broad consensus for how to move forward, and I’m confident that we can shape an approach that meets our security needs while upholding the civil liberties of every American.

Let me now turn to the separate set of concerns that have been raised overseas, and focus on America’s approach to intelligence collection abroad. As I’ve indicated, the United States has unique responsibilities when it comes to intelligence collection. Our capabilities help protect not only our nation, but our friends and our allies, as well. But our efforts will only be effective if ordinary citizens in other countries have confidence that the United States respects their privacy, too. And the leaders of our close friends and allies deserve to know that if I want to know what they think about an issue, I’ll pick up the phone and call them, rather than turning to surveillance. In other words, just as we balance security and privacy at home, our global leadership demands that we balance our security requirements against our need to maintain the trust and cooperation among people and leaders around the world.

For that reason, the new presidential directive that I’ve issued today will clearly prescribe what we do, and do not do, when it comes to our overseas surveillance. To begin with, the directive makes clear that the United States only uses signals intelligence for legitimate national security purposes, and not for the purpose of indiscriminately reviewing the emails or phone calls of ordinary folks. I’ve also made it clear that the United States does not collect intelligence to suppress criticism or dissent, nor do we collect intelligence to disadvantage people on the basis of their ethnicity, or race, or gender, or sexual orientation, or religious beliefs. We do not collect intelligence to provide a competitive advantage to U.S. companies or U.S. commercial sectors.

And in terms of our bulk collection of signals intelligence, U.S. intelligence agencies will only use such data to meet specific security requirements: counterintelligence, counterterrorism, counter-proliferation, cybersecurity, force protection for our troops and our allies, and combating transnational crime, including sanctions evasion.

In this directive, I have taken the unprecedented step of extending certain protections that we have for the American people to people overseas. I’ve directed the DNI, in consultation with the Attorney General, to develop these safeguards, which will limit the duration that we can hold personal information, while also restricting the use of this information.

The bottom line is that people around the world, regardless of their nationality, should know that the United States is not spying on ordinary people who don’t threaten our national security, and that we take their privacy concerns into account in our policies and procedures. This applies to foreign leaders as well. Given the understandable attention that this issue has received, I have made clear to the intelligence community that unless there is a compelling national security purpose, we will not monitor the communications of heads of state and government of our close friends and allies. And I’ve instructed my national security team, as well as the intelligence community, to work with foreign counterparts to deepen our coordination and cooperation in ways that rebuild trust going forward.

Now let me be clear: Our intelligence agencies will continue to gather information about the intentions of governments -- as opposed to ordinary citizens -- around the world, in the same way that the intelligence services of every other nation does. We will not apologize simply because our services may be more effective. But heads of state and government with whom we work closely, and on whose cooperation we depend, should feel confident that we are treating them as real partners. And the changes I’ve ordered do just that.

Finally, to make sure that we follow through on all these reforms, I am making some important changes to how our government is organized. The State Department will designate a senior officer to coordinate our diplomacy on issues related to technology and signals intelligence. We will appoint a senior official at the White House to implement the new privacy safeguards that I have announced today. I will devote the resources to centralize and improve the process we use to handle foreign requests for legal assistance, keeping our high standards for privacy while helping foreign partners fight crime and terrorism.

I have also asked my counselor, John Podesta, to lead a comprehensive review of big data and privacy. And this group will consist of government officials who, along with the President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology, will reach out to privacy experts, technologists and business leaders, and look how the challenges inherent in big data are being confronted by both the public and private sectors; whether we can forge international norms on how to manage this data; and how we can continue to promote the free flow of information in ways that are consistent with both privacy and security.

For ultimately, what’s at stake in this debate goes far beyond a few months of headlines, or passing tensions in our foreign policy. When you cut through the noise, what’s really at stake is how we remain true to who we are in a world that is remaking itself at dizzying speed. Whether it’s the ability of individuals to communicate ideas; to access information that would have once filled every great library in every country in the world; or to forge bonds with people on other sides of the globe, technology is remaking what is possible for individuals, and for institutions, and for the international order. So while the reforms that I have announced will point us in a new direction, I am mindful that more work will be needed in the future.

One thing I’m certain of: This debate will make us stronger. And I also know that in this time of change, the United States of America will have to lead. It may seem sometimes that America is being held to a different standard. And I'll admit the readiness of some to assume the worst motives by our government can be frustrating. No one expects China to have an open debate about their surveillance programs, or Russia to take privacy concerns of citizens in other places into account. But let’s remember: We are held to a different standard precisely because we have been at the forefront of defending personal privacy and human dignity.

As the nation that developed the Internet, the world expects us to ensure that the digital revolution works as a tool for individual empowerment, not government control. Having faced down the dangers of totalitarianism and fascism and communism, the world expects us to stand up for the principle that every person has the right to think and write and form relationships freely -- because individual freedom is the wellspring of human progress.

Those values make us who we are. And because of the strength of our own democracy, we should not shy away from high expectations. For more than two centuries, our Constitution has weathered every type of change because we have been willing to defend it, and because we have been willing to question the actions that have been taken in its defense. Today is no different. I believe we can meet high expectations. Together, let us chart a way forward that secures the life of our nation while preserving the liberties that make our nation worth fighting for.

Thank you. God bless you. May God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Fifth Presidential State of the Union

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, Members of Congress, my fellow Americans:

Today in America, a teacher spent extra time with a student who needed it, and did her part to lift America's graduation rate to its highest level in more than three decades.

An entrepreneur flipped on the lights in her tech startup, and did her part to add to the more than eight million new jobs our businesses have created over the past four years.

An autoworker fine-tuned some of the best, most fuel-efficient cars in the world, and did his part to help America wean itself off foreign oil.

A farmer prepared for the spring after the strongest five-year stretch of farm exports in our history. A rural doctor gave a young child the first prescription to treat asthma that his mother could afford. A man took the bus home from the graveyard shift, bone-tired but dreaming big dreams for his son. And in tight-knit communities across America, fathers and mothers will tuck in their kids, put an arm around their spouse, remember fallen comrades, and give thanks for being home from a war that, after twelve long years, is finally coming to an end.

Tonight, this chamber speaks with one voice to the people we represent: it is you, our citizens, who make the state of our union strong.

Here are the results of your efforts: The lowest unemployment rate in over five years. A rebounding housing market. A manufacturing sector that's adding jobs for the first time since the 1990s. More oil produced at home than we buy from the rest of the world -- the first time that's happened in nearly twenty years. Our deficits -- cut by more than half. And for the first time in over a decade, business leaders around the world have declared that China is no longer the world's number one place to invest; America is.

That's why I believe this can be a breakthrough year for America. After five years of grit and determined effort, the United States is better-positioned for the 21st century than any other nation on Earth.

The question for everyone in this chamber, running through every decision we make this year, is whether we are going to help or hinder this progress. For several years now, this town has been consumed by a rancorous argument over the proper size of the federal government. It's an important debate -- one that dates back to our very founding. But when that debate prevents us from carrying out even the most basic functions of our democracy -- when our differences shut down government or threaten the full faith and credit of the United States -- then we are not doing right by the American people.

As President, I'm committed to making Washington work better, and rebuilding the trust of the people who sent us here. I believe most of you are, too. Last month, thanks to the work of Democrats and Republicans, this Congress finally produced a budget that undoes some of last year's severe cuts to priorities like education. Nobody got everything they wanted, and we can still do more to invest in this country's future while bringing down our deficit in a balanced way. But the budget compromise should leave us freer to focus on creating new jobs, not creating new crises.

In the coming months, let's see where else we can make progress together. Let's make this a year of action. That's what most Americans want -- for all of us in this chamber to focus on their lives, their hopes, their aspirations. And what I believe unites the people of this nation, regardless of race or region or party, young or old, rich or poor, is the simple, profound belief in opportunity for all -- the notion that if you work hard and take responsibility, you can get ahead.

Let's face it: that belief has suffered some serious blows. Over more than three decades, even before the Great Recession hit, massive shifts in technology and global competition had eliminated a lot of good, middle-class jobs, and weakened the economic foundations that families depend on.

Today, after four years of economic growth, corporate profits and stock prices have rarely been higher, and those at the top have never done better. But average wages have barely budged. Inequality has deepened. Upward mobility has stalled. The cold, hard fact is that even in the midst of recovery, too many Americans are working more than ever just to get by -- let alone get ahead. And too many still aren't working at all.

Our job is to reverse these trends. It won't happen right away, and we won't agree on everything. But what I offer tonight is a set of concrete, practical proposals to speed up growth, strengthen the middle class, and build new ladders of opportunity into the middle class. Some require Congressional action, and I'm eager to work with all of you. But America does not stand still -- and neither will I. So wherever and whenever I can take steps without legislation to expand opportunity for more American families, that's what I'm going to do.

As usual, our First Lady sets a good example. Michelle's Let's Move partnership with schools, businesses, and local leaders has helped bring down childhood obesity rates for the first time in thirty years -- an achievement that will improve lives and reduce health care costs for decades to come. The Joining Forces alliance that Michelle and Jill Biden launched has already encouraged employers to hire or train nearly 400,000 veterans and military spouses. Taking a page from that playbook, the White House just organized a College Opportunity Summit where already, 150 universities, businesses, and nonprofits have made concrete commitments to reduce inequality in access to higher education -- and help every hardworking kid go to college and succeed when they get to campus. Across the country, we're partnering with mayors, governors, and state legislatures on issues from homelessness to marriage equality.

The point is, there are millions of Americans outside Washington who are tired of stale political arguments, and are moving this country forward. They believe, and I believe, that here in America, our success should depend not on accident of birth, but the strength of our work ethic and the scope of our dreams. That's what drew our forebears here. It's how the daughter of a factory worker is CEO of America's largest automaker; how the son of a barkeeper is Speaker of the House; how the son of a single mom can be President of the greatest nation on Earth.

Opportunity is who we are. And the defining project of our generation is to restore that promise.

We know where to start: the best measure of opportunity is access to a good job. With the economy picking up speed, companies say they intend to hire more people this year. And over half of big manufacturers say they're thinking of insourcing jobs from abroad.

So let's make that decision easier for more companies. Both Democrats and Republicans have argued that our tax code is riddled with wasteful, complicated loopholes that punish businesses investing here, and reward companies that keep profits abroad. Let's flip that equation. Let's work together to close those loopholes, end those incentives to ship jobs overseas, and lower tax rates for businesses that create jobs here at home.

Moreover, we can take the money we save with this transition to tax reform to create jobs rebuilding our roads, upgrading our ports, unclogging our commutes -- because in today's global economy, first-class jobs gravitate to first-class infrastructure. We'll need Congress to protect more than three million jobs by finishing transportation and waterways bills this summer. But I will act on my own to slash bureaucracy and streamline the permitting process for key projects, so we can get more construction workers on the job as fast as possible.

We also have the chance, right now, to beat other countries in the race for the next wave of high-tech manufacturing jobs. My administration has launched two hubs for high-tech manufacturing in Raleigh and Youngstown, where we've connected businesses to research universities that can help America lead the world in advanced technologies. Tonight, I'm announcing we'll launch six more this year. Bipartisan bills in both houses could double the number of these hubs and the jobs they create. So get those bills to my desk and put more Americans back to work.

Let's do more to help the entrepreneurs and small business owners who create most new jobs in America. Over the past five years, my administration has made more loans to small business owners than any other. And when ninety-eight percent of our exporters are small businesses, new trade partnerships with Europe and the Asia-Pacific will help them create more jobs. We need to work together on tools like bipartisan trade promotion authority to protect our workers, protect our environment, and open new markets to new goods stamped "Made in the USA." China and Europe aren't standing on the sidelines. Neither should we.

We know that the nation that goes all-in on innovation today will own the global economy tomorrow. This is an edge America cannot surrender. Federally-funded research helped lead to the ideas and inventions behind Google and smartphones. That's why Congress should undo the damage done by last year's cuts to basic research so we can unleash the next great American discovery -- whether it's vaccines that stay ahead of drug-resistant bacteria, or paper-thin material that's stronger than steel. And let's pass a patent reform bill that allows our businesses to stay focused on innovation, not costly, needless litigation.

Now, one of the biggest factors in bringing more jobs back is our commitment to American energy. The all-of-the-above energy strategy I announced a few years ago is working, and today, America is closer to energy independence than we've been in decades.

One of the reasons why is natural gas -- if extracted safely, it's the bridge fuel that can power our economy with less of the carbon pollution that causes climate change. Businesses plan to invest almost $100 billion in new factories that use natural gas. I'll cut red tape to help states get those factories built, and this Congress can help by putting people to work building fueling stations that shift more cars and trucks from foreign oil to American natural gas. My administration will keep working with the industry to sustain production and job growth while strengthening protection of our air, our water, and our communities. And while we're at it, I'll use my authority to protect more of our pristine federal lands for future generations.

It's not just oil and natural gas production that's booming; we're becoming a global leader in solar, too. Every four minutes, another American home or business goes solar; every panel pounded into place by a worker whose job can't be outsourced. Let's continue that progress with a smarter tax policy that stops giving $4 billion a year to fossil fuel industries that don't need it, so that we can invest more in fuels of the future that do.

And even as we've increased energy production, we've partnered with businesses, builders, and local communities to reduce the energy we consume. When we rescued our automakers, for example, we worked with them to set higher fuel efficiency standards for our cars. In the coming months, I'll build on that success by setting new standards for our trucks, so we can keep driving down oil imports and what we pay at the pump.

Taken together, our energy policy is creating jobs and leading to a cleaner, safer planet. Over the past eight years, the United States has reduced our total carbon pollution more than any other nation on Earth. But we have to act with more urgency -- because a changing climate is already harming western communities struggling with drought, and coastal cities dealing with floods. That's why I directed my administration to work with states, utilities, and others to set new standards on the amount of carbon pollution our power plants are allowed to dump into the air. The shift to a cleaner energy economy won't happen overnight, and it will require tough choices along the way. But the debate is settled. Climate change is a fact. And when our children's children look us in the eye and ask if we did all we could to leave them a safer, more stable world, with new sources of energy, I want us to be able to say yes, we did.

Finally, if we are serious about economic growth, it is time to heed the call of business leaders, labor leaders, faith leaders, and law enforcement -- and fix our broken immigration system. Republicans and Democrats in the Senate have acted. I know that members of both parties in the House want to do the same. Independent economists say immigration reform will grow our economy and shrink our deficits by almost $1 trillion in the next two decades. And for good reason: when people come here to fulfill their dreams -- to study, invent, and contribute to our culture -- they make our country a more attractive place for businesses to locate and create jobs for everyone. So let's get immigration reform done this year.

The ideas I've outlined so far can speed up growth and create more jobs. But in this rapidly-changing economy, we have to make sure that every American has the skills to fill those jobs.

The good news is, we know how to do it. Two years ago, as the auto industry came roaring back, Andra Rush opened up a manufacturing firm in Detroit. She knew that Ford needed parts for the best-selling truck in America, and she knew how to make them. She just needed the workforce. So she dialed up what we call an American Job Center -- places where folks can walk in to get the help or training they need to find a new job, or better job. She was flooded with new workers. And today, Detroit Manufacturing Systems has more than 700 employees.

What Andra and her employees experienced is how it should be for every employer -- and every job seeker. So tonight, I've asked Vice President Biden to lead an across-the-board reform of America's training programs to make sure they have one mission: train Americans with the skills employers need, and match them to good jobs that need to be filled right now. That means more on-the-job training, and more apprenticeships that set a young worker on an upward trajectory for life. It means connecting companies to community colleges that can help design training to fill their specific needs. And if Congress wants to help, you can concentrate funding on proven programs that connect more ready-to-work Americans with ready-to-be-filled jobs.

I'm also convinced we can help Americans return to the workforce faster by reforming unemployment insurance so that it's more effective in today's economy. But first, this Congress needs to restore the unemployment insurance you just let expire for 1.6 million people.

Let me tell you why.

Misty DeMars is a mother of two young boys. She'd been steadily employed since she was a teenager. She put herself through college. She'd never collected unemployment benefits. In May, she and her husband used their life savings to buy their first home. A week later, budget cuts claimed the job she loved. Last month, when their unemployment insurance was cut off, she sat down and wrote me a letter -- the kind I get every day. "We are the face of the unemployment crisis," she wrote. "I am not dependent on the government…Our country depends on people like us who build careers, contribute to society…care about our neighbors…I am confident that in time I will find a job…I will pay my taxes, and we will raise our children in their own home in the community we love. Please give us this chance."

Congress, give these hardworking, responsible Americans that chance. They need our help, but more important, this country needs them in the game. That's why I've been asking CEOs to give more long-term unemployed workers a fair shot at that new job and new chance to support their families; this week, many will come to the White House to make that commitment real. Tonight, I ask every business leader in America to join us and to do the same -- because we are stronger when America fields a full team.

Of course, it's not enough to train today's workforce. We also have to prepare tomorrow's workforce, by guaranteeing every child access to a world-class education.

Estiven Rodriguez couldn't speak a word of English when he moved to New York City at age nine. But last month, thanks to the support of great teachers and an innovative tutoring program, he led a march of his classmates -- through a crowd of cheering parents and neighbors -- from their high school to the post office, where they mailed off their college applications. And this son of a factory worker just found out he's going to college this fall.

Five years ago, we set out to change the odds for all our kids. We worked with lenders to reform student loans, and today, more young people are earning college degrees than ever before. Race to the Top, with the help of governors from both parties, has helped states raise expectations and performance. Teachers and principals in schools from Tennessee to Washington, D.C. are making big strides in preparing students with skills for the new economy -- problem solving, critical thinking, science, technology, engineering, and math. Some of this change is hard. It requires everything from more challenging curriculums and more demanding parents to better support for teachers and new ways to measure how well our kids think, not how well they can fill in a bubble on a test. But it's worth it -- and it's working.

The problem is we're still not reaching enough kids, and we're not reaching them in time. That has to change.

Research shows that one of the best investments we can make in a child's life is high-quality early education. Last year, I asked this Congress to help states make high-quality pre-K available to every four year-old. As a parent as well as a President, I repeat that request tonight. But in the meantime, thirty states have raised pre-k funding on their own. They know we can't wait. So just as we worked with states to reform our schools, this year, we'll invest in new partnerships with states and communities across the country in a race to the top for our youngest children. And as Congress decides what it's going to do, I'm going to pull together a coalition of elected officials, business leaders, and philanthropists willing to help more kids access the high-quality pre-K they need.

Last year, I also pledged to connect 99 percent of our students to high-speed broadband over the next four years. Tonight, I can announce that with the support of the FCC and companies like Apple, Microsoft, Sprint, and Verizon, we've got a down payment to start connecting more than 15,000 schools and twenty million students over the next two years, without adding a dime to the deficit.

We're working to redesign high schools and partner them with colleges and employers that offer the real-world education and hands-on training that can lead directly to a job and career. We're shaking up our system of higher education to give parents more information, and colleges more incentives to offer better value, so that no middle-class kid is priced out of a college education. We're offering millions the opportunity to cap their monthly student loan payments to ten percent of their income, and I want to work with Congress to see how we can help even more Americans who feel trapped by student loan debt. And I'm reaching out to some of America's leading foundations and corporations on a new initiative to help more young men of color facing tough odds stay on track and reach their full potential.

The bottom line is, Michelle and I want every child to have the same chance this country gave us. But we know our opportunity agenda won't be complete -- and too many young people entering the workforce today will see the American Dream as an empty promise -- unless we do more to make sure our economy honors the dignity of work, and hard work pays off for every single American.

Today, women make up about half our workforce. But they still make 77 cents for every dollar a man earns. That is wrong, and in 2014, it's an embarrassment. A woman deserves equal pay for equal work. She deserves to have a baby without sacrificing her job. A mother deserves a day off to care for a sick child or sick parent without running into hardship -- and you know what, a father does, too. It's time to do away with workplace policies that belong in a "Mad Men" episode. This year, let's all come together -- Congress, the White House, and businesses from Wall Street to Main Street -- to give every woman the opportunity she deserves. Because I firmly believe when women succeed, America succeeds.

Now, women hold a majority of lower-wage jobs -- but they're not the only ones stifled by stagnant wages. Americans understand that some people will earn more than others, and we don't resent those who, by virtue of their efforts, achieve incredible success. But Americans overwhelmingly agree that no one who works full time should ever have to raise a family in poverty.

In the year since I asked this Congress to raise the minimum wage, five states have passed laws to raise theirs. Many businesses have done it on their own. Nick Chute is here tonight with his boss, John Soranno. John's an owner of Punch Pizza in Minneapolis, and Nick helps make the dough. Only now he makes more of it: John just gave his employees a raise, to ten bucks an hour -- a decision that eased their financial stress and boosted their morale.

Tonight, I ask more of America's business leaders to follow John's lead and do what you can to raise your employees' wages. To every mayor, governor, and state legislator in America, I say, you don't have to wait for Congress to act; Americans will support you if you take this on. And as a chief executive, I intend to lead by example. Profitable corporations like Costco see higher wages as the smart way to boost productivity and reduce turnover. We should too. In the coming weeks, I will issue an Executive Order requiring federal contractors to pay their federally-funded employees a fair wage of at least $10.10 an hour -- because if you cook our troops' meals or wash their dishes, you shouldn't have to live in poverty.

Of course, to reach millions more, Congress needs to get on board. Today, the federal minimum wage is worth about twenty percent less than it was when Ronald Reagan first stood here. Tom Harkin and George Miller have a bill to fix that by lifting the minimum wage to $10.10. This will help families. It will give businesses customers with more money to spend. It doesn't involve any new bureaucratic program. So join the rest of the country. Say yes. Give America a raise.

There are other steps we can take to help families make ends meet, and few are more effective at reducing inequality and helping families pull themselves up through hard work than the Earned Income Tax Credit. Right now, it helps about half of all parents at some point. But I agree with Republicans like Senator Rubio that it doesn't do enough for single workers who don't have kids. So let's work together to strengthen the credit, reward work, and help more Americans get ahead.

Let's do more to help Americans save for retirement. Today, most workers don't have a pension. A Social Security check often isn't enough on its own. And while the stock market has doubled over the last five years, that doesn't help folks who don't have 401ks. That's why, tomorrow, I will direct the Treasury to create a new way for working Americans to start their own retirement savings: MyRA. It's a new savings bond that encourages folks to build a nest egg. MyRA guarantees a decent return with no risk of losing what you put in. And if this Congress wants to help, work with me to fix an upside-down tax code that gives big tax breaks to help the wealthy save, but does little to nothing for middle-class Americans. Offer every American access to an automatic IRA on the job, so they can save at work just like everyone in this chamber can. And since the most important investment many families make is their home, send me legislation that protects taxpayers from footing the bill for a housing crisis ever again, and keeps the dream of homeownership alive for future generations of Americans.

One last point on financial security. For decades, few things exposed hard-working families to economic hardship more than a broken health care system. And in case you haven't heard, we're in the process of fixing that.

A pre-existing condition used to mean that someone like Amanda Shelley, a physician assistant and single mom from Arizona, couldn't get health insurance. But on January 1st, she got covered. On January 3rd, she felt a sharp pain. On January 6th, she had emergency surgery. Just one week earlier, Amanda said, that surgery would've meant bankruptcy.

That's what health insurance reform is all about -- the peace of mind that if misfortune strikes, you don't have to lose everything.

Already, because of the Affordable Care Act, more than three million Americans under age 26 have gained coverage under their parents' plans.

More than nine million Americans have signed up for private health insurance or Medicaid coverage.

And here's another number: zero. Because of this law, no American can ever again be dropped or denied coverage for a preexisting condition like asthma, back pain, or cancer. No woman can ever be charged more just because she's a woman. And we did all this while adding years to Medicare's finances, keeping Medicare premiums flat, and lowering prescription costs for millions of seniors.

Now, I don't expect to convince my Republican friends on the merits of this law. But I know that the American people aren't interested in refighting old battles. So again, if you have specific plans to cut costs, cover more people, and increase choice -- tell America what you'd do differently. Let's see if the numbers add up. But let's not have another forty-something votes to repeal a law that's already helping millions of Americans like Amanda. The first forty were plenty. We got it. We all owe it to the American people to say what we're for, not just what we're against.

And if you want to know the real impact this law is having, just talk to Governor Steve Beshear of Kentucky, who's here tonight. Kentucky's not the most liberal part of the country, but he's like a man possessed when it comes to covering his commonwealth's families. "They are our friends and neighbors," he said. "They are people we shop and go to church with…farmers out on the tractors…grocery clerks…they are people who go to work every morning praying they don't get sick. No one deserves to live that way."

Steve's right. That's why, tonight, I ask every American who knows someone without health insurance to help them get covered by March 31st. Moms, get on your kids to sign up. Kids, call your mom and walk her through the application. It will give her some peace of mind -- plus, she'll appreciate hearing from you.

After all, that's the spirit that has always moved this nation forward. It's the spirit of citizenship -- the recognition that through hard work and responsibility, we can pursue our individual dreams, but still come together as one American family to make sure the next generation can pursue its dreams as well.

Citizenship means standing up for everyone's right to vote. Last year, part of the Voting Rights Act was weakened. But conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats are working together to strengthen it; and the bipartisan commission I appointed last year has offered reforms so that no one has to wait more than a half hour to vote. Let's support these efforts. It should be the power of our vote, not the size of our bank account, that drives our democracy.

Citizenship means standing up for the lives that gun violence steals from us each day. I have seen the courage of parents, students, pastors, and police officers all over this country who say "we are not afraid," and I intend to keep trying, with or without Congress, to help stop more tragedies from visiting innocent Americans in our movie theaters, shopping malls, or schools like Sandy Hook.

Citizenship demands a sense of common cause; participation in the hard work of self-government; an obligation to serve to our communities. And I know this chamber agrees that few Americans give more to their country than our diplomats and the men and women of the United States Armed Forces.

Tonight, because of the extraordinary troops and civilians who risk and lay down their lives to keep us free, the United States is more secure. When I took office, nearly 180,000 Americans were serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. Today, all our troops are out of Iraq. More than 60,000 of our troops have already come home from Afghanistan. With Afghan forces now in the lead for their own security, our troops have moved to a support role. Together with our allies, we will complete our mission there by the end of this year, and America's longest war will finally be over.

After 2014, we will support a unified Afghanistan as it takes responsibility for its own future. If the Afghan government signs a security agreement that we have negotiated, a small force of Americans could remain in Afghanistan with NATO allies to carry out two narrow missions: training and assisting Afghan forces, and counterterrorism operations to pursue any remnants of al Qaeda. For while our relationship with Afghanistan will change, one thing will not: our resolve that terrorists do not launch attacks against our country.

The fact is, that danger remains. While we have put al Qaeda's core leadership on a path to defeat, the threat has evolved, as al Qaeda affiliates and other extremists take root in different parts of the world. In Yemen, Somalia, Iraq, and Mali, we have to keep working with partners to disrupt and disable these networks. In Syria, we'll support the opposition that rejects the agenda of terrorist networks. Here at home, we'll keep strengthening our defenses, and combat new threats like cyberattacks. And as we reform our defense budget, we have to keep faith with our men and women in uniform, and invest in the capabilities they need to succeed in future missions.

We have to remain vigilant. But I strongly believe our leadership and our security cannot depend on our military alone. As Commander-in-Chief, I have used force when needed to protect the American people, and I will never hesitate to do so as long as I hold this office. But I will not send our troops into harm's way unless it's truly necessary; nor will I allow our sons and daughters to be mired in open-ended conflicts. We must fight the battles that need to be fought, not those that terrorists prefer from us -- large-scale deployments that drain our strength and may ultimately feed extremism.

So, even as we aggressively pursue terrorist networks -- through more targeted efforts and by building the capacity of our foreign partners -- America must move off a permanent war footing. That's why I've imposed prudent limits on the use of drones -- for we will not be safer if people abroad believe we strike within their countries without regard for the consequence. That's why, working with this Congress, I will reform our surveillance programs -- because the vital work of our intelligence community depends on public confidence, here and abroad, that the privacy of ordinary people is not being violated. And with the Afghan war ending, this needs to be the year Congress lifts the remaining restrictions on detainee transfers and we close the prison at Guantanamo Bay -- because we counter terrorism not just through intelligence and military action, but by remaining true to our Constitutional ideals, and setting an example for the rest of the world.

You see, in a world of complex threats, our security and leadership depends on all elements of our power -- including strong and principled diplomacy. American diplomacy has rallied more than fifty countries to prevent nuclear materials from falling into the wrong hands, and allowed us to reduce our own reliance on Cold War stockpiles. American diplomacy, backed by the threat of force, is why Syria's chemical weapons are being eliminated, and we will continue to work with the international community to usher in the future the Syrian people deserve -- a future free of dictatorship, terror and fear. As we speak, American diplomacy is supporting Israelis and Palestinians as they engage in difficult but necessary talks to end the conflict there; to achieve dignity and an independent state for Palestinians, and lasting peace and security for the State of Israel -- a Jewish state that knows America will always be at their side.

And it is American diplomacy, backed by pressure, that has halted the progress of Iran's nuclear program -- and rolled parts of that program back -- for the very first time in a decade. As we gather here tonight, Iran has begun to eliminate its stockpile of higher levels of enriched uranium. It is not installing advanced centrifuges. Unprecedented inspections help the world verify, every day, that Iran is not building a bomb. And with our allies and partners, we're engaged in negotiations to see if we can peacefully achieve a goal we all share: preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.

These negotiations will be difficult. They may not succeed. We are clear-eyed about Iran's support for terrorist organizations like Hezbollah, which threaten our allies; and the mistrust between our nations cannot be wished away. But these negotiations do not rely on trust; any long-term deal we agree to must be based on verifiable action that convinces us and the international community that Iran is not building a nuclear bomb. If John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan could negotiate with the Soviet Union, then surely a strong and confident America can negotiate with less powerful adversaries today.

The sanctions that we put in place helped make this opportunity possible. But let me be clear: if this Congress sends me a new sanctions bill now that threatens to derail these talks, I will veto it. For the sake of our national security, we must give diplomacy a chance to succeed. If Iran's leaders do not seize this opportunity, then I will be the first to call for more sanctions, and stand ready to exercise all options to make sure Iran does not build a nuclear weapon. But if Iran's leaders do seize the chance, then Iran could take an important step to rejoin the community of nations, and we will have resolved one of the leading security challenges of our time without the risks of war.

Finally, let's remember that our leadership is defined not just by our defense against threats, but by the enormous opportunities to do good and promote understanding around the globe -- to forge greater cooperation, to expand new markets, to free people from fear and want. And no one is better positioned to take advantage of those opportunities than America.

Our alliance with Europe remains the strongest the world has ever known. From Tunisia to Burma, we're supporting those who are willing to do the hard work of building democracy. In Ukraine, we stand for the principle that all people have the right to express themselves freely and peacefully, and have a say in their country's future. Across Africa, we're bringing together businesses and governments to double access to electricity and help end extreme poverty. In the Americas, we are building new ties of commerce, but we're also expanding cultural and educational exchanges among young people. And we will continue to focus on the Asia-Pacific, where we support our allies, shape a future of greater security and prosperity, and extend a hand to those devastated by disaster -- as we did in the Philippines, when our Marines and civilians rushed to aid those battered by a typhoon, and were greeted with words like, "We will never forget your kindness" and "God bless America!"

We do these things because they help promote our long-term security. And we do them because we believe in the inherent dignity and equality of every human being, regardless of race or religion, creed or sexual orientation.

And next week, the world will see one expression of that commitment -- when Team USA marches the red, white, and blue into the Olympic Stadium -- and brings home the gold.

My fellow Americans, no other country in the world does what we do. On every issue, the world turns to us, not simply because of the size of our economy or our military might -- but because of the ideals we stand for, and the burdens we bear to advance them.

No one knows this better than those who serve in uniform. As this time of war draws to a close, a new generation of heroes returns to civilian life. We'll keep slashing that backlog so our veterans receive the benefits they've earned, and our wounded warriors receive the health care -- including the mental health care -- that they need. We'll keep working to help all our veterans translate their skills and leadership into jobs here at home. And we all continue to join forces to honor and support our remarkable military families.

Let me tell you about one of those families I've come to know.

I first met Cory Remsburg, a proud Army Ranger, at Omaha Beach on the 65th anniversary of D-Day. Along with some of his fellow Rangers, he walked me through the program -- a strong, impressive young man, with an easy manner, sharp as a tack. We joked around, and took pictures, and I told him to stay in touch.

A few months later, on his tenth deployment, Cory was nearly killed by a massive roadside bomb in Afghanistan. His comrades found him in a canal, face down, underwater, shrapnel in his brain.

For months, he lay in a coma. The next time I met him, in the hospital, he couldn't speak; he could barely move. Over the years, he's endured dozens of surgeries and procedures, and hours of grueling rehab every day.

Even now, Cory is still blind in one eye. He still struggles on his left side. But slowly, steadily, with the support of caregivers like his dad Craig, and the community around him, Cory has grown stronger. Day by day, he's learned to speak again and stand again and walk again -- and he's working toward the day when he can serve his country again.

"My recovery has not been easy," he says. "Nothing in life that's worth anything is easy."

Cory is here tonight. And like the Army he loves, like the America he serves, Sergeant First Class Cory Remsburg never gives up, and he does not quit.

My fellow Americans, men and women like Cory remind us that America has never come easy. Our freedom, our democracy, has never been easy. Sometimes we stumble; we make mistakes; we get frustrated or discouraged. But for more than two hundred years, we have put those things aside and placed our collective shoulder to the wheel of progress -- to create and build and expand the possibilities of individual achievement; to free other nations from tyranny and fear; to promote justice, and fairness, and equality under the law, so that the words set to paper by our founders are made real for every citizen. The America we want for our kids -- a rising America where honest work is plentiful and communities are strong; where prosperity is widely shared and opportunity for all lets us go as far as our dreams and toil will take us -- none of it is easy. But if we work together; if we summon what is best in us, with our feet planted firmly in today but our eyes cast towards tomorrow -- I know it's within our reach.

Believe it.

God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address at the 62nd Prayer Breakfast

Thank you. Please, everyone have a seat. Giving all praise and honor to God, who brought us here this morning.

Thank you so much for our two outstanding co-chairs, Louie and Jan. And I have to say, I would have enjoyed a behind-the-scenes look at the two of these folks getting this breakfast organized this morning. But there does seem to be that sibling thing a little bit, Louie. They love each other, but they’ve got to go at each other a little bit. I, by the way, have always found Louie to be unbelievably gracious every time I’ve seen him. Now, I don’t watch TV, I’ve got to admit. But he is a good man and a great storyteller, and Janice was just reminding me the first time we saw each other was at one of my first events when I first ran for office.

It’s wonderful to see all of the dignitaries and friends who are here today. To the Presidents, and Prime Ministers, the leaders of business and the nonprofit community; to my incredible friend and Vice President, Joe Biden; to my Cabinet members who are here and members of the administration who do such great work every single day; to my fellow Hawaiian, it is wonderful to see you. I should tell you that my surfing is not that good. I just want to be clear. But my bodysurfing is pretty good.

Hamilton: Bodysurfing is fun.

The President: It is. And to Raj Shah, who is just such an incredible young leader and is out there every single day, I could not be more proud of his outstanding leadership at USAID. And it’s a good reminder -- it’s a good reminder of the dedicated public servants that I have the chance to interact with every single day. And they do great work, don’t always get a lot of credit, sometimes get subject to the sort of criticism that you do when you’re in public life, but Raj is single-minded in terms of trying to help as many people as possible all around the world and is an extraordinary representative for our country. So I’m very, very proud of him -- although he does always make me feel like an underachiever whenever I listen to him. I’m thinking, I should have been working harder and not slouching.

Dale Jones and everyone else who worked on this breakfast this morning, thank you, and obviously I’m thrilled to be joined by my extraordinary wife and she does a great job every single day keeping me in line.

Just two other thank-yous. To our men and women in uniform all around the world, we pray for them. Many of them doing such great work to keep us safe. And then there is one colleague of mine who is missing today. A great friend of mine who I came into the Senate with, Senator Tom Coburn. Tom is going through some tough times right now but I love him dearly even though we’re from different parties. He’s a little closer to Louie’s political perspective than mine but he is a good man and I’m keeping him and his family in my prayers all the time. So just a shout-out to my good friend, Tom Coburn.

So each time we gather, it’s a chance to set aside the rush of our daily lives; to pause with humility before an Almighty God; to seek His grace; and, mindful of our own imperfections, to remember the admonition from the Book of Romans, which is especially fitting for those of us in Washington: “Do not claim to be wiser than you are.”

So here we put aside labels of party and ideology, and recall what we are first: all children of a loving God; brothers and sisters called to make His work our own. But in this work, as Lincoln said, our concern should not be whether God is on our side, but whether we are on God’s side.

And here we give thanks for His guidance in our own individual faith journeys. In my life, He directed my path to Chicago and my work with churches who were intent on breaking the cycle of poverty in hard-hit communities there. And I’m grateful not only because I was broke and the church fed me, but because it led to everything else. It led me to embrace Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. It led me to Michelle -- the love of my life -- and it blessed us with two extraordinary daughters. It led me to public service. And the longer I serve, especially in moments of trial or doubt, the more thankful I am of God’s guiding hand.

Now, here, as Americans, we affirm the freedoms endowed by our Creator, among them freedom of religion. And, yes, this freedom safeguards religion, allowing us to flourish as one of the most religious countries on Earth, but it works the other way, too -- because religion strengthens America. Brave men and women of faith have challenged our conscience and brought us closer to our founding ideals, from the abolition of slavery to civil rights, workers’ rights.

So many of you carry on this good work today -- for the child who deserves a school worthy of his dreams; for the parents working overtime to pull themselves out of poverty; for the immigrants who want to step out of the shadows and become a full member of our American family; for the young girl who prays for rescue from the modern slavery of human trafficking, an outrage that we must all join together to end.

Through our Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, led by Melissa Rogers, we’re proud to work with you on this and many other issues. And I invite you to join us in a new initiative that I announced in my State of the Union address -- an effort to help more young men of color overcome the odds, because so many boys in this country need that mentor to help them become a man and a good father.

I’ve felt the love that faith can instill in our lives during my visits to the Holy Land and Jerusalem -- sacred to Jews and Christians and Muslims. I’ve felt it in houses of worship -- whether paying my respects at the tomb of Archbishop Romero in San Salvador, or visiting a synagogue on the eve of Rosh Hashanah, the Blue Mosque in Istanbul or a Buddhist temple in Bangkok. And I’ve felt the compassion of so many faith leaders around the world, and I am especially looking forward to returning to the Vatican next month to meet His Holiness, Pope Francis, whose message about caring for the “least of these” is one that I hope all of us heed. Like Matthew, he has answered the call of Jesus, who said “follow me,” and he inspires us with his words and deeds, his humility, his mercy and his missionary impulse to serve the cause of social justice.

Yet even as our faith sustains us, it’s also clear that around the world freedom of religion is under threat. And that is what I want to reflect on this morning. We see governments engaging in discrimination and violence against the faithful. We sometimes see religion twisted in an attempt to justify hatred and persecution against other people just because of who they are, or how they pray or who they love. Old tensions are stoked, fueling conflicts along religious lines, as we’ve seen in the Central African Republic recently, even though to harm anyone in the name of faith is to diminish our own relationship with God. Extremists succumb to an ignorant nihilism that shows they don’t understand the faiths they claim to profess -- for the killing of the innocent is never fulfilling God’s will; in fact, it’s the ultimate betrayal of God’s will.

Today, we profess the principles we know to be true. We believe that each of us is “wonderfully made” in the image of God. We, therefore, believe in the inherent dignity of every human being -- dignity that no earthly power can take away. And central to that dignity is freedom of religion -- the right of every person to practice their faith how they choose, to change their faith if they choose, or to practice no faith at all, and to do this free from persecution and fear.

Our faith teaches us that in the face of suffering, we can’t stand idly by and that we must be that Good Samaritan. In Isaiah, we’re told “to do right. Seek justice. Defend the oppressed.” The Torah commands: “Know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.” The Koran instructs: “Stand out firmly for justice.” So history shows that nations that uphold the rights of their people -- including the freedom of religion -- are ultimately more just and more peaceful and more successful. Nations that do not uphold these rights sow the bitter seeds of instability and violence and extremism. So freedom of religion matters to our national security.

As I’ve said before, there are times when we work with governments that don’t always meet our highest standards, but they’re working with us on core interests such as the security of the American people. At the same time, we also deeply believe that it’s in our interest, even with our partners, sometimes with our friends, to stand up for universal human rights. So promoting religious freedom is a key objective of U.S. foreign policy. And I’m proud that no nation on Earth does more to stand up for the freedom of religion around the world than the United States of America.

It is not always comfortable to do, but it is right. When I meet with Chinese leaders -- and we do a lot of business with the Chinese, and that relationship is extraordinarily important not just to our two countries but to the world -- but I stress that realizing China’s potential rests on upholding universal rights, including for Christians, and Tibetan Buddhists, and Uighur Muslims.

When I meet with the President of Burma, a country that is trying to emerge out of a long darkness into the light of a representative government, I’ve said that Burma’s return to the international community depends on respecting basic freedoms, including for Christians and Muslims. I’ve pledged our support to the people of Nigeria, who deserve to worship in their churches and mosques in peace, free from terror. I’ve put the weight of my office behind the efforts to protect the people of Sudan and South Sudan, including religious minorities.

As we support Israelis and Palestinians as they engage in direct talks, we’ve made clear that lasting peace will require freedom of worship and access to holy sites for all faiths. I want to take this opportunity to thank Secretary Kerry for his extraordinary passion and principled diplomacy that he’s brought to the cause of peace in the Middle East. Thank you, John.

More broadly, I’ve made the case that no society can truly succeed unless it guarantees the rights of all its peoples, including religious minorities, whether they’re Ahmadiyya Muslims in Pakistan, or Baha’i in Iran, or Coptic Christians in Egypt. And in Syria, it means ensuring a place for all people -- Alawites and Sunni, Shia and Christian.

Going forward, we will keep standing for religious freedom around the world. And that includes, by the way, opposing blasphemy and defamation of religion measures, which are promoted sometimes as an expression of religion, but, in fact, all too often can be used to suppress religious minorities. We continue to stand for the rights of all people to practice their faiths in peace and in freedom. And we will continue to stand against the ugly tide of anti-Semitism that rears it's ugly head all too often.

I look forward to nominating our next ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom to help lead these efforts. And we’re moving ahead with our new strategy to partner more closely with religious leaders and faith communities as we carry out our foreign policy. And I want to thank Shaun Casey, from the Wesley Theological Seminary, for leading this work at the State Department. Shaun I think is here today and we want to thank him for the outstanding work that he’s doing. Thank you, Shaun.

So around the world we’re elevating our engagement with faith leaders and making it a regular part of our diplomacy. And today, I invite you to join us in focusing on several pressing challenges. Let’s do more together to advance human rights, including religious freedom. Let’s do more to promote the development that Raj describes -- from ending extreme poverty to saving lives, from HIV/AIDS to combating climate change so that we can preserve God’s incredible creation. On all these issues, faith leaders and faith organizations here in the United States and around the world are incredible partners, and we're grateful to them.

And in contrast to those who wield religion to divide us, let’s do more to nurture the dialogue between faiths that can break cycles of conflict and build true peace, including in the Holy Land.

And finally, as we build the future we seek, let us never forget those who are persecuted today, among them Americans of faith. We pray for Kenneth Bae, a Christian missionary who’s been held in North Korea for 15 months, sentenced to 15 years of hard labor. His family wants him home. And the United States will continue to do everything in our power to secure his release because Kenneth Bae deserves to be free.

We pray for Pastor Saeed Abedini. He’s been held in Iran for more than 18 months, sentenced to eight years in prison on charges relating to his Christian beliefs. And as we continue to work for his freedom, today, again, we call on the Iranian government to release Pastor Abedini so he can return to the loving arms of his wife and children in Idaho.

And as we pray for all prisoners of conscience, whatever their faiths, wherever they’re held, let’s imagine what it must be like for them. We may not know their names, but all around the world there are people who are waking up in cold cells, facing another day of confinement, another day of unspeakable treatment, simply because they are affirming God. Despite all they’ve endured, despite all the awful punishments if caught, they will wait for that moment when the guards aren’t looking, and when they can close their eyes and bring their hands together and pray.

In those moments of peace, of grace, those moments when their faith is tested in ways that those of us who are more comfortable never experience; in those far-away cells, I believe their unbroken souls are made stronger. And I hope that somehow they hear our prayers for them, that they know that, along with the spirit of God, they have our spirit with them as well, and that they are not alone.

Today we give humble thanks for the freedoms we cherish in this country. And I join you in seeking God’s grace in all of our lives. I pray that His wisdom will give us the capacity to do right and to seek justice, and defend the oppressed wherever they may dwell.

I want to thank all of you for the extraordinary privilege of being here this morning. I want to ask you for your prayers as I continue in this awesome privilege and responsibility as President of the United States. May God bless the United States of America, and God bless all those who seek peace and justice.

Thank you very much.

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# Address to European Youth

Good evening. Goede avond. Bonsoir. Guten abend. Thank you, Laura, for that remarkable introduction. Before she came out she told me not to be nervous. And I can only imagine -- I think her father is in the audience, and I can only imagine how proud he is of her. We're grateful for her work, but she’s also reminding us that our future will be defined by young people like her.

Your Majesties, Mr. Prime Minister, and the people of Belgium -- on behalf of the American people, we are grateful for your friendship. We stand together as inseparable allies, and I thank you for your wonderful hospitality. I have to admit it is easy to love a country famous for chocolate and beer.

Leaders and dignitaries of the European Union; representatives of our NATO Alliance; distinguished guests: We meet here at a moment of testing for Europe and the United States, and for the international order that we have worked for generations to build.

Throughout human history, societies have grappled with fundamental questions of how to organize themselves, the proper relationship between the individual and the state, the best means to resolve inevitable conflicts between states. And it was here in Europe, through centuries of struggle -- through war and Enlightenment, repression and revolution -- that a particular set of ideals began to emerge: The belief that through conscience and free will, each of us has the right to live as we choose. The belief that power is derived from the consent of the governed, and that laws and institutions should be established to protect that understanding. And those ideas eventually inspired a band of colonialists across an ocean, and they wrote them into the founding documents that still guide America today, including the simple truth that all men -- and women -- are created equal.

But those ideals have also been tested -- here in Europe and around the world. Those ideals have often been threatened by an older, more traditional view of power. This alternative vision argues that ordinary men and women are too small-minded to govern their own affairs, that order and progress can only come when individuals surrender their rights to an all-powerful sovereign. Often, this alternative vision roots itself in the notion that by virtue of race or faith or ethnicity, some are inherently superior to others, and that individual identity must be defined by “us” versus “them,” or that national greatness must flow not by what a people stand for, but by what they are against.

In many ways, the history of Europe in the 20th century represented the ongoing clash of these two sets of ideas, both within nations and among nations. The advance of industry and technology outpaced our ability to resolve our differences peacefully, and even among the most civilized of societies, on the surface we saw a descent into barbarism.

This morning at Flanders Field, I was reminded of how war between peoples sent a generation to their deaths in the trenches and gas of the First World War. And just two decades later, extreme nationalism plunged this continent into war once again -- with populations enslaved, and great cities reduced to rubble, and tens of millions slaughtered, including those lost in the Holocaust.

It is in response to this tragic history that, in the aftermath of World War II, America joined with Europe to reject the darker forces of the past and build a new architecture of peace. Workers and engineers gave life to the Marshall Plan. Sentinels stood vigilant in a NATO Alliance that would become the strongest the world has ever known. And across the Atlantic, we embraced a shared vision of Europe -- a vision based on representative democracy, individual rights, and a belief that nations can meet the interests of their citizens through trade and open markets; a social safety net and respect for those of different faiths and backgrounds.

For decades, this vision stood in sharp contrast to life on the other side of an Iron Curtain. For decades, a contest was waged, and ultimately that contest was won -- not by tanks or missiles, but because our ideals stirred the hearts of Hungarians who sparked a revolution; Poles in their shipyards who stood in Solidarity; Czechs who waged a Velvet Revolution without firing a shot; and East Berliners who marched past the guards and finally tore down that wall.

Today, what would have seemed impossible in the trenches of Flanders, the rubble of Berlin, or a dissident’s prison cell -- that reality is taken for granted. A Germany unified. The nations of Central and Eastern Europe welcomed into the family of democracies. Here in this country, once the battleground of Europe, we meet in the hub of a Union that brings together age-old adversaries in peace and cooperation. The people of Europe, hundreds of millions of citizens -- east, west, north, south -- are more secure and more prosperous because we stood together for the ideals we share.

And this story of human progress was by no means limited to Europe. Indeed, the ideals that came to define our alliance also inspired movements across the globe among those very people, ironically, who had too often been denied their full rights by Western powers. After the Second World War, people from Africa to India threw off the yoke of colonialism to secure their independence. In the United States, citizens took freedom rides and endured beatings to put an end to segregation and to secure their civil rights. As the Iron Curtain fell here in Europe, the iron fist of apartheid was unclenched, and Nelson Mandela emerged upright, proud, from prison to lead a multiracial democracy. Latin American nations rejected dictatorship and built new democracies, and Asian nations showed that development and democracy could go hand in hand.

Young people in the audience today, young people like Laura, were born in a place and a time where there is less conflict, more prosperity and more freedom than any time in human history. But that’s not because man’s darkest impulses have vanished. Even here, in Europe, we’ve seen ethnic cleansing in the Balkans that shocked the conscience.

The difficulties of integration and globalization, recently amplified by the worst economic crisis of our lifetimes, strained the European project and stirred the rise of a politics that too often targets immigrants or gays or those who seem somehow different.

While technology has opened up vast opportunities for trade and innovation and cultural understanding, it’s also allowed terrorists to kill on a horrifying scale. Around the world, sectarian warfare and ethnic conflicts continue to claim thousands of lives. And once again, we are confronted with the belief among some that bigger nations can bully smaller ones to get their way -- that recycled maxim that might somehow makes right.

So I come here today to insist that we must never take for granted the progress that has been won here in Europe and advanced around the world, because the contest of ideas continues for your generation. And that’s what’s at stake in Ukraine today. Russia’s leadership is challenging truths that only a few weeks ago seemed self-evident -- that in the 21st century, the borders of Europe cannot be redrawn with force, that international law matters, that people and nations can make their own decisions about their future.

To be honest, if we defined our interests narrowly, if we applied a cold-hearted calculus, we might decide to look the other way. Our economy is not deeply integrated with Ukraine’s. Our people and our homeland face no direct threat from the invasion of Crimea. Our own borders are not threatened by Russia’s annexation. But that kind of casual indifference would ignore the lessons that are written in the cemeteries of this continent. It would allow the old way of doing things to regain a foothold in this young century. And that message would be heard not just in Europe, but in Asia and the Americas, in Africa and the Middle East.

And the consequences that would arise from complacency are not abstractions. The impact that they have on the lives of real people -- men and women just like us -- have to enter into our imaginations. Just look at the young people of Ukraine who were determined to take back their future from a government rotted by corruption -- the portraits of the fallen shot by snipers, the visitors who pay their respects at the Maidan. There was the university student, wrapped in the Ukrainian flag, expressing her hope that “every country should live by the law.” A postgraduate student, speaking of her fellow protestors, saying, “I want these people who are here to have dignity.” Imagine that you are the young woman who said, “there are some things that fear, police sticks and tear gas cannot destroy.”

We’ve never met these people, but we know them. Their voices echo calls for human dignity that rang out in European streets and squares for generations. Their voices echo those around the world who at this very moment fight for their dignity. These Ukrainians rejected a government that was stealing from the people instead of serving them, and are reaching for the same ideals that allow us to be here today.

None of us can know for certain what the coming days will bring in Ukraine, but I am confident that eventually those voices -- those voices for human dignity and opportunity and individual rights and rule of law -- those voices ultimately will triumph. I believe that over the long haul, as nations that are free, as free people, the future is ours. I believe this not because I’m naÃ¯ve, and I believe this not because of the strength of our arms or the size of our economies, I believe this because these ideals that we affirm are true; these ideals are universal.

Yes, we believe in democracy -- with elections that are free and fair; and independent judiciaries and opposition parties; civil society and uncensored information so that individuals can make their own choices. Yes, we believe in open economies based on free markets and innovation, and individual initiative and entrepreneurship, and trade and investment that creates a broader prosperity. And, yes, we believe in human dignity -- that every person is created equal, no matter who you are, or what you look like, or who you love, or where you come from. That is what we believe. That’s what makes us strong.

And our enduring strength is also reflected in our respect for an international system that protects the rights of both nations and people -- a United Nations and a Universal Declaration of Human Rights; international law and the means to enforce those laws. But we also know that those rules are not self-executing; they depend on people and nations of goodwill continually affirming them. And that’s why Russia’s violation of international law -- its assault on Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity -- must be met with condemnation. Not because we’re trying to keep Russia down, but because the principles that have meant so much to Europe and the world must be lifted up.

Over the last several days, the United States, Europe, and our partners around the world have been united in defense of these ideals, and united in support of the Ukrainian people. Together, we’ve condemned Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, and rejected the legitimacy of the Crimean referendum. Together, we have isolated Russia politically, suspending it from the G8 nations and downgrading our bilateral ties. Together, we are imposing costs through sanctions that have left a mark on Russia and those accountable for its actions. And if the Russian leadership stays on its current course, together we will ensure that this isolation deepens. Sanctions will expand. And the toll on Russia’s economy, as well as its standing in the world, will only increase.

And meanwhile, the United States and our allies will continue to support the government of Ukraine as they chart a democratic course. Together, we are going to provide a significant package of assistance that can help stabilize the Ukrainian economy, and meet the basic needs of the people. Make no mistake: Neither the United States, nor Europe has any interest in controlling Ukraine. We have sent no troops there. What we want is for the Ukrainian people to make their own decisions, just like other free people around the world.

Understand, as well, this is not another Cold War that we’re entering into. After all, unlike the Soviet Union, Russia leads no bloc of nations, no global ideology. The United States and NATO do not seek any conflict with Russia. In fact, for more than 60 years, we have come together in NATO -- not to claim other lands, but to keep nations free. What we will do -- always -- is uphold our solemn obligation, our Article 5 duty to defend the sovereignty and territorial integrity of our allies. And in that promise we will never waver; NATO nations never stand alone.

Today, NATO planes patrol the skies over the Baltics, and we’ve reinforced our presence in Poland. And we’re prepared to do more. Going forward, every NATO member state must step up and carry its share of the burden by showing the political will to invest in our collective defense, and by developing the capabilities to serve as a source of international peace and security.

Of course, Ukraine is not a member of NATO -- in part because of its close and complex history with Russia. Nor will Russia be dislodged from Crimea or deterred from further escalation by military force. But with time, so long as we remain united, the Russian people will recognize that they cannot achieve security, prosperity and the status that they seek through brute force. And that’s why, throughout this crisis, we will combine our substantial pressure on Russia with an open door for diplomacy. I believe that for both Ukraine and Russia, a stable peace will come through de-escalation -- direct dialogue between Russia and the government of Ukraine and the international community; monitors who can ensure that the rights of all Ukrainians are protected; a process of constitutional reform within Ukraine; and free and fair elections this spring.

So far, Russia has resisted diplomatic overtures, annexing Crimea and massing large forces along Ukraine’s border. Russia has justified these actions as an effort to prevent problems on its own borders and to protect ethnic Russians inside Ukraine. Of course, there is no evidence, and never has been, of systemic violence against ethnic Russians inside of Ukraine. Moreover, many countries around the world face similar questions about their borders and ethnic minorities abroad, about sovereignty and self-determination. These are tensions that have led in other places to debate and democratic referendums, conflicts and uneasy co-existence. These are difficult issues, and it is precisely because these questions are hard that they must be addressed through constitutional means and international laws so that majorities cannot simply suppress minorities, and big countries cannot simply bully the small.

In defending its actions, Russian leaders have further claimed Kosovo as a precedent -- an example they say of the West interfering in the affairs of a smaller country, just as they’re doing now. But NATO only intervened after the people of Kosovo were systematically brutalized and killed for years. And Kosovo only left Serbia after a referendum was organized not outside the boundaries of international law, but in careful cooperation with the United Nations and with Kosovo’s neighbors. None of that even came close to happening in Crimea.

Moreover, Russia has pointed to America’s decision to go into Iraq as an example of Western hypocrisy. Now, it is true that the Iraq War was a subject of vigorous debate not just around the world, but in the United States as well. I participated in that debate and I opposed our military intervention there. But even in Iraq, America sought to work within the international system. We did not claim or annex Iraq’s territory. We did not grab its resources for our own gain. Instead, we ended our war and left Iraq to its people and a fully sovereign Iraqi state that could make decisions about its own future.

Of course, neither the United States nor Europe are perfect in adherence to our ideals, nor do we claim to be the sole arbiter of what is right or wrong in the world. We are human, after all, and we face difficult choices about how to exercise our power. But part of what makes us different is that we welcome criticism, just as we welcome the responsibilities that come with global leadership.

We look to the East and the South and see nations poised to play a growing role on the world stage, and we consider that a good thing. It reflects the same diversity that makes us stronger as a nation and the forces of integration and cooperation that Europe has advanced for decades. And in a world of challenges that are increasingly global, all of us have an interest in nations stepping forward to play their part -- to bear their share of the burden and to uphold international norms.

So our approach stands in stark contrast to the arguments coming out of Russia these days. It is absurd to suggest -- as a steady drumbeat of Russian voices do -- that America is somehow conspiring with fascists inside of Ukraine or failing to respect the Russian people. My grandfather served in Patton’s Army, just as many of your fathers and grandfathers fought against fascism. We Americans remember well the unimaginable sacrifices made by the Russian people in World War II, and we have honored those sacrifices.

Since the end of the Cold War, we have worked with Russia under successive administrations to build ties of culture and commerce and international community not as a favor to Russia, but because it was in our national interests. And together, we’ve secured nuclear materials from terrorists. We welcomed Russia into the G8 and the World Trade Organization. From the reduction of nuclear arms to the elimination of Syria’s chemical weapons, we believe the world has benefited when Russia chooses to cooperate on the basis of mutual interests and mutual respect.

So America, and the world and Europe, has an interest in a strong and responsible Russia, not a weak one. We want the Russian people to live in security, prosperity and dignity like everyone else -- proud of their own history. But that does not mean that Russia can run roughshod over its neighbors. Just because Russia has a deep history with Ukraine does not mean it should be able to dictate Ukraine’s future. No amount of propaganda can make right something that the world knows is wrong.

In the end, every society must chart its own course. America’s path or Europe’s path is not the only ways to reach freedom and justice. But on the fundamental principle that is at stake here -- the ability of nations and peoples to make their own choices -- there can be no going back. It’s not America that filled the Maidan with protesters -- it was Ukrainians. No foreign forces compelled the citizens of Tunis and Tripoli to rise up -- they did so on their own. From the Burmese parliamentarian pursuing reform to the young leaders fighting corruption and intolerance in Africa, we see something irreducible that all of us share as human beings -- a truth that will persevere in the face of violence and repression and will ultimately overcome.

For the young people here today, I know it may seem easy to see these events as removed from our lives, remote from our daily routines, distant from concerns closer to home. I recognize that both in the United States and in much of Europe there’s more than enough to worry about in the affairs of our own countries. There will always be voices who say that what happens in the wider world is not our concern, nor our responsibility. But we must never forget that we are heirs to a struggle for freedom. Our democracy, our individual opportunity only exists because those who came before us had the wisdom and the courage to recognize that our ideals will only endure if we see our self-interest in the success of other peoples and other nations.

Now is not the time for bluster. The situation in Ukraine, like crises in many parts of the world, does not have easy answers nor a military solution. But at this moment, we must meet the challenge to our ideals -- to our very international order -- with strength and conviction.

And it is you, the young people of Europe, young people like Laura, who will help decide which way the currents of our history will flow. Do not think for a moment that your own freedom, your own prosperity, that your own moral imagination is bound by the limits of your community, your ethnicity, or even your country. You’re bigger than that. You can help us to choose a better history. That’s what Europe tells us. That’s what the American experience is all about.

I say this as the President of a country that looked to Europe for the values that are written into our founding documents, and which spilled blood to ensure that those values could endure on these shores. I also say this as the son of a Kenyan whose grandfather was a cook for the British, and as a person who once lived in Indonesia as it emerged from colonialism. The ideals that unite us matter equally to the young people of Boston or Brussels, or Jakarta or Nairobi, or Krakow or Kyiv.

In the end, the success of our ideals comes down to us -- including the example of our own lives, our own societies. We know that there will always be intolerance. But instead of fearing the immigrant, we can welcome him. We can insist on policies that benefit the many, not just the few; that an age of globalization and dizzying change opens the door of opportunity to the marginalized, and not just a privileged few. Instead of targeting our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters, we can use our laws to protect their rights. Instead of defining ourselves in opposition to others, we can affirm the aspirations that we hold in common. That’s what will make America strong. That’s what will make Europe strong. That’s what makes us who we are.

And just as we meet our responsibilities as individuals, we must be prepared to meet them as nations. Because we live in a world in which our ideals are going to be challenged again and again by forces that would drag us back into conflict or corruption. We can’t count on others to rise to meet those tests. The policies of your government, the principles of your European Union, will make a critical difference in whether or not the international order that so many generations before you have strived to create continues to move forward, or whether it retreats.

And that’s the question we all must answer -- what kind of Europe, what kind of America, what kind of world will we leave behind. And I believe that if we hold firm to our principles, and are willing to back our beliefs with courage and resolve, then hope will ultimately overcome fear, and freedom will continue to triumph over tyranny -- because that is what forever stirs in the human heart.

Thank you very much.

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# Keynote Address at the Civil Rights Summit

What a singular honor it is for me to be here today. I want to thank, first and foremost, the Johnson family for giving us this opportunity and the graciousness with which Michelle and I have been received.

We came down a little bit late because we were upstairs looking at some of the exhibits and some of the private offices that were used by President Johnson and Mrs. Johnson. And Michelle was in particular interested to -- of a recording in which Lady Bird is critiquing President Johnson’s performance. And she said, come, come, you need to listen to this. And she pressed the button and nodded her head. Some things do not change -- even 50 years later.

To all the members of Congress, the warriors for justice, the elected officials and community leaders who are here today -- I want to thank you.

Four days into his sudden presidency -- and the night before he would address a joint session of the Congress in which he once served -- Lyndon Johnson sat around a table with his closest advisors, preparing his remarks to a shattered and grieving nation.

He wanted to call on senators and representatives to pass a civil rights bill -- the most sweeping since Reconstruction. And most of his staff counseled him against it. They said it was hopeless; that it would anger powerful Southern Democrats and committee chairmen; that it risked derailing the rest of his domestic agenda. And one particularly bold aide said he did not believe a President should spend his time and power on lost causes, however worthy they might be. To which, it is said, President Johnson replied, “Well, what the hell’s the presidency for?”

1

What the hell’s the presidency for if not to fight for causes you believe in?

Today, as we commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act, we honor the men and women who made it possible. Some of them are here today. We celebrate giants like John Lewis and Andrew Young and Julian Bond. We recall the countless unheralded Americans, black and white, students and scholars, preachers and housekeepers -- whose names are etched not on monuments, but in the hearts of their loved ones, and in the fabric of the country they helped to change.

But we also gather here, deep in the heart of the state that shaped him, to recall one giant man’s remarkable efforts to make real the promise of our founding: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.”

Those of us who have had the singular privilege to hold the office of the Presidency know well that progress in this country can be hard and it can be slow, frustrating and sometimes you’re stymied. The office humbles you. You’re reminded daily that in this great democracy, you are but a relay swimmer in the currents of history, bound by decisions made by those who came before, reliant on the efforts of those who will follow to fully vindicate your vision.

But the presidency also affords a unique opportunity to bend those currents -- by shaping our laws and by shaping our debates; by working within the confines of the world as it is, but also by reimagining the world as it should be.

This was President Johnson’s genius. As a master of politics and the legislative process, he grasped like few others the power of government to bring about change.

LBJ was nothing if not a realist. He was well aware that the law alone isn’t enough to change hearts and minds. A full century after Lincoln’s time, he said,

Until justice is blind to color, until education is unaware of race, until opportunity is unconcerned with the color of men’s skins, emancipation will be a proclamation but not a fact.

2

He understood laws couldn’t accomplish everything. But he also knew that only the law could anchor change, and set hearts and minds on a different course. And a lot of Americans needed the law’s most basic protections at that time. As Dr. King said at the time,

It may be true that the law can’t make a man love me but it can keep him from lynching me, and I think that’s pretty important.

3

And passing laws was what LBJ knew how to do. No one knew politics and no one loved legislating more than President Johnson. He was charming when he needed to be, ruthless when required. He could wear you down with logic and argument. He could horse trade, and he could flatter. You come with me on this bill,” he would reportedly tell a key Republican leader from my home state during the fight for the Civil Rights Bill, “and 200 years from now, schoolchildren will know only two names: Abraham Lincoln and Everett Dirksen And he knew that senators would believe things like that.

President Johnson liked power. He liked the feel of it, the wielding of it. But that hunger was harnessed and redeemed by a deeper understanding of the human condition; by a sympathy for the underdog, for the downtrodden, for the outcast. And it was a sympathy rooted in his own experience.

As a young boy growing up in the Texas Hill Country, Johnson knew what being poor felt like. “Poverty was so common,” he would later say, “we didn’t even know it had a name.” The family home didn’t have electricity or indoor plumbing. Everybody worked hard, including the children. President Johnson had known the metallic taste of hunger; the feel of a mother’s calloused hands, rubbed raw from washing and cleaning and holding a household together. His cousin Ava remembered sweltering days spent on her hands and knees in the cotton fields, with Lyndon whispering beside her, “Boy, there’s got to be a better way to make a living than this. There’s got to be a better way.”

4

It wasn’t until years later when he was teaching at a so-called Mexican school in a tiny town in Texas that he came to understand how much worse the persistent pain of poverty could be for other races in a Jim Crow South. Oftentimes his students would show up to class hungry. And when he’d visit their homes, he’d meet fathers who were paid slave wages by the farmers they worked for. Those children were taught, he would later say, “that the end of life is in a beet row, a spinach field, or a cotton patch.”

Deprivation and discrimination -- these were not abstractions to Lyndon Baines Johnson. He knew that poverty and injustice are as inseparable as opportunity and justice are joined. So that was in him from an early age.

Now, like any of us, he was not a perfect man. His experiences in rural Texas may have stretched his moral imagination, but he was ambitious, very ambitious, a young man in a hurry to plot his own escape from poverty and to chart his own political career. And in the Jim Crow South, that meant not challenging convention. During his first 20 years in Congress, he opposed every civil rights bill that came up for a vote, once calling the push for federal legislation “a farce and a sham.” He was chosen as a vice presidential nominee in part because of his affinity with, and ability to deliver, that Southern white vote. And at the beginning of the Kennedy administration, he shared with President Kennedy a caution towards racial controversy.

But marchers kept marching. Four little girls were killed in a church. Bloody Sunday happened. The winds of change blew. And when the time came, when LBJ stood in the Oval Office -- I picture him standing there, taking up the entire doorframe, looking out over the South Lawn in a quiet moment -- and asked himself what the true purpose of his office was for, what was the endpoint of his ambitions, he would reach back in his own memory and he’d remember his own experience with want.

And he knew that he had a unique capacity, as the most powerful white politician from the South, to not merely challenge the convention that had crushed the dreams of so many, but to ultimately dismantle for good the structures of legal segregation. He’s the only guy who could do it -- and he knew there would be a cost, famously saying the Democratic Party may “have lost the South for a generation.”

5

That’s what his presidency was for. That’s where he meets his moment. And possessed with an iron will, possessed with those skills that he had honed so many years in Congress, pushed and supported by a movement of those willing to sacrifice everything for their own liberation, President Johnson fought for and argued and horse traded and bullied and persuaded until ultimately he signed the Civil Rights Act into law.

And he didn’t stop there -- even though his advisors again told him to wait, again told him let the dust settle, let the country absorb this momentous decision. He shook them off. “The meat in the coconut,” as President Johnson would put it, was the Voting Rights Act, so he fought for and passed that as well. Immigration reform came shortly after. And then, a Fair Housing Act. And then, a health care law that opponents described as “socialized medicine” that would curtail America’s freedom, but ultimately freed millions of seniors from the fear that illness could rob them of dignity and security in their golden years, which we now know today as Medicare.

What President Johnson understood was that equality required more than the absence of oppression. It required the presence of economic opportunity. He wouldn’t be as eloquent as Dr. King would be in describing that linkage, as Dr. King moved into mobilizing sanitation workers and a poor people’s movement, but he understood that connection because he had lived it. A decent job, decent wages, health care -- those, too, were civil rights worth fighting for. An economy where hard work is rewarded and success is shared, that was his goal. And he knew, as someone who had seen the New Deal transform the landscape of his Texas childhood, who had seen the difference electricity had made because of the Tennessee Valley Authority, the transformation concretely day in and day out in the life of his own family, he understood that government had a role to play in broadening prosperity to all those who would strive for it.

“We want to open the gates to opportunity,” President Johnson said, “But we are also going to give all our people, black and white, the help they need to walk through those gates.”

6

Now, if some of this sounds familiar, it’s because today we remain locked in this same great debate about equality and opportunity, and the role of government in ensuring each. As was true 50 years ago, there are those who dismiss the Great Society as a failed experiment and an encroachment on liberty; who argue that government has become the true source of all that ails us, and that poverty is due to the moral failings of those who suffer from it. There are also those who argue, John, that nothing has changed; that racism is so embedded in our DNA that there is no use trying politics -- the game is rigged.

But such theories ignore history. Yes, it’s true that, despite laws like the Civil Rights Act, and the Voting Rights Act and Medicare, our society is still racked with division and poverty. Yes, race still colors our political debates, and there have been government programs that have fallen short. In a time when cynicism is too often passed off as wisdom, it’s perhaps easy to conclude that there are limits to change; that we are trapped by our own history; and politics is a fool’s errand, and we’d be better off if we roll back big chunks of LBJ’s legacy, or at least if we don’t put too much of our hope, invest too much of our hope in our government.

I reject such thinking. Not just because Medicare and Medicaid have lifted millions from suffering; not just because the poverty rate in this nation would be far worse without food stamps and Head Start and all the Great Society programs that survive to this day. I reject such cynicism because I have lived out the promise of LBJ’s efforts. Because Michelle has lived out the legacy of those efforts. Because my daughters have lived out the legacy of those efforts. Because I and millions of my generation were in a position to take the baton that he handed to us.

Because of the Civil Rights movement, because of the laws President Johnson signed, new doors of opportunity and education swung open for everybody -- not all at once, but they swung open. Not just blacks and whites, but also women and Latinos; and Asians and Native Americans; and gay Americans and Americans with a disability. They swung open for you, and they swung open for me. And that’s why I’m standing here today -- because of those efforts, because of that legacy.

And that means we’ve got a debt to pay. That means we can’t afford to be cynical. Half a century later, the laws LBJ passed are now as fundamental to our conception of ourselves and our democracy as the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. They are foundational; an essential piece of the American character.

But we are here today because we know we cannot be complacent. For history travels not only forwards; history can travel backwards, history can travel sideways. And securing the gains this country has made requires the vigilance of its citizens. Our rights, our freedoms -- they are not given. They must be won. They must be nurtured through struggle and discipline, and persistence and faith.

And one concern I have sometimes during these moments, the celebration of the signing of the Civil Rights Act, the March on Washington -- from a distance, sometimes these commemorations seem inevitable, they seem easy. All the pain and difficulty and struggle and doubt -- all that is rubbed away. And we look at ourselves and we say, oh, things are just too different now; we couldn’t possibly do what was done then -- these giants, what they accomplished. And yet, they were men and women, too. It wasn’t easy then. It wasn’t certain then.

Still, the story of America is a story of progress. However slow, however incomplete, however harshly challenged at each point on our journey, however flawed our leaders, however many times we have to take a quarter of a loaf or half a loaf -- the story of America is a story of progress. And that’s true because of men like President Lyndon Baines Johnson.

In so many ways, he embodied America, with all our gifts and all our flaws, in all our restlessness and all our big dreams. This man -- born into poverty, weaned in a world full of racial hatred -- somehow found within himself the ability to connect his experience with the brown child in a small Texas town; the white child in Appalachia; the black child in Watts. As powerful as he became in that Oval Office, he understood them. He understood what it meant to be on the outside. And he believed that their plight was his plight too; that his freedom ultimately was wrapped up in theirs; and that making their lives better was what the hell the presidency was for.

And those children were on his mind when he strode to the podium that night in the House Chamber, when he called for the vote on the Civil Rights law. “It never occurred to me,” he said, “in my fondest dreams that I might have the chance to help the sons and daughters of those students” that he had taught so many years ago, “and to help people like them all over this country. But now I do have that chance. And I’ll let you in on a secret -- I mean to use it. And I hope that you will use it with me.”7

That was LBJ’s greatness. That’s why we remember him. And if there is one thing that he and this year’s anniversary should teach us, if there’s one lesson I hope that Malia and Sasha and young people everywhere learn from this day, it’s that with enough effort, and enough empathy, and enough perseverance, and enough courage, people who love their country can change it.

In his final year, President Johnson stood on this stage, racked with pain, battered by the controversies of Vietnam, looking far older than his 64 years, and he delivered what would be his final public speech.

“We have proved that great progress is possible,” he said. “We know how much still remains to be done. And if our efforts continue, and if our will is strong, and if our hearts are right, and if courage remains our constant companion, then, my fellow Americans, I am confident, we shall overcome.”

We shall overcome. We, the citizens of the United States. Like Dr. King, like Abraham Lincoln, like countless citizens who have driven this country inexorably forward, President Johnson knew that ours in the end is a story of optimism, a story of achievement and constant striving that is unique upon this Earth. He knew because he had lived that story. He believed that together we can build an America that is more fair, more equal, and more free than the one we inherited. He believed we make our own destiny. And in part because of him, we must believe it as well.

Thank you. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

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# Press Conference on Affordable Care Act and Ukraine

Hello, everybody. Before I begin I just want to express on behalf of the American people our deepest condolences to the Republic of Korea and the families of all those who’ve seen their loved ones lost when a ferry sank within the last couple of days.

Obviously, information is still coming in. We know that many of the victims of this terrible tragedy were students. And American Navy personnel and Marines have already been on the scene helping the search and rescue. As one of our closest allies, our commitment to South Korea is unwavering in good times and in bad, and that's something I'll underscore during my visit to Seoul next week.

Before I take questions I'd also like to say a few words about how the Affordable Care Act is now covering more people at less cost than most would have predicted just a few months ago.

The first open enrollment period under this law ended a little over two weeks ago. And as more data comes in, we now know that the number of Americans who’ve signed up for private insurance in the marketplaces has grown to 8 million people -- 8 million people. Thirty-five percent of people who enrolled through the federal marketplace are under the age of 35. All told, independent experts now estimate that millions of Americans who were uninsured have gained coverage this year -- with millions more to come next year and the year after.

We’ve also seen signs that the Affordable Care Act is bringing economic security to more Americans. Before this law added new transparency and competition to the individual market, folks who bought insurance on their own regularly saw double-digit increases in their premiums. That was the norm. And while we suspect that premiums will keep rising, as they have for decades, we also know that since the law took effect health care spending has risen more slowly than at any time in the past 50 years.

In the decade before the Affordable Care Act, employer-based insurance rose almost 8 percent a year. Last year, it grew at half that rate. Under this law, real Medicare costs per person have nearly stopped growing. The life of the Medicare Trust Fund has been extended by 10 years. And the independent Congressional Budget Office now expects premiums for plans on the marketplace to be 15 percent lower than originally predicted.

So those savings add up to more money that families can spend at businesses, more money that businesses can spend hiring new workers. And the CBO now says that the Affordable Care Act will be cheaper than recently projected. Lower costs from coverage provisions will shrink our deficits by an extra $100 billion.

So the bottom line is, under the Affordable Care Act, the share of Americans with insurance is up, the growth of health care costs is down. Hundreds of millions of Americans who already have insurance now have new benefits and protections from free preventive care to freedom from lifetime caps on your care. No American with a preexisting condition like asthma or cancer can be denied coverage. No woman can be charged more just for being a woman. Those days are over. And this thing is working.

I’ve said before, this law won’t solve all the problems in our health care system. We know we've got more work to do. But we now know for a fact that repealing the Affordable Care Act would increase the deficit, raise premiums for millions of Americans, and take insurance away from millions more -- which is why, as I've said before, I find it strange that the Republican position on this law is still stuck in the same place that it has always been.

They still can’t bring themselves to admit that the Affordable Care Act is working. They said nobody would sign up; they were wrong about that. They said it would be unaffordable for the country; they were wrong about that. They were wrong to keep trying to repeal a law that is working when they have no alternative answer for millions of Americans with preexisting conditions who would be denied coverage again, or every woman who would be charged more for just being a woman again.

I know every American isn’t going to agree with this law. But I think we can agree that it’s well past time to move on as a country and refocus our energy on the issues that the American people are most concerned about -- and that continues to be the economy. Because these endless, fruitless repeal efforts come at a cost. The 50 or so votes Republicans have taken to repeal this law could have been 50 votes to create jobs by investing in things like infrastructure or innovation. Or 50 votes to make it easier for middle-class families to send their kids to college. Or 50 votes to raise the minimum wage, or restore unemployment insurance that they let expire for folks working hard to find a new job.

The point is the repeal debate is and should be over. The Affordable Care Act is working. And I know the American people don’t want us spending the next two and a half years refighting the settled political battles of the last five years. They sent us here to repair our economy, to rebuild our middle class, and to restore our founding promise of opportunity -- not just for a few, but for all. And as President, that’s exactly what I intend to keep doing as long as I’m in this office.

With that, I’ll take some questions. Let’s see who we got. Kathleen Hennessey of the LA Times.

Question: Thanks, Mr. President. It sounds like there’s been some development in the Ukraine talks in Geneva. I’m just wondering if you could describe your level of confidence in what this agreement is and how you can be sure that Russia will follow through, given some of the remarks from President Putin this morning.

President Obama: I don’t think we can be sure of anything at this point. I think there is the possibility, the prospect that diplomacy may deescalate the situation and we may be able to move towards what has always been our goal, which is let the Ukrainians make their own decisions about their own lives.

There was a meeting in Geneva -- representatives of the Ukrainian government, the Russian government, the EU, as well as the United States. It was a lengthy, vigorous conversation. My understanding is, is that the Ukrainian Prime Foreign\*\* Minister gave a detailed and thorough presentation about the reforms that they intend to introduce, including reforms that provide assurances for Ukrainians who live in eastern and southern Ukraine that they will be fully represented, that their rights will be protected, that Russian speakers and Russian natives in Ukraine will have the full protection of the law. And my understanding, based on what I’ve heard, is that there was an acknowledgement within the meeting that the Ukrainian government in Kyiv had gone out of its way to address a range of the concerns that may have existed in southern and eastern Ukraine.

There was a promising public statement that indicated the need to disarm all irregular forces and militias and groups that have been occupying buildings. There was an offer of amnesty to those who would willingly lay down their arms, evacuate those buildings, so that law and order could be restored in eastern and southern Ukraine.

The Russians signed on to that statement. And the question now becomes will, in fact, they use the influence that they’ve exerted in a disruptive way to restore some order so that Ukrainians can carry out an election, move forward with the decentralization reforms that they’ve proposed, stabilize their economy, and start getting back on the path of growth and democracy and that their sovereignty will be respected.

We’re not going to know whether, in fact, there’s follow-through on these statements for several days. And so today I spoke with Chancellor Merkel; later on in the day I’m going to be speaking to David Cameron. We’re going to be consulting with our European allies. Over the last week, we have put in place additional consequences that we can impose on the Russians if we do not see actual improvement of the situation on the ground. And we are coordinating now with our European allies.

My hope is that we actually do see follow-through over the next several days. But I don’t think given past performance that we can count on that, and we have to be prepared to potentially respond to what continue to be efforts of interference by the Russians in Eastern and Southern Ukraine.

If, in fact, we do see improvements, then that will obviously be a positive. In the meantime, we’re going to make sure that we continue to help the Ukrainian government -- working with the IMF, the Europeans and others -- to stabilize their economy and to start reforming it. We’re going to continue to work with our NATO allies to make sure that they are assured that we’re going to meet our Article 5 obligations and that they are secure.

And as I’ve said before -- I think I had an interview with Major yesterday in which I mentioned this whole exercise by the Russians is not good for Russia either. There are, I think, a number of articles today indicating the degree to which an economy that was already stuck in the mud is further deteriorating because of these actions.

And in my conversations with President Putin, I’ve emphasized the same thing, that we have no desire to see further deterioration of the Russian economy. On the other hand, we are going to continue to uphold the basic principle of sovereignty and territorial integrity for all countries; and that there’s a way for Ukraine to be independent, to be sovereign, and to have positive relationships with both the West and the East, with both its European neighbors and its Russian neighbors. And that’s our primary concern.

Maria PeÃ±a, La OpiniÃ³n.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. I’ve got a hot spot for you here in the U.S. House Majority Leader Eric Cantor said -- or claimed that you haven’t learned how to work with them. And he’s angry that you’re attacking the GOP on the lack of movement on immigration reform. So I was wondering how you respond to that.

And the second part to that, right now you have hunger strikers across the street demanding relief for undocumented immigrants. And I was wondering if you can dispel the rumors or if there’s a leak from the White House that you will make some sort of announcement in the coming weeks to expand that relief for the undocumented. Thank you.

President Obama: Well, I actually had a very pleasant conversation with Mr. Cantor yesterday.

Question: Really?

President Obama: I did. You’re always kind of surprised by the mismatch between press releases and the conversation. I wished him happy Passover. And what I said to him privately is something that I would share with him -- that I’ve said publicly, which is there is bipartisan support for comprehensive immigration reform. It would strengthen our economy, it would help with our security, and it would provide relief to families who -- many of whom have lived here for years and who have children and family members who are U.S. citizens; and that Congress should act; and that right now what’s holding us back is House Republican leadership not willing to go ahead and let the process move forward.

So it was a pretty friendly conversation. I think in his press release, I gather he was referring to the observation that we’d made a day earlier that it had now been a year since the Senate had passed a strong bipartisan bill, and that although we had heard a lot of talk about the House Republicans being interested in doing something, nothing had happened yet, and suggesting that we need some urgency here. I still feel the same way.

I know there are Republicans in the House, as there are Republicans in the Senate, who know this is the right thing to do. I also know it’s hard politics for Republicans because there are some in their base that are very opposed to this. But what I also know is that there are families all across the country who are experiencing great hardship and pain because this is not getting resolved. I also know that there are businesses around the country that could be growing even faster, that our deficits could be coming down faster, that we would have more customers in our shops, if we get this thing resolved.

We know what the right thing to do is. It’s a matter of political will. It’s not any longer a matter of policy. And I’m going to continue to encourage them to get this done.

As far as our actions, Jeh Johnson, our new head of the Department of Homeland Security, has been talking to everybody -- law enforcement, immigrant rights groups -- to do a thorough-going review of our approach towards enforcement. And we’re doing that in consultation with Democrats and Republicans and with any interested party.

I do think that the system we have right now is broken. I’m not alone in that opinion. The only way to truly fix it is through congressional action. We have already tried to take as many administrative steps as we could. We’re going to review it one more time to see if there’s more that we can do to make it more consistent with common sense and more consistent with I think the attitudes of the American people, which is we shouldn’t be in the business necessarily of tearing families apart who otherwise are law-abiding.

And so let me --

Question: Do you have a time?

President Obama: I won’t get into timing right now because Mr. Johnson is going to go ahead and do that review.

Tamara Keith.

Question: So you -- regarding the Affordable Care Act, I think you --

President Obama: Yes, let’s talk about that.

Question: Since you brought it up. I think everyone agrees that it has flaws. But Democrats have been sort of reluctant in Congress to reopen the conversation, and Republicans have been more than happy to reopen the conversation but in a different way. Now that, as you say, it’s here to stay, there are so many people that signed up, in this environment is it possible to do the kind of corrections that the business community and many others would like to see -- sort of small, technical corrections?

President Obama: It is absolutely possible, but it will require a change in attitude on the part of the Republicans.

I have always said from the outset that on any large piece of legislation like this, there are going to be things that need to be improved, need to be tweaked. I said that I think the day I signed the bill. And I don't think there’s been any hesitation on our part to consider ideas that would actually improve the legislation. The challenge we have is, is that if you have certain members in the Republican Party whose view is making it work better is a concession to me, then it's hard in that environment to actually get it done.

And I recognize that their party is going through the stages of grief -- anger and denial and all that stuff -- and we're not at acceptance yet. But at some point, my assumption is, is that there will be an interest to figure out how do we make this work in the best way possible.

We have 8 million people signed up through the exchanges. That doesn’t include the 3 million young people who are able to stay on their parents’ plan. It doesn’t include the 3 million people who benefited from expansions to Medicaid. So if my math is correct, that's 14 million right there. You’ve got another 5 million people who signed up outside of the marketplaces but are part of the same insurance pool. So we've got a sizable part of the U.S. population now in the first -- for the first time in many cases, in a position to enjoy the financial security of health insurance.

And I'm meeting them as I'm on the road. I saw a woman yesterday -- young woman, maybe 34, with her mom and her dad, and she’s got two small kids and self-employed husband, and was diagnosed with breast cancer. And this isn’t an abstraction to her. She is saving her home. She is saving her business. She is saving her parents’ home, potentially, because she’s got health insurance, which she just could not afford.

And the question now becomes if, in fact, this is working for a lot of people but there are still improvements to make, why are we still having a conversation about repealing the whole thing, and why are we having folks say that any efforts to improve it are somehow handing Obama a victory? This isn’t about me. And my hope is, is that we start moving beyond that. My suspicion is that probably will not happen until after November because it seems as if this is the primary agenda item in the Republican political platform.

But here’s what I know: The American people would much rather see us talk about jobs, would much rather see us talk about high college costs, would much rather see us discussing how we can rebuild our roads and our bridges and our infrastructure and put people back to work. They’d much rather see us talk about how we’d boost wages and boost incomes and improve their individual family bottom lines.

And if the Republicans want to spend the entire next six months or year talking about repealing a bill that provides millions of people health insurance without providing any meaningful alternative, instead of wanting to talk about jobs and the economic situation of families all across the country, that's their prerogative. At some point I think they’ll make the transition. That's my hope, anyway. If not, we're just going to keep on doing what we're doing, which is making it work for people all across the country.

I'm sorry, I'm going to say one last thing about this, just because this does frustrate me: States that have chosen not to expand Medicaid for no other reason than political spite. You’ve got 5 million people who could be having health insurance right now at no cost to these states -- zero cost to these states -- other than ideological reasons. They have chosen not to provide health insurance for their citizens. That's wrong. It should stop. Those folks should be able to get health insurance like everybody else.

Isaac, from Politico. Where are you, Isaac? There you are.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Given all that you were just saying about the Affordable Care Act, do you think it's time for Democrats to start campaigning loudly and positively on the benefits of Obamacare? Will you lead that charge?

And on Ukraine, you’ve said in other situations -- Iran, for example -- that the military option remains on the table even as talks go on. Is the military option on the table with Russia? And if so, would that be through NATO forces, through lethal aid to Ukraine?

President Obama: Now, keep in mind I think I’ve been very clear that military options are not on the table in Ukraine because this is not a situation that would be amenable to a clear military solution. What we have to do is to create an environment in which irregular forces disarm, that the seizing of buildings cease, that a national dialogue by Ukrainians -- not by Russians, not by Americans or anybody else, but by Ukrainians -- takes place. They move forward with reforms that meet the interests of the various groups within Ukraine, they move forward with elections, and they start getting their economic house in order. That’s what’s going to solve the problem.

And so obviously, Russia right now still has its forces amassed along the Ukrainian-Russian border as a gesture of intimidation. And it is our belief -- and not ours alone -- but I think broad portions of the international community believe that Russia’s hand is in the disruptions and chaos that we’ve been seeing in southern and eastern Ukraine. But there is an opportunity for Russia to take a different approach. We are encouraging them to do so.

In the meantime, we’re going to prepare additional responses should Russia fail to take a different course. We’ve already had an impact on their economy that is well documented. It could get significantly worse. But we don’t have an interest in hurting ordinary Russians just for the sake of it. Our strong preference would be for Mr. Putin to follow through on what is a glimmer of hope coming out of these Geneva talks. But we’re not going to count on it until we see it. And in the meantime, we’re going to prepare what our other options are.

With respect to the Affordable Care Act, my point is that we’ve been having a political fight about this for five years. We need to move on to something else. That’s what the American people are interested in. I think that Democrats should forcefully defend and be proud of the fact that millions of people like the woman I just described who I saw in Pennsylvania yesterday we’re helping because of something we did. I don’t think we should apologize for it, and I don’t think we should be defensive about it. I think there is a strong, good, right story to tell.

I think what the other side is doing and what the other side is offering would strip away protections from those families and from hundreds of millions of people who already had health insurance before the law passed, but never knew if the insurance company could drop them when they actually needed it, or women who were getting charged more just because they were a woman. I’m still puzzled why they’ve made this their sole agenda item when it comes to our politics. It’s curious.

But what I intend to talk about is what the American people are interested in hearing: Our plans for putting people back to work; our plans for making sure our economy continues to innovate; our plans to make sure that, as I discussed yesterday, we’re training people for the jobs that are out there right now and making better use of our community colleges and linking them up with businesses; and how we’re going to continue to bring manufacturing back the way we have over the last several years; and how we’re going to put more money in the pockets of ordinary people.

So if they want to -- if Republicans want to spend all their time talking about repealing a law that’s working, that’s their business. I think what Democrats should do is not be defensive, but we need to move on and focus on other things that are really important to the American people right now.

David Jackson.

Question: Yes, sir. Thank you. One reason the Republicans talk about it is there are people who object to the law who said they’ve had problems with the law, and there are a significant number of opponents of the law. I guess my question is, what makes you think a significant majority of the American people, of voters, will accept this law? Or are we destined to see health care as a 50/50, red state/blue state argument for years to come?

President Obama: I think you’re mixing up two things here, David. You said there are people who have seen problems with the law. That’s not 50 percent of the American people. There may have been folks who have been affected in ways that they weren’t happy about -- by the law. That is a far smaller number than the millions of people who’ve been signed up. That doesn’t mean we shouldn’t be concerned about it. That’s an area where, as I said to Tamara, we should be open to other ways that we can make it even better. So that’s objective facts and real problems out there.

The other side of it is just polling, right? What’s the general opinion of the law -- which is attached to general opinions about me or about Democrats and partisanship in the country generally?

My view is that the longer we see the law benefiting millions of people, the more we see accusations that the law is hurting millions of people being completely debunked -- as some of you in the press have done -- and the more the average American who already has health insurance sees that it’s actually not affecting them in an adverse way, then it becomes less of a political football -- which is where I want it to be. This shouldn’t be a political football. This should be something that we take for granted, that in this country you should be able to get affordable health care regardless of how wealthy you are.

Now, the larger issue about whether we can move past the polarization and sort of the bitter political debates between Democrats and Republicans, of which Obamacare is just one small part, that’s going to take more time. But it’s not for lack of trying on my part. And I think that I speak for all Democrats in saying we would much prefer a constructive conversation with the Republicans about how do we get some stuff done, and let’s focus on some areas that the American people really care about.

On jobs, we know that infrastructure would put people back to work right now and it would improve our economy for the long term. It didn't used to be a partisan issue. Why aren’t we coming up with a way to make sure that we’re rebuilding our roads and our bridges, and improving our air traffic control system? There’s no reason that has to be political. There really isn’t any ideological disagreement on that. And I guarantee you after this winter, if you look at the potholes that are the size of canyons all across big chunks of the United States, that people would like to see an infrastructure bill. Let’s get it done.

Question: How long before health care ceases to become a political football, do you think? Are we talking years? Months?

President Obama: I think it’s hard to say. It’s interesting, I spoke at the LBJ Library the other day, and most of us weren’t around to pay real close attention to those debates, or they're pretty distant now in the past. Apparently it took several years before people realized, hey, Medicare actually works and it’s lifting a lot of seniors out of despair and poverty.

So we’ve been through this cycle before. It happens each and every time we make some strides in terms of strengthening our commitments to each other and we expand some of these social insurance programs.

There’s a lot of fear-mongering and a lot of political argument and debate, and a lot of accusations are flung back and forth about socialized medicine and the end of freedom. And then it turns out that, you know what, it’s working for a lot of folks, and we still live in a free-market society and the Constitution is intact. And then we move on. And I don't know how long it’s going to take. But in the meantime, how about us focusing on some things that the American people really care about?

Thank you, everybody.

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# Joint Press Conference with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe

Prime Minister Abe: [As interpreted.] On behalf of the Japanese people, I would like to express my heartfelt welcome to President Barack Obama, who is in Japan as our state guest.

Barack and I met at the White House for the first time last year in February. We talked about all the different themes that one could think of. We had talks without reserve and we confirmed that we had the same awareness with regard to issues and that we share common objectives.

The Japan-U.S. alliance has been revived very strongly. And the nature of our talks this time was such that we were able to demonstrate this both inside and outside of the country. Barack said this before -- to create a large economic zone in the Asia Pacific would bring about major benefits to Japan, the United States, and to the Asian nations.

The TPP was indeed a very farsighted plan. As a result of serious exchanges between Barack and myself, Japan was able to make the transition to the next stage, which was to participate in the TPP talks. It’s been one year since then and Japan along with the United States is in a role to lead in a major way the TPP talks. To make the talks between the two leaders a milestone and so as to resolve pending issues between our two countries, Minister Amari and U.S. Trade Representative Ambassador Froman decided that they would energetically and earnestly continue the talks.

President Obama and I instructed the ministers to continue these talks so as to bring to a conclusion the remaining issues and so as to bring about a major conclusion of the TPP talks as a whole. Today and tomorrow, the talks will continue. So the joint statement released will see the result of this and we will formulate a joint statement after this.

Between Japan and the United States, we share values such as freedom, democracy, human rights and rule of law. We have shared these basic values and strategic interests. We are global partners. So we have this partnership and this strong alliance between our two countries. It’s the cornerstone of peace and prosperity in the Asia Pacific region.

Japan espouses the principle of proactive contribution to peace. And the United States is moving forward with its policy of pivoting to the Asia Pacific. These are contributing to peace and stability in the region. And we mutually appreciated and welcomed each other’s policies. Having done so between Barack and myself, we were able to confirm that the Japan-U.S. alliance would play a leading role in ensuring peace and prosperity of the Asia Pacific. This is what I wanted to communicate to you.

With regard to security, including the review of the Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation guidelines

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, wide-ranging security and defensive cooperation would be promoted. We agreed on this point. With regard to the realignment of U.S. forces in Japan, including the transfer of U.S. Marines in Okinawa to Guam and relocation of the Futenma Air Station, we would make steady progress on this front. And we reaffirmed the resolve on both sides to make this transpire.

Okinawa Governor Nakaima has requested termination of the operation of the Futenma Air Station in five years or less. With regard to this and other requests by the Governor, I explained this to President Barack and requested further cooperation from the United States to alleviate the impact on Okinawa.

With regard to various issues which the international society is facing, we had a heart-to-heart talk between Barack and myself. On the situation in Ukraine, changing the status quo against the backdrop of coercion and intimidation would not be condoned. We confirmed this point once again, and the importance to providing support to Ukraine and to cooperate between Japan and the G7 is something that we agreed on.

With regard to China, based on the rule of law, a free and open Asia Pacific region will be developed and we would try to engage China in this region. And we agreed to cooperate toward this end. With regard to moves to try to change the status quo through coercion and intimidation, we agreed that we would clearly oppose such news. Going forward with regard to policies vis-Ã -vis China, we agreed to maintain close cooperation between Japan and the United States. This was confirmed.

On the DPRK, we confirmed that close cooperation between the U.S., Japan and ROK would continue to be important. And this time Barack made the time to meet with the Yokotas and Mr. Iizuka. At our talks, I requested understanding, and continued understanding and cooperation toward the resolution of the abduction issue and the President expressed his support.

This month I met three times with Ambassador Kennedy. I had this honor. We discussed space, linear and cultural exchanges, and so this is a manifestation of the best of the cooperative relationship which exists between our two countries. In the talks between the leaders, I put forth once again the proposal to introduce Maglev technology in the United States. We had an exchange of views with regard to energy cooperation, and inclusive of a society where women can shine, and global issues. We agreed that we would cooperate on these issues.

Ambassador Kennedy is a symbol of the friendship which exists between our two countries and the bonds which exist. I’d like to cooperate even more closely with the Ambassador to further deepen cooperative relations between our two countries.

Going forward, what supports the alliance are the youth in both of our countries. To further enhance exchanges between youth I have told Barack of our plans to send 6,000 Japanese students to the United States this fiscal year. The Japan-U.S. alliance is more robust than ever before.

Barack, you talked about the sushi you had last night and you said it was the best you had in your life. We had heart-to-heart talks for an hour and a half. We talked about issues between our two countries and challenges of the world. We confirmed the bonds and the roles of our two countries and we talked about further potential of the relationship between our two countries. It was a very enriching and satisfactory time. And the sushi I had yesterday, for me, too, was the best I had in my life so far, and it is without a doubt that this is the case.

So, between Barack and I, we want to make U.S.-Japan relations more favorable than ever before. And that is all for me. Thank you.

President Obama: Konnichiwa. I want to thank Prime Minister Abe for your kind words and your warm welcome, as well as the outstanding sushi and sake yesterday. It is wonderful to be back in Japan. This is my third visit as President. I’m deeply honored to be making the first state visit by a U.S. President in nearly two decades. I’m grateful to Their Majesties, the Emperor and Empress, for their gracious welcome this morning. And I've once again been touched by the kindness and hospitality of the Japanese people -- your omotenashi.

I’ve said many times the United States is and always will be a Pacific nation. America’s security and prosperity is inseparable from the future of this region, and that’s why I’ve made it a priority to renew American leadership in the Asia Pacific. And the cornerstone of our strategy -- and the foundation of the region’s security and economic progress -- is our historic treaty alliances, including with Japan.

Prime Minister Abe, I want to thank you for your exceptional commitment to our alliance, which in recent years has grown even stronger. Under your leadership, Japan is also looking to make even greater contributions to peace and security around the world, which the United States very much welcomes.

And last night we had an excellent discussion on a whole range of issues. We agreed to continue deepening our security cooperation. We continue to make progress towards realigning our forces in the region, including Okinawa, which will lessen the impact of our bases on local communities. As we modernize our defense posture in the region, our forces in Japan will include our most advanced military capabilities.

We stand together in calling for disputes in the region, including maritime issues, to be resolved peacefully through dialogue. We share a commitment to fundamental principles such as freedom of navigation and respect for international law. And let me reiterate that our treaty commitment to Japan’s security is absolute, and Article 5 covers all territories under Japan’s administration, including the Senkaku Islands.

Our two nations are united along with the Republic of Korea in our determination to bring about the peaceful denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and in our firm response to North Korea’s provocations. And we stand with Japan as it seeks to resolve the tragedy of North Korea’s abductions of Japanese citizens.

Beyond Northeast Asia, Japan and the United States are working together to enhance our economic and diplomatic and security coordination with our ASEAN partners in Southeast Asia. We’re deepening our cooperation as global partners, from the relief we delivered together after the typhoon in the Philippines last year to our unified response to Russia’s military intervention in Ukraine.

We made important progress in the Trans-Pacific Partnership, TPP, which will support good jobs and growth in the United States as well as economic reform and revitalization here in Japan. We’re closer to agreement on issues like automobiles and agriculture. I’ve been very clear and honest that American manufacturers and farmers need to have meaningful access to markets that are included under TPP, including here in Japan. That’s what will make it a good deal for America -- for our workers and our consumers, and our families. That’s my bottom line, and I can’t accept anything less.

At the same time, Prime Minister Abe is committed to renewing Japan’s economy, and TPP is a vital part of that. As I’ve told Shinzo, Japan has the opportunity -- in part through TPP -- to play a key leadership role in the Asia Pacific region for this century. So now is the time for bold steps that are needed to reach a comprehensive agreement, and I continue to believe we can get this done.

I would add that our countries are more prosperous when we tap the talents of all of our citizens. So I want to commend the Prime Minister for his commitment to bringing more women into the work force. And because our economic security also depends on energy security, we’re going to keep working together on clean and efficient alternatives to fossil fuels both at home and abroad that can power the global economy while combating climate change.

Finally, I’m pleased that we continue to deepen the extraordinary ties between our people, especially our young people, like the Japanese students that I’ll be meeting later today. And I’m proud to announce that we’re launching a new program that will help even more Japanese students come to the United States to improve their English-language skills and gain valuable experience working in American businesses and organizations. And that’s part of our effort to double student exchanges by 2020 -- bonds among our young people that can bring us closer together for decades to come.

So, Prime Minister Abe, thank you for your friendship, your partnership, and the progress that we’ve made together. I want to thank you and the people of Japan for being such extraordinary allies. Standing together, I have no doubt about what our nations can achieve. So as you say here, ganbarou. Thank you.

Question: I’d like to raise a question with regard to security. First, my question is addressed to Prime Minister Abe. President Obama, with regard to the defense of the Senkaku Islands, he had clearly stated his security stance based on the security treaty. And what kind of discussion did you have on the exercise of collective security rights?

To President Obama, the following question: Based on the security treaty, the obligation to defend the Senkaku Islands, this is the first time that you referred to this issue. Why did you mention this? Could you talk about the import of your statement?

Prime Minister Abe: [As interpreted.] Through the talks with President Obama, as President Obama mentioned at the outset in his speech, between our two countries we have the security treaty and under the security treaty, all of the abilities and capabilities to perform the commitment is provided. And this includes all territories under the administration of Japan, inclusive of the Senkaku Islands. And any unilateral action to undermine Japan’s administration of the Senkaku Islands will be opposed by the United States. We agreed on this point.

On the exercise of the right of collective defense, presently in Japan the legal basis for security is being discussed and with regard to the stability of Japan and regional safety and stability, and to function the alliance effectively, and to contribute to the stability of the region we are making these studies. This is what I have explained to President Obama. Concerning such studies and examinations being made in Japan, this was welcomed and this would be supported. That was the position expressed by President Obama.

President Obama: Our position is not new. Secretary Hagel, our Defense Secretary, when he visited here, Secretary of State John Kerry when he visited here, both indicated what has been our consistent position throughout. We don’t take a position on final sovereignty determinations with respect to Senkakus, but historically they have been administered by Japan and we do not believe that they should be subject to change unilaterally. And what is a consistent part of the alliance is that the treaty covers all territories administered by Japan. So this is not a new position, this is a consistent one.

In our discussions, I emphasized with Prime Minister Abe the importance of resolving this issue peacefully -- not escalating the situation, keeping the rhetoric low, not taking provocative actions, and trying to determine how both Japan and China can work cooperatively together. And I want to make that larger point. We have strong relations with China. They are a critical country not just to the region, but to the world.

Obviously, with a huge population, a growing economy, we want to continue to encourage the peaceful rise of China. I think there’s enormous opportunities for trade, development, working on common issues like climate change with China. But what we’ve also emphasized -- and I will continue to emphasize throughout this trip -- is that all of us have responsibilities to help maintain basic rules of the road and an international order so that large countries, small countries, all have to abide by what is considered just and fair, and that we are resolving disputes in peaceful fashion.

And this is a message that I’ve delivered directly to the Chinese and it’s one that I think is entirely consistent with China being successful. I think the alternative is a situation in which large countries, like the United States or China or Russia or other countries, feel as if whenever they think it’s expedient they can take actions that disadvantage smaller countries, and that’s not the kind of world that is going to be stable and prosperous and secure over the long term.

So we are invested in an international order, and that applies to a whole range of issues, including maritime issues. My hope is, is that China will continue to engage with us and other countries in the region where we do not take a position on the particular sovereignty of this piece of land or this rock but we do take a position in making sure that all countries are following basic international procedures in resolving these disputes. And if that happens, then I think not only will China be successful, but I think there’s a great potential for Chinese and Japanese cooperation, Chinese and Vietnamese cooperation, cooperation with the Philippines and China -- all of which will benefit the peoples of the region.

Mr. Carney: The next question comes from Jim Acosta of CNN.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Arigato, Mr. Prime Minister. Mr. President, in regards to the Senkaku Islands, I just want to make sure that this is absolutely clear. Are you saying that the U.S. would consider using military force were China to have some sort of military incursion in those islands to protect those islands? And how does that not draw another red line that you would have to enforce -- of putting U.S. credibility, your credibility on the line once again, as it was in the case with Syria and Russia? And on another key security issue, you mentioned North Korea in your meeting with the Prime Minister. Are you issuing a warning to North Korea that there should not be another nuclear test?

And to Prime Minister Abe, do you have confidence in President Obama’s assurances about your security when the U.S. and the West were unable to stop Russia’s advances in Ukraine? Thank you.

President Obama: Well, Jim, let me unpack that question because there’s a whole bunch of assumptions in there, some of which I don’t agree with.

First of all, the treaty between the United States and Japan preceded my birth, so obviously, this isn’t a “red line” that I’m drawing; it is the standard interpretation over multiple administrations of the terms of the alliance, which is that territories under the administration of Japan are covered under the treaty. There’s no shift in position. There’s no “red line” that’s been drawn. We’re simply applying the treaty.

At the same time, as I’ve said directly to the Prime Minister that it would be a profound mistake to continue to see escalation around this issue rather than dialogue and confidence-building measures between Japan and China. And we’re going to do everything we can to encourage that diplomatically.

With respect to the other issues that you raise, our position, Jim, the United States’ position is that countries should abide by international law; that those laws, those rules, those norms are violated when you gas children, or when you invade the territory of another country. Now, the implication of the question I think is, is that each and every time a country violates one of those norms the United States should go to war, or stand prepared to engage militarily, and if it doesn’t then somehow we’re not serious about those norms. Well, that’s not the case.

Right now, we have 87 percent of serious chemical weapons have already been removed from Syria. There’s about 13 percent left. That’s as a consequence of U.S. leadership. And the fact that we didn’t have to fire a missile to get that accomplished is not a failure to uphold those international norms, it’s a success. It’s not a complete success until we have the last 13 percent out.

With respect to Russia and Ukraine, we’ve been very clear about the fact that there’s not going to be a military solution to the problem in Ukraine, but we have already applied sanctions that have had an impact on the Russian economy and we have continued to hold out the prospect, the possibility to resolve this issue diplomatically. There was some possibility that Russia could take the wiser course after the meetings in Geneva. So far, at least, we have seen them not abide by the spirit or the letter of the agreement in Geneva. And instead, we continue to see militias and armed men taking over buildings, harassing folks who are disagreeing with them, and destabilizing the region, and we haven’t seen Russia step up and discourage that.

On the other side, you’ve seen the government in Kyiv take very concrete steps, in introducing an amnesty law and offering a whole range of reforms with respect to the constitution, that are consistent with what was discussed in Geneva. And my expectation is, is that if, once again, Russia fails to abide by both the spirit and the letter of what was discussed in Geneva, that there will be further consequences and we will ramp up further sanctions.

That doesn’t mean that the problem is going to be solved right away. These are difficult issues. But what we try to do is to make sure that we are very clear about what we stand for, what we believe in, and we are willing to take actions on behalf of those values, those norms, and those ideals.

Question: And on North Korea?

President Obama: And the question was?

Question: Is there a warning to North Korea to not conduct another nuclear test?

President Obama: North Korea has engaged in provocative actions for the last several decades. It’s been an irresponsible actor on the international stage for the last several decades. So our message on North Korea has been consistent throughout. They are the most isolated country in the world. They are subject to more international sanctions and international condemnation than any country in the world. As a consequence, their people suffer as much as any peoples in the world.

And what we’ve said is if you are, in fact, serious about North Korea being a normal nation, then you’ve got to start changing your behavior. And that starts with the basic principle of denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula.

Now, am I optimistic that there’s going to be a major strategic shift in North Korea’s attitudes any time soon? Probably not. But what I am confident about is, is that working with Japan, working with the Republic of Korea, and working with China and other interested parties in the region, that we can continue to apply more and more pressure on North Korea so that at some juncture they end up taking a different course.

In the meantime, they’re dangerous, and we have to make sure that we are guarding against any provocations getting out of hand. This is one of the reasons why the alliance is so important and collective self-defense is so important. But we are not surprised when they engage in irresponsible behavior. That’s been their pattern for the last couple of decades. And what we have to do is to continue to try to contain and mitigate the potential damage that this behavior has and continue to put pressure on them so that we can see a shift.

And China’s participation in pushing the DPRK in a different direction is critically important as well. They have not only an opportunity but I think a security interest and a broader interest in a peaceful resolution to what has been a generation-long conflict and is the most destabilizing, dangerous situation in all of the Asia Pacific region.

Prime Minister Abe: [As interpreted.] First of all, I would like to state the following: The Japan-U.S. alliance is unwavering and it’s indispensable to maintain the Asia Pacific region peaceful and stable. The Japan-U.S. alliance and the relationship and the strengthening thereof is very beneficial. And to strengthen our bilateral relationship, you have tremendous enthusiasm. I believe in that. And your enthusiasm and the United States’ is what we place our confidence in. And in the talks between us today that confidence became even stronger. This is something that I wished to mention to you.

And the alliance between our two countries in order to strengthen this -- or if we strengthen this, this is not applying pressure to other countries or intimidating other countries. This is for the peace and stability of the region and to strengthen this and to make this region a law-abiding region. Changes of the status quo based on intimidation and coercion will not be condoned. We want to make this a peaceful region which values laws, and in doing this strengthening of our bilateral alliance is extremely important. On this point, I fully trust President Obama.

The reporter has mentioned the situation in Ukraine. In The Hague the G7 meeting took place, and President Obama exerted strong leadership and the G7 was united in its approach toward Russia. Annexation of Crimea in violation of the international laws would not be condoned -- that was the message which was generated to Russia. We would continue to communicate information -- message under the leadership of President Obama to Russia.

And with regard to the DPRK, unless they change the present policies there is no future for the public in the DPRK. We need to make the DPRK understand this and pressure must be applied with cooperation between the international society to achieve this. And China holds the key to this. Japan, the United States, and ROK must exercise its influence over China.

With regard to the Asia Pacific region as well as international society, there are various challenges and the alliance must continue to be robust so that we can cooperate to resolve issues in Asia and in the world.

Question: On the TPP, I’d like to ask the question to the two leaders. First to Prime Minister Abe, regarding TPP -- negotiations and consultations are to continue, you have said. What are the remaining issues? And to what extent have you made progress at the Diet? With regard to the five sensitive items they resolve that in this stage the elimination of tariffs would not be accepted. Do you believe under such circumstances an agreement can be reached?

The next question to President Obama. Japan, with regard to rice and wheat and beef and pork, is very careful about reducing tariffs. What is your view on this for agreement between Japan and the United States? Agriculture, produce tariffs -- what is the ideal resolution to this issue in your view, please?

Prime Minister Abe: [As interpreted.] On the TPP, this is to create a major economic zone in the growth area of Asia -- basic human rights, rule of law, and democracy with countries that share these values. We will be creating new rules and it is for this purpose. It is the 21st-century type of economic zone which we wish to create. For the region as a whole, it’s strategically very important, and we see eye-to-eye on this point between President Obama and myself.

The remaining issues must be overcome very quickly and resolved so that TPP as a whole can be concluded. We should cooperate and exert further leadership. And that is the task that President Obama and I have, I believe. And from a broad perspective, along with President Obama, we want to make decisions and judgments. On the part of our country, there is this resolution adopted by the Diet. We will take the proper heed of this so that we will choose the path in the best interest of the country. But we also hope to conclude the talks in a favorable way. We want to try to achieve conclusion of the talks as a whole.

President Obama: I will leave the details of the negotiations to the negotiators. I think it’s fair to say that there are certain sectors of the Japanese economy -- agricultural sectors, the auto sector -- in which market access has been restricted historically, certainly compared to the market access that Japan has had to U.S. consumers. And those are all issues that people are all familiar with, and at some point have to be resolved. I believe that point is now.

Prime Minister Abe, I think courageously, has recognized that although Japan continues to be one of the most powerful economies in the world, that over the last two decades its pace of growth and innovation had stalled and that if, in fact, Japan wanted to push forward in this new century then reforms were going to have to take place. And he has initiated a number of those reforms.

TPP is consistent with those reforms. And as Prime Minister Abe said, there’s strategic importance to this because what’s happening now is we’re shaping the economic environment for the fastest-growing region in the world, not just for this year or next year, but potentially for this decade and the next decade. And what rules apply -- whether we are operating in a fair and transparent way, whether intellectual property is respected, whether markets are freely accessible, whether, in fact, countries are able to increase trade and as a consequence, increase jobs and prosperity for their people -- a lot of that is going to depend on choices and decisions that we make right now. TPP is an opportunity for us to make that happen.

Now, there are always political sensitivities in any kind of trade discussions. Prime Minister Abe has got to deal with his politics; I’ve got to deal with mine. And I think that Congress has passed, for example, recently a free trade agreement with the Republic of Korea and other countries around the world, and it’s been based on notions of reciprocity and notions that if we tear down some of these existing barriers that both countries can do better, both countries can grow.

This is even more challenging because we have more countries involved. But my basis for doing this is because, ultimately, I think it’s good for America to have a Asia Pacific region where our companies can innovate, can compete, can sell our goods and services freely, where our intellectual property is protected. And I think that’s going to create more jobs in the United States. It’s going to create greater prosperity in the United States. But it’s a win-win situation, because I think the same is going to be true for Japan, the same is going to be true for Malaysia, the same is going to be true for Vietnam, the same is going to be true for the other countries that are in this discussion.

But that means that short term, all of us have to move out of our comfort zones and not just expect that we’re going to get access to somebody else’s market without providing access to our own. And it means that we have to sometimes push our constituencies beyond their current comfort levels because ultimately it’s going to deliver a greater good for all people.

Mr. Carney: Julie Pace of the Associated Press has the final question.

Question: I wanted to go back to the situation in Ukraine. You said that Russia is so far not abiding by the Geneva agreement, but you appeared to indicate that you have not made a decision yet on levying further sanctions. So, first, can you just clarify whether you have or have not made that decision? And if you have not, what gives you confidence that holding off on further sanctions might change Russia’s calculus? And couldn’t they just be using the Geneva agreement as a stalling tactic as they weigh military options or try to influence the May Ukraine elections?

And, Prime Minister Abe, there are historical disputes in Asia that are a powerful source of tension and instability in this region. What responsibility do you and other leaders in Asia have to avoid inflammatory language or actions, including further visits to the Yasukuni Shrine that could further exacerbate these tensions? Thank you.

President Obama: Well, Julie, we have been consistently preparing for the possibility that, in fact, Geneva didn’t deliver on its promise. I think you’ll remember I was asked the day that the discussions had concluded what my hopes were and I said, well, I’m not overly optimistic about the ability to deliver. And so what that means is that we have been preparing for the prospect that we’re going to have to engage in further sanctions. Those are teed up.

It requires some technical work and it also requires coordination with other countries. So the fact that I haven’t announced them yet doesn’t mean that they haven’t been prepared and teed up. At the point where they are ready to go, I guarantee you AP is going to be the first to know.

Question: I’ll hold you to that.

President Obama: But I think it’s important to emphasize that throughout this process, our goal has been to change Mr. Putin’s calculus; that our preference is to resolve this issue diplomatically; that sanctions hurt Russia more than anybody else but they’re disruptive to the global economy and they’re unnecessary if, in fact, Russia would recognize that the government in Kyiv is prepared to have serious negotiations that preserve the rights of all Ukrainians, including Russian speakers, and is prepared to decentralize in ways that, originally, Mr. Putin said were of utmost importance to him.

So far, at least, they have not chosen the wise path. And over the medium and long term, this is going to hurt Russia as much as it hurts Ukraine. Already you’ve seen a whole lot of money, a whole lot of foreign investors leaving Russia because they don’t see this as a reliable place to invest. And Russia needs to reform its economy and needs to diversify its economy because the rest of the world is moving further and further off the fossil fuels that are the primary way that Russia is able to bankroll itself. And the decisions right now that are being made in Ukraine will not help that process; it will hinder it.

Now, I understand that additional sanctions may not change Mr. Putin’s calculus -- that’s possible. How well they change his calculus in part depends on not just us applying sanctions but also the cooperation of other countries. And that’s why there’s got to be a lot of diplomatic spadework done at each phase of this process.

And in discussions that I’ve had with Prime Minister Abe, in discussions that I had with my European counterparts, my consistent point has been there’s some things the United States can do alone, but ultimately it’s going to have to be a joint effort, a collective effort. And so while we’ve done our homework and we have things teed up, it’s also important for us to make sure that we’re in consultation with all these countries each and every time that we apply additional sanctions.

Question: Can I clarify?

President Obama: Sure.

Question: Are you saying that you have made a decision to apply further sanctions but you just have to wait for a technical process to play out? Or are you saying you have not made the decision yet to levy those sanctions?

President Obama: What I’m saying is, is that we have prepared for the possibility of applying additional sanctions, that there are a whole bunch of technical issues behind that; that there’s always the possibility that Russia, tomorrow or the next day, reverses course and takes a different approach -- which, by the way, would simply involve them stating clearly that they actually believe in what they said in Geneva, that they actually call on those who are holding buildings in the south and eastern Ukraine to get out of those buildings, that they are encouraged by the willingness of the Kyiv government to follow through on amnesty, that they allow OSCE monitors in and that they support an election process where Ukrainians are able to make their own decisions. So it wouldn’t require a radical shift. It would require the kinds of steps that on paper, at least they already agreed to as recently as last week.

Do I think they’re going to do that? So far, the evidence doesn’t make me hopeful. And I think it’s fair to say that, as we’ve said earlier this week, this is a matter of days and not weeks. Assuming that they do not follow through, we will follow through on what we said, which is that there will be additional consequences on the Russians.

Prime Minister Abe: [As interpreted.] First of all, my basic recognition of history is such that politicians have to have a sense of humility when it comes to history. Japan, 70 years ago in the war -- when the war ended, to many persons especially persons in Asia, we had inflicted tremendous damage and pain. And we have reflected on this, and we started our work after the war. For 70 years, as a peace-loving nation we have steadily shed the past, and that is Japan and that is the Japanese public.

Ever since we were poor we tried to contribute to Asia. We made our maximum efforts, even when we were poor. And many nations in Asia have evaluated highly Japan’s work. In the Abe government, there is no change in stance compared to previous governments. Last year’s end, I visited Yasukuni, and to those that have fought for the country and that have been wounded, that have passed away, I have prayed and prayed for the souls of such persons. That was the purpose of my visit to the shrine.

And many leaders of the world share this common attitude, I believe. And at the same time, in Yasukuni Shrine there is a remembrance memorial called Chinreisha, and I visited this memorial. This has not been reported much, but in this memorial, those who have passed away as a result of the war, not only Japanese, but those from all over the world honored there. So I have visited this memorial so that never again people would suffer in wars. I renewed my resolve to create such a society and such a world and I have renewed my pledge not to engage in war. And I have released a statement to that effect.

With regard to my basic thinking, I will continue to explain and make efforts so that people will understand. I should like to accumulate such efforts. After the war, in order to create a democratic and free nation, we have made tremendous efforts and we have respected human rights and we have valued the rule of law not only in Japan, but in the world. We want to increase regions of this kind.

And so, we would like to accumulate efforts toward this end -- a peaceful and a prosperous world. In order to build such a world, we would like to contribute. And by so doing, I hope that many countries of the world would understand.

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# Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative Town Hall Malaysia

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Moderator Anita Woo: Welcome to the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative Town Hall. My name is Anita Woo, your moderator this afternoon. Today we have the crÃ¨me de la crÃ¨me of ASEAN youth right here, gathered in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in University of Malaya's Tunku Chancellor Hall.

Having produced two Malaysia prime ministers, this venue is no stranger to young leaders, such as yourselves. We are here because, as youth under the age of 35, we currently represent 60 percent of the ASEAN population; and being the single largest demographic in ASEAN, we not only have an impact on our respective nations, but also across the region.

From a global perspective, although ASEAN covers just three percent of land area, ASEAN is a single -- as a single identity would rank as the seventh largest economy in the world; however, each nation within ASEAN is in a different place in our journeys towards development, each journey unique.

Deep poverty persists in the region, but one of the leaders tackling this issue is Indonesia's Dr. Sri Mulyani Indrawati, who is currently managing director of World Bank Group.

Similarly, although the record on upholding human rights and democratic governance within the region still leaves much to be desired, Aung San Suu Kyi heroic struggle and triumph proves that mountains can be moved with determination and tenacity.

ASEAN young entrepreneurs don't have to look far to know that success is within their reach as AirAsia's Tan Sri Tony Fernandes carved his success from within this very region, Moreover, with a thriving scene in Southeast Asia -- creative scene -- who knows? The next Jimmy Choo could be amongst us this very moment.

As our region faces the challenges inherent in a rapidly developing nation and economy, where perspectives on education, business, environment must change with the times, we should use our ingenuity and entrepreneurial spirit to change how we plan to overcome these obstacles and emerge stronger than ever. Southeast Asia is one of the diversity-rich regions, home to an array of cultures and histories, and as we know, it was once even home to President Obama. The future of ASEAN will lie in its ability to not only celebrate this diversity, but to harness it as a key building block for our success.

Today the President himself will be taking questions directly from those present here, as well as questions submitted to you -- submitted by you through Facebook and Twitter from around the region.

Without further ado, please join me in welcoming to stage the 44th President of the United States, President Barack Obama!

President Obama: Hello, everybody. Well, good afternoon. Selamat petang. Please, everybody have a seat. It is wonderful to be here and it is wonderful to see all these outstanding young people here.

I want to thank, first of all, the University of Malaya for hosting us. I want to thank the Malaysian people for making us feel so welcome. Anita, thank you for helping to moderate.

These trips are usually all business for me, but every once in a while I want to have some fun, so I try to hold an event like this where I get to hear directly from young people like you -- because I firmly believe that you will shape the future of your countries and the future of this region. And I'm glad to see so many students who are here today, including young people from across Southeast Asia. And I know some of you are joining us online and through social media, and you’ll be able to ask me questions, too.

This is my fifth trip to Asia as President, and I plan to be back again later this year -- not just because I like the sights and the food, although I do, but because a few years ago I made a deliberate and strategic decision as President of the United States that America will play a larger, more comprehensive role in this region’s future.

I know some still ask what this strategy is all about. So before I answer your questions, I just want to answer that one question -- why Asia is so important to America, and why Southeast Asia has been a particular focus, and finally, why I believe that young people like you have to be the ones who lead us forward.

Many of you know this part of the world has special meaning for me. I was born in Hawaii, right in the middle of the Pacific. I lived in Indonesia as a boy. Hey! There’s the Indonesian contingent. Yes, that’s where they’re from. My sister, Maya, was born in Jakarta. She’s married to a man whose parents were born here -- my brother-in-law’s father in Sandakan, and his mom in Kudat. And my mother spent years working in the villages of Southeast Asia, helping women buy sewing machines or gain an education so that they could better earn a living.

And as I mentioned last night to His Majesty the King, and the Prime Minister, I’m very grateful for the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia for hosting an exhibit that showcased some of my mother’s batik collection, because it meant a lot to her and it's part of the connection that I felt and I continue to feel to this region.

So the Asia Pacific, with its rich cultures and beautiful traditions and vibrant society -- that's all part of who I am. It helped shape how I see the world. And it's also helped to shape my approach as President.

And while our government, our financial centers, many of our traditions began along the Atlantic Coast, America has always been a Pacific nation, as well. Our biggest, most populous state is on the Pacific Coast. And for generations, waves of immigrants from all over Asia -- from different countries and races and religions -- have come to America and contributed to our success.

From our earliest years, when our first President, George Washington, sent a trade mission to China, through last year, when the aircraft carrier that bears his name, the George Washington, helped with typhoon relief in the Philippines, America has always had a history with Asia. And we’ve got a future with Asia. This is the world’s fastest-growing region. Over the next five years, nearly half of all economic growth outside the United States is projected to come from right here in Asia.

That means this region is vital to creating jobs and opportunity not only for yourselves but also for the American people. And any serious leader in America recognizes that fact. And because you're home to more than half of humanity, Asia will largely define the contours of the century ahead -- whether it’s going to be marked by conflict or cooperation; by human suffering or human progress. This is why America has refocused our attention on the vast potential of the Asia Pacific region.

My country has come through a decade in which we fought two wars and an economic crisis that hurt us badly -- along with countries all over the globe. But we’ve now ended the war in Iraq; our war in Afghanistan will end this year. Our businesses are steadily creating new jobs. And we’ve begun addressing the challenges that have weighed down our economy for too long -- reforming our health care and financial systems, raising standards in our schools, building a clean energy economy, cutting our fiscal deficits by more than half since I took office.

Though we’ve been busy at home, the crisis still confronts us in other parts of the world from the Middle East to Ukraine. But I want to be very clear. Let me be clear about this, because some people have wondered whether because of what happens in Ukraine or what happens in the Middle East, whether this will sideline our strategy -- it has not. We are focused and we’re going to follow through on our interest in promoting a strong U.S.-Asia relationship.

America has responsibilities all around the world, and we’re glad to embrace those responsibilities. And, yes, sometimes we have a political system of our own and it can be easy to lose sight of the long view. But we have been moving forward on our rebalance to this part of the world by opening ties of commerce and negotiating our most ambitious trade agreement; by increasing our defense and educational exchange cooperation, and modernizing our alliances; by participating fully in regional institutions like the East Asia Summit; building deeper partnerships with emerging powers like Indonesia and Vietnam.

And increasingly, we’re building these partnerships throughout Southeast Asia. Since President Johnson’s visit here to Malaysia in 1966, there’s perhaps no region on Earth that has changed so dramatically. Old dictatorships have crumbled. New voices have emerged. Controlled economies have given way to free markets. What used to be small villages, kampungs, are now gleaming skyscrapers. The 10 nations that make up ASEAN are home to nearly one in 10 of the world’s citizens. And when you put those countries together, you’re the seventh largest economy in the world, the fourth largest market for American exports, the number-one destination for American investment in Asia.

And I’m proud to be the first American President to meet regularly with all 10 ASEAN leaders, and I intend to do it every year that I remain President. By the way, I want to congratulate Malaysia on its turn to assume the chairmanship of ASEAN next year. Malaysia plays a central role in this region that will only keep growing over time, with an ability to promote economic growth and opportunity, and be an anchor of stability and maritime security.

Now, one of the things that makes this region so interesting is its diversity. That diversity creates a unique intersection of humanity -- people from so many ethnic groups and backgrounds and religious and political beliefs. It gives Malaysia, as one primary example, the chance to prove -- as America constantly tries to prove -- that nations are stronger and more successful when they work to uphold the civil rights and political rights and human rights of all their citizens.

That’s why, over the past few years, Prime Minister Najib and I have worked to broaden and deepen the relationship between our two countries in the same spirit of berkerja sama that I think so many of you embody. The United States remains the number-one investor in Malaysia. We’re partnering to promote security in shipping lanes. We’re making progress on the Trans-Pacific Partnership to boost trade that supports good jobs and prosperity in both our countries. Today, I’m very pleased that we’ve forged a comprehensive partnership that lays the foundation for even closer cooperation for years to come.

But our strategy is more than just security alliances or trade agreements. It’s also about building genuine relationships between the peoples of Asia and the peoples of the United States, especially young people. We want you to be getting to know the young people of the United States and partnering well into the future in science and technology, and entrepreneurship, and education.

One program that we’re proud of here in Malaysia is the Fulbright English Teaching Assistant Program. Hey, there we go. Over the past two years, nearly 200 Americans have come here, and they haven’t just taught English -- they’ve made lifelong friendships with their students and their communities.

One of these Americans, I’m told, was a young woman named Kelsey, from a city in Boston -- the city of Boston. Last year, after the Boston Marathon was attacked, she taught her students all about her hometown -- its history and its culture. She taught them a phrase that’s popular in Boston -- “wicked awesome.” So that was part of the English curriculum.

And so her students began to feel like a place -- that this place, Boston, that was a world away was actually something they understood and they connected to and they cared about. They responded by writing get-well cards and sending them to hospitals where many of the victims were being treated.

Partnerships like those remind us that the relationship between nations is not just defined by governments, but is defined by people -- especially the young people who will determine the future long after those of us who are currently in positions of power leave the stage. And that’s especially true in Southeast Asia, because almost two-thirds of the population in this region is under 35 years old. This is a young part of the world.

And I’ve seen the hope and the energy and the optimism of your generation wherever I travel, from Rangoon to Jakarta to here in KL. I've seen the desire for conflict resolution through diplomacy and not war. I've seen the desire for prosperity through entrepreneurship, not corruption or cronyism. I’ve seen a longing for harmony not by holding down one segment of society but by upholding the rights of every human being, regardless of what they look like or who they love or how they pray. And so you give me hope.

Robert Kennedy once said, “It is a revolutionary world that we live in, and thus it is young people who must take the lead.” And I believe it is precisely because you come of age in such world with fewer walls, with instant information -- you have the world at your fingertips, and you can change it for the better. And I believe that together we can do things that your parents, your grandparents, your great-grandparents would have never imagined.

But today I am proud that we’re launching a new Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative to increase and enhance America’s engagement with young people across the region. You’re part of this new effort. You’re the next generation of leaders -- in government, in civil society, in business and the arts.

Some of you have already founded non-profit organizations to promote human rights, or prevent human trafficking, or encourage religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue. Some of you have started projects to educate young people on the environment, and engage them to protect our air and our water, and to prevent climate change. Some of you have been building your own ASEAN-wide network of young leaders to meet challenges like youth unemployment. And I know that some of you have been spending this weekend collaborating on solutions to these major issues.

And over the next few months, across Southeast Asia, we’re going to find ways to listen to young people about your ideas and the partnerships we can then build together to empower your efforts, develop new exchanges, connect young leaders across Southeast Asia with young Americans.

So that’s part of what we’re starting here today. And before I take your questions, let me just close by sharing with you the future that I want to work for in this region, about where we want America’s rebalance in the Asia Pacific to lead, about the work we can do together.

I believe that together we can make the Asia Pacific more secure. America has the strongest military in the world, but we don’t seek conflict; we seek to keep the peace. We want a future where disputes are resolved peacefully and where bigger nations don’t bully smaller nations. All nations are equal in the eyes of international law. We want to deepen our cooperation with other nations on issues like counterterrorism and piracy, but also humanitarian aid and disaster relief -- which will help us respond quickly to catastrophes like the tsunami in Japan, or the typhoon in the Philippines. We want to do that together.

Together, we want to make the Asia Pacific more prosperous, with more commerce and shared innovation and entrepreneurship. And we want to see broader and more inclusive development and prosperity. Through agreements like the TPP, we want to make sure nations in the Asia Pacific can trade under rules that ensure fair access to markets, and support jobs and economic growth for everybody, and set high standards for the protection of workers and the environment.

Together, we want to make the Asia Pacific -- and the world –- cleaner and more secure. The nations of this region are uniquely threatened by climate change. No nation is immune to dangerous and disruptive weather patterns, so every nation is going to have to do its part. And the United States is ready to do ours. Last year, I introduced America’s first-ever Climate Action Plan to use more clean energy and less dirty energy, and cut the dangerous carbon pollution that contributes to climate change. So we want to cooperate with countries in Southeast Asia to do the same, to combat the destruction of our forests. We can’t condemn future generations to a planet that is beyond fixing. We can only do that together.

Together, we can make this world more just. America is the world’s oldest constitutional democracy; that means we’re going to stand up for democracy -- it’s a part of who we are. And we do this not only because we think it’s right, but because it’s been proven to be the most stable and successful form of government. In recent decades, many Asian nations have shown that different nations can realize the promise of self-government in their own way; they have their own path. But we must recognize that democracies don’t stop just with elections; they also depend on strong institutions and a vibrant civil society, and open political space, and tolerance of people who are different than you. We have to create an environment where the rights of every citizen, regardless of race or gender, or religion or sexual orientation are not only protected, but respected.

We want a future where nations that are pursuing reforms, like Myanmar, like Burma, consolidate their own democracy, and allow for people of different faiths and ethnicities to live together in peace. We want to see open space for civil society in all our countries so that citizens can hold their governments accountable and improve their own communities. And we want to work together to ensure that we’re drawing on the potential of all our people –- and that means ensuring women have full and equal access to opportunity, just like men.

And to make sure we can sustain all these efforts, we want a future where we’re building an architecture of institutions and relationships. For America, that always begins with our alliances, which serve as the cornerstone of our approach to the world. But we also want to work with organizations like ASEAN and in forums like APEC and the East Asia Summit to resolve disputes and forge new partnerships. And we want to cooperate with our old allies and our emerging partners, and with China. We want to see a peaceful rise for China, because we think it can and should contribute to the stability and prosperity that we all seek.

So that’s the shared future I want to see in the Asia Pacific. Now, America cannot impose that future. It’s one we need to build together, in partnership, with all the nations and peoples of the region, especially young people. That vision is within our reach if we’re willing to work for it.

Now, this world has its share of threats and challenges, and that’s usually what makes the news. We know that progress can always be reversed, and that positive change is achieved not through passion alone, but through patient and persistent effort. But we’ve seen things change for the better in this region and around the world because of the effort of ordinary people, together -- working together. It’s possible. We’ve seen it in the opportunity and progress that’s been unleashed in this amazing part of the world.

I’ve only been in Malaysia for a day, but I’ve already picked up a new phrase: Malaysia boleh. Malaysia can do it. Now, I have to say, we have a similar saying in America: Yes, we can. That’s the spirit in which I hope America and all the nations of Southeast Asia can work together, and it’s going to depend on your generation to carry it forward. As Presidents and Prime Ministers, they can help lay the foundation, but you’ve got to build the future.

And now I want to hear directly from you. I want to hear your aspirations for your own lives, your hopes for your communities and your culture, what you think we can do together in the years to come.

Terima kasih banyak.

Moderator Anita Woo: Thank you very much, Mr. President. If you may?

President Obama: Well, I’m going to take the first question, and then I think Anita is going to take a question from social media. This is tough because we have so many outstanding young people. I’ll call on this young lady right here, right in the front.

Tell me your name. If you’re going to school, tell me what level you’re at, what year you are in school, and where you’re from.

Question: Hi, Mr. President. I’m from Cambodia, and I went to Institute of Foreign Languages at the Royal University of Phnom Penh. And I’ve got a very simple question for you. What was your dream when you were in your 20s, and did you achieve it? And if so, how did you achieve it?

President Obama: Well, it’s a short question but it’s not a simple one. When I was in high school -- so, for those of you who are studying under a different system, when I was 15, 16, 17, before I went to the university -- I wasn’t always the best student. Sometimes I was enjoying life too much. Don’t clap. This guy is the same way. No, part of it I was rebelling, which is natural for young people that age. I didn’t know my father, and so my family life was complicated. So I didn’t always focus on my studies, and that probably carried over into the first two years of university.

But around the age of 20, I began to realize that I could have an impact on the world if I applied myself more. I became interested in social policy and government, and I decided that I wanted to work in the non-profit sector for people who are disadvantaged in the United States. And so I was able to do that for three years after I graduated from college. That’s how I moved to the city of Chicago. I was hired by a group of churches to work in poor areas to help people get jobs and help improve housing and give young people more opportunity. And that was a great experience for me, and it led me to go to law school and to practice civil rights laws, and then ultimately to run for elected office.

And when I think back to my journey, my past, I think the most important thing for -- and maybe the most important thing for all the young people here -- is to realize that you really can have an impact on the world; you can achieve your dreams. But in order to do so, you have to focus not so much on a title or how much money you’re going to make, you have to focus more on what kind of influence and impact are you going to have on other people’s lives -- what good can you do in the world.

Now, that may involve starting a business, but if you want to start a business you should be really excited about the product or the service that you’re making. It shouldn’t just be how much money I can make -- because the business people who I meet who do amazing things, like Bill Gates, who started Microsoft -- they’re usually people who are really interested in what they do and they really think that it can make a difference in people’s lives.

If you want to go into government, you shouldn’t just want to be a particular government official. You should want to go into government because you think it can help educate some children, or it can help provide jobs for people who need work.

So I think the most important thing for me was when I started thinking more about other people and how I could have an impact in my larger society and community, and wasn’t just thinking about myself. That’s when I think your dreams can really take off -- because if you’re only thinking about you, then your world is small; if you‘re thinking about others, then your world gets bigger.

Thank you.

Moderator Woo: Thank you, Mr. President. We now have a question from the social media, which we’ve been collecting over the week.

President Obama: Okay.

Question: The question comes from our friend from Burma, from Myanmar. And he asks: To Mr. President, what would be your own key words or encouragement for each of us leaders of our next generation while we are cooperating with numerous diversities such as different races, languages, beliefs and cultures not only in Myanmar, but also across ASEAN? Thank you.

President Obama: Well, it’s a great question. If you look at the biggest source of conflict and war and hardship around the world, one of the most if not the most important reasons is people treating those who are not like them differently. So in Myanmar right now, they’re going through a transition after decades of repressive government, they’re trying to open things up and make the country more democratic. And that’s a very courageous process that they’re going through.

But the danger, now that they’re democratizing is that there are different ethnic groups and different religions inside of Myanmar, and if people start organizing politically around their religious identity or around their ethnic identity as opposed to organizing around principles of justice and rule of law and democracy, then you can actually start seeing conflicts inside those countries that could move Myanmar in a very bad direction -- particularly, if you’ve got a Muslim minority inside of Myanmar right now that the broader population has historically looked down upon and whose rights are not fully being protected.

Now, that’s not unique to Myanmar. Here in Malaysia, this is a majority Muslim country. But then, there are times where those who are non-Muslims find themselves perhaps being disadvantaged or experiencing hostility. In the United States, obviously historically the biggest conflicts arose around race. And we had to fight a civil war and we had to have a civil rights movement over the course of generations until I could stand before you as a President of African descent. But of course, the job is not done. There is still discrimination and prejudice and ethnic conflict inside the United States that we have to be vigilant against.

So my point is all of us have within us biases and prejudices of people who are not like us or were not raised in the same faith or come from a different ethnic background. But the world is shrinking. It’s getting smaller. You could think that way when we were all living separately in villages and tribes, and we didn’t have contact with each other. We now have the Internet and smart phones, and our cultures are all colliding. The world has gotten smaller and no country is going to succeed if part of its population is put on the sidelines because they’re discriminated against.

Malaysia won’t succeed if non-Muslims don’t have opportunity. Myanmar won’t succeed if the Muslim population is oppressed. No society is going to succeed if half your population -- meaning women -- aren’t getting the same education and employment opportunities as men. So I think the key point for all of you, especially as young people, is you should embrace your culture. You should be proud of who you are and your background. And you should appreciate the differences in language and food. And how you worship God is going to be different, and those are things that you should be proud of. But it shouldn’t be a tool to look down on somebody else. It shouldn’t be a reason to discriminate.

And you have to make sure that you are speaking out against that in your daily life, and as you emerge as leaders you should be on the side of politics that brings people together rather than drives them apart. That is the most important thing for this generation. And part of the way to do that is to be able to stand in other people’s shoes, see through their eyes. Almost every religion has within it the basic principle that I, as a Christian, understand from the teachings of Jesus. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Treat people the way you want to be treated. And if you’re not doing that and if society is not respecting that basic principle, then we’re going backwards instead of going forward.

And this is true all around the world. And sometimes, it’s among groups that those of us on the outside, we look -- they look exactly the same. In Northern Ireland, there has been a raging conflict -- although they have finally come to arrive at peace -- because half or a portion of the population is Catholic, a portion is Protestant. From the outside, you look -- why are they arguing? They’re both Irish. They speak the same language. It seems as if they’d have nothing to argue about. But that’s been a part of Ireland that has been held back and is poor and less developed than the part of Ireland that didn’t have that conflict.

In Africa, you go to countries -- my father’s country of Kenya, where oftentimes you’ve seen tribal conflicts from the outside you’d think, what are they arguing about? This is a country that has huge potential. They should be growing, but instead they spend all their time arguing and organizing politically only around tribe and around ethnicity. And then, when one gets on top, they’re suspicious and they’re worried that the other might take advantage of them. And when power shifts, then it’s payback. And we see that in society after society. The most important thing young people can do is break out of that mindset.

When I was in Korea, I had a chance to -- or in Tokyo rather -- I had a chance to see an exhibit with an astronaut, a Japanese astronaut who was at the International Space Station and it was looking at the entire globe and they’re tracking now changing weather patterns in part because it gives us the ability to respond to disasters quicker. And when you see astronauts from Japan or from the United States or from Russia or others working together, and they’re looking down at this planet from a distance you realize we’re all on this little rock in the middle of space and the differences that seem so important to us from a distance dissolve into nothing.

And so, we have to have that same perspective -- respecting everybody, treating everybody equally under the law. That has to be a principle that all of you uphold. Great question. Let me call on the -- I’m going to go boy, girl, boy, girl so that everybody gets a fair chance. Let’s see, hold on. This gentleman right here, right there with the glasses. There you go.

Question: Hello, Mr. President.

President Obama: Hello.

Question: I’m from Malaysia, currently with YES Alumni Malaysia. Well, I have a question. I wondered what was your first project -- community service project that you didn’t like and how did the project impact your community? Thank you so much.

President Obama: That’s a great question. I told you that when I graduated from college, I wanted to work in poor neighborhoods. And so, I moved to Chicago and I worked. This community had gone through some very difficult times. The steel plants there, the steel mills had closed. A lot of manufacturing was moving out of America or becoming technologically obsolete, these old mills. And so, these were areas that had been entirely dependent on steel. And as those jobs left, the communities were being abandoned.

And there was also racial change in the area. They had been predominantly white, and then blacks and Latinos had moved in. And there was fear among the various groups. So they had a lot of problems. I will tell you this, what I did was I organized a series of meetings listening to people to find out what they wanted to do something about first. The most immediate problem they saw was there was a lot of crime that had emerged in the area, but they didn’t quite know how to do anything about it. So I organized a meeting with the police commander, so that they could file their complaints directly to the police commander and try to get more action to create more safe space in those communities for children and to end people standing on street corners, because it was depressing the whole community.

Now, here’s the main thing I want to tell you. That first meeting, nobody came. It was a complete failure and I was very depressed, because I thought, well, everybody said that they were concerned about crime, but when I organized the meeting nobody came. And what it made me realize is, is that if you want to bring about change in a community or in a nation it’s not going to happen overnight. Usually, it’s very hard to bring about change, because people are busy in their daily lives. They have things to do. One of the things I realized was I hadn’t organized the meeting at the right time. It was right around dinner time, and if people were working they were coming home and picking up their kids, and they couldn’t get to the meeting fast enough.

So, first of all, you’ve got to try to get people involved. And a lot of people are busy in their own lives or they don’t think it’s going to make a difference or they’re scared if they’re speaking out against authority. And many of the problems that we’re facing, like trying to create jobs or better opportunity or dealing with poverty or dealing with the environment, these are problems that have been going on for decades. And so, to think that somehow you’re going to change it in a day or a week, and then if it doesn’t happen you just give up, well, then you definitely won’t succeed.

So the most important thing that I learned as a young person trying to bring about change is you have to be persistent, and you have to get more people involved, and you have to form relationships with different groups and different organizations. And you have to listen to people about what they’re feeling and what they’re concerned about, and build trust. And then, you have to try to find a small part of the problem and get success on that first, so that maybe from there you can start something else and make it bigger and make it bigger, until over time you are really making a difference in your community and in that problem.

But you can’t be impatient. And the great thing about young people is they’re impatient. The biggest problem with young people is they’re impatient. It’s a strength, because it’s what makes you want to change things. But sometimes, you can be disappointed if change doesn’t happen right away and then you just give up. And you just have to stay with it and learn from your failures, as well as your successes.

Anita.

Moderator Woo: Mr. President, thank you very much. We have a question from our friend in Singapore. He asks, what is the legacy you wish to leave behind?

President Obama: I’ve still got two and a half years left as President, so I hope he’s not rushing me. But what is true is that as President of the United States, you have so many issues coming at you every day, but sometimes I try to step back and think about 20 years from now when I look back what will I be most proud of or what do I think will be most important in the work that I’ve done.

Now, my most important legacy is Malia and Sasha, who are turning out to be wonderful young people. So your children, if you’re a parent the most important legacy you have is great children -- and I have those -- who are happy and healthy, and I think they’re going to do great things. Another important legacy is being a good husband. So I’ve tried to do that. That’s important, because if you don’t do those things well, then everything else you’re going to have some problems with.

But I think as President, what I’ve tried to do in the United States is really focus on how do you create opportunity for all people. And when I first came into office, we were in a huge financial crisis that had hit the entire world. And it was the worst crisis the United States had had since the 1930s. So the first thing I had to do was just make sure that we stop the crisis and start allowing the economy to recover. And we've now created more than 9 million jobs and the economy is beginning to improve for a lot of people. But what you’ve also seen is a trend in the United States but also around the world in which even when the economy grows, it tends to benefit a lot of people at the very top, but the vast majority of people, they don't benefit as much. And you're starting to see bigger and bigger gaps in inequality and in wealth and in opportunity.

And that's true not just in the United States, it's true in Europe; it's long been true in parts of Asia; it's been true in Latin America. And I believe that economies work best when growth and development is broad-based, when it's shared -- when ordinary people, if they work hard and they take responsibility, they can succeed. Not everybody is going to be rich, but everybody should be able to live a good life. Not everybody is going to be a billionaire, but everybody should be able to have a nice home and educate their children and feel some sense of security.

So that's not something that I can do by myself as President of the United States, but everything that I do -- whether it's providing more help for people to go to college, or giving early childhood education to young children because we know that the younger children get some additional schooling, especially poor children, the better off they’ll do in school for all the years to come, to the work that we're trying to do in providing health care for all Americans so that they don't experience a crisis when somebody in their family gets sick -- all of those efforts are with the objective of making sure that ordinary people, if they work hard and act responsibly, they can succeed.

And internationally, my main goal has been to work with other partners to promote a system of rules so that conflicts can be resolved peacefully, so that nations observe basic rules of behavior, so that whether you're a big country or a small country, you know that there are certain principles that are observed -- that might doesn’t just make right, but that there’s a set of ideals and there’s justice both inside countries and between countries.

Now, that means trying to end the proliferation of nuclear weapons, which are a threat to humanity. And we've made progress in that front, me negotiating the reduction of our nuclear stockpiles with the Russians, and trying to resolve through diplomacy the problem that Iran has been trying to pursue nuclear weapons, and working with countries like Malaysia to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

That means working to get chemical weapons out of Syria. It means trying to promote a just peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. It means opening up to Burma. And I was the first President to visit there, and seeing if we could take advantage of the opportunity with Aung San Suu Kyi’s release to create a country that was a responsible part of the world order.

Sometimes our efforts have been successful; sometimes, as I told this young man here, my efforts initially haven't been as successful and I've had to keep on trying. And I am confident that when I'm done as President there’s still going to be parts of the world that are having war, that are having conflict, that are oppressing their own people. So I'm not going to solve all these problems. I've got to leave some work for all of you.

But what I do hope is that I will have made progress on each of those fronts -- that if when I leave I can say there are a few more countries that are democracies now and the United States helped; if there are countries where I can say -- or areas of the world where I can say we avoided conflict between two countries because we helped to mediate a dispute, I'll be proud of that. If there are countries where a spotlight has been shined internationally on the oppression of a minority group and it has forced that country to change its practices, that will be a success.

I don't consider -- I don't think I can do that by myself, of course. I can only do that not only with the cooperation and consultation of other leaders, but it's also other citizens of the world -- all of you and people in various regions, they’ve got to want more justice and more peace in order for us to achieve it.

Sometimes the United States is viewed as, on the one hand, the cause of everybody’s problem, or on the other hand, the United States is expected to solve everybody’s problem. And we are a big, powerful nation and we take our responsibilities very seriously, but we can only do so much. Ultimately, the people in these countries themselves have to partner with us -- because we have problems in our own country that we have to solve. But hopefully, I'm also lifting up certain universal principles and ideals that all of us can embrace and share.

All right, it’s a woman’s turn. It's a young woman’s turn. I've got to -- let’s see who is back here. No, it's a young lady’s turn. Okay, this young lady right here -- since the microphone is right there.

Question: Good afternoon, Mr. President, and welcome to Malaysia. Gathering from what you’ve said, I think it's a shared consensus that youth worldwide can be the catalyst, planting the seeds for an early conditioning on certain global issues here. So my question is how exactly can America lead us youth internationally in championing such issues, for example, climate change, women empowerment, poverty eradication -- the goal being to bring the human race together? It appears that a lot of policies have been put in place, but a lot of the policies that have been put in place by the Gen Xers, the Baby Boomers. People like us, the Gen Ys, we don't have a say in this policy, so we are supposed to champion them, but how are we supposed to do all these things?

President Obama: I'm trying to figure out which generation I am. You got Baby Boomers, then Gen X, and then there’s a Gen Y -- we're on Y? Is that Z, are they here yet, or -- that's next?

Well, first of all, just to be very specific, as I said in my speech, part of the reason that I like to meet with young people is to get their suggestions and their ideas. But then what we try to do is set up a process and a network of young leaders who can share ideas with each other and with us, to let us know how they think we can empower you.

So coming out of this meeting, there will be mechanisms through social media and in our embassies in each of the 10 ASEAN countries where we're going to be bringing together youth leaders to talk to each other about their plans, what their priorities are, how they think the United States can be most helpful. And we're going to take your suggestions.

And let’s take the example of something like climate change. The voice of young people on this issue is so important because you are the ones who are going to have to deal with the consequences of this most significantly. I rode with Prime Minister Najib from our press conference to the new MaGIC Center that's been set up -- entrepreneurial center that came out of our global entrepreneur summit that was hosted here in Malaysia. And on the ride over, it hadn’t started raining yet, but you could tell it was going to be raining soon. And he said that here in Malaysia you’ve already seen a change in weather patterns -- it used to be that the dry season and the rainy season was very clear. Now it all just kind of is blurring together.

Now, not all of that can be directly attributed precisely to climate change. But when you look at what’s been happening all across the country or all around the world, there’s no doubt that weather patterns are changing. It is getting warmer. That is going to have impacts in terms of more flooding, more drought, displacement. It could affect food supplies. It could affect the incidences of diseases. Coastal communities could be severely affected. And what happens when humans are placed under stress is the likelihood of conflict increases.

There is a theory that one of the things that happened in Syria to trigger the protests that resulted in the terrible, violent efforts to suppress them by President Assad was repeated drought in Syria that drove people off their land, so they could no longer afford to make the traditional living that they had made. Now, whether that’s true or not we don’t know precisely. But what we do know is that you see in communities that are under severe weather pressure -- drought, famine, food prices increasing -- they’re more likely to be in conflict.

And you’re going to have to deal with this, unless we do something about it. So the question is what can we do? Every country should be coming up with a Climate Action Plan to try to reduce its carbon emissions. In Southeast Asia, one of the most important issues is deforestation. In Indonesia and Malaysia, what you’ve seen is huge portions of tropical forests that actually use carbon and so reduce the effects of climate change, reduce carbon being released into the atmosphere and warming the planet -- they’re just being shredded because of primarily the palm oil industry. And there are large business interests behind that industry.

Now, the question is are we going to in each of those countries say how can we help preserve these forests while using a different approach to economic development that does less to damage the atmosphere? And that means engaging then with the various stakeholders. You’ve got to talk to the businesses involved. You’ve got to talk to the government, the communities who may be getting jobs -- because their first priority is feeding themselves, so if you just say, we’ve got to stop cutting down the forests, but you don’t have an alternative opportunity for people then they may just ignore you. So there are going to be all kinds of pieces just to that one part of the problem. And each country may have a different element to it.

The point, though, is that you have to be part of the solution, not part of the problem. You have to say, this is important. You don’t have to be a climate science expert, but you can educate yourselves on the issue. You can discuss it with your peer groups. You can organize young people to interact with international organizations that are already dealing with this issue. You can help to publicize it. You can educate your parents, friends, coworkers. And through that process, you can potentially change policy.

So it may take -- it will take years. It will not happen next week. But our hope is that through this network that we’re going to be developing that we can be a partner with you in that process.

So I just want to check how many -- how much time do we have here? Who is in charge?

Moderator Woo: We’ve got time, Mr. President.

President Obama: How much time?

Moderator Woo: A couple more questions.

President Obama: A couple more questions -- all right, because I just want to make sure that I’m being fair here. All right, it’s a guy’s turn. Let’s see -- all right, how about this guy, because I like his hair cut, the guy with the spiky hair right there.

Question: In your opinion, what are the top three advice to fellow Malaysians and government to become a developed country in six years’ time? As this is one of country’s missions and I think it’s important for fellow Malaysians to contribute together in order to achieve that. Thank you.

President Obama: Well, I had an extensive conversation with Prime Minister Najib about his development strategy. First of all, Malaysia is now a middle-income country. It’s done much better than many other countries in per capita income and growth over the last two decades, and there’s been some wise leadership that has helped to promote Malaysian exports and to help to train its people.

You’ve got high literacy rates, which is critically important. Investing in people is the single most important thing in the knowledge economy. Traditionally, wealth was defined by land and natural resources. Today the most important resources is between our ears. And Malaysia has made a good investment in young people. So that continues to be I think the most important strategy for growth in the 21st century.

And in the United States, my main focus is improving our education system and lifelong learning. Because part of what’s changed in the economy -- in the 20th century, you got a change at a company, you might stay there for 30 years; things didn’t change that much. Now you may be at one company and that company may be absorbed, and you might have to retrain for a new job because the thing that you were doing before has been made obsolete because of technology.

So we have to keep on investing in not only elementary school and secondary school and even universities. But in the United States, for example, we have a system of community colleges and job training where somebody who’s in their 30s or even 40s or 50s can go back, get retrained, get more skills, adapt to a new industry, and then be a productive citizen. That’s a critical investment that needs to be made.

The second thing that I know Prime Minister Najib is focused on -- and this applies throughout the region -- is if you want to move to the next level of development, then you have to open up an economy to innovation and entrepreneurship. The initial push for growth in Southeast Asia initially started with exporting raw materials, and then shifted to manufacturing and light assembly and being part of the global supply chain. And that’s all a very important ladder into development. But now a lot of wealth is being created by new products and new ideas.

And at least in the United States, for example, we don’t want to just assemble the latest smartphone, we want to invent the latest smartphone. We want to invent the apps and the content for those smartphones. And then we have an asset that whoever is manufacturing it, some of the value is still flowing to us. Well, what that requires then is changes in the economy to make it more open, to make it more entrepreneurial. Some of the old systems have to be broken down.

Now, different countries in ASEAN and different countries around the world are at different stages of development. In some countries, the most important thing for development is just basic rule of law, and something that I said earlier, which is making sure that the law applies to everybody in the same way. I believe if Malaysia is going to take that next leap, then it’s going to have to make sure that the economy is one where everybody has the opportunity, regardless of where they started, to succeed. And that energy has to be unleashed. And I think Prime Minister Najib understands that.

And the trade agreement that we’re trying to create, the TPP, part of what we’re trying to do is to create higher standards for labor protection, higher standards for environmental protection, more consistent protection of intellectual property -- because increasingly that’s the next phase of wealth. All those things require more transparency and more accountability and more rule of law, and I think that it’s entirely consistent with Malaysia moving into the next phase.

Now, it’s hard to change old ways of doing things -- and that’s true for every country. I mean, China right now, after unprecedented growth over the last 20 years, realizes it’s got to change its whole strategy. It’s been so export-oriented, but now they’re starting to realize that if they want to continue to grow they’ve got to develop consumer markets inside their own country.

And what that means is, is that they’ve got to give workers more ability to spend on consumer goods, and that they have to have a social safety net so that workers aren’t just saving all the time, because if they get sick they don’t have any social insurance programs and they don’t have any retirement groups. And so they’re starting to make these shifts, but these are hard shifts.

Even in a country that’s controlled by the central party that’s not democratic. It’s because certain people have gotten accustomed to and done very well with an export-driven strategy. So when you shift, there’s going to be somebody who resists. That’s true in every country. It’s true in the United States. We’ve got to change how we do things. And when you try to change, somebody somewhere is benefiting from the status quo. Malaysia is no different. But I’m confident that you can make it happen.

I’ll take two more questions. And it’s a young lady’s turn. So, guys, you can all put down your hands. Let’s see -- this young lady with the yellow.

Question: Good morning. I’m from Indonesia.

President Obama: Apa kabar?

Question: Baik-baik saja.

President Obama: Baik.

Question: Well, okay, I have a very short question. What does happiness mean for you?

President Obama: What does happiness mean to me?

Question: Yes.

President Obama: Wow, you guys -- that’s a big, philosophical question. I mentioned earlier my family, and it really is true that the older I get the more -- when I think about when I’m on my deathbed -- I mean, I don’t think about this all the time. I don’t want you to think -- I’m still fairly young. But when I think, at the end of my life and I’m looking back, what will have been most important to me, I think it’s the time I will have spent with the people I love. And so that makes me happy.

But I also think that, as I get older, what’s most important to me is feeling as if I’ve been true to my beliefs and that I’ve lived with some integrity. Now, that doesn’t always make you happy in the sense of you’re laughing or just enjoying life -- because sometimes, being true to your beliefs is uncomfortable. Sometimes doing things that you think are right may put you in some conflict with somebody. Sometimes people may not appreciate it and it may be inconvenient.

But I think that part of being satisfied at least with life as you get older is feeling as if you know that every day you wake up and there’s certain things you believe in -- for example, respecting other people, or showing kindness to others, or trying to promote justice, or whatever it is that you think is best in you -- that at the end of each day you can say, okay, you know what, I was consistent with what I say I’m about, what I say I believe in -- the image I have of myself.

And when I’m uncomfortable is when I think, you know, I didn’t do my best today. Maybe I didn’t speak out when I should have spoken out. Maybe I didn’t work as hard on this issue as I should have worked. Then I’m tossing and turning and I don’t feel good.

And I think that having that kind of integrity is important -- where you can look at yourself in the mirror and you can say, okay, I am who I want -- who I say I want to be. And nobody is perfect and everybody is going to make mistakes, but I think if you feel as if you’re always striving towards your ideals, then you’ll feel okay at the end.

Okay, last question. And it’s -- let’s see. No, no, it’s a guy’s question. Women, put down your hands. Okay, I’ll call on this gentleman here because he -- there you go, with the glasses.

Question: Good evening, Mr. President Obama. I’m from Malaysia. I’m an undergrad from University of Malaya. So my question is, in your position right now, what values that you uphold the most that you think is very important, that makes you what you are today? And what do you wish to bring that value to the young people of today that can change the world to become a better world? Thank you.

President Obama: Well, thank you. I’m going to take another question after that, because I’ve already answered this question. Wait, wait, wait -- let me -- let me explain the -- what I think is most important is showing people respect who you disagree with, right? And so, for example, there’s a note over there -- I don’t know what those young people are putting a note about -- but I think that the basic idea that if somebody is not like you, if they look differently than you, if they believe differently than you -- that you are treating them as you want to be treated. If you are applying those ideas, I think you’re going to be halfway there in terms of solving most of the world’s problems.

And a lot of that is around some of the traditional divisions that we have in our society -- race, ethnicity, religion, gender. Treat people with respect, whoever they are, and expect your governments to treat everybody with respect. And if you do that, then you’re going to be okay.

All right, last question. Young ladies -- wait, wait, wait, everybody put down their hands for a second. Okay, now I’ve heard from -- I’ve had an Indonesian, a Malaysian, a Cambodian, Myanmar. Thailand didn’t get called on. So I think -- all right, Thailand. Where -- okay. And the Philippines -- well, see, I can’t call on everybody. Thailand said -- they were the first ones to shout. Go ahead, this young lady right here.

Question: Hi, President. Very short question. What are the things that you regret now that you have done in the past?

President Obama: What are the things that I regret? Oh, the list is so long. I regret calling on you, because now I’m going to be telling everybody my business. No, I’m just joking about that.

I’m now 52. And I still feel pretty good. I’m a little gray-haired. But I will tell you two things I regret -- one is very specific, one is more general. The specific thing is I regret not having spent more time with my mother. Because she died early -- she got cancer right around when she was my age, actually, she was just a year older than I am now -- she died. It happened very fast, in about six months. And I realized that -- there was a stretch of time from when I was, let’s say, 20 until I was 30 where I was so busy with my own life that I didn’t always reach out and communicate with her and ask her how she was doing and tell her about things. I was nice and I’d call and write once in a while. But this goes to what I was saying earlier about what you remember in the end I think is the people you love. I realized that I didn’t -- every single day, or at least more often, just spend time with her and find out what she was thinking and what she was doing, because she had been such an important part of my life.

Now, that’s natural as young people. As you grow up, you become independent. But for those of you who have not called their parents lately, I would just say that that is something, actually, that I regret.

The more general answer is I regret wasting time. I think when I was young I spent a lot of time on things that I realize now were not very important and I wish I had used my time more wisely.

Now, I don’t want people to spend every minute of every day working all the time, because you have to enjoy life and you have to have friends and you have to appreciate all that life has to offer. But I do think that in America at least, but now I think worldwide, we spend an awful lot of time on diversions -- watching TV or playing video games. And all that time, when you add it all up, I say to myself, I could have spent more time learning a foreign language, or I could have spent more time working on a project that was important. And I think it would be useful for all of you to consider how you’re spending your time and make sure that you’re making every day count.

Let me just say this by way of thank you to all of you. I think you’ve asked terrific questions. I’m so impressed with all of you and what you have done and what you’ll do in the future. I do want you to feel optimistic about your future. Even though I told you about some problems like climate change that seem so big now, I always say -- we get White House interns to come in and they work at the White House, and they’re there for six months, and then I usually speak to them at the end of six months. And I always tell them that despite how hard sometimes the world seems to be, and all you see on television is war and conflict and poverty and violence, the truth is that if you had to choose when to be born, not knowing where or who you would be, in all of human history, now would be the time. Because the world is less violent, it is healthier, it is wealthier, it is more tolerant and it offers more opportunity than any time in human history for more people than any time in human history.

Now, that doesn’t mean that there aren’t still terrible things happening around the world or in this region. We still have things like human trafficking. And we still have terrible abuse of children. And there are conflicts. And so these are things that we’re going to have to tackle and deal with. But you should know that with each successive generation things have improved just a little bit. And over time, that little bit adds to a lot. And it’s now up to you, the next generation, to make sure that 20 years from now, or 30 years from now, people look back and say, wow, things are a lot better now than they were back then.

And there will still be problems 20 or 30 years from now also. But they will be different problems, because you will have solved many of the problems that exist today. And America wants to be a partner with you in that process, so good luck.

Thank you, everybody.

Moderator Woo: Thank you very much, Mr. President. It’s been a wonderful opportunity and we appreciate it very much.

President Obama: Thank you, everybody.

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# Joint Press Conference with Philippine President Benigno Aquino III

President Aquino: The honorable President of the United States Barack Obama and his official delegation, members of the Cabinet present, members of the press, ladies and gentlemen: good afternoon.

Today, the Philippines welcomes President Obama and his delegation on his first state visit to the Philippines. The United States is a key ally, a strategic partner, and a reliable friend of the Philippines.

With this visit, we reaffirm the deep partnership between our countries, one founded on democratic values, mutual interest in our shared history and aspirations, and one that will definitely give us the momentum to propel our peoples to even greater heights.

We witnessed the most recent and tangible manifestations of this in the immediate outpouring of assistance from the government of the United States and the American people in the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan (or Yolanda), and your nation’s clear expression of solidarity with the typhoon survivors.

Mr. President, in your State of the Union address earlier this year, you spoke of how American volunteers and troops were greeted with gratitude in the affected areas. Today, I reiterate formally the Filipino people will never forget such kindness and compassion. On behalf of my countrymen, I thank the United States of America once more for being a true friend to our people.

The friendship and partnership between our countries, however, are evident not only in times of crisis and immediate need, but also in other aspects of our relations. Our defense alliance has been a cornerstone of peace and stability in the Asia Pacific region for more than 60 years. And our strategic partnership spans a broad range of areas of cooperation, contributing to the growth and prosperity of both our nations, and fostering closer bonds between our peoples.

As such, President Obama and I met today with the shared resolve to ensure that our deepening relations are attune to the realities and needs that have emerged in the 21st century, which affect not only our two countries, but also the entire community of nations.

I thank President Obama for the U.S.’s support for our government’s efforts in modernizing and enhancing its defense capabilities. The Philippines-U.S. Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement takes our security cooperation to a higher level of engagement, reaffirms our country’s commitment to mutual defense and security, and promotes regional peace and stability.

Both President Obama and I shared the conviction that territorial and maritime disputes in the Asia Pacific region should be settled peacefully based on international law. We affirm that arbitration is an open, friendly and peaceful approach to seeking a just and durable solution. We also underscored the importance of the full and effective implementation of the Declaration of Conduct and the expeditious conclusion of a substantive and legally binding Code of Conduct in the South China Sea -- all towards fostering peace and stability in our part of the world.

We, likewise, welcome the active participation of the United States in regional mechanisms such as the ASEAN Regional Forum and the East Asia Summit.

Typhoon Haiyan showed the entire world how vulnerable the Philippines as well as other developing countries are to natural disasters. As such, humanitarian assistance and disaster response is an essential component of our cooperation. As the United States and the American people have always been ready to support us in the aftermath of disasters, so too do we look forward to the continued cooperation of the United States and the rest of our partners in the international community as we undertake the task of building back the communities affected by Typhoon Haiyan.

This morning we made a promising start as we discussed how our partnership can be enhanced through building climate resilient communities. These kind of strong communities are important not only in withstanding disasters, but also in fostering inclusive growth across the entire country.

President Obama and I recognize the importance of strong economic engagement for the continued growth of both the Philippines and the United States.

On this note, we expressed our appreciation for the U.S.’s support for our government’s programs under the Partnership for Growth framework, which enhances the policy environment for economic growth through US $145 million total plan contribution from the USAID. U.S. support is also coursed through the Millennium Challenge Corporation, which supports the implementation of projects and road infrastructure, poverty reduction, and good governance, with $434 million grant from 2011 to 2016.

Recently, the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration reinstated the Philippines to a Category 1 status. This will redound to mutual benefit for our countries from opening more routes for travel between the United States and the Philippines to creating more business opportunities to facilitate the increased tourism and business travel.

We welcome the substantive agreement between our countries on the terms and concessions for the U.S. to support the Philippines’ request for the extension of special treatment for rice imports until 2017.

We also discussed the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which is a high-standard trade agreement that will shape the global and regional economic architecture in the 21st century. The Philippines is working to assert in how participation in TPP can be realized.

The signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro last March 27 brings a just and lasting peace within our reach -- a peace that will serve as a strong foundation for stability, inclusivity, and progress in Mindanao. This was born of the steadfast commitment and the hard work of our administration, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, and other partners and stakeholders, the U.S. included.

We thank President Obama for the United States’ significant assistance and support for the Philippine peace process. Our meeting today was comprehensive, historic and significant, embodying our shared values and aspirations. It afforded President Obama and myself the opportunity to build on the relations between our countries, and discuss our strategic mission for the future of the Philippines-United States relationship -- a relationship that is modern, mature and forward-looking, and one that allows us to surpass challenges towards the benefit of our peoples, the entire region and the world.

Thank you.

President Obama: Mabuhay. Thank you, President Aquino, for your warm welcome and your very kind words.

With the President’s indulgence, I want to begin by saying a few words about some terrible storms and tornadoes back home in the United States. Over the weekend, a series of storms claimed at least a dozen lives and damaged or destroyed homes and businesses and communities across multiple states, with the worst toll in Arkansas. So I want to offer my deepest condolences to all those who lost loved ones. I commend the heroic efforts of first responders and neighbors who rushed to help.

I want everyone affected by this tragedy to know that FEMA and the federal government is on the ground and will help our fellow Americans in need, working with state and local officials. And I want everybody to know that your country will be there to help you recover and rebuild as long as it takes.

Now, this is my first visit to the Philippines as President, and I’m proud to be here as we mark the 70th anniversary of the Battle of Leyte Gulf, when Americans and Filipinos fought together to liberate this nation during World War II. All these years later, we continue to stand shoulder-to-shoulder to uphold peace and security in this region and around the world.

So, Benigno, I want to thank you and the Filipino people not only for your generous hospitality today, but for a friendship that has spanned generations. And I’d add that our friendship is deeper and the United States is stronger because of the contributions and patriotism of millions of proud Filipino-Americans.

As I’ve made clear throughout this trip, the United States is renewing our leadership in the Asia Pacific, and our engagement is rooted in our alliances. And that includes the Philippines, which is the oldest security treaty alliance that we have in Asia. As a vibrant democracy, the Philippines reflects the desire of citizens in this region to live in freedom and to have their universal rights upheld. As one of the fastest-growing economies in Asia, the Philippines represents new opportunities for the trade and investment that creates jobs in both countries.

And given its strategic location, the Philippines is a vital partner on issues such as maritime security and freedom of navigation. And let me add that the recent agreement to end the insurgency in the south gives the Philippines an historic opportunity to forge a lasting peace here at home, with greater security and prosperity for the people of that region.

I was proud to welcome President Aquino to the White House two years ago, and since then we’ve worked to deepen our cooperation and to modernize our alliances. Our partnership reflects an important Filipino concept -- bayanihan -- the idea that we have to work together to accomplish things that we couldn’t achieve on our own. That’s what we saw last year when Typhoon Yolanda devastated so many communities. Our armed forces and civilians from both our countries worked as one to rescue victims and to deliver lifesaving aid. That’s what friends do for each other. And, Mr. President, I want to say to you and the people of the Philippines: The United States will continue to stand with you as you recover and rebuild. Our commitment to the Philippines will not waver.

Today, I’m pleased that we’re beginning an important new chapter in the relationship between our countries, and it starts with our security -- with the new defense cooperation agreement that was signed today. I want to be very clear: The United States is not trying to reclaim old bases or build new bases. At the invitation of the Philippines, American servicemembers will rotate through Filipino facilities. We’ll train and exercise more together so that we’re prepared for a range of challenges, including humanitarian crises and natural disasters like Yolanda.

We’ll work together to build the Philippines’ defense capabilities and to work with other nations to promote regional stability, such as in the South China Sea. And I’m looking forward to my visit with forces from both our nations tomorrow to honor their service and to look ahead to the future we can shape together.

As we strengthen our bilateral security cooperation, we’re also working together with regional institutions like ASEAN and the East Asia Summit. When we met in the Oval Office two years ago, Benigno and I agreed to promote a common set of rules, founded in respect for international law, that will help the Asia Pacific remain open and inclusive as the region grows and develops.

Today, we have reaffirmed the importance of resolving territorial disputes in the region peacefully, without intimidation or coercion. And in that spirit, I told him that the United States supports his decision to pursue international arbitration concerning territorial disputes in the South China Sea.

Finally, we agreed to keep deepening our economic cooperation. I congratulated President Aquino on the reforms that he’s pursued to make the Philippines more competitive. Through our Partnership for Growth and our Millennium Challenge Corporation compact, we’re going to keep working together to support these efforts so that more Filipinos can share in this nation’s economic progress -- because growth has to be broad-based and it has to be inclusive.

We discussed the steps that the Philippines could take to position itself for the Trans-Pacific Partnership. And I encouraged the President to seize the opportunity he’s created by opening the next phase of economic reform and growth.

Today, I’m announcing that my Commerce Secretary, Penny Pritzker, will lead a delegation of American business leaders to the Philippines this June to explore new opportunities. And I’d add that we’ve also committed to work together to address the devastating effects of climate change and to make Philippine communities less vulnerable to extreme storms like Yolanda.

So, Mr. President, let me once again thank you for everything you’ve done to strengthen our alliance and our friendship. I’m looking forward to paying tribute to the bonds between our people at the dinner tonight and to working with you as we write the next chapter in the relationship between our two countries.

Question: Good afternoon, Your Excellencies. President Aquino, President Obama -- welcome to the Philippines. My questions are: How did the United States reassure the Philippines that the U.S. is genuinely committed to countering an increasingly assertive China in the region? Will the U.S. defend the Philippines in case the territorial dispute with China in the West Philippine Sea or the South China Sea becomes an armed conflict? And how do you think will China react to the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement? And what are you going to do with this that is consistent with your position to have the territorial disputes resolved in arbitration? Thank you.

President Obama: Well, I’ve been consistent throughout my travels in Asia. We welcome China’s peaceful rise. We have a constructive relationship with China. There is enormous trade, enormous business that’s done between the United States and China. There are a whole range of issues on the international stage in which cooperation between the U.S. and China are vital. So our goal is not to counter China. Our goal is not to contain China.

Our goal is to make sure that international rules and norms are respected, and that includes in the area of maritime disputes. We do not have claims in this area territorially. We’re an Asia Pacific nation and our primary interest is the peaceful resolution of conflict, the freedom of navigation that allows for continued progress and prosperity. And we don’t even take a specific position on the disputes between nations.

But as a matter of international law and international norms, we don’t think that coercion and intimidation is the way to manage these disputes. And for that reason we’re very supportive of President Benigno’s approach to go before the tribunal for the law of the sea and to seek international arbitration that can resolve this in a diplomatic fashion.

With respect to the new Defense Cooperation Agreement that’s been signed, the goal here is wide-ranging. We’ve had decades of alliance with the Philippines, but obviously in the 21st century we have to continue to update that. And the goal for this agreement is to build Philippine capacity, to engage in training, to engage in coordination -- not simply to deal with issues of maritime security, but also to enhance our capabilities so that if there’s a natural disaster that takes place, we’re able to potentially respond more quickly; if there are additional threats that may arise, that we are able to work in a cooperative fashion.

This is consistent with, for example, the agreement that we have with Australia, in Darwin. Obviously, we’ve had a longstanding alliance with Australia, but we also recognize that as circumstances change, as capacities change, we have to update that alliance to meet new needs and new challenges.

And so, I think this is going to be a terrific opportunity for us to work with the Philippines to make sure that our navies, our air force are coordinated, to make sure that there’s information-sharing to allow us to respond to new threats, and to work with other countries, ASEAN countries -- Australia, Japan. My hope is, is that at some point we’re going to be able to work cooperatively with China as well, because our goal here is simply to make sure that everybody is operating in a peaceful, responsible fashion. When that happens, that allows countries to focus on what’s most important to people day to day, and that is prosperity, growth, jobs. Those are the things that we as leaders should be focused on, need to be focused on. And if we have security arrangements that avoid conflict and dispute, then we’re able to place our attention on where we should be focused.

Mr. Carney: The next question comes from Margaret Talev of Bloomberg.

Question: Mr. President, later today we are expecting to hear about new sanctions on people close to President Putin. And I wanted to ask you, do you see this as a way to get to Mr. Putin’s personal wealth? Do you believe that he has amassed personal wealth that’s unreported? Or is it just a means of ratcheting up pressure before a move to sectoral sanctions? You mentioned yesterday specifically the defense industry as an area where it doesn’t make sense to move without Europe moving. I wanted to ask you, are we likely to see defense sanctions soon, banking and energy sanctions soon? What kind of timeframe?

And then, President Aquino, if I may, I also wanted to ask you about China and the new agreement. What I wanted to ask you is what message should China take away from the U.S. and the G7’s approach to Russia and Ukraine when it comes to territorial disputes? And do you believe that the military agreement that we’ve just been talking about will in and of itself deter China from being aggressive territorially, or should the U.S. begin developing military options that could be possible contingencies if you needed to go that course? Thanks.

President Obama: You’re right, Margaret, that later today there will be an announcement made, and I can tell you that it builds on the sanctions that were already in place. As I indicated, we saw an opportunity through the Geneva talks to move in the direction of a diplomatic resolution to the situation in Ukraine.

The G7 statement accurately points out that the government in Kyiv, the Ukrainian government, has, in fact, abided by that agreement and operated in good faith. And we have not seen comparable efforts by the Russians. And as a consequence, we are going to be moving forward with an expanded list of individuals and companies that will be affected by sanctions. They remain targeted. We will also focus on some areas of high-tech defense exports to Russia that we don’t think are appropriate to be exporting in this kind of climate.

The goal here is not to go after Mr. Putin, personally. The goal is to change his calculus with respect to how the current actions that he’s engaging in in Ukraine could have an adverse impact on the Russian economy over the long haul, and to encourage him to actually walk the walk and not just talk the talk when it comes to diplomatically resolving the crisis in Ukraine. There are specific steps that Russia can take. And if it takes those steps, then you can see an election taking place in Ukraine; you can see the rights of all people inside of Ukraine respected.

The Ukrainian government has put forward credible constitutional reforms of the sort that originally Russian-speaking Ukrainians in the south and east said were part of their grievances, the failure to have their voices heard and represented. Kyiv has responded to those.

And so there’s a path here to resolve this. But Russia has not yet chosen to move forward, and these sanctions represent the next stage in a calibrated effort to change Russia’s behavior. We don’t yet know whether it’s going to work. And that’s why the next phase if, in fact, we saw further Russian aggression towards Ukraine could be sectoral sanctions, less narrowly targeted, addressing sectors like banking or the defense industry.

So those would be more broad-based. Those aren’t what we’ll be announcing today. Today’s will be building on what we’ve already done and continue to be narrowly focused but will exact some additional costs on the Russians. But we are keeping in reserve additional steps that we could take should the situation escalate further.

President Aquino: First of all, I think China shouldn’t be concerned about this agreement, especially if you look at what is being contemplated -- for instance, training for emergency disaster relief operations.

I’ll give you a perfect example. The Americans have the V-22 Osprey aircraft, which is quite a significant upgrade in capabilities in terms of reaching out to very remote areas. We don’t have a comparable aircraft. We have smaller helicopters. And we had 44 of our provinces devastated by Typhoon Haiyan. Now, the training will not just train our people on how to operate this particular aircraft, but more importantly, even help the Office of Civil Defense, for instance, manage this resource in case a storm or another natural disaster of the scale that transpired does happen.

Secondly, I think the statements that America has been making with regards to Ukraine is the same message that has been said to China, and I guess not only by America but so many other countries. China itself has said repeatedly that they will and have been conforming to international law. And the rest of the world is I think saying we are expecting you to confirm and, by actions, that which you have already been addressing by words, and not distort international law.

The Philippines has not just won through arbitration, but we did remind obviously the President and our dialogue partners that in 2002 they tried to come up with a code of conduct with regards to the South China Sea and the portion which the Philippines claims, which we call the West Philippine Sea. And in 2012, the 10th anniversary, there had still been no progress even -- in the meeting. So the Philippines felt it was timely to raise the matter up and to remind everybody that there is no code of conduct that binds us that sets the operational parameters for all to manage any potential conflict. And as a result of that, there has been preparatory meetings towards the formal meeting to try and constitute a code of conduct.

So at the end of the day, we are not a threat militarily to any country. We don’t even have -- and I have said this often enough -- we don’t even have presently a single fighter aircraft in our inventory. Now, we have I think legitimate needs. We have a 36,000 kilometer coastline. We do have an exclusive economic zone. We do have concerns about poaching on our waters and preserving the environment and even protecting endangered species. So I think no country should begrudge us our rights to be able to attend to our concerns and our needs.

Question: Good afternoon, Your Excellencies. This question goes to President Obama, but I would also like to hear the thoughts of President Aquino. I understand the tough balancing act that you need to do between China and your allies in Asia. But do you believe that China’s expansionism is a threat to regional peace and stability? And will the Mutual Defense Treaty apply in the event that the territorial conflict with China escalates into an armed conflict?

President Obama: Well, let me repeat what I said earlier. I think that it is good for the region and good for the world if China is successfully developing, if China is lifting more of its people out of poverty. There are a lot of people in China, and the more they’re able to develop and provide basic needs for their people and work cooperatively with other countries in the region, that’s only going to strengthen the region -- that’s not going to weaken it.

I do think that, as President Aquino said very persuasively, that China as a large country has already asserted that it is interested in abiding by international law. And really, our message to China consistently on a whole range of issues is we want to be a partner with you in upholding international law. In fact, larger countries have a greater responsibility in abiding by international norms and rules because when we move, it can worry smaller countries if we don’t do it in a way that’s consistent with international law.

And I think that there are going to be territorial disputes around the world. We have territorial disputes with some of our closest allies. I suspect that there are some islands and rocks in and around Canada and the United States where there are probably still some arguments dating back to the 1800s. But we don’t go around sending ships and threatening folks. What we do is we sit down and we have some people in a room -- it’s boring, it’s not exciting, but it’s usually a good way to work out these problems and work out these issues.

And I think that all the countries that I’ve spoken to in the region during the course of my trip -- Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, and now the Philippines -- their message has been the same everywhere I go, which is they would like to resolve these issues peacefully and diplomatically. That’s why I think that the approach that President Aquino has been taking, putting this before international arbitration, is a sound one.

And if China I think listens to its neighbors and recognizes that there’s another approach to resolve these disputes, what China will find is they’ve got ready and willing partners throughout the Asia Pacific region that want to work with them on trade and commerce and selling goods and buying goods. And it’s inevitable that China is going to be a dominant power in this region just by sheer size. Nobody, I think, denies that. The question is just whether other countries in the region are also able to succeed and prosper on their own terms and tend to the various interests and needs that they and their people have as well. And that’s what we support.

President Aquino: I think from the onset, our message to China has been I think we’re all focused on achieving greater prosperity for all our respective peoples, and prosperity and continued prosperity does not happen in a vacuum. There has to be stability. And in turn, they have responded that the disputes in the South China Sea/West Philippine Sea are not the end all, be all of our relationships. And we have had good cooperation with them on so many different fronts, and perhaps one could even argue that this is the only sore point in our relationship.

Now, having said that, perhaps -- we have tried to work on that particular premise of building up our ties on different aspects where there is no conflict or very little conflict. And in this particular instance, I have to find the way and means by which we can both achieve our respective goals, which I believe are not -- or should not be mutually exclusive, but rather should be inclusive if at the end of the day, we do want to strive for the prosperity of our respective peoples.

That I think has to be the primordial concern, rather than disputes on a few rocks that are not possible to be inhabited. And I think in due time, given the fact that there’s so much commerce that traverses this particular -- both in the maritime and the air domain -- China, which has achieved its goals of improving the life of its people, will see the soundness of this proposal and perhaps will act more, shall we say, consistently and actively towards achieving that stability for all. That is our hope.

Question: Thank you to both Presidents. President Aquino, as a journalist, I’d like to ask you why 26 journalists have been killed since you took office. And I understand that there have only been suspects arrested in six of those cases. What are you doing to fix that?

President Obama, as you grappled here with all these national security challenges, I have two questions. One, back home we’ve learned that 40 military veterans died while they were waiting for health care, a very tragic situation. I know you don’t run the Phoenix Office of Veterans Affairs, but as Commander-in-Chief, what specifically will you pledge to fix that?

And, secondly, more broadly -- big picture -- as you end this trip, I don’t think I have to remind you there have been a lot of unflattering portraits of your foreign policy right now. And rather than get into all the details or red lines, et cetera, I’d like to give you a chance to lay out what your vision is more than five years into office, what you think the Obama doctrine is in terms of what your guiding principle is on all of these crises and how you answer those critics who say they think the doctrine is weakness.

President Obama: Well, Ed, I doubt that I’m going to have time to lay out my entire foreign policy doctrine. And there are actually some complimentary pieces as well about my foreign policy, but I’m not sure you ran them.

Here’s I think the general takeaway from this trip. Our alliances in the Asia Pacific have never been stronger; I can say that unequivocally. Our relationship with ASEAN countries in Southeast Asia have never been stronger. I don’t think that’s subject to dispute. As recently as a decade ago, there were great tensions between us and Malaysia, for example. And I think you just witnessed the incredible warmth and strength of the relationship between those two countries.

We’re here in the Philippines signing a defense agreement. Ten years ago, fifteen years ago there was enormous tensions around our defense relationship with the Philippines. And so it’s hard to square whatever it is that the critics are saying with facts on the ground, events on the ground here in the Asia Pacific region. Typically, criticism of our foreign policy has been directed at the failure to use military force. And the question I think I would have is, why is it that everybody is so eager to use military force after we’ve just gone through a decade of war at enormous costs to our troops and to our budget? And what is it exactly that these critics think would have been accomplished?

My job as Commander-in-Chief is to deploy military force as a last resort, and to deploy it wisely. And, frankly, most of the foreign policy commentators that have questioned our policies would go headlong into a bunch of military adventures that the American people had no interest in participating in and would not advance our core security interests.

So if you look at Syria, for example, our interest is in helping the Syrian people, but nobody suggests that us being involved in a land war in Syria would necessarily accomplish this goal. And I would note that those who criticize our foreign policy with respect to Syria, they themselves say, no, no, no, we don’t mean sending in troops. Well, what do you mean? Well, you should be assisting the opposition -- well, we’re assisting the opposition. What else do you mean? Well, perhaps you should have taken a strike in Syria to get chemical weapons out of Syria. Well, it turns out we’re getting chemical weapons out of Syria without having initiated a strike. So what else are you talking about? And at that point it kind of trails off.

In Ukraine, what we’ve done is mobilize the international community. Russia has never been more isolated. A country that used to be clearly in its orbit now is looking much more towards Europe and the West, because they’ve seen that the arrangements that have existed for the last 20 years weren’t working for them. And Russia is having to engage in activities that have been rejected uniformly around the world. And we’ve been able to mobilize the international community to not only put diplomatic pressure on Russia, but also we’ve been able to organize European countries who many were skeptical would do anything to work with us in applying sanctions to Russia. Well, what else should we be doing? Well, we shouldn’t be putting troops in, the critics will say. That’s not what we mean. Well, okay, what are you saying? Well, we should be arming the Ukrainians more. Do people actually think that somehow us sending some additional arms into Ukraine could potentially deter the Russian army? Or are we more likely to deter them by applying the sort of international pressure, diplomatic pressure and economic pressure that we’re applying?

The point is that for some reason many who were proponents of what I consider to be a disastrous decision to go into Iraq haven’t really learned the lesson of the last decade, and they keep on just playing the same note over and over again. Why? I don’t know. But my job as Commander-in-Chief is to look at what is it that is going to advance our security interests over the long term, to keep our military in reserve for where we absolutely need it. There are going to be times where there are disasters and difficulties and challenges all around the world, and not all of those are going to be immediately solvable by us.

But we can continue to speak out clearly about what we believe. Where we can make a difference using all the tools we’ve got in the toolkit, well, we should do so. And if there are occasions where targeted, clear actions can be taken that would make a difference, then we should take them. We don't do them because somebody sitting in an office in Washington or New York think it would look strong. That's not how we make foreign policy. And if you look at the results of what we've done over the last five years, it is fair to say that our alliances are stronger, our partnerships are stronger, and in the Asia Pacific region, just to take one example, we are much better positioned to work with the peoples here on a whole range of issues of mutual interest.

And that may not always be sexy. That may not always attract a lot of attention, and it doesn’t make for good argument on Sunday morning shows. But it avoids errors. You hit singles, you hit doubles; every once in a while we may be able to hit a home run. But we steadily advance the interests of the American people and our partnership with folks around the world.

Question: The Veterans Affairs --

President Obama: You got me all worked up on the other one. The moment we heard about the allegations around these 40 individuals who had died in Phoenix, I immediately ordered the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, General Shinseki, to investigate. We also have an IG investigation taking place. And so we take the allegations very seriously.

That is consistent with what has been my rock-solid commitment to make sure that our veterans are cared for. I believe that if somebody has served our nation then they have to get the benefits and services that they have earned. And my budgets have consistently reflected that. That's why we’ve resourced the Veterans Affairs office more in terms of increases than any other department or agency in my government.

That doesn’t mean, though, that some folks may still not be getting the help that they need. And we're going to find out if, in fact, that's the case, and I'm interested in working with everybody, whether it's our outstanding veteran service organizations or Congress, to make sure that there is not a single veteran in the United States who needs help -- whether because they’re homeless, because they’re sick, because they’re looking for a job. I want to make sure that they are getting the help that they need.

President Aquino: With regards to the killing of journalists, perhaps we should say from the outset that I don't have the figures right here before me. But we did set up an interagency committee to look on extralegal killings and forced disappearances, torture, and other grave violations of right to life, liberty and security of persons.

And in this particular body, there has been -- I have the figures for labor-related issues -- there were 62 suspected cases of extrajudicial killings referred to it, and of the 62 investigations before this committee, there have been 10 that have been determined to fulfill the criteria and the definitions of what constitutes an extrajudicial killing. Of the 10 cases that have been determined to be possible EJK cases, only one happened during our watch -- the case of Mr. Estrellado.

Now, as far as journalists are concerned, perhaps the track record speaks for itself. The Maguindanao massacre involved something like 52 journalists, and there are presently something like over 100 people who have been indicted for this crime and are undergoing trial. That doesn’t mean that we have stopped trying to look for others potentially involved in this particular killing. And may we just state for the record that even when it comes to journalists, it is not a policy of this state to silence critics. All you have to do would be to turn on the TV, the radio, or look at any newspaper to find an abundance of criticisms.

Now, having said that, investigations have been done. Anybody who has been killed obviously is a victim, and investigations have been ongoing. If at times we do not reveal the discoveries by our intelligence agencies and security services, perhaps we are very sensitive to personal relationships by the people who are deceased who were killed not because of professional activities, but, shall we say, other issues. But having said that, they were killed. That is against the law. And the people will have to be found, prosecuted and sent to jail.

The fourth plank of my promise when I ran for election was judicial reform, and this is still a work in progress. We want to protect all the rights of every individual but also ensure that the speedy portion of the promise also happens. Unfortunately, speed is not a hallmark of our current judicial system and there are various steps -- laws, amendments, particular laws -- even a rethink of the whole process to try and ensure the speedy disposition of justice.

Thank you.

President Obama: Thank you very much, everybody.

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# Address at Fort Bonifacio

Hello, everybody! Please, have a seat. Kumusta kayo. It is great to be here at Fort Bonifacio. Vice President Binay, distinguished guests: It’s an honor to be here with our outstanding allies -- the leaders and members of the armed forces of the Philippines. And we’re joined by men and women who stand tall and proud to wear the uniform of the United States of America. And let me also welcome all our Filipino friends.

Now, I’m not going to give a long speech, because it’s hot and people are in uniform. I hope you don’t mind me not wearing my jacket. And I also want to make sure that I have some time to shake some hands.

But I’m here in the Philippines to reaffirm the enduring alliance between our two countries. I thank President Aquino for his partnership and the deeper ties that we forged yesterday. I’m especially proud to be here as we remember one of the defining moments of our shared history -- the 70th anniversary of the battle of Leyte during World War II and the beginning of the liberation of the Philippines.

Right after this, I’ll pay my respects at the American cemetery here in Manila -- the final resting place of so many Americans and Filipinos who made the ultimate sacrifice for the freedom of this country in that war. These Americans and Filipinos rest in peace as they stood in war -- side-by-side, shoulder-to-shoulder -- balikatan.

Together, Filipinos and Americans put up a heroic defense, at Bataan and Corregidor. Together, they endured the agony of the death marches and the horror of the prisoner of war camps. Many never made it out. In those years of occupation, Filipino resistance fighters kept up the struggle. And hundreds of thousands of Filipinos fought under the American flag.

And sadly, the proud service of many of these Filipino veterans was never fully recognized by the United States. Many were denied the compensation they had been promised. It was an injustice. So in recent years, my administration, working with Congress and others, have worked to right this wrong. We passed a law, reviewed the records, processed claims, and nearly 20,000 Filipino veterans from World War II and their families finally received the compensation they had earned. And it was the right thing to do.

What’s been written about Bataan could be said of their entire generation: “The loss of life was grievous, and hardly a Filipino family was untouched by the tragedy. But the heroic struggle brought out the best in the Filipino character in the face of adversity and served as a beacon to freedom loving peoples everywhere.”

We are truly honored to have some of these extraordinary veterans here with us today. Among them are men who fought at Bataan and Corregidor, and a survivor of those hellish prisoner of war camps. Some fought in the resistance, including nurse Carolina Garcia Delfin. These veterans are now in their nineties. They are an inspiration to us all, and I’d ask those who can stand to stand or give a wave so that we can all salute their service.

The spirit of these veterans -- their strength, their solidarity -- I see it in you as well when you train and exercise together to stay ready for the future, when our special forces -- some of you here today -- advise and assist our Filipino partners in their fight against terrorism, and when you respond to crises together, as you did after Yolanda. Along with your civilian partners, you rushed into the disaster zone, pulled people from the rubble, delivered food and medicine. You showed what friends can do when we take care of each other.

These are the kinds of missions we face today. Yesterday, President Aquino and I agreed to begin a new chapter in our alliance. And under our new agreement, American forces can begin rotating through Filipino airfields and ports. We’ll train and exercise together more to bring our militaries even closer, and to support your efforts to strengthen your armed forces. We’ll improve our ability to respond even faster to disasters like Yolanda. Today, I thank the people of the Philippines for welcoming our servicemembers as your friends and partners.

Deepening our alliance is part of our broader vision for the Asia Pacific. We believe that nations and peoples have the right to live in security and peace, and to have their sovereignty and territorial integrity respected. We believe that international law must be upheld, that freedom of navigation must be preserved and commerce must not be impeded. We believe that disputes must be resolved peacefully and not by intimidation or force. That’s what our nations stand for. That’s the future we’re working for. And that’s why your service is so important.

Let me be absolutely clear. For more than 60 years, the United States and the Philippines have been bound by a mutual defense treaty. And this treaty means our two nations pledge -- and I’m quoting -- our “common determination to defend themselves against external armed attacks, so that no potential aggressor could be under the illusion that either of them stands alone.” In other words, our commitment to defend the Philippines is ironclad and the United States will keep that commitment, because allies never stand alone.

In closing, I want to leave you with an incredible story that captures the strength of our alliance. We all know about the massive international response after Yolanda. What few people realize is that it started all with a single aircraft carrying a handful of Filipino and American troops and civilians. The storm hit land that Friday.

The very next morning, the first aircraft took off -- a Philippine C-130 carrying Captain Roy Trinidad, a Philippine Navy SEAL; Colonel Mike Wylie, United States Marines; and Major George Apalisok, U.S. Air Force.

Just hours after the storm passed, with Tacloban devastated, they landed at the airport. And the next day, they were joined by others, including Army Major Leo Liebreich. In the days that followed, they worked together -- Filipinos and Americans -- setting up a medical station, clearing debris from the runway, reopening that airport. Filipino soldiers unloading aid from American cargo aircraft; American troops loading supplies onto Filipino helicopters. And when all the cargo was off those aircraft, our troops worked together to help local residents aboard so that they could be evacuated to safety. And over and over, those grateful Filipinos responded with a simple word -- salamat.

There, in the ruin, men like these worked around the clock, day after day. And at night they’d sleep on boards for cots, in a damaged building with only half a roof. “It rained on some nights, and we got a little wet,” said George, “but nobody complained.” “We’ve been training together for many years,” he said -- “we worked as a team.” And because of individuals like these, thousands were evacuated to safety, and what started with a few men on that first day became a global relief effort that saved countless lives. Roy, the Philippine Navy SEAL -- George, Mike, Leo -- they are here today. George also happens to be a proud Filipino-American. I want them to stand again and accept our thanks. We are proud of their outstanding service.

There’s a connection between our proud veterans from World War II and our men and women serving today -- bound across the generations by the spirit of our alliance, Filipinos and Americans standing together, shoulder-to-shoulder, balikatan. On behalf of the American people, thank you all for your service. Thank you for making us so proud. To the Americans here, I am never prouder than being able to stand before you as your Commander-in-Chief. To our Filipino armed forces -- thank you for being such an outstanding ally. Together, you are helping to secure the prosperity and peace of both our nations.

God bless you.

God bless the Republic of the Philippines.

God bless the United States of America.

And God bless the alliance between our great nations.

Thank you.

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# White House Correspondents' Dinner Address 2014

Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you so much, everybody. Please have a seat, have a seat. Before I get started, can we get the new presidential setup out here?

It's worked before.

That's more like it.

It is great to be back. What a year, huh? I usually start these dinners with a few self-deprecating jokes. After my stellar 2013, what could I possibly talk about?

I admit it -- last year was rough. Sheesh. At one point things got so bad, the 47 percent called Mitt Romney to apologize.

Of course, we rolled out healthcare.gov. That could have gone better. In 2008 my slogan was, "Yes We Can." In 2013 my slogan was, "Control-Alt-Delete." On the plus side, they did turn the launch of healthcare.gov into one of the year's biggest movies.

But rather than dwell on the past, I would like to pivot to this dinner. Let's welcome our headliner this evening, Joel McHale. On "Community," Joel plays a preening, self-obsessed narcissist. So this dinner must be a real change of pace for you.

I want to thank the White House Correspondents Association for hosting us here tonight. I am happy to be here, even though I am a little jet-lagged from my trip to Malaysia. The lengths we have to go to get CNN coverage these days. I think they're still searching for their table.

MSNBC is here. They're a little overwhelmed. They've never seen an audience this big before.

But, look, everybody is trying to keep up with this incredibly fast-changing media landscape. For example, I got a lot of grief on cable news for promoting Obamacare to young people on Between Two Ferns. But that's what young people like to watch. And to be fair, I am not the first person on television between two potted plants.

Sometimes I do feel disrespected by you reporters. But that's okay. Seattle Seahawk cornerback Richard Sherman is here tonight. And he gave me some great tips on how to handle it. Jake Tapper, don't you ever talk about me like that!1 I'm the best President in the game!

What do you think, Richard? Was that good? A little more feeling next time?

While we're talking sports, just last month, a wonderful story -- an American won the Boston Marathon for first time in 30 years. Which was inspiring and only fair, since a Kenyan has been president for the last six. Had to even things out.

We have some other athletes here tonight, including Olympic snowboarding gold medalist Jamie Anderson is here. We're proud of her. Incredibly talented young lady. Michelle and I watched the Olympics -- we cannot believe what these folks do -- death-defying feats -- haven't seen somebody pull a "180" that fast since Rand Paul disinvited that Nevada rancher from this dinner. As a general rule, things don't like end well if the sentence starts, Let me tell you something "I know about the negro."2 You don't really need to hear the rest of it. Just a tip for you -- don't start your sentence that way.

Speaking of Rand Paul -- Colorado legalized marijuana this year, an interesting social experiment. I do hope it doesn't lead to a whole lot of paranoid people who think that the federal government is out to get them and listening to their phone calls. That would be a problem.

And speaking of conservative heroes, the Koch brothers bought a table here tonight. But as usual, they used a shadowy right-wing organization as a front. Hello, Fox News.

I'm just kidding. Let's face it, Fox, you'll miss me when I'm gone. It will be harder to convince the American people that Hillary was born in Kenya.

A lot of us really are concerned about the way big money is influencing our politics. I remember when a Super PAC was just me buying Marlboro 100s instead of regulars.

Of course, now that it's 2014, Washington is obsessed on the midterms. Folks are saying that with my sagging poll numbers, my fellow Democrats don't really want me campaigning with them. And I don't think that's true -- although I did notice the other day that Sasha needed a speaker at career day, and she invited Bill Clinton. I was a little hurt by that.

Both sides are doing whatever it takes to win the ruthless game. Republicans -- this is a true story -- Republicans actually brought in a group of consultants to teach their candidates how to speak to women. This is true. And I don't know if it will work with women, but I understand that America's teenage boys are signing up to run for the Senate in droves.

Anyway, while you guys focus on the horserace, I'm going to do what I do -- I'm going to be focused on everyday Americans. Just yesterday, I read a heartbreaking letter -- you know I get letters from folks from around the country; every day I get 10 that I read -- this one got to me. A Virginia man who's been stuck in the same part-time job for years; no respect from his boss; no chance to get ahead. I really wish Eric Cantor would stop writing me. You can just pick up the phone, Eric.

And I'm feeling sorry -- believe it or not -- for the Speaker of the House, as well. These days, the House Republicans actually give John Boehner a harder time than they give me, which means orange really is the new black.

But I have not given up the idea of working with Congress. In fact, two weeks ago, Senator Ted Cruz and I, we got a bill done together. And I have to say, the signing ceremony was something special. We've got a picture of it I think.

Look, I know, Washington seems more dysfunctional than ever. Gridlock has gotten so bad in this town you have to wonder: What did we do to piss off Chris Christie so bad?

One issue, for example, we haven't been able to agree on is unemployment insurance. Republicans continue to refuse to extend it. And you know what, I am beginning to think they've got a point. If you want to get paid while not working, you should have to run for Congress just like everybody else.

Of course, there is one thing that keeps Republicans busy. They have tried more than 50 times to repeal Obamacare. Despite that, 8 million people signed up for health care in the first open enrollment. Which does lead one to ask, How well does Obamacare have to work before you don't want to repeal it? What if everybody's cholesterol drops to 120? What if your yearly checkup came with tickets to a Clippers game? Not the old, Donald Sterling Clippers -- the new Oprah Clippers. Would that be good enough? What if they gave Mitch McConnell a pulse? What is it going to take?

Anyway, this year, I've promised to use more executive actions to get things done without Congress. My critics call this the "imperial presidency." The truth is, I just show up every day in my office and do my job. I've got a picture of this, I think. You would think they'd appreciate a more assertive approach, considering that the new conservative darling is none other than Vladimir Putin. Last year, Pat Buchanan said Putin is "headed straight for the Nobel Peace Prize."3 He said this. Now I know it sounds crazy but to be fair, they give those to just about anybody these days. So it could happen.

But it's not just Pat -- Rudy Giuliani said Putin is "what you call a leader." Mike Huckabee and Sean Hannity keep talking about his bare chest, which is kind of weird. Look it up -- they talk about it a lot.

It is strange to think that I have just two and a half years left in this office. Everywhere I look, there are reminders that I only hold this job temporarily.

But it's a long time between now and 2016, and anything can happen. You may have heard the other day, Hillary had to dodge a flying shoe at a press conference. I love that picture.

Regardless of what happens, I've run my last campaign and I'm beginning to think about my legacy. Some of you know -- Mayor Rahm Emanuel recently announced he is naming a high school in Chicago after me, which is extremely humbling. I was even more flattered to hear Rick Perry, who is here tonight, is doing the same thing in Texas. Take a look. Thank you, Rick. It means a lot to me.

And I intend to enjoy all the free time that I will have. George W. Bush took up painting after he left office, which inspired me to take up my own artistic side. I'm sure we've got a shot of this. Maybe not. The joke doesn't work without the slide. Oh well. Assume that it was funny. Does this happen to you, Joel? It does? Okay.

On a more serious note, tonight reminds us that we really are lucky to live in a country where reporters get to give a head of state a hard time on a daily basis -- and then, once a year, give him or her the chance, at least, to try to return the favor.

But we also know that not every journalist, or photographer, or crewmember is so fortunate, because even as we celebrate the free press tonight, our thoughts are with those in places around the globe like Ukraine, and Afghanistan, and Syria, and Egypt, who risk everything -- in some cases, even give their lives -- to report the news.

And what tonight also reminds us is that the fight for full and fair access goes beyond the chance to ask a question. As Steve mentioned, decades ago, an African American who wanted to cover his or her President might be barred from journalism school, burdened by Jim Crow, and, once in Washington, banned from press conferences. But after years of effort, black editors and publishers began meeting with FDR's press secretary, Steve Early. And then they met with the President himself, who declared that a black reporter would get a credential. And even when Harry McAlpin made history as the first African American to attend a presidential news conference, he wasn't always welcomed by the other reporters. But he was welcomed by the President, who told him, I'm glad to see you, McAlpin, and I'm very happy to have you here.

Now, that sentiment might have worn off once Harry asked him a question or two -- and Harry's battles continued. But he made history. And we're s proud of Sherman and his family for being here tonight, and the White House Correspondents Association for creating a scholarship in Harry's name.

For over 100 years, even as the White House Correspondents Association has told the story of America's progress, you've lived it, too -- gradually allowing equal access to women, and minorities, and gays, and Americans with disabilities. And, yes, radio, and television, and Internet reporters, as well. And through it all, you've helped make sure that even as societies change, our fundamental commitment to the interaction between those who govern and those who ask questions doesn't change. And as Jay will attest, it's a legacy you carry on enthusiastically every single day.

And because this is the 100th anniversary of the Correspondents' Association, I actually recorded an additional brief video thanking all of you for your hard work. Can we run the video?

[Video fails to play.]

President Obama: What's going on? I was told this would work. Does anybody know how to fix this?

[HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius enters from backstage.]

President Obama: Oh, thank you. You got it?

Secretary Sebelius: I got this -- I see it all the time. There, that should work.

[Video plays.]

President Obama: Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you. And God bless America, and thank you, Kathleen Sebelius.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Presser on Misconduct Allegations at the Dept of Veterans Affairs

Good morning, everybody. I just met with Secretary Shinseki and Rob Nabors, who I’ve temporarily assigned to work with Secretary Shinseki and the VA. We focused on two issues: the allegations of misconduct at Veterans Affairs facilities, and our broader mission of caring for our veterans and their families.

As Commander-in-Chief, I have the honor of standing with our men and women in uniform at every step of their service: from the moment they take their oath, to when our troops prepare to deploy, to Afghanistan -- where they put their lives on the line for our security, to their bedside, as our wounded warriors fight to recover from terrible injuries. The most searing moments of my presidency have been going to Walter Reed, or Bethesda, or Bagram and meeting troops who have left a part of themselves on the battlefield. And their spirit and their determination to recover and often to serve again is an inspiration.

So these men and women and their families are the best that our country has to offer. They’ve done their duty, and they ask nothing more than that this country does ours -- that we uphold our sacred trust to all who have served.

So when I hear allegations of misconduct -- any misconduct -- whether it’s allegations of VA staff covering up long wait times or cooking the books, I will not stand for it. Not as Commander-in-Chief, but also not as an American. None of us should. So if these allegations prove to be true, it is dishonorable, it is disgraceful, and I will not tolerate it -- period.

Here’s what I discussed with Secretary Shinseki this morning. First, anybody found to have manipulated or falsified records at VA facilities has to be held accountable. The inspector general at the VA has launched investigations into the Phoenix VA and other facilities. And some individuals have already been put on administrative leave. I know that people are angry and want a swift reckoning. I sympathize with that. But we have to let the investigators do their job and get to the bottom of what happened. Our veterans deserve to know the facts. Their families deserve to know the facts. And once we know the facts, I assure you -- if there is misconduct, it will be punished.

Second, I want to know the full scope of this problem. And that’s why I ordered Secretary Shinseki to investigate. Today, he updated me on his review, which is looking not just at the Phoenix facility, but also VA facilities across the nation. And I expect preliminary results from that review next week.

Third, I’ve directed Rob Nabors to conduct a broader review of the Veterans Health Administration -- the part of the VA that delivers health care to our veterans. And Rob is going to Phoenix today. Keep in mind, though, even if we had not heard reports out of this Phoenix facility or other facilities, we all know that it often takes too long for veterans to get the care that they need. That’s not a new development. It’s been a problem for decades and it’s been compounded by more than a decade of war.

That’s why, when I came into office, I said we would systematically work to fix these problems, and we have been working really hard to address them. My attitude is, for folks who have been fighting on the battlefield, they should not have to fight a bureaucracy at home to get the care that they’ve earned.

So the presumption has always been we’ve got to do better. And Rob’s review will be a comprehensive look at the Veterans Health Administration’s approach currently to access to care. I want to know what’s working. I want to know what is not working. And I want specific recommendations on how VA can up their game. And I expect that full report from Rob next month.

Number four -- I said that I expect everyone involved to work with Congress, which has an important oversight role to play. And I welcome Congress as a partner in our efforts not just to address the current controversies, but to make sure we’re doing right by our veterans across the board. I served on the Veterans Affairs Committee when I was in the Senate, and it was one of the proudest pieces of business that I did in the legislature. And I know the folks over there care deeply about our veterans.

It is important that our veterans don’t become another political football, especially when so many of them are receiving care right now. This is an area where Democrats and Republicans should always be working together.

Which brings me to my final point. Even as we get to the bottom of what happened at Phoenix and other facilities, all of us, whether here in Washington or all across the country, have to stay focused on the larger mission, which is upholding our sacred trust to all of our veterans, bringing the VA system into the 21st century -- which is not an easy task.

We have made progress over the last five years. We’ve made historic investments in our veterans. We’ve boosted VA funding to record levels. And we created consistency through advanced appropriations so that veterans organizations knew their money would be there regardless of political wrangling in Washington.

We made VA benefits available to more than 2 million veterans who did not have it before -- delivering disability pay to more Vietnam vets exposed to Agent Orange; making it easier for veterans with post-traumatic stress and mental health issues and traumatic brain injury to get treatment; and improving care for women veterans.

Because of these steps and the influx of new veterans requiring services added in many cases to wait times, we launched an all-out war on the disability claims backlog. And in just the past year alone, we’ve slashed that backlog by half.

Of course, we’re not going to let up, because it’s still too high. We’re going to keep at it until we eliminate the backlog once and for all. Meanwhile, we’re also reducing homelessness among our veterans. We’re helping veterans and their families -- more than a million so far -- pursue their education under the Post-9/11 GI Bill. We’re stepping up our efforts to help our newest veterans get the skills and training to find jobs when they come home. And along with Michelle and Jill Biden and Joining Forces, we’ve helped hundreds of thousands of veterans find a job. More veterans are finding work and veterans unemployment, although still way too high, is coming down.

The point is, caring for our veterans is not an issue that popped up in recent weeks. Some of the problems with respect to how veterans are able to access the benefits that they’ve earned, that’s not a new issue. That’s an issue that I was working on when I was running for the United States Senate. Taking care of our veterans and their families has been one of the causes of my presidency, and it is something that all of us have to be involved with and have to be paying attention to.

We ended the war in Iraq. And as our war in Afghanistan ends, and as our newest veterans are coming home, the demands on the VA are going to grow. So we’re going to have to redouble our efforts to get it right as a nation. And we have to be honest that there are and will continue to be areas where we’ve got to do a lot better.

So today, I want every veteran to know we are going to fix whatever is wrong. And so long as I have the privilege of serving as Commander-in-Chief, I’m going to keep on fighting to deliver the care and the benefits and the opportunities that your families deserve, now and for decades to come. That is a commitment to which I feel a sacred duty to maintain.

So with that, I’m going to take two questions. I’m going to take Jim Kuhnhenn at AP, first of all.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. As you said, this is a cause of your presidency. You ran on this issue -- you mentioned it. Why was it allowed to get to this stage where you actually had potentially 40 veterans who died while waiting for treatment? That’s an extreme circumstance. Why did it get to that?

President Obama: Well, we have to find out, first of all, what exactly happened. And I don’t want to get ahead of the IG report or the other investigations that are being done. And I think it is important to recognize that the wait times generally -- what the IG indicated so far at least -- is the wait times were for folks who may have had chronic conditions, were seeking their next appointment but may have already received service. It was not necessarily a situation where they were calling for emergency services. And the IG indicated that he did not see a link between the wait and them actually dying.

That does not excuse the fact that the wait times in general are too long in some facilities. And so what we have to do is find out what exactly happened. We have to find out how can we realistically cut some of these wait times. There has been a large influx of new veterans coming in. We’ve got a population of veterans that is also aging as part of the baby boom population. And we’ve got to make sure that the scheduling system, the access to the system, that all those things are in sync. There are parts of the VA health care system that have performed well.

And what we’ve seen is, for example, satisfaction rates in many facilities with respect to many providers has been high. But what we’re seeing is that, in terms of how folks get scheduled, how they get in the system, there are still too many problems. I’m going to get a complete report from it. It is not, as a consequence, people not caring about the problem, but there are 85 million appointments scheduled among veterans during the course of a year. That’s a lot of appointments. And that means that we’ve got to have a system that is built in order to be able to take those folks in in a smooth fashion, that they know what to expect, that it’s reliable, and it means that the VA has got to set standards that it can meet. And if it can’t meet them right now, then it’s going to have to set realistic goals about how they improve the system overall.

Question: Does the responsibility ultimately rest with General Shinseki?

President Obama: You know, the responsibility for things always rests ultimately with me, as the President and Commander-in-Chief. Ric Shinseki has been a great soldier. He himself is a disabled veteran. And nobody cares more about our veterans than Ric Shinseki. So if you ask me how do I think Ric Shinseki has performed overall, I would say that on homelessness, on the 9/11 GI Bill, on working with us to reduce the backlog, across the board he has put his heart and soul into this thing and he has taken it very seriously.

But I have said to Ric -- and I said it to him today -- I want to see what the results of these reports are and there is going to be accountability. And I’m going to expect even before the reports are done that we are seeing significant improvement in terms of how the admissions process takes place in all of our VA health care facilities. So I know he cares about it deeply and he has been a great public servant and a great warrior on behalf of the United States of America. We’re going to work with him to solve the problem, but I am going to make sure that there is accountability throughout the system after I get the full report.

Steve Holland from Reuters.

Question: Thank you, sir. Has Secretary Shinseki offered to resign? And if he’s not to blame, then who is? And were you caught by surprise by these allegations?

President Obama: Ric Shinseki I think serves this country because he cares deeply about veterans and he cares deeply about the mission. And I know that Ric’s attitude is if he does not think he can do a good job on this and if he thinks he has let our veterans down, then I’m sure that he is not going to be interested in continuing to serve. At this stage, Ric is committed to solving the problem and working with us to do it. And I am going to do everything in my power, using the resources of the White House, to help that process of getting to the bottom of what happened and fixing it.

But I’m also going to be waiting to see what the results of all this review process yields. I don’t yet know how systemic this is. I don’t yet know are there a lot of other facilities that have been cooking the books, or is this just an episodic problem. We know that, essentially, the wait times have been a problem for decades in all kinds of circumstances with respect to the VA -- getting benefits, getting health care, et cetera. Some facilities do better than others. A couple of years ago, the Veterans Affairs set a goal of 14 days for wait times. What’s not yet clear to me is whether enough tools were given to make sure that those goals were actually met.

And I won’t know until the full report is put forward as to whether there was enough management follow-up to ensure that those folks on the front lines who were doing scheduling had the capacity to meet those goals; if they were being evaluated for meeting goals that were unrealistic and they couldn’t meet, because either there weren’t enough doctors or the systems weren’t in place or what have you. We need to find out who was responsible for setting up those guidelines. So there are going to be a lot of questions that we have to answer.

In the meantime, what I said to Ric today is let’s not wait for the report retrospectively to reach out immediately to veterans who are currently waiting for appointments, to make sure that they are getting better service. That’s something that we can initiate right now. We don’t have to wait to find out if there was misconduct to dig in and make sure that we’re upping our game in all of our various facilities.

I do think it is important not just with respect to Ric Shinseki, but with respect to the VA generally, to say that every single day there are people working in the VA who do outstanding work and put everything they’ve got into making sure that our veterans get the care, benefits and services that they need. And so I do want to close by sending a message out there that there are millions of veterans who are getting really good service from the VA, who are getting really good treatment from the VA. I know because I get letters from veterans sometimes asking me to write letters of commendation or praise to a doctor or a nurse or a facility that couldn’t have given them better treatment.

And so this is a big system with a lot of really good people in it who care about our veterans deeply. We have seen the improvements on a whole range of issues like homelessness, like starting to clear the backlog up, like making sure that folks who previously weren’t even eligible for disability because it was a mental health issue or because it was an Agent Orange issue are finally able to get those services. I don’t want us to lose sight of the fact that there are a lot of folks in the VA who are doing a really good job and working really hard at it. That does not, on the other hand, excuse the possibility that, number one, we weren’t just -- we were not doing a good enough job in terms of providing access to folks who need an appointment for chronic conditions. Number two, it never excuses the possibility that somebody was trying to manipulate the data in order to look better or make their facility look better.

It is critical to make sure that we have good information in order to make good decisions. I want people on the front lines, if there’s a problem, to tell me or tell Ric Shinseki, or tell whoever is their superior, that this is a problem. Don’t cover up a problem. Do not pretend the problem doesn’t exist. If you can’t get wait times down to 14 days right now, I want you to let folks up the chain know so that we can solve the problem. Do we need more doctors? Do we need a new system in order to make sure that the scheduling and coordination is more effective and more smooth? Is there more follow-up?

And that’s the thing that right now most disturbs me about the report -- the possibility that folks intentionally withheld information that would have helped us fix a problem, because there’s not a problem out there that’s not fixable. It can’t always be fixed as quickly as everybody would like, but typically we can chip away at these problems. We’ve seen this with the backlog. We’ve seen it with veterans homelessness. We’ve seen it with the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Initially, there were problems with it. They got fixed and now it’s operating fairly smoothly. So problems can be fixed, but folks have to let the people that they’re reporting to know that there is a problem in order for us to fix it.

Question: What about bonuses for those implicated in mismanagement, Mr. President?

President Obama: We’re going to find out. My attitude is --

Question: Does that upset you?

President Obama: Listen, if somebody has mismanaged or engaged in misconduct, not only do I not want them getting bonuses, I want them punished. So that’s what we’re going to hopefully find out from the IG report, as well as the audits that are taking place.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Statement on Afghanistan

Good afternoon, everybody. As you know, this weekend, I traveled to Afghanistan to thank our men and women in uniform and our deployed civilians, on behalf of a grateful nation, for the extraordinary sacrifices they make on behalf of our security. I was also able to meet with our commanding General and Ambassador to review the progress that we’ve made. And today, I’d like to update the American people on the way forward in Afghanistan and how, this year, we will bring America’s longest war to a responsible end.

The United States did not seek this fight. We went into Afghanistan out of necessity, after our nation was attacked by al Qaeda on September 11th, 2001. We went to war against al Qaeda and its extremist allies with the strong support of the American people and their representatives in Congress; with the international community and our NATO allies; and with the Afghan people, who welcomed the opportunity of a life free from the dark tyranny of extremism.

We have now been in Afghanistan longer than many Americans expected. But make no mistake -- thanks to the skill and sacrifice of our troops, diplomats, and intelligence professionals, we have struck significant blows against al Qaeda’s leadership, we have eliminated Osama bin Laden, and we have prevented Afghanistan from being used to launch attacks against our homeland. We have also supported the Afghan people as they continue the hard work of building a democracy. We’ve extended more opportunities to their people, including women and girls. And we’ve helped train and equip their own security forces.

Now we’re finishing the job we started. Over the last several years, we’ve worked to transition security responsibilities to the Afghans. One year ago, Afghan forces assumed the lead for combat operations. Since then, they’ve continued to grow in size and in strength, while making huge sacrifices for their country. This transition has allowed us to steadily draw down our own forces -- from a peak of 100,000 U.S. troops, to roughly 32,000 today.

2014, therefore, is a pivotal year. Together with our allies and the Afghan government, we have agreed that this is the year we will conclude our combat mission in Afghanistan. This is also a year of political transition in Afghanistan. Earlier this spring, Afghans turned out in the millions to vote in the first round of their presidential election -- defying threats in order to determine their own destiny. And in just over two weeks, they will vote for their next President, and Afghanistan will see its first democratic transfer of power in history.

In the context of this progress, having consulted with Congress and my national security team, I’ve determined the nature of the commitment that America is prepared to make beyond 2014. Our objectives are clear: Disrupting threats posed by al Qaeda; supporting Afghan security forces; and giving the Afghan people the opportunity to succeed as they stand on their own.

Here’s how we will pursue those objectives. First, America’s combat mission will be over by the end of this year. Starting next year, Afghans will be fully responsible for securing their country. American personnel will be in an advisory role. We will no longer patrol Afghan cities or towns, mountains or valleys. That is a task for the Afghan people.

Second, I’ve made it clear that we’re open to cooperating with Afghans on two narrow missions after 2014: training Afghan forces and supporting counterterrorism operations against the remnants of al Qaeda.

Today, I want to be clear about how the United States is prepared to advance those missions. At the beginning of 2015, we will have approximately 98,000 U.S. -- let me start that over, just because I want to make sure we don’t get this written wrong. At the beginning of 2015, we will have approximately 9,800 U.S. servicemembers in different parts of the country, together with our NATO allies and other partners. By the end of 2015, we will have reduced that presence by roughly half, and we will have consolidated our troops in Kabul and on Bagram Airfield. One year later, by the end of 2016, our military will draw down to a normal embassy presence in Kabul, with a security assistance component, just as we’ve done in Iraq.

Now, even as our troops come home, the international community will continue to support Afghans as they build their country for years to come. But our relationship will not be defined by war -- it will be shaped by our financial and development assistance, as well as our diplomatic support. Our commitment to Afghanistan is rooted in the strategic partnership that we agreed to in 2012. And this plan remains consistent with discussions we’ve had with our NATO allies. Just as our allies have been with us every step of the way in Afghanistan, we expect that our allies will be with us going forward.

Third, we will only sustain this military presence after 2014 if the Afghan government signs the Bilateral Security Agreement that our two governments have already negotiated. This Agreement is essential to give our troops the authorities they need to fulfill their mission, while respecting Afghan sovereignty. The two final Afghan candidates in the run-off election for President have each indicated that they would sign this agreement promptly after taking office. So I’m hopeful that we can get this done.

The bottom line is, it’s time to turn the page on more than a decade in which so much of our foreign policy was focused on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. When I took office, we had nearly 180,000 troops in harm’s way. By the end of this year, we will have less than 10,000. In addition to bringing our troops home, this new chapter in American foreign policy will allow us to redirect some of the resources saved by ending these wars to respond more nimbly to the changing threat of terrorism, while addressing a broader set of priorities around the globe.

I think Americans have learned that it’s harder to end wars than it is to begin them. Yet this is how wars end in the 21st century -- not through signing ceremonies, but through decisive blows against our adversaries, transitions to elected governments, security forces who take the lead and ultimately full responsibility. We remain committed to a sovereign, secure, stable, and unified Afghanistan. And toward that end, we will continue to support Afghan-led efforts to promote peace in their country through reconciliation. We have to recognize that Afghanistan will not be a perfect place, and it is not America’s responsibility to make it one. The future of Afghanistan must be decided by Afghans. But what the United States can do -- what we will do -- is secure our interests and help give the Afghans a chance, an opportunity to seek a long, overdue and hard-earned peace.

America will always keep our commitments to friends and partners who step up, and we will never waver in our determination to deny al Qaeda the safe haven that they had before 9/11. That commitment is embodied by the men and women in and out of uniform who serve in Afghanistan today and who have served in the past. In their eyes, I see the character that sustains American security and our leadership abroad. These are mostly young people who did not hesitate to volunteer in a time of war. And as many of them begin to transition to civilian life, we will keep the promise we make to them and to all veterans, and make sure they get the care and benefits that they have earned and deserve.

This 9/11 Generation is part of an unbroken line of heroes who give up the comfort of the familiar to serve a half a world away -- to protect their families and communities back home, and to give people they never thought they’d meet the chance to live a better life. It’s an extraordinary sacrifice for them and for their families. But we shouldn’t be surprised that they’re willing to make it. That’s who we are as Americans. That’s what we do.

Tomorrow, I will travel to West Point and speak to America’s newest class of military officers to discuss how Afghanistan fits into our broader strategy going forward. And I’m confident that if we carry out this approach, we can not only responsibly end our war in Afghanistan and achieve the objectives that took us to war in the first place, we’ll also be able to begin a new chapter in the story of American leadership around the world.

Thanks very much.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# United States Military Academy Commencement Address

Thank you, General Caslen, for that introduction. To General Trainor, General Clarke, the faculty and staff at West Point -- you have been outstanding stewards of this proud institution and outstanding mentors for the newest officers in the United States Army. I’d like to acknowledge the Army’s leadership -- General McHugh -- Secretary McHugh, General Odierno, as well as Senator Jack Reed, who is here, and a proud graduate of West Point himself.

To the class of 2014, I congratulate you on taking your place on the Long Gray Line. Among you is the first all-female command team -- Erin Mauldin and Austen Boroff. In Calla Glavin, you have a Rhodes Scholar. And Josh Herbeck proves that West Point accuracy extends beyond the three-point line. To the entire class, let me reassure you in these final hours at West Point: As Commander-in-Chief, I hereby absolve all cadets who are on restriction for minor conduct offenses. Let me just say that nobody ever did that for me when I was in school.

I know you join me in extending a word of thanks to your families. Joe DeMoss, whose son James is graduating, spoke for a whole lot of parents when he wrote me a letter about the sacrifices you’ve made. “Deep inside,” he wrote, “we want to explode with pride at what they are committing to do in the service of our country.” Like several graduates, James is a combat veteran. And I would ask all of us here today to stand and pay tribute -- not only to the veterans among us, but to the more than 2.5 million Americans who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as their families.

This is a particularly useful time for America to reflect on those who have sacrificed so much for our freedom, a few days after Memorial Day. You are the first class to graduate since 9/11 who may not be sent into combat in Iraq or Afghanistan. When I first spoke at West Point in 2009, we still had more than 100,000 troops in Iraq. We were preparing to surge in Afghanistan. Our counterterrorism efforts were focused on al Qaeda’s core leadership -- those who had carried out the 9/11 attacks. And our nation was just beginning a long climb out of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.

Four and a half years later, as you graduate, the landscape has changed. We have removed our troops from Iraq. We are winding down our war in Afghanistan. Al Qaeda’s leadership on the border region between Pakistan and Afghanistan has been decimated, and Osama bin Laden is no more. And through it all, we’ve refocused our investments in what has always been a key source of American strength: a growing economy that can provide opportunity for everybody who’s willing to work hard and take responsibility here at home.

In fact, by most measures, America has rarely been stronger relative to the rest of the world. Those who argue otherwise -- who suggest that America is in decline, or has seen its global leadership slip away -- are either misreading history or engaged in partisan politics. Think about it. Our military has no peer. The odds of a direct threat against us by any nation are low and do not come close to the dangers we faced during the Cold War.

Meanwhile, our economy remains the most dynamic on Earth; our businesses the most innovative. Each year, we grow more energy independent. From Europe to Asia, we are the hub of alliances unrivaled in the history of nations. America continues to attract striving immigrants. The values of our founding inspire leaders in parliaments and new movements in public squares around the globe. And when a typhoon hits the Philippines, or schoolgirls are kidnapped in Nigeria, or masked men occupy a building in Ukraine, it is America that the world looks to for help. So the United States is and remains the one indispensable nation. That has been true for the century passed and it will be true for the century to come.

But the world is changing with accelerating speed. This presents opportunity, but also new dangers. We know all too well, after 9/11, just how technology and globalization has put power once reserved for states in the hands of individuals, raising the capacity of terrorists to do harm. Russia’s aggression toward former Soviet states unnerves capitals in Europe, while China’s economic rise and military reach worries its neighbors. From Brazil to India, rising middle classes compete with us, and governments seek a greater say in global forums. And even as developing nations embrace democracy and market economies, 24-hour news and social media makes it impossible to ignore the continuation of sectarian conflicts and failing states and popular uprisings that might have received only passing notice a generation ago.

It will be your generation’s task to respond to this new world. The question we face, the question each of you will face, is not whether America will lead, but how we will lead -- not just to secure our peace and prosperity, but also extend peace and prosperity around the globe.

Now, this question isn’t new. At least since George Washington served as Commander-in-Chief, there have been those who warned against foreign entanglements that do not touch directly on our security or economic wellbeing. Today, according to self-described realists, conflicts in Syria or Ukraine or the Central African Republic are not ours to solve. And not surprisingly, after costly wars and continuing challenges here at home, that view is shared by many Americans.

A different view from interventionists from the left and right says that we ignore these conflicts at our own peril; that America’s willingness to apply force around the world is the ultimate safeguard against chaos, and America’s failure to act in the face of Syrian brutality or Russian provocations not only violates our conscience, but invites escalating aggression in the future.

And each side can point to history to support its claims. But I believe neither view fully speaks to the demands of this moment. It is absolutely true that in the 21st century American isolationism is not an option. We don’t have a choice to ignore what happens beyond our borders. If nuclear materials are not secure, that poses a danger to American cities. As the Syrian civil war spills across borders, the capacity of battle-hardened extremist groups to come after us only increases. Regional aggression that goes unchecked -- whether in southern Ukraine or the South China Sea, or anywhere else in the world -- will ultimately impact our allies and could draw in our military. We can’t ignore what happens beyond our boundaries.

And beyond these narrow rationales, I believe we have a real stake, an abiding self-interest, in making sure our children and our grandchildren grow up in a world where schoolgirls are not kidnapped and where individuals are not slaughtered because of tribe or faith or political belief. I believe that a world of greater freedom and tolerance is not only a moral imperative, it also helps to keep us safe.

But to say that we have an interest in pursuing peace and freedom beyond our borders is not to say that every problem has a military solution. Since World War II, some of our most costly mistakes came not from our restraint, but from our willingness to rush into military adventures without thinking through the consequences -- without building international support and legitimacy for our action; without leveling with the American people about the sacrifices required. Tough talk often draws headlines, but war rarely conforms to slogans. As General Eisenhower, someone with hard-earned knowledge on this subject, said at this ceremony in 1947: “War is mankind’s most tragic and stupid folly; to seek or advise its deliberate provocation is a black crime against all men.”

Like Eisenhower, this generation of men and women in uniform know all too well the wages of war, and that includes those of you here at West Point. Four of the servicemembers who stood in the audience when I announced the surge of our forces in Afghanistan gave their lives in that effort. A lot more were wounded. I believe America’s security demanded those deployments. But I am haunted by those deaths. I am haunted by those wounds. And I would betray my duty to you and to the country we love if I ever sent you into harm’s way simply because I saw a problem somewhere in the world that needed to be fixed, or because I was worried about critics who think military intervention is the only way for America to avoid looking weak.

Here’s my bottom line: America must always lead on the world stage. If we don’t, no one else will. The military that you have joined is and always will be the backbone of that leadership. But U.S. military action cannot be the only -- or even primary -- component of our leadership in every instance. Just because we have the best hammer does not mean that every problem is a nail. And because the costs associated with military action are so high, you should expect every civilian leader -- and especially your Commander-in-Chief -- to be clear about how that awesome power should be used.

So let me spend the rest of my time describing my vision for how the United States of America and our military should lead in the years to come, for you will be part of that leadership.

First, let me repeat a principle I put forward at the outset of my presidency: The United States will use military force, unilaterally if necessary, when our core interests demand it -- when our people are threatened, when our livelihoods are at stake, when the security of our allies is in danger. In these circumstances, we still need to ask tough questions about whether our actions are proportional and effective and just. International opinion matters, but America should never ask permission to protect our people, our homeland, or our way of life.

On the other hand, when issues of global concern do not pose a direct threat to the United States, when such issues are at stake -- when crises arise that stir our conscience or push the world in a more dangerous direction but do not directly threaten us -- then the threshold for military action must be higher. In such circumstances, we should not go it alone. Instead, we must mobilize allies and partners to take collective action. We have to broaden our tools to include diplomacy and development; sanctions and isolation; appeals to international law; and, if just, necessary and effective, multilateral military action. In such circumstances, we have to work with others because collective action in these circumstances is more likely to succeed, more likely to be sustained, less likely to lead to costly mistakes.

This leads to my second point: For the foreseeable future, the most direct threat to America at home and abroad remains terrorism. But a strategy that involves invading every country that harbors terrorist networks is naÃ¯ve and unsustainable. I believe we must shift our counterterrorism strategy -- drawing on the successes and shortcomings of our experience in Iraq and Afghanistan -- to more effectively partner with countries where terrorist networks seek a foothold.

And the need for a new strategy reflects the fact that today’s principal threat no longer comes from a centralized al Qaeda leadership. Instead, it comes from decentralized al Qaeda affiliates and extremists, many with agendas focused in countries where they operate. And this lessens the possibility of large-scale 9/11-style attacks against the homeland, but it heightens the danger of U.S. personnel overseas being attacked, as we saw in Benghazi. It heightens the danger to less defensible targets, as we saw in a shopping mall in Nairobi.

So we have to develop a strategy that matches this diffuse threat -- one that expands our reach without sending forces that stretch our military too thin, or stir up local resentments. We need partners to fight terrorists alongside us. And empowering partners is a large part of what we have done and what we are currently doing in Afghanistan.

Together with our allies, America struck huge blows against al Qaeda core and pushed back against an insurgency that threatened to overrun the country. But sustaining this progress depends on the ability of Afghans to do the job. And that’s why we trained hundreds of thousands of Afghan soldiers and police. Earlier this spring, those forces, those Afghan forces, secured an election in which Afghans voted for the first democratic transfer of power in their history. And at the end of this year, a new Afghan President will be in office and America’s combat mission will be over.

Now, that was an enormous achievement made because of America’s armed forces. But as we move to a train-and-advise mission in Afghanistan, our reduced presence allows us to more effectively address emerging threats in the Middle East and North Africa. So, earlier this year, I asked my national security team to develop a plan for a network of partnerships from South Asia to the Sahel. Today, as part of this effort, I am calling on Congress to support a new Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund of up to $5 billion, which will allow us to train, build capacity, and facilitate partner countries on the front lines. And these resources will give us flexibility to fulfill different missions, including training security forces in Yemen who have gone on the offensive against al Qaeda; supporting a multinational force to keep the peace in Somalia; working with European allies to train a functioning security force and border patrol in Libya; and facilitating French operations in Mali.

A critical focus of this effort will be the ongoing crisis in Syria. As frustrating as it is, there are no easy answers, no military solution that can eliminate the terrible suffering anytime soon. As President, I made a decision that we should not put American troops into the middle of this increasingly sectarian war, and I believe that is the right decision. But that does not mean we shouldn’t help the Syrian people stand up against a dictator who bombs and starves his own people. And in helping those who fight for the right of all Syrians to choose their own future, we are also pushing back against the growing number of extremists who find safe haven in the chaos.

So with the additional resources I’m announcing today, we will step up our efforts to support Syria’s neighbors -- Jordan and Lebanon; Turkey and Iraq -- as they contend with refugees and confront terrorists working across Syria’s borders. I will work with Congress to ramp up support for those in the Syrian opposition who offer the best alternative to terrorists and brutal dictators. And we will continue to coordinate with our friends and allies in Europe and the Arab World to push for a political resolution of this crisis, and to make sure that those countries and not just the United States are contributing their fair share to support the Syrian people.

Let me make one final point about our efforts against terrorism. The partnerships I’ve described do not eliminate the need to take direct action when necessary to protect ourselves. When we have actionable intelligence, that’s what we do -- through capture operations like the one that brought a terrorist involved in the plot to bomb our embassies in 1998 to face justice; or drone strikes like those we’ve carried out in Yemen and Somalia. There are times when those actions are necessary, and we cannot hesitate to protect our people.

But as I said last year, in taking direct action we must uphold standards that reflect our values. That means taking strikes only when we face a continuing, imminent threat, and only where there is no certainty -- there is near certainty of no civilian casualties. For our actions should meet a simple test: We must not create more enemies than we take off the battlefield.

I also believe we must be more transparent about both the basis of our counterterrorism actions and the manner in which they are carried out. We have to be able to explain them publicly, whether it is drone strikes or training partners. I will increasingly turn to our military to take the lead and provide information to the public about our efforts. Our intelligence community has done outstanding work, and we have to continue to protect sources and methods. But when we cannot explain our efforts clearly and publicly, we face terrorist propaganda and international suspicion, we erode legitimacy with our partners and our people, and we reduce accountability in our own government.

And this issue of transparency is directly relevant to a third aspect of American leadership, and that is our effort to strengthen and enforce international order.

After World War II, America had the wisdom to shape institutions to keep the peace and support human progress -- from NATO and the United Nations, to the World Bank and IMF. These institutions are not perfect, but they have been a force multiplier. They reduce the need for unilateral American action and increase restraint among other nations.

Now, just as the world has changed, this architecture must change as well. At the height of the Cold War, President Kennedy spoke about the need for a peace based upon, “a gradual evolution in human institutions.” And evolving these international institutions to meet the demands of today must be a critical part of American leadership.

Now, there are a lot of folks, a lot of skeptics, who often downplay the effectiveness of multilateral action. For them, working through international institutions like the U.N. or respecting international law is a sign of weakness. I think they’re wrong. Let me offer just two examples why.

In Ukraine, Russia’s recent actions recall the days when Soviet tanks rolled into Eastern Europe. But this isn’t the Cold War. Our ability to shape world opinion helped isolate Russia right away. Because of American leadership, the world immediately condemned Russian actions; Europe and the G7 joined us to impose sanctions; NATO reinforced our commitment to Eastern European allies; the IMF is helping to stabilize Ukraine’s economy; OSCE monitors brought the eyes of the world to unstable parts of Ukraine. And this mobilization of world opinion and international institutions served as a counterweight to Russian propaganda and Russian troops on the border and armed militias in ski masks.

This weekend, Ukrainians voted by the millions. Yesterday, I spoke to their next President. We don’t know how the situation will play out and there will remain grave challenges ahead, but standing with our allies on behalf of international order working with international institutions, has given a chance for the Ukrainian people to choose their future without us firing a shot.

Similarly, despite frequent warnings from the United States and Israel and others, the Iranian nuclear program steadily advanced for years. But at the beginning of my presidency, we built a coalition that imposed sanctions on the Iranian economy, while extending the hand of diplomacy to the Iranian government. And now we have an opportunity to resolve our differences peacefully.

The odds of success are still long, and we reserve all options to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. But for the first time in a decade, we have a very real chance of achieving a breakthrough agreement -- one that is more effective and durable than what we could have achieved through the use of force. And throughout these negotiations, it has been our willingness to work through multilateral channels that kept the world on our side.

The point is this is American leadership. This is American strength. In each case, we built coalitions to respond to a specific challenge. Now we need to do more to strengthen the institutions that can anticipate and prevent problems from spreading. For example, NATO is the strongest alliance the world has ever known. But we’re now working with NATO allies to meet new missions, both within Europe where our Eastern allies must be reassured, but also beyond Europe’s borders where our NATO allies must pull their weight to counterterrorism and respond to failed states and train a network of partners.

Likewise, the U.N. provides a platform to keep the peace in states torn apart by conflict. Now we need to make sure that those nations who provide peacekeepers have the training and equipment to actually keep the peace, so that we can prevent the type of killing we’ve seen in Congo and Sudan. We are going to deepen our investment in countries that support these peacekeeping missions, because having other nations maintain order in their own neighborhoods lessens the need for us to put our own troops in harm’s way. It’s a smart investment. It’s the right way to lead.

Keep in mind, not all international norms relate directly to armed conflict. We have a serious problem with cyber-attacks, which is why we’re working to shape and enforce rules of the road to secure our networks and our citizens. In the Asia Pacific, we’re supporting Southeast Asian nations as they negotiate a code of conduct with China on maritime disputes in the South China Sea. And we’re working to resolve these disputes through international law. That spirit of cooperation needs to energize the global effort to combat climate change -- a creeping national security crisis that will help shape your time in uniform, as we are called on to respond to refugee flows and natural disasters and conflicts over water and food, which is why next year I intend to make sure America is out front in putting together a global framework to preserve our planet.

You see, American influence is always stronger when we lead by example. We can’t exempt ourselves from the rules that apply to everybody else. We can’t call on others to make commitments to combat climate change if a whole lot of our political leaders deny that it’s taking place. We can’t try to resolve problems in the South China Sea when we have refused to make sure that the Law of the Sea Convention is ratified by our United States Senate, despite the fact that our top military leaders say the treaty advances our national security. That’s not leadership; that’s retreat. That’s not strength; that’s weakness. It would be utterly foreign to leaders like Roosevelt and Truman, Eisenhower and Kennedy.

I believe in American Exceptionalism with every fiber of my being. But what makes us exceptional is not our ability to flout international norms and the rule of law; it is our willingness to affirm them through our actions. And that’s why I will continue to push to close Gitmo -- because American values and legal traditions do not permit the indefinite detention of people beyond our borders. That’s why we’re putting in place new restrictions on how America collects and uses intelligence -- because we will have fewer partners and be less effective if a perception takes hold that we’re conducting surveillance against ordinary citizens. America does not simply stand for stability or the absence of conflict, no matter what the cost. We stand for the more lasting peace that can only come through opportunity and freedom for people everywhere.

Which brings me to the fourth and final element of American leadership: Our willingness to act on behalf of human dignity. America’s support for democracy and human rights goes beyond idealism -- it is a matter of national security. Democracies are our closest friends and are far less likely to go to war. Economies based on free and open markets perform better and become markets for our goods. Respect for human rights is an antidote to instability and the grievances that fuel violence and terror.

A new century has brought no end to tyranny. In capitals around the globe -- including, unfortunately, some of America’s partners -- there has been a crackdown on civil society. The cancer of corruption has enriched too many governments and their cronies, and enraged citizens from remote villages to iconic squares. And watching these trends, or the violent upheavals in parts of the Arab World, it’s easy to be cynical.

But remember that because of America’s efforts, because of American diplomacy and foreign assistance as well as the sacrifices of our military, more people live under elected governments today than at any time in human history. Technology is empowering civil society in ways that no iron fist can control. New breakthroughs are lifting hundreds of millions of people out of poverty. And even the upheaval of the Arab World reflects the rejection of an authoritarian order that was anything but stable, and now offers the long-term prospect of more responsive and effective governance.

In countries like Egypt, we acknowledge that our relationship is anchored in security interests -- from peace treaties with Israel, to shared efforts against violent extremism. So we have not cut off cooperation with the new government, but we can and will persistently press for reforms that the Egyptian people have demanded.

And meanwhile, look at a country like Burma, which only a few years ago was an intractable dictatorship and hostile to the United States -- 40 million people. Thanks to the enormous courage of the people in that country, and because we took the diplomatic initiative, American leadership, we have seen political reforms opening a once closed society; a movement by Burmese leadership away from partnership with North Korea in favor of engagement with America and our allies. We’re now supporting reform and badly needed national reconciliation through assistance and investment, through coaxing and, at times, public criticism. And progress there could be reversed, but if Burma succeeds we will have gained a new partner without having fired a shot. American leadership.

In each of these cases, we should not expect change to happen overnight. That’s why we form alliances not just with governments, but also with ordinary people. For unlike other nations, America is not afraid of individual empowerment, we are strengthened by it. We’re strengthened by civil society. We’re strengthened by a free press. We’re strengthened by striving entrepreneurs and small businesses. We’re strengthened by educational exchange and opportunity for all people, and women and girls. That’s who we are. That’s what we represent.

I saw that through a trip to Africa last year, where American assistance has made possible the prospect of an AIDS-free generation, while helping Africans care themselves for their sick. We’re helping farmers get their products to market, to feed populations once endangered by famine. We aim to double access to electricity in sub-Saharan Africa so people are connected to the promise of the global economy. And all this creates new partners and shrinks the space for terrorism and conflict.

Now, tragically, no American security operation can eradicate the threat posed by an extremist group like Boko Haram, the group that kidnapped those girls. And that’s why we have to focus not just on rescuing those girls right away, but also on supporting Nigerian efforts to educate its youth. This should be one of the hard-earned lessons of Iraq and Afghanistan, where our military became the strongest advocate for diplomacy and development. They understood that foreign assistance is not an afterthought, something nice to do apart from our national defense, apart from our national security. It is part of what makes us strong.

Ultimately, global leadership requires us to see the world as it is, with all its danger and uncertainty. We have to be prepared for the worst, prepared for every contingency. But American leadership also requires us to see the world as it should be -- a place where the aspirations of individual human beings really matters; where hopes and not just fears govern; where the truths written into our founding documents can steer the currents of history in a direction of justice. And we cannot do that without you.

Class of 2014, you have taken this time to prepare on the quiet banks of the Hudson. You leave this place to carry forward a legacy that no other military in human history can claim. You do so as part of a team that extends beyond your units or even our Armed Forces, for in the course of your service you will work as a team with diplomats and development experts. You’ll get to know allies and train partners. And you will embody what it means for America to lead the world.

Next week, I will go to Normandy to honor the men who stormed the beaches there. And while it’s hard for many Americans to comprehend the courage and sense of duty that guided those who boarded small ships, it’s familiar to you. At West Point, you define what it means to be a patriot.

Three years ago, Gavin White graduated from this academy. He then served in Afghanistan. Like the soldiers who came before him, Gavin was in a foreign land, helping people he’d never met, putting himself in harm’s way for the sake of his community and his family, of the folks back home. Gavin lost one of his legs in an attack. I met him last year at Walter Reed. He was wounded, but just as determined as the day that he arrived here at West Point -- and he developed a simple goal. Today, his sister Morgan will graduate. And true to his promise, Gavin will be there to stand and exchange salutes with her.

We have been through a long season of war. We have faced trials that were not foreseen, and we’ve seen divisions about how to move forward. But there is something in Gavin’s character, there is something in the American character that will always triumph. Leaving here, you carry with you the respect of your fellow citizens. You will represent a nation with history and hope on our side. Your charge, now, is not only to protect our country, but to do what is right and just. As your Commander-in-Chief, I know you will.

May God bless you.

May God bless our men and women in uniform.

And may God bless the United States of America.

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# Presser on Misconduct Findings at the Dept of Veterans Affairs

Good morning, everybody. A few minutes ago, Secretary Shinseki and Rob Nabors, who I’ve temporarily assigned to work with the VA, presented me with the department’s initial review of VA facilities nationwide. And what they’ve found is that the misconduct has not been limited to a few VA facilities, but many across the country. That’s totally unacceptable. Our veterans deserve the best. They’ve earned it. Last week, I said that if we found misconduct, it would be punished. And I meant it.

Secretary Shinseki has now begun the process of firing many of the people responsible, including senior leaders at the Phoenix VA. He’s canceled any possible performance bonuses this year for VHA senior executives. And he has ordered the VA to personally contact every veteran in Phoenix waiting for appointments to get them the care that they need and that they deserve.

This morning, I think some of you also heard Ric [Gen. Shinseki] take a truly remarkable action -- in public remarks, he took responsibility for the conduct of those facilities, and apologized to his fellow veterans and to the American people. And a few minutes ago, Secretary Shinseki offered me his own resignation. With considerable regret, I accepted.

Ric Shinseki has served his country with honor for nearly 50 years. He did two tours of combat in Vietnam -- he’s a veteran who left a part of himself on the battlefield. He rose to command the First Cavalry Division, served as Army Chief of Staff, and has never been afraid to speak truth to power.

As Secretary at the VA, he presided over record investments in our veterans -- enrolling 2 million new veterans in health care, delivering disability pay to more Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange, making it easier for veterans with post-traumatic stress, mental health issues and traumatic brain injury to get treatment, improving care for our women veterans. At the same time, he helped reduce veteran homelessness, and helped more than 1 million veterans, servicemembers and their families pursue their education under the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

So Ric’s commitment to our veterans is unquestioned. His service to our country is exemplary. I am grateful for his service, as are many veterans across the country. He has worked hard to investigate and identify the problems with access to care, but as he told me this morning, the VA needs new leadership to address them. He does not want to be a distraction, because his priority is to fix the problem and make sure our vets are getting the care that they need. That was Ric’s judgment on behalf of his fellow veterans. And I agree. We don't have time for distractions. We need to fix the problem.

For now, the leader that will help move us forward is Sloan Gibson, who will take on the reins as Acting Secretary. Sloan became Deputy Secretary at the VA just three months ago, but he, too, has devoted his life to serving our country and our veterans. His grandfather fought on the front lines of World War I. His father was a tail-gunner in World War II. Sloan graduated from West Point, earned his Airborne and Ranger qualifications, and served in the infantry. And most recently, he was President and CEO of the USO, which does a remarkable job supporting our men and women at war, their families, our wounded warriors, and families of the fallen.

So all told, Sloan has 20 years of private sector and nonprofit experience that he brings to bear on our ongoing work to build a 21st century VA. And I’m grateful that he is willing to take on this task.

I met with Sloan after I met with Ric this morning, and made it clear that reforms should not wait. They need to proceed immediately. I’ve also asked Rob Nabors to stay at the VA temporarily to help Sloan and the department through this transition, and to complete his own review of the VHA. In the meantime, we’re going to look diligently for a new permanent VA Secretary and we hope to confirm that successor and fill that post as soon as possible.

We’re going to do right by our veterans across the board, as long as it takes. We're not going to stop working to make sure that they get the care, the benefit, and the opportunities that they’ve earned and they deserve. I said we wouldn’t tolerate misconduct, and we will not. I said that we have to do better, and we will. There are too many veterans receiving care right now who deserve all of our best efforts -- and an honest assessment if something is not working.

This week, I visited some of our men and women in uniform at different stages of their service: our newest Army officers who graduated from West Point; our troops currently serving in Afghanistan; our veterans and our military families at Arlington. And what I saw is what I’ve seen in every single servicemember, veteran, and military spouse that I have had the privilege to meet -- a selfless, clear-eyed commitment to serving their country the best way that they know how. They’re the best that our country has to offer. They do their duty. They expect us to do ours.

So, today, I want every man and woman who’s served under our flag to know -- whether your tour has been over for decades, or it’s just about to end -- we will never stop working to do right by you and your families.

Let me take a couple questions. Leo Shane from Military Times.

Question: Mr. President, what changed in your opinion of Secretary Shinseki in the last few days? You had said you had confidence in him -- even him coming in today and saying it was time for him to resign. What made the difference in your mind?

President Obama: Ric’s judgment. I think his belief that he would be a distraction from the task at hand, which is to make sure that what’s broken gets fixed so that his fellow veterans are getting the services that they need.

I want to reiterate, he is a very good man. I don’t just mean he’s an accomplished man. I don’t just mean that he’s been an outstanding soldier. He’s a good person who’s done exemplary work on our behalf. And under his leadership, we have seen more progress on more fronts at the VA and a bigger investment in the VA than just about any other VA Secretary: Cut veterans’ homelessness by 24 percent; brought in folks who had been exposed to Agent Orange who had been waiting for decades to get the services and benefits that they had earned; making sure that post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury was dealt with in a serious way; making sure we had facilities for our women vets, who all too often weren’t receiving the kind of specialized services that they needed.

So he’s been a champion of our veterans. And where there’s problems, he has been ready and willing to get in there and fix them. So with the disability backlog that had shot up as a consequence of the admission of the Agent Orange veterans, as well as making it easier to apply for post-traumatic stress disorder disability claims -- when it spiked, he went at it in a systematic way, and we’ve now cut it by 50 percent over the course of the last year or so.

He’s not adverse to admitting where there’s a problem and going after it. But we occupy a -- not just an environment that calls for management fixes, we’ve also got to deal with Congress and you guys. And I think Ric’s judgment that he could not carry out the next stages of reform without being a distraction himself.

And so my assessment was, unfortunately, that he was right. I regret that he has to resign under these circumstances, but I also have confidence in Sloan, and I share Ric Shinseki’s assessment that the number-one priority is making sure that problems get fixed so that if there’s a veteran out there who needs help that they’re getting a schedule and they’re able to come in and see a doctor, and that if there are facilities that don’t have enough doctors or do not have enough nurses or do not have enough space, that that information immediately gets in the hands of decision-makers, all the way up to me and all the way to Congress, so that we can get more resources in there to help folks.

And that seems to be the biggest problem. I think that’s the thing that offended Secretary Shinseki the most during the course of this process. He described to me the fact that when he was in theater, he might have to order an attack just based on a phone call from some 20-something-year-old corporal, and he’s got to trust that he’s getting good information -- and it’s life or death. And I think he is deeply disappointed in the fact that bad news did not get to him, and that the structures weren’t in place for him to identify this problem quickly and fix it. His priority now is to make sure that happens, and he felt like new leadership would be -- would serve our veterans best. And I agree with him.

Phil Mattingly.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Based on the audit, at least the early stage audit the Secretary presented to you, is there a sense that there was criminal wrongdoing? And I guess more broadly, how much responsibility do you personally bear, as this being an issue you campaigned on and cared about deeply -- you said cared about deeply during your administration -- now that we’re at this point?

President Obama: Well, I will leave it up to the Justice Department to make determinations in terms of whether there’s been criminal wrongdoing. In terms of responsibility, as I’ve said before, this is my administration; I always take responsibility for whatever happens. And this is an area that I have a particular concern with. This predates my presidency. When I was in the Senate, I was on the Veterans Affairs Committee. I heard firsthand veterans who were not getting the kinds of services and benefits that they had earned. And I pledged that if I had the privilege of serving as Commander-in-Chief and President, that we would fix it.

The VA is a big organization that has had problems for a very long time -- in some cases, management problems; in some cases, funding problems. And so what we’ve tried to do is to systematically go after the problems that we were aware of and fix them. And where we have seen our veterans not being properly served -- whether it was too many homeless veterans, or a disability claims process that was taking too long -- we would go at it and chip away at it and fix it.

When it came to funding, we’ve increased funding for VA services in an unprecedented fashion, because we understood that it’s not enough just to give lip service to our veterans, but not being willing to put our money where our mouth is.

And so what I can say confidently is that this has been a priority, it’s been a priority reflected in my budget, and that in terms of managing the VA, where we have seen a problem, where we have been aware of a problem, we have gone after it and fixed it, and have been able to make significant progress.

But what is absolutely clear is this one, this issue of scheduling, is one that the reporting systems inside of the VHA did not surface to the level where Ric was aware of it or we were able to see it. This was not something that we were hearing when I was traveling around the country -- the particular issues of schedule. And what we’re going to have to do -- part of the review is going to have to be to see how do we make sure that we get information about systems that aren’t working.

I just was talking to Rob Nabors, and he described to me, for example, just in very specific detail, how in some of these facilities you’ve got computer systems for scheduling that date back to the ‘90s; situations in which one scheduler might have to look at four or five different screens to figure out where there’s a slot and where there might be a doctor available; situations in which they’re manually passing requests for an appointment over to somebody else, who’s then inputting them. Right? So you have in many cases old systems, broken-down systems.

This is stuff that is eminently fixable, but we’ve got to know about it. And the big concern that I’ve got, and what I’m going to be interested in finding out, is how is it that in a number of these facilities, if, in fact, you have veterans who are waiting too long for an appointment, that that information didn’t surface sooner so that we could go ahead and fix it.

One last point I want to make on this: When veterans have gotten access to the system, the health care itself that they are receiving has gotten high marks from our veterans service organizations and the veterans themselves. So I think it’s important to keep in mind that what the review indicates so far, at least, is that there have been great strides made in the actual care provided to veterans. The challenge is getting veterans into the door, particularly for their first appointment, in some cases, and where they don’t have an established relationship with a doctor and they’re not in the system.

Part of that is going to be technology. Part of that is management. But as Ric Shinseki himself indicated, there is a need for a change in culture within the VHA, and perhaps the VHA as a whole -- or the VA as a whole that makes sure that bad news gets surfaced quickly so that things can be fixed. And I know that was the attitude of Secretary Shinseki, and that was what he communicated to folks under him but they didn’t execute. And that’s a problem.

Christi Parsons, last question.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. You said that it was the General’s own judgment that made the decision for you here. If I remember correctly, Secretary Sebelius offered you her resignation after healthcare.gov failed, and you declined to take it. So I wonder if there’s a little bit of scapegoating taking place here.

President Obama: Meaning?

Question: Meaning, I mean, the dysfunction within the department seems to have been very deep and very widespread.

President Obama: Yes.

Question: So is lopping off the head of it really the best step to take going forward here? What I’m asking is, is there a political reason for removing him other than going straight to the problem of the bureaucracy?

President Obama: Well, the distractions that Ric refers to in part are political. He needs to be -- at this stage, what I want is somebody at the VA who is not spending time outside of solving problems for the veterans. I want somebody who’s spending every minute of every day figuring out have we called every single veteran that’s waiting; have they gotten a schedule; are we fixing the system; what kind of new technology do we need; have we made a realistic assessment of how long the wait times are right now, and how are we going to bring those wait times down in certain facilities where the wait times are too long; if we need more money, how much more money do we need to ask from Congress, and how am I going to make sure Congress delivers on that additional funding.

That’s what I want somebody at the VA focused on. Not how are they getting second-guessed, and speculations about their futures, and so forth and so on. And that was what Ric agreed to, as well.

With respect to Secretary Sebelius, at the time I thought it would be a distraction to replace somebody at HHS at a time when we were trying to fix that system. And I wanted to just stay focused because I knew that if we bear down on it and we got folks enrolled that it would work.

So in each instance, my primary decision is based on, how can I deliver service to the American people, and in this case, how can I deliver for our veterans. And because they are people of integrity, I think in both the cases of Secretary Sebelius, but certainly in the case here of Ric Shinseki, they’ve got the same priority. They’re view is, what is it that is going to best deliver on behalf of folks who, as Ric said this morning, have been let down.

Question: I remember at the time that you felt she had so much knowledge about what had gone wrong that you couldn’t afford to lose that.

President Obama: Right.

Question: Does somebody with three months in leadership at the department have the capacity to attack the problem quickly now?

President Obama: Well, we’re going to need a new VA Secretary. So Sloan is acting. Sloan, I think, would be the first to acknowledge that he’s going to have a learning curve that he’s got to deal with.

But the nature of the problem that has surfaced and has been the cause of this attention is one that we can start tackling right away, and without completely transforming the system we can immediately make some progress. We’re going to have some longer-term issues that we’re going to have to take care of.

So my first step is everybody who’s out there waiting, get them an appointment. If we need more doctors, let’s figure out how we can surge some doctors in there to make sure that they’re getting the help that they need. What I wanted to make sure of then is that even if it’s still patchwork, how do we make sure that there is no slippage between somebody making a phone call and them getting an appointment scheduled. And let’s have a realistic time for how soon they’re going to get an appointment. Those are things that don’t require rocket science. It requires execution; it requires discipline; it requires focus. Those are things that Sloan has.

There are then going to be some broader issues that we’re going to have to tackle. The information systems inside the VHA, those are probably going to have to be changed. That will cost some money, that will take some time, and it will have to be implemented. I think there are going to have to be some changes in the culture within the VHA, because as I said, they’re providing very good service, medical treatment to our veterans when they get in the system, but they don’t have, apparently, the state-of-the-art operations that you would want to see, for example, in a major medical center or hospital.

Now, keep in mind, those of us who are outside of the VA system and try to get an appointment with the doctor in the private sector, and try to get an appointment for -- a schedule for a hospital visit, there are probably some wait times as well. So part of what we have to do is figure out what are realistic benchmarks for the system.

And my suspicion is that with not only all the veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan coming back, but also the aging of our Vietnam vets who may have more chronic illnesses, may need more visits -- we may need to get more doctors, and we may need to get more nurses. And that’s going to cost some money, which means that’s going to have to be reflected in a Veterans Affairs budget, which I have consistently increased. Even during fiscally tight times, there’s been no area where I’ve put more priority than making sure that we’re delivering the kind of budget that’s necessary to make sure our veterans are being served, but it may still not be enough.

And we’re going to -- but before we start spending more money, our first job is let’s take care of some basic management issues that I think can be fixed.

All right? Thank you.

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# Polish Freedom Day 25th Anniversary Address

Hello, Warsaw! Witaj, Polsko!

Mr. President; Mr. Prime Minister; Madam Mayor; heads of state and government, past and present -- including the man who jumped that shipyard wall to lead a strike that became a movement, the prisoner turned President who transformed this nation -- thank you, Lech Walesa, for your outstanding leadership.

Distinguished guests, people of Poland, thank you for your extraordinary welcome and for the privilege of joining you here today. I bring with me the greetings and friendship of the American people -- and of my hometown of Chicago, home to so many proud Polish Americans. In Chicago, we think of ourselves as a little piece of Poland. In some neighborhoods, you only hear Polish. The faithful come together at churches like Saint Stanislaus Kostka. We have a parade for Polish Constitution Day. And every summer, we celebrate the Taste of Polonia, with our kielbasa and pierogies, and we’re all a little bit Polish for that day. So being here with you, it feels like home.

Twenty-five years ago today, we witnessed a scene that had once seemed impossible -- an election where, for the first time, the people of this nation had a choice. The Communist regime thought an election would validate their rule or weaken the opposition. Instead, Poles turned out in the millions. And when the votes were counted, it was a landslide victory for freedom. One woman who voted that day said, “There is a sense that something is beginning to happen in Poland. We feel the taste of Poland again.” She was right. It was the beginning of the end of Communism -- not just in this country, but across Europe.

The images of that year are seared in our memory. Citizens filling the streets of Budapest and Bucharest. Hungarians and Austrians cutting the barbed wire border. Protestors joining hands across the Baltics. Czechs and Slovaks in their Velvet Revolution. East Berliners climbing atop that wall. And we have seen the extraordinary progress since that time. A united Germany. Nations in Central and Eastern Europe standing tall as proud democracies. A Europe that is more integrated, more prosperous and more secure. We must never forget that the spark for so much of this revolutionary change, this blossoming of hope, was lit by you, the people of Poland.

History was made here. The victory of 1989 was not inevitable. It was the culmination of centuries of Polish struggle, at times in this very square. The generations of Poles who rose up and finally won independence. The soldiers who resisted invasion, from the east and the west. The Righteous Among the Nations -- among them Jan Karski -- who risked all to save the innocent from the Holocaust. The heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto who refused to go without a fight. The Free Poles at Normandy and the Poles of the Home Army who -- even as this city was reduced to rubble -- waged a heroic uprising.

We remember how, when an Iron Curtain descended, you never accepted your fate. When a son of Poland ascended to the Chair of Saint Peter, he returned home, and here, in Warsaw, he inspired a nation with his words -- “there can be no just Europe without the independence of Poland.” And today we give thanks for the courage of the Catholic Church and the fearless spirit of Saint John Paul II.

We also recall how you prevailed 25 years ago. In the face of beatings and bullets, you never wavered from the moral force of nonviolence. Through the darkness of martial law, Poles lit candles in their windows. When the regime finally agreed to talk, you embraced dialogue. When they held those elections -- even though not fully free -- you participated. As one Solidarity leader said at the time, “We decided to accept what was possible.” Poland reminds us that sometimes the smallest steps, however imperfect, can ultimately tear down walls, can ultimately transform the world.

But of course, your victory that June day was only the beginning. For democracy is more than just elections. True democracy, real prosperity, lasting security -- these are neither simply given, nor imposed from the outside. They must be earned and built from within. And in that age-old contest of ideas -- between freedom and authoritarianism, between liberty and oppression, between solidarity and intolerance -- Poland’s progress shows the enduring strength of the ideals that we cherish as a free people.

Here we see the strength of democracy: Citizens raising their voices, free from fear. Here we see political parties competing in open and honest elections. Here we see an independent judiciary working to uphold the rule of law. Here in Poland we see a vibrant press and a growing civil society that holds leaders accountable -- because governments exist to lift up their people, not to hold them down.

Here we see the strength of free markets and the results of hard reforms -- gleaming skyscrapers soaring above the city, and superhighways across this country, high-tech hubs and living standards that previous generations of Poles could only imagine. This is the new Poland you have built -- an economic “Miracle on the Vistula” -- Cud nad Wisłą.

Here we see the strength of free nations that stand united. Across those centuries of struggle, Poland’s fate too often was dictated by others. This land was invaded and conquered, carved up and occupied. But those days are over. Poland understands as few other nations do that every nation must be free to chart its own course, to forge its own partnerships, to choose its own allies.

This year marks the 15th anniversary of Poland’s membership in NATO. We honor Polish service in the Balkans, in Iraq and Afghanistan. And as Americans, we are proud to call Poland one of our strongest and closest allies.

This is the Poland we celebrate today. The free and democratic Poland that your forebears and some who are here today dreamed of and fought for and, in some cases, died for. The growing and secure Poland that you -- particularly the young people who are here today -- have enjoyed for your entire lives.

It’s a wonderful story, but the story of this nation reminds us that freedom is not guaranteed. And history cautions us to never take progress for granted. On the same day 25 years ago that Poles were voting here, tanks were crushing peaceful democracy protests in Tiananmen Square on the other side of the world. The blessings of liberty must be earned and renewed by every generation -- including our own. This is the work to which we rededicate ourselves today.

Our democracies must be defined not by what or who we’re against, but by a politics of inclusion and tolerance that welcomes all our citizens. Our economies must deliver a broader prosperity that creates more opportunity -- across Europe and across the world -- especially for young people. Leaders must uphold the public trust and stand against corruption, not steal from the pockets of their own people. Our societies must embrace a greater justice that recognizes the inherent dignity of every human being. And as we’ve been reminded by Russia’s aggression in Ukraine, our free nations cannot be complacent in pursuit of the vision we share -- a Europe that is whole and free and at peace. We have to work for that. We have to stand with those who seek freedom.

I know that throughout history, the Polish people were abandoned by friends when you needed them most. So I’ve come to Warsaw today -- on behalf of the United States, on behalf of the NATO Alliance -- to reaffirm our unwavering commitment to Poland’s security. Article 5 is clear -- an attack on one is an attack on all. And as allies, we have a solemn duty -- a binding treaty obligation -- to defend your territorial integrity. And we will. We stand together -- now and forever -- for your freedom is ours. Poland will never stand alone. But not just Poland -- Estonia will never stand alone. Latvia will never stand alone. Lithuania will never stand alone. Romania will never stand alone.

These are not just words. They’re unbreakable commitments backed by the strongest alliance in the world and the armed forces of the United States of America -- the most powerful military in history. You see our commitment today. In NATO aircraft in the skies of the Baltics. In allied ships patrolling the Black Sea. In the stepped-up exercises where our forces train together. And in our increased and enduring American presence here on Polish soil. We do these things not to threaten any nation, but to defend the security and territory of ourselves and our friends.

Yesterday, I announced a new initiative to bolster the security of our NATO allies and increase America’s military presence in Europe. With the support of Congress, this will mean more pre-positioned equipment to respond quickly in a crisis, and exercises and training to keep our forces ready; additional U.S. forces -- in the air, and sea, and on land, including here in Poland. And it will mean increased support to help friends like Ukraine, and Moldova and Georgia provide for their own defense.

Just as the United States is increasing our commitment, so must others. Every NATO member is protected by our alliance, and every NATO member must carry its share in our alliance. This is the responsibility we have to each other.

Finally, as free peoples, we join together, not simply to safeguard our own security but to advance the freedom of others. Today we affirm the principles for which we stand.

We stand together because we believe that people and nations have the right to determine their own destiny. And that includes the people of Ukraine. Robbed by a corrupt regime, Ukrainians demanded a government that served them. Beaten and bloodied, they refused to yield. Threatened and harassed, they lined up to vote; they elected a new President in a free election -- because a leader’s legitimacy can only come from the consent of the people.

Ukrainians have now embarked on the hard road of reform. I met with President-elect Poroshenko this morning, and I told him that, just as free nations offered support and assistance to Poland in your transition to democracy, we stand with Ukrainians now. Ukraine must be free to choose its own future for itself and by itself. We reject the zero-sum thinking of the past -- a free and independent Ukraine needs strong ties and growing trade with Europe and Russia and the United States and the rest of the world. Because the people of Ukraine are reaching out for the same freedom and opportunities and progress that we celebrate here today -- and they deserve them, too.

We stand together because we believe that upholding peace and security is the responsibility of every nation. The days of empire and spheres of influence are over. Bigger nations must not be allowed to bully the small, or impose their will at the barrel of a gun or with masked men taking over buildings. And the stroke of a pen can never legitimize the theft of a neighbor’s land. So we will not accept Russia’s occupation of Crimea or its violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty. Our free nations will stand united so that further Russian provocations will only mean more isolation and costs for Russia. Because after investing so much blood and treasure to bring Europe together, how can we allow the dark tactics of the 20th century to define this new century?

We stand together because we know that the spirit of Warsaw and Budapest and Prague and Berlin stretches to wherever the longing for freedom stirs in human hearts, whether in Minsk or Caracas, or Damascus or Pyongyang. Wherever people are willing to do the hard work of building democracy -- from Tbilisi to Tunis, from Rangoon to Freetown -- they will have a partner in our nations. For in the struggles of these citizens we recall our own struggles. In their faces we see our own. And few see this more clearly than the people of Poland.

The Ukrainians of today are the heirs of Solidarity -- men and women like you who dared to challenge a bankrupt regime. When your peaceful protests were met with an iron fist, Poles placed flowers in the shipyard gate.

Today, Ukrainians honor their fallen with flowers in Independence Square. We remember the Polish voter who rejoiced to “feel the taste of Poland again.” Her voice echoes in the young protestor in the Maidan who savored what she called “a taste of real freedom.” “I love my country,” she said, and we are standing up for “justice and freedom.” And with gratitude for the strong support of the Polish people, she spoke for many Ukrainians when she said, “Thank you, Poland. We hear you and we love you.”

Today we can say the same. Thank you, Poland -- thank you for your courage. Thank you for reminding the world that no matter how brutal the crackdown, no matter how long the night, the yearning for liberty and dignity does not fade away. It will never go away. Thank you, Poland, for your iron will and for showing that, yes, ordinary citizens can grab the reins of history, and that freedom will prevail -- because, in the end, tanks and troops are no match for the force of our ideals.

Thank you, Poland -- for your triumph -- not of arms, but of the human spirit, the truth that carries us forward. There is no change without risk, and no progress without sacrifice, and no freedom without solidarity.

Dziękuję, Polsko! God bless Poland. God bless America. God bless our unbreakable alliance.

Thank you very much.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# 70th Anniversary of D-Day Address

President Hollande; to the people of France; friends; the family; our veterans:

If prayer were made of sound, the skies over England that night would have deafened the world.

Captains paced their decks. Pilots tapped their gauges. Commanders pored over maps, fully aware that for all the months of meticulous planning, everything could go wrong -- the winds, the tides, the element of surprise -- and above all, the audacious bet that what waited on the other side of the Channel would compel men not to shrink away, but to charge ahead.

Fresh-faced GIs rubbed trinkets, kissed pictures of sweethearts, checked and re-checked their equipment. “God,” asked one, “give me guts.” And in the pre-dawn hours, planes rumbled down runways; gliders and paratroopers slipped through the sky; giant screws began to turn on an armada that looked like more ships than sea. And more than 150,000 souls set off towards this tiny sliver of sand upon which hung more than the fate of a war, but rather the course of human history.

President Hollande, distinguished guests, I’m honored to return here today to pay tribute to the men and women of a generation who defied every danger -- among them, our veterans of D-Day. And, gentlemen, we are truly humbled by your presence here today.

Just last week, I received a letter from a French citizen. “Dear Mr. President, and the American people,” he wrote, “[we are] honored to welcome you...to thank you again for all the pain and efforts of [the] American people and others in our common struggle for freedom.”

Today, we say the same to the people of France. Thank you, especially, for the generosity that you’ve shown the Americans who’ve come here over the generations -- to these beaches, and to this sacred place of rest for 9,387 Americans. At the end of the war, when our ships set off for America, filled with our fallen, tens of thousands of liberated Europeans turned out to say farewell, and they pledged to take care of the more than 60,000 Americans who would remain in cemeteries on this continent. In the words of one man, we will take care of the fallen “as if their tombs were our children’s.” And the people of France, you have kept your word like the true friends you are. We are forever grateful.

Here, we don’t just commemorate victory, as proud of that victory as we are. We don’t just honor sacrifice, as grateful as the world is. We come to remember why America and our allies gave so much for the survival of liberty at its moment of maximum peril. We come to tell the story of the men and women who did it so that it remains seared into the memory of a future world.

We tell this story for the old soldiers who pull themselves a little straighter today to salute brothers who never made it home. We tell the story for the daughter who clutches a faded photo of her father, forever young; for the child who runs his fingers over colorful ribbons he knows signify something of great consequence, even if he doesn’t yet fully understand why. We tell this story to bear what witness we can to what happened when the boys from America reached Omaha Beach.

By daybreak, blood soaked the water, bombs broke the sky. Thousands of paratroopers had dropped into the wrong landing sites; thousands of rounds bit into flesh and sand. Entire companies’ worth of men fell in minutes. “Hell’s Beach” had earned its name.

By 8:30 a.m., General Omar Bradley expected our troops to be a mile inland. “Six hours after the landings,” he wrote, “we held only ten yards of beach.” In this age of instant commentary, the invasion would have swiftly and roundly been declared, as it was by one officer, “a debacle.”

But such a race to judgment would not have taken into account the courage of free men. “Success may not come with rushing speed,” President Roosevelt would say that night, “but we shall return again and again.” And paratroopers fought through the countryside to find one another. Rangers pulled themselves over those cliffs to silence Nazi guns. To the west, Americans took Utah Beach with relative ease. To the east, the British tore through the coast, fueled by the fury of five years of bombs over London and a solemn vow to “fight them on the beaches.” The Canadians, whose shores had not been touched by war, drove far into France. And here, at Omaha, troops who finally made it to the seawall used it as shelter -- where a general barked, “If you’re Rangers… lead the way!”

By the end of that longest day, this beach had been fought, lost, refought, and won -- a piece of Europe once again liberated and free. Hitler’s Wall was breached, letting loose Patton’s Army to pour into France. Within a week, the world’s bloodiest beach had become the world’s busiest port. Within a month, one million Allied troops thundered through Normandy into Europe, and as our armies marched across the continent, one pilot said it looked “as if the very crust of the Earth had shaken loose.” The Arc de Triomphe lit up for the first time in years, and Paris was punctuated by shouts of “Vive la France!” and “Vive les Ã‰tats-Unis!”

Of course, even as we gather here at Normandy, we remember that freedom’s victory was also made possible by so many others who wore America’s uniform. Two years before he commanded armies, Eisenhower’s troops sliced through North Africa. Three times before D-Day, our GIs stormed the beaches at Sicily, Salerno, Anzio. Divisions like the Fighting 36th brawled their way through Italy, fighting through the mud for months, marching through towns past waving children before opening the gates to Rome. As the “dogfaces” marched to victory in Europe, the Devil Dogs -- the Marines -- clawed their way from island to island in the Pacific, in some of the war’s fiercest fighting. And back home, an army of women -- including my grandmother -- rolled up their sleeves to help build a mighty arsenal of democracy.

But it was here, on these shores, that the tide was turned in that common struggle for freedom. What more powerful manifestation of America’s commitment to human freedom than the sight of wave after wave after wave of young men boarding those boats to liberate people they had never met?

We say it now as if it couldn’t be any other way. But in the annals of history, the world had never seen anything like it. And when the war was won, we claimed no spoils of victory -- we helped Europe rebuild. We claimed no land other than the earth where we buried those who gave their lives under our flag and where we station those who still serve under it. But America’s claim -- our commitment -- to liberty, our claim to equality, our claim to freedom and to the inherent dignity of every human being -- that claim is written in the blood on these beaches, and it will endure for eternity.

Omaha -- Normandy -- this was democracy’s beachhead. And our victory in that war decided not just a century, but shaped the security and well-being of all posterity. We worked to turn old adversaries into new allies. We built new prosperity. We stood once more with the people of this continent through a long twilight struggle until finally a wall tumbled down, and an Iron Curtain, too. And from Western Europe to East, from South America to Southeast Asia -- 70 years of democratic movement spread. And nations that once knew only the blinders of fear began to taste the blessings of freedom.

None of that would have happened without the men who were willing to lay down their lives for people they’d never met and ideals they couldn’t live without.

None of it would have happened without the troops President Roosevelt called “the life-blood of America… the hope of the world.”

They left home barely more than boys and returned home heroes. But to their great credit, that is not how this generation carried itself. After the war, some put away their medals, were quiet about their service, moved on. Some, carrying shrapnel and scars, found that moving on was much harder. Many, like my grandfather, who served in Patton’s Army, lived a quiet life, trading one uniform and set of responsibilities for another -- as a teacher, or a salesman, or a doctor, or an engineer, a dad, a grandpa.

Our country made sure millions of them earned a college education, opening up opportunity on an unprecedented scale. And they married those sweethearts and bought new homes and raised families and built businesses, lifting up the greatest middle class the world has ever known. And through it all, they were inspired, I suspect, by memories of their fallen brothers -- memories that drove them to live their lives each day as best they possibly could.

Whenever the world makes you cynical, stop and think of these men. Whenever you lose hope, stop and think of these men.

Think of Wilson Colwell, who was told he couldn’t pilot a plane without a high school degree, so he decided to jump out of a plane instead. And he did, here on D-Day, with the 101st Airborne when he was just 16 years old.

Think of Harry Kulkowitz, the Jewish son of Russian immigrants, who fudged his age at enlistment so he could join his friends in the fight. And don’t worry, Harry, the statute of limitations has expired. Harry came ashore at Utah Beach on D-Day. And now that he’s come back, we said he could have anything he wants for lunch today -- he helped liberate this coast, after all. But he said a hamburger would do fine. What’s more American than that?

Think of “Rock” Merritt, who saw a recruitment poster asking him if he was man enough to be a paratrooper -- so he signed up on the spot. And that decision landed him here on D-Day with the 508th regiment, a unit that would suffer heavy casualties. And 70 years later, it’s said that all across Fort Bragg, they know Rock -- not just for his exploits on D-Day, or his 35 years in the Army, but because 91-year-old Rock Merritt still spends his time speaking to the young men and women of today’s Army and still bleeds “O.D. Green” for his 82nd Airborne.

Whenever the world makes you cynical, whenever you doubt that courage and goodness is possible -- stop and think of these men.

Wilson and Harry and Rock, they are here today, and although I know we already gave them a rousing round of applause, along with all our veterans of D-Day -- if you can stand, please stand; if not, please raise your hand. Let us recognize your service once more. These men waged war so that we might know peace. They sacrificed so that we might be free. They fought in hopes of a day when we’d no longer need to fight. We are grateful to them.

And, gentlemen, I want each of you to know that your legacy is in good hands. For in a time when it has never been more tempting to pursue narrow self-interest, to slough off common endeavor, this generation of Americans, a new generation -- our men and women of war -- have chosen to do their part as well.

Rock, I want you to know that Staff Sergeant Melvin Cedillo-Martin, who’s here today, is following in your footsteps. He just had to become an American first -- because Melvin was born in Honduras, moved to the United States, joined the Army. After tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, he was reassigned to the 82nd Airborne. And Sunday, he’ll parachute into Normandy. “I became part of a family of real American heroes,” he said. “The Paratroopers of the 82nd.”

Wilson, you should know that Specialist Jannise Rodriguez joined the Army not even two years ago, was assigned to the 101st Airborne, and just last month earned the title of the 101st Airborne Division Air Assault Soldier of the Year. And that’s inspiring but not surprising, when the women of today’s military have taken on responsibilities, including combat, like never before.

I want each of you to know that their commitment to their fellow servicemembers and veterans endures. Sergeant First Class Brian Hawthorne’s grandfather served under General Patton and General MacArthur. Brian himself served two tours in Iraq, earned the Bronze Star in Baghdad for saving the life of his best friend, and today, he and his wife use their experience to help other veterans and military families navigate theirs. And Brian is here in Normandy to participate in Sunday’s jump, and here, just yesterday, he reenlisted in the Army Reserve.

And this generation -- this 9/11 Generation of servicemembers -- they, too, felt something. They answered some call; they said “I will go.” They, too, chose to serve a cause that’s greater than self -- many even after they knew they’d be sent into harm’s way. And for more than a decade, they have endured tour after tour.

Sergeant First Class Cory Remsburg has served ten. And I’ve told Cory’s incredible story before, most recently when he sat with my wife, Michelle, at the State of the Union address. It was here, at Omaha Beach, on the 65th anniversary of D-Day, where I first met Cory and his fellow Army Rangers, right after they made their own jump into Normandy. The next time I saw him, he was in the hospital, unable to speak or walk after an IED nearly killed him in Afghanistan. But over the past five years, Cory has grown stronger, learning to speak again and stand again and walk again. And earlier this year, he jumped out of a plane again. The first words Cory said to me after his accident echoed those words first shouted all those years ago on this beach: “Rangers lead the way.”

So Cory has come back today, along with Melvin and Jannise and Brian, and many of their fellow active-duty servicemembers. We thank them for their service. They are a reminder that the tradition represented by these gentlemen continues.

We are on this Earth for only a moment in time. And fewer of us have parents and grandparents to tell us about what the veterans of D-Day did here 70 years ago. As I was landing on Marine One, I told my staff, I don’t think there’s a time where I miss my grandfather more, where I’d be more happy to have him here, than this day. So we have to tell their stories for them. We have to do our best to uphold in our own lives the values that they were prepared to die for. We have to honor those who carry forward that legacy, recognizing that people cannot live in freedom unless free people are prepared to die for it.

And as today’s wars come to an end, this generation of servicemen and women will step out of uniform, and they, too, will build families and lives of their own. They, too, will become leaders in their communities, in commerce, in industry, and perhaps politics -- the leaders we need for the beachheads of our time. And, God willing, they, too, will grow old in the land they helped to keep free. And someday, future generations, whether 70 or 700 years hence, will gather at places like this to honor them and to say that these were generations of men and women who proved once again that the United States of America is and will remain the greatest force for freedom the world has ever known.

May God bless our veterans and all who served with them, including those who rest here in eternal peace. And may God bless all who serve today for the peace and security of the world.

May God bless the people of France.

And may God bless our United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address on Border Security and Immigration Reform

Good afternoon, everybody. One year ago this month, senators of both parties –- with support from the business, labor, law enforcement, faith communities –- came together to pass a commonsense immigration bill.

Independent experts said that bill would strengthen our borders, grow our economy, shrink our deficits. As we speak, there are enough Republicans and Democrats in the House to pass an immigration bill today. I would sign it into law today, and Washington would solve a problem in a bipartisan way.

But for more than a year, Republicans in the House of Representatives have refused to allow an up-or-down vote on that Senate bill or any legislation to fix our broken immigration system. And I held off on pressuring them for a long time to give Speaker Boehner the space he needed to get his fellow Republicans on board.

Meanwhile, here’s what a year of obstruction has meant. It has meant fewer resources to strengthen our borders. It’s meant more businesses free to game the system by hiring undocumented workers, which punishes businesses that play by the rules, and drives down wages for hardworking Americans. It’s meant lost talent when the best and brightest from around the world come to study here but are forced to leave and then compete against our businesses and our workers. It’s meant no chance for 11 million immigrants to come out of the shadows and earn their citizenship if they pay a penalty and pass a background check, pay their fair share of taxes, learn English, and go to the back of the line. It’s meant the heartbreak of separated families.

That’s what this obstruction has meant over the past year. That’s what the Senate bill would fix if the House allowed it to go to a vote.

Our country and our economy would be stronger today if House Republicans had allowed a simple yes-or-no vote on this bill or, for that matter, any bill. They’d be following the will of the majority of the American people who support reform. Instead, they’ve proven again and again that they’re unwilling to stand up to the tea party in order to do what’s best for the country. And the worst part about it is a bunch of them know better.

We now have an actual humanitarian crisis on the border that only underscores the need to drop the politics and fix our immigration system once and for all. In recent weeks, we’ve seen a surge of unaccompanied children arrive at the border, brought here and to other countries by smugglers and traffickers.

The journey is unbelievably dangerous for these kids. The children who are fortunate enough to survive it will be taken care of while they go through the legal process, but in most cases that process will lead to them being sent back home. I’ve sent a clear message to parents in these countries not to put their kids through this. I recently sent Vice President Biden to meet with Central American leaders and find ways to address the root causes of this crisis. Secretary Kerry will also be meeting with those leaders again tomorrow. With our international partners, we’re taking new steps to go after the dangerous smugglers who are putting thousands of children’s lives at risk.

Today, I sent a letter to congressional leaders asking that they work with me to address the urgent humanitarian challenge on the border, and support the immigration and Border Patrol agents who already apprehend and deport hundreds of thousands of undocumented immigrants every year. And understand, by the way, for the most part, this is not a situation where these children are slipping through. They’re being apprehended. But the problem is, is that our system is so broken, so unclear that folks don’t know what the rules are.

Now, understand –- there are a number of Republicans who have been willing to work with us to pass real, commonsense immigration reform, and I want to thank them for their efforts. There are a number of Republican leaders in the Senate who did excellent work and deserve our thanks. And less visibly, there have been folks in the House who have been trying to work to get this done. And quietly, because it doesn’t always help me to praise them, I’ve expressed to them how much I appreciate the efforts that they’ve made.

I believe Speaker Boehner when he says he wants to pass an immigration bill. I think he genuinely wants to get something done. But last week, he informed me that Republicans will continue to block a vote on immigration reform at least for the remainder of this year. Some in the House Republican Caucus are using the situation with unaccompanied children as their newest excuse to do nothing. Now, I want everybody to think about that. Their argument seems to be that because the system is broken, we shouldn’t make an effort to fix it. It makes no sense. It’s not on the level. It’s just politics, plain and simple.

Now, there are others in the Republican Caucus in the House who are arguing that they can’t act because they’re mad at me about using my executive authority too broadly. This also makes no sense. I don’t prefer taking administrative action. I’d rather see permanent fixes to the issue we face. Certainly that’s true on immigration. I’ve made that clear multiple times. I would love nothing more than bipartisan legislation to pass the House, the Senate, land on my desk so I can sign it. That’s true about immigration, that’s true about the minimum wage, it’s true about equal pay. There are a whole bunch of things where I would greatly prefer Congress actually do something. I take executive action only when we have a serious problem, a serious issue, and Congress chooses to do nothing. And in this situation, the failure of House Republicans to pass a darn bill is bad for our security, it’s bad for our economy, and it’s bad for our future.

So while I will continue to push House Republicans to drop the excuses and act –- and I hope their constituents will too -– America cannot wait forever for them to act. And that’s why, today, I’m beginning a new effort to fix as much of our immigration system as I can on my own, without Congress. As a first step, I’m directing the Secretary of Homeland Security and the Attorney General to move available and appropriate resources from our interior to the border. Protecting public safety and deporting dangerous criminals has been and will remain the top priority, but we are going to refocus our efforts where we can to make sure we do what it takes to keep our border secure.

I have also directed Secretary Johnson and Attorney General Holder to identify additional actions my administration can take on our own, within my existing legal authorities, to do what Congress refuses to do and fix as much of our immigration system as we can. If Congress will not do their job, at least we can do ours. I expect their recommendations before the end of summer and I intend to adopt those recommendations without further delay.

Of course, even with aggressive steps on my part, administrative action alone will not adequately address the problem. The reforms that will do the most to strengthen our businesses, our workers, and our entire economy will still require an act of Congress. And I repeat: These are reforms that already enjoy the wide support of the American people. It’s very rare where you get labor, business, evangelicals, law enforcement all agreeing on what needs to be done. And at some point, that should be enough. Normally, that is enough. The point of public service is to solve public problems. And those of us who have the privilege to serve have a responsibility to do everything in our power to keep Americans safe and to keep the doors of opportunity open.

And if we do, then one year from now, not only would our economy and our security be stronger, but maybe the best and the brightest from around the world who come study here would stay and create jobs here. Maybe companies that play by the rules will no longer be undercut by companies that don’t. Maybe more families who’ve been living here for years, whose children are often U.S. citizens, who are our neighbors and our friends, whose children are our kids’ friends and go to school with them, and play on ball teams with them, maybe those families would get to stay together. But much of this only happens if Americans continue to push Congress to get this done.

So I’ve told Speaker Boehner that even as I take those steps that I can within my existing legal authorities to make the immigration system work better, I’m going to continue to reach out to House Republicans in the hope that they deliver a more permanent solution with a comprehensive bill. Maybe it will be after the midterms, when they’re less worried about politics. Maybe it will be next year. Whenever it is, they will find me a willing partner. I have been consistent in saying that I am prepared to work with them even on a bill that I don't consider perfect. And the Senate bill was a good example of the capacity to compromise and get this done. The only thing I can’t do is stand by and do nothing while waiting for them to get their act together.

And I want to repeat what I said earlier. If House Republicans are really concerned about me taking too many executive actions, the best solution to that is passing bills. Pass a bill; solve a problem. Don't just say no on something that everybody agrees needs to be done. Because if we pass a bill, that will supplant whatever I’ve done administratively. We’ll have a structure there that works, and it will be permanent. And people can make plans and businesses can make plans based on the law. And there will be clarity both here inside this country and outside it.

Let me just close by saying Friday is the Fourth of July. It’s the day we celebrate our independence and all the things that make this country so great. And each year, Michelle and I host a few hundred servicemembers and wounded warriors and their families right here on the lawn for a barbecue and fireworks on the Mall.

And some of the servicemembers coming this year are unique because they signed up to serve, to sacrifice, potentially to give their lives for the security of this country even though they weren’t yet Americans. That's how much they love this country. They were prepared to fight and die for an America they did not yet fully belong to. I think they’ve earned their stripes in more ways than one. And that’s why on Friday morning we’re going to naturalize them in a ceremony right here at the White House. This Independence Day will be their first day as American citizens.

One of the things we celebrate on Friday –- one of the things that make this country great –- is that we are a nation of immigrants. Our people come from every corner of the globe. That's what makes us special. That's what makes us unique. And throughout our history, we’ve come here in wave after wave from everywhere understanding that there was something about this place where the whole was greater than the sum of its parts; that all the different cultures and ideas and energy would come together and create something new.

We won this country’s freedom together. We built this country together. We defended this country together. It makes us special. It makes us strong. It makes us Americans. That’s worth celebrating. And that's what I want not just House Republicans but all of us as Americans to remember.

Thanks very much.

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# Statement on the Downing Malaysia Airlines Flight 17

Good morning, everybody.

Yesterday, Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17 took off from Amsterdam and was shot down over Ukraine near the Russian border. Nearly 300 innocent lives were taken -- men, women, children, infants -- who had nothing to do with the crisis in Ukraine. Their deaths are an outrage of unspeakable proportions.

We know at least one American citizen, Quinn Lucas Schansman, was killed. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family for this terrible loss.

Yesterday, I spoke with the leaders of Ukraine, Malaysia, and the Netherlands. I told them that our thoughts and prayers are with all the families and that the American people stand with them during this difficult time. Later today, I’ll be speaking to Prime Minister Abbott of Australia, which also suffered a terrible loss.

By far, the country that lost the most people on board the plane was the Netherlands. From the days of our founding, the Dutch have been close friends and stalwart allies of the United States of America. And today, I want the Dutch people to know that we stand with you, shoulder to shoulder, in our grief and in our absolute determination to get to the bottom of what happened.

Here’s what we know so far. Evidence indicates that the plane was shot down by a surface-to-air missile that was launched from an area that is controlled by Russian-backed separatists inside of Ukraine. We also know that this is not the first time a plane has been shot down in eastern Ukraine. Over the last several weeks, Russian-backed separatists have shot down a Ukrainian transport plane and a Ukrainian helicopter, and they claimed responsibility for shooting down a Ukrainian fighter jet. Moreover, we know that these separatists have received a steady flow of support from Russia. This includes arms and training. It includes heavy weapons, and it includes anti-aircraft weapons.

Here’s what must happen now. This was a global tragedy. An Asian airliner was destroyed in European skies, filled with citizens from many countries. So there has to be a credible international investigation into what happened. The U.N. Security Council has endorsed this investigation, and we will hold all its members -- including Russia -- to their word. In order to facilitate that investigation, Russia, pro-Russian separatists, and Ukraine must adhere to an immediate cease-fire. Evidence must not be tampered with. Investigators need to access the crash site. And the solemn task of returning those who were lost on board the plane to their loved ones needs to go forward immediately.

The United States stands ready to provide any assistance that is necessary. We’ve already offered the support of the FBI and the National Transportation Safety Board, which has experience in working with international partners on these types of investigations. They are on their way, personnel from the FBI and the National Transportation Safety Board.

In the coming hours and days, I’ll continue to be in close contact with leaders from around the world as we respond to this catastrophe. Our immediate focus will be on recovering those who were lost, investigating exactly what happened, and putting forward the facts.

I want to point out there will likely be misinformation as well. I think it's very important for folks to sift through what is factually based and what is simply speculation. No one can deny the truth that is revealed in the awful images that we all have seen. And the eyes of the world are on eastern Ukraine, and we are going to make sure that the truth is out.

More broadly, I think it's important for us to recognize that this outrageous event underscores that it is time for peace and security to be restored in Ukraine. For months, we’ve supported a pathway to peace, and the Ukrainian government has reached out to all Ukrainians, put forward a peace plan, and lived up to a cease-fire, despite repeated violations by the separatists -- violations that took the lives of Ukrainian soldiers and personnel.

Moreover, time and again, Russia has refused to take the concrete steps necessary to deescalate the situation. I spoke to President Putin yesterday in the wake of additional sanctions that we had imposed. He said he wasn’t happy with them, and I told him that we have been very clear from the outset that we want Russia to take the path that would result in peace in Ukraine, but so far at least, Russia has failed to take that path. Instead, it has continued to violate Ukrainian sovereignty and to support violent separatists. It has also failed to use its influence to press the separatists to abide by a cease-fire. That’s why, together with our allies, we’ve imposed growing costs on Russia.

So now is, I think, a somber and appropriate time for all of us to step back and take a hard look at what has happened. Violence and conflict inevitably lead to unforeseen consequences. Russia, these separatists, and Ukraine all have the capacity to put an end to the fighting. Meanwhile, the United States is going to continue to lead efforts within the world community to de-escalate the situation; to stand up for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine; and to support the people of Ukraine as they courageously work to strengthen their democracy and make their own decisions about how they should move forward.

Before I take just a couple of questions let me remark on one other issue. This morning, I spoke with Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel about the situation in Gaza. We discussed Israel’s military operation in Gaza, including its efforts to stop the threat of terrorist infiltration through tunnels into Israel. I reaffirmed my strong support for Israel’s right to defend itself. No nation should accept rockets being fired into its borders, or terrorists tunneling into its territory. In fact, while I was having the conversation with Prime Minister Netanyahu, sirens went off in Tel Aviv.

I also made clear that the United States, and our friends and allies, are deeply concerned about the risks of further escalation and the loss of more innocent life. And that’s why we’ve indicated, although we support military efforts by the Israelis to make sure that rockets are not being fired into their territory, we also have said that our understanding is the current military ground operations are designed to deal with the tunnels, and we are hopeful that Israel will continue to approach this process in a way that minimizes civilian casualties and that all of us are working hard to return to the cease-fire that was reached in November of 2012.

Secretary Kerry is working to support Egypt’s initiative to pursue that outcome. I told Prime Minister Netanyahu that John is prepared to travel to the region following additional consultations.

Let me close by making one additional comment. On board Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17, there were apparently nearly 100 researchers and advocates traveling to an international conference in Australia dedicated to combating AIDS/HIV. These were men and women who had dedicated their own lives to saving the lives of others and they were taken from us in a senseless act of violence.

In this world today, we shouldn’t forget that in the midst of conflict and killing, there are people like these -- people who are focused on what can be built rather than what can be destroyed; people who are focused on how they can help people that they’ve never met; people who define themselves not by what makes them different from other people but by the humanity that we hold in common. It’s important for us to lift them up and to affirm their lives. And it’s time for us to heed their example.

The United States of America is going to continue to stand for the basic principle that people have the right to live as they choose; that nations have the right to determine their own destiny; and that when terrible events like this occur, the international community stands on the side of justice and on the side of truth.

So with that, let me take just a couple questions. I’ll start with you, Julie.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# SSG Bryan Pitts Medal of Honor Presentation Address

For our forces in Afghanistan, the Battle of Wanat was one of the most fierce of this entire war. Forty-eight Americans, along with their Afghan partners, were manning their small base, deep in a valley when they were attacked by some 200 insurgents. And those insurgents seemed determined to overrun an even smaller post just outside the base -- an elevated patch of boulders and sandbags defended by just nine American soldiers.

Soon, under the relentless fire, all nine of those men were wounded or killed. Insurgents broke through the wire. And that little post was on the verge of falling, giving the enemy a perch from which to devastate the base below. Against that onslaught, one American held the line -- Just 22 years old, nearly surrounded, bloodied but unbowed -- the soldier we recognize today with our nation’s highest military decoration, the Medal of Honor, Staff Sergeant Ryan M. Pitts.

Now, I don’t want to embarrass Ryan, but the character he displayed that day was clearly forged early. I’m told that in kindergarten, when asked what he wanted to be when he grew up, he drew a picture of a soldier. When he was in the 5th grade, his teacher sent home a note that described Ryan in words that would be familiar to all those who knew him today -- Ryan, she wrote, is "a very special human being."

In Ryan Pitts you see the humility and the loyalty that define America’s men and women in uniform. Of this medal, he says, "It’s not mine alone. It belongs to everybody who was there that day because we did it together."

So I want to welcome those who were there that day -- Ryan’s brothers in arms, and those who are going to be welcoming him into their ranks -- the members of the Medal of Honor Society. We are very proud of them and we are honored by the presence of the families of our fallen heroes as well.

We welcome Ryan’s family, many from New Hampshire, including his wonderful wife, Amy. I have to take a pause because they are actually celebrating -- Ryan and Amy -- their second anniversary today. As Ryan put it, it’s going to be tough topping this one, as anniversaries go. But let me just give you a piece of advice as somebody who now has been married for over 20 years: You should try. I’m just saying don’t rest on your laurels after just two years.

We welcome their gorgeous son, one-year-old Lucas, who Ryan is beginning to teach a love for all things New England -- of course, the Red Sox and the Bruins and the Celtics and the Pats.

I want you to try and imagine the extraordinary circumstances in which Ryan and his team served. This was the summer of 2008, and this was a time when our forces in Afghanistan were stretched thin and our troops were deployed to isolated outposts. They had just arrived in Wanat just days before and they were still building their very small base -- a handful of armored vehicles and fighting positions and foxholes and sandbags.

Wanat, one report later concluded, had "significant vulnerabilities." Parts of the village sat on higher ground. On every side, mountains soared 10,000 feet into the sky. Heavy equipment to help build their defenses was delayed. In the 100-degree heat the soldiers ran low on water. And the aerial surveillance they were counting on was diverted away to other missions.

Early that morning, in the pre-dawn darkness, they spotted several men up the mountains. But before Ryan and his team could take action, the entire valley erupted. Machine gun fire and mortar and rocket-propelled grenades poured down from every direction. And those 200 insurgents were firing from ridges and from the village and from trees. Down at the base, a vehicle exploded -- scattering its missiles, back at our soldiers. It was, said a soldier, "hell on Earth."

Up at their tiny post, Ryan and his team were being pounded. Almost instantly, every one of them was wounded. Ryan was hit by shrapnel in the arm and both legs and was bleeding badly. Already, three American soldiers in that valley had fallen. And then a fourth.

As the insurgents moved in, Ryan picked up a grenade, pulled the pin, and held that live grenade -- for a moment, then another, then another -- finally hurling it so they couldn’t throw it back. And he did that again. And he did it again.

Unable to stand, Ryan pulled himself up on his knees and manned a machine gun. Soldiers from the base below made a daring run, dodging bullets and explosions, and joined the defense. But now the enemy was inside the post -- so close they were throwing rocks at the Americans, so close they came right up to the sandbags. Eight American soldiers had now fallen. And Ryan Pitts was the only living soldier at that post.

The enemy was so close Ryan could hear their voices. He whispered into the radio he was the only one left and was running out of ammo. "I was going to die," he remembers, "and made my peace with it." And then he prepared to make a last stand. Bleeding and barely conscious, Ryan threw his last grenades. He grabbed a grenade launcher and fired nearly straight up, so the grenade came back down on the enemy just yards away. One insurgent was now right on top of the post, shooting down until another team of Americans showed up and drove him back. As one of his teammates said, had it not been for Ryan Pitts, that post "almost certainly would have been overrun."

Even with reinforcements, the battle was not over. Another wave of rocket-propelled grenades slammed into the post. Nine American soldiers were now gone. And still, the fighting raged. Ryan worked the radio, helping target the air strikes that were hitting "danger-close" -- just yards away. And with those strikes the tide of the battle began to turn. Eventually, the insurgents fell back. Ryan and his fellow soldiers had held their ground.

This medal, Ryan says, is an opportunity to tell "our" story. "There was valor everywhere," according to Ryan. And so today we also pay tribute to all who served with such valor that day. Shielding their wounded buddies with their own bodies. Picking up unexploded missiles with their hands and carrying them away. Running through the gunfire to reinforce that post. Fighting through their injuries and never giving up. Helicopter pilots and MEDEVAC crews who came in under heavy fire. Said one soldier, "Never in my career have I seen such bravery and sacrifice."

And so I would ask all those who served at Wanat -- on the ground and in the air -- to please stand, those of you who are here today.

Most of all, Ryan says he considers this medal "a memorial for the guys who didn’t come home." So today, we honor nine American soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice for us all.

The son who "absorbed love like a sponge;" the expectant father whose dream would later come true, a beautiful baby girl -- Specialist Sergio Abad.

The boy who dominated the soccer fields, and fell in love with motorcycles, and there in that remote outpost took a direct hit in the helmet and kept on fighting -- Corporal Jonathan Ayers.

The photographer whose beautiful pictures captured the spirit of the Afghan people, and who wrote to his family: "Afghanistan is exactly [where]…I wanted to be" -- Corporal Jason Bogar.

The father who loved surfing with his son; the platoon leader who led a dash through the gunfire to that post to reinforce his men -- 1st Lieutenant Jonathan Brostrom.

An immigrant from Mexico who became a proud American soldier, on his third tour, whose final thoughts were of his family and his beloved wife, Lesly -- Sergeant Israel Garcia.

A young man of deep faith, who served God and country, who could always get a laugh with his impersonation of his commander -- Corporal Jason Hovater.

The husband who couldn’t wait to become an uncle; the adventurous spirit who in every photo from Afghanistan has a big smile on his face -- Corporal Matthew Phillips.

The big guy with an even bigger heart, a prankster whose best play was cleaning up at the poker table with his buddies and his dad -- Corporal Pruitt Rainey.

And the youngest, just 20 years old, the "little brother" of the platoon, who loved to play guitar, and who, says his dad, did everything in his life with passion -- Corporal Gunnar Zwilling.

These American patriots lived to serve us all. They died to protect each of us. And their legacy lives on in the hearts of all who love them still, especially their families. Mothers. Fathers. Wives. Brothers and sisters. Sons and daughters.

To you, their families, I know no words can match the depth of your loss, but please know that this nation will honor your soldiers now and forever. And I would ask the Gold Star families from that deployment to please stand -- including Ali Kahler, age 11, and Jase Brostrom, who this week turns 12. Please stand.

This is the story Ryan wants us to remember -- soldiers who loved each other like brothers and who fought for each other, and families who have made a sacrifice that our nation must never forget. Ryan says, "I think we owe it to them to live lives worthy of their sacrifice." And he’s absolutely right.

As Commander-in-Chief, I believe one of the ways we can do that is by heeding the lessons of Wanat. When this nation sends our troops into harm’s way, they deserve a sound strategy and a well-defined mission. And they deserve the forces and support to get the job done. And that's what we owe soldiers like Ryan and all the comrades that were lost. That’s how we can truly honor all those who gave their lives that day. That’s how, as a nation, we can remain worthy of their sacrifice.

I know that's a view that's shared by our Secretary of Defense and by our Joint Chiefs of Staff and all the leadership here. They’re hard lessons, but they’re ones that are deeply engrained in our hearts.

It is remarkable that we have young men and women serving in our military who, day in, day out, are able to perform with so much integrity, so much humility, and so much courage. Ryan represents the very best of that tradition, and we are very, very proud of him, as we are of all of you.

So God bless you, Ryan. God bless all who serve in our name. May God continue to bless the United States of America.

And with that, I would like our military aide to please complete the ceremony.

Military Aide: The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, March 3, 1863, has awarded in the name of Congress the Medal of Honor to

Sergeant Ryan M. Pitts

United States Army

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty:

Sergeant Ryan M. Pitts distinguished himself by extraordinary acts of heroism at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a Forward Observer in 2d Platoon, Chosen Company, 2d Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry Regiment, 173d Airborne Brigade, during combat operations against an armed enemy at Vehicle Patrol Base Kahler in the vicinity of Wanat Village, Kunar Province, Afghanistan on July 13, 2008.

Early that morning, while Sergeant Pitts was providing perimeter security at Observation Post Topside, a well-organized Anti-Afghan Force consisting of over 200 members initiated a close proximity sustained and complex assault using accurate and intense rocket-propelled grenade, machine gun and small arms fire on Wanat Vehicle Patrol Base. An immediate wave of rocket-propelled grenade rounds engulfed the Observation Post wounding Sergeant Pitts and inflicting heavy casualties. Sergeant Pitts had been knocked to the ground and was bleeding heavily from shrapnel wounds to his arm and legs, but with incredible toughness and resolve, he subsequently took control of the Observation Post and returned fire on the enemy.

As the enemy drew nearer, Sergeant Pitts threw grenades, holding them after the pin was pulled and the safety lever was released to allow a nearly immediate detonation on the hostile forces. Unable to stand on his own and near death because of the severity of his wounds and blood loss, Sergeant Pitts continued to lay suppressive fire until a two-man reinforcement team arrived. Sergeant Pitts quickly assisted them by giving up his main weapon and gathering ammunition all while continually lobbing fragmentary grenades until these were expended.

At this point, Sergeant Pitts crawled to the northern position radio and described the situation to the Command Post as the enemy continued to try and isolate the Observation Post from the main Patrol Base. With the enemy close enough for him to hear their voices, and with total disregard for his own life, Sergeant Pitts whispered in radio situation reports and conveyed information that the Command Post used to provide indirect fire support.

Sergeant Pitts' courage, steadfast commitment to the defense of his unit and ability to fight while seriously wounded prevented the enemy from overrunning the Observation Post and capturing fallen American soldiers, and ultimately prevented the enemy from gaining fortified positions on higher ground from which to attack Wanat Vehicle Patrol Base. Sergeant Ryan M. Pitts' extraordinary heroism and selflessness above and beyond the call of duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, Company C, 2d Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry Regiment, 173d Airborne Brigade and the United States Army.

# Press Conference on the Economy and Foreign Policy

Good afternoon, everybody. Happy Friday. I thought I’d take some questions, but first, let me say a few words about the economy.

This morning, we learned that our economy created over 200,000 new jobs in July. That’s on top of about 300,000 new jobs in June. So we are now in a six-month streak with at least 200,000 new jobs each month. That's the first time that has happened since 1997. Over the past year, we’ve added more jobs than any year since 2006. And all told, our businesses have created 9.9 million new jobs over the past 53 months. That's the longest streak of private sector job creation in our history.

And as we saw on Wednesday, the economy grew at a strong pace in the spring. Companies are investing. Consumers are spending. American manufacturing, energy, technology, autos -- all are booming. And thanks to the decisions that we’ve made, and the grit and resilience of the American people, we’ve recovered faster and come farther from the recession than almost any other advanced country on Earth.

So the good news is the economy clearly is getting stronger. Things are getting better. Our engines are revving a little bit louder. And the decisions that we make right now can sustain and keep that growth and momentum going.

Unfortunately, there are a series of steps that we could be taking to maintain momentum, and perhaps even accelerate it; there are steps that we could be taking that would result in more job growth, higher wages, higher incomes, more relief for middle-class families. And so far, at least, in Congress, we have not seen them willing or able to take those steps.

I've been pushing for common-sense ideas like rebuilding our infrastructure in ways that are sustained over many years and support millions of good jobs and help businesses compete. I've been advocating on behalf of raising the minimum wage, making it easier for working folks to pay off their student loans; fair pay, paid leave. All these policies have two things in common: All of them would help working families feel more stable and secure, and all of them so far have been blocked or ignored by Republicans in Congress. That’s why my administration keeps taking whatever actions we can take on our own to help working families.

Now, it’s good that Congress was able to pass legislation to strengthen the VA. And I want to thank the chairmen and ranking members who were involved in that. It's good that Congress was able to at least fund transportation projects for a few more months before leaving town -- although it falls far short of the kind of infrastructure effort that we need that would actually accelerate the economy. But for the most part, the big-ticket items, the things that would really make a difference in the lives of middle-class families, those things just are not getting done.

Let’s just take a recent example: Immigration. We all agree that there’s a problem that needs to be solved in a portion of our southern border. And we even agree on most of the solutions. But instead of working together -- instead of focusing on the 80 percent where there is agreement between Democrats and Republicans, between the administration and Congress -- House Republicans, as we speak, are trying to pass the most extreme and unworkable versions of a bill that they already know is going nowhere, that can't pass the Senate and that if it were to pass the Senate I would veto. They know it.

They’re not even trying to actually solve the problem. This is a message bill that they couldn't quite pull off yesterday, so they made it a little more extreme so maybe they can pass it today -- just so they can check a box before they’re leaving town for a month. And this is on an issue that they all insisted had to be a top priority.

Now, our efforts administratively so far have helped to slow the tide of child migrants trying to come to our country. But without additional resources and help from Congress, we're just not going to have the resources we need to fully solve the problem. That means while they’re out on vacation I'm going to have to make some tough choices to meet the challenge -- with or without Congress.

And yesterday, even though they’ve been sitting on a bipartisan immigration bill for over a year, House Republicans suggested that since they don't expect to actually pass a bill that I can sign, that I actually should go ahead and act on my own to solve the problem. Keep in mind that just a few days earlier, they voted to sue me for acting on my own. And then when they couldn’t pass a bill yesterday, they put out a statement suggesting I should act on my own because they couldn't pass a bill.

So immigration has not gotten done. A student loan bill that would help folks who have student loan debt consolidate and refinance at lower rates -- that didn’t pass. The transportation bill that they did pass just gets us through the spring, when we should actually be planning years in advance. States and businesses are raising the minimum wage for their workers because this Congress is failing to do so.

Even basic things like approving career diplomats for critical ambassadorial posts aren't getting done. Last night, for purely political reasons, Senate Republicans, for a certain period of time, blocked our new ambassador to Russia. It raised such an uproar that finally they went ahead and let our Russian ambassador pass -- at a time when we are dealing every day with the crisis in Ukraine.

They’re still blocking our ambassador to Sierra Leone, where there’s currently an Ebola outbreak. They’re blocking our ambassador to Guatemala, even as they demand that we do more to stop the flow of unaccompanied children from Guatemala. There are a lot of things that we could be arguing about on policy -- that's what we should be doing as a democracy -- but we shouldn’t be having an argument about placing career diplomats with bipartisan support in countries around the world where we have to have a presence.

So the bottom line is this: We have come a long way over the last five and a half years. Our challenges are nowhere near as daunting as they were when I first came into office. But the American people demand and deserve a strong and focused effort on the part of all of us to keep moving the country forward and to focus on their concerns. And the fact is we could be much further along and we could be doing even better, and the economy could be even stronger, and more jobs could be created if Congress would do the job that the people sent them here to do.

And I will not stop trying to work with both parties to get things moving faster for middle-class families and those trying to get into the middle class. When Congress returns next month, my hope is, is that instead of simply trying to pass partisan message bills on party lines that don't actually solve problems, they’re going to be willing to come together to at least focus on some key areas where there’s broad agreement. After all that we've had to overcome, our Congress should stop standing in the way of our country’s success.

So with that, let me take a couple of questions. And I will start with Roberta Rampton of Reuters.

Question: Thanks. I want to ask about the situation in the Middle East. And why do you think Israel should embrace a cease-fire in Gaza when one of its soldiers appears to have been abducted and when Hamas continues to use its network of tunnels to launch attacks? And also, have you seen Israel act at all on your call to do more to protect civilians?

President Obama: Well, first of all, I think it's important to note that we have -- and I have -- unequivocally condemned Hamas and the Palestinian factions that were responsible for killing two Israeli soldiers and abducting a third almost minutes after a cease-fire had been announced. And the U.N. has condemned them as well.

And I want to make sure that they are listening: If they are serious about trying to resolve this situation, that soldier needs to be unconditionally released as soon as possible.

I have been very clear throughout this crisis that Israel has a right to defend itself. No country can tolerate missiles raining down on its cities and people having to rush to bomb shelters every 20 minutes or half hour. No country can or would tolerate tunnels being dug under their land that can be used to launch terrorist attacks.

And so, not only have we been supportive of Israel in its right to defend itself, but in very concrete terms -- for example, in support for the Iron Dome program that has intercepted rockets that are firing down on Israeli cities -- we've been trying to cooperate as much as we can to make sure that Israel is able to protect its citizens.

Now, at the same time, we've also been clear that innocent civilians in Gaza caught in the crossfire have to weigh on our conscience and we have to do more to protect them. A cease-fire was one way in which we could stop the killing, to step back and to try to resolve some of the underlying issues that have been building up over quite some time. Israel committed to that 72-hour cease-fire, and it was violated. And trying to put that back together is going to be challenging, but we will continue to make those efforts.

And let me take this opportunity, by the way, to give Secretary John Kerry credit. He has been persistent. He has worked very hard. He has endured on many occasions really unfair criticism simply to try to get to the point where the killing stops and the underlying issues about Israel’s security but also the concerns of Palestinians in Gaza can be addressed.

We're going to keep working towards that. It's going to take some time. I think it's going to be very hard to put a cease-fire back together again if Israelis and the international community can't feel confident that Hamas can follow through on a cease-fire commitment.

And it's not particularly relevant whether a particular leader in Hamas ordered this abduction. The point is, is that when they sign onto a cease-fire they’re claiming to speak for all the Palestinian factions. And if they don't have control of them, and just moments after a cease-fire is signed you have Israeli soldiers being killed and captured, then it's hard for the Israelis to feel confident that a cease-fire can actually be honored.

I'm in constant consultation with Prime Minister Netanyahu. Our national security team is in constant communication with the Israel military. I want to see everything possible done to make sure that Palestinian civilians are not being killed. And it is heartbreaking to see what’s happening there, and I think many of us recognize the dilemma we have. On the one hand, Israel has a right to defend itself and it's got to be able to get at those rockets and those tunnel networks. On the other hand, because of the incredibly irresponsible actions on the part of Hamas to oftentimes house these rocket launchers right in the middle of civilian neighborhoods, we end up seeing people who had nothing to do with these rockets ending up being hurt.

Part of the reason why we've been pushing so hard for a cease-fire is precisely because it's hard to reconcile Israel’s legitimate need to defend itself with our concern with those civilians. And if we can pause the fighting, then it's possible that we may be able to arrive at a formula that spares lives and also ensures Israel’s security. But it's difficult. And I don't think we should pretend otherwise.

Bill Plante.

Question: Mr. President, like that cease-fire, you’ve called for diplomatic solutions not only in Israel and Gaza but also in Ukraine, in Iraq, to very little effect so far. Has the United States of America lost its influence in the world? Have you lost yours?

President Obama: Look, this is a common theme that folks bring up. Apparently people have forgotten that America, as the most powerful country on Earth, still does not control everything around the world. And so our diplomatic efforts often take time. They often will see progress and then a step backwards. That’s been true in the Middle East. That’s been true in Europe. That’s been true in Asia. That’s the nature of world affairs. It’s not neat, and it’s not smooth.

But if you look at, for example, Ukraine, we have made progress in delivering on what we said we would do. We can’t control how Mr. Putin thinks. But what we can do is say to Mr. Putin, if you continue on the path of arming separatists with heavy armaments that the evidence suggests may have resulted in 300 innocent people on a jet dying, and that violates international law and undermines the integrity -- territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, then you’re going to face consequences that will hurt your country.

And there was a lot of skepticism about our ability to coordinate with Europeans for a strong series of sanctions. And each time we have done what we said we would do, including this week, when we put in place sanctions that have an impact on key sectors of the Russian economy -- their energy, their defense, their financial systems.

It hasn’t resolved the problem yet. I spoke to Mr. Putin this morning, and I indicated to him, just as we will do what we say we do in terms of sanctions, we’ll also do what we say we do in terms of wanting to resolve this issue diplomatically if he takes a different position. If he respects and honors the right of Ukrainians to determine their own destiny, then it’s possible to make sure that Russian interests are addressed that are legitimate, and that Ukrainians are able to make their own decisions, and we can resolve this conflict and end some of the bloodshed.

But the point is, though, Bill, that if you look at the 20th century and the early part of this century, there are a lot of conflicts that America doesn’t resolve. That’s always been true. That doesn’t mean we stop trying. And it’s not a measure of American influence on any given day or at any given moment that there are conflicts around the world that are difficult. The conflict in Northern Ireland raged for a very, very long time until finally something broke, where the parties decided that it wasn’t worth killing each other.

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict has been going on even longer than you’ve been reporting. And I don’t think at any point was there a suggestion somehow that America didn’t have influence just because we weren’t able to finalize an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal.

You will recall that situations like Kosovo and Bosnia raged on for quite some time, and there was a lot more death and bloodshed than there has been so far in the Ukrainian situation before it ultimately did get resolved.

And so I recognize with so many different issues popping up around the world, sometimes it may seem as if this is an aberration or it’s unusual. But the truth of the matter is, is that there’s a big world out there, and that as indispensable as we are to try to lead it, there’s still going to be tragedies out there and there are going to be conflicts. And our job is to just make sure that we continue to project what’s right, what’s just, and that we’re building coalitions of like-minded countries and partners in order to advance not only our core security interests but also the interests of the world as a whole.

Question: Do you think you could have done more?

President Obama: On which one?

Question: On any of them? Ukraine?

President Obama: Well look, I think, Bill, that the nature of being President is that you’re always asking yourself what more can you do. But with respect to, let’s say, the Israeli-Palestinian issue, this administration invested an enormous amount to try to bring the parties together around a framework for peace and a two-state solution. John Kerry invested an enormous amount of time. In the end, it’s up to the two parties to make a decision. We can lead them to resolve some of the technical issues and to show them a path, but they’ve got to want it.

With respect to Ukraine, I think that we have done everything that we can to support the Ukrainian government and to deter Russia from moving further into Ukraine. But short of going to war, there are going to be some constraints in terms of what we can do if President Putin and Russia are ignoring what should be their long-term interests.

Right now, what we’ve done is impose sufficient costs on Russia that, objectively speaking, they should -- President Putin should want to resolve this diplomatically, get these sanctions lifted, get their economy growing again, and have good relations with Ukraine. But sometimes people don’t always act rationally, and they don’t always act based on their medium- or long-term interests. That can’t deter us, though. We’ve just got to stay at it.

Wendell.

Question: Mr. President, Republicans point to some of your executive orders as reason, they say, that they can’t trust you to implement legislation that they pass. Even if you don’t buy that argument, do you hold yourself totally blameless in the inability it appears to reach agreement with the Republican-led House?

President Obama: Wendell, let’s just take the recent example of immigration. A bipartisan bill passed out of the Senate, co-sponsored by not just Democrats but some very conservative Republicans who recognize that the system currently is broken and if, in fact we put more resources on the border, provide a path in which those undocumented workers who’ve been living here for a long time and may have ties here are coming out of the shadows, paying their taxes, paying a fine, learning English -- if we fix the legal immigration system so it’s more efficient, if we are attracting young people who may have studied here to stay here and create jobs here, that that all is going to be good for the economy, it’s going to reduce the deficit, it might have forestalled some of the problems that we’re seeing now in the Rio Grande Valley with these unaccompanied children.

And so we have a bipartisan bill, Wendell, bipartisan agreement supported by everybody from labor to the evangelical community to law enforcement. So the argument isn’t between me and the House Republicans. It’s between the House Republicans and Senate Republicans, and House Republicans and the business community, and House Republicans and the evangelical community. I’m just one of the people they seem to disagree with on this issue.

So that’s on the comprehensive bill. So now we have a short-term crisis with respect to the Rio Grande Valley. They say we need more resources, we need tougher border security in this area where these unaccompanied children are showing up. We agree. So we put forward a supplemental to give us the additional resources and funding to do exactly what they say we should be doing, and they can’t pass the bill. They can’t even pass their own version of the bill. So that’s not a disagreement between me and the House Republicans; that’s a disagreement between the House Republicans and the House Republicans.

The point is that on a range of these issues, whether it’s tax reform, whether it’s reducing the deficit, whether it’s rebuilding our infrastructure, we have consistently put forward proposals that in previous years and previous administrations would not have been considered radical or left wing; they would have been considered pretty sensible, mainstream approaches to solving problems.

I include under that, by the way, the Affordable Care Act. That’s a whole other conversation.

And in circumstances where even basic, common-sense, plain, vanilla legislation can’t pass because House Republicans consider it somehow a compromise of their principles, or giving Obama a victory, then we’ve got to take action. Otherwise, we’re not going to be making progress on the things that the American people care about.

Question: On the border supplemental -- can you act alone?

President Obama: Well, I’m going to have to act alone because we don’t have enough resources. We’ve already been very clear -- we’ve run out of money. And we are going to have to reallocate resources in order to just make sure that some of the basic functions that have to take place down there -- whether it’s making sure that these children are properly housed, or making sure we’ve got enough immigration judges to process their cases -- that those things get done. We’re going to have to reallocate some resources.

But the broader point, Wendell, is that if, in fact, House Republicans are concerned about me acting independently of Congress -- despite the fact that I’ve taken fewer executive actions than my Republican predecessor or my Democratic predecessor before that, or the Republican predecessor before that -- then the easiest way to solve it is passing legislation. Get things done.

On the supplemental, we agreed on 80 percent of the issues. There were 20 percent of the issues that perhaps there were disagreements between Democrats and Republicans. As I said to one Republican colleague who was down here that I was briefing about some national security issues, why wouldn’t we just go ahead and pass the 80 percent that we agree on and we’ll try to work to resolve the differences on the other 20 percent? Why wouldn’t we do that? And he didn't really have a good answer for it.

So there’s no doubt that I can always do better on everything, including making additional calls to Speaker Boehner, and having more conversations with some of the House Republican leadership. But in the end, the challenge I have right now is that they are not able to act even on what they say their priorities are, and they're not able to work and compromise even with Senate Republicans on certain issues. And they consider what have been traditionally Republican-supported initiatives, they consider those as somehow a betrayal of the cause.

Take the example of the Export-Import Bank. This is an interesting thing that's happened. This is a program in which we help to provide financing to sell American goods and products around the world. Every country does this. It’s traditionally been championed by Republicans. For some reason, right now the House Republicans have decided that we shouldn’t do this -- which means that when American companies go overseas and they're trying to close a sale on selling Boeing planes, for example, or a GE turbine, or some other American product, that has all kinds of subcontractors behind it and is creating all kinds of jobs, and all sorts of small businesses depend on that sale, and that American company is going up against a German company or a Chinese company, and the Chinese and the German company are providing financing and the American company isn’t, we may lose that sale.

When did that become something that Republicans opposed? It would be like me having a car dealership for Ford, and the Toyota dealership offers somebody financing and I don't. We will lose business and we’ll lose jobs if we don’t pass it.

So there’s some big issues where I understand why we have differences. On taxes, Republicans want to maintain some corporate loopholes I think need to be closed because I think that we should be giving tax breaks to families that are struggling with child care or trying to save for a college education. On health care, obviously their view is, is that we should not be helping folks get health care, even though it’s through the private marketplace. My view is, is that in a country as wealthy as ours, we can afford to make sure that everybody has access to affordable care.

Those are legitimate policy arguments. But getting our ambassadors confirmed? These are career diplomats, not political types. Making sure that we pass legislation to strengthen our borders and put more folks down there? Those shouldn’t be controversial. And I think you’d be hard-pressed to find an example of where I wouldn’t welcome some reasonable efforts to actually get a bill passed out of Congress that I could sign.

Last question, Michelle Kosinski.

Question: You made the point that in certain difficult conflicts in the past, both sides had to reach a point where they were tired of the bloodshed. Do you think that we are actually far from that point right now? And is it realistic to try to broker a cease-fire right now when there are still tunnel operations allowed to continue? Is that going to cause a change of approach from this point forward?

President Obama: Well, keep in mind that the cease-fire that had been agreed to would have given Israel the capability to continue to dismantle these tunnel networks, but the Israelis can dismantle these tunnel networks without going into major population centers in Gaza. So I think the Israelis are entirely right that these tunnel networks need to be dismantled. There is a way of doing that while still reducing the bloodshed.

You are right that in past conflicts, sometimes people have to feel deeply the costs. Anybody who has been watching some of these images I’d like to think should recognize the costs. You have children who are getting killed. You have women, defenseless, who are getting killed. You have Israelis whose lives are disrupted constantly and living in fear. And those are costs that are avoidable if we’re able to get a cease-fire that preserves Israel’s ability to defend itself and gives it the capacity to have an assurance that they’re not going to be constantly threatened by rocket fire in the future, and, conversely, an agreement that recognizes the Palestinian need to be able to make a living and the average Palestinian’s capacity to live a decent life.

But it’s hard. It’s going to be hard to get there. I think that there’s a lot of anger and there’s a lot of despair, and that’s a volatile mix. But we have to keep trying.

And it is -- Bill asked earlier about American leadership. Part of the reason why America remains indispensable, part of the essential ingredient in American leadership is that we’re willing to plunge in and try, where other countries don’t bother trying. I mean, the fact of the matter is, is that in all these crises that have been mentioned, there may be some tangential risks to the United States. In some cases, as in Iraq and ISIS, those are dangers that have to be addressed right now, and we have to take them very seriously. But for the most part, these are not -- the rockets aren’t being fired into the United States. The reason we are concerned is because we recognize we’ve got some special responsibilities.

We have to have some humility about what we can and can’t accomplish. We have to recognize that our resources are finite, and we’re coming out of a decade of war and our military has been stretched very hard, as has our budget. Nevertheless, we try. We go in there and we make an effort.

And when I see John Kerry going out there and trying to broker a cease-fire, we should all be supporting him. There shouldn’t be a bunch of complaints and second-guessing about, well, it hasn’t happened yet, or nitpicking before he’s had a chance to complete his efforts. Because, I tell you what, there isn’t any other country that’s going in there and making those efforts.

And more often than not, as a consequence of our involvement, we get better outcomes -- not perfect outcomes, not immediate outcomes, but we get better outcomes. And that’s going to be true with respect to the Middle East. That’s going to be true with respect to Ukraine. That’s going to be certainly true with respect to Iraq.

And I think it’s useful for me to end by just reminding folks that, in my first term, if I had a press conference like this, typically, everybody would want to ask about the economy and how come jobs weren’t being created, and how come the housing market is still bad, and why isn’t it working. Well, you know what, what we did worked. And the economy is better. And when I say that we’ve just had six months of more than 200,000 jobs that hasn’t happened in 17 years that shows you the power of persistence. It shows you that if you stay at it, eventually we make some progress. All right?

Question: What about John Brennan?

Question: The Africa summit -- Ebola?

President Obama: I thought that you guys were going to ask me how I was going to spend my birthday. What happened to the happy birthday thing?

Statement: Happy birthday.

Question: What about John Brennan?

Question: Africa summit?

President Obama: I will address two points. I’ll address --

Question: And Flight 17?

President Obama: Hold on, guys. Come on. There’s just --

Question: And Africa.

President Obama: You're not that pent up. I’ve been giving you questions lately.

On Brennan and the CIA, the RDI report has been transmitted, the declassified version that will be released at the pleasure of the Senate committee.

I have full confidence in John Brennan. I think he has acknowledged and directly apologized to Senator Feinstein that CIA personnel did not properly handle an investigation as to how certain documents that were not authorized to be released to the Senate staff got somehow into the hands of the Senate staff. And it’s clear from the IG report that some very poor judgment was shown in terms of how that was handled. Keep in mind, though, that John Brennan was the person who called for the IG report, and he’s already stood up a task force to make sure that lessons are learned and mistakes are resolved.

With respect to the larger point of the RDI report itself, even before I came into office I was very clear that in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 we did some things that were wrong. We did a whole lot of things that were right, but we tortured some folks. We did some things that were contrary to our values.

I understand why it happened. I think it’s important when we look back to recall how afraid people were after the Twin Towers fell and the Pentagon had been hit and the plane in Pennsylvania had fallen, and people did not know whether more attacks were imminent, and there was enormous pressure on our law enforcement and our national security teams to try to deal with this. And it’s important for us not to feel too sanctimonious in retrospect about the tough job that those folks had. And a lot of those folks were working hard under enormous pressure and are real patriots.

But having said all that, we did some things that were wrong. And that's what that report reflects. And that's the reason why, after I took office, one of the first things I did was to ban some of the extraordinary interrogation techniques that are the subject of that report.

And my hope is, is that this report reminds us once again that the character of our country has to be measured in part not by what we do when things are easy, but what we do when things are hard. And when we engaged in some of these enhanced interrogation techniques, techniques that I believe and I think any fair-minded person would believe were torture, we crossed a line. And that needs to be -- that needs to be understood and accepted. And we have to, as a country, take responsibility for that so that, hopefully, we don't do it again in the future.

Question: Mr. President --

President Obama: Now, I gave you a question.

Statement: All right.

Question: The summit -- the U.S.-Africa --

President Obama: We’ve got a U.S.-Africa Summit coming up next week. It is going to be an unprecedented gathering of African leaders. The importance of this for America needs to be understood. Africa is one of the fastest-growing continents in the world. You’ve got six of the 10 fastest-growing economies in Africa. You have all sorts of other countries like China and Brazil and India deeply interested in working with Africa -- not to extract natural resources alone, which traditionally has been the relationship between Africa and the rest of the world -- but now because Africa is growing and you’ve got thriving markets and you’ve got entrepreneurs and extraordinary talent among the people there.

And Africa also happens to be one of the continents where America is most popular and people feel a real affinity for our way of life. And we’ve made enormous progress over the last several years in not just providing traditional aid to Africa, helping countries that are suffering from malnutrition or helping countries that are suffering from AIDS, but rather partnering and thinking about how can we trade more and how can we do business together. And that’s the kind of relationship that Africa is looking for.

And I’ve had conversations over the last several months with U.S. businesses -- some of the biggest U.S. businesses in the world -- and they say, Africa, that’s one of our top priorities; we want to do business with those folks, and we think that we can create U.S. jobs and send U.S. exports to Africa. But we’ve got to be engaged, and so this gives us a chance to do that. It also gives us a chance to talk to Africa about security issues -- because, as we’ve seen, terrorist networks try to find places where governance is weak and security structures are weak. And if we want to keep ourselves safe over the long term, then one of the things that we can do is make sure that we are partnering with some countries that really have pretty effective security forces and have been deploying themselves in peacekeeping and conflict resolution efforts in Africa. And that, ultimately, can save us and our troops and our military a lot of money if we’ve got strong partners who are able to deal with conflicts in these regions.

So it’s going to be a terrific conference. I won’t lie to you, traffic will be bad here in Washington. I know that everybody has been warned about that, but we are really looking forward to this and I think it’s going to be a great success.

Now, the last thing I’m going to say about this, because I know that it’s been on people’s minds, is the issue of Ebola. This is something that we take very seriously. As soon as there’s an outbreak anywhere in the world of any disease that could have significant effects, the CDC is in communication with the World Health Organization and other multilateral agencies to try to make sure that we’ve got an appropriate response.

This has been a more aggressive Ebola outbreak than we’ve seen in the past. But keep in mind that it is still affecting parts of three countries, and we’ve got some 50 countries represented at this summit. We are doing two things with respect to the summit itself. We’re taking the appropriate precautions. Folks who are coming from these countries that have even a marginal risk or an infinitesimal risk of having been exposed in some fashion, we’re making sure we’re doing screening on that end -- as they leave the country. We’ll do additional screening when they’re here. We feel confident that the procedures that we’ve put in place are appropriate.

More broadly, the CDC and our various health agencies are going to be working very intently with the World Health Organization and some of our partner countries to make sure that we can surge some resources down there and organization to these countries that are pretty poor and don’t have a strong public health infrastructure so that we can start containing the problem.

Keep in mind that Ebola is not something that is easily transmitted. That’s why, generally, outbreaks dissipate. But the key is identifying, quarantining, isolating those who contract it and making sure that practices are in place that avoid transmission. And it can be done, but it’s got to be done in an organized, systematic way, and that means that we’re going to have to help these countries accomplish that.

All right? Okay.

Question: Happy Birthday, Mr. President.

President Obama: There you go, April. That’s what I was talking about -- somebody finally wished me happy birthday -- although it isn’t until Monday, you’re right.

Thank you so much.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# On Authorizing Targeted Air Strikes and Humanitarian Aid in Iraq

Good evening. Today I authorized two operations in Iraq -- targeted airstrikes to protect our American personnel, and a humanitarian effort to help save thousands of Iraqi civilians who are trapped on a mountain without food and water and facing almost certain death. Let me explain the actions we’re taking and why.

First, I said in June -- as the terrorist group ISIL began an advance across Iraq -- that the United States would be prepared to take targeted military action in Iraq if and when we determined that the situation required it. In recent days, these terrorists have continued to move across Iraq, and have neared the city of Erbil, where American diplomats and civilians serve at our consulate and American military personnel advise Iraqi forces.

To stop the advance on Erbil, I’ve directed our military to take targeted strikes against ISIL terrorist convoys should they move toward the city. We intend to stay vigilant, and take action if these terrorist forces threaten our personnel or facilities anywhere in Iraq, including our consulate in Erbil and our embassy in Baghdad. We’re also providing urgent assistance to Iraqi government and Kurdish forces so they can more effectively wage the fight against ISIL.

Second, at the request of the Iraqi government -- we’ve begun operations to help save Iraqi civilians stranded on the mountain

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. As ISIL has marched across Iraq, it has waged a ruthless campaign against innocent Iraqis. And these terrorists have been especially barbaric towards religious minorities, including Christian and Yezidis, a small and ancient religious sect. Countless Iraqis have been displaced. And chilling reports describe ISIL militants rounding up families, conducting mass executions, and enslaving Yezidi women.

In recent days, Yezidi women, men and children from the area of Sinjar have fled for their lives. And thousands -- perhaps tens of thousands -- are now hiding high up on the mountain, with little but the clothes on their backs. They’re without food, they’re without water. People are starving. And children are dying of thirst. Meanwhile, ISIL forces below have called for the systematic destruction of the entire Yezidi people, which would constitute genocide. So these innocent families are faced with a horrible choice: descend the mountain and be slaughtered, or stay and slowly die of thirst and hunger.

I’ve said before, the United States cannot and should not intervene every time there’s a crisis in the world. So let me be clear about why we must act, and act now. When we face a situation like we do on that mountain -- with innocent people facing the prospect of violence on a horrific scale, when we have a mandate to help -- in this case, a request from the Iraqi government -- and when we have the unique capabilities to help avert a massacre, then I believe the United States of America cannot turn a blind eye. We can act, carefully and responsibly, to prevent a potential act of genocide. That’s what we’re doing on that mountain.

I’ve, therefore, authorized targeted airstrikes, if necessary, to help forces in Iraq as they fight to break the siege of Mount Sinjar and protect the civilians trapped there. Already, American aircraft have begun conducting humanitarian airdrops of food and water to help these desperate men, women and children survive. Earlier this week, one Iraqi in the area cried to the world, "There is no one coming to help." Well today, America is coming to help. We’re also consulting with other countries -- and the United Nations -- who have called for action to address this humanitarian crisis.

I know that many of you are rightly concerned about any American military action in Iraq, even limited strikes like these. I understand that. I ran for this office in part to end our war in Iraq and welcome our troops home, and that’s what we’ve done. As Commander-in-Chief, I will not allow the United States to be dragged into fighting another war in Iraq. And so even as we support Iraqis as they take the fight to these terrorists, American combat troops will not be returning to fight in Iraq, because there’s no American military solution to the larger crisis in Iraq. The only lasting solution is reconciliation among Iraqi communities and stronger Iraqi security forces.

However, we can and should support moderate forces who can bring stability to Iraq. So even as we carry out these two missions, we will continue to pursue a broader strategy that empowers Iraqis to confront this crisis. Iraqi leaders need to come together and forge a new government that represents the legitimate interests of all Iraqis, and that can fight back against the threats like ISIL. Iraqis have named a new President, a new Speaker of Parliament, and are seeking consensus on a new Prime Minister. This is the progress that needs to continue in order to reverse the momentum of the terrorists who prey on Iraq’s divisions.

Once Iraq has a new government, the United States will work with it and other countries in the region to provide increased support to deal with this humanitarian crisis and counterterrorism challenge. None of Iraq’s neighbors have an interest in this terrible suffering or instability.

And so we’ll continue to work with our friends and allies to help refugees get the shelter and food and water they so desperately need, and to help Iraqis push back against ISIL. The several hundred American advisors that I ordered to Iraq will continue to assess what more we can do to help train, advise and support Iraqi forces going forward. And just as I consulted Congress on the decisions I made today, we will continue to do so going forward.

My fellow Americans, the world is confronted by many challenges. And while America has never been able to right every wrong, America has made the world a more secure and prosperous place. And our leadership is necessary to underwrite the global security and prosperity that our children and our grandchildren will depend upon. We do so by adhering to a set of core principles. We do whatever is necessary to protect our people. We support our allies when they’re in danger. We lead coalitions of countries to uphold international norms. And we strive to stay true to the fundamental values -- the desire to live with basic freedom and dignity -- that is common to human beings wherever they are. That’s why people all over the world look to the United States of America to lead. And that’s why we do it.

So let me close by assuring you that there is no decision that I take more seriously than the use of military force. Over the last several years, we have brought the vast majority of our troops home from Iraq and Afghanistan. And I’ve been careful to resist calls to turn time and again to our military, because America has other tools in our arsenal than our military. We can also lead with the power of our diplomacy, our economy, and our ideals.

But when the lives of American citizens are at risk, we will take action. That’s my responsibility as Commander-in-Chief. And when many thousands of innocent civilians are faced with the danger of being wiped out, and we have the capacity to do something about it, we will take action. That is our responsibility as Americans. That’s a hallmark of American leadership. That’s who we are.

So tonight, we give thanks to our men and women in uniform -— especially our brave pilots and crews over Iraq who are protecting our fellow Americans and saving the lives of so many men, women and children that they will never meet. They represent American leadership at its best. As a nation, we should be proud of them, and of our country’s enduring commitment to uphold our own security and the dignity of our fellow human beings.

God bless our Armed Forces, and God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# First Update On Authorizing Targeted Air Strikes and Humanitarian Aid in Iraq

Good morning. Over the past two days, American pilots and crews have served with courage and skill in the skies over Iraq.

First, American forces have conducted targeted airstrikes against terrorist forces outside the city of Erbil to prevent them from advancing on the city and to protect our American diplomats and military personnel. So far, these strikes have successfully destroyed arms and equipment that ISIL terrorists could have used against Erbil. Meanwhile, Kurdish forces on the ground continue to defend the city, and the United States and the Iraqi government have stepped up our military assistance to Kurdish forces as they wage their fight.

Second, our humanitarian effort continues to help the men, women and children stranded on Mount Sinjar.

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American forces have so far conducted two successful airdrops -- delivering thousands of meals and gallons of water to these desperate men, women and children. And American aircraft are positioned to strike ISIL terrorists around the mountain to help forces in Iraq break the siege and rescue those who are trapped there.

Now, even as we deal with these immediate situations, we continue to pursue a broader strategy in Iraq. We will protect our American citizens in Iraq, whether they’re diplomats, civilians or military. If these terrorists threaten our facilities or our personnel, we will take action to protect our people.

We will continue to provide military assistance and advice to the Iraqi government and Kurdish forces as they battle these terrorists, so that the terrorists cannot establish a permanent safe haven.

We will continue to work with the international community to deal with the growing humanitarian crisis in Iraq. Even as our attention is focused on preventing an act of genocide and helping the men and women and children on the mountain, countless Iraqis have been driven or fled from their homes, including many Christians.

This morning, I spoke with Prime Minister Cameron of the United Kingdom and President Hollande of France. I’m pleased that both leaders expressed their strong support for our actions and have agreed to join us in providing humanitarian assistance to Iraqi civilians who are suffering so much. Once again, America is proud to act alongside our closest friends and allies.

More broadly, the United Nations in Iraq is working urgently to help respond to the needs of those Iraqis fleeing from areas under threat. The U.N. Security Council has called on the international community to do everything it can to provide food, water and shelter. And in my calls with allies and partners around the world, I’ll continue to urge them to join us in this humanitarian effort.

Finally, we continue to call on Iraqis to come together and form the inclusive government that Iraq needs right now. Vice President Biden has been speaking to Iraqi leaders, and our team in Baghdad is in close touch with the Iraqi government. All Iraqi communities are ultimately threatened by these barbaric terrorists and all Iraqi communities need to unite to defend their country.

Just as we are focused on the situation in the north affecting Kurds and Iraqi minorities, Sunnis and Shia in different parts of Iraq have suffered mightily at the hands of ISIL. Once an inclusive government is in place, I’m confident it will be easier to mobilize all Iraqis against ISIL, and to mobilize greater support from our friends and allies. Ultimately, only Iraqis can ensure the security and stability of Iraq. The United States can’t do it for them, but we can and will be partners in that effort.

One final thing -- as we go forward, we’ll continue to consult with Congress and coordinate closely with our allies and partners. And as Americans, we will continue to show gratitude to our men and women in uniform who are conducting our operations there. When called, they were ready -- as they always are. When given their mission, they’ve performed with distinction -- as they always do. And when we see them serving with such honor and compassion, defending our fellow citizens and saving the lives of people they’ve never met, it makes us proud to be Americans -- as we always will be.

So with that, let me take a couple questions.

Q: Mr. President, for how long a period of time do you see these airstrikes continuing for? And is your goal there to contain ISIS or to destroy it?

THE PRESIDENT: I’m not going to give a particular timetable, because as I’ve said from the start, wherever and whenever U.S. personnel and facilities are threatened, it’s my obligation, my responsibility as Commander-in-Chief, to make sure that they are protected. And we’re not moving our embassy anytime soon. We’re not moving our consulate anytime soon. And that means that, given the challenging security environment, we’re going to maintain vigilance and ensure that our people are safe.

Our initial goal is to not only make sure Americans are protected, but also to deal with this humanitarian situation in Sinjar. We feel confident that we can prevent ISIL from going up a mountain and slaughtering the people who are there. But the next step, which is going to be complicated logistically, is how do we give safe passage for people down from the mountain, and where can we ultimately relocate them so that they are safe. That’s the kind of coordination that we need to do internationally.

I was very pleased to get the cooperation of both Prime Minister Cameron and President Hollande in addressing some of the immediate needs in terms of airdrops and some of the assets and logistical support that they’re providing. But there’s a broader set of questions that our experts now are engaged in with the United Nations and our allies and partners, and that is how do we potentially create a safe corridor or some other mechanism so that these people can move. That may take some time -- because there are varying estimates of how many people are up there, but they’re in the thousands, and moving them is not simple in this kind of security environment.

Just to give people a sense, though, of a timetable -- that the most important timetable that I’m focused on right now is the Iraqi government getting formed and finalized. Because in the absence of an Iraqi government, it is very hard to get a unified effort by Iraqis against ISIL. We can conduct airstrikes, but ultimately there’s not going to be an American military solution to this problem. There’s going to have to be an Iraqi solution that America and other countries and allies support. And that can’t happen effectively until you have a legitimate Iraqi government.

So right now we have a president, we have a speaker. What we don’t yet have is a prime minister and a cabinet that is formed that can go ahead and move forward, and then start reaching out to all the various groups and factions inside of Iraq, and can give confidence to populations in the Sunni areas that ISIL is not the only game in town. It also then allows us to take those Iraqi security forces that are able and functional, and they understand who they’re reporting to and what they’re fighting for, and what the chain of command is. And it provides a structure in which better cooperation is taking place between the Kurdish region and Baghdad.

So we’re going to be pushing very hard to encourage Iraqis to get their government together. Until we do that, it is going to be hard to get the unity of effort that allows us to not just play defense, but also engage in some offense.

Q: Mr. President, the United States has fought long wars in Afghanistan and Iraq with uncertain outcomes. How do you assure the American people that we’re not getting dragged into another war in Iraq? Have you underestimated the power of ISIS? And finally, you said that you involved international partners in humanitarian efforts. Is there any thought to talking to international partners as far as military actions to prevent the spread of ISIS?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, a couple of things I would say. Number one, I’ve been very clear that we’re not going to have U.S. combat troops in Iraq again. And we are going to maintain that, because we should have learned a lesson from our long and immensely costly incursion in Iraq. And that is that our military is so effective that we can keep a lid on problems wherever we are, if we put enough personnel and resources into it. But it can only last if the people in these countries themselves are able to arrive at the kinds of political accommodations and compromise that any civilized society requires.

And so it would be, I think, a big mistake for us to think that we can, on the cheap, simply go in, tamp everything down again, restart without some fundamental shift in attitudes among the various Iraqi factions. That’s why it is so important to have an Iraqi government on the ground that is taking responsibility that we can help, that we can partner with, that has the capacity to get alliances in the region. And once that’s in place, then I think we end up being one of many countries that can work together to deal with the broader crisis that ISIL poses.

What were your other questions? Did we underestimate ISIL? I think that there is no doubt that their advance, their movement over the last several months has been more rapid than the intelligence estimates and I think the expectations of policymakers both in and outside of Iraq. And part of that is I think not a full appreciation of the degree to which the Iraqi security forces, when they’re far away from Baghdad, did not have the incentive or the capacity to hold ground against an aggressive adversary. And so that’s one more reason why Iraqi government formation is so important -- because there has to be a rebuilding and an understanding of who it is that the Iraqi security forces are reporting to, what they are fighting for. And there has to be some investment by Sunnis in pushing back against ISIL.

I think we’re already seeing -- and we will see even further -- the degree to which those territories under ISIL control alienated populations, because of the barbarity and brutality with which they operate. But in order to ensure that Sunni populations reject outright these kinds of incursions, they’ve got to feel like they’re invested in a broader national government. And right now, they don’t feel that.

So the upshot is that what we’ve seen over the last several months indicates the weaknesses in an Iraqi government. But what we’ve also seen I think is a wake-up call for a lot of Iraqis inside of Baghdad recognizing that we’re going to have to rethink how we do business if we’re going to hold our country together. And, hopefully, that change in attitude supplemented by improved security efforts in which we can assist and help, that can make a difference.

Q: You just expressed confidence that the Iraqi government can eventually prevent a safe haven. But you’ve also just described the complications with the Iraqi government and the sophistication of ISIL. So is it possible that what you’ve described and your ambitions there could take years, not months?

THE PRESIDENT: I don’t think we’re going to solve this problem in weeks, if that’s what you mean. I think this is going to take some time. The Iraqi security forces, in order to mount an offensive and be able to operate effectively with the support of populations in Sunni areas, are going to have to revamp, get resupplied -- have a clearer strategy. That’s all going to be dependent on a government that the Iraqi people and the Iraqi military have confidence in. We can help in all those efforts.

I think part of what we’re able to do right now is to preserve a space for them to do the hard work that’s necessary. If they do that, the one thing that I also think has changed is that many of the Sunni countries in the region who have been generally suspicious or wary of the Iraqi government are more likely to join in, in the fight against ISIS, and that can be extremely helpful. But this is going to be a long-term project.

Part of what we’ve seen is that a minority Sunni population in Iraq, as well as a majority Sunni population in Syria, has felt dissatisfied and detached and alienated from their respective governments. And that has been a ripe territory for these jihadists and extremists to operate. And rebuilding governance in those areas, and legitimacy for stable, moderate governing in those areas is going to take time.

Now, there are some immediate concerns that we have to worry about. We have to make sure that ISIL is not engaging in the actions that could cripple a country permanently. There’s key infrastructure inside of Iraq that we have to be concerned about. My team has been vigilant, even before ISIL went into Mosul, about foreign fighters and jihadists gathering in Syria, and now in Iraq, who might potentially launch attacks outside the region against Western targets and U.S. targets. So there’s going to be a counterterrorism element that we are already preparing for and have been working diligently on for a long time now.

There is going to be a military element in protecting our people, but the long-term campaign of changing that environment so that the millions of Sunnis who live in these areas feel connected to and well-served by a national government, that’s a long-term process. And that’s something that the United States cannot do, only the Iraqi people themselves can do. We can help, we can advise, but we can’t do it for them. And the U.S. military cannot do it for them.

And so this goes back to the earlier question about U.S. military involvement. The nature of this problem is not one that a U.S. military can solve. We can assist and our military obviously can play an extraordinarily important role in bolstering efforts of an Iraqi partner as they make the right steps to keep their country together, but we can’t do it for them.

Last question.

Q: America has spent 800 billion dollars in Iraq. Do you anticipate having to ask Congress for additional funds to support this mission?

THE PRESIDENT: Currently, we are operating within the budget constraints that we already have. And we’ll have to evaluate what happens over time. We already have a lot of assets in the region. We anticipate, when we make our preliminary budgets, that there may be things that come up requiring us to engage. And right now, at least, I think we are okay. If and when we need additional dollars to make sure that American personnel and American facilities are protected, then we will certainly make that request. But right now, that’s not our primary concern.

Last question.

Q: Mr. President, do you have any second thoughts about pulling all ground troops out of Iraq? And does it give you pause as the U.S. -- is it doing the same thing in Afghanistan?

THE PRESIDENT: What I just find interesting is the degree to which this issue keeps on coming up, as if this was my decision. Under the previous administration, we had turned over the country to a sovereign, democratically elected Iraqi government. In order for us to maintain troops in Iraq, we needed the invitation of the Iraqi government and we needed assurances that our personnel would be immune from prosecution if, for example, they were protecting themselves and ended up getting in a firefight with Iraqis, that they wouldn’t be hauled before an Iraqi judicial system.

And the Iraqi government, based on its political considerations, in part because Iraqis were tired of a U.S. occupation, declined to provide us those assurances. And on that basis, we left. We had offered to leave additional troops. So when you hear people say, do you regret, Mr. President, not leaving more troops, that presupposes that I would have overridden this sovereign government that we had turned the keys back over to and said, you know what, you’re democratic, you’re sovereign, except if I decide that it’s good for you to keep 10,000 or 15,000 or 25,000 Marines in your country, you don’t have a choice -- which would have kind of run contrary to the entire argument we were making about turning over the country back to Iraqis, an argument not just made by me, but made by the previous administration.

So let’s just be clear: The reason that we did not have a follow-on force in Iraq was because the Iraqis were -- a majority of Iraqis did not want U.S. troops there, and politically they could not pass the kind of laws that would be required to protect our troops in Iraq.

Having said all that, if in fact the Iraqi government behaved the way it did over the last five, six years, where it failed to pass legislation that would reincorporate Sunnis and give them a sense of ownership; if it had targeted certain Sunni leaders and jailed them; if it had alienated some of the Sunni tribes that we had brought back in during the so-called Awakening that helped us turn the tide in 2006 -- if they had done all those things and we had had troops there, the country wouldn’t be holding together either. The only difference would be we’d have a bunch of troops on the ground that would be vulnerable. And however many troops we had, we would have to now be reinforcing, I’d have to be protecting them, and we’d have a much bigger job. And probably, we would end up having to go up again in terms of the number of grounds troops to make sure that those forces were not vulnerable.

So that entire analysis is bogus and is wrong. But it gets frequently peddled around here by folks who oftentimes are trying to defend previous policies that they themselves made.

Going forward with respect to Afghanistan, we are leaving the follow-on force there. I think the lesson for Afghanistan is not the fact that we’ve got a follow-on force that will be capable of training and supporting Afghan security efforts. I think the real lesson in Afghanistan is that if factions in a country after a long period of civil war do not find a way to come up with a political accommodation; if they take maximalist positions and their attitude is, I want 100 percent of what I want and the other side gets nothing, then the center doesn’t hold.

And the good news is, is that in part thanks to the excellent work of John Kerry and others, we now are seeing the two candidates in the recent presidential election start coming together and agreeing not only to move forward on the audit to be able to finally certify a winner in the election, but also the kinds of political accommodations that are going to be required to keep democracy moving.

So that’s a real lesson I think for Afghanistan coming out of Iraq is, if you want this thing to work, then whether it’s different ethnicities, different religions, different regions, they’ve got to accommodate each other, otherwise you start tipping back into old patterns of violence. And it doesn’t matter how many U.S. troops are there -- if that happens, you end up having a mess.

Thanks a lot, guys.

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# Statement on the Situations in Northern Iraq and Ferguson, Missouri

Good afternoon, everybody. This sound system is really powerful. Today, I’d like to update the American people on two issues that I’ve been monitoring closely these last several days.

First of all, we continue to make progress in carrying out our targeted military operations in Iraq. Last week, I authorized two limited missions: protecting our people and facilities inside of Iraq, and a humanitarian operation to help save thousands of Iraqi civilians stranded on a mountain.

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A week ago, we assessed that many thousands of Yezidi men, women and children had abandoned their possessions to take refuge on Mount Sinjar in a desperate attempt to avoid slaughter. We also knew that ISIL terrorists were killing and enslaving Yezidi civilians in their custody, and laying siege to the mountain. Without food or water, they faced a terrible choice -- starve on the mountain, or be slaughtered on the ground. That’s when America came to help.

Over the last week, the U.S. military conducted humanitarian air drops every night -- delivering more than 114,000 meals and 35,000 gallons of fresh water. We were joined in that effort by the United Kingdom, and other allies pledged support. Our military was able to successfully strike ISIL targets around the mountain, which improved conditions for civilians to evacuate the mountain safely.

Yesterday, a small team of Americans -- military and civilian -- completed their review of the conditions on the mountain. They found that food and water have been reaching those in need, and that thousands of people have been evacuating safely each and every night. The civilians who remain continue to leave, aided by Kurdish forces and Yezidis who are helping to facilitate the safe passage of their families. So the bottom line is, is that the situation on the mountain has greatly improved and Americans should be very proud of our efforts.

Because of the skill and professionalism of our military -- and the generosity of our people -- we broke the ISIL siege of Mount Sinjar; we helped vulnerable people reach safety; and we helped save many innocent lives. Because of these efforts, we do not expect there to be an additional operation to evacuate people off the mountain, and it’s unlikely that we’re going to need to continue humanitarian air drops on the mountain. The majority of the military personnel who conducted the assessment will be leaving Iraq in the coming days. And I just want to say that as Commander-in-Chief, I could not be prouder of the men and women of our military who carried out this humanitarian operation almost flawlessly. I’m very grateful to them and I know that those who were trapped on that mountain are extraordinarily grateful as well.

Now, the situation remains dire for Iraqis subjected to ISIL’s terror throughout the country, and this includes minorities like Yezidis and Iraqi Christians; it also includes Sunnis, Shia and Kurds. We’re going to be working with our international partners to provide humanitarian assistance to those who are suffering in northern Iraq wherever we have capabilities and we can carry out effective missions like the one we carried out on Mount Sinjar without committing combat troops on the ground.

We obviously feel a great urge to provide some humanitarian relief to the situation and I’ve been very encouraged by the interest of our international partners in helping on these kinds of efforts as well. We will continue air strikes to protect our people and facilities in Iraq. We have increased the delivery of military assistance to Iraqi and Kurdish forces fighting ISIL on the front lines.

And, perhaps most importantly, we are urging Iraqis to come together to turn the tide against ISIL -- above all, by seizing the enormous opportunity of forming a new, inclusive government under the leadership of Prime Minister-designate Abadi. I had a chance to speak to Prime Minister-designate Abadi a few days ago, and he spoke about the need for the kind of inclusive government -- a government that speaks to all the people of Iraq -- that is needed right now. He still has a challenging task in putting a government together, but we are modestly hopeful that the Iraqi government situation is moving in the right direction.

Now, second, I want to address something that’s been in the news over the last couple of days and that’s the situation in Ferguson, Missouri. I know that many Americans have been deeply disturbed by the images we’ve seen in the heartland of our country, as police have clashed with people protesting. Today, I’d like us all to take a step back and think about how we’re going to be moving forward.

This morning, I received a thorough update on the situation from Attorney General Eric Holder, who has been following it and been in communication with his team. I’ve already tasked the Department of Justice and the FBI to independently investigate the death of Michael Brown, along with local officials on the ground.

The Department of Justice is also consulting with local authorities about ways that they can maintain public safety without restricting the right of peaceful protest and while avoiding unnecessary escalation. I made clear to the Attorney General that we should do what is necessary to help determine exactly what happened, and to see that justice is done.

I also just spoke with Governor Jay Nixon of Missouri. I expressed my concern over the violent turn that events have taken on the ground, and underscored that now is the time for all of us to reflect on what’s happened, and to find a way to come together going forward. He is going to be traveling to Ferguson. He is a good man and a fine governor, and I’m confident that, working together, he is going to be able to communicate his desire to make sure that justice is done and his desire to make sure that public safety is maintained in an appropriate way.

Of course, it’s important to remember how this started. We lost a young man, Michael Brown, in heartbreaking and tragic circumstances. He was 18 years old. His family will never hold Michael in their arms again. And when something like this happens, the local authorities -- including the police -- have a responsibility to be open and transparent about how they are investigating that death, and how they are protecting the people in their communities.

There is never an excuse for violence against police, or for those who would use this tragedy as a cover for vandalism or looting. There’s also no excuse for police to use excessive force against peaceful protests, or to throw protestors in jail for lawfully exercising their First Amendment rights. And here, in the United States of America, police should not be bullying or arresting journalists who are just trying to do their jobs and report to the American people on what they see on the ground. Put simply, we all need to hold ourselves to a high standard, particularly those of us in positions of authority.

I know that emotions are raw right now in Ferguson and there are certainly passionate differences about what has happened. There are going to be different accounts of how this tragedy occurred. There are going to be differences in terms of what needs to happen going forward. That’s part of our democracy. But let’s remember that we’re all part of one American family. We are united in common values, and that includes belief in equality under the law; a basic respect for public order and the right to peaceful public protest; a reverence for the dignity of every single man, woman and child among us; and the need for accountability when it comes to our government.

So now is the time for healing. Now is the time for peace and calm on the streets of Ferguson. Now is the time for an open and transparent process to see that justice is done. And I’ve asked that the Attorney General and the U.S. Attorney on the scene continue to work with local officials to move that process forward. They will be reporting to me in the coming days about what’s being done to make sure that happens.

Thanks very much, everybody.

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# On Iraq and Ukraine

Good afternoon, everybody. I want to say a few words on a number of topics and take a few questions before the long Labor Day weekend.

First, beginning with the number one thing most Americans care about -- the economy. This morning, we found out that our economy actually grew at a stronger clip in the 2nd quarter than we originally thought. Companies are investing. Consumers are spending. Over the past four and a half years, our businesses have now created nearly 10 million new jobs. So there are reasons to feel good about the direction we’re headed.

But as everybody knows, there’s a lot more that we should be doing to make sure that all Americans benefit from the progress that we’ve made. And I’m going to be pushing Congress hard on this when they return next week.

Second, in Iraq, our dedicated pilots and crews continue to carry out the targeted strikes that I authorized to protect Americans there and to address the humanitarian situation on the ground.

As Commander-in-Chief, I will always do what is necessary to protect the American people and defend against evolving threats to our homeland. Because of our strikes, the terrorists of ISIL are losing arms and equipment. In some areas, Iraqi government and Kurdish forces have begun to push them back.

And we continue to be proud and grateful to our extraordinary personnel serving in this mission.

Now, ISIL poses an immediate threat to the people of Iraq and to people throughout the region. And that’s why our military action in Iraq has to be part of a broader, comprehensive strategy to protect our people and to support our partners who are taking the fight to ISIL. And that starts with Iraq’s leaders building on the progress that they’ve made so far and forming an inclusive government that will unite their country and strengthen their security forces to confront ISIL.

Any successful strategy, though, also needs strong regional partners. I’m encouraged so far that countries in the region -- countries that don’t always agree on many things -- increasingly recognize the primacy of the threat that ISIL poses to all of them. And I’ve asked Secretary Kerry to travel to the region to continue to build the coalition that’s needed to meet this threat. As I’ve said, rooting out a cancer like ISIL will not be quick or easy, but I’m confident that we can -- and we will -- working closely with our allies and our partners.

For our part, I’ve directed Secretary Hagel and our Joint Chiefs of Staff to prepare a range of options. I’ll be meeting with my National Security Council again this evening as we continue to develop that strategy. And I’ve been consulting with members of Congress and I’ll continue to do so in the days ahead.

Finally, I just spoke with Chancellor Merkel of Germany on the situation in Ukraine. We agree -- if there was ever any doubt -- that Russia is responsible for the violence in eastern Ukraine. The violence is encouraged by Russia. The separatists are trained by Russia. They are armed by Russia. They are funded by Russia. Russia has deliberately and repeatedly violated the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. And the new images of Russian forces inside Ukraine make that plain for the world to see. This comes as Ukrainian forces are making progress against the separatists.

As a result of the actions Russia has already taken, and the major sanctions we’ve imposed with our European and international partners, Russia is already more isolated than at any time since the end of the Cold War. Capital is fleeing. Investors are increasingly staying out. Its economy is in decline. And this ongoing Russian incursion into Ukraine will only bring more costs and consequences for Russia.

Next week, I’ll be in Europe to coordinate with our closest allies and partners. In Estonia, I will reaffirm our unwavering commitment to the defense of our NATO allies.

At the NATO Summit in the United Kingdom, we’ll focus on the additional steps we can take to ensure the Alliance remains prepared for any challenge. Our meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Commission will be another opportunity for our alliance to continue our partnership with Ukraine. And I look forward to reaffirming the unwavering commitment of the United States to Ukraine and its people when I welcome President Poroshenko to the White House next month.

So with that, I’m going to take a few questions. And I’m going to start with somebody who I guess is now a big cheese -- he’s moved on. But I understand this is going to be his last chance to ask me a question in the press room. So I want to congratulate Chuck Todd and give him first dibs.

Q: I’m glad you said “in the press room.” Let me start with Syria. The decision that you have to make between -- first of all, is it a “if” or “when” situation about going after ISIL in Syria? Can you defeat ISIL or ISIS without going after them in Syria? And then how do you prioritize? You have said that Assad has lost legitimacy to lead. Defeating ISIS could help Assad keep power. Talk about how you prioritize those two pieces of your foreign policy.

President Obama: Well, first of all, I want to make sure everybody is clear on what we’re doing now, because it is limited. Our focus right now is to protect American personnel on the ground in Iraq; to protect our embassy, to protect our consulates, to make sure that critical infrastructure that could adversely affect our personnel is protected.

Where we see an opportunity that allows us with very modest risk to help the humanitarian situation there as we did in Sinjar Mountain, we will take those opportunities after having consulted with Congress. But our core priority right now is just to make sure that our folks are safe and to do an effective assessment of Iraqi and Kurdish capabilities.

As I said I think in the last press conference, in order for us to be successful, we’ve got to have an Iraqi government that is unified and inclusive. So we are continuing to push them to get that job done. As soon as we have an Iraqi government in place, the likelihood of the Iraqi security forces being more effective in taking the fight to ISIL significantly increases. And the options that I’m asking for from the Joint Chiefs focuses primarily on making sure that ISIL is not overrunning Iraq.

What is true, though, is that the violence that’s been taking place in Syria has obviously given ISIL a safe haven there in ungoverned spaces. And in order for us to degrade ISIL over the long term, we’re going to have to build a regional strategy. Now, we’re not going to do that alone. We’re going to have to do that with other partners, and particularly Sunni partners, because part of the goal here is to make sure that Sunnis both in Syria and in Iraq feel as if they’ve got an investment in a government that actually functions, a government that can protect them, a government that makes sure that their families are safe from the barbaric acts that we’ve seen in ISIL. And right now, those structures are not in place.

And that’s why the issue with respect to Syria is not simply a military issue, it’s also a political issue. It’s also an issue that involves all the Sunni states in the region and Sunni leadership recognizing that this cancer that has developed is one that they have to be just as invested in defeating as we are.

And so to cut to the chase in terms of what may be your specific concerns, Chuck, my priority at this point is to make sure that the gains that ISIL made in Iraq are rolled back, and that Iraq has the opportunity to govern itself effectively and secure itself.

But when we look at a broader strategy that is consistent with what I said at West Point, that’s consistent with what I said at the National Defense College, clearly ISIL has come to represent the very worst elements in the region that we have to deal with collectively. And that’s going to be a long-term project. It’s going to require us to stabilize Syria in some fashion, and stabilizing Syria in some fashion means that we’ve got to get moderate Sunnis who are able to govern and offer a real alternative and competition to what ISIL has been doing in some of these spaces.

Now, the last point with respect to Assad, it’s not just my opinion -- I think it would be international opinion -- that Assad has lost legitimacy in terms of dropping barrel bombs on innocent families and killing tens of thousands of people. And right now, what we’re seeing is the areas that ISIL is occupying are not controlled by Assad anyway. And, frankly, Assad doesn’t seem to have the capability or reach to get into those areas. So I don’t think this is a situation where we have to choose between Assad or the kinds of people who carry on the incredible violence that we’ve been seeing there. We will continue to support a moderate opposition inside of Syria, in part because we have to give people inside of Syria a choice other than ISIL or Assad.

And I don’t see any scenario in which Assad somehow is able to bring peace and stability to a region that is majority Sunni and has not so far shown any willingness to share power with them or in any kind of significant way deal with the longstanding grievances that they have there.

Q: Do you need Congress’s approval to go into Syria?

President Obama: I have consulted with Congress throughout this process. I am confident that as Commander-in-Chief I have the authorities to engage in the acts that we are conducting currently. As our strategy develops, we will continue to consult with Congress. And I do think that it will be important for Congress to weigh in, or that our consultations with Congress continue to develop so that the American people are part of the debate.

But I don’t want to put the cart before the horse. We don’t have a strategy yet. I think what I’ve seen in some of the news reports suggests that folks are getting a little further ahead of where we’re at than we currently are. And I think that’s not just my assessment, but the assessment of our military as well. We need to make sure that we’ve got clear plans, that we’re developing them. At that point, I will consult with Congress and make sure that their voices are heard. But there’s no point in me asking for action on the part of Congress before I know exactly what it is that is going to be required for us to get the job done.

Colleen McCain Nelson.

Q: Thank you, Mr. President. Do you consider today’s escalation in Ukraine an invasion? And when you talk about additional costs to Russia, are you ready at this point to impose broader economic sanctions? Or are you considering other responses that go beyond sanctions?

President Obama: I consider the actions that we’ve seen in the last week a continuation of what’s been taking place for months now. As I said in my opening statement, there is no doubt that this is not a homegrown, indigenous uprising in eastern Ukraine. The separatists are backed, trained, armed, financed by Russia. Throughout this process, we’ve seen deep Russian involvement in everything that they’ve done.

I think in part because of the progress that you had seen by the Ukrainians around Donetsk and Luhansk, Russia determined that it had to be a little more overt in what it had already been doing. But it’s not really a shift.

What we have seen, though, is that President Putin and Russia have repeatedly passed by potential off-ramps to resolve this diplomatically. And so in our consultations with our European allies and partners, my expectation is, is that we will take additional steps primarily because we have not seen any meaningful action on the part of Russia to actually try to resolve this in diplomatic fashion.

And I think that the sanctions that we’ve already applied have been effective. Our intelligence shows that the Russians know they’ve been effective, even though it may not appear on Russian television. And I think there are ways for us to deepen or expand the scope of some of that work.

But ultimately, I think what’s important to recognize is the degree to which Russian decision-making is isolating Russia. They're doing this to themselves. And what I’ve been encouraged by is the degree to which our European partners recognize even though they are bearing a cost in implementing these sanctions, they understand that a broader principle is at stake. And so I look forward to the consultations that we’ll have when I see them next week.

Zeke Miller.

Q: Thank you, Mr. President. Last year, you said that you believe our democracy is stronger when the President acts with the support of Congress. In response to Chuck’s question you said you don’t have a strategy yet, but you’ll reconsider that going forward. But why didn’t you go to Congress before this current round of strikes in Iraq? Do you not believe that that’s the case anymore, what you said last year? And throughout your career you’ve also said that -- you raised concerns with the expansion of powers of the executive. Are you concerned that your recent actions, unilaterally, had maybe -- have cut against that?

President Obama: No. And here’s why: It is not just part of my responsibility, but it is a sacred duty for me as Commander-in-Chief to protect the American people. And that requires me to act fast, based on information I receive, if an embassy of ours or a consulate of ours is being threatened. The decisions I made were based on very concrete assessments about the possibility that Erbil might be overrun in the Kurdish region and that our consulate could be in danger. And I can’t afford to wait in order to make sure that those folks are protected.

But throughout this process, we’ve consulted closely with Congress, and the feedback I’ve gotten from Congress is, is that we’re doing the right thing. Now, as we go forward -- as I’ve described to Chuck -- and look at a broader regional strategy with an international coalition and partners to systematically degrade ISIL’s capacity to engage in the terrible violence and disruptions that they’ve been engaging in not just in Syria, not just in Iraq, but potentially elsewhere if we don’t nip this at the bud, then those consultations with Congress for something that is longer term I think become more relevant.

And it is my intention that Congress has to have some buy-in as representatives of the American people. And, by the way, the American people need to hear what that strategy is. But as I said to Chuck, I don’t want to put the cart before the horse. And in some of the media reports the suggestion seems to have been that we’re about to go full scale on an elaborate strategy for defeating ISIL, and the suggestion, I guess, has been that we’ll start moving forward imminently and somehow Congress -- still out of town -- is going to be left in the dark. That’s not what’s going to happen.

We are going to continue to focus on protecting the American people. We’re going to continue, where we can, to engage in the sort of humanitarian acts that saved so many folks who were trapped on a mountain. We are going to work politically and diplomatically with folks in the region. And we’re going to cobble together the kind of coalition that we need for a long-term strategy as soon as we are able to fit together the military, political and economic components of that strategy. There will be a military aspect to that, and it’s going to be important for Congress to know what that is, in part because it may cost some money.

I’ll just take a couple more. Yes.

Q: Thank you, Mr. President. Do you regret not moving on ISIS earlier? There are some reports indicating that most of the weapons, the U.S. weapons that they have, they got it or they acquired it after the fall of Mosul. And also, the Iraqi President said today that the Iraqi forces are in no position to stand up to ISIS. What makes you think that forming a new government will change the situation?

President Obama: Well, once ISIL got into Mosul that posed a big problem, because there’s no doubt that they were able to capture some weapons and resources that they then used to finance additional operations.

And at that stage, we immediately contacted the Iraqi government. Keep in mind we had been in communications with the Iraqi government for more than a year indicating that we saw significant problems in the Sunni areas. Prime Minister Maliki was not as responsive perhaps as we would have liked to some of the underlying political grievances that existed at the time.

There is no doubt that in order for Iraq security forces to be successful, they're going to need help. They're going to need help from us. They're going to need help from our international partners. They're going to need additional training. They're going to need additional equipment. And we are going to be prepared to offer that support.

There may be a role for an international coalition providing additional air support for their operations. But the reason it’s so important that an Iraqi government be in place is this is not simply a military problem. The problem we have had consistently is a Sunni population that feels alienated from Baghdad and does not feel invested in what’s happening, and does not feel as if anybody is looking out for them.

If we can get a government in place that provides Sunnis some hope that a national government serves their interest, if they can regain some confidence and trust that it will follow through on commitments that were made way back in 2006 and 2007 and 2008 and earlier about how you arrive at, for example, de-Baathification laws and give people opportunities so they're not locked out of government positions -- if those things are followed through on, and we are able to combine it with a sound military strategy, then I think we can be successful. If we can't, then the idea that the United States or any outside power would perpetually defeat ISIS I think is unrealistic.

As I’ve said before -- I think I said in the previous press conference -- our military is the best in the world. We can route ISIS on the ground and keep a lid on things temporarily. But then as soon as we leave, the same problems come back again. So we’ve got to make sure that Iraqis understand in the end they're going to be responsible for their own security. And part of that is going to be the capacity for them to make compromises.

It also means that states in the region stop being ambivalent about these extremist groups. The truth is that we’ve had state actors who at times have thought that the way to advance their interests is, well, financing some of these groups as proxies is not such a bad strategy. And part of our message to the entire region is this should be a wake-up call to Sunni,to Shia -- to everybody -- that a group like ISIS is beyond the pale; that they have no vision or ideology beyond violence and chaos and the slaughter of innocent people. And as a consequence, we’ve got to all join together -- even if we have differences on a range of political issues -- to make sure that they’re rooted out.

Last question.

Q: Mr. President, despite all of the actions the West has taken to get Russia to pull back from Ukraine, Russia seems intent on taking one step after another -- convoys, transports of arms. At what point do sanctions no longer work? Would you envisage the possibility of a necessity of military action to get Russia to pull back from Ukraine?

President Obama: We are not taking military action to solve the Ukrainian problem. What we’re doing is to mobilize the international community to apply pressure on Russia. But I think it is very important to recognize that a military solution to this problem is not going to be forthcoming. Now, the fact that Russia has taken these actions in violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Ukrainians has resulted, I believe, in a weakening of Russia, not a strengthening of Russia. That may not be apparent immediately, but I think it will become increasingly apparent.

What it’s also done is isolated Russia from its trading partners, its commercial partners, international business in ways that I think are going to be very difficult to recover from. And we will continue to stand firm with our allies and partners that what is happening is wrong, that there is a solution that allows Ukraine and Russia to live peacefully. But it is not in the cards for us to see a military confrontation between Russia and the United States in this region.

Keep in mind, however, that I’m about to go to a NATO conference. Ukraine is not a member of NATO, but a number of those states that are close by are. And we take our Article 5 commitments to defend each other very seriously, and that includes the smallest NATO member, as well as the largest NATO member. And so part of the reason I think this NATO meeting is going to be so important is to refocus attention on the critical function that NATO plays to make sure that every country is contributing in order to deliver on the promise of our Article 5 assurances.

Part of the reason I’ll be going to Estonia is to let the Estonians know that we mean what we say with respect to our treaty obligations. We don’t have those treaty obligations with Ukraine. We do, however, stand shoulder to shoulder with them, and we’re doing not just a lot of work diplomatically but also financially in order to make sure that they have the best chance at dealing with what is admittedly a very difficult situation.

Thank you very much, everybody.

Q: On immigration?

President Obama: Thank you, guys. Thank you.

Q: Immigration?

Q: Mr. President, how are external events and your executive decision-making going to impact your decision on immigration reform? Some people say you’re going to delay this.

The President: Let me just say this: I’ve been very clear about the fact that our immigration system is broken and needs to be fixed. And my preference continues to be that Congress act. I don’t think anybody thinks that Congress is going to act in the short term, but hope springs eternal that after the midterm elections they may act.

In the meantime, what I’ve asked Jeh Johnson to do is to look at what kinds of executive authorities we have in order to make the system work better. And we’ve had a lot of stakeholder discussions; that set of proposals is being worked up.

And the one thing that I think has happened was the issue with unaccompanied children that got so much attention a couple of months back. And part of the reason that was important was not because that represented a huge unprecedented surge in overall immigration at the border, but I do think that it changed the perception of the American people about what’s happening at the borders.

And so one of the things we’ve had -- have had to do is to work through systematically to make sure that that specific problem in a fairly defined area of the border, that we’re starting to deal with that in a serious way. And the good news is we’ve started to make some progress. I mean, what we’ve seen so far is that throughout the summer the number of apprehensions have been decreasing -- maybe that’s counterintuitive, but that’s a good thing because that means that fewer folks are coming across. The number of apprehensions in August are down from July, and they’re actually lower than they were August of last year. Apprehensions in July were half of what they were in June. So we’re seeing a significant downward trend in terms of these unaccompanied children.

And what that I think allows us to do is to make sure that those kids are being taken care of properly, with due process. At the same time, it’s allowed us to then engage in a broader conversation about what we need to do to get more resources down at the border. It would have been helped along if Congress had voted for the supplemental that I asked for; they did not. That means we’ve got to make some administrative choices and executive choices about, for example, getting more immigration judges down there.

So that has kept us busy, but it has not stopped the process of looking more broadly about how do we get a smarter immigration system in place while we’re waiting for Congress to act. And it continues to be my belief that if I can’t see congressional action, that I need to do at least what I can in order to make the system work better.

But some of these things do affect timelines, and we’re just going to be working through as systematically as possible in order to get this done. But have no doubt, in the absence of congressional action, I’m going to do what I can to make sure the system works better.

Thank you, guys.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Joint Presser with Toomas Ilves

President Ilves: Good morning. To begin with, I’d like to welcome President Obama to Estonia. It is a genuine pleasure and an honor to receive you right before the NATO Summit. Your visit sends a strong message. We are grateful to the United States and to you personally for your leadership, your commitment, and your support to Estonia.

To begin with, I also want to say that we are appalled by the latest news from Iraq. We condemn these barbaric acts. We see ISIS as a serious threat to all of us, and stand together with the United States and our allies on this issue.

The main issue on our agenda today is security. The question on everyone’s mind is the situation in Ukraine and its wider impact on European security. I just did hear that President Poroshenko and President Putin have agreed on a cease-fire. I just hope it works. But in the general situation, we need to be clear and consistent in the language that we use to describe the situation in Ukraine.

As the EU underlined last weekend, this is Russian aggression. The EU and the United States are ready to take further restrictive measures in response to Russia’s behavior. Russia must admit that it is a party to the conflict, and take genuine steps that will lead to a de-escalation of the conflict. We must also continue to support Ukraine by providing the country with the assistance that it needs.

When it comes to the security of our region, the United States engagement here runs deep. Estonia is a close and reliable ally to the United States. We take our NATO commitment seriously -- very seriously. We have not sat back and waited for others to take care of our security. Since joining the Alliance, Estonian soldiers have consistently defended the freedom of others -- in Afghanistan, in Iraq, and most recently in the Central African Republic. We dedicate sufficient resources to defense, and are consistently increasing our national defense capacity.

We are grateful to the United States for sending troops here and for actively participating in the Baltic air policing mission. Your presence underlies the credibility of NATO’s Article 5. Without a doubt, your bilateral contributions have helped set an example for other NATO Allies. A robust and visible Allied presence here in Estonia is the best way of discouraging any possible aggressors. We look forward to the NATO Summit confirming this.

But we face a completely new security situation in Europe, and we are pleased that this is reflected in many of the summit’s documents. We expect the NATO Summit in Wales to adopt the readiness action plan that will guide allied nations for years to come through a set of practical steps and measures of reassurance and deterrence.

In addition to our close defense cooperation, I am also pleased that our bilateral relations are strong in many, many other areas, including and especially cyber and energy security.

Globally, we are working together to promote our common values -- democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Estonia is a world leader in Internet freedom and in e-governance. We have a liberal economy offering many exciting opportunities for increased trade, cooperation and investment. And this is also one reason why we believe that T-TIP is a crucial, crucial effort on the part of both the European Union and the United States.

And let me once again welcome President Obama to Estonia, to Northern Europe, one of Europe’s most prosperous and successful regions. Our countries share common values and interests, and I’m certain that together we can and will contribute to the vision of a Europe whole, free and at peace.

Thank you.

President Obama: Tere PÃ¤evast. To President Ilves -- I want to thank you and the people of Estonia for welcoming me here today. It is a great honor to be in Estonia, especially as we mark our 10th anniversary as NATO Allies.

Mr. President, thank you for being such an outstanding partner. I was proud to welcome you to the White House last year, and we’ve spoken since on the situation in Ukraine. Your life reflects the story of your nation -- the son of refugees who returned home to help to chart a path for a free and democratic Estonia. As many of you know, that long journey also took Toomas and his family to America, to New Jersey, where they still remember him as “Tom.” And it was wonderful to meet your daughter today and find out she had gone back to New Jersey as well. He says that he “knew Bruce Springsteen before he had his first record.” So you embody the deep ties between Americans and Estonians. I want to thank you for your friendship.

I’ve come here today because Estonia is one of the great success stories among the nations that reclaimed their independence after the Cold War. You’ve built a vibrant democracy and new prosperity, and you’ve become a model for how citizens can interact with their government in the 21st century, something President Ilves has championed. With their digital IDs, Estonians can use their smart phones to get just about anything done online -- from their children’s grades to their health records. I should have called the Estonians when we were setting up our health care website.

Most of all, I’m here because Estonia has been a model ally. Estonian forces have served with courage and skill in Iraq and Afghanistan, and we honor our servicemembers who made the ultimate sacrifice in Afghanistan, including nine brave Estonians. As NATO nears the end of our combat mission in three months, I want to thank Estonia for the commitments you have made to help sustain Afghan security forces going forward.

As a high-tech leader, Estonia is also playing a leading role in protecting NATO from cyber threats. Estonia contributes its full share -- its full 2 percent of GDP -- to the defense of our Alliance. In other words, Estonia meets its responsibilities. And as we head into the NATO Summit in Wales, Estonia is an example of how every NATO member needs to do its fair share for our collective defense.

So I’ve come here, first and foremost, to reaffirm the commitment of the United States to the security of Estonia. As NATO Allies, we have Article 5 duties to our collective defense. That is a commitment that is unbreakable. It is unwavering. It is eternal. And Estonia will never stand alone.

As President, I’ve made sure that we are fulfilling that promise. Early in my presidency, I urged our Alliance to update our contingency planning for the defense of this region, and additional NATO forces began rotating through the Baltics, including Estonia, for more training and exercises. In response to Russia’s actions in Ukraine earlier this year, the United States increased our presence further. We have contributed additional aircraft to the Baltic air policing mission -- a mission to which 14 other NATO Allies have also contributed over the past decade. And we’re now continuously rotating additional personnel and aircraft through the Baltics. I look forward to joining Prime Minister RÃµivas in thanking our servicemembers later today.

On my visit to Warsaw this spring, I announced a new initiative to bolster the American military presence here in Europe, including in the Baltics, and we’re working with Congress to make sure that we deliver. Today, I can announce that this initiative will include additional air force units and aircraft for training exercises here in the Nordic-Baltic region. And we agree with our Estonian allies that an ideal location to host and support these exercises would be Amari Air Base here in Estonia. With the support of Congress and our Estonian friends, I’m confident that we can make this happen. And I look forward to discussing this further when we meet with Presidents Bērziņš and Grybauskaitė this afternoon.

As President Ilves indicated, we spend a great deal of time on Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. I’ll have much more to say about this in my speech today. For now, I just want to commend Estonia -- including President Ilves -- for being such a strong voice both in NATO and the EU on behalf of the Ukrainian people. Estonia has provided assistance as Ukrainians work to strengthen their democratic institutions and reform their economy. And because we’ve stood together, Russia is paying a heavy price for its actions, and NATO is poised to do more to help Ukraine strengthen its forces and defend their country.

And more broadly, I want to commend Estonia for being such a strong leader beyond NATO. Whether it’s contributing forces to the EU mission in the Central African Republic or supporting relief efforts for the Syrian people, helping nations like Tunisia in their own transition to democracy or standing up for Internet freedom and human rights, this nation of 1.3 million people, as we say, truly punches above its weight. The world is better for it, and it’s yet another reason why the United States will always be proud to stand with our ally, Estonia.

Finally, I want to say that today the prayers of the American people are with the family of a devoted and courageous journalist, Steven Sotloff. Overnight, our government determined that, tragically, Steven was taken from us in a horrific act of violence. We cannot even begin to imagine the agony that everyone who loved Steven is feeling right now, especially his mother, his father and his younger sister. So today, our country grieves with them.

Like Jim Foley before him, Steve’s life stood in sharp contrast to those who have murdered him so brutally. They make the absurd claim that they kill in the name of religion, but it was Steven, his friends say, who deeply loved the Islamic world. His killers try to claim that they defend the oppressed, but it was Steven who traveled across the Middle East, risking his life to tell the story of Muslim men and women demanding justice and dignity.

Whatever these murderers think they’ll achieve by killing innocent Americans like Steven, they have already failed. They have failed because, like people around the world, Americans are repulsed by their barbarism. We will not be intimidated. Their horrific acts only unite us as a country and stiffen our resolve to take the fight against these terrorists. And those who make the mistake of harming Americans will learn that we will not forget, and that our reach is long and that justice will be served.

Mr. President.

President Ilves: Well, I thought we could open things up for some questions, I understand two from Estonian journalists and two from President Obama’s entourage. As the host, I’ll give the first opportunity to one of our tough questioners, Aarne RannamÃ¤e.

Question: Yes, thank you. Aarne RannamÃ¤e, Estonian Public Broadcasting. I have the same question to both presidents. The partnership between Russia and NATO is not the same, as we all know. Why to keep actually it alive, the agreement signed in 1997 between Russia and NATO? Perhaps it would push or give some new opportunities to our region’s security in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

President Ilves: Well, from our side, first of all, NATO did decide to freeze its relations with Russia several months ago. But on the issue in terms of what is the -- what are the implications of the NATO-Russia Founding Act, I suggest all those who say we can’t do anything because of the NATO-Russia Founding Act read the NATO-Russia Founding Act, which says that these conditions hold -- to quote -- “in the current and foreseeable” future, or “the security environment of the current and foreseeable” future. That was the security environment of 1997, when Boris Yeltsin was President, and there had been no violations of either the U.N. Charter or the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, the 1990 Paris Charter.

So I would argue this is an unforeseen and new security environment, and therefore one has to hold on to certain provisions. It does not mean we have to give up the whole act, but certainly when an agreement in certain parts no longer holds, well, then it’s time to make a change.

I mean, the NATO-Russia Founding Act has been violated by Russia. We continue to support the vision of that document, but its substance has changed dramatically, and I am confident that all of NATO’s actions are and will be conducted in accordance with its international commitments as an alliance.

President Obama: The circumstances clearly have changed. And I think this will be a topic of discussion in Wales. Beyond the issue of that particular document, our top priority has been to make sure that there is no ambiguity when it comes to our Article 5 commitments to our NATO Allies. And as a consequence of the rotations that have been increased, the presence of U.S. troops in the course of those rotations and additional NATO Allies, what we want to send a clear message to everyone is, is that we take those commitments seriously.

And I think what’s going to be clear during the course of this summit is that, given the changed landscape, not only do we have to make sure that these rotations are effective and designed towards current threats, but more broadly, NATO has to look at its defense capabilities as a whole and make sure that they are updated and properly resourced. For I think a certain period of time there was a complacency here in Europe about the demands that were required to make sure that NATO was able to function effectively. My former Secretary of Defense I think came here and gave some fairly sharp speeches repeatedly about the need for making certain that every NATO member was doing its fair share. I think Secretary General Rasmussen, during the course of his tenure, continually emphasized the need for us to upgrade our joint capabilities.

And obviously what’s happened in Ukraine is tragic, but I do think it gives us an opportunity to look with fresh eyes and understand what it is that's necessary to make sure that our NATO commitments are met. And that's one of the reasons that I’m here in Estonia today.

I’m going to call on Ann Compton. Ann is on her farewell tour.

Question: Thank you very much, Mr. President. Now that you say a second American has been slain, what is your response? Will airstrikes continue inside Iraq? Might they expand into Syria? Will you have a full strategy now on ISIS which will satisfy those like Prime Minister Cameron, who call it an imminent threat to all the interests? And will it satisfy some of your supporters like Senator Feinstein who fears that on this you may have been too cautious? Thank you.

President Obama: Well, keep in mind that from the outset, the moment that ISIS went into Mosul, we were very clear that this was a very serious threat not just to Iraq but to the region and to U.S. interests. And so we’ve been putting forward a strategy since that time that was designed to do a number of things. Number one, to make sure that Americans were protected in Iraq, in our embassies, in our consulates. Number two, that we worked with Iraqis to create a functioning government that was inclusive and that could serve as the basis for Iraq to begin to go on the offensive.

And the airstrikes that we’ve conducted in support of protecting Americans conducting humanitarian missions and providing space for the Iraqi government to form have borne fruit. We’ve seen that in Sinjar Mountain. We’ve seen it most recently in the town of Amerli, which heroically held out against a siege by ISIL. We’re seeing progress in the formation of an inclusive Sunni-Shia-Kurd central government. And so what we’ve seen is the strategy that we’ve laid out moving effectively.

But what I’ve said from the start is, is that this is not going to be a one-week or one-month or six-month proposition. Because of what’s happened in the vacuum of Syria, as well as the battle-hardened elements of ISIS that grew out of al Qaeda in Iraq during the course of the Iraq war, it’s going to take time for us to be able to roll them back. And it is going to take time for us to be able to form the regional coalition that's going to be required so that we can reach out to Sunni tribes in some of the areas that ISIS has occupied, and make sure that we have allies on the ground in combination with the airstrikes that we’ve already conducted.

So the bottom line is this: Our objective is clear, and that is to degrade and destroy ISIL so that it’s no longer a threat not just to Iraq but also the region and to the United States. In order for us to accomplish that, the first phase has been to make sure that we’ve got an Iraqi government that's in place and that we are blunting the momentum that ISIL was carrying out. And the airstrikes have done that.

But now what we need to do is make sure that we’ve got the regional strategy in place that can support an ongoing effort -- not just in the air but on the ground -- to move that forward.

And last week when this question was asked, I was specifically referring to the possibility of the military strategy inside of Syria that might require congressional approval. It is very important from my perspective that when we send our pilots in to do a job, that we know that this is a mission that's going to work, that we’re very clear on what our objectives are, what our targets are; we’ve made the case to Congress and we’ve made the case to the American people; and we’ve got allies behind us so that it’s not just a one-off, but it’s something that over time is going to be effective.

And so the bottom line is this, Ann -- it’s not only that we’re going to be bringing to justice those who perpetrated this terrible crime against these two fine young men. More broadly, the United States will continue to lead a regional and international effort against the kind of barbaric and ultimately empty vision that ISIL represents. And that's going to take some time, but we’re going to get it done. I’m very confident of it.

Question: Did you just say that the strategy is to destroy ISIS, or to simply contain them or push them back?

President Obama: Our objective is to make sure that ISIL is not an ongoing threat to the region. And we can accomplish that. It’s going to take some time and it’s going to take some effort. As we’ve seen with al Qaeda, there are always going to be remnants that can cause havoc of any of these networks, in part because of the nature of terrorist activities. You get a few individuals, and they may be able to carry out a terrorist act.

But what we can do is to make sure that the kind of systemic and broad-based aggression that we’ve seen out of ISIL that terrorizes primarily Muslims, Shia, Sunni -- terrorizes Kurds, terrorizes not just Iraqis, but people throughout the region, that that is degraded to the point where it is no longer the kind of factor that we’ve seen it being over the last several months.

Question: Argo Ideon. Estonian daily newspaper, Postimees. My question is also for both presidents. Ukraine is facing a difficult time, and the situation on the ground may become even more complicated in the run-up to the parliamentary elections there in October. In your view, what more could be done and should be done to support Ukraine politically, economically, and also from a security point of view? What do you think about the idea of providing Ukrainian armed forces with weapons to counter Russia’s attack in the east of the country more effectively? Thank you.

President Ilves: Well, most importantly, Ukraine needs above all continued political support. And from that support comes decisions that involve everything else -- economic aid, humanitarian aid, and also military aid. And from that come also decisions on equipment.

In Wales, the NATO-Ukraine committee will gather and will decide how to increase NATO defense cooperation with Ukraine. This is the kind of decision that we in NATO take together. On the humanitarian side, we have doubled our humanitarian and development assistance in looking for what more we can do. We have already brought wounded, seriously wounded Ukrainian soldiers to our top-notch rehabilitation center here and will continue to do so. That is certainly one thing that is -- we know the Ukrainians lack that and we have it at a superbly high level, and also, I should add quickly, that with the assistance with the United States and the Walter Reed Hospital that we have this here.

The next couple of months leading up to the parliamentary elections will be very tricky. Russia, I predict, will do everything in its power to undermine the elections. We saw this already in the case of the presidential elections. It will try to destabilize the government in Kyiv, and to keep Ukraine forces from regaining ground in the east. So we should be prepared for a tough several -- or a month, month and a half. The next government, of course, that will be then will have the full legitimacy that comes with the new parliamentary elections -- must show that it is a clear and better alternative to the one that the people of Ukraine ousted half a year ago.

And I also see that making sure -- ensuring that the elections are carried out in a free and fair manner will be a topmost priority for us, for the OSCE. And I think one of the issues should be, in fact, the kind of interference that we saw in the presidential elections, that not be allowed or be fully addressed and recognized by the monitoring of the elections. I think that we all -- after especially the presidential elections, we all know what the Russian forces can do to disrupt the democratic process. And I think we should be far better prepared to document all of that when we get to the elections.

President Obama: Political support is absolutely vital. And one of our goals at the summit over the next several days is to once again project unity across NATO on behalf of Ukraine’s efforts to maintain its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The sanctions that we’ve applied so far have had a real effect on Russia. And I think it’s important for us to continue to impose costs on Russia so long as it is violating basic principles of international law. And so far at least we’ve been able to combine efforts between Europe and the United States and some of our allies around the world, and the results are a Russian economy that is effectively contracting, capital flight putting a burden on the Russian economy that at the moment may be overridden by politics inside of Russia as a consequence of state-run propaganda, but over time will point to the fact that this is a strategy that’s not serving Russia well, in addition to not serving Ukraine, obviously, well.

Beyond that, the Ukrainian economy is something that we have been paying a lot of attention to. We helped work with the IMF to ensure that Ukraine had the resources to get through some of the emergency financing issues that they had to deal with, but we’re going to have more work to do.

The military efforts that have been required to deal with Russian-financed, Russian-armed, Russian-trained, Russian-supported and often Russian-directed separatists has meant that -- has meant a drain on the Ukrainian economy, not to mention the fact that you have major industrial areas inside of Ukraine that obviously have been impacted by the conflict there.

So we’re going to have to make sure that the international community stands behind the Ukrainian economy in the short term, even as we encourage and advise and work with Ukraine to carry out some of the basic reforms that are going to be required in order for them to achieve the kinds of models of success that we’ve seen in Estonia and Poland and other places. And that’s a tough row to hoe. It took a couple of decades for some of the countries who are currently in the EU to achieve the sort of market-based reforms that have led to such great prosperity.

Ukraine is not going to be able to do that overnight, but we have to make sure that we are helping build a bridge towards that new future. And if we combine those efforts with a commitment to continuing the NATO-Ukraine military relationship -- they are not a member of NATO, but we have consistently worked with their military in terms of training and support -- then I think that not only will Ukraine feel that in words we are behind them, but they’ll see that in deed we are working with them, as well.

Steve Holland of Reuters.

Question: Thank you, sir. Just following up on Ann -- will you have this military strategy on ISIS ready for discussion with NATO allies this week? And in your view, what should NATO be prepared to do to take on Islamic State? Lastly, how much stock do you put in this reported cease-fire between Ukraine and Russia? How do you assess Putin’s motives?

President Obama: It’s too early to tell what this cease-fire means. We haven’t seen any details; we’ve just seen a couple of wire reports. We have consistently supported the effort of President Poroshenko to achieve a meaningful cease-fire that could lead to a political settlement of the conflict.

So far, it hasn’t held, either because Russia has not been serious about it or has pretended that it’s not controlling the separatists; and the separatists, when they’ve thought it was to their advantage, have not abided by the cease-fire. So we haven’t seen a lot of follow-up on so-called announced cease-fires.

Having said that, if, in fact, Russia is prepared to stop financing, arming, training -- in many cases joining with Russian troops -- activities in Ukraine, and is serious about a political settlement, that is something that we all hope for.

I’ve said consistently our preference is a strong, productive, cooperative Russia. But the way to achieve that is by abiding to international norms, to improving the economy, to focusing on how they can actually produce goods and services that other people want and give opportunity to their people and educate them. That's not the path that they’ve been pursuing over the last several years. It’s certainly not in evidence when it comes to their strategy in Ukraine.

I’ll leave it up to others to interpret Mr. Putin’s psychology on this. But in terms of actions, what we’ve seen is aggression and appeals to nationalist sentiments that have historically been very dangerous in Europe and are rightly a cause of concern.

So there’s an opportunity here. Let’s see if there’s follow-up. In my discussions with President Poroshenko I’ve consistently said that he needs to follow up on the kinds of reforms that he proposed so that eastern Ukraine feels as if it is fairly represented and that Russian-language speakers are protected against discrimination. These are all things that are part of this platform. We encourage them to move forward. But no realistic political settlement can be achieved if effectively Russia says we are going to continue to send tanks and troops and arms and advisors under the guise of separatists who are not homegrown, and the only possible settlement is if Ukraine cedes its territory or its sovereignty or its ability to make its own decisions about its security and its economic future.

With respect to Iraq, we will be discussing this topic. Even before ISIL dominated the headlines, one of the concerns that we have had is the development of terrorist networks and organizations, separate and apart from al Qaeda, whose focus oftentimes is regional and who are combining terrorist tactics with the tactics of small armies. And we’ve seen ISIS to be the first one that has broken through, but we anticipated this awhile back and it was reflected in my West Point speech.

So one of our goals is to get NATO to work with us to help create the kinds of partnerships regionally that can combat not just ISIL, but these kinds of networks as they arise and potentially destabilize allies and partners of ours in the region.

Already we’ve seen NATO countries recognize the severity of this problem, that it is going to be a long-run problem. Immediately, they’ve dedicated resources to help us with humanitarian airdrops, to provide arms to the Peshmerga and to the Iraqi security forces. And we welcome those efforts. What we hope to do at the NATO Summit is to make sure that we are more systematic about how we do it, that we’re more focused about how we do it.

NATO is unique in the annals of history as a successful alliance. But we have to recognize that threats evolve, and threats have evolved as a consequence of what we’ve seen in Ukraine, but threats are also evolving in the Middle East that have a direct effect on Europe.

And to go back to what I said earlier to Ann, we know that if we are joined by the international community, we can continue to shrink ISIL’s sphere of influence, its effectiveness, its financing, its military capabilities to the point where it is a manageable problem. And the question is going to be making sure we’ve got the right strategy, but also making sure that we’ve got the international will to do it. This is something that is a continuation of a problem we’ve seen certainly since 9/11, but before. And it continues to metastasize in different ways.

And what we’ve got to do is make sure that we are organizing the Arab world, the Middle East, the Muslim world along with the international community to isolate this cancer, this particular brand of extremism that is, first and foremost, destructive to the Muslim world and the Arab world and North Africa, and the people who live there. They’re the ones who are most severely affected. They’re the ones who are constantly under threat of being killed. They’re the ones whose economies are completely upended to the point where they can’t produce their own food and they can’t produce the kinds of goods and services to sell in the world marketplace. And they’re falling behind because of this very small and narrow, but very dangerous, segment of the population. And we’ve got to combat it in a sustained, effective way. And I’m confident we’re going to be able to do that.

Thank you very much. I appreciate it, Mr. President.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address to the People of Estonia

Thank you. Thank you so much. Hello, Estonia! Tere Eesti! Thank you, Oskar, for your wonderful introduction and for representing the talent and the energy and the optimism of today’s Estonia, especially its young people.

And Oskar is sitting next to his father, and his father and I agree that we’re getting gray, so we have to make sure that somebody is coming up behind us. Please give Oskar a big round of applause for the great job that he did.

To President Ilves and distinguished guests, to the people of Estonia -- it is a great pleasure to be with you in this historic city, in this beautiful land. I thank you for the incredible hospitality that you’ve shown me today. I understand the weather is always like this. My only regret is that I missed this summer’s Laulupidu. And I’ll try to come back next time and catch it. I bring with me the friendship of the American people, and I am honored to be the first President of the United States to deliver an address like this to the people of Estonia.

I just had the opportunity to meet once again with the presidents of all the Baltic states, and I thank the presidents of Latvia and Lithuania for being here. We’re joined by friends from throughout the region. And I want to say a special welcome to everyone watching this out in Freedom Square. And I’m especially pleased to see so many young people here today. Because, like Oskar, you are fulfilling the dream that your parents and grandparents struggled for but could only imagine -- and that is living your lives in free and independent and democratic Baltic nations.

That dream of freedom endured through centuries of occupation and oppression. It blossomed into independence, only to have it stolen by foreign pacts and secret protocols. It survived the mass deportations that ripped parents from their children. It was defended by Forest Brothers in their resistance and sustained by poets and authors who kept alive your languages and cultures. And here in Estonia, it was a dream that found its most eloquent expression in your voices -- on a grassy field not far from here, when Estonians found the courage to stand up against an empire and sing “land of my fathers, land that I love.”

And Heinz Valk, who is here today, spoke for the entire Singing Revolution when he said, “One day, no matter what, we will win!”

And then, exactly 25 years ago, people across the Baltics came together in one of the greatest displays of freedom and non-violent resistance that the world has ever seen. On that August evening, perhaps two million people stepped out of their homes and joined hands -- a human chain of freedom, the Baltic Way. And they stretched down highways and across farmlands, from Tallinn to Riga to Vilnius. They lit candles and they sang anthems. Old men and women brought out their flags of independence. And young parents brought their children to teach them that when ordinary people stand together, great change is possible. Here in Estonia, when people joined the line, the password was “freedom.” As one man said that day, “The Berlin Wall is made of brick and concrete. Our wall is stronger.” And it was.

Within months, that wall in Berlin was pushed open. The next year, the Baltic peoples finally voted in elections. And when the forces of the past made their last grab for power, you stood up. Lithuanians faced down tanks. Latvians manned barricades. Here in Tallinn, citizens rushed to the TV tower to defend the airwaves of democracy. You won. You reclaimed your countries. And in your new constitution you declared, “The independence and sovereignty of Estonia are timeless and inalienable.”

But the people of the Baltic nations also knew that freedom needs a foundation of security. So you reached out to join the NATO Alliance.

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And we were proud to welcome you as new allies, so that those words of your constitution -- your timeless independence -- will always be guaranteed by the strongest military alliance the world has ever known.

Today, people working to build their own democracies -- from Kyiv to Tunis -- look to you for inspiration. Your experience cautions that progress is neither easy nor quick. Here in the Baltics, after decades of authoritarian rule, the habits of democracy had to be learned. The institutions of good governance had to be built. Economies had to be reformed. Foreign forces had to be removed from your territory.

And transitions of this magnitude are daunting for any nation. But the Baltics show the world what’s possible when free peoples come together for the change that they seek. And in that great contest of ideas -- between freedom and authoritarianism, between liberty and oppression -- your success proves, like that human chain 25 years ago, that our way will always be stronger.

We’re stronger because we’re democracies. We’re not afraid of free and fair elections, because true legitimacy can only come from one source -- and that is the people. We’re not afraid of an independent judiciary, because no one is above the law. We’re not afraid of a free press or vibrant debate or a strong civil society, because leaders must be held accountable. We’re not afraid to let our young people go online to learn and discover and organize, because we know that countries are more successful when citizens are free to think for themselves.

We’re stronger because we embrace open economies. Look at the evidence. Here in Estonia, we see the success of free markets, integration with Europe, taking on tough reforms. You’ve become one of the most wired countries on Earth -- a global leader in e-government and high-tech start-ups. The entrepreneurial spirit of the Estonian people has been unleashed, and your innovations, like Skype, are transforming the world.

And we’re stronger because we stand together. This year we celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Baltics in NATO. A decade ago, skeptics wondered whether your countries were up to the task. And today, they need only look at our training exercises, where our troops grow even stronger together, shoulder to shoulder. They can look at Afghanistan, where our forces have sacrificed together to keep us safe -- and where, in just three months, the largest operation in NATO history will come to an end, as planned. There’s no doubt the Baltics have made our alliance stronger.

And your progress reflects a larger truth: Because of the work of generations, because we’ve stood together in a great alliance, because people across this continent have forged a European Union dedicated to cooperation and peace, we have made historic progress toward the vision we share -- a Europe that is whole and free and at peace.

And yet, as we gather here today, we know that this vision is threatened by Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. It is a brazen assault on the territorial integrity of Ukraine -- a sovereign and independent European nation. It challenges that most basic of principles of our international system -- that borders cannot be redrawn at the barrel of a gun; that nations have the right to determine their own future. It undermines an international order where the rights of peoples and nations are upheld and can’t simply be taken away by brute force. This is what’s at stake in Ukraine. This is why we stand with the people of Ukraine today.

Now, let’s put to rest, once and for all, the distortions or outdated thinking that has caused this crisis. Our NATO Alliance is not aimed “against” any other nation; we’re an alliance of democracies dedicated to our own collective defense. Countries like Estonia and Latvia and Lithuania are not “post-Soviet territory.” You are sovereign and independent nations with the right to make your own decisions. No other nation gets to veto your security decisions.

The protests in Ukraine, on the Maidan, were not led by neo-Nazis or fascists. They were led by ordinary Ukrainians -- men and women, young and old -- who were fed up with a corrupt regime and who wanted to share in the progress and prosperity that they see in the rest of Europe. And they did not engage in an “armed seizure of power.” After an agreement was brokered for constitutional reform, the former president then abandoned his office, and parliament endorsed new elections so that today Ukrainians have a new democratically elected president. And I look forward to welcoming President Poroshenko to the Oval Office this month. He was chosen by the people of Ukraine.

It was not the government in Kyiv that destabilized eastern Ukraine; it’s been the pro-Russian separatists who are encouraged by Russia, financed by Russia, trained by Russia, supplied by Russia and armed by Russia. And the Russian forces that have now moved into Ukraine are not on a humanitarian or peacekeeping mission. They are Russian combat forces with Russian weapons in Russian tanks. Now, these are the facts. They are provable. They’re not subject to dispute.

As a result of state-run propaganda, many Russians have become convinced that the actions taken by their government is strengthening Russia. But reaching back to the days of the tsars -- trying to reclaim lands “lost” in the 19th century -- is surely not the way to secure Russia’s greatness in the 21st century. It only shows that unrestrained nationalism is the last refuge of those who cannot or will not deliver real progress and opportunity for their own people at home.

Let’s also be clear where we stand. Just as we refused to accept smaller European nations being dominated by bigger neighbors in the last century, we reject any talk of spheres of influence today. And just as we never accepted the occupation and illegal annexation of the Baltic nations, we will not accept Russia’s occupation and illegal annexation of Crimea or any part of Ukraine.

As free peoples, as an Alliance, we will stand firm and united to meet the test of this moment, and here’s how.

First, we will defend our NATO Allies, and that means every Ally. In this Alliance, there are no old members or new members, no junior partners or senior partners -- there are just Allies, pure and simple. And we will defend the territorial integrity of every single Ally. Today, more NATO aircraft patrol the skies of the Baltics. More American forces are on the ground training and rotating through each of the Baltic states. More NATO ships patrol the Black Sea. Tonight, I depart for the NATO Summit in Wales, and I believe our Alliance should extend these defensive measures for as long as necessary. Because the defense of Tallinn and Riga and Vilnius is just as important as the defense of Berlin and Paris and London.

During the long Soviet occupation, the great Estonian poet, Marie Under, wrote a poem in which she cried to the world: “Who’ll come to help? Right here, at present, now!” And I say to the people of Estonia and the people of the Baltics, today we are bound by our treaty Alliance. We have a solemn duty to each other. Article 51 is crystal clear: An attack on one is an attack on all. So if, in such a moment, you ever ask again, “who will come to help,” you’ll know the answer -- the NATO Alliance, including the Armed Forces of the United States of America, “right here, [at] present, now!” We’ll be here for Estonia. We will be here for Latvia. We will be here for Lithuania. You lost your independence once before. With NATO, you will never lose it again.

Second -- and in addition to the measures we’ve already taken -- the United States is working to bolster the security of our NATO Allies and further increase America’s military presence in Europe. The new initiative I proposed in Warsaw this spring includes several elements, and we’re working with Congress to get it done. Here in the Baltics, it would mean positioning more American equipment so it’s ready if needed. It would mean more training and exercises between our militaries. And it would mean more U.S. forces -- including American boots on the ground -- continuously rotating through Estonia and Latvia and Lithuania.

Third, NATO forces need the ability to deploy even faster in times of crisis. This week, our Alliance must unite around a new plan to enhance our readiness. And that means we need to step up our defense planning, so we’re fully prepared for any threat to any ally. It also means we need to have the infrastructure and facilities that can receive rapid reinforcements, including here in the Baltics. We need to enhance NATO’s Rapid Response Force so it can deploy even more quickly and not just react to threats, but also deter them.

And even as we meet conventional threats, we need to face other challenges. And that includes propaganda campaigns that try to whip up fears and divide people from one another. We reject the idea that people cannot live and thrive together, just because they have different backgrounds or speak a different language. And the best antidotes to such distorted thinking are the values that define us. Not just in the Baltics, but throughout Europe, we must acknowledge the inherent dignity and human rights of every person -- because our democracies cannot truly succeed until we root out bias and prejudice, both from our institutions and from our hearts. We have to uphold a free press and freedom of speech -- because, in the end, lies and misinformation are no match for the truth. We have to embrace open and inclusive societies -- because our countries are more successful and more prosperous when we welcome the talents of all our people, including minorities. That’s part of the work that we must do. That's the example we must set.

Fourth -- even as we keep our countries strong at home, we need to keep our Alliance strong for the future. And that means investing in capabilities like intelligence and surveillance and reconnaissance and missile defense. And here in Europe, nations need to do more to spur the growth and prosperity that sustains our alliance. To its great credit, Estonia stands out as an ally that contributes its full share -- its full two percent of GDP -- to the defense of our alliance. And Latvia and Lithuania have pledged to do the same. So this week -- that's worth applause. So this week’s summit is the moment for every NATO nation to step up and commit to meeting its responsibilities to our alliance. Estonia does it; every ally must do it.

Fifth -- we must continue to stand united against Russia’s aggression in Ukraine. Keep in mind that, repeatedly, President Putin has ignored the opportunity to resolve the crisis in Ukraine diplomatically. The United States, the European Union, our partners around the world have all said we prefer a diplomatic solution. But in light of Russia’s unwillingness to seize that opportunity, we have come together to impose major sanctions on Russia for its actions. And make no mistake, Russia is paying a price. Capital is fleeing, foreign investment is plummeting -- because investors know that today’s Russia is a bad bet, given its behavior. The Russian economy has slipped into recession. Its energy production -- which is the engine of the Russian economy -- is expected to drop. Its credit rating is near junk status. The ruble just fell to an all-time low. In short, Russia’s actions in Ukraine are weakening Russia. Russia’s actions are hurting the Russian people.

And it doesn’t have to be this way. We have no interest in weakening Russia. It’s a nation with a rich history and a remarkable people. We do not seek out confrontation with Russia. Over the past two decades, the United States has gone to great lengths to welcome Russia into the community of nations and to encourage its economic success. We welcome a Russia that is strong and growing and contributes to international security and peace, and that resolves disputes peacefully, with diplomacy.

And in contrast to Russia’s isolation and economic woes today, that path -- which would include a stable and prosperous Ukraine whose sovereignty is respected -- would also ultimately result in greater success and opportunity and respect for Russia. That path remains available to Russia; that path that will deliver truer progress for the Russian people. But it’s a path that starts by Russia changing course and leaving Ukraine so that Ukrainians can make their own decisions. And I have no doubt that one of their decisions would be to have strong relations with not just Europe but also with Russia. But it has to be freely chosen.

And this brings me to the final area where our nations have to come together -- in our steadfast support for those who reach for their freedom. And, yes, that includes the people of Ukraine. And few understand this better than the Baltic peoples. You know from bitter experience that we can never take our security and liberties for granted. We want Ukrainians to be independent and strong and able to make their own choices free from fear and intimidation, because the more countries are free and strong, and free from intimidation, the more secure our own liberties are.

So the United States will continue to help Ukraine reform -- to escape a legacy of corruption and build democratic institutions, to grow its economy, and, like other European nations, diversify its energy sources, because no country should ever be held hostage to another nation that wields energy like a weapon. We’ll continue to offer training and assistance to help the Ukrainian military grow stronger as they defend their country. And since ultimately there is no military solution to this crisis, we will continue to support President Poroshenko’s efforts to achieve peace. Because, like all independent nations, Ukraine must be free to decide its own destiny.

And this week, NATO must send an unmistakable message in support of Ukraine as well. Our Alliance has had a partnership with Ukraine for more than 20 years. Ukrainian forces have served with distinction in NATO operations in the Balkans and Afghanistan. So in Wales, we’ll meet as an Alliance with President Poroshenko to show that our 28 nations are united in support of Ukraine’s sovereignty and right to defend its territory.

Now, Ukraine needs more than words. NATO needs to make concrete commitments to help Ukraine modernize and strengthen its security forces. And, by the way, we have to do more to help other NATO Partners, including Georgia and Moldova, strengthen their defenses as well. And we must reaffirm the principle that has always guided our Alliance -- for countries that meet our standards and that can make meaningful contributions to allied security, the door to NATO membership will remain open.

So this is a moment of testing. The actions of the separatists in Ukraine and Russia evoke dark tactics from Europe’s past that ought to be consigned to a distant history. Masked men storming buildings. Soldiers without flags slipping across the border. Violence sending families fleeing and killing thousands, including nearly 300 innocent men, women and children from all across Europe and around the world when that airliner was shot out of the sky. In the face of violence that seems intractable and suffering that is so senseless, it is easy to grow cynical, and I think tempting to give in to the notion that peace and security may be beyond our grasp.

But I say to all of you here today, especially the young people, do not give into that cynicism. Do not lose the idealism and optimism that is the root of all great change. Don’t ever lose the faith that says, if we want it, if we are willing to work for it, if we stand together, the future can be different; tomorrow can be better. After all, the only reason we’re here today in a free and democratic Estonia is because the Estonian people never gave up.

You never gave up when the Red Army came in from the east, or when the Nazis came in from the west. You never gave up when the Soviets came back or when they sent your best and brightest to the gulag, never to return. You never gave up through a long occupation that tried to break your spirit and crush your culture. Their tanks were no equal to the moral power of your voices, united in song. Their walls were no match for the strength of your people, united in that unbreakable chain. Like the Poles and Hungarians, the Czechs and the Slovaks, and the East Germans on top of that wall, you were stronger and you always believed, “one day, no matter what, we will win.”

Today, your example -- your victory -- gives hope to people all over the world. Yes, there will be setbacks and there will be frustrations, and there will be moments of doubt and moments of despair. The currents of history ebb and flow, but over time they flow toward freedom -- more people, in every corner of the Earth, standing up and reaching to claim those rights that are universal. And that’s why, in the end, our ideals are stronger. And that’s why, in the end, our ideals will win.

Dignity will win -- because every human being is born equal, with free will and inalienable rights. And any regime or system of government that tries to deny these rights will ultimately fail and countries that uphold them will only grow stronger.

Justice will win -- because might does not make right, and the only path to lasting peace is when people know that their dignity will be respected and that their rights will be upheld. And citizens, like nations, will never settle for a world where the big are allowed to bully the small. Sooner or later, they fight back.

Democracy will win -- because a government’s legitimacy can only come from citizens; because in this age of information and empowerment, people want more control over their lives, not less; and because, more than any other form of government ever devised, only democracy, rooted in the sanctity of the individual, can deliver real progress.

And freedom will win -- not because it’s inevitable, not because it is ordained, but because these basic human yearnings for dignity and justice and democracy do not go away. They can be suppressed. At times, they can be silenced, but they burn in every human heart in a place where no regime could ever reach, a light that no army can ever extinguish. And so long as free peoples summon the confidence and the courage and the will to defend the values that we cherish, then freedom will always be stronger and our ideas will always prevail no matter what.

Thank you. And long live our great Alliance. Thank you very much. Thank you.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address to the Nation on the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

My fellow Americans, tonight I want to speak to you about what the United States will do with our friends and allies to degrade and ultimately destroy the terrorist group known as ISIL.

As Commander-in-Chief, my highest priority is the security of the American people. Over the last several years, we have consistently taken the fight to terrorists who threaten our country. We took out Osama bin Laden and much of al Qaeda's leadership in Afghanistan and Pakistan. We've targeted al Qaeda's affiliate in Yemen, and recently eliminated the top commander of its affiliate in Somalia. We've done so while bringing more than 140,000 American troops home from Iraq, and drawing down our forces in Afghanistan, where our combat mission will end later this year. Thanks to our military and counterterrorism professionals, America is safer.

Still, we continue to face a terrorist threat. We can't erase every trace of evil from the world, and small groups of killers have the capacity to do great harm. That was the case before 9/11, and that remains true today. And that's why we must remain vigilant as threats emerge. At this moment, the greatest threats come from the Middle East and North Africa, where radical groups exploit grievances for their own gain. And one of those groups is ISIL -- which calls itself the "Islamic State."

Now let's make two things clear: ISIL is not "Islamic." No religion condones the killing of innocents. And the vast majority of ISIL's victims have been Muslim. And ISIL is certainly not a state. It was formerly al Qaeda's affiliate in Iraq, and has taken advantage of sectarian strife and Syria's civil war to gain territory on both sides of the Iraq-Syrian border. It is recognized by no government, nor by the people it subjugates. ISIL is a terrorist organization, pure and simple. And it has no vision other than the slaughter of all who stand in its way.

In a region that has known so much bloodshed, these terrorists are unique in their brutality. They execute captured prisoners. They kill children. They enslave, rape, and force women into marriage. They threatened a religious minority with genocide. And in acts of barbarism, they took the lives of two American journalists -- Jim Foley and Steven Sotloff.

So ISIL poses a threat to the people of Iraq and Syria, and the broader Middle East -- including American citizens, personnel and facilities. If left unchecked, these terrorists could pose a growing threat beyond that region, including to the United States. While we have not yet detected specific plotting against our homeland, ISIL leaders have threatened America and our allies. Our Intelligence Community believes that thousands of foreigners -– including Europeans and some Americans –- have joined them in Syria and Iraq. Trained and battle-hardened, these fighters could try to return to their home countries and carry out deadly attacks.

I know many Americans are concerned about these threats. Tonight, I want you to know that the United States of America is meeting them with strength and resolve. Last month, I ordered our military to take targeted action against ISIL to stop its advances. Since then, we've conducted more than 150 successful airstrikes in Iraq. These strikes have protected American personnel and facilities, killed ISIL fighters, destroyed weapons, and given space for Iraqi and Kurdish forces to reclaim key territory. These strikes have also helped save the lives of thousands of innocent men, women and children.

But this is not our fight alone. American power can make a decisive difference, but we cannot do for Iraqis what they must do for themselves, nor can we take the place of Arab partners in securing their region. And that's why I've insisted that additional U.S. action depended upon Iraqis forming an inclusive government, which they have now done in recent days. So tonight, with a new Iraqi government in place, and following consultations with allies abroad and Congress at home, I can announce that America will lead a broad coalition to roll back this terrorist threat.

Our objective is clear: We will degrade, and ultimately destroy, ISIL through a comprehensive and sustained counterterrorism strategy.

First, we will conduct a systematic campaign of airstrikes against these terrorists. Working with the Iraqi government, we will expand our efforts beyond protecting our own people and humanitarian missions, so that we're hitting ISIL targets as Iraqi forces go on offense. Moreover, I have made it clear that we will hunt down terrorists who threaten our country, wherever they are. That means I will not hesitate to take action against ISIL in Syria, as well as Iraq. This is a core principle of my presidency: If you threaten America, you will find no safe haven.

Second, we will increase our support to forces fighting these terrorists on the ground. In June, I deployed several hundred American servicemembers to Iraq to assess how we can best support Iraqi security forces. Now that those teams have completed their work –- and Iraq has formed a government –- we will send an additional 475 servicemembers to Iraq. As I have said before, these American forces will not have a combat mission –- we will not get dragged into another ground war in Iraq. But they are needed to support Iraqi and Kurdish forces with training, intelligence and equipment. We'll also support Iraq's efforts to stand up National Guard Units to help Sunni communities secure their own freedom from ISIL's control.

Across the border, in Syria, we have ramped up our military assistance to the Syrian opposition. Tonight, I call on Congress again to give us additional authorities and resources to train and equip these fighters. In the fight against ISIL, we cannot rely on an Assad regime that terrorizes its own people -- a regime that will never regain the legitimacy it has lost. Instead, we must strengthen the opposition as the best counterweight to extremists like ISIL, while pursuing the political solution necessary to solve Syria's crisis once and for all.

Third, we will continue to draw on our substantial counterterrorism capabilities to prevent ISIL attacks. Working with our partners, we will redouble our efforts to cut off its funding; improve our intelligence; strengthen our defenses; counter its warped ideology; and stem the flow of foreign fighters into and out of the Middle East. And in two weeks, I will chair a meeting of the U.N. Security Council to further mobilize the international community around this effort.

Fourth, we will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to innocent civilians who have been displaced by this terrorist organization. This includes Sunni and Shia Muslims who are at grave risk, as well as tens of thousands of Christians and other religious minorities. We cannot allow these communities to be driven from their ancient homelands.

So this is our strategy. And in each of these four parts of our strategy, America will be joined by a broad coalition of partners. Already, allies are flying planes with us over Iraq; sending arms and assistance to Iraqi security forces and the Syrian opposition; sharing intelligence; and providing billions of dollars in humanitarian aid. Secretary Kerry was in Iraq today meeting with the new government and supporting their efforts to promote unity. And in the coming days he will travel across the Middle East and Europe to enlist more partners in this fight, especially Arab nations who can help mobilize Sunni communities in Iraq and Syria, to drive these terrorists from their lands. This is American leadership at its best: We stand with people who fight for their own freedom, and we rally other nations on behalf of our common security and common humanity.

My Administration has also secured bipartisan support for this approach here at home. I have the authority to address the threat from ISIL, but I believe we are strongest as a nation when the President and Congress work together. So I welcome congressional support for this effort in order to show the world that Americans are united in confronting this danger.

Now, it will take time to eradicate a cancer like ISIL. And any time we take military action, there are risks involved –- especially to the servicemen and women who carry out these missions. But I want the American people to understand how this effort will be different from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It will not involve American combat troops fighting on foreign soil. This counterterrorism campaign will be waged through a steady, relentless effort to take out ISIL wherever they exist, using our air power and our support for partner forces on the ground.

This strategy of taking out terrorists who threaten us, while supporting partners on the front lines, is one that we have successfully pursued in Yemen and Somalia for years. And it is consistent with the approach I outlined earlier this year: to use force against anyone who threatens America's core interests, but to mobilize partners wherever possible to address broader challenges to international order.

My fellow Americans, we live in a time of great change. Tomorrow marks 13 years since our country was attacked. Next week marks six years since our economy suffered its worst setback since the Great Depression. Yet despite these shocks, through the pain we have felt and the grueling work required to bounce back, America is better positioned today to seize the future than any other nation on Earth.

Our technology companies and universities are unmatched. Our manufacturing and auto industries are thriving. Energy independence is closer than it's been in decades. For all the work that remains, our businesses are in the longest uninterrupted stretch of job creation in our history. Despite all the divisions and discord within our democracy, I see the grit and determination and common goodness of the American people every single day –- and that makes me more confident than ever about our country's future.

Abroad, American leadership is the one constant in an uncertain world. It is America that has the capacity and the will to mobilize the world against terrorists. It is America that has rallied the world against Russian aggression, and in support of the Ukrainian peoples' right to determine their own destiny. It is America –- our scientists, our doctors, our know-how –- that can help contain and cure the outbreak of Ebola. It is America that helped remove and destroy Syria's declared chemical weapons so that they can't pose a threat to the Syrian people or the world again. And it is America that is helping Muslim communities around the world not just in the fight against terrorism, but in the fight for opportunity, and tolerance, and a more hopeful future.

America, our endless blessings bestow an enduring burden. But as Americans, we welcome our responsibility to lead. From Europe to Asia, from the far reaches of Africa to war-torn capitals of the Middle East, we stand for freedom, for justice, for dignity. These are values that have guided our nation since its founding.

Tonight, I ask for your support in carrying that leadership forward. I do so as a Commander-in-Chief who could not be prouder of our men and women in uniform –- pilots who bravely fly in the face of danger above the Middle East, and servicemembers who support our partners on the ground.

When we helped prevent the massacre of civilians trapped on a distant mountain, here's what one of them said: "We owe our American friends our lives. Our children will always remember that there was someone who felt our struggle and made a long journey to protect innocent people."

That is the difference we make in the world. And our own safety, our own security, depends upon our willingness to do what it takes to defend this nation and uphold the values that we stand for –- timeless ideals that will endure long after those who offer only hate and destruction have been vanquished from the Earth.

May God bless our troops, and may God bless the United States of America.

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# Address on Ebola at the Centers For Disease Control

Good afternoon, everybody. Please be seated. I want to thank Dr. Frieden and everybody here at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for welcoming me here today. Tom and his team just gave me an update on the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, our efforts to help mobilize the international community to fight it, and the steps that we’re taking to keep people here at home safe.

Tom and his team are doing outstanding work. Between the specialists they have on the ground in West Africa and here at headquarters, they’ve got hundreds of professionals who are working tirelessly on this issue. This is the largest international response in the history of the CDC. After this, I’ll be meeting with some of these men and women, including some who recently returned from the front lines of the outbreak. And they represent public service at its very best. And so I just want them to know how much the American people appreciate them. Many of them are serving far away from home, away from their families. They are doing heroic work and serving in some unbelievably challenging conditions -- working through exhaustion, day and night, and many have volunteered to go back. So we are very, very proud of them.

Their work and our efforts across the government is an example of what happens when America leads in confronting some major global challenges. Faced with this outbreak, the world is looking to us, the United States, and it’s a responsibility that we embrace. We’re prepared to take leadership on this to provide the kinds of capabilities that only America has, and to mobilize the world in ways that only America can do. That’s what we’re doing as we speak.

First and foremost, I want the American people to know that our experts, here at the CDC and across our government, agree that the chances of an Ebola outbreak here in the United States are extremely low. We’ve been taking the necessary precautions, including working with countries in West Africa to increase screening at airports so that someone with the virus doesn’t get on a plane for the United States. In the unlikely event that someone with Ebola does reach our shores, we’ve taken new measures so that we’re prepared here at home. We’re working to help flight crews identify people who are sick, and more labs across our country now have the capacity to quickly test for the virus. We’re working with hospitals to make sure that they are prepared, and to ensure that our doctors, our nurses and our medical staff are trained, are ready, and are able to deal with a possible case safely.

And here I’ve got to commend everybody at Emory University Hospital. I just had the opportunity to meet with Doctors Gartland and Ribner and members of their team and the nurses who -- sorry, doctors, but having been in hospitals, I know -- they’re the ones really doing the work. And I had a chance to thank them for their extraordinary efforts in helping to provide care for the first Americans who recently contracted the disease in Africa. The first two of those patients were released last month and continue to improve. And it’s a reminder for the American people that, should any cases appear in the United States, we have world-class facilities and professionals ready to respond. And we have effective surveillance mechanisms in place.

I should mention, by the way, that I had a chance to see Dr. Brantly in the Oval Office this morning. And although he is still having to gain back some weight, he looks great. He looks strong and we are incredibly grateful to him and his family for the service that he has rendered to people who are a lot less lucky than all of us.

As we all know, however, West Africa is facing a very different situation, especially in the hardest hit countries: Liberia, Sierra Leone, and in Guinea. Tom and others recently returned from the region, and the scenes that they describe are just horrific. More than 2,400 men, women and children are known to have died -- and we strongly suspect that the actual death toll is higher than that. Hospitals, clinics and the few treatment centers that do exist have been completely overwhelmed. An already very weak public health system is near collapse in these countries. Patients are being turned away, and people are literally dying in the streets.

Now, here’s the hard truth: In West Africa, Ebola is now an epidemic of the likes that we have not seen before. It’s spiraling out of control. It is getting worse. It’s spreading faster and exponentially. Today, thousands of people in West Africa are infected. That number could rapidly grow to tens of thousands. And if the outbreak is not stopped now, we could be looking at hundreds of thousands of people infected, with profound political and economic and security implications for all of us. So this is an epidemic that is not just a threat to regional security -- it’s a potential threat to global security if these countries break down, if their economies break down, if people panic. That has profound effects on all of us, even if we are not directly contracting the disease.

And that’s why, two months ago, I directed my team to make this a national security priority. We’re working this across our entire government, which is why today I’m joined by leaders throughout my administration, including from my national security team.

And we’ve devoted significant resources in support of our strategy with four goals in mind. Number one, to control the outbreak. Number two, to address the ripple effects of local economies and communities to prevent a truly massive humanitarian disaster. Number three, to coordinate a broader global response. And number four, to urgently build up a public health system in these countries for the future -- not just in West Africa but in countries that don’t have a lot of resources generally.

Now, this is a daunting task. But here’s what gives us hope. The world knows how to fight this disease. It’s not a mystery. We know the science. We know how to prevent it from spreading. We know how to care for those who contract it. We know that if we take the proper steps, we can save lives. But we have to act fast. We can’t dawdle on this one. We have to move with force and make sure that we are catching this as best we can, given that it has already broken out in ways that we had not seen before.

So today, I’m announcing a major increase in our response. At the request of the Liberian government, we’re going to establish a military command center in Liberia to support civilian efforts across the region -- similar to our response after the Haiti earthquake. It’s going to be commanded by Major General Darryl Williams, commander of our Army forces in Africa. He just arrived today and is now on the ground in Liberia. And our forces are going to bring their expertise in command and control, in logistics, in engineering. And our Department of Defense is better at that, our Armed Services are better at that than any organization on Earth.

We’re going to create an air bridge to get health workers and medical supplies into West Africa faster. We’re going to establish a staging area in Senegal to help distribute personnel and aid on the ground more quickly. We are going to create a new training site to train thousands of health workers so they can effectively and safely care for more patients. Personnel from the U.S. Public Health Service will deploy to the new field hospitals that we’re setting up in Liberia. And USAID will join with international partners and local communities in a Community Care Campaign to distribute supplies and information kits to hundreds of thousands of families so they can better protect themselves.

We’re also going to build additional treatment units, including new isolation spaces and more than 1,000 beds. And in all our efforts, the safety of our personnel will remain a top priority. Meanwhile, our scientists continue their urgent research in the hope of finding new treatments and perhaps vaccines. And today I’m calling on Congress to approve the funding that we’ve requested so that we can carry on with all these critical efforts.

Today, the United States is doing even more. But this is a global threat, and it demands a truly global response. International organizations just have to move faster than they have up until this point. More nations need to contribute experienced personnel, supplies, and funding that’s needed, and they need to deliver on what they pledge quickly. Charities and individual philanthropists have given generously, and they can make a big difference. And so we’re not restricting these efforts to governmental organizations; we also need NGOs and private philanthropies to work with us in a coordinated fashion in order to maximize the impact of our response.

This week, the United States will chair an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council. Next week, I’ll join U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to continue mobilizing the international community around this effort. And then, at the White House, we’re going to bring more nations together to strengthen our global health security so that we can better prevent, detect and respond to future outbreaks before they become epidemics.

This is actually something that we had announced several months ago at the G7 meeting. We determined that this has to be a top priority; this was before the Ebola outbreak. We anticipated the fact that in many of these countries with a weak public health system, if we don’t have more effective surveillance, more effective facilities on the ground, and are not helping poor countries in developing their ability to catch these things quickly, that there was at least the potential of seeing these kinds of outbreaks. And sadly, we now see that our predictions were correct. It gives more urgency to this effort -- a global health initiative -- that we have been pushing internationally.

Let me just close by saying this: The scenes that we’re witnessing in West Africa today are absolutely gut-wrenching. In one account over the weekend, we read about a family in Liberia. The disease had already killed the father. The mother was cradling a sick and listless five-year-old son. Her other son, 10-years-old, was dying, too. They finally reached a treatment center but they couldn’t get in. And, said a relative, “We are just sitting.”

These men and women and children are just sitting, waiting to die, right now. And it doesn’t have to be this way.

The reality is that this epidemic is going to get worse before it gets better. But right now, the world still has an opportunity to save countless lives. Right now, the world has the responsibility to act -- to step up, and to do more. The United States of America intends to do more. We are going to keep leading in this effort. We’re going to do our part, and we’re going to continue to make sure that the world understands the need for them to step alongside us as well in order for us to not just save the lives of families like the one I just discussed, but ultimately, to make sure that this doesn’t have the kinds of spillover effects that become even more difficult to control.

So thank you very much to the entire team that’s already doing this work. And please know that you’ve got your President and Commander-in-Chief behind you.

Thank you.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# 69th Session of the United Nations General Assembly Address

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary General, fellow delegates, ladies and gentlemen: We come together at a crossroads between war and peace; between disorder and integration; between fear and hope.

Around the globe, there are signposts of progress. The shadow of World War that existed at the founding of this institution has been lifted, and the prospect of war between major powers reduced. The ranks of member states has more than tripled, and more people live under governments they elected. Hundreds of millions of human beings have been freed from the prison of poverty, with the proportion of those living in extreme poverty cut in half. And the world economy continues to strengthen after the worst financial crisis of our lives.

Today, whether you live in downtown Manhattan or in my grandmother’s village more than 200 miles from Nairobi, you can hold in your hand more information than the world’s greatest libraries. Together, we’ve learned how to cure disease and harness the power of the wind and the sun. The very existence of this institution is a unique achievement -- the people of the world committing to resolve their differences peacefully, and to solve their problems together. I often tell young people in the United States that despite the headlines, this is the best time in human history to be born, for you are more likely than ever before to be literate, to be healthy, to be free to pursue your dreams.

And yet there is a pervasive unease in our world -- a sense that the very forces that have brought us together have created new dangers and made it difficult for any single nation to insulate itself from global forces. As we gather here, an outbreak of Ebola overwhelms public health systems in West Africa and threatens to move rapidly across borders. Russian aggression in Europe recalls the days when large nations trampled small ones in pursuit of territorial ambition. The brutality of terrorists in Syria and Iraq forces us to look into the heart of darkness.

Each of these problems demands urgent attention. But they are also symptoms of a broader problem -- the failure of our international system to keep pace with an interconnected world. We, collectively, have not invested adequately in the public health capacity of developing countries. Too often, we have failed to enforce international norms when it’s inconvenient to do so. And we have not confronted forcefully enough the intolerance, sectarianism, and hopelessness that feeds violent extremism in too many parts of the globe.

Fellow delegates, we come together as united nations with a choice to make. We can renew the international system that has enabled so much progress, or we can allow ourselves to be pulled back by an undertow of instability. We can reaffirm our collective responsibility to confront global problems, or be swamped by more and more outbreaks of instability. And for America, the choice is clear: We choose hope over fear. We see the future not as something out of our control, but as something we can shape for the better through concerted and collective effort. We reject fatalism or cynicism when it comes to human affairs. We choose to work for the world as it should be, as our children deserve it to be.

There is much that must be done to meet the test of this moment. But today I’d like to focus on two defining questions at the root of so many of our challenges -- whether the nations here today will be able to renew the purpose of the UN’s founding; and whether we will come together to reject the cancer of violent extremism.

First, all of us -- big nations and small -- must meet our responsibility to observe and enforce international norms. We are here because others realized that we gain more from cooperation than conquest. One hundred years ago, a World War claimed the lives of many millions, proving that with the terrible power of modern weaponry, the cause of empire ultimately leads to the graveyard. It would take another World War to roll back the forces of fascism, the notions of racial supremacy, and form this United Nations to ensure that no nation can subjugate its neighbors and claim their territory.

Recently, Russia’s actions in Ukraine challenge this post-war order. Here are the facts. After the people of Ukraine mobilized popular protests and calls for reform, their corrupt president fled. Against the will of the government in Kyiv, Crimea was annexed. Russia poured arms into eastern Ukraine, fueling violent separatists and a conflict that has killed thousands. When a civilian airliner was shot down from areas that these proxies controlled, they refused to allow access to the crash for days. When Ukraine started to reassert control over its territory, Russia gave up the pretense of merely supporting the separatists, and moved troops across the border.

This is a vision of the world in which might makes right -- a world in which one nation’s borders can be redrawn by another, and civilized people are not allowed to recover the remains of their loved ones because of the truth that might be revealed. America stands for something different. We believe that right makes might -- that bigger nations should not be able to bully smaller ones, and that people should be able to choose their own future.

And these are simple truths, but they must be defended. America and our allies will support the people of Ukraine as they develop their democracy and economy. We will reinforce our NATO Allies and uphold our commitment to collective self-defense. We will impose a cost on Russia for aggression, and we will counter falsehoods with the truth. And we call upon others to join us on the right side of history -- for while small gains can be won at the barrel of a gun, they will ultimately be turned back if enough voices support the freedom of nations and peoples to make their own decisions.

Moreover, a different path is available -- the path of diplomacy and peace, and the ideals this institution is designed to uphold. The recent cease-fire agreement in Ukraine offers an opening to achieve those objectives. If Russia takes that path -- a path that for stretches of the post-Cold War period resulted in prosperity for the Russian people -- then we will lift our sanctions and welcome Russia’s role in addressing common challenges. After all, that’s what the United States and Russia have been able to do in past years -- from reducing our nuclear stockpiles to meeting our obligations under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, to cooperating to remove and destroy Syria’s declared chemical weapons. And that’s the kind of cooperation we are prepared to pursue again -- if Russia changes course.

This speaks to a central question of our global age -- whether we will solve our problems together, in a spirit of mutual interest and mutual respect, or whether we descend into the destructive rivalries of the past. When nations find common ground, not simply based on power, but on principle, then we can make enormous progress. And I stand before you today committed to investing American strength to working with all nations to address the problems we face in the 21st century.

As we speak, America is deploying our doctors and scientists -- supported by our military -- to help contain the outbreak of Ebola and pursue new treatments. But we need a broader effort to stop a disease that could kill hundreds of thousands, inflict horrific suffering, destabilize economies, and move rapidly across borders. It’s easy to see this as a distant problem -- until it is not. And that is why we will continue to mobilize other countries to join us in making concrete commitments, significant commitments to fight this outbreak, and enhance our system of global health security for the long term.

America is pursuing a diplomatic resolution to the Iranian nuclear issue, as part of our commitment to stop the spread of nuclear weapons and pursue the peace and security of a world without them. And this can only take place if Iran seizes this historic opportunity. My message to Iran’s leaders and people has been simple and consistent: Do not let this opportunity pass. We can reach a solution that meets your energy needs while assuring the world that your program is peaceful.

America is and will continue to be a Pacific power, promoting peace, stability, and the free flow of commerce among nations. But we will insist that all nations abide by the rules of the road, and resolve their territorial disputes peacefully, consistent with international law. That’s how the Asia-Pacific has grown. And that’s the only way to protect this progress going forward.

America is committed to a development agenda that eradicates extreme poverty by 2030. We will do our part to help people feed themselves, power their economies, and care for their sick. If the world acts together, we can make sure that all of our children enjoy lives of opportunity and dignity.

America is pursuing ambitious reductions in our carbon emissions, and we’ve increased our investments in clean energy. We will do our part, and help developing nations do theirs. But the science tells us we can only succeed in combating climate change if we are joined in this effort by every other nation, by every major power. That’s how we can protect this planet for our children and our grandchildren.

In other words, on issue after issue, we cannot rely on a rule book written for a different century. If we lift our eyes beyond our borders -- if we think globally and if we act cooperatively -- we can shape the course of this century, as our predecessors shaped the post-World War II age. But as we look to the future, one issue risks a cycle of conflict that could derail so much progress, and that is the cancer of violent extremism that has ravaged so many parts of the Muslim world.

Of course, terrorism is not new. Speaking before this Assembly, President Kennedy put it well: “Terror is not a new weapon,” he said. “Throughout history it has been used by those who could not prevail, either by persuasion or example.” In the 20th century, terror was used by all manner of groups who failed to come to power through public support. But in this century, we have faced a more lethal and ideological brand of terrorists who have perverted one of the world’s great religions. With access to technology that allows small groups to do great harm, they have embraced a nightmarish vision that would divide the world into adherents and infidels -- killing as many innocent civilians as possible, employing the most brutal methods to intimidate people within their communities.

I have made it clear that America will not base our entire foreign policy on reacting to terrorism. Instead, we’ve waged a focused campaign against al Qaeda and its associated forces -- taking out their leaders, denying them the safe havens they rely on. At the same time, we have reaffirmed again and again that the United States is not and never will be at war with Islam. Islam teaches peace. Muslims the world over aspire to live with dignity and a sense of justice. And when it comes to America and Islam, there is no us and them, there is only us -- because millions of Muslim Americans are part of the fabric of our country.

So we reject any suggestion of a clash of civilizations. Belief in permanent religious war is the misguided refuge of extremists who cannot build or create anything, and therefore peddle only fanaticism and hate. And it is no exaggeration to say that humanity’s future depends on us uniting against those who would divide us along the fault lines of tribe or sect, race or religion.

But this is not simply a matter of words. Collectively, we must take concrete steps to address the danger posed by religiously motivated fanatics, and the trends that fuel their recruitment. Moreover, this campaign against extremism goes beyond a narrow security challenge. For while we’ve degraded methodically core al Qaeda and supported a transition to a sovereign Afghan government, extremist ideology has shifted to other places -- particularly in the Middle East and North Africa, where a quarter of young people have no job, where food and water could grow scarce, where corruption is rampant and sectarian conflicts have become increasingly hard to contain.

As an international community, we must meet this challenge with a focus on four areas. First, the terrorist group known as ISIL must be degraded and ultimately destroyed.

This group has terrorized all who they come across in Iraq and Syria. Mothers, sisters, daughters have been subjected to rape as a weapon of war. Innocent children have been gunned down. Bodies have been dumped in mass graves. Religious minorities have been starved to death. In the most horrific crimes imaginable, innocent human beings have been beheaded, with videos of the atrocity distributed to shock the conscience of the world.

No God condones this terror. No grievance justifies these actions. There can be no reasoning -- no negotiation -- with this brand of evil. The only language understood by killers like this is the language of force. So the United States of America will work with a broad coalition to dismantle this network of death.

In this effort, we do not act alone -- nor do we intend to send U.S. troops to occupy foreign lands. Instead, we will support Iraqis and Syrians fighting to reclaim their communities. We will use our military might in a campaign of airstrikes to roll back ISIL. We will train and equip forces fighting against these terrorists on the ground. We will work to cut off their financing, and to stop the flow of fighters into and out of the region. And already, over 40 nations have offered to join this coalition.

Today, I ask the world to join in this effort. Those who have joined ISIL should leave the battlefield while they can. Those who continue to fight for a hateful cause will find they are increasingly alone. For we will not succumb to threats, and we will demonstrate that the future belongs to those who build -- not those who destroy. So that's an immediate challenge, the first challenge that we must meet.

The second: It is time for the world -- especially Muslim communities -- to explicitly, forcefully, and consistently reject the ideology of organizations like al Qaeda and ISIL.

It is one of the tasks of all great religions to accommodate devout faith with a modern, multicultural world. No children are born hating, and no children -- anywhere -- should be educated to hate other people. There should be no more tolerance of so-called clerics who call upon people to harm innocents because they’re Jewish, or because they're Christian, or because they're Muslim. It is time for a new compact among the civilized peoples of this world to eradicate war at its most fundamental source, and that is the corruption of young minds by violent ideology.

That means cutting off the funding that fuels this hate. It’s time to end the hypocrisy of those who accumulate wealth through the global economy and then siphon funds to those who teach children to tear it down.

That means contesting the space that terrorists occupy, including the Internet and social media. Their propaganda has coerced young people to travel abroad to fight their wars, and turned students -- young people full of potential -- into suicide bombers. We must offer an alternative vision.

That means bringing people of different faiths together. All religions have been attacked by extremists from within at some point, and all people of faith have a responsibility to lift up the value at the heart of all great religions: Do unto thy neighbor as you would do -- you would have done unto yourself.

The ideology of ISIL or al Qaeda or Boko Haram will wilt and die if it is consistently exposed and confronted and refuted in the light of day. Look at the new Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies -- Sheikh bin Bayyah described its purpose: “We must declare war on war, so the outcome will be peace upon peace.” Look at the young British Muslims who responded to terrorist propaganda by starting the “NotInMyName” campaign, declaring, “ISIS is hiding behind a false Islam.” Look at the Christian and Muslim leaders who came together in the Central African Republic to reject violence; listen to the Imam who said, “Politics try to divide the religious in our country, but religion shouldn’t be a cause of hate, war, or strife.”

Later today, the Security Council will adopt a resolution that underscores the responsibility of states to counter violent extremism. But resolutions must be followed by tangible commitments, so we’re accountable when we fall short. Next year, we should all be prepared to announce the concrete steps that we have taken to counter extremist ideologies in our own countries -- by getting intolerance out of schools, stopping radicalization before it spreads, and promoting institutions and programs that build new bridges of understanding.

Third, we must address the cycle of conflict -- especially sectarian conflict -- that creates the conditions that terrorists prey upon.

There is nothing new about wars within religions. Christianity endured centuries of vicious sectarian conflict. Today, it is violence within Muslim communities that has become the source of so much human misery. It is time to acknowledge the destruction wrought by proxy wars and terror campaigns between Sunni and Shia across the Middle East. And it is time that political, civic and religious leaders reject sectarian strife. So let’s be clear: This is a fight that no one is winning. A brutal civil war in Syria has already killed nearly 200,000 people, displaced millions. Iraq has come perilously close to plunging back into the abyss. The conflict has created a fertile recruiting ground for terrorists who inevitably export this violence.

The good news is we also see signs that this tide could be reversed. We have a new, inclusive government in Baghdad; a new Iraqi Prime Minister welcomed by his neighbors; Lebanese factions rejecting those who try to provoke war. And these steps must be followed by a broader truce. Nowhere is this more necessary than Syria.

Together with our partners, America is training and equipping the Syrian opposition to be a counterweight to the terrorists of ISIL and the brutality of the Assad regime. But the only lasting solution to Syria’s civil war is political -- an inclusive political transition that responds to the legitimate aspirations of all Syrian citizens, regardless of ethnicity, regardless of creed.

Cynics may argue that such an outcome can never come to pass. But there is no other way for this madness to end -- whether one year from now or ten. And it points to the fact that it’s time for a broader negotiation in the region in which major powers address their differences directly, honestly, and peacefully across the table from one another, rather than through gun-wielding proxies. I can promise you America will remain engaged in the region, and we are prepared to engage in that effort.

My fourth and final point is a simple one: The countries of the Arab and Muslim world must focus on the extraordinary potential of their people -- especially the youth.

And here I’d like to speak directly to young people across the Muslim world. You come from a great tradition that stands for education, not ignorance; innovation, not destruction; the dignity of life, not murder. Those who call you away from this path are betraying this tradition, not defending it.

You have demonstrated that when young people have the tools to succeed -- good schools, education in math and science, an economy that nurtures creativity and entrepreneurship -- then societies will flourish. So America will partner with those that promote that vision.

Where women are full participants in a country’s politics or economy, societies are more likely to succeed. And that’s why we support the participation of women in parliaments and peace processes, schools and the economy.

If young people live in places where the only option is between the dictates of a state, or the lure of an extremist underground, then no counterterrorism strategy can succeed. But where a genuine civil society is allowed to flourish -- where people can express their views, and organize peacefully for a better life -- then you dramatically expand the alternatives to terror.

And such positive change need not come at the expense of tradition and faith. We see this in Iraq, where a young man started a library for his peers. “We link Iraq’s heritage to their hearts,” he said, and “give them a reason to stay.” We see it in Tunisia, where secular and Islamist parties worked together through a political process to produce a new constitution. We see it in Senegal, where civil society thrives alongside a strong democratic government. We see it in Malaysia, where vibrant entrepreneurship is propelling a former colony into the ranks of advanced economies. And we see it in Indonesia, where what began as a violent transition has evolved into a genuine democracy.

Now, ultimately, the task of rejecting sectarianism and rejecting extremism is a generational task -- and a task for the people of the Middle East themselves. No external power can bring about a transformation of hearts and minds. But America will be a respectful and constructive partner. We will neither tolerate terrorist safe havens, nor act as an occupying power. We will take action against threats to our security and our allies, while building an architecture of counterterrorism cooperation. We will increase efforts to lift up those who counter extremist ideologies and who seek to resolve sectarian conflict. And we will expand our programs to support entrepreneurship and civil society, education and youth -- because, ultimately, these investments are the best antidote to violence.

We recognize as well that leadership will be necessary to address the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis. As bleak as the landscape appears, America will not give up on the pursuit of peace. Understand, the situation in Iraq and Syria and Libya should cure anybody of the illusion that the Arab-Israeli conflict is the main source of problems in the region. For far too long, that's been used as an excuse to distract people from problems at home. The violence engulfing the region today has made too many Israelis ready to abandon the hard work of peace. And that's something worthy of reflection within Israel.

Because let’s be clear: The status quo in the West Bank and Gaza is not sustainable. We cannot afford to turn away from this effort -- not when rockets are fired at innocent Israelis, or the lives of so many Palestinian children are taken from us in Gaza. So long as I am President, we will stand up for the principle that Israelis, Palestinians, the region and the world will be more just and more safe with two states living side by side, in peace and security.

So this is what America is prepared to do: Taking action against immediate threats, while pursuing a world in which the need for such action is diminished. The United States will never shy away from defending our interests, but we will also not shy away from the promise of this institution and its Universal Declaration of Human Rights -- the notion that peace is not merely the absence of war, but the presence of a better life.

I realize that America’s critics will be quick to point out that at times we too have failed to live up to our ideals; that America has plenty of problems within its own borders. This is true. In a summer marked by instability in the Middle East and Eastern Europe, I know the world also took notice of the small American city of Ferguson, Missouri -- where a young man was killed, and a community was divided. So, yes, we have our own racial and ethnic tensions. And like every country, we continually wrestle with how to reconcile the vast changes wrought by globalization and greater diversity with the traditions that we hold dear.

But we welcome the scrutiny of the world -- because what you see in America is a country that has steadily worked to address our problems, to make our union more perfect, to bridge the divides that existed at the founding of this nation. America is not the same as it was 100 years ago, or 50 years ago, or even a decade ago. Because we fight for our ideals, and we are willing to criticize ourselves when we fall short. Because we hold our leaders accountable, and insist on a free press and independent judiciary. Because we address our differences in the open space of democracy -- with respect for the rule of law; with a place for people of every race and every religion; and with an unyielding belief in the ability of individual men and women to change their communities and their circumstances and their countries for the better.

After nearly six years as President, I believe that this promise can help light the world. Because I have seen a longing for positive change -- for peace and for freedom and for opportunity and for the end to bigotry -- in the eyes of young people who I’ve met around the globe.

They remind me that no matter who you are, or where you come from, or what you look like, or what God you pray to, or who you love, there is something fundamental that we all share. Eleanor Roosevelt, a champion of the UN and America’s role in it, once asked, “Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places,” she said, “close to home -- so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm or office where he works.”

Around the world, young people are moving forward hungry for a better world. Around the world, in small places, they're overcoming hatred and bigotry and sectarianism. And they're learning to respect each other, despite differences.

The people of the world now look to us, here, to be as decent, and as dignified, and as courageous as they are trying to be in their daily lives. And at this crossroads, I can promise you that the United States of America will not be distracted or deterred from what must be done. We are heirs to a proud legacy of freedom, and we’re prepared to do what is necessary to secure that legacy for generations to come. I ask that you join us in this common mission, for today’s children and tomorrow’s.

Thank you very much.

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# United Nations Security Council Address

I thank His Excellency, the Secretary-General, for his statement. I'll now make a statement in my capacity as President of the United States.

Mr. Secretary-General, heads of state and government distinguished representatives, thank you for being here today.

In the nearly 70 years of the United Nations, this is only the sixth time that the Security Council has met at a level like this. We convene such sessions to address the most urgent threats to peace and security. And I called this meeting because we must come together -- as nations and an international community -- to confront the real and growing threat of foreign terrorist fighters.

As I said earlier today, the tactic of terrorism is not new.

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So many nations represented here today, including my own, have seen our citizens killed by terrorists who target innocents. And today, the people of the world have been horrified by another brutal murder, of Herve Gourdel, by terrorists in Algeria. President Hollande, we stand with you and the French people not only as you grieve this terrible loss, but as you show resolve against terror and in defense of liberty.

What brings us together today, what is new is the unprecedented flow of fighters in recent years to and from conflict zones, including Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa, Yemen, Libya, and most recently, Syria and Iraq.

Our intelligence agencies estimate that more than 15,000 foreign fighters from more than 80 nations have traveled to Syria in recent years. Many have joined terrorist organizations such as al Qaeda’s affiliate, the Nusrah Front, and ISIL, which now threatens people across Syria and Iraq. And I want to acknowledge and thank Prime Minister Abadi of Iraq for being here today.

In the Middle East and elsewhere, these terrorists exacerbate conflicts; they pose an immediate threat to people in these regions; and as we’ve already seen in several cases, they may try to return to their home countries to carry out deadly attacks. In the face of this threat, many of our nations -- working together and through the United Nations -- have increased our cooperation. Around the world, foreign terrorist fighters have been arrested, plots have been disrupted and lives have been saved.

Earlier this year at West Point, I called for a new Partnership to help nations build their capacity to meet the evolving threat of terrorism, including foreign terrorist fighters. And preventing these individuals from reaching Syria and then slipping back across our borders is a critical element of our strategy to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL.

The historic resolution that we just adopted enshrines our commitment to meet this challenge. It is legally binding. It establishes new obligations that nations must meet. Specifically, nations are required to “prevent and suppress the recruiting, organizing, transporting or equipping” of foreign terrorist fighters, as well as the financing of their travel or activities. Nations must “prevent the movement of terrorists or terrorist groups” through their territory, and ensure that their domestic laws allow for the prosecution of those who attempt to do so.

The resolution we passed today calls on nations to help build the capacity of states on the front lines of this fight -- including with the best practices that many of our nations approved yesterday, and which the United States will work to advance through our Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund. This resolution will strengthen cooperation between nations, including sharing more information about the travel and activities of foreign terrorist fighters. And it makes clear that respecting human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law is not optional -- it is an essential part of successful counterterrorism efforts. Indeed, history teaches us that the failure to uphold these rights and freedoms can actually fuel violent extremism.

Finally, this resolution recognizes that there is no military solution to the problem of misguided individuals seeking to join terrorist organizations, and it, therefore, calls on nations to work together to counter the violent extremism that can radicalize, recruit, and mobilize individuals to engage in terrorism. Potential recruits must hear the words of former terrorist fighters who have seen the truth -- that groups like ISIL betray Islam by killing innocent men, women and children, the majority of whom are Muslim.

Often it is local communities -- family, friends, neighbors, and faith leaders -- that are best able to identify and help disillusioned individuals before they succumb to extremist ideologies and engage in violence. That’s why the United States government is committed to working with communities in America and around the world to build partnerships of trust, respect and cooperation.

Likewise, even as we are unrelenting against terrorists who threaten our people, we must redouble our work to address the conditions -- the repression, the lack of opportunity, too often the hopelessness that can make some individuals more susceptible to appeals to extremism and violence. And this includes continuing to pursue a political solution in Syria that allows all Syrians to live in security, dignity, and peace.

This is the work that we must do as nations. These are the partnerships we must forge as an international community. And these are the standards that we now must meet. Yet even as we’re guided by the commitments that we make here today, let me close by stating the obvious. Resolutions alone will not be enough. Promises on paper cannot keep us safe. Lofty rhetoric and good intentions will not stop a single terrorist attack.

The words spoken here today must be matched and translated into action, into deeds -- concrete action, within nations and between them, not just in the days ahead, but for years to come. For if there was ever a challenge in our interconnected world that cannot be met by any one nation alone, it is this: terrorists crossing borders and threatening to unleash unspeakable violence. These terrorists believe our countries will be unable to stop them. The safety of our citizens demand that we do. And I’m here today to say that all of you who are committed to this urgent work will find a strong and steady partner in the United States of America.

I now would like to resume my function as President of the Council. And I will now give the floor to the other members of the Security Council.

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# United Nations Meeting Address on Ebola Outbreak

Mr. Secretary-General, thank you for bringing us together today to address an urgent threat to the people of West Africa, but also a potential threat to the world.

Dr. Chan, heads of state and government, especially our African partners, ladies and gentlemen: As we gather here today, the people of Liberia and Sierra Leone and Guinea are in crisis. As Secretary-General Ban and Dr. Chan have already indicated, the Ebola virus is spreading at alarming speed. Thousands of men, women and children have died. Thousands more are infected. If unchecked, this epidemic could kill hundreds of thousands of people in the coming months. Hundreds of thousands.

Ebola is a horrific disease. It’s wiping out entire families. It has turned simple acts of love and comfort and kindness -- like holding a sick friend’s hand, or embracing a dying child -- into potentially fatal acts. If ever there were a public health emergency deserving an urgent, strong and coordinated international response, this is it.

But this is also more than a health crisis. This is a growing threat to regional and global security. In Liberia, in Guinea, in Sierra Leone, public health systems have collapsed. Economic growth is slowing dramatically. If this epidemic is not stopped, this disease could cause a humanitarian catastrophe across the region. And in an era where regional crises can quickly become global threats, stopping Ebola is in the interest of all of us.

The courageous men and women fighting on the front lines of this disease have told us what they need. They need more beds, they need more supplies, they need more health workers, and they need all of this as fast as possible. Right now, patients are being left to die in the streets because there’s nowhere to put them and there’s nobody to help them. One health worker in Sierra Leone compared fighting this outbreak to “fighting a forest fire with spray bottles.” But with our help, they can put out the blaze.

Last week, I visited the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which is mounting the largest international response in its history. I said that the world could count on America to lead, and that we will provide the capabilities that only we have, and mobilize the world the way we have done in the past in crises of similar magnitude. And I announced that, in addition to the civilian response, the United States would establish a military command in Liberia to support civilian efforts across the region.

Today, that command is up and it is running. Our commander is on the ground in Monrovia, and our teams are working as fast as they can to move in personnel, equipment and supplies. We’re working with Senegal to stand up an air bridge to get health workers and medical supplies into West Africa faster. We’re setting up a field hospital, which will be staffed by personnel from the U.S. Public Health Service, and a training facility, where we’re getting ready to train thousands of health workers from around the world. We’re distributing supplies and information kits to hundreds of thousands of families so they can better protect themselves. And together with our partners, we’ll quickly build new treatment units across Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone, where thousands will be able to receive care.

Meanwhile, in just the past week, more countries and organizations have stepped up their efforts -- and so has the United Nations. Mr. Secretary-General, the new UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response that you announced last week will bring all of the U.N.’s resources to bear in fighting the epidemic. We thank you for your leadership.

So this is all progress, and it is encouraging. But I want us to be clear: We are not moving fast enough. We are not doing enough. Right now, everybody has the best of intentions, but people are not putting in the kinds of resources that are necessary to put a stop to this epidemic. There is still a significant gap between where we are and where we need to be. We know from experience that the response to an outbreak of this magnitude has to be fast and it has to be sustained. It’s a marathon, but you have to run it like a sprint.

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And that’s only possible if everybody chips in, if every nation and every organization takes this seriously. Everybody here has to do more.

International organizations have to move faster, and cut through red tape and mobilize partners on the ground as only they can. More nations need to contribute critical assets and capabilities -- whether it is air transport, or medical evacuation, or health care workers, or equipment, or treatment. More foundations can tap into the networks of support that they have, to raise funds and awareness. More businesses, especially those who already have a presence in the region, can quickly provide their own expertise and resources, from access to critical supply chains to telecommunications. And more citizens -- of all nations -- can educate themselves on this crisis, contribute to relief efforts, and call on their leaders to act. So everybody can do something. That’s why we’re here today.

And even as we meet the urgent threat of Ebola, it’s clear that our nations have to do more to prevent, detect and respond to future biological threats -- before they erupt into full-blown crises. Tomorrow, in Washington, I’ll host 44 nations to advance our Global Health Security Agenda, and we are interested in working with any country that shares this commitment.

Just to emphasize this issue of speed again. When I was down at the CDC -- and perhaps this has already been discussed, but I want to emphasize this -- the outbreak is such where at this point more people will die. But the slope of the curve, how fast we can arrest the spread of this disease, how quickly we can contain it is within our control. And if we move fast, even if imperfectly, then that could mean the difference between 10,000, 20,000, 30,000 deaths versus hundreds of thousands or even a million deaths. So this is not one where there should be a lot of wrangling and people waiting to see who else is doing what. Everybody has got to move fast in order for us to make a difference. And if we do, we'll save hundreds of thousands of lives.

Stopping Ebola is a priority for the United States. I've said that this is as important a national security priority for my team as anything else that's out there. We'll do our part. We will continue to lead, but this has to be a priority for everybody else. We cannot do this alone. We don't have the capacity to do all of this by ourselves. We don't have enough health workers by ourselves. We can build the infrastructure and the architecture to get help in, but we're going to need others to contribute.

To my fellow leaders from Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, to the people of West Africa, to the heroic health workers who are on the ground as we speak, in some cases, putting themselves at risk -- I want you to know that you are not alone. We’re working urgently to get you the help you need. And we will not stop, we will not relent until we halt this epidemic once and for all.

So I want to thank all of you for the efforts that are made. But I hope that I'm properly communicating a sense of urgency here. Do not stand by, thinking that somehow, because of what we've done, that it's taken care of. It's not. And if we don't take care of this now we are going to see fallout effects and secondary effects from this that will have ramifications for a long time, above and beyond the lives that will have been lost.

I urge all of you, particularly those who have direct access to your heads of state, to make sure that they are making this a top priority in the next several weeks and months.

Thank you very much.

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# Address on Signing Executive Order 13681

President Obama: Good job, everybody. Everybody, please have a seat. Well, it is good to be back at CFPB.

Audience Member: Woo!

President Obama: Yes, this is an enthusiastic and rowdy crowd, this group. That’s what happens when you do good things -- you feel good. And this group is doing great work.

I want to thank your director, Rich Cordray, for hosting me here today, and I want to thank all of you for doing a great job in looking out for the financial security of all Americans.

Now, obviously, right now the news is dominated by Ebola, and we’ve got an all-hands-on-deck approach across government to make sure that we are keeping the American people safe. But even as we meet that particular challenge, it’s also important that we don’t lose sight of the other challenges that we face as a nation, especially the challenge of making sure that our economy works for every single American. And that includes the challenge that brings me here today: protecting Americans from financial fraud and identity theft.

As President, I believe that America is stronger when our middle class can count on things like affordable health insurance, and Medicare and Social Security, where there are rules to protect our kids from dirty air or dirty water; rules to protect consumers from being taken advantage of. And I know you agree, those of you at CFPB, because that’s your mission.

And that’s why part of the financial reform that we passed in the wake of the worse financial crisis since the Great Depression was the creation of this agency, to make sure that we are looking at every aspect of the financial system and ensuring that the American people have the basic protections that they should be able to count on. You have one mission: You’re a watchdog for consumers to make sure that the American people have somebody who’s got their backs.

And because of the good work of many of the people who are here today, Americans have saved millions because they’ve been protected from predatory mortgage practices. You’ve protected folks from deceptive credit card practices. You’ve set up “Know Before You Owe” to help college be a little more affordable for young people and to make sure that they know the kind of debt that they’re accruing. You’ve simplified mortgage forms so homeowners don’t get tricked in the final print. But all this work, taken together, the reason it’s important is because it’s not an abstraction; it saves people money and time and heartache.

And before you, Americans who had gotten taken advantage of often had no way of achieving some sort of compensation. Today, you’ve actually secured billions of dollars in relief for victims. You’ve helped to make people a little more whole after somebody engaged in fraudulent behavior.

Some folks in Congress fought tooth and nail to keep this agency from getting off the ground. There are some, frankly, who are still fighting to undo the rules we put in place to protect consumers. But I refuse to back down and go back to the days when mortgage lenders or financial firms could take advantage of consumers, and consumers had no recourse. We’re moving forward. America is better because of this agency and because of the rules that we’ve put in place.

And the good news is, is that we’ve got more work to do. And today, we’re building on the progress that’s already been made by announcing new measures to protect America from identity theft and fraud.

Now, we’ve all experienced the benefits of new technologies that let us buy and sell things faster and more efficiently than ever before. But there are risks that come with these technologies as well. Last year, millions of Americans became victims of identity theft. Millions were victims of this kind of fraud. More than 100 million Americans had information that was compromised in data breaches in some of our largest companies. And identity theft is now America’s fastest-growing crime.

These crimes don’t just cost companies and consumers billions of dollars every year, they also threaten the economic security of middle-class Americans who have worked really hard for a lifetime to build some sort of security. The idea that somebody halfway around the world could run up thousands of dollars in charges in your name just because they stole your number, or because you swiped your card at the wrong place in the wrong time, that’s infuriating. For victims, it’s heartbreaking. And as a country, we’ve got to do more to stop it.

And that’s why today we are launching an initiative called “Buy Secure” -- because you should be able to buy the things that you need without risking your identity, your credit score, or your savings.

First, starting next year, we’re going to begin making sure that credit cards and credit-card readers issued by the United States government come equipped with two new layers of protection: a microchip in the card that’s harder for thieves to clone than a magnetic strip, and a pin number you enter into the reader just as you do with an ATM. We know this technology works. When Britain switched to a chip-and-pin system, they cut fraud in stores by 70 percent. Seventy percent.

Of course, no one security measure, no matter how powerful, can stop fraud on its own. So today, I’m also directing federal law enforcement to share more information with the private sector when they discover identity theft rings.

Folks here at the CFPB are working with banks to help make it easier for consumers to discover if fraudulent charges have been made to their account. The Federal Trade Commission will add new features to IdentityTheft.gov, and they’re going to work with credit bureaus to dramatically cut down on the time it takes for victims to recover their stolen identities. And in the coming months I’ll be bringing together industry leaders and consumer advocates for a cybersecurity summit focused on protecting consumers using the next generation of mobile payment systems and devices.

And I’m happy to say that the private sector is already deeply engaged in this effort. Today, a group of retailers that include some of our largest -- Home Depot, Target, Walgreens, Walmart -- and representing more than 15,000 stores across the country, all of them are pledging to adopt chip-and-pin technology by the beginning of next year. American Express is pledging $10 million to replace outdated card readers at small businesses. MasterCard is pledging to provide its customers with free identity-theft monitoring and resolution support. And Citi is joining other financial institutions in making free FICO scores available to customers, because a sudden drop in your credit rating is one of the clearest signs that you’ve been hit by fraud.

So I want to thank all the business leaders who are choosing to protect their companies and their customers from the kind of hacking that we saw too many times this past year. I want to encourage every retailer, every bank, and every credit card company to join them in this effort.

And even though I’m taking action today without Congress, Congress needs to do its part, as well. Today, data breaches are handled by dozens of separate state laws, and it’s time to have one clear national standard that brings certainty to businesses and keeps consumers safe.

Let me just close by saying this. Last week, I saw a survey that asked folks from all over the world what they thought of the idea that “success in life is pretty much determined by forces outside of our control.” Of all the advanced economies on Earth, Americans, as you might expect, were the least likely to agree with that. We think our fate is in our own hands. We think that if we work hard, that we can get ahead. For all the challenges of the 21st century, for all the tough, grueling work that's been required to rebuild this economy and people rebuilding their individual lives after a terrible recession, we still believe that our destiny is written by us -- not for us. We believe that this is a country where hard work should pay off and responsibility should be rewarded.

That’s the principle all of you here at the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau deeply believe in. That's what you're fighting for every single day. That's what I’m going to keep fighting for as long as I have the opportunity to be President. And the executive order I’m signing and the great work that the companies are doing who are participating here today is going to just be one more brick in that bridge that we provide to hopefully all Americans so that they can translate their dreams into reality.

So good job, everybody. Let me sign this.1

President Obama: Rich, I should mention, by the way, that I went to a restaurant up in New York when I was there during the General Assembly, and my credit card was rejected. It turned out I guess I don't use it enough. So they thought there was some fraud going on. Fortunately, Michelle had hers. And I was trying to explain to the waitress, no, I really think that I’ve been paying my bills. Even I’m affected by this.

Thank you very much, everybody.

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# Ebola Response Update

Good afternoon, everybody. I just want to offer a quick update on Ebola and a number of the issues that have been raised.

We know that the best way to protect Americans ultimately is going to stop this outbreak at the source. And I just had the privilege of speaking with some of the men and women who are working to do just that -- our Disaster Assistance Response Team on the ground in West Africa.

First and foremost, I thanked them for their incredible dedication and compassion. These are the folks that, from the minute that we saw this Ebola outbreak growing larger than we had seen traditionally, were deployed, were on the ground, and were helping to coordinate the countries where the outbreak is happening to make sure that the response was effective.

And it's typical of what America does best -- when others are in trouble, when disease or disaster strikes, Americans help. And no other nation is doing as much to make sure that we contain and ultimately eliminate this outbreak than America.

We deployed this DART team to West Africa back in early August. They’re now the strategic and operational backbone of America’s response. They’ve increased the number of Ebola treatment units and burial teams. They’ve expanded the pipeline of medical personnel and equipment and supplies. They’ve launched an aggressive education campaign in-country. The bottom line is, is that they’re doing what it takes to make sure that medical personnel and health care workers from all countries have what they need to get the job done.

And the good news is that it's starting to have an impact. Based on the conversations that I had today with them, they’re starting to see some progress in Liberia, and the infrastructure is beginning to get built out. That's thanks to the incredible work and dedication of folks from the United States who are leading the way in helping Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone.

And it's critical that we maintain that leadership. The truth is that we're going to have to stay vigilant here at home until we stop the epidemic at its source. And for that, we're going to need to make sure that our doctors and our health care professionals here in the United States are properly trained and informed and that they are coordinated if and when an Ebola case crops up here in the United States. But what’s also critically important is making sure that all the talent, skill, compassion, professionalism, dedication and experience of our folks here can be deployed to help those countries deal with this outbreak at the source.

And that's why, yesterday, the CDC announced that we're going to have new monitoring and movement guidance that is sensible, based in science, and tailored to the unique circumstances of each health worker that may be returning from one of these countries after they have provided the kind of help that they need. In fact, tomorrow I'm going to have a chance to meet with doctors and public health workers who’ve already returned from fighting this disease in West Africa or who are about to go -- not only to say thank you to them and give them encouragement, but to make sure that we're getting input from them based on the science, based on the facts, based on experience, about how the battle to deal with Ebola is going and how our policies can support the incredible heroism that they are showing.

So we don't want to discourage our health care workers from going to the frontlines and dealing with this in an effective way. Our medical teams here are getting better and better prepared and trained for the possibility of an isolated Ebola case here in the United States. But in the meantime, we've got to make sure that we continue to provide the support of health workers who are going overseas to deal with the disease where it really has been raging.

It's also important for the American people to remind themselves that only two people so far have contracted Ebola on American soil -- the two Dallas nurses who treated a patient who contracted it in West Africa. Today both of them are disease-free. I met with one of them, Nina Pham, last week, and she is doing wonderfully. And I just had a chance to get off the phone with Amber Vinson, who is on her way back home and also, as many of you saw in her press statement today, is doing well also.

Of the seven Americans treated for Ebola so far, all have survived. Right now, the only American still undergoing treatment is Dr. Craig Spencer, who contracted the disease abroad while working to protect others. And we should be saluting his service. And we are focused on getting him the best care possible, as well. And our thoughts and prayers are with him.

Meanwhile, the West African nations of Senegal and Nigeria have now been declared Ebola-free. That's in part because of outstanding work led in many cases by Americans working in coordination with those countries to make sure that we did not see an outbreak there.

So the point is, is that this disease can be contained. It will be defeated. Progress is possible. But we're going to have to stay vigilant and we've got to make sure that we're working together. We have to keep leading the global response. America cannot look like it is shying away because other people are watching what we do, and if we don't have a robust international response in West Africa, then we are actually endangering ourselves here back home. In order to do that, we've got to make sure that those workers who are willing and able and dedicated to go over there in a really tough job, that they’re applauded, thanked and supported. That should be our priority.

And we can make sure that when they come back they are being monitored in a prudent fashion. But we want to make sure that we understand that they are doing God’s work over there. And they’re doing that to keep us safe. And I want to make sure that every policy we put in place is supportive of their efforts, because if they are successful then we're not going to have to worry about Ebola here at home.

America in the end is not defined by fear. That's not who we are. America is defined by possibility. And when we see a problem and we see a challenge, then we fix it. We don't just react based on our fears. We react based on facts and judgment and making smart decisions. That's how we have built this country and sustained this country and protected this country. That's why America has defined progress -- because we're not afraid when challenges come up.

Thanks to our military, our dedicated medical and health care professionals, the men and women who I spoke to today in West Africa, that leadership and progress continues. And we're going to keep on making progress and we are going to solve this particular problem just like we’ve solved every other problem.

But it starts with us having the confidence and understanding that, as challenging as this may be, this is something that will get fixed -- in large part because we've got extraordinary Americans with experience, talent, dedication, who are willing to put themselves on the frontlines to get things done.

I'll have more to say about this tomorrow when I have those workers here. But I just wanted to emphasize how proud I am of the people who are already involved in this effort, and how confident I am after speaking to them that, in fact, we're going to get this problem under control.

All right? Thank you.

Question: Are you concerned, sir, that there might be some confusion between the quarantine rules used by the military and used by health care workers and by some states?

President Obama: Well, the military is a different situation, obviously, because they are, first of all, not treating patients. Second of all, they are not there voluntarily, it’s part of their mission that's been assigned to them by their commanders and ultimately by me, the Commander-in-Chief. So we don't expect to have similar rules for our military as we do for civilians. They are already, by definition, if they're in the military, under more circumscribed conditions.

When we have volunteers who are taking time out from their families, from their loved ones and so forth, to go over there because they have a very particular expertise to tackle a very difficult job, we want to make sure that when they come back that we are prudent, that we are making sure that they are not at risk themselves or at risk of spreading the disease, but we don't want to do things that aren’t based on science and best practices. Because if we do, then we’re just putting another barrier on somebody who’s already doing really important work on our behalf. And that's not something that I think any of us should want to see happen.

All right? Thank you, guys.

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# Presser on Republican Midterm Election Victory

Good afternoon, everybody. Have a seat.

Today, I had a chance to speak with John Boehner and congratulated Mitch McConnell on becoming the next Senate Majority Leader. And I told them both that I look forward to finishing up this Congress’ business, and then working together for the next two years to advance America’s business. And I very much appreciated Leader McConnell’s words last night about the prospect of working together to deliver for the American people. On Friday, I look forward to hosting the entire Republican and Democratic leadership at the White House to chart a new course forward.

Obviously, Republicans had a good night, and they deserve credit for running good campaigns. Beyond that, I’ll leave it to all of you and the professional pundits to pick through yesterday’s results. What stands out to me, though, is that the American people sent a message, one that they’ve sent for several elections now. They expect the people they elect to work as hard as they do. They expect us to focus on their ambitions and not ours. They want us to get the job done.

All of us, in both parties, have a responsibility to address that sentiment. Still, as President, I have a unique responsibility to try and make this town work. So, to everyone who voted, I want you to know that I hear you. To the two-thirds of voters who chose not to participate in the process yesterday, I hear you, too. All of us have to give more Americans a reason to feel like the ground is stable beneath their feet, that the future is secure, that there’s a path for young people to succeed, and that folks here in Washington are concerned about them. So I plan on spending every moment of the next two-plus years doing my job the best I can to keep this country safe and to make sure that more Americans share in its prosperity.

This country has made real progress since the crisis six years ago. The fact is more Americans are working; unemployment has come down. More Americans have health insurance. Manufacturing has grown. Our deficits have shrunk. Our dependence on foreign oil is down, as are gas prices. Our graduation rates are up. Our businesses aren’t just creating jobs at the fastest pace since the 1990s, our economy is outpacing most of the world. But we’ve just got to keep at it until every American feels the gains of a growing economy where it matters most, and that's in their own lives.

Obviously, much of that will take action from Congress. And I’m eager to work with the new Congress to make the next two years as productive as possible. I'm committed to making sure that I measure ideas not by whether they are from Democrats or Republicans, but whether they work for the American people. And that’s not to say that we won’t disagree over some issues that we’re passionate about. We will. Congress will pass some bills I cannot sign. I'm pretty sure I'll take some actions that some in Congress will not like. That’s natural. That's how our democracy works. But we can surely find ways to work together on issues where there’s broad agreement among the American people.

So I look forward to Republicans putting forward their governing agenda. I will offer my ideas on areas where I think we can move together to respond to people’s economic needs.

So, just take one example. We all agree on the need to create more jobs that pay well. Traditionally, both parties have been for creating jobs rebuilding our infrastructure -- our roads, bridges, ports, waterways. I think we can hone in on a way to pay for it through tax reform that closes loopholes and makes it more attractive for companies to create jobs here in the United States.

We can also work together to grow our exports and open new markets for our manufacturers to sell more American-made goods to the rest of the world. That's something I’ll be focused on when I travel to Asia next week.

We all share the same aspirations for our young people. And I was encouraged that this year Republicans agreed to investments that expanded early childhood education. I think we've got a chance to do more on that front. We’ve got some common ideas to help more young people afford college and graduate without crippling debt so that they have the freedom to fill the good jobs of tomorrow and buy their first homes and start a family.

And in the five states where a minimum wage increase was on the ballot last night, voters went five for five to increase it. That will give about 325,000 Americans a raise in states where Republican candidates prevailed. So that should give us new reason to get it done for everybody, with a national increase in the minimum wage.

So those are some areas where I think we've got some real opportunities to cooperate. And I am very eager to hear Republican ideas for what they think we can do together over the next couple of years. Of course, there’s still business on the docket that needs attention this year. And here are three places where I think we can work together over the next several weeks, before this Congress wraps up for the holidays.

First, I’m submitting a request to Congress for funding to ensure that our doctors, scientists, and troops have the resources that they need to combat the spread of Ebola in Africa and to increase our preparedness for any future cases here at home.

Second, I'm going to begin engaging Congress over a new Authorization to Use Military Force against ISIL. The world needs to know we are united behind this effort, and the men and women of our military deserve our clear and unified support.

Third, back in September, Congress passed short-term legislation to keep the government open and operating into December. That gives Congress five weeks to pass a budget for the rest of the fiscal year. And I hope that they’ll do it in the same bipartisan, drama-free way that they did earlier this year. When our companies are steadily creating jobs -- which they are -- we don’t want to inject any new uncertainty into the world economy and to the American economy.

The point is it’s time for us to take care of business. There are things this country has to do that can’t wait another two years or another four years. There are plans this country has to put in place for our future.

And the truth is I’m optimistic about our future. I have good reason to be. I meet Americans all across the country who are determined, and big-hearted, and ask what they can do, and never give up, and overcome obstacles. And they inspire me every single day. So the fact is I still believe in what I said when I was first elected six years ago last night. For all the maps plastered across our TV screens today, and for all the cynics who say otherwise, I continue to believe we are simply more than just a collection of red and blue states. We are the United States.

And whether it's immigration or climate change, or making sure our kids are going to the best possible schools, to making sure that our communities are creating jobs; whether it's stopping the spread of terror and disease, to opening up doors of opportunity to everybody who’s willing to work hard and take responsibility -- the United States has big things to do. We can and we will make progress if we do it together. And I look forward to the work ahead.

So, with that, let me take some questions. I think that our team has got my list. And we're going to start with Julie Pace at Associated Press.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. You said during this election that while your name wasn’t on the ballot, your policies were. And despite the optimism that you’re expressing here, last night was a devastating night for your party. Given that, do you feel any responsibility to recalibrate your agenda for the next two years? And what changes do you need to make in your White House and in your dealings with Republicans in order to address the concerns that voters expressed with your administration?

President Obama: Well, as I said in my opening remarks, the American people overwhelmingly believe that this town doesn’t work well and that it is not attentive to their needs. And as President, they, rightly, hold me accountable to do more to make it work properly. I’m the guy who’s elected by everybody, not just from a particular state or a particular district. And they want me to push hard to close some of these divisions, break through some of the gridlock, and get stuff done. So the most important thing I can do is just get stuff done, and help Congress get some things done.

In terms of agenda items, though, Julie, if you look, as I just mentioned, to a minimum wage increase, for example, that’s something I talked about a lot during the campaign. Where voters had a chance to vote directly on that agenda item, they voted for it. And so I think it would be hard to suggest that people aren’t supportive of it. We know that the surveys consistently say they want to see that happen.

The key is to find areas where the agenda that I’ve put forward, one that I believe will help strengthen the middle class and create more ladders of opportunity into the middle class, and improve our schools, and make college more affordable to more young people, and make sure that we’re growing faster as an economy and we stay competitive -- the key is to make sure that those ideas that I have overlap somewhere with some of the ideas that Republicans have.

There’s not going to be perfect overlap. I mean, there are going to be some ideas that I’ve got that I think the evidence backs up would be good for the economy; and Republicans disagree. They’re not going to support those ideas. But I’m going to keep on arguing for them because I think they’re the right thing for the country to do. There are going to be some ideas that they’ve got that they believe will improve the economy or create jobs that, from my perspective, isn’t going to help middle-class families improve their economic situation, so I probably won’t support theirs.

But I do think there are going to be areas where we do agree -- on infrastructure, on making sure that we’re boosting American exports. And part of my task then is to reach out to Republicans, make sure that I’m listening to them. I’m looking forward to them putting forward a very specific agenda in terms of what they would like to accomplish. Let’s compare notes in terms of what I’m looking at and what they’re looking at, and let’s get started on those things where we agree. Even if we don’t agree 100 percent, let’s get started on those things where we agree 70, 80, 90 percent. And if we can do that, and build up some trust and improve how processes work in Washington, then I think that’s going to give the American people a little bit more confidence that, in fact, their government is looking after them.

Question: But is there anything specific that you feel like you and your administration need to change given this disastrous election for your party and the message that voters sent?

President Obama: Julie, I think every single day I’m looking for, how can we do what we need to do better. Whether that is delivering basic services the government provides to the American people; whether that is our capacity to work with Congress so that they’re passing legislation; whether it’s how we communicate with the American people about what our priorities and vision is -- we are constantly asking ourselves questions about how do we make sure that we’re doing a better job. And that’s not going to stop. I think that every election is a moment for reflection, and I think that everybody in this White House is going to look and say, all right, what do we need to do differently.

But the principles that we’re fighting for, the things that motivate me every single day and motivate my staff every day -- those things aren’t going to change. There’s going to be a consistent focus on how do we deliver more opportunity to more people in this country; how do we grow the economy faster; how do we put more people back to work.

And I maybe have a naÃ¯ve confidence that if we continue to focus on the American people, and not on our own ambitions or image or various concerns like that, that at the end of the day, when I look back, I’m going to be able to say the American people are better off than they were before I was President. And that’s my most important goal.

But the other thing I just want to emphasize is I’m -- I’ve said this before, I want to reiterate it -- if there are ideas that the Republicans have that I have confidence will make things better for ordinary Americans, the fact that the Republicans suggesting it as opposed to a Democrat, that will be irrelevant to me. I want to just see what works.

And there are some things like rebuilding our infrastructure or early childhood education that we know works. And I’m hoping that the kind of attitude and approach that Mitch McConnell and John Boehner have already expressed, their desire to get things done, allows us to find some common ground.

Jeff Mason.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. In 2010, you called the result of the midterm election “a shellacking.” What do you call this? And can you give us an update on your feelings about the immigration executive order in the result -- in the aftermath of this election? Does the election affect your plans to release it? Will it still -- is it likely to come out before the lame duck session is over? And have you reduced its scope to just a couple million people?

President Obama: Well, as I said in my opening statement, there’s no doubt that Republicans had a good night. And what we’re going to make sure that we do is to reach out to Mitch McConnell and John Boehner, who are now running both chambers in Congress, and find out what their agenda is. And my hope is, is that they’ve got some specific things they want to do that correspond with some things that we want to get done.

What’s most important to the American people right now, the resounding message not just of this election, but basically the last several is: Get stuff done. Don't worry about the next election. Don't worry about party affiliation. Do worry about our concerns. Worry about the fact that I’m a single mom, and at the end of the month it’s really hard for me to pay the bills, in part because I’ve got these huge child care costs.

Do worry about the fact that I’m a young person who’s qualified to go to college, but I’m really worried about taking $50,000 a year out in debt and I don't know how I’d pay that back.

Do worry about the fact that I’m a construction worker who has been working all my life, and I know that there’s construction work that should be done, but right now, for some reason, projects are stalled.

If we're thinking about those folks I think we're, hopefully, going to be able to get some stuff done.

In terms of immigration, I have consistently said that it is my profound preference and interest to see Congress act on a comprehensive immigration reform bill that would strengthen our borders; would streamline our legal immigration system so that it works better and we're attracting the best and the brightest from around the world; and that we give an opportunity for folks who’ve lived here, in many cases, for a very long time, may have kids who are U.S. citizens, but aren’t properly documented -- give them a chance to pay their back taxes, get in the back of the line, but get through a process that allows them to get legal.

The Senate, on a bipartisan basis, passed a good bill. It wasn’t perfect, it wasn’t exactly what I wanted, but it was a sound, smart, piece of legislation that really would greatly improve not just our immigration system but our economy, and would improve business conditions here in the United States -- and make sure that American-born workers aren’t undercut by workers who are undocumented and aren’t always paid a fair wage and, as a consequence, employers who are breaking the rules are able to undercut folks who are doing the right thing.

So we got a bipartisan bill out of the Senate. I asked John Boehner at that point, can we pass this through the House? There’s a majority of votes in the House to get this passed. And Speaker Boehner I think was sincere about wanting to pass it, but had difficulty over the last year trying to get it done.

So when he finally told me he wasn’t going to call it up this year, what I indicated to him is I feel obliged to do everything I can lawfully with my executive authority to make sure that we don't keep on making the system worse, but that whatever executive actions that I take will be replaced and supplanted by action by Congress. You send me a bill that I can sign, and those executive actions go away.

That's a commitment I made not just to the American people -- and to businesses and the evangelical community and the law enforcement folks and everybody who’s looked at this issue and thinks that we need immigration reform -- that's a commitment that I also made to John Boehner, that I would act in the absence of action by Congress.

So before the end of the year, we're going to take whatever lawful actions that I can take that I believe will improve the functioning of our immigration system that will allow us to surge additional resources to the border, where I think the vast majority of Americans have the deepest concern. And at the same time, I’ll be reaching out to both Mitch McConnell, John Boehner, and other Republican as well as Democratic leaders to find out how it is that they want to proceed. And if they want to get a bill done -- whether it’s during the lame duck or next year -- I'm eager to see what they have to offer.

But what I’m not going to do is just wait. I think it’s fair to say that I’ve shown a lot of patience and have tried to work on a bipartisan basis as much as possible, and I’m going to keep on doing so. But in the meantime, let’s figure out what we can do lawfully through executive actions to improve the functioning of the existing system.

Question: How will you make sure that that executive action has teeth if Republicans try to block it by blocking funding? And can you give us a sense of whether or not you're thinking about --

President Obama: Jeff, I think if you want to get into the details of it, I suspect that when I announce that executive action, it will be rife with detail. And I’m sure there will be a lot of follow-up questions.

Chris Jansing.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. I want to follow up on a couple of things and start with immigration. And are you concerned that if you sign an executive order on immigration before the end of the year it will scuttle whatever chances there may be for there to be some sort of compromise on the issues that you talked about? And I wonder that, given this unhappy electorate, clearly, and they seem to be disappointed with both sides pretty much, why they punished the Democrats more than the Republicans by far.

President Obama: Well, as I said, when it comes to the political analysis, that’s your job. But what is also true is I am the President of the United States, and I think, understandably, people are going to ask for greater accountability and more responsibility from me than from anybody else in this town. Appropriately so, and I welcome that. And the commitment that I will make to the American people and the way I’ve tried to conduct myself throughout this presidency is that I’m going to wake up every single day doing my absolute best to deliver for them.

And there are areas where we’ve made real progress. I think economically, I can look back and there is no doubt that almost -- on almost every measure, we are better off economically than we were when I took office. But what is also true is there are still a lot of folks out there who are anxious and are hurting and are having trouble making ends meet, or are worried about their children’s future. And it’s my job to give them some confidence that this town can work to respond to some of those worries that folks have.

And we haven’t done a good enough job convincing them of that. And I understand that. They’ve been watching Washington over the last two, four years. What they’ve seen is a lot of arguing and a lot of gridlock, but not a lot of concrete actions, at least legislatively, that have made a difference in their lives. And so we’ve got to make sure that we do a better job, and I’m committed to doing that.

On immigration, I know that concerns have been expressed that, well, if you do something through executive actions, even if it’s within your own authorities, that that will make it harder to pass immigration reform. I just have to remind everybody I’ve heard that argument now for a couple of years. This is an issue I actually wanted to get done in my first term, and we didn’t see legislative action. And in my second term, I made it my top legislative priority, and we got really good work done by a bipartisan group of senators, but it froze up in the House.

And I think that the best way if folks are serious about getting immigration reform done is going ahead and passing a bill and getting it to my desk. And then the executive actions that I take go away. They’re superseded by the law that has passed.

And I will engage any member of Congress who’s interested in this in how we can shape legislation that will be a significant improvement over the existing system. But what we can’t do is just keep on waiting. There is a cost to waiting. There’s a cost to our economy. It means that resources are misallocated.

When the issue of unaccompanied children cropped up during this summer, there was a lot of folks who perceived this as a major crisis in our immigration system. Now, the fact is, is that those numbers have now come down and they’re approximately where they were a year ago or two years ago or a year before that. But it did identify a real problem in a certain portion of the border where we got to get more resources.

But those resources may be misallocated, separating families right now that most of us, most Americans would say probably we’d rather have them just pay their back taxes, pay a fine, learn English, get to the back of the line, but we’ll give you a pathway where you can be legal in this country.

So where I’ve got executive authorities to do that, we should get started on that. But I want to emphasize once again, if, in fact, Republican leadership wants to see an immigration bill passed, they now have the capacity to pass it. And hopefully engaging with me and Democrats in both the House and the Senate, it’s a bill that I can sign because it addresses the real concerns that are out there. And the sooner they do it, from my perspective, the better.

Jonathan Karl.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Mitch McConnell has been the Republican Leader for six years, as long as you’ve been President. But his office tells me that he has only met with you one-on-one once or twice during that entire six-year period. So I’m wondering, as somebody who came to Washington promising to end the hyper-partisanship that was here long before you became President but has gotten worse since you got here, was it a mistake for you to do so little to develop relationships with Republicans in Congress?

President Obama: I think that every day I’m asking myself, are there some things I can do better. And I’m going to keep on asking that every single day. The fact is that most of my interactions with members of Congress have been cordial and they’ve been constructive. Oftentimes, though, we just haven’t been able to actually get what’s discussed in a leadership meeting through caucuses in the House and the Senate to deliver a bill.

The good news is that now Mitch McConnell and John Boehner are from the same party; I think they can come together and decide what their agenda is. They’ve got sufficient majorities to make real progress on some of these issues. And I’m certainly going to be spending a lot more time with them now because that’s the only way that we’re going to be able to get some stuff done.

And I take them at their word that they want to produce. They’re in the majority; they need to present their agenda. I need to put forward my best ideas. I think the American people are going to be able to watch us and they’re paying attention to see whether or not we’re serious about actually compromising and being constructive. And my commitment to them -- and I’ve said this when I spoke to them -- is, is that anywhere where we can find common ground, I’m eager to pursue it.

Question: Are you going to have that drink with Mitch McConnell now that you joked about at the White House Correspondents Dinner?

President Obama: You know, actually, I would enjoy having some Kentucky bourbon with Mitch McConnell. I don’t know what his preferred drink is, but -- my interactions with Mitch McConnell, he has always been very straightforward with me. To his credit, he has never made a promise that he couldn’t deliver. And he knows the legislative process well. He obviously knows his caucus well -- he has always given me, I think, realistic assessments of what he can get through his caucus and what he can’t. And so I think we can have a productive relationship.

Phil Mattingly.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Another deadline coming up is your negotiators by November 24th have to figure out if they’re going to reach a deal with Iran on a nuclear area, a nuclear agreement. I’m interested what your current perspective is on how those negotiations are going. Also if it is your feeling that you have the power to implement any type of agreement that's reached without any action from Congress? And then, also I just wanted to quickly touch on the AUMF that you mentioned earlier. Is that going to be more of a codification of the limits that you've put in place for the mission up to this point? Or what should we be looking for on that when you send it to the Hill? Thank you.

President Obama: On the AUMF, the leaders are going to be coming here on Friday. It will be an expanded group, not just the four leaders, but a larger group who all have an interest in the issues we're discussing today. And I’m actually going to invite Lloyd Austin, the CENTCOM Commander, to make a presentation about how our fight against ISIL is proceeding and I think to answer questions and assure that Congress is fully briefed on what we're doing there.

With respect to the AUMF, we’ve already had conversations with members of both parties in Congress, and the idea is to right-size and update whatever authorization Congress provides to suit the current fight, rather than previous fights.

In 2001, after the heartbreaking tragedy of 9/11, we had a very specific set of missions that we had to conduct, and the AUMF was designed to pursue those missions. With respect to Iraq, there was a very specific AUMF.

We now have a different type of enemy. The strategy is different. How we partner with Iraq and other Gulf countries and the international coalition -- that has to be structured differently. So it makes sense for us to make sure that the authorization from Congress reflects what we perceive to be not just our strategy over the next two or three months, but our strategy going forward.

And it will be a process of listening to members of Congress, as well as us presenting what we think needs to be the set of authorities that we have. And I’m confident we're going to be able to get that done. And that may just be a process of us getting it started now. It may carry over into the next Congress.

On Iran, because of the unprecedented sanctions that we put in place that really did have a crippling effect on Iran’s economy, they’ve come to the table and they’ve negotiated seriously around providing assurances that they're not developing a nuclear weapon for the first time. And they have abided by the interim rules. We have been able to freeze their program, in some cases reduce the stockpile of nuclear material that they already had in hand. And the discussions, the negotiations have been constructive.

The international community has been unified and cohesive. There haven’t been a lot of cracks in our alliance. Even countries where we have some differences, like Russia, have agreed with us and have worked with us cooperatively in trying to find ways to make sure that we can verify and have confidence going forward that Iran doesn't have the capacity to develop a nuclear weapon that could not only threaten friends of ours like Israel, trigger a nuclear arms race in the region, but could over the long term, potentially threaten us.

Whether we can actually get a deal done, we’re going to have to find out over the next three to four weeks. We have presented to them a framework that would allow them to meet their peaceful energy needs. And if, in fact, what their leadership says, that they don’t want to develop a nuclear a weapon -- if that is, in fact, true, then they’ve got an avenue here to provide that assurance to the world community, and in a progressive, step-by-step, verifiable way, allow them to get out from under sanctions so that they can reenter as full-fledged members of the international community.

But they have their own politics, and there’s a long tradition of mistrust between the two countries. And there’s a sizeable portion of the political elite that cut its teeth on anti-Americanism and still finds it convenient to blame America for every ill that there is. And whether they can manage to say yes to what clearly would be better for Iran, better for the region, and better for the world, is an open question. We’ll find out over the next several weeks.

Question: Sir, on whether or not you have the power unilaterally to relax sanctions to implement an agreement?

President Obama: There are a series of different sanctions. There are multilateral sanctions; there are U.N. sanctions; there are sanctions that have been imposed by us, this administration, unilaterally. And I think it’s different for each of those areas.

But I don’t want to put the cart before the horse. What I want to do is see if we, in fact, have a deal. If we do have a deal that I have confidence will prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, and that we can convince the world and the public will prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, then it will be time to engage in Congress. And I think that we’ll be able to make a strong argument to Congress that this is the best way for us to avoid a nuclear Iran; that it will be more effective than any other alternatives we might take, including military action.

But that requires it being a good deal. And I’ve said consistently that I’d rather have no deal than a bad deal -- because what we don’t want to do is lift sanctions and provide Iran legitimacy but not have the verifiable mechanisms to make sure that they don’t break out and produce a nuclear weapon.

Ed Henry. I missed you guys. I haven't done this in a while.

Question: I know, I’ve missed you. Thank you, Mr. President. I haven't heard you say a specific thing during this news conference that you would do differently. You’ve been asked it a few different ways. I understand you’re going to reach out, but you’ve talked about doing that before. It’s almost like you’re doubling down on the same policies and approach you’ve had for six years. So my question is, why not pull a page from the Clinton playbook and admit you have to make a much more dramatic shift in course for these last two years?

And on ISIS, there was pretty dramatic setback in the last few days with it appearing that the Syrian rebels have been routed. There are some Gitmo detainees who have rejoined the battlefield, helping ISIS and other terror groups, is what the reports are suggesting. So my question is, are we winning?

President Obama: Well, I think it’s too early to say whether we are winning, because as I said at the outset of the ISIL campaign, this is going to be a long-term plan to solidify the Iraqi government, to solidify their security forces, to make sure that in addition to air cover that they have the capacity to run a ground game that pushes ISIL back from some of the territories that they had taken, that we have a strong international coalition that we’ve now built, but that they are on the ground providing the training, providing the equipment, providing the supplies that are necessary for Iraqis to fight on behalf of their territory.

And what I also said was that in Syria that’s been complicated and that’s not going to be solved any time soon. Our focus in Syria is not to solve the entire Syria situation, but rather to isolate the areas in which ISIL can operate. And there is no doubt that because of the extraordinary bravery of our men and women in uniform, and the precision of our pilots and the strikes that have taken place, that ISIL is in a more vulnerable position and it is more difficult for them to maneuver than it was previously.

Now, there’s a specific issue about trying to get a moderate opposition in Syria that can serve as a partner with us on the ground. That’s always been the hardest piece of business to get done. There are a lot of opposition groups in Syria along a spectrum from radical jihadists who are our enemies to folks who believe in inclusive democracy, and everything in between. They fight among each other. They are fighting the regime.

And what we’re trying to do is to find a core group that we can work with that we have confidence in, that we’ve vetted, that can help in regaining territory from ISIL, and then ultimately serve as a responsible party to sit at the table in eventual political negotiations that are probably some ways off in the future.

That’s always been difficult. As you know, one of the debates has consistently been, should the Obama administration provide more support to the opposition? Could that have averted some of the problems that are taking place in Syria? And as I’ve said before, part of the challenge is it’s a messy situation. This is not a situation where we have one single unified, broad-based, effective, reliable --

Question: -- the idea that maybe we have to have --

President Obama: Let me answer the question, Ed. And so what we are going to continue to test is, can we get a more stable, effective, cohesive, moderate opposition?

But that’s not the sole measure of whether we are “winning” or not. Remember, our first focus, Ed, here is to drive ISIL out of Iraq. And what we’re doing in Syria is, first and foremost, in service of reducing ISIL’s capacity to resupply and send troops, and then run back over the Syrian border -- to eventually reestablish a border between Iraq and Syria so that slowly Iraq regains control of its security and its territory. That is our number-one mission. That is our number-one focus.

There are aspects of what’s going on in Syria that we’ve got to deal with in order to reduce the scope of ISIL’s operations. So, for example, our support for Kurds in Kobani, where they’ve been able to hold off ISIL and where we’ve been able to effectively strike ISIL positions consistently -- that’s not just because we’re trying to solve a Syria problem. That’s also because it gives us an opportunity to further weaken ISIL so that we can meet our number-one mission, which is Iraq.

In terms of things to do differently, I guess, Ed, the question you’re asking is one actually I think I have answered. If you’re asking about personnel, or if you’re asking about position on issues, or what have you, then it’s probably premature because I want to hear what --

Question: Your leadership. Is there something about your leadership --

President Obama: Ed, what I’d like to do is to hear from the Republicans to find out what it is that they would like to see happen. And what I’m committing to is making sure that I am open to working with them on the issues where they think that there’s going to be cooperation.

Now, that isn’t a change, because I’ve suggested to them before that where they think there’s areas of cooperation, I’d like to see us get some things done. But the fact that they now control both chambers of Congress I think means that perhaps they have more confidence that they can pass their agenda and get a bill on my desk. It means that negotiations end up perhaps being a little more real because they have larger majorities, for example, in the House and they may be able to get some things through their caucuses that they couldn’t before.

But the bottom line that the American people want to know and that I’m going to repeat here today is that my number-one goal -- because I’m not running again, I’m not on the ballot, I don’t have any further political aspirations -- my number-one goal is just to deliver as much as I can for the American people in these last two years. And wherever I see an opportunity, no matter how large or how small, to make it a little bit easier for a kid to go to college, make it a little more likely that somebody is finding a good-paying job, make it a little more likely that somebody has high-quality health care -- even if I’m not getting a whole loaf, I’m interested in getting whatever legislation we can get passed that adds up to improved prospects and an improved future for the American people.

Sam Stein.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Following the elections, congressional Republicans are pushing once again for major reforms to your health care act. In the past, you’ve said you’re open to good ideas but you don’t want to undermine the bill. Can you tell us what specific ideas you’re ruling out? Have the election results changed your calculus on reforming the law? And how confident are you heading into the second enrollment period? And on a totally unrelated matter -- have you settled on a nominee to replace Attorney General Eric Holder, and if so, who is it?

President Obama: You guys want to spread out your news a little bit, don’t you? You don’t want it all in just one big bang.

On the attorney general, we have a number of outstanding candidates who we’re taking a look at now, and in due course I will have an announcement. And you’ll be there, Sam, when that’s announced. But I’m confident that we’ll find somebody who is well-qualified, will elicit the confidence of the American people, will uphold their constitutional obligations and rule of law, and will get confirmed by the Senate.

On health care, there are certainly some lines I’m going to draw. Repeal of the law I won’t sign. Efforts that would take away health care from the 10 million people who now have it and the millions more who are eligible to get it we're not going to support. In some cases there may be recommendations that Republicans have for changes that would undermine the structure of the law, and I’ll be very honest with them about that and say, look, the law doesn't work if you pull out that piece or that piece.

On the other hand, what I have said is there’s no law that's ever been passed that is perfect. And given the contentious nature in which it was passed in the first place, there are places where, if I were just drafting a bill on our own, we would have made those changes back then, and certainly as we’ve been implementing, there are some other areas where we think we can do even better.

So if, in fact, one of the items on Mitch McConnell’s agenda and John Boehner’s agenda is to make responsible changes to the Affordable Care Act to make it work better, I’m going to be very open and receptive to hearing those ideas. But what I will remind them is that despite all the contention, we now know that the law works. You've got millions of people who have health insurance who didn't have it before. You've got states that have expanded Medicaid to folks who did not have it before, including Republican governors who’ve concluded this is a good deal for their state.

And despite some of the previous predictions, even as we’ve enrolled more people into the Affordable Care Act and given more people the security of health insurance, health care inflation has gone done every single year since the law passed, so that we now have the lowest increase in health care costs in 50 years, which is saving us about $180 billion in reduced overall costs to the federal government in the Medicare program.

So we are I think really proud of the work that's been done. But there’s no doubt that there are areas where we can improve it. So I’ll look forward to see what list they’ve got of improvements.

Question: Is the individual mandate one of those lines you can't cross?

President Obama: The individual mandate is a line I can't cross because the concept, borrowed from Massachusetts, from a law instituted by a former opponent of mine, Mitt Romney, understood that if you're providing health insurance to people through the private marketplace, then you've got to make sure that people can't game the system and just wait until they get sick before they go try to buy health insurance. You can't ensure that people with preexisting conditions can get health insurance unless you also say, while you're healthy, before you need it, you've got to get health insurance.

And obviously, there are hardship exemptions. We understand that there are some folks who, even with the generous subsidies that have been provided, still can't afford it. But that's a central component of the law.

In terms of enrollment, we’ll do some additional announcements about that in the days to come. Starting in the middle of this month, people can sign up again. I think there are a number of people who the first time around sat on the sidelines in part because of our screw-ups on healthcare.gov.

That's one area, Ed, by the way, that's very particular. We're really making sure the website works super well before the next open enrollment period. We're double and triple-checking it. And so I think a lot of people who maybe initially thought we're not sure how this works, let’s wait and see -- they're going to have an opportunity now to sign up. And what’s been terrific is to see how more private insurers have come into the marketplace so that there’s greater competition in more markets all around the country. The premiums that have come in that are available to people and the choices that are available are better than a lot of people I think had predicted.

So the law is working. That doesn’t mean it can’t be improved.

Major Garrett.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. And if you do miss us, allow me to humbly suggest we do this every week.

President Obama: We might. Who knows. I’m having a great time.

Question: Let me go back to immigration. Moments before you walked out here, sir, Mitch McConnell said -- and I quote -- that if you in fact use your executive authority to legalize a certain number of millions of undocumented workers, it would “poison the well” -- direct quote -- and it would be “like waving a red flag in front of a bull.” Do you not believe that is the considered opinion of the new Republican majority in the House and Senate? And do you also not believe what they have said in the aftermath of last night’s results that the verdict rendered by voters should stop you or should prevent you from taking this action because it was a subtext in many of the campaigns? Let me ask you a couple of specifics. Republicans haven’t made a mystery about some of the things they intend to say --

President Obama: Do I have to write all of these down?

Question: You’re very well familiar with these. These will not be mysteries to you.

President Obama: No, but I --

Question: Keystone XL pipeline -- they will send you legislation on that. They will ask you to repeal the medical device tax as a part of a funding mechanism of the Affordable Care Act. And they have said they would like to repatriate some maybe $2 trillion of offshore revenue at the corporate level by reforming the corporate tax code without touching the individual tax code. To use your words, Mr. President, are any of those three lines you cannot cross and also deal with what you perceive to be Republican attitudes about immigration?

President Obama: All right. I think, Major, that I answered the question on immigration. I have no doubt that there will be some Republicans who are angered or frustrated by any executive action that I may take. Those are folks, I just have to say, who are also deeply opposed to immigration reform in any form and blocked the House from being able to pass a bipartisan bill.

I have said before that I actually believe that John Boehner is sincere about wanting to get immigration reform passed, which is why for a year I held off taking any action beyond what we had already done for the so-called DREAM kids, and did everything I could to give him space and room to get something done. And what I also said at the time was, if, in fact, Congress -- if this Congress could not get something done, then I would take further executive actions in order to make the system work better, understanding that any bill that they pass will supplant the executive actions that I take.

So I just want to reemphasize this, Major -- if, in fact, there is a great eagerness on the part of Republicans to tackle a broken immigration system, then they have every opportunity to do it. My executive actions not only do not prevent them from passing a law that supersedes those actions, but should be a spur for them to actually try to get something done. And I am prepared to engage them every step of the way with their ideas.

I think we should have further broad-based debate among the American people. As I’ve said before, I do think that the episode with the unaccompanied children changed a lot of attitudes. I think what may also change a lot of attitudes is when the public now realizes that that was a very temporary and isolated event, and that, in fact, we have fewer illegal immigrants coming in today than we did five years ago, 10 years ago or 20 years go, but that what we also have is a system that is not serving our economy well.

Question: -- Republicans who say the election was a referendum, at least in part, on your intentions to use executive authority for immigration.

President Obama: As I said before, I don’t want to try to read the tea leaves on election results. What I am going to try to do as President is to make sure that I’m advancing what I think is best for the country. And here’s an opportunity where I can use my administrative authorities, executive authorities, and lawfully try to make improvements on the existing system, understanding that that’s not going to fix the entire problem, and we’re much better off if we go ahead and pass a comprehensive bill. And I hope that the Republicans really want to get it passed. If they do, they’re going to have a lot of cooperation from me.

So let me just tick off -- on Keystone, there’s an independent process. It’s moving forward. And I’m going to let that process play out. I’ve given some parameters in terms of how I think about it: Ultimately, is this going to be good for the American people? Is it going to be good for their pocketbook? Is it going to actually create jobs? Is it actually going to reduce gas prices that have been coming down? And is it going to be, on net, something that doesn’t increase climate change that we’re going to have to grapple with?

There’s a pending case before a Nebraska judge about some of the citing. The process is moving forward. And I’m just going to gather up the facts.

I will note, while this debate about Canadian oil has been raging -- keep in mind this is Canadian oil, this isn’t U.S. oil -- while that debate has been raging, we’ve seen some of the biggest increases in American oil production and American natural gas production in our history. We are closer to energy independence than we’ve ever been before -- or at least as we’ve been in decades. We are importing less foreign oil than we produce for the first time in a very long time. We’ve got a 100-year supply of natural gas that if we responsibly tap puts us in the strongest position when it comes to energy of any industrialized country around the world.

When I travel to Asia or I travel to Europe, their biggest envy is the incredible homegrown U.S. energy production that is producing jobs and attracting manufacturing, because locating here means you’ve got lower energy costs.

So our energy sector is booming. And I’m happy to engage Republicans with additional ideas for how we can enhance that. I should note that our clean energy production is booming as well. And so Keystone I just consider as one small aspect of a broader trend that’s really positive for the American people.

And let’s see -- okay, medical device tax. I’ve already answered the question. We are going to take a look at whatever ideas -- let me take a look comprehensively at the ideas that they present. Let’s give them time to tell me. I’d rather hear it from them than from you.

Question: For example --

President Obama: Major --

Question: I’m just telling you what they said.

President Obama: Conceivably, I could just cancel my meeting on Friday because I’ve heard everything from you. I think I’d rather let Mitch McConnell --

Question: I just asked if it was a line you couldn’t cross.

President Obama: I’d rather hear from Mitch McConnell and John Boehner what ideas they’d like to pursue, and we’ll have a conversation with them on that.

On repatriation, I said in my opening remarks that there is an opportunity for us to do a tax reform package that is good for business, good for jobs, and can potentially finance infrastructure development here in the United States.

Now, the devil is in the details. So I think, conceptually, it’s something where we may have some overlap, and I’m very interested in pursuing ideas that can put folks to work right now on roads and bridges and waterways and ports, and a better air traffic control system. If we had one, by the way, we would reduce delays by about 30 percent. We could reduce fuel costs for airlines by about 30 percent. And hopefully that would translate into cheaper airline tickets, which I know everybody would be interested in.

So there’s all kind of work we can do on our infrastructure. This may be one mechanism that Republicans are comfortable in financing those kinds of efforts. So that will be part of the discussion that I think we’re prepared for on Friday and then in the weeks to come leading into the new Congress.

Whew. Major works me, man.

Jim Acosta.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. I know you don’t want to read the tea leaves, but it is a fact that your party rejected you in these midterms. By and large, they did not want you out on the campaign trail in these key battleground states. How do you account for that? And your aides have said that this is the fourth quarter of your administration, but I don’t know if you saw the morning talk shows, but there were several potential candidates for 2016 who are out there already. Is the clock ticking? Are you running out of time? How much time do you have left? And what do you make of the notion that you’re now a lame duck?

President Obama: Well, traditionally, after the last midterm of the two-term presidency, since I can’t run again, that’s the label that you guys apply.

Here’s what I tell my team -- I told them this last week and I told them this this morning -- we had this incredible privilege of being in charge of the most important organization on Earth, the U.S. government and our military, and everything that we do for good around the world.

And there’s a lot of work to be done to make government work better, to make Americans safer, to make opportunity available to more people, for us to be able to have a positive influence in every corner of the globe -- the way we're doing right now in West Africa. And I’m going to squeeze every last little bit of opportunity to help make this world a better place over these last two years.

And some of that is going to be what we can do administratively, and simple things like how do we make customer service better in every agency. Are there things we can do to streamline how our veterans access care? Are there better ways that we can make businesses understand the programs that are available to them to promote their business or exports?

So there’s a whole bunch of stuff to do on that front. And as I said before, there’s going to be opportunities to work with Democrats and Republicans on Capitol Hill to get laws done. And if you look at the history of almost every President, those last two years, all kinds of stuff happens; in some cases, stuff that we couldn’t predict.

So the one thing I’m pretty confident about, Jim, is I’m going to be busy for the next two years. And the one thing that I want the American people to be confident about is that every day I’m going to be filling up my time trying to figure out how I can make their lives better. And if I’m doing that, at the end of my presidency, I’ll say, we played that fourth quarter well. And we played the game well.

And the only difference between I guess basketball and politics is that the only score that matters is how did somebody else do, not how you did. And that's the score I’m keeping. Am I going to be able to look back and say, are more people working? Are there bank accounts better? Are more kids going to college? Has housing improved? Is the financial system more stable? Are younger kids getting a better education? Do we have greater energy independence? Is the environment cleaner? Have we done something about climate change? Have we dealt with an ongoing terrorist threat and helped to bring about stability around the world? And those things -- every single day I’ve got an opportunity to make a difference on those fronts, which is --

Question: And you're not satisfied with where you are now?

President Obama: Absolutely not. I wouldn’t be satisfied as long as I’m meeting somebody who has a -- doesn’t have a job and wants one. I’m not going to be satisfied as long as there’s a kid who writes me a letter and says, I got $60,000 worth of debt and I don’t know how to pay it back.

And the American people aren’t satisfied. So I want to do everything I can to deliver for them.

Question: And how about Democrats, the fact that they kept you out of these battleground states? Does that kind of bug you a little bit?

President Obama: Listen, as I think some of you saw when I was out on the campaign trail, I love campaigning. I love talking to ordinary people. I love listening to their stories. I love shaking hands and getting hugs and just seeing the process of democracy and citizenship manifest itself during an election.

But I’m also a practical guy. And ultimately, every candidate out there had to make their own decisions about what they thought would be most helpful for them. And I wanted to make sure that I’m respectful of their particular region, their particular state or congressional district, and if it was more helpful for them for me to be behind the scenes, I’m happy to do it.

Question: You don't think it was a mistake?

President Obama: I don’t have -- I’ll let other people analyze that. But what I will emphasize is that one of the nice things about being in the sixth year of your presidency is you’ve seen a lot of ups and downs and you’ve gotten more than your fair share of attention. And I’ve had the limelight, and there have been times where the request for my appearances were endless. There have been times where, politically, we were down -- and it all kind of evens out, which is why what’s most important I think is keeping your eye on the ball, and that is are you actually getting some good done.

Scott Horsley, last question.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. You mentioned that where your policies actually were on the ballot they often did better than members of your party. Does that signal some shortcoming on your part or on the party’s part in framing this election and communicating to the American people what it is that Democrats stand for?

President Obama: I do think that one area where I know we’re constantly experimenting and trying to do better is just making sure that people know exactly what it is that we’re trying to accomplish and what we have accomplished in clear ways that people can -- that understand how it affects them. And I think the minimum wage I talked about a lot on the campaign trail, but I’m not sure it penetrated well enough to make a difference.

Part of what I also think we’ve got to look at is that two-thirds of people who were eligible to vote just didn’t vote. One of the things that I’m very proud of in 2008 and 2012 when I ran for office was we got people involved who hadn’t been involved before. We got folks to vote who hadn’t voted before, particularly young people.

And that was part of the promise and the excitement was if you get involved, if you participate, if you embrace that sense of citizenship, then things change -- and not just in abstract ways, they change in concrete ways. Somebody gets a job who didn’t have it before. Somebody gets health care who didn’t have it before. Or a student is able to go to college who couldn’t afford it before. And sustaining that, especially in midterm elections, has proven difficult; sustaining that sense of, if you get involved and if you vote then there is going to be big change out there. And partly I think when they look at Washington, they say, nothing is working and it’s not making a difference, and there’s just a constant slew of bad news coming over the TV screen, then you can understand how folks would get discouraged.

But it’s my job to figure this out as best I can. And if the way we are talking about issues isn’t working, then I’m going to try some different things. If the ways that we’re approaching the Republicans in Congress isn’t working, I’m going to try different things -- whether it’s having a drink with Mitch McConnell or letting John Boehner beat me again at golf, or weekly press conferences -- I don’t know if that would be effective. Whatever I think might make a difference in this, I’m going to be trying out up until my last day in office.

But I’ll close with what I said in my opening statement. I am really optimistic about America. I know that runs counter to the current mood, but when you look at the facts, our economy is stronger than just about anybody’s. Our energy production is better than just about anybody’s. We’ve slashed our deficit by more than half. More people have health insurance. Our businesses have the strongest balance sheets that they’ve had in decades. Our young people are just incredibly talented and gifted, and more of them are graduating from high school, and more of them are going on to college, and more women are getting degrees and entering into the workforce.

And part of the reason I love campaigning is you travel around the country, folks are just good. They're smart and they're hardworking. And they're not always paying a lot of attention to Washington, and in some cases they’ve given up on Washington. But their impulses are not sharply partisan, and their impulses are not ideological. They're really practical, good, generous people.

And we continue to be a magnet for the best and brightest from all around the world. We have all the best cards relative to every other country on Earth. Our armed forces, you talk to them -- I had a chance this morning to just call some of our health service that is operating in Liberia, and the amount of hope and professionalism that they’ve brought has galvanized the entire country, and has built -- they’ve built a platform effectively for other countries suddenly to start coming in. And we're seeing real progress in fighting the disease in a country that just a month or a month and a half ago was desperate and had no hope.

So all that makes me optimistic. And my job over the next couple of years is to do some practical, concrete things -- as much as possible with Congress; where it’s not possible with Congress, on my own -- to show people why we should be confident, and to give people a sense of progress and a sense of hope.

That doesn't mean there aren’t going to be ongoing nagging problems that are stubborn and can't be solved overnight. And probably the biggest one is the fact that despite economic growth, wages and income have still not gone up. And that's a long-term trend that we’ve seen for 10, 20, 30 years. And it makes people worried about not just their own situation, but whether their kids are going to be doing better than they did, which is the essence of the American Dream. I think there are some concrete things we can do to make sure that wages and incomes do go up. Minimum wage in those five states was a good start.

But I think more than anything what I want to communicate over these next two years is the promise and possibility of America. This is just an extraordinary country. And our democracy is messy. And we're diverse and we're big. And there are times where you're a politician and you're disappointed with election results. But maybe I’m just getting older -- I don't know. It doesn't make me mopey. It energizes me because it means that this democracy is working. And people in America were restless and impatient, and we want to get things done. And even when things are going good, we want them to do better. And that's why this is the greatest country on Earth. That's why I’m so privileged to have a chance to be President for the next couple years.

All right? Thank you, everybody.

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# Joint Press Conference with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi: I -- I'm sorry if we've kept you waiting. Let me just begin by saying what a great pleasure it is for me to welcome President Obama again to my house, and to be able to meet all of you.

I would just like to say that there have been those who have been saying that there is tension between the United States and the National League for Democracy -- or perhaps with me. I would like to make quite clear that the friendship between the United States and those who have been struggling for democracy in Burma is a very strong one. We may view things differently from time to time but it will in no way affect our friendship.

And I have absolute confidence that the United States will continue to support us with regard to the democratic transformation and that when Burma becomes a fully functioning democracy in accordance with the will of the people, we will be able to say that among those friends who enabled us to get there, the United States was among the first.

So please don't think -- please don't worry that there will be any problems between the United States and those working for democracy in Burma. We all believe in the same values. We all believe in the same principles. We may sometimes think that there are different ways of getting to the goal that we wish to achieve, but these differences are part of the democratic tradition. Democracy allows people to have different views, and democracy makes it also -- makes us also responsible for negotiating an answer to those views.

I would like all of you to feel welcome in this country, and I would all -- like all of you to feel that you can join us in hoping for better days. But at the same time, I always warn against over-optimism because that could lead to complacency.

Our reform process is going through, let’s us say, a bumpy...patch. But this bumpy patch is something that we can negotiate with commitment and with the help and understanding of our friends from all over the world. So let us not exaggerate the differences, the difficulties. But at the same time, let us not exaggerate the rosy picture either.

What we need is a healthy balance between optimism and pessimism. We need to view the -- the situation for what it was. But at the same time, we all have to be confident that we will get there -- we will get where we want to get to, because that’s what our people want. In the end, it’s the people of Burma who will decide where this country is going to and which way and how and when.

So we accept responsibility for the fate of our country, but at the same time we welcome the support and the help of our friends. And we always appreciate them very greatly.

Thank you.

Barack Obama: Well, good afternoon, everybody. Mingalaba. It is wonderful to be back in Rangoon and to once more have the opportunity to spend time with Aung San Suu Kyi. As we know, it was in this house that she endured years of confinement -- never giving up hope, never wavering in her determination to build a free and democratic Burma. Daw Suu, you helped set this country on a better path. I’m grateful for your friendship and for the hospitality that you’ve shown in opening your home up not only to me, but to all these people.

When I made my first historic visit to Burma, this country was just taking preliminary steps towards democracy. And in the past two years, important changes have been made. The economy has begun to grow. Political prisoners have been set free. There are more newspapers and media outlets. Children have been released from the military. And these are all important changes that have opened up greater opportunity for the people of Burma.

At the same time, as Aung San Suu Kyi just said, it’s clear how much hard work remains to be done and that many difficult choices still lie ahead. The process for reform is by no means complete or irreversible. For many, progress has not come fast enough or spread far enough. People need to feel safe in their homes and not be subject to arbitrary harassment by authorities or individuals acting with impunity. People need to be empowered to pursue their dreams. And as Burma approaches important national elections next year, it will be critical to ensure that all of Burma’s people can participate in shaping the future of their country.

As a member of parliament and the head of the rule of law committee, Aung San Suu Kyi is working hard to make government more transparent, more accountable, to protect the rights of all the Burmese people, to promote reforms that would expand the political space for more people to contribute their voices. But implementing the major political and economic reforms that are necessary to keep Burma advancing toward democracy is going to take a great deal of political will and no small amount of determination. And we, as friends of the Burmese people, are clear-eyed about the scale of the challenges that remain, and recognize that we cannot remain complacent.

Today, Daw Suu and I had a wide-ranging discussion about how the United States can help facilitate and bolster Burma’s democratic transition. We talked about the need for stronger rule of law, for elections that are free, fair and inclusive, and for continued constitutional changes that will move Burma more fully towards a civilian government.

We spoke about how we can work together to promote national reconciliation and defuse sectarian tensions among Burma’s diverse ethnic groups. Specifically, I stressed the need to find durable and effective solutions for the terrible violence in Rakhine state -- solutions that end discrimination, provide greater security and economic opportunities, protect all citizens, and promote greater tolerance and understanding. Strengthening human rights protections for all of Burma’s people is an essential step to realizing the vision we share for the future of this beautiful country.

The last time I stood here, I made a pledge to the people of Burma -- that if we continued to see progress toward reform, the ties between our countries would grow stronger, and the United States would continue to do whatever it could to help ensure Burma’s success. Over the last two years, I think we’ve made good on that pledge, and I want to reiterate the commitment to match continued reforms with greater support and friendships in the future.

We’re committed to working directly with the people of Burma, and not just the government. So later today, I’m looking forward to speaking with representatives of Burma’s civil society groups and with young leaders from Burma and all across Southeast Asia who are working to create greater opportunities for themselves and for future generations. I think these new voices are going to be critical to making sure that reforms are sustainable and meaningful to people across the country and across the region.

So, Daw Suu, thank you again for welcoming us here today. We continue to look to you for inspiration as well as resolve, and I know that you will continue to be a fierce advocate on behalf of the people of Burma, a future of democracy, and I know that you will be a strong partner with the United States.

Thank you. Questions?

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi:

Who’s speaking?

Barack Obama:

I’ll go first. Christi Parsons.

Q: You have been traveling in countries with long histories of repressing freedom of expression and censorship. And it was interesting yesterday that President Xi seemed to be saying that reporters who have problems have themselves to blame. And so I wonder to what extent you feel the need to contend with these ideas with leaders in this region as you travel. And what do you say to them? And by way of example, I might ask you -- Attorney General Eric Holder says no journalist will go to prison for doing his or her job, on his watch. And so I ask about the case of James Risen, the journalist who is facing this prosecution for not revealing his source in a leak prosecution. I wonder if that’s -- are you speaking specifically about this case, and is that your position as well?

And if I may, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, ask you -- how concerned are you about the violence against ethnic minorities in your country, and specifically the Rohingya people? And what do you believe is your responsibility to speak out about it? Thank you very much.

Barack Obama:

The issue of press freedom is a constant concern in my interactions with the Chinese government. It’s an issue that I’ve raised with the President here in Burma. I’m pretty blunt and pretty frank about the fact that societies that repress journalists ultimately oppress people as well, and that if you want a society that is free and vibrant and successful, part of that formula is the free flow of information, of ideas, and that requires a free press. That is part of our tradition.

As I explained to President Xi in China, it’s in our DNA. We believe in the primacy individuals being able to pursue their dreams, endowed with certain inalienable rights. And we believe that when governments censor or control information, that ultimately that undermines not only the society, but it leads to eventual encroachments on individual rights as well.

I can't comment, Christi, on any particular pending case, as you know -- that's sort of an iron-clad rule -- or any particular prosecution. I can read back to you what Attorney General Holder has said, which is no journalist is going to go to jail for doing their job. And I don't think you're suggesting that there's -- that the two cases are comparable. But I recognize that in our own society we have to constantly balance the need for certain national security issues to remain secret with journalists pursuing leads wherever they can.

And the good news is, is that we've got courts and we've got a First Amendment. And we got a whole bunch of tools to ensure that that balance is properly debated and adjudicated.

But I think that when I am traveling, it is important as the President of the United States to not just talk about our interests, but also to talk about our values. Sometimes it has an impact; sometimes it doesn't. Although I was impressed that Mark Landler got an answer to his question from President Xi. It might not have been the one he was expecting, but he did end up taking the question. So you just keep on chipping away and seeing if we can make progress.

Q: [Off-mic inaudible]

Barack Obama:

Hold on a second, Christi. Don't try to segue into a second question.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi:

I think I better take over because I've got to have my time as well.

Barack Obama:

There you go.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi:

The National League for Democracy always has been against violence of any kind, either on racial grounds, or religious grounds, or ideological grounds. We do not believe that violence really resolves anything at all.

Our struggle for democracy has been carried out with a strong grasp on the principle of nonviolence. And also, we believe in the rule of law. So if you ask how do we propose to resolve all of these problems of violence between communities, between different ethnic groups, we've got to start with rule of law. People have to feel secure before they can start talking to one another. We cannot achieve harmony without security. People who feel threatened are not going to sit down and sort out their problems.

So I would like to recommend, as the chair of the Rule of Law and Tranquility Committee -- don't forget that tranquility is also included -- that the government should look to rule of law. It is the duty of the government to make all our people feel secure, and it is the duty of our people to learn to live in harmony with one another.

If we want democracy, we have to be prepared to live by the principles of democracy. We have to dare to live according to the principles of democracy. I think we'll get there, but it will take us some time. But we will remain fully committed to the principle of nonviolence.

Q: [inaudible] Mr. President, I'd like to know about the Myanmar reforms. You've been talking with the President and parliament speakers, and also you're going to talk with the civil societies group, and then youth. So my direct question to you is that: Have you got any specific agreement with the Myanmar government or President Thein Sein about Myanmar reforms such as constitutional change, and peace negotiation, peace process, and also 2015 general election?

And also to Daw Aung San Sui Kyi, you have got a one-hour discussion with the President, and at the current political situation, as you said, it’s a bumpy situation. So if you didn't make amendment, or you didn't change constitution, the NLD and you, yourself, is going to be very difficult after 2015 elections. So have you talked about those issues with the President? Or the President talk to you about U.S. support for you? Thank you.

Barack Obama:

Well, the issue of making sure that reforms and the transition is fully realized was the main topic of our conversation and the main topic of my conversation with the President last night.

As I indicated before, there are signs of progress. We shouldn't deny that Burma today is not the same as Burma five years ago. But the process is still incomplete. And I was very specific with the President in terms of how we will measure whether or not the transition has been fully realized.

Number one, we expect elections to take place on time. We do not want to see delays, because it's time for the voice of the people of Burma to be heard in a fair, free, transparent election.

Number two, I indicated to the President that the constitution amendment process needs to reflect inclusion rather than exclusion, that there are certain provisions in the Burmese constitution that objectively don't make much sense. Ultimately, what changes are made are up to the people of Burma. But, for example, I don't understand a provision that would bar somebody from running for President because of who their children are. That doesn't make much sense to me.

Number three, we are very much in favor of the peace process, and I encourage the President to move forward in the negotiations. He expressed some optimism about the ability to bring a deal to a conclusion. But as Daw Suu has indicated, you have to be skeptical until it's actually done.

Number four, I indicated that we are paying attention to how religious minorities are treated in this country. Now, I recognize the complexities of the situation in Rakhine state. On the other hand, consistent with what Daw Suu just said, I am a firm believer that any legitimate government has to be based on rule of law and a recognition that all people are equal under the law. And discrimination against the Rohingya or any other religious minority I think does not express the kind of country that Burma over the long term wants to be. And I know of no successful democracy in which sectarian or religious divisions are allowed to fester, or the people of different faiths are treated as second-class citizens. Ultimately, that is destabilizing to a democracy.

And finally, I expressed to the President the need to continue to make additional progress on basic issues of freedom and personal security, that journalists can't be jailed simply because they were critical of the government; that arbitrary arrests or individuals being in some fashion abused by government with impunity rather than being respected and treated in accordance with law, that that's a test of whether or not a society is moving towards a genuine democratic process.

And the President yesterday acknowledged that some progress has been made, and there was more to do. And our position will be to continue to measure what's happening on the ground, to consult with a wide range of groups here in Burma. We will strengthen our relationship where we see progress. Where we don’t see progress, then we will continue to express our concerns, and we will not be able to fully realize the kind of bilateral relationship that we want to have with Burma, the Burmese government, until we’ve seen some of these reforms completed.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi:

Well, you asked whether it's going to be fruitful for the NLD to win the elections if the amendments to the constitution are not pushed through. I think it’s too early to ask this question. We’ve just spent one afternoon debating the question of constitutional amendment. I think perhaps some of you may have heard that proportional representation is not going to be instituted.

So when we started defending [inaudible] system against proportional representation, there were many who said to us, you are a very small minority in the legislature; how can you hope to win this case? It’s not a matter of wanting to win a case, it’s a matter of standing up for what you believe in, for what you believe is necessary for the future of our country.

Now we are asking for a constitutional amendment not because we’re trying to win a case, but because we think that certain amendments are necessary if this country is to be a truly functioning democracy in line with the will of the people. Because of that, we will persist in our efforts to have the constitution amended in the right way and within the framework of the law. I’ve always put great emphasis on this because I want peace and tranquility in our country. I want our people to learn to live under the rule of law, and to support and uphold the importance of the rule of law.

So with regard to the constitution, we know that the people support our wish to amend it in certain ways, and we are prepared to negotiate with those who do not wish to amend the constitution. I think that’s what democracy is all about. We need a culture of negotiated compromise as the foundation for our democratic union.

So we would like to -- it’s not just a matter of debating the case in parliament and winning Brownie points or Boy Scout points, or whatever they’re called. But it’s just a case of standing up for what we think our country needs. And we would like to talk to those who disagree with us. That, again, is what democracy is about. You talk to those who disagree with you; you don’t beat them down. You exchange views. And you come to a compromise, a settlement that would be best for the country.

I’ve always said that dialogues and debates are not aimed at achieving victory for one particular party or the other, but victory for our people as a whole. Whatever we decide on should be seen as a victory for our nation, for the kind of democratic union that we have been trying to build up for decades.

So please don’t worry about whether or not we will win the elections in 2015. Of course, any party wants to win the elections. I’m sure the President will tell you that. But winning is not everything -- it’s how you win. I’d rather lose than win in the wrong way. And that is the way I want our party and our people to approach the problems that we have to tackle -- that we want to win in the right way. We want to bring the changes of the constitution about in the right way.

We want to build up a strong foundation for national reconciliation, which means reconciliation not just between the different ethnic groups and between different religious groups, but between different ideas -- for example, between the idea of military supremacy and the idea of civilian authority over the military, which is the foundation of democracy.

So we want to exchange views and to come to an understanding with all those who at this moment do not yet agree with us. And we are confident that we can come to such a settlement, come to such an agreement because, after all, I do believe that what all of us want is what is best for the country as a whole -- not just for particular individuals or groups or organizations.

So while I tell you that you need not worry about what affects amendment or non-amendment to the constitution might have on the elections, I might as well ask you to vote for us when we do get there.

Barack Obama:

Pete Maer.

Q: Mr. President, it seems the stage is set for even more confrontations between you and Republicans when you get home, if that’s possible. We’re told that you’re soon going to sign the immigration reform executive order. To what extent are you concerned about a Republican backlash from an action of that magnitude?

And on two other issues, I’m wondering what your take is on the plan to pass a bill to build the Keystone pipeline that’s in the works now, before the State Department’s review process is over. And Senator McConnell is angry over the climate deal that you had made with China. How does all of this square with your post-election assessment that people want to, as you put it, get stuff done?

And if I may also pose a question to you, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Thank you for hosting all of us here from the White House media corps. As the President mentioned of the constitutional barring of you running in your country’s election, what do you think the impact will be from the President’s statement that was made here today on his strong opposition to that constitutional wording? And what impact do you think it will have on the government here? And is there anything more that you’d like to see him do? Thank you.

Barack Obama:

Pete, the day after the election I said that there are going to be areas of agreement between me and Republicans, and there are going to be areas of disagreement. There are going to be actions I take they don’t like, and there are going to be bills they pass that I don’t like.

And I think, moving forward, that’s exactly what’s going to happen. You’ve mentioned areas where we disagree. I believe that America is a nation of immigrants. Everybody agrees that the system is broken. There has been ample opportunity for Congress to pass a bipartisan immigration bill that would strengthen our borders, improve the legal immigration system, lift millions of people out of the shadows so they are paying taxes and getting right by the law. It passed out of the Senate. I gave the House over a year to go ahead and at least give a vote to the Senate bilaterally; they failed to do so. And I indicated to Speaker Boehner several months ago that if, in fact, Congress failed to act, I would use all the lawful authority that I possess to try to make the system work better. And that’s going to happen. That’s going to happen before the end of the year.

But what I’ve also said to them -- and I said this during the lunch with the Speaker and Leader McConnell -- is that I am always interested in negotiating a legislative solution to the immigration problem, and that the minute they pass a bill that I can sign that fixes our immigration system, then any executive actions I take are replaced.

So they have the ability to fix the system. What they don’t have the ability to do is to expect me to stand by with a broken system in perpetuity. And I would advise that if, in fact, they want to take a different approach, rather than devote a lot of time trying to constrain my lawful actions as the Chief Executive of the U.S. government in charge of our enforcing our immigration laws, that they spend some time passing a bill and engaging with all the stakeholders, the immigrant rights groups, the law enforcement groups, the evangelicals, the business community, all of whom have said this is something that needs to be done, is way overdue. And we’ve been talking about it for 10 years now, and it’s been consistently stalled.

So with respect to Keystone, I’ve been clear in the past, Pete, my position hasn’t changed, that this is a process that is supposed to be followed. Right now you have a case pending in Nebraska, where the pipeline would run through, in which a state court judge has questioned the plan. And until we know what the route is, it’s very hard to finish that evaluation. And I don’t think we should short-circuit that process.

I have also noted that, as policy matter, my government believes that we should judge this pipeline based on whether or not it accelerates climate change or whether it helps the American people with their energy costs and their gas prices. And I have to constantly push back against this idea that somehow the Keystone pipeline is either this massive jobs bill for the United States, or is somehow lowering gas prices.

Understand what this project is. It is providing the ability of Canada to pump their oil, send it through our land, down to the Gulf, where it will be sold everywhere else. That doesn't have an impact on U.S. gas prices. You know what does have an impact on U.S. gas prices is the incredible boom in U.S. oil production and natural gas production that's taken place under my administration.

And if my Republican friends really want to focus on what's good for the American people in terms of job creation and lower energy costs, we should be engaging in a conversation about what are we doing to produce even more homegrown energy. I'm happy to have that conversation.

With respect to the climate change deal, I have been very clear that I have responsibilities as President not just to current generations, but to future generations. The science is indisputable. The planet is getting warm, and it is getting warmer in part because of man-made activity.

And the release of carbon gases -- carbon dioxide and greenhouse gases into the atmosphere can have a potentially devastating effect that will cost our country, could devastate communities, could increase the impact of natural disasters, and will have an impact worldwide that is destabilizing and could affect our national security. That's not my opinion, by the way, that is the opinion of our Joint Chiefs of Staff, that climate change is a direct national security threat.

Now the argument that I've received in the past has been either denial of the science or, alternatively, there's no point in us doing something about it despite us being one of the two largest emitters in the world, because if we do something and China doesn't do anything, we'll just put ourselves at a competitive disadvantage, we'll lose jobs to China, and the problem won't be solved anyway.

I'm not going deny the science, but I took seriously the notion that we want all countries to participate in solving a global problem. And so I engaged with China over a lengthy set of negotiations. And by all independent accounts, for the first time, we got China to make a very serious commitment to constrain its greenhouse gases. Why would anybody be against that? That sounds like the right thing to do to me. So that's a response to those specific ideas.

But let me reiterate what I said at the top. The fact that I disagree or Republicans disagree with me on a certain set of issues doesn't exclude us working together on a whole range of issues where we do agree. They're interested in tax reform -- so am I. Let's get to work. They're interested in promoting trade that will create jobs and opportunity for U.S. workers and U.S. businesses -- all over it. It's part of what this Asia trip has been all about. They're interested in rebuilding our roads, our bridges, our ports, our airports, putting people back to work, making sure we're competitive -- I'm game. So the one thing that I think is going to be important for us to have a successful partnership over the next couple of years is not making disagreements on a single issue suddenly a deal-breaker on every issue. Democracy can never work that way because there are always going to be some differences. And when there are differences you can't elevate those differences above the commonalities.

I'm sorry that was a long answer, but it was a lot of questions.

Do you want to --

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi:

I'm sorry the President can't get away from all those.

Barack Obama:

I know. But before Daw Suu responds to the point about the constitutional amendment, I just want to emphasize, ultimately it's up to the people of Burma to make a decision about all these provisions.

I expressed an objective view that some of current provisions don't seem to have much grounding in common sense or precedent when you look at other constitutions around the world, and seem more focused on advantaging or disadvantaging certain players. And one of the basic concepts of a constitution is that it creates a level playing field for all people, and then so I use that as an example not because I think my voice is the one that's most relevant in terms of the constitutional amendment process, but ultimately it's up to the people of Burma.

Q: [Off-mic.]

Barack Obama:

I did? It doesn't make much sense to me.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi:

I believe democracy should stand up for that principle.

Barack Obama:

Absolutely.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi:

Well, I've always said that it's somewhat flattering to have a constitution written with me in mind. But it shouldn't be done that way. That's not how a democratic constitution should be written. And we object to that clause not because -- not because it debars me from the presidency as such, but because it is against the principle of democracy and also unconstitutional. The constitution says that all citizens should be treated as equals, and this is discrimination on the grounds of my children, my children's spouses, et cetera, et cetera.

Now, this is not acceptable. And our people are firmly behind us in our desire to change this clause. And if President Obama said anything about the necessity to change a clause like that, they will love him very much for it. So he will be very popular among our people.

And as he said, in the end, it is up to our people to shape the destiny of our country, including the way the constitution is going to be rewritten. And I think the majority of our people understand that this constitution cannot stand as it is if we want to make the full transition to democracy; 59(f), as you know, debars anybody who is children of -- the spouses of the children belong to -- are citizens of another country.

And according to the law -- and I think the President will know the law better than I do because I'm not a lawyer -- according to the law, anybody who is over the age of 18, or whatever legal adult age may be in his or her country, is responsible for himself or herself. Nobody else is responsible for that person.

So from that point of view also, you cannot penalize anybody for what his or her adult children do. From that point of view, it's illegal, it's against all norms of justice. And from the point of view of democracy, it is not right to discriminate against one particular citizen. You wouldn't like to be discriminated against, would you?

So I think our people support the idea of amending this clause because -- not particularly because they want me to be president, perhaps because they do. But I don't think it is so much because of that, but because they realize that this is unfair, unjust and undemocratic.

Q: Thank you. I am [inaudible] from 11 Media from Myanmar. And I wanted to ask the question to Mr. President. The question is, have you discussed about the [inaudible] situation in Myanmar [inaudible] president Thein Sein last night? Because more journalists than politicians have been arrested, particularly in [inaudible], under the present Thein Sein administration. And when you discuss about this, how did he respond to this discussion? Thank you.

Barack Obama:

I didn't bring up specific cases with him. I brought up a basic principle that I stated earlier, which is that a free press is a foundation for any democracy.

We rely on journalists to explain and describe the actions of our government. If the government controls the journalists, then it's very difficult for citizens to hold that government accountable. It's a fairly straightforward proposition. And I recognize that there is a transition process that's taking place, that there is a more robust debate today than there was the last time I visited. But to go back to what we said earlier, we can't be complacent. And we, as a government, are going to be troubled when we hear reports of journalists being imprisoned, being killed, being intimidated, or being censored.

And when we engage with this government -- or any government -- and we have evidence that that's taking place, then we're going to raise it.

Thank you very much.

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# Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative Town Hall Burma/Myanmar

Hello, everybody! Myanmar Luu Ngae Myar Min Galarbar! It’s wonderful to be back in Myanmar. Everybody, please have a seat. Have a seat. Oh, we got some signs -- “Reform is fake.” “Change…” -- okay, well, you guys will have a chance to ask questions later. Yeah, you can put them away. That’s why we’re here -- for a town hall. See, that’s the thing, when you have a town hall, you don’t have a protest because you can just ask the questions directly.

Two years ago, I was the first American President to visit this country, and I was deeply moved by the generous hospitality that greeted us here, and the sight of children waving the flags of both of our nations. And I was inspired by the incredible diversity and culture, and the various religious sites from different faiths and communities. And I was inspired again today, when I had the opportunity to visit the Secretariat -- the birthplace of modern Burma; the blueprint for democracy; a home to Burmese, Chinese, Indians, Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, and Christians who lived together peacefully -- an incredible example of multicultural and multi-faith diversity and tolerance. And it’s a profound symbol of this country’s rich diversity and this region’s potential.

Whenever I travel the world, from Europe to Africa, South America to Southeast Asia, one of the things I most enjoy doing is meeting young men and women like you. It’s more fun than being in a conference room. And it’s also more important -- because you are the young leaders who will determine the future of this country and this region. So I’m going to keep my remarks short at the top, because I want to take as many questions and comments from you.

As President of the United States, I’ve made it a priority to deepen America’s ties with Southeast Asia -- in particular, with the young people of Southeast Asia. And I do this for reasons that go beyond the fact that I spent some of my childhood in Southeast Asia, in Indonesia. And that gives me a special attachment, a special feeling for Southeast Asia and this region. But I do it mainly because the 10 nations of ASEAN are home to about one in ten of the world’s citizens. About two-thirds of Southeast Asia’s population is under 35 years old. So this region -- a region of growing economies and emerging democracies, and a vibrant diversity that includes oceans and islands, and jungles and cities, and peoples of different races and religions and beliefs -- this region will shape the 21st century.

And that’s why I launched the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative -- to deepen America’s engagement with the next generation of leaders in government and civil society, in education and in entrepreneurship. And more than 10,000 young leaders like you have joined this Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative network, working to solve the challenges and seize the opportunities of this dynamic region in a spirit of mutual cooperation and respect. So earlier this year, I held a town hall just like this one, in Malaysia. And today, I’d like to take our next steps together with you.

When I took office nearly six years ago, I said the United States would extend our hand to any nation willing to unclench its fist. And here, after decades of authoritarian rule, we’ve begun to see significant progress in just a few years. There is more of a sense of hope in Myanmar, that was once so closed to the world, about the role that it can now play in the region and in the world.

But we know that a journey to progress is not completed overnight. There are setbacks and false starts, and sometimes even reverses. And that was true in America during our 238-year history. It’s happened here in the past two or three years. We’ve seen some progress, and we should acknowledge that progress.

We also know, though, that despite the fact that political prisoners have been released and people are more engaged in political dialogue, there’s a parliament and civil society is emerging -- despite all that, some reforms have not come quickly enough. There are still attacks against journalists and against ethnic minorities. America is still deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in Rakhine state, and the treatment of minorities who endure discrimination and abuse.

On this visit, I’ve met separately with President Thein Sein and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, as well as members of parliament, and civil society leaders. And we discussed key reforms that have to be made to ensure that human rights and freedoms are respected, and the people of this country can reach for their rightful place in the region and the world. And I was also proud to announce that the Peace Corps will come here, to Myanmar, to deepen the ties between our people. It gives an extraordinary opportunity for young Americans to interact with young people here in Myanmar. And that people-to-people exchange is often as important or more important as government-to-government exchanges.

So progress is not inevitable. History does not always march forward. History can travel sideways and sometimes backwards. Building trust after years of conflict takes time. Being able to look past the scars of violence takes courage. Securing the gains of freedom and democracy requires good faith and strength of will, and tolerance and respect for diversity, and it requires vigilance from all citizens. The American people know well that rights and freedoms are not given; they have to be won through struggle and through discipline, and persistence and faith. And it’s often young people who have led these struggles; who have compelled us to slowly but surely perfect our own union in America over time.

Now, I understand there's a Burmese saying. I've got to make sure that I say this right. Ngote mi thÃ¨ daing -- help me out. Is that right? -- tet naing hpyar yauk.

So for those Americans who don't speak Burmese as well as I do -- that means, "Dive until you reach the sand, climb until you reach the top. Keep persevering."

And America is committed to helping the young people of this nation and this region climb until you reach the top. We believe in this nation. That's why I've come and visited twice in the last few years, because we see a future where democratic institutions can be accountable and responsive; where political activists are free; where elections are fair; where journalists can pursue the truth; where ethnic minorities can live without fear.

So we're betting on this country, but we're also betting on this region, because we see young people of different nations and religions and ethnicities who are eager to come together and address all the challenges that are out there: environmental protection; human rights; improving education; combating poverty; advocating for a greater role for women in business, in government and in society; increasing resilience in the face of natural disasters; spurring economic progress so more young people can follow in your footsteps and get a good education and have opportunity.

We see young leaders who embrace the diversity of this region not as a weakness, but as a strength, and who realize that even though we are all individually different and come from different traditions and different communities, we're stronger when we work together.

So the future of this region, your region, is not going to be determined by dictators or by armies, it's going to be determined by entrepreneurs and inventors and dreamers and people who are doing things in the community. And you're going to be the leaders who make that happen. Your generation has greater potential to shape society than any generation that's come before because you have the power to get knowledge from everywhere, and you have more sophistication and experiences than your parents or your grandparents. And you have now the chance to share knowledge and experiences with other young people all across this region and around the world. And that wasn't true 20 years ago or 50 years ago.

La Min Oo uses his power to tell the story of his fellow Burmese. He studied at Gettysburg College in the United States. The transformation that he watched unfold through Facebook inspired him to return home and make an award-winning documentary about the plight of Burmese farmers. And he says, "My country has been closed so long, there are a lot of stories to be told." So you young people have the chance to say -- to tell those stories. You have the power to improve institutions that are very important for democratic governance, like civil society, and an impartial judicial, and a free press, and private enterprise. And there's so much to build here.

In countries like this, it's critical that you get involved in that way. I'll give you an example. Ryan Louis Madrid dreamt of being a journalist. But as he stood surrounded by the wreckage of a typhoon in his beloved Philippines, he made himself into an instrument for his fellow citizens rebuilding. Today the organization he co-founded puts solar rooftops in developing and recovering communities. And he wants to use his skills to encourage other enterprising young people in developing countries to say in their countries and help their own people, to think globally and act locally. You have the power to remind us all that human dignity is not just a universal aspiration, but a human right.

So Wai Wai Nu spent seven years of her youth behind bars as a political prisoner. And she called it her "university about life." Today she uses that hard-earned degree to advocate for tolerance and acceptance, saying, "We too sacrificed many things for the same cause, that that is democracy."

You have the chance to overcome hatred and make sure that freedom rather than repression, hope rather than fear is governing your country. You have the power to set your own countries on a new and different path.

And in all of this, America wants to be your partner. We want to help any way that we can to help you shape your future. We want you to have the tools and the connections and the resources that you need to change the world.

So one way that we can do this, I'm announcing a significant expansion of the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative Fellowship, an exchange program that will bring 500 Southeast Asian leaders to the United States every year. And these fellows will have the chance to strengthen their professional leadership skills, network with one another, share experiences and ideas, and then come back home better prepared to lead your region and change the world.

So some of these fellows will benefit from five-week instruction at some of the best universities in America on issues like entrepreneurship and environmental stewardship and civil society and human rights. Others will have the chance to work in professional fellowships at state and local governments and NGOs across the United States. And, by the way, through this program that I hope some of you will be able to take advantage of, when you spend time in the United States our people learn from you. So it's not just you learning from us.

And when these fellows then return home with these new ideas and new experiences, our embassies and USAID missions will reach out and offer the support and resources to help make your dreams a reality. So today I'm proud to announce that America will convene a young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative Summit in this region every year, giving fellows the chance to share their successes with each other and strengthen their network to accomplish even more.

So I hope some of you will take advantage of this. I expect many of you will take up the mantle of reform from student activists like Aung San Suu Kyi and Min Ko Naing; take your rightful place as leaders in a stable and prosperous and progressive Southeast Asia. And as you do, I promise you will have no better friend and partner than the United States of America.

So thank you very much. Kyeizu tin ba de. I now want to take your questions.

And I hope you don't mind, because it's a little warm in Myanmar, I'm going to take off my jacket.

Okay, so there should be -- I've got a microphone, and there should be mics in the audience. And I'll take as many questions as I can before I have to go to Australia.

All right, who wants to go first? This young man right here.

Question: I'm [inaudible.] I'm a third-year student, majoring in English at Sittwe University, Rakhine state, or as you would say, Rakhine state.

President Obama: I'm still working on my pronunciation.

Question: I've experienced some sectarian and racial balance firsthand in my region. So the question I would like to ask you to answer is: How can I be part of educating my generation to promote tolerance and respect cultural differences, and most of all, eradicate extremism among different ethnic groups?

President Obama: That's a great question. Thank you so much. I had a chance to meet with some civil society groups, and I had a press conference earlier today. Yesterday, I had a chance to meet with parliamentarians, including the speaker -- the two speakers, as well as Aung San Suu Kyi, and then spoke with the President. And to all of them, I said this: There is no example of a country that is successful if its people are divided based on religion or ethnicity. If you look at the Middle East right now and the chaos that’s taking place in a place like Syria, so much of that is based on religious differences. Even though they’re all Muslim, Shia and Sunni are fighting each other. If you look in Northern Ireland, then Catholics and Protestants fought for decades and only now have arrived at peace.

So in this globalized world where people of different faiths and cultures and races are going to meet each other inevitably -- because nobody just lives in a village anymore; people are constantly getting information from different places and new ideas and meeting people who are different from them –- it is critical for any country to abide by the basic principle that all people are equal, all people are deserving of respect, all people are equal under the law, all people can participate in the life of their country, all people should be able to express their views without fear of being repressed. And those attitudes start with each of us individually. It’s important that government play a role in making sure that it applies laws fairly, not arbitrarily, not on the basis of preferring one group over another.

But what’s also true is that each of us have to cultivate an attitude of tolerance and mutual respect. And for young people, we have to try to encourage each other to be tolerant and respectful. So in the United States, obviously one of the biggest problems historically has been the issue of racial discrimination. And part of our efforts to overcome racial discrimination involve passing laws like the Civil Rights Law and the Voting Rights Law, and that required marches and protests and Dr. King. But part of the effort was also people changing the hearts and minds, and realizing that just because somebody doesn’t look like me doesn’t mean that they’re not worthy of respect.

And when you’re growing up and you saw a friend of yours call somebody by a derogatory name, a rude name because they were different, it’s your job to say to that person, actually, that’s not the right way to think. If you are Christian and you have a friend who says I hate Muslims, then it’s up to you to say to that friend, you know what, I don’t believe in that; I think that’s the wrong attitude, I think we have to be respectful of the Muslim population. If you’re Buddhist and you say -- you hear somebody in your group say I want to treat a Hindu differently, it’s your job to speak out. So the most important thing I think is for you to, in whatever circle of influence you have, speak out on behalf of tolerance and diversity and respect. If you are quiet, then the people who are intolerant, they’ll own the stage and they’ll set the terms of the debate. And one of the things that leadership requires is saying things even when it’s uncomfortable, even when it’s unpopular -- especially when it’s unpopular. So I hope that as you get more influence, you’ll continue to speak out on behalf of these values.

All right, who’s next?

Okay, I’m going to go –- now, the one thing I’m going to do is I’m going to go boy, girl, boy, girl to make sure that it’s fair, because one thing I didn’t say in my initial speech is societies that are most successful also treat their women and girls with respect. Otherwise, they won’t be successful.

The young lady in the yellow, right there, who had her hand up. Okay, hold on so we can get a microphone.

Question: I am [inaudible]. I am Kachin and Burmese. I would like to ask about the ASEAN affair. So my question is, there are different political system and different level of democratic freedom in ASEAN. Do you think those differences will cost challenges to ASEAN integration? And do you believe it is the right time to push for ASEAN integration? Thank you.

President Obama: Of the 10 countries in ASEAN, I just had a chance to meet with all their leaders at the U.S.-ASEAN Summit. And the good news is that ASEAN has become more ambitious over the last several years in trying to promote integration, to work together on issues like disaster relief or public health or maritime security or improved education. And I think it’s inevitable that integration is going to happen more and more.

And my hope is that by encouraging integration, that the countries who are doing better on issues like democracy and human rights have a positive influence in bringing up those countries that don’t have such a good record. And we’ve actually I think seen that happen. Listen, when I first came into office, Myanmar was still very much a dictatorship. And there was some controversy about me participating in an ASEAN Summit because there was still no freedom in Myanmar. And I think that President Thein Sein, because he was with leaders like SBY of Indonesia -- see there, all right, the Indonesians started cheering -- who had traveled the path of democracy, I think President Thein Sein began to see how more open societies were becoming more successful, and I think had a positive influence on -- I think his participation in ASEAN had a positive influence in providing an opening to begin the process of transition here in Myanmar.

But it’s important I think that even as we engage with countries that are less open or less democratic, that we also continue to apply constructive criticism where they fall backwards, where they fall short. And sometimes that’s hard to do. I think a lot of the leaders of ASEAN don’t like to criticize each other because they think that it’s not respectful. And no country is perfect, so they worry that if we criticize one country then somebody will criticize us.

But I think the goal should be for all of us to try to improve what we do on behalf of our people every single day. I’m very proud of the United States. I believe that the United States is a force for good around the world. But I wouldn’t be a good President if I don’t listen to criticism of our policies and stay open to what other countries say about us. Sometimes I think those criticisms are unfair. Sometimes I think people like to complain about the United States because we’re doing too much. Sometimes they complain because they’re doing too little. Every problem around the world, why isn’t the United States doing something about it. Sometimes there are countries that don’t take responsibility for themselves and they want us to fix it. And then when we do try to fix it, they say why are you meddling in our affairs. Yes, it’s kind of frustrating sometimes.

But the fact that we are getting these criticisms means that we’re constantly thinking, okay, is this how we should apply this policy? Are we doing the right thing when we provide aid to a country, but the country is still ruled by a small elite and maybe it’s not getting down to the people? Are we doing the right thing when we engage in training a military to become more professional, but maybe the military is still engaging in repressive activity? If we’re not open to those criticisms, then we won’t get better, we won’t improve.

And I think all of us should be interested in trying to get better, because none of us are perfect and no country is perfect. So I do think ASEAN has an opportunity to play a very important role. But integration is inevitable just because of the nature of economies today. There’s too much travel, there’s too much Internet, there are too many smartphones. When I was driving through here, everybody had a smartphone. I saw a bunch of people -- they didn’t have any shirt, but they had a smartphone. So what that means is -- and most manufacturing today of various products, the parts are made in, like, five different countries, and then they become integrated in some fashion. And then they’re sold all around the world. So integration is going to happen no matter what. The question is, do we integrate at a high level that improves freedom and improves opportunity, or are we integrating at a low level, where there’s less freedom and less opportunity. And I believe integrating at a high level, and I hope most members of ASEAN do also.

All right, it’s a guy’s turn now. I don’t want to discriminate against the men. This gentleman right here. Yes, with the mustache and the beard. There you go. There’s a microphone coming right here. You can just stay where you are. Careful. Hold on to her, so she doesn’t fall.

Question: Hello, Mr. President Obama. My name is [inaudible] and I am studying law. My question is, now we are in the democratic transition, so our country is facing so many challenges in every sector. So if you were the President of Myanmar -- which sector you will focus on first? And how you will make our country develop? Thank you.

President Obama: Well, let me just say, you’re always popular in somebody else’s country. When you’re in your own country, everybody is complaining. I think you’re right, Myanmar has so many challenges. I think the most important challenge right now is completing the transition to democracy. And so my first focus is I think the focus that many people have already talked about.

Number one, there needs to be an election next year. It shouldn’t be delayed. Number two, there should be constitutional amendments that ensure a transition over time to a fully civilian government. Number three, there needs to be laws put in place to protect freedom of the press, freedom of expression, freedom to politically organize.

And I think that if that process is fixed and institutionalized and made permanent, and you now have the tools to deal with all the other challenges, and I think that inevitably what would happen if you had a genuine democracy in Myanmar is the focus next would then be on providing economic opportunity, because Myanmar is still a very poor country. And what we know in the 21st century is, is that the most important tools for economic opportunity are making sure that young people are getting a good education. And my understanding is, is that the education system in Myanmar is still under-developed. I think all of you represent the best of Myanmar’s students. But my understanding is there are many villages you go to where there’s really no schools, as a practical matter, and many of the schools still teach just how to memorize certain things rather than how to think critically about problems.

And every country at this point, if it wants to succeed, needs to put in place free, compulsory education for its young people -- because they just can’t succeed unless they have some basic skills. They have to be able to read. They have to be able to do mathematics. They have to have some familiarity with computers. They have to be able to understand basic principles of science. If you don’t have those basic tools, then it’s very hard to find a decent job in today’s economy.

Now, because Myanmar is still very agricultural, I think issues of land reform and trying to increase productivity in the agricultural sector is also a very immediate and urgent problem. This is true not just in Myanmar; this is true in many relatively poor countries. In Africa, for example, we initiated something called Feed the Future, and the whole goal is to improve the productivity of farmers. And farmers in many poor countries, they still use the same techniques that they used 200 years ago. They’re still using a buffalo or an ox, and waiting on the rains. And sometimes the new techniques, they're not necessarily expensive; it's just a matter of applying them scientifically.

And if you double yields for a farm and double income for farmers in a country like Myanmar, suddenly you have increased wealth, which means that some people now can start businesses. Maybe now somebody can take some of the profits they made and invest in a tractor, or they can start processing the rice that they produce so that they can gain more value. Or they may be able to buy a smartphone so they know what the prices are in the market, and not get taken advantage of. So just small changes are really important.

Now, my understanding, and I'm not expert, is that some of that will also require some reforms in terms of land ownership and leasing so that people can keep the products of their labor, as opposed to just being essentially what we call sharecroppers in the United States, where you're working the land, but you're giving it over to somebody else and never getting ahead.

So those are just two examples of things that I think will happen naturally if you've got a democratic system in place.

All right, it's a young lady's turn. So this young lady in the glasses right here. She's waving very hard, so she must have an excellent question.

Question: Good morning. My name is [inaudible].

President Obama: It's afternoon, though. Maybe you've been waiting here since morning. But now it's the afternoon.

Question: But you can call me Amy [ph]. I want to ask one question. My question is, now we are working on IT, so America is already doubled up in IT. So can you provide any development center of IT and job opportunity for youth?

President Obama: Well, I was just talking to the civil society groups, and there was one person there who mentioned that Internet penetration in Myanmar is still only about 9 percent, which means there's enormous room for growth. The issue for IT in a country like Myanmar is, first of all, setting up the infrastructure -- whether it's wireless or other methods -- so that people can start communicating. And once the hardware is in place, then where the real development happens is in the software. And that's where it's really a matter of education, training, and developing a homegrown capacity.

And so what we'll do is we'll work with both civil society groups, as well as the government, to find opportunities where we can promote the building of the infrastructure that's required. But what's really required is also making sure that young people are trained.

And part of what's going to have to happen is, in the United States most of the IT development happened through the private sector. Government invested in research, and so the idea of the Internet was developed with the help of government funding. But what became then the World Wide Web and then all the applications and social media and all that was really developed through the private sector. So part of what has to happen once democracy is installed in Myanmar is then also looking at how are you structuring laws to encourage innovation and entrepreneurship.

So, for example, one of the debates that we're having in trade negotiations with Asian countries in the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the big trade initiative that we're moving forward, is the need to protect intellectual property. If you invent a better tractor, then in the United States, you go to a patent office and you register your patent. You show that this is a new invention. And if anybody then wants to produce this new tractor, they have to pay you for using your idea. The same is true for intellectual property. If you come up with the idea of Facebook, then you need to be able to get a benefit from this idea.

And one of the problems I think that you still have in many countries in Southeast Asia and around the world is weak intellectual property protections, which means that if you're an entrepreneur with a good idea, you don't want to start your business here, because next thing you know somebody steals your idea and they just start their business. So you'd rather start the idea in the United States where you know that it will be protected. And then maybe you will lease to other countries, but the jobs and the opportunities will have been created someplace else.

So setting up regulatory structures, protections for intellectual property, all those things are also going to be very important in order to get a strong IT culture and an innovation culture here in Myanmar and throughout the region.

Okay, it's a man's turn. Let's see. I'm going to go with this guy right here. Hold on a second. Now, you're not going to read that whole thing, are you? Because --

Question: I read you a question --

President Obama: I think you have to summarize it quickly because we don't want --

Question: Yes, yes, just want to give you a kind of sheet, cheat sheet.

President Obama: Yes, I'll take the sheet.

Question: Okay.

President Obama: There you go. All right.

Question: I have only one question.

President Obama: There are like -- there are 20 questions on here.

Question: Just want you to know --

President Obama: Why don't you just ask me one of them? I'll read the rest.

Question: My question, as you know -- may I know your opinion about like how to create national identity, or like Myanmar identity -- different, strong identity in our country?

President Obama: Yes. That's a great question. Yes, I was talking about this with the civil society groups because we are very supportive of the efforts to get a ceasefire and a peace process with the ethnic groups that have been engaged in armed conflict for a long time. And we've already talked about some of the problems that the Muslim populations have faced in Rakhine state.

But what I said to the civil society groups is, yes, it is important to protect specific ethnic groups from discrimination. And it is natural in a democracy that ethnic groups organize among themselves to be heard in the halls of power. So in the United States, for example, as its democracy developed, the Irish in big cities, they came together and they built organizations, and they were able to promote the interests of Irish Americans. And African Americans, when they were seeking their freedom, you had organizations like the NAACP that promoted the interests of African Americans. So there's nothing wrong with groups organizing around ethnic identity, or around economic interests, or around regional concerns. That's how a democracy naturally works. You get with people who agree with you or who are like you to make sure that your concerns are heard.

But what I said is that it is important for a democracy that people's identities are also a national identity. If you walk down the streets of New York City, you will see people looking more different than this group right here. You'll see blue-eyed, blonde people. You'll see dark-skinned, black people. You'll see Asians. You'll see Muslims. You'll see -- but if you ask any of those people, “What are you?” -- I'm American.

Now I may be an African American or an Asian American or an Irish American, but the first thing I'll say is, I'm an American.

And if you don't have that sense of national unity, then it's very hard for a country to succeed -- particularly a small country like Myanmar. If people think in terms of ethnic identity before national identity, then I think over time the country will start breaking apart and democracy will not work. So there has to be a sense of common purpose.

But that's not an excuse then for majority groups to say, don’t complain, to ethnic minorities -- because the ethnic minorities may have some real complaints. And part of what is important for the majority groups to do -- if, in fact, you have a national identity, that means that you've got to be concerned with a minority also because it reflects badly on your country if somebody from a minority group is not being treated fairly.

America could not live up to its potential until it treated its black citizens fairly. That's just a fact, that that was a stain on America when an entire group of people couldn't vote, or didn't have legal protections. Because it made all the Declarations of Independence and Constitution and rule of law, it made that seem like an illusion.

And so when the Civil Rights Movement happened in the United States, that wasn't just a victory for African Americans, that was a victory for America because what it showed was that the whole country was going to be concerned about everybody, not just about some people. And it was a victory for America's national identity that it was treating minorities fairly.

And that's I think how every country in ASEAN, including Myanmar, needs to think about these problems. You need to respect people's differences. You need to be attentive to the grievances of minorities that may be discriminated against. But both the majority and the minority, the powerful and the powerless, also have to have a sense of national identity in order to be successful.

I got time for two more questions. Two more. He said one, but I'm going to take two. See, it's going to be one of you three. What do you think? Who should -- out of the three of you, who should I call on? Are you friends? Okay, so why don't you decide? What do you think? Okay, yes, rock, paper, scissors. Let's see. Who won? Okay, go on. There you go. What did you win with? Were you scissors or rock? Were you rock or scissors or paper?

Question: Rock.

President Obama: Rock.

Question: I rock!

President Obama: You rock?

Question: Yes.

President Obama: Yes.

Question: Mingalaba, Mr. President. I am from Burma from [inaudible] in American Center. Right now we're working on a documentary on Yangon University, Congregation Hall where you spoke the last time you came.

President Obama: Yes, last time I was here.

Question: Yes. So as you know, Yangon University has reopened last year, 2013. So do think it is a good start to rebuild the higher education system in Burma?

President Obama: Well, I think it's a great start. But I think -- as I said before, one of the biggest challenges Myanmar is going to face is rebuilding its education system. And I think it has to start early. It has to start from the youngest ages.

One of the things that we've learned from science is that the most that you will ever learn in your entire life happens from the time you're born until you're three years old. Between your birth and the age of three, that's when your brain is developing the most. And what we've learned, for example, is that when you read -- when parents read to young children even before the children know how to read, the children are building a vocabulary that will put them in a strong position then to learn how to read later on because they've heard the words over and over again.

And so I just make that point because it shows that if you're only worried about university education, but you're not worrying about what happens to children when they're three, four, five, six years old, then you're missing the foundation for a good education system.

And this is true in the United States, as well. We've got the best university system in the world. Obviously I'm biased because I'm the President of the United States, so I think everything in the United States is the best in the world.

But I think anybody objectively would say that we have a system of universities and colleges that is unequaled anyplace else. But we still have problems. And one of the things that I'm spending a lot of time on reform is the elementary, secondary school levels. And also, even earlier having what we call early childhood education to get children off to a good start so that by the time they go to school, they already know their alphabet and they can already start reading at an early age. And I hope that that ends up being a basic emphasis here in Myanmar.

But I also think that from what I've heard, one of the reforms that will need to take place in universities here is to make sure that in all the departments there is the ability for universities and students to shape curriculums and to have access to information from everywhere around the world, and that it's not just a narrow process of indoctrination. Because the best universities are ones that teach you how to think not what to think, right? A good education is not just knowing facts, although you need to know facts. You need to know that two plus two is four; it's not five. That's an important fact. But you also need to know how to ask questions, and how to critically analyze a problem, and how to be able to distinguish between fact and opinion, and how to compare two different ideas.

And I think there's a danger sometimes in countries that are -- don't have a long tradition of higher education to try to narrow the learning process, as opposed to open it up. And I think that that's something that I'm sure university students here in Myanmar will want to express during the course of this transition period and the reforms that are taking place.

All right, I've got time for one more question. Wait, wait, wait. No point in yelling. First of all, all the women have to put their hands down because I told you it was going to be boy, girl, boy, girl. And the second thing is, how many students are there from countries other than Myanmar who are here? Okay, so I think that in the interest of ASEAN unity, and because this is a Young Southeast Asian Leaders Forum, I've got to ask --

Question: [Inaudible.]

President Obama: No, no, no, first of all, you can't -- I told you already that women aren't going to get a chance to ask the next question. Where are you from?

Question: [Inaudible.]

President Obama: Well, you're still in Burma. All right. Where you from? Sit down. Where you from? All right, let me -- I'm going to ask this guy, guy from the Philippines right here. Come on. You just started yelling. I didn't even call on you.

Question: Good afternoon, Mr. President. My name is Ryan Louis Madrid. I'm from the Philippines. I'm one of the person you --

President Obama: I was just talking about you.

Question: Yes. And, yes, it gave me a little tear in my eyes. I thank you so much for putting us -- making me as, like, one of the models maybe for what youth can do for change. But my question really is, I just learned recently that the U.S. and ASEAN will be making a climate change statement. I'd like to know if you could tell us what this is all about, and how this would be different from the Kyoto Protocol and other climate change efforts in making real efforts towards curbing climate change. Thank you.

President Obama: Good. So first of all, let's just establish the science and the facts. The planet is getting warmer. The reason the planet is getting warmer is because human activity is releasing greenhouse gases that is trapping heat and increasing temperatures. And because you start getting a negative feedback loop, as it gets hotter, ice melts. The permafrost in places like Siberia start releasing methane gases. Ice packs in Greenland start melting. That then makes it even warmer. And we're on a trajectory in which the temperatures could rise so high that it would have catastrophic impacts around the world because temperatures start changing, weather patterns shift. Traditional monsoon seasons might completely reverse themselves. Areas that once used to have arable land suddenly now have long droughts. Areas that used to be temperate suddenly get floods. We're seeing the impacts in developed countries. We see it in my own country. And we're seeing impacts in poor countries. And we're seeing impacts, obviously, in island nations where if the temperatures continue to rise, we'll end up with oceans that are two feet or three feet higher, and it could swallow up entire countries.

So this is perhaps the central challenge, the most important challenge facing humanity in the 21st century, is getting control of this.

Now, the good news is that we can begin to slow down that process so that the temperatures only go up a certain level, and although we'll have to make some adaptations, it doesn't become catastrophic. But in order to do that, we have to start transitioning our economies to clean energy rather than dirty energy. It means that we have to start developing wind power and solar power. It means that societies have to use energy more efficiently. It means that we have to find ways to use safe nuclear power because they don't -- that doesn’t emit greenhouse gases. So there's no single answer. There's a group of answers to the problem.

And some of you may be aware that the United States and China are the two biggest emitters in the world. The United States had been the biggest emitter; China overtook us. In fairness to China, each individual Chinese person probably uses less energy and emits less greenhouse gases than an individual American. But there are a lot more Chinese than there are Americans.

And if, as China continues to develop, they start matching the United States in how much carbon they release, we'll never survive. None of us. Same is true with India -- just because of the size of its population. And the same is true with Southeast Asia, which, as I said before, contains one out of every 10 people in the world.

So all of us are going to have to be a part of this. And the United States and China -- in a meeting with President Xi -- we announced that we are both going to set bold targets for greenhouse gas reductions from 2020 forward.

What we're encouraging ASEAN to do, individual ASEAN countries, is also to come up with goals for how they are going to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. And if all countries around the world put forward ambitious goals at a Paris conference that we're going to be having in 2015, then this can serve at the basis for collective action in reducing greenhouse gases.

But although we know what we need to do, the transition will be difficult because -- just to give you one example -- Indonesia.

Audience Member: Yeah!

President Obama: You might not want to cheer about this -- has been cutting down its forests at a very high rate in order to accommodate the palm oil industry. Now the palm oil industry is very lucrative, and you have some very big landholders and big companies who are making a lot of money from the palm oil industry. And they create some jobs. But when you just deforest entire sections of Sumatra or Borneo, that can end up having a devastating effect on the climate.

There are countries in ASEAN that subsidize energy. Now, oftentimes this is with the best of intentions. The idea would be we want to make gasoline cheaper or electricity cheaper so that poor people can afford it. The problem is that when you subsidize energy, there's no incentive to use less energy. So typically when you have a lot of fuel subsidies, those economies are very inefficient in how they use energy, and they generate more pollution.

The countries that are most efficient in energy use, not only do they not subsidize energy -- in fact, they tax energy use. So you look like -- in a country like Norway, which produces a lot of oil, but gasoline there is still $6 or $7 a gallon, which in liters -- who wants to do a liter conversion for me? Anyway, it's very expensive.

So part of what we hope each country in ASEAN commits to is to take the steps that will be required to reduce or at least slow the growth of its carbon emissions, and then slowly start reducing them. And it doesn't have to be overnight, but the transition has to begin.

So if you look at a country like Indonesia, making a commitment to reduce deforestation, reduce and eventually end fuel subsidies, those two things alone could probably help Indonesia meet a very bold carbon reduction goal.

In the United States, I've instructed my Environmental Protection Agency to regulate the amount of greenhouse gases that power plants can send into the atmosphere. And we've doubled fuel-efficiency standards on cars. So in a few years, by the middle of the next century, by 2025, you won't be able to sell a car in the United States unless it is delivering twice as much mileage for every gallon of gas.

And so you can build in transition times to get this done. But we have to start now. And this is probably a good place for me to end by just saying that the issue of climate change is a perfect example of why young people have to lead.

Because old people, they've created a mess, and then they'll be gone. And then you -- you're the ones who have to deal with it. And also what happens is old people get set in their ways. So the older you get, the more likely you are to say, that's how it's always been so that's how I'm going to keep on doing it -- even if there's a better way to do things.

Young people, they're asking, well, why do I have to do it that way? Let's try it this way. And that kind of willingness to accept challenges and try things in a new way, to not be stuck in the past, or to look towards the future, that's what all of you represent.

So I'm hopeful that you have a chance to participate in our Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative Fellows Program. Maybe I'll see some of you in the United States. I'm sure all of you are going to do great things. And I hope all of you dream big and then work hard to achieve those dreams.

Okay? Thank you very much, everybody.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address to the Nation on Redressing U.S. Immigration Policy

My fellow Americans, tonight, I’d like to talk with you about immigration.

For more than 200 years, our tradition of welcoming immigrants from around the world has given us a tremendous advantage over other nations. It’s kept us youthful, dynamic, and entrepreneurial. It has shaped our character as a people with limitless possibilities -- people not trapped by our past, but able to remake ourselves as we choose.

But today, our immigration system is broken -- and everybody knows it.

Families who enter our country the right way and play by the rules watch others flout the rules. Business owners who offer their workers good wages and benefits see the competition exploit undocumented immigrants by paying them far less. All of us take offense to anyone who reaps the rewards of living in America without taking on the responsibilities of living in America. And undocumented immigrants who desperately want to embrace those responsibilities see little option but to remain in the shadows, or risk their families being torn apart.

It’s been this way for decades. And for decades, we haven’t done much about it.

When I took office, I committed to fixing this broken immigration system. And I began by doing what I could to secure our borders. Today, we have more agents and technology deployed to secure our southern border than at any time in our history. And over the past six years, illegal border crossings have been cut by more than half. Although this summer, there was a brief spike in unaccompanied children being apprehended at our border, the number of such children is now actually lower than it’s been in nearly two years. Overall, the number of people trying to cross our border illegally is at its lowest level since the 1970s. Those are the facts.

Meanwhile, I worked with Congress on a comprehensive fix, and last year, 68 Democrats, Republicans, and independents came together to pass a bipartisan bill in the Senate. It wasn’t perfect. It was a compromise. But it reflected common sense. It would have doubled the number of border patrol agents while giving undocumented immigrants a pathway to citizenship if they paid a fine, started paying their taxes, and went to the back of the line. And independent experts said that it would help grow our economy and shrink our deficits.

Had the House of Representatives allowed that kind of bill a simple yes-or-no vote, it would have passed with support from both parties, and today it would be the law. But for a year and a half now, Republican leaders in the House have refused to allow that simple vote.

Now, I continue to believe that the best way to solve this problem is by working together to pass that kind of common sense law. But until that happens, there are actions I have the legal authority to take as President -- the same kinds of actions taken by Democratic and Republican presidents before me -- that will help make our immigration system more fair and more just.

Tonight, I am announcing those actions.

First, we’ll build on our progress at the border with additional resources for our law enforcement personnel so that they can stem the flow of illegal crossings, and speed the return of those who do cross over.

Second, I’ll make it easier and faster for high-skilled immigrants, graduates, and entrepreneurs to stay and contribute to our economy, as so many business leaders have proposed.

Third, we’ll take steps to deal responsibly with the millions of undocumented immigrants who already live in our country.

I want to say more about this third issue, because it generates the most passion and controversy. Even as we are a nation of immigrants, we’re also a nation of laws. Undocumented workers broke our immigration laws, and I believe that they must be held accountable -- especially those who may be dangerous. That’s why, over the past six years, deportations of criminals are up 80 percent. And that’s why we’re going to keep focusing enforcement resources on actual threats to our security. Felons, not families. Criminals, not children. Gang members, not a mom who’s working hard to provide for her kids. We’ll prioritize, just like law enforcement does every day.

But even as we focus on deporting criminals, the fact is, millions of immigrants in every state, of every race and nationality still live here illegally. And let’s be honest -- tracking down, rounding up, and deporting millions of people isn’t realistic. Anyone who suggests otherwise isn’t being straight with you. It’s also not who we are as Americans. After all, most of these immigrants have been here a long time. They work hard, often in tough, low-paying jobs. They support their families. They worship at our churches. Many of their kids are American-born or spent most of their lives here, and their hopes, dreams, and patriotism are just like ours. As my predecessor, President Bush, once put it: “They are a part of American life.”

Now here’s the thing: We expect people who live in this country to play by the rules. We expect that those who cut the line will not be unfairly rewarded. So we’re going to offer the following deal: If you’ve been in America for more than five years; if you have children who are American citizens or legal residents; if you register, pass a criminal background check, and you’re willing to pay your fair share of taxes -- you’ll be able to apply to stay in this country temporarily without fear of deportation. You can come out of the shadows and get right with the law. That’s what this deal is.

Now, let’s be clear about what it isn’t. This deal does not apply to anyone who has come to this country recently. It does not apply to anyone who might come to America illegally in the future. It does not grant citizenship, or the right to stay here permanently, or offer the same benefits that citizens receive -- only Congress can do that. All we’re saying is we’re not going to deport you.

I know some of the critics of this action call it amnesty. Well, it’s not. Amnesty is the immigration system we have today -- millions of people who live here without paying their taxes or playing by the rules while politicians use the issue to scare people and whip up votes at election time.

That’s the real amnesty -- leaving this broken system the way it is. Mass amnesty would be unfair. Mass deportation would be both impossible and contrary to our character. What I’m describing is accountability -- a common-sense, middle-ground approach: If you meet the criteria, you can come out of the shadows and get right with the law. If you’re a criminal, you’ll be deported. If you plan to enter the U.S. illegally, your chances of getting caught and sent back just went up.

The actions I’m taking are not only lawful, they’re the kinds of actions taken by every single Republican President and every single Democratic President for the past half century. And to those members of Congress who question my authority to make our immigration system work better, or question the wisdom of me acting where Congress has failed, I have one answer: Pass a bill.

I want to work with both parties to pass a more permanent legislative solution. And the day I sign that bill into law, the actions I take will no longer be necessary. Meanwhile, don’t let a disagreement over a single issue be a dealbreaker on every issue. That’s not how our democracy works, and Congress certainly shouldn’t shut down our government again just because we disagree on this. Americans are tired of gridlock. What our country needs from us right now is a common purpose -- a higher purpose.

Most Americans support the types of reforms I’ve talked about tonight. But I understand the disagreements held by many of you at home. Millions of us, myself included, go back generations in this country, with ancestors who put in the painstaking work to become citizens. So we don’t like the notion that anyone might get a free pass to American citizenship.

I know some worry immigration will change the very fabric of who we are, or take our jobs, or stick it to middle-class families at a time when they already feel like they’ve gotten the raw deal for over a decade. I hear these concerns. But that’s not what these steps would do. Our history and the facts show that immigrants are a net plus for our economy and our society. And I believe it’s important that all of us have this debate without impugning each other’s character.

Because for all the back and forth of Washington, we have to remember that this debate is about something bigger. It’s about who we are as a country, and who we want to be for future generations.

Are we a nation that tolerates the hypocrisy of a system where workers who pick our fruit and make our beds never have a chance to get right with the law? Or are we a nation that gives them a chance to make amends, take responsibility, and give their kids a better future?

Are we a nation that accepts the cruelty of ripping children from their parents’ arms? Or are we a nation that values families, and works together to keep them together?

Are we a nation that educates the world’s best and brightest in our universities, only to send them home to create businesses in countries that compete against us? Or are we a nation that encourages them to stay and create jobs here, create businesses here, create industries right here in America?

That’s what this debate is all about. We need more than politics as usual when it comes to immigration. We need reasoned, thoughtful, compassionate debate that focuses on our hopes, not our fears. I know the politics of this issue are tough. But let me tell you why I have come to feel so strongly about it.

Over the past few years, I have seen the determination of immigrant fathers who worked two or three jobs without taking a dime from the government, and at risk any moment of losing it all, just to build a better life for their kids. I’ve seen the heartbreak and anxiety of children whose mothers might be taken away from them just because they didn’t have the right papers. I’ve seen the courage of students who, except for the circumstances of their birth, are as American as Malia or Sasha; students who bravely come out as undocumented in hopes they could make a difference in the country they love.

These people -- our neighbors, our classmates, our friends -- they did not come here in search of a free ride or an easy life. They came to work, and study, and serve in our military, and above all, contribute to America’s success.

Tomorrow, I’ll travel to Las Vegas and meet with some of these students, including a young woman named Astrid Silva. Astrid was brought to America when she was four years old. Her only possessions were a cross, her doll, and the frilly dress she had on. When she started school, she didn’t speak any English. She caught up to other kids by reading newspapers and watching PBS, and she became a good student. Her father worked in landscaping. Her mom cleaned other people’s homes. They wouldn’t let Astrid apply to a technology magnet school, not because they didn’t love her, but because they were afraid the paperwork would out her as an undocumented immigrant -- so she applied behind their back and got in. Still, she mostly lived in the shadows -- until her grandmother, who visited every year from Mexico, passed away, and she couldn’t travel to the funeral without risk of being found out and deported. It was around that time she decided to begin advocating for herself and others like her, and today, Astrid Silva is a college student working on her third degree.

Are we a nation that kicks out a striving, hopeful immigrant like Astrid, or are we a nation that finds a way to welcome her in? Scripture tells us that we shall not oppress a stranger, for we know the heart of a stranger -- we were strangers once, too.

My fellow Americans, we are and always will be a nation of immigrants. We were strangers once, too. And whether our forebears were strangers who crossed the Atlantic, or the Pacific, or the Rio Grande, we are here only because this country welcomed them in, and taught them that to be an American is about something more than what we look like, or what our last names are, or how we worship. What makes us Americans is our shared commitment to an ideal -- that all of us are created equal, and all of us have the chance to make of our lives what we will.

That’s the country our parents and grandparents and generations before them built for us. That’s the tradition we must uphold. That’s the legacy we must leave for those who are yet to come.

Thank you. God bless you. And God bless this country we love.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address on the Grand Jury Decision in Ferguson, Missouri

As you know, a few moments ago, the grand jury deliberating the death of Michael Brown issued its decision. It’s an outcome that, either way, was going to be subject of intense disagreement not only in Ferguson, but across America. So I want to just say a few words suggesting how we might move forward.

First and foremost, we are a nation built on the rule of law. And so we need to accept that this decision was the grand jury’s to make. There are Americans who agree with it, and there are Americans who are deeply disappointed, even angry. It’s an understandable reaction.

But I join Michael’s parents in asking anyone who protests this decision to do so peacefully. Let me repeat Michael’s father’s words:

Hurting others or destroying property is not the answer. No matter what the grand jury decides, I do not want my son’s death to be in vain. I want it to lead to incredible change, positive change, change that makes the Saint Louis region better for everyone.

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Michael Brown’s parents have lost more than anyone. We should be honoring their wishes.

I also appeal to the law enforcement officials in Ferguson and the region to show care and restraint in managing peaceful protests that may occur. Understand, our police officers put their lives on the line for us every single day. They’ve got a tough job to do to maintain public safety and hold accountable those who break the law.

As they do their jobs in the coming days, they need to work with the community, not against the community, to distinguish the handful of people who may use the grand jury’s decision as an excuse for violence -- distinguish them from the vast majority who just want their voices heard around legitimate issues in terms of how communities and law enforcement interact.

Finally, we need to recognize that the situation in Ferguson speaks to broader challenges that we still face as a nation. The fact is, in too many parts of this country, a deep distrust exists between law enforcement and communities of color. Some of this is the result of the legacy of racial discrimination in this country. And this is tragic, because nobody needs good policing more than poor communities with higher crime rates. The good news is we know there are things we can do to help. And I’ve instructed Attorney General Holder to work with cities across the country to help build better relations between communities and law enforcement.

That means working with law enforcement officials to make sure their ranks are representative of the communities they serve. We know that makes a difference. It means working to train officials so that law enforcement conducts itself in a way that is fair to everybody. It means enlisting the community actively on what should be everybody’s goal, and that is to prevent crime.

And there are good people on all sides of this debate, as well as in both Republican and Democratic parties, that are interested not only in lifting up best practices -- because we know that there are communities who have been able to deal with this in an effective way -- but also who are interested in working with this administration and local and state officials to start tackling much-needed criminal justice reform.

So those should be the lessons that we draw from these tragic events. We need to recognize that this is not just an issue for Ferguson, this is an issue for America. We have made enormous progress in race relations over the course of the past several decades. I've witnessed that in my own life. And to deny that progress I think is to deny America’s capacity for change.

But what is also true is that there are still problems and communities of color aren't just making these problems up. Separating that from this particular decision, there are issues in which the law too often feels as if it is being applied in discriminatory fashion. I don't think that's the norm. I don't think that's true for the majority of communities or the vast majority of law enforcement officials. But these are real issues. And we have to lift them up and not deny them or try to tamp them down. What we need to do is to understand them and figure out how do we make more progress. And that can be done.

That won't be done by throwing bottles. That won't be done by smashing car windows. That won't be done by using this as an excuse to vandalize property. And it certainly won't be done by hurting anybody. So, to those in Ferguson, there are ways of channeling your concerns constructively and there are ways of channeling your concerns destructively. Michael Brown’s parents understand what it means to be constructive. The vast majority of peaceful protesters, they understand it as well.

Those of you who are watching tonight understand that there’s never an excuse for violence, particularly when there are a lot of people in goodwill out there who are willing to work on these issues.

On the other hand, those who are only interested in focusing on the violence and just want the problem to go away need to recognize that we do have work to do here, and we shouldn’t try to paper it over. Whenever we do that, the anger may momentarily subside, but over time, it builds up and America isn't everything that it could be.

And I am confident that if we focus our attention on the problem and we look at what has happened in communities around the country effectively, then we can make progress not just in Ferguson, but in a lot of other cities and communities around the country.

Okay?

Question: Mr. President, will you go to Ferguson when things settle down there?

President Obama: Well, let’s take a look and see how things are going. Eric Holder has been there. We've had a whole team from the Justice Department there, and I think that they have done some very good work. As I said, the vast majority of the community has been working very hard to try to make sure that this becomes an opportunity for us to seize the moment and turn this into a positive situation. But I think that we have to make sure that we focus at least as much attention on all those positive activities that are taking place as we do on a handful of folks who end up using this as an excuse to misbehave or to break the law or to engage in violence. I think that it's going to be very important -- and I think the media is going to have a responsibility as well -- to make sure that we focus on Michael Brown’s parents, and the clergy, and the community leaders, and the civil rights leaders, and the activists, and law enforcement officials who have been working very hard to try to find better solutions -- long-term solutions, to this issue. There is inevitably going to be some negative reaction, and it will make for good TV. But what we want to do is to make sure that we're also focusing on those who can offer the kind of real progress that we know is possible, that the vast majority of people in Ferguson, the St. Louis region, in Missouri, and around the country are looking for. And I want to be partners with those folks. And we need to lift up that kind of constructive dialogue that's taking place. All right.

# NIH Address on Ebola Vaccine Research Potential

Well, to Secretary Burwell, to Francis Collins, Tony Fauci, your teams, to all of you, thanks so much for welcoming me here today. It is wonderful to be back to America’s laboratory, even if I don’t always understand what you’re doing.

Last year, I welcomed Francis and some of you to the White House to launch our BRAIN Initiative to unlock the mysteries of the mind and to pursue new cures for disease. And Francis promoted me at the time to "scientist in chief." Which made me very proud, although I sort of felt guilty that I hadn’t studied more chemistry.

But the work you do here is remarkable, and I just got a fascinating tour of your vaccine research center. I have to say, I was very impressed with how you can clone a virus gene into a vaccine vector, then subject it to gel electrophoresis. And then pipet the samples into a 96-well microplate. Run it through the world’s most advanced multiparameter flow cytometer. I mean, it was impressive. I’ve been tinkering around the White House, setting up a similar system. We use it for brewing beer. But it works well for your work also.

Now, the last time I was here at NIH, early in my presidency, I came to announce a historic boost in funding for biomedical research. Because part of American leadership in the world -- one of the things that has always marked us as exceptional -- is our leadership in science and our leadership in research. And here at NIH, you have always been at the forefront of groundbreaking innovations. You’ve helped pioneer new treatments for everything from cancer to heart disease to HIV/AIDS. And as a consequence, you’ve helped not just Americans but people around the world live longer, fuller lives. You’ve saved countless lives in every corner of the globe. And so to Francis and Tony, and all your directors and staff, and the researchers that you fund across the country and around the globe, you deserve great thanks for your leadership, and your service, and your patriotism, and your lifesaving work.

And that brings me back to today. This past summer, as Ebola spread in West Africa, I told my team that fighting this disease had to be a national security priority, and a priority across agencies and across our government. I realize that here in the United States, some of the attention has shifted away recently -- that’s sort of how our attention spans work sometimes. Ebola is not leading the news right now. But I wanted to come here because, every day, we’re focused on keeping the American people safe. Every day, the NIH is at the forefront of this mission. NIH personnel have volunteered and deployed to West Africa. Some have served in medical labs, testing for Ebola. Some of your clinicians -- members of the U.S. Public Health Service -- have deployed to care for health care workers who got infected in the line of duty.

When Nina Pham, one of the two Dallas nurses who were infected, needed treatment, Tony and his team stepped up and you were ready. You manned shifts around the clock, day and night. You remembered your training. You displayed great skill and professionalism. You reminded the world that it is possible to treat Ebola patients effectively and safely without endangering yourselves or others.

And all that has made an enormous difference. Like a lot of Americans, I know you fell in love with Nina-- she was so sweet and big smile, her optimism, her sense of service, and reminded us -- she reminded us of the incredible sacrifices that our tireless nurses make every day, and we can never thank them enough. And I know Tony thanks Nina for teaching him how to FaceTime. And after she was released, Ebola-free, I was proud to welcome Nina to the Oval Office and give her a big hug, and she’s now back home in Texas, recovering, getting stronger. And we remember what she told the world when she was released: "Throughout this ordeal, I have put my trust in God and my medical team." And we thank everyone on her team at the NIH Clinical Center who delivered such remarkable care to Nina.

But the point is, is that the work that you have done has continued even if the cameras have gone elsewhere. And the urgency remains, because if we are going to actually solve this problem for ourselves, we have to solve it in West Africa as well. And one of the great virtues of what you’ve done here at NIH is reminded people that science matters and that science works. It’s not always going to be immediate; sometimes it’s going to be iterative and there are going to be some trials and there are going to be some errors and false starts and blind alleys, but the basic concept of subjecting hypotheses to tests and seeing if they work and being able to document them and replicate them -- the basic concept of science -- and making judgments on the basis of evidence, that’s what’s most needed during difficult, challenging moments like the ones that we had this summer and that we continue to have in West Africa.

Last week, just in time for Thanksgiving, NIH and your partners gave us something new to be thankful for, and that was news of the first successful step -— completion of the Phase 1 clinical trials -- of a potential Ebola vaccine. And on my tour just now, Doctors Nancy Sullivan and Mario Roederer showed me how they and their teams did it. And I have to say both Nancy and Mario were really good teachers and were very patient with my rudimentary questions, and the lasers were really cool. No potential Ebola vaccine has ever made it this far. So this is exciting news. But it’s also a reminder of the importance of government-funded research and our need to keep investing in basic research.

Because Nancy, as she was talking about the steps that had been taken, showed me -- this is the kind of mementos scientists keep I guess -- is there was some numbers on a little chart -- from back in 1999? -- in which she had first done some experiments and trials on the Ebola virus. So this is the product not just of last year’s work; it’s the product of over a decade of inquiry and work. And at the time, when -- Nancy was explaining when she first had some breakthroughs in understanding the Ebola virus, nobody really gave a hoot. Until you do. And that’s part of how science works -- you make investments and you pursue knowledge for knowledge’s sake, in part because it turns out that knowledge may turn out useful later and you don’t always know when.

Last week’s news is still just a first step. There are no guarantees. But Dr. Cliff Lane, who is here, is working with Liberian officials to begin large-scale tests in that country. And other potential Ebola vaccines are also in the works. I know that here at NIH you’re also working on potential treatments for Ebola. As you move ahead on all these fronts, I want you to know you have your President’s full support, and the administration’s full support.

You are a vital part of our fight against Ebola, across our government. Today, we released an update on our efforts, here in the United States and abroad. And it shows that, because we’ve stepped up our efforts in recent months, we’re more prepared when it comes to protecting Americans here at home. We’re screening and monitoring arrivals from the affected countries. We’ve equipped more hospitals with new protective gear and protocols. We’ve conducted outreach and training of hundreds of thousands of healthcare workers.

A few months ago, only 13 states could test for Ebola; today 36 states can. Previously, there were only three facilities in the country deemed capable of treating an Ebola patient, including NIH. Today, we’re announcing that we now have 35 Treatment Centers designated to care for a patient with Ebola. So this is important progress. And we’re going to just keep on at it. And throughout, we are going to be guided by the science -- not by speculation, not by fear, not by rumor, not by panic -- by science.

Now, part of what the science and epidemiology and experience has taught us -- and I’ve said this all along -- is the best way to fight this disease, to protect Americans, is to stop it at its source. And that’s why the United States continues to lead the global response in West Africa. Some 3,000 of our servicemembers and civilians are now on the ground -- manning that air bridge, moving in supplies, building treatment units. I called some of our troops in West Africa on Thanksgiving to express gratitude and they were inspiring, the can-do spirit that they displayed.

The new Medical Unit we built in Liberia to treat health workers opened last month and has begun discharging patients Ebola-free. We’ve ramped up the capacity to train hundreds of new health workers per week. We’ve helped improve burial practices across Liberia. And as a consequence, we’ve seen some encouraging news: A decline in infection rates in Liberia. And meanwhile, over the last few months, the United States has helped rally the international community. We’ve mobilized more than $2 billion in commitments to this fight because this has to truly be a global effort. But that money would not be there had it not been for U.S. leadership.

So our strategy is beginning to show results. We’re seeing some progress. But the fight is not even close to being over. As long as this disease continues to rage in West Africa, we could continue to see isolated cases here in America. In West Africa, this remains the worst Ebola epidemic in history by a long shot. And although we’ve made some progress in Liberia, we’ve still got work to do. We are seeing that we still have a lot of work in Guinea, and it’s actually been getting worse in Sierra Leone despite some good efforts from our British partners. And this can still spread to other countries, as we’ve seen in Mali. Every hot-spot is an ember that, if not contained, could become a new fire. So we cannot let down our guard, even for a minute. And we can’t just fight this epidemic; we have to extinguish it.

Much of the progress we’ve made -- and the progress we still need to make -- depends on funding that’s running out. We can’t beat Ebola without more funding. This is an expensive enterprise. And that money is running out. We cannot beat Ebola without more funding. If we want other countries to keep stepping up, we will have to continue to lead the way. And that’s why I’m calling on Congress to approve our emergency funding request to fight this disease before they leave for the holidays. It’s a good Christmas present to the American people and to the world.

The funding we’re asking for is needed to keep strengthening our capacity here at home, so we can respond to any future Ebola cases. The funding allows us to keep making progress in West Africa. Remember, we have to extinguish this disease -- this is not something that we can just manage with a few cases here and there; we’ve got to stamp it out. The funding is needed to speed up testing and approval of any promising Ebola vaccines and treatments, including those here at the NIH. It’s needed to help us partner with other countries to prevent and deal with future outbreaks and threats before they become epidemics.

This is something I want to just focus on for a second. Tony and I were fondly reminiscing about SARS and H1N1. That’s what these guys do for fun. And we were lucky with H1N1 -- that it did not prove to be more deadly. We can’t say we’re lucky with Ebola because obviously it’s having a devastating effect in West Africa but it is not airborne in its transmission.

There may and likely will come a time in which we have both an airborne disease that is deadly. And in order for us to deal with that effectively, we have to put in place an infrastructure -- not just here at home, but globally -- that allows us to see it quickly, isolate it quickly, respond to it quickly. And it also requires us to continue the same path of basic research that is being done here at NIH that Nancy is a great example of. So that if and when a new strain of flu, like the Spanish flu, crops up five years from now or a decade from now, we’ve made the investment and we’re further along to be able to catch it. It is a smart investment for us to make. It’s not just insurance; it is knowing that down the road we’re going to continue to have problems like this -- particularly in a globalized world where you move from one side of the world to the other in a day.

So this is important now, but it’s also important for our future and our children’s future and our grandchildren’s future. And the last few elections, the American people have sent Washington a pretty clear message: Find areas where you agree, don’t let the areas where you disagree shut things down, work together and get the job done.

I cannot think of a better example of an area where we should all agree than passing this emergency funding to fight Ebola and to set up some of the public health infrastructure that we need to deal with potential outbreaks in the future. How do you argue with that? That is not a partisan issue. That is a basic, common-sense issue that all Americans can agree on.

Now, I have to say I’ve been very encouraged so far by the bipartisan support in our various visits with members of Congress. For the most part, people have recognized this is not a Democratic issue or a Republican issue -- it’s about the safety and security of the American people. So let’s get it done. This can get caught up in normal politics -- we need to protect the American people and we need to show the world how American leads.

I have to tell you, I traveled to Asia, we had the G20 Summit -- if America had not led, if I had not been able to go to CDC, make a major announcement about the commitments we were going to make, be able to go to the United Nations and basically call on other countries to step up, and know that we were following through with our own commitments, had we not done that, the world would not have responded in the same way. American leadership matters every time. We set the tone and we set the agenda.

Now, in closing, I want to leave with a story that speaks to what we have to do. Nancy Writebol, is from Charlotte, North Carolina. She’s a mom, grandma, wife, also a Christian missionary. Along with her husband, she went to Liberia. She was doing God’s work -— caring for Ebola patients. It’s hard to imagine a greater expression of the Christian ethic. And she was then infected herself. So she was brought back to Emory in Atlanta, she received excellent care. Nancy was released in August. She is Ebola-free, she continues to recover. And she said this about how people treat her, even today: "You have some people that just totally wrap their arms around you, and shake your hand. And then you have other people that stand 10 feet away."

Some people wrap their arms around you. Some people stand 10 feet away. This disease is not just a test of our health systems; it is a test of our character as a nation. It asks us who we are as Americans. When we see a problem in the world -- like thousands of people dying from a disease that we know how to fight -- do we stand 10 feet away, or 10,000 miles away, or do we lead and deploy and go to help?

And I know what kind of character I want to see in America, and I know the kind of character that’s displayed by people here at NIH and some of your colleagues that are deployed right now in Liberia -- that’s who we are. We don’t give in to fears. We are guided by our hopes and we are guided by our reason, and we are guided by our faith, and we’re guided by our confidence that we can ease suffering and make a difference. And we imagine new treatments and cures, and we discover, and we invent, and we innovate, and we test, and we unlock new possibilities.

And when we save a life and we help a person heal, we go up to them and we open our arms, and we wrap our arms around them with understanding and love and compassion and reason. That’s what you do here at NIH. It’s what we do as Americans. That’s who we are. That’s who we’ll always be.

Thank you very much.

God bless you.

God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Cuba Policy Changes Address

Good afternoon. Today, the United States of America is changing its relationship with the people of Cuba. In the most significant changes in our policy in more than fifty years, we will end an outdated approach that, for decades, has failed to advance our interests, and instead we will begin to normalize relations between our two countries. Through these changes, we intend to create more opportunities for the American and Cuban people, and begin a new chapter among the nations of the Americas. There’s a complicated history between the United States and Cuba. I was born in 1961 -- just over two years after Fidel Castro took power in Cuba, and just a few months after the Bay of Pigs invasion, which tried to overthrow his regime. Over the next several decades, the relationship between our countries played out against the backdrop of the Cold War, and America’s steadfast opposition to communism. We are separated by just over 90 miles. But year after year, an ideological and economic barrier hardened between our two countries. Meanwhile, the Cuban exile community in the United States made enormous contributions to our country -- in politics and business, culture and sports. Like immigrants before, Cubans helped remake America, even as they felt a painful yearning for the land and families they left behind. All of this bound America and Cuba in a unique relationship, at once family and foe. Proudly, the United States has supported democracy and human rights in Cuba through these five decades. We have done so primarily through policies that aimed to isolate the island, preventing the most basic travel and commerce that Americans can enjoy anyplace else. And though this policy has been rooted in the best of intentions, no other nation joins us in imposing these sanctions, and it has had little effect beyond providing the Cuban government with a rationale for restrictions on its people. Today, Cuba is still governed by the Castros and the Communist Party that came to power half a century ago. Neither the American, nor Cuban people are well served by a rigid policy that is rooted in events that took place before most of us were born. Consider that for more than 35 years, we’ve had relations with China -- a far larger country also governed by a Communist Party. Nearly two decades ago, we reestablished relations with Vietnam, where we fought a war that claimed more Americans than any Cold War confrontation. That’s why -- when I came into office -- I promised to re-examine our Cuba policy. As a start, we lifted restrictions for Cuban Americans to travel and send remittances to their families in Cuba. These changes, once controversial, now seem obvious. Cuban Americans have been reunited with their families, and are the best possible ambassadors for our values. And through these exchanges, a younger generation of Cuban Americans has increasingly questioned an approach that does more to keep Cuba closed off from an interconnected world. While I have been prepared to take additional steps for some time, a major obstacle stood in our way -- the wrongful imprisonment, in Cuba, of a U.S. citizen and USAID sub-contractor Alan Gross for five years. Over many months, my administration has held discussions with the Cuban government about Alan’s case, and other aspects of our relationship. His Holiness Pope Francis issued a personal appeal to me, and to Cuba’s President Raul Castro, urging us to resolve Alan’s case, and to address Cuba’s interest in the release of three Cuban agents who have been jailed in the United States for over 15 years.

Today, Alan returned home -- reunited with his family at long last. Alan was released by the Cuban government on humanitarian grounds. Separately, in exchange for the three Cuban agents, Cuba today released one of the most important intelligence agents that the United States has ever had in Cuba, and who has been imprisoned for nearly two decades. This man, whose sacrifice has been known to only a few, provided America with the information that allowed us to arrest the network of Cuban agents that included the men transferred to Cuba today, as well as other spies in the United States. This man is now safely on our shores. Having recovered these two men who sacrificed for our country, I’m now taking steps to place the interests of the people of both countries at the heart of our policy. First, I’ve instructed Secretary Kerry to immediately begin discussions with Cuba to reestablish diplomatic relations that have been severed since January of 1961. Going forward, the United States will reestablish an embassy in Havana, and high-ranking officials will visit Cuba. Where we can advance shared interests, we will -- on issues like health, migration, counterterrorism, drug trafficking and disaster response. Indeed, we’ve seen the benefits of cooperation between our countries before. It was a Cuban, Carlos Finlay, who discovered that mosquitoes carry yellow fever; his work helped Walter Reed fight it. Cuba has sent hundreds of health care workers to Africa to fight Ebola, and I believe American and Cuban health care workers should work side by side to stop the spread of this deadly disease. Now, where we disagree, we will raise those differences directly -- as we will continue to do on issues related to democracy and human rights in Cuba. But I believe that we can do more to support the Cuban people and promote our values through engagement. After all, these 50 years have shown that isolation has not worked. It’s time for a new approach. Second, I’ve instructed Secretary Kerry to review Cuba’s designation as a State Sponsor of Terrorism. This review will be guided by the facts and the law. Terrorism has changed in the last several decades. At a time when we are focused on threats from al Qaeda to ISIL, a nation that meets our conditions and renounces the use of terrorism should not face this sanction. Third, we are taking steps to increase travel, commerce, and the flow of information to and from Cuba. This is fundamentally about freedom and openness, and also expresses my belief in the power of people-to-people engagement. With the changes I’m announcing today, it will be easier for Americans to travel to Cuba, and Americans will be able to use American credit and debit cards on the island. Nobody represents America’s values better than the American people, and I believe this contact will ultimately do more to empower the Cuban people. I also believe that more resources should be able to reach the Cuban people. So we’re significantly increasing the amount of money that can be sent to Cuba, and removing limits on remittances that support humanitarian projects, the Cuban people, and the emerging Cuban private sector. I believe that American businesses should not be put at a disadvantage, and that increased commerce is good for Americans and for Cubans. So we will facilitate authorized transactions between the United States and Cuba. U.S. financial institutions will be allowed to open accounts at Cuban financial institutions. And it will be easier for U.S. exporters to sell goods in Cuba. I believe in the free flow of information. Unfortunately, our sanctions on Cuba have denied Cubans access to technology that has empowered individuals around the globe. So I’ve authorized increased telecommunications connections between the United States and Cuba. Businesses will be able to sell goods that enable Cubans to communicate with the United States and other countries. These are the steps that I can take as President to change this policy. The embargo that’s been imposed for decades is now codified in legislation. As these changes unfold, I look forward to engaging Congress in an honest and serious debate about lifting the embargo. Yesterday, I spoke with Raul Castro to finalize Alan Gross’s release and the exchange of prisoners, and to describe how we will move forward. I made clear my strong belief that Cuban society is constrained by restrictions on its citizens. In addition to the return of Alan Gross and the release of our intelligence agent, we welcome Cuba’s decision to release a substantial number of prisoners whose cases were directly raised with the Cuban government by my team. We welcome Cuba’s decision to provide more access to the Internet for its citizens, and to continue increasing engagement with international institutions like the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross that promote universal values. But I’m under no illusion about the continued barriers to freedom that remain for ordinary Cubans. The United States believes that no Cubans should face harassment or arrest or beatings simply because they’re exercising a universal right to have their voices heard, and we will continue to support civil society there. While Cuba has made reforms to gradually open up its economy, we continue to believe that Cuban workers should be free to form unions, just as their citizens should be free to participate in the political process. Moreover, given Cuba’s history, I expect it will continue to pursue foreign policies that will at times be sharply at odds with American interests. I do not expect the changes I am announcing today to bring about a transformation of Cuban society overnight. But I am convinced that through a policy of engagement, we can more effectively stand up for our values and help the Cuban people help themselves as they move into the 21st century. To those who oppose the steps I’m announcing today, let me say that I respect your passion and share your commitment to liberty and democracy. The question is how we uphold that commitment. I do not believe we can keep doing the same thing for over five decades and expect a different result. Moreover, it does not serve America’s interests, or the Cuban people, to try to push Cuba toward collapse. Even if that worked -- and it hasn’t for 50 years -- we know from hard-earned experience that countries are more likely to enjoy lasting transformation if their people are not subjected to chaos. We are calling on Cuba to unleash the potential of 11 million Cubans by ending unnecessary restrictions on their political, social, and economic activities. In that spirit, we should not allow U.S. sanctions to add to the burden of Cuban citizens that we seek to help. To the Cuban people, America extends a hand of friendship. Some of you have looked to us as a source of hope, and we will continue to shine a light of freedom. Others have seen us as a former colonizer intent on controlling your future. JosÃ© MartÃ­ once said, “Liberty is the right of every man to be honest.” Today, I am being honest with you. We can never erase the history between us, but we believe that you should be empowered to live with dignity and self-determination. Cubans have a saying about daily life: “No es facil” -- it’s not easy. Today, the United States wants to be a partner in making the lives of ordinary Cubans a little bit easier, more free, more prosperous. To those who have supported these measures, I thank you for being partners in our efforts. In particular, I want to thank His Holiness Pope Francis, whose moral example shows us the importance of pursuing the world as it should be, rather than simply settling for the world as it is; the government of Canada, which hosted our discussions with the Cuban government; and a bipartisan group of congressmen who have worked tirelessly for Alan Gross’s release, and for a new approach to advancing our interests and values in Cuba. Finally, our shift in policy towards Cuba comes at a moment of renewed leadership in the Americas. This April, we are prepared to have Cuba join the other nations of the hemisphere at the Summit of the Americas. But we will insist that civil society join us so that citizens, not just leaders, are shaping our future. And I call on all of my fellow leaders to give meaning to the commitment to democracy and human rights at the heart of the Inter-American Charter. Let us leave behind the legacy of both colonization and communism, the tyranny of drug cartels, dictators and sham elections. A future of greater peace, security and democratic development is possible if we work together -- not to maintain power, not to secure vested interest, but instead to advance the dreams of our citizens. My fellow Americans, the city of Miami is only 200 miles or so from Havana. Countless thousands of Cubans have come to Miami -- on planes and makeshift rafts; some with little but the shirt on their back and hope in their hearts. Today, Miami is often referred to as the capital of Latin America. But it is also a profoundly American city -- a place that reminds us that ideals matter more than the color of our skin, or the circumstances of our birth; a demonstration of what the Cuban people can achieve, and the openness of the United States to our family to the South. Todos somos Americanos. Change is hard -- in our own lives, and in the lives of nations. And change is even harder when we carry the heavy weight of history on our shoulders. But today we are making these changes because it is the right thing to do. Today, America chooses to cut loose the shackles of the past so as to reach for a better future -- for the Cuban people, for the American people, for our entire hemisphere, and for the world. Thank you. God bless you and God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Year End Press Conference

Hello, everybody. We've really got a full house today, huh? Well, all I want for Christmas is to take your questions. But first let me say a little bit about this year.

In last year’s final press conference, I said that 2014 would be a year of action and would be a breakthrough year for America. And it has been. Yes, there were crises that we had to tackle around the world, many that were unanticipated. We have more work to do to make sure our economy, our justice system, and our government work not just for the few, but for the many. But there is no doubt that we can enter into the New Year with renewed confidence that America is making significant strides where it counts.

The steps that we took early on to rescue our economy and rebuild it on a new foundation helped make 2014 the strongest year for job growth since the 1990s. All told, over a 57-month streak, our businesses have created nearly 11 million new jobs. Almost all the job growth that we’ve seen have been in full-time positions. Much of the recent pickup in job growth has been in higher-paying industries. And in a hopeful sign for middle-class families, wages are on the rise again.

Our investments in American manufacturing have helped fuel its best stretch of job growth also since the 1990s. America is now the number-one producer of oil, the number-one producer of natural gas. We're saving drivers about 70 cents a gallon at the pump over last Christmas. And effectively today, our rescue of the auto industry is officially over. We've now repaid taxpayers every dime and more of what my Administration committed, and the American auto industry is on track for its strongest year since 2005. And we've created about half a million new jobs in the auto industry alone.

Thanks to the Affordable Care Act, about 10 million Americans have gained health insurance just this past year. Enrollment is beginning to pick up again during the open enrollment period. The uninsured rate is at a near record low. Since the law passed, the price of health care has risen at its slowest rate in about 50 years. And we’ve cut our deficits by about two-thirds since I took office, bringing them to below their 40-year average.

Meanwhile, around the world, America is leading. We’re leading the coalition to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL -- a coalition that includes Arab partners. We’re leading the international community to check Russian aggression in Ukraine. We are leading the global fight to combat Ebola in West Africa, and we are preventing an outbreak from taking place here at home. We’re leading efforts to address climate change, including last month’s joint announcement with China that’s already jumpstarting new progress in other countries. We’re writing a new chapter in our leadership here in the Americas by turning a new page on our relationship with the Cuban people.

And in less than two weeks, after more than 13 years, our combat mission in Afghanistan will be over. Today, more of our troops are home for the holidays than any time in over a decade. Still, many of our men and women in uniform will spend Christmas in harm’s way. And they should know that the country is united in support of you and grateful not only to you but also to your families.

The six years since the crisis have demanded hard work and sacrifice on everybody’s part. But as a country, we have every right to be proud of what we’ve accomplished -- more jobs; more people insured; a growing economy; shrinking deficits; bustling industry; booming energy. Pick any metric that you want -- America’s resurgence is real. We are better off.

I’ve always said that recovering from the crisis of 2008 was our first order of business, and on that business, America has outperformed all of our other competitors. Over the past four years, we’ve put more people back to work than all other advanced economies combined. We’ve now come to a point where we have the chance to reverse an even deeper problem, the decades-long erosion of middle-class jobs and incomes, and to make sure that the middle class is the engine that powers our prosperity for decades to come.

To do that, we're going to have to make some smart choices; we've got to make the right choices. We're going to have to invest in the things that secure even faster growth in higher-paying jobs for more Americans. And I’m being absolutely sincere when I say I want to work with this new Congress to get things done, to make those investments, to make sure the government is working better and smarter. We're going to disagree on some things, but there are going to be areas of agreement and we've got to be able to make that happen. And that's going to involve compromise every once in a while, and we saw during this lame duck period that perhaps that spirit of compromise may be coming to the fore.

In terms of my own job, I'm energized, I'm excited about the prospects for the next couple of years, and I'm certainly not going to be stopping for a minute in the effort to make life better for ordinary Americans. Because, thanks to their efforts, we really do have a new foundation that's been laid. We are better positioned than we have been in a very long time. A new future is ready to be written. We've set the stage for this American moment. And I'm going to spend every minute of my last two years making sure that we seize it.

My presidency is entering the fourth quarter; interesting stuff happens in the fourth quarter. And I'm looking forward to it. But going into the fourth quarter, you usually get a timeout. I'm now looking forward to a quiet timeout -- Christmas with my family. So I want to wish everybody a Merry Christmas, a Happy Hanukkah, a Happy New Year. I hope that all of you get some time to spend with your families as well, because one thing that we share is that we're away too much from them.

And now, Josh has given me the “who’s been naughty and who’s been nice” list -- and I'm going to use it to take some questions. And we're going to start with Carrie Budoff Brown of Politico. There you go, Carrie.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. I’ll start on North Korea -- that seems to be the biggest topic today. What does a proportional response look like to the Sony hack? And did Sony make the right decision in pulling the movie? Or does that set a dangerous precedent when faced with this kind of situation?

President Obama: Well, let me address the second question first. Sony is a corporation. It suffered significant damage. There were threats against its employees. I am sympathetic to the concerns that they faced. Having said all that, yes, I think they made a mistake.

In this interconnected, digital world, there are going to be opportunities for hackers to engage in cyber assaults both in the private sector and the public sector. Now, our first order of business is making sure that we do everything to harden sites and prevent those kinds of attacks from taking place. When I came into office, I stood up a cybersecurity interagency team to look at everything that we could at the government level to prevent these kinds of attacks. We’ve been coordinating with the private sector, but a lot more needs to be done. We’re not even close to where we need to be.

And one of the things in the New Year that I hope Congress is prepared to work with us on is strong cybersecurity laws that allow for information-sharing across private sector platforms, as well as the public sector, so that we are incorporating best practices and preventing these attacks from happening in the first place.

But even as we get better, the hackers are going to get better, too. Some of them are going to be state actors; some of them are going to be non-state actors. All of them are going to be sophisticated and many of them can do some damage.

We cannot have a society in which some dictator someplace can start imposing censorship here in the United States. Because if somebody is able to intimidate folks out of releasing a satirical movie, imagine what they start doing when they see a documentary that they don’t like, or news reports that they don’t like. Or even worse, imagine if producers and distributors and others start engaging in self-censorship because they don’t want to offend the sensibilities of somebody whose sensibilities probably need to be offended.

So that’s not who we are. That’s not what America is about. Again, I’m sympathetic that Sony as a private company was worried about liabilities, and this and that and the other. I wish they had spoken to me first. I would have told them, do not get into a pattern in which you’re intimidated by these kinds of criminal attacks. Imagine if, instead of it being a cyber-threat, somebody had broken into their offices and destroyed a bunch of computers and stolen disks. Is that what it takes for suddenly you to pull the plug on something?

So we’ll engage with not just the film industry, but the news industry and the private sector around these issues. We already have. We will continue to do so. But I think all of us have to anticipate occasionally there are going to be breaches like this. They’re going to be costly. They’re going to be serious. We take them with the utmost seriousness. But we can’t start changing our patterns of behavior any more than we stop going to a football game because there might be the possibility of a terrorist attack; any more than Boston didn’t run its marathon this year because of the possibility that somebody might try to cause harm. So let’s not get into that way of doing business.

Question: Can you just say what the response would be to this attack? Wwould you consider taking some sort of symbolic step like watching the movie yourself or doing some sort of screening here that --

President Obama: I’ve got a long list of movies I’m going to be watching.

Question: Will this be one of them?

President Obama: I never release my full movie list.

But let’s talk of the specifics of what we now know. The FBI announced today and we can confirm that North Korea engaged in this attack. I think it says something interesting about North Korea that they decided to have the state mount an all-out assault on a movie studio because of a satirical movie starring Seth Rogen and James Flacco [Franco]. I love Seth and I love James, but the notion that that was a threat to them I think gives you some sense of the kind of regime we’re talking about here.

They caused a lot of damage, and we will respond. We will respond proportionally, and we’ll respond in a place and time and manner that we choose. It’s not something that I will announce here today at a press conference.

More broadly, though, this points to the need for us to work with the international community to start setting up some very clear rules of the road in terms of how the Internet and cyber operates. Right now, it’s sort of the Wild West. And part of the problem is, is you’ve got weak states that can engage in these kinds of attacks, you’ve got non-state actors that can do enormous damage. That’s part of what makes this issue of cybersecurity so urgent.

Again, this is part of the reason why it’s going to be so important for Congress to work with us and get a actual bill passed that allows for the kind of information-sharing we need. Because if we don’t put in place the kind of architecture that can prevent these attacks from taking place, this is not just going to be affecting movies, this is going to be affecting our entire economy in ways that are extraordinarily significant.

And, by the way, I hear you’re moving to Europe. Where you going to be?

Question: Brussels.

President Obama: Brussels.

Question: Yes. Helping Politico start a new publication.

President Obama: Well, congratulations.

Question: I’ve been covering you since the beginning.

President Obama: Well, I think --

Question: It’s been a long road for the both of us.

President Obama: I think there’s no doubt that what Belgium needs is a version of Politico.

Question: I’ll take that as an endorsement.

President Obama: The waffles are delicious there, by the way. Cheryl Bolen. You’ve been naughty. Cheryl, go ahead.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Looking ahead to your work with Congress next year, you’ve mentioned as an area of possible compromise tax reform. And so I am wondering, do you see a Republican Congress as presenting a better opportunity for actually getting tax reform next year? Will you be putting out a new proposal? Are you willing to consider both individual and corporate side of the tax ledger there? And also, are you still concerned about corporate inversions?

President Obama: I think an all-Democratic Congress would have provided an even better opportunity for tax reform. But I think, talking to Speaker Boehner and Leader McConnell that they are serious about wanting to get some things done. The tax area is one area where we can get things done. And I think in the coming weeks leading up to the State of Union, there will be some conversations at the staff levels about what principles each side are looking at.

I can tell you broadly what I’d like to see. I’d like to see more simplicity in the system. I’d like to see more fairness in the system. With respect to the corporate tax reform issue, we know that there are companies that are paying the full freight -- 35 percent -- higher than just about any other company on Earth, if you're paying 35 percent, and then there are other companies that are paying zero because they’ve got better accountants or lawyers. That's not fair.

There are companies that are parking money outside the country because of tax avoidance. We think that it’s important that everybody pays something if, in fact, they are effectively headquartered in the United States. In terms of corporate inversion, those are situations where companies really are headquartered here but, on paper, switch their headquarters to see if they can avoid paying their fair share of taxes. I think that needs to be fixed.

So, fairness, everybody paying their fair share, everybody taking responsibility I think is going to be very important.

Some of those principles I’ve heard Republicans say they share. How we do that -- the devil is in the details. And I’ll be interested in seeing what they want to move forward. I’m going to make sure that we put forward some pretty specific proposals building on what we’ve already put forward.

One other element of this that I think is important is -- and I’ve been on this hobby horse now for six years. [Audience member sneezes.] Bless you. We’ve got a lot of infrastructure we’ve got to rebuild in this country if we're going to be competitive -- roads, bridges, ports, airports, electrical grids, water systems, sewage systems. We are way behind.

And early on we indicated that there is a way of us potentially doing corporate tax reform, lowering rates, eliminating loopholes so everybody is paying their fair share, and during that transition also providing a mechanism where we can get some infrastructure built. I’d like to see us work on that issue as well. Historically, obviously, infrastructure has not been a Democratic or a Republican issue, and I’d like to see if we can return to that tradition.

Julie Pace.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. I wanted to ask about Cuba. What would you say to dissidents or democracy advocates inside Cuba who fear that the policy changes you announced this week could give the Castro regime economic benefits without having to address human rights or their political system? When your Administration was lifting sanctions on Myanmar you sought commitments of reform. Why not do the same with Cuba?

And if I could just follow up on North Korea. Do you have any indication that North Korea was acting in conjunction with another country, perhaps China?

President Obama: We’ve got no indication that North Korea was acting in conjunction with another country.

With respect to Cuba, we are glad that the Cuban government have released slightly over 50 dissidents; that they are going to be allowing the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations human rights agencies to operate more freely inside of Cuba and monitor what is taking place.

I share the concerns of dissidents there and human rights activists that this is still a regime that represses its people. And as I said when I made the announcement, I don’t anticipate overnight changes, but what I know deep in my bones is that if you’ve done the same thing for 50 years and nothing has changed, you should try something different if you want a different outcome. And this gives us an opportunity for a different outcome, because suddenly Cuba is open to the world in ways that it has not been before. It’s open to Americans traveling there in ways that it hasn’t been before. It’s open to church groups visiting their fellow believers inside of Cuba in ways they haven't been before. It offers the prospect of telecommunications and the Internet being more widely available in Cuba in ways that it hasn’t been before.

And over time, that chips away at this hermetically sealed society, and I believe offers the best prospect then of leading to greater freedom, greater self-determination on the part of the Cuban people.

I think it will happen in fits and starts. But through engagement, we have a better chance of bringing about change then we would have otherwise.

Question: Do you have a goal for where you see Cuba being at the end of your presidency?

President Obama: I think it would be unrealistic for me to map out exactly where Cuba will be. But change is going to come to Cuba. It has to. They’ve got an economy that doesn’t work. They’ve been reliant for years first on subsidies from the Soviet Union, then on subsidies from Venezuela. Those can’t be sustained. And the more the Cuban people see what’s possible, the more interested they are going to be in change.

But how societies change is country-specific, it’s culturally specific. It could happen fast; it could happen slower than I’d like; but it’s going to happen. And I think this change in policy is going to advance that.

Lesley Clark.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. I had a number of questions on Cuba as well. Appreciate that. I wanted to --

President Obama: Do I have to write all these down? How many are there? “A number” sounded intimidating.

Question: As quick as I can. As quick as I can. I wanted to see if you got an assurances from the Cuban government that it would not revert to the same sort of -- sabotage the deal, as it has in the past when past Presidents had made similar overtures to the government. President Obama: Meaning? Be specific. What do you mean?

Question: When the Clinton Administration made some overtures, they shot down planes. They sort of had this pattern of doing provocative -- provocative events. President Obama: Okay, so just general provocative activity.

Question: Provocative activities any time the U.S. has sort of reached out a hand to them. I wanted to see what is your knowledge of whether Fidel Castro -- did he have any role in the talks? When you talked to President Raul Castro, did Fidel Castro’s name come up? Or did you ask about him? How he’s doing? People haven't seen him in a while. Given the deep opposition from some Republicans in Congress to lifting the embargo, to an embassy, to any of the changes that you’re doing, are you going to personally get involved in terms of talking to them about efforts that they want to do to block money on a new embassy?

President Obama: All right, Lesley, I think I’m going to cut you off here. This is taking up a lot of time.

Question: Okay, all right.

President Obama: All right. So, with respect to sabotage, I mean, my understanding of the history, for example, of the plane being shot down, it’s not clear that that was the Cuban government purposely trying to undermine overtures by the Clinton Administration. It was a tragic circumstance that ended up collapsing talks that had begun to take place. I haven't seen a historical record that suggests that they shot the plane down specifically in order to undermine overtures by the Clinton government.

I think it is not precedented for the President of the United States and the President of Cuba to make an announcement at the same time that they are moving towards normalizing relations. So there hasn’t been anything like this in the past. That doesn’t meant that over the next two years we can anticipate them taking certain actions that we may end up finding deeply troubling either inside of Cuba or with respect to their foreign policy. And that could put significant strains on the relationship. But that’s true of a lot of countries out there where we have an embassy. And the whole point of normalizing relations is that it gives us a greater opportunity to have influence with that government than not.

So I would be surprised if the Cuban government purposely tries to undermine what is now effectively its own policy. I wouldn’t be surprised if they take at any given time actions that we think are a problem. And we will be in a position to respond to whatever actions they take the same way we do with a whole range of countries around the world when they do things we think are wrong. But the point is, is that we will be in a better position I think to actually have some influence, and there may be carrots as well as sticks that we can then apply.

The only way that Fidel’s name came up -- I think I may have mentioned this in the Davie Muir article -- interview that I did -- was I delivered a fairly lengthy statement at the front end about how we’re looking forward to a new future in the relationship between our two countries, but that we are going to continue to press on issues of democracy and human rights, which we think are important.

My opening remarks probably took about 15 minutes, which on the phone is a pretty long time. And at the end of that, he said, Mr. President, you’re still a young man. Perhaps you have the -- at the end of my remarks I apologized for taking such a long time, but I wanted to make sure that before we engaged in the conversation he was very clear about where I stood. He said, oh, don’t worry about it, Mr. President, you’re still a young man and you have still the chance to break Fidel’s record -- he once spoke seven hours straight.

And then, President Castro proceeded to deliver his own preliminary remarks that last at least twice as long as mine. And then I was able to say, obviously it runs in the family. But that was the only discussion of Fidel Castro that we had.

I sort of forgot all the other questions.

Question: I have a few more if you’re -- how personally involved are you going to get in --

President Obama: With respect to Congress? We cannot unilaterally bring down the embargo. That’s codified in the Libertad Act. And what I do think is going to happen, though, is there’s going to be a process where Congress digests it. There are bipartisan supporters of our new approach, there are bipartisan detractors of this new approach. People will see how the actions we take unfold. And I think there’s going to be a healthy debate inside of Congress.

And I will certainly weigh in. I think that ultimately we need to go ahead and pull down the embargo, which I think has been self-defeating in advancing the aims that we’re interested in. But I don’t anticipate that that happens right away. I think people are going to want to see how does this move forward before there’s any serious debate about whether or not we would make major shifts in the embargo.

Roberta Rampton.

Question: I want to follow on that by asking, under what conditions would you meet with President Castro in Havana? Would you have certain preconditions that you would want to see met before doing that? And on the hack, I know that you said that you’re not going to announce your response, but can you say whether you’re considering additional economic or financial sanctions on North Korea? Can you rule out the use of military force or some kind of cyber hit of your own?

President Obama: I think I’m going to leave it where I left it, which is we just confirmed that it was North Korea; we have been working up a range of options. They will be presented to me. I will make a decision on those based on what I believe is proportional and appropriate to the nature of this crime.

With respect to Cuba, we’re not at a stage here where me visiting Cuba or President Castro coming to the United States is in the cards. I don’t know how this relationship will develop over the next several years. I’m a fairly young man so I imagine that at some point in my life I will have the opportunity to visit Cuba and enjoy interacting with the Cuban people. But there’s nothing specific where we're trying to target some sort of visit on my part.

Colleen McCain Nelson.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President.

President Obama: There you are.

Question: You spoke earlier about 2014 being a breakthrough year, and you ended the year with executive actions on Cuba and immigration and climate change. But you didn't make much progress this year on your legislative agenda. And some Republican lawmakers have said they're less inclined to work with you if you pursue executive actions so aggressively. Are you going to continue to pursue executive actions if that creates more roadblocks for your legislative agenda? Or have you concluded that it’s not possible to break the fever in Washington and the partisan gridlock here?

President Obama: I think there are real opportunities to get things done in Congress. As I said before, I take Speaker Boehner and Mitch McConnell at their words that they want to get things done. I think the American people would like to see us get some things done. The question is going to be are we able to separate out those areas where we disagree and those areas where we agree. I think there are going to be some tough fights on areas where we disagree.

If Republicans seek to take health care away from people who just got it, they will meet stiff resistance from me. If they try to water down consumer protections that we put in place in the aftermath of the financial crisis, I will say no. And I’m confident that I’ll be able to uphold vetoes of those types of provisions. But on increasing American exports, on simplifying our tax system, on rebuilding our infrastructure, my hope is that we can get some things done.

I’ve never been persuaded by this argument that if it weren’t for the executive actions they would have been more productive. There’s no evidence of that. So I intend to continue to do what I’ve been doing, which is where I see a big problem and the opportunity to help the American people, and it is within my lawful authority to provide that help, I’m going to do it. And I will then, side-by-side, reach out to members of Congress, reach out to Republicans, and say, let’s work together; I’d rather do it with you.

Immigration is the classic example. I was really happy when the Senate passed a bipartisan, comprehensive immigration bill. And I did everything I could for a year and a half to provide Republicans the space to act, and showed not only great patience, but flexibility, saying to them, look, if there are specific changes you’d like to see, we're willing to compromise, we're willing to be patient, we're willing to work with you. Ultimately it wasn’t forthcoming.

And so the question is going to be I think if executive actions on areas like minimum wage, or equal pay, or having a more sensible immigration system are important to Republicans, if they care about those issues, and the executive actions are bothering them, there is a very simple solution, and that is: Pass bills. And work with me to make sure I’m willing to sign those bills.

Because both sides are going to have to compromise. On most issues, in order for their initiatives to become law, I’m going to have sign off. And that means they have to take into account the issues that I care about, just as I’m going to have to take into account the issues that they care about. All right. I think this is going to be our last question. Juliet Eilperin. There you go. Question: Thanks so much. So one of the first bills that Mitch McConnell said he will send to you is one that would authorize the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline. When you talked about this in the past, you’ve minimized the benefits and you highlighted some of the risks associated with that project. I’m wondering if you could tell us both what you would do when faced with that bill, given the Republican majority that we’ll have in both chambers. And also, what do you see as the benefits? And given the precipitous drop we’ve seen in oil prices recently, does that change the calculus in terms of how it will contribute to climate change, and whether you think it makes sense to go ahead with that project?

President Obama: Well, I don’t think I’ve minimized the benefits, I think I’ve described the benefits. At issue in Keystone is not American oil. It is Canadian oil that is drawn out of tar sands in Canada. That oil currently is being shipped out through rail or trucks, and it would save Canadian oil companies and the Canadian oil industry an enormous amount of money if they could simply pipe it all the way through the United States down to the Gulf. Once that oil gets to the Gulf, it is then entering into the world market, and it would be sold all around the world.

So there’s no -- I won’t say “no” -- there is very little impact, nominal impact, on U.S. gas prices -- what the average American consumer cares about -- by having this pipeline come through. And sometimes the way this gets sold is, let’s get this oil and it’s going to come here. And the implication is, is that’s going to lower gas prices here in the United States. It’s not. There’s a global oil market. It’s very good for Canadian oil companies and it’s good for the Canadian oil industry, but it’s not going to be a huge benefit to U.S. consumers. It’s not even going to be a nominal benefit to U.S. consumers. Now, the construction of the pipeline itself will create probably a couple thousand jobs. Those are temporary jobs until the construction actually happens. There’s probably some additional jobs that can be created in the refining process down in the Gulf. Those aren’t completely insignificant -- it’s just like any other project. But when you consider what we could be doing if we were rebuilding our roads and bridges around the country -- something that Congress could authorize -- we could probably create hundreds of thousands of jobs, or a million jobs. So if that’s the argument, there are a lot more direct ways to create well-paying Americans construction jobs. And then, with respect to the cost, all I’ve said is that I want to make sure that if, in fact, this project goes forward, that it’s not adding to the problem of climate change, which I think is very serious and does impose serious costs on the American people -- some of them long term, but significant costs nonetheless. If we’ve got more flooding, more wildfires, more drought, there are direct economic impacts on that.

And as we’re now rebuilding after Sandy, for example, we’re having to consider how do we increase preparedness in how we structure infrastructure and housing, and so forth, along the Jersey Shore. That’s an example of the kind of costs that are imposed, and you can put a dollar figure on it.

So, in terms of process, you’ve got a Nebraska judge that’s still determining whether or not the new path for this pipeline is appropriate. Once that is resolved, then the State Department will have all the information it needs to make its decision.

But I’ve just tried to give this perspective, because I think that there’s been this tendency to really hype this thing as some magic formula to what ails the U.S. economy, and it’s hard to see on paper where exactly they’re getting that information from.

In terms of oil prices and how it impacts the decision, I think that it won’t have a significant impact except perhaps in the minds of folks -- when gas prices are lower, maybe they’re less susceptible to the argument that this is the answer to lowering gas prices. But it was never going to be the answer to lowering gas prices, because the oil that would be piped through the Keystone pipeline would go into the world market. And that’s what determines oil prices, ultimately.

Question: And in terms of Congress forcing your hand on this, is this something where you clearly say you’re not going to let Congress force your hand on whether to approve or disapprove of this?

President Obama: I’ll see what they do. We’ll take that up in the New Year.

Question: Any New Year’s resolutions?

President Obama: I’ll ask -- April, go ahead.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Last question, I guess. Six years ago this month, I asked you what was the state of black America in the Oval Office, and you said it was the “the best of times and the worst of times.” You said it was the best of times in the sense that there was -- has never been more opportunity for African Americans to receive a good education, and the worst of times for unemployment and the lack of opportunity. We're ending 2014. What is the state of black America as we talk about those issues as well as racial issues in this country?

President Obama: Like the rest of America, black America in the aggregate is better off now than it was when I came into office. The jobs that have been created, the people who’ve gotten health insurance, the housing equity that’s been recovered, the 401 pensions that have been recovered -- a lot of those folks are African American. They’re better off than they were.

The gap between income and wealth of white and black America persists. And we’ve got more work to do on that front. I’ve been consistent in saying that this is a legacy of a troubled racial past of Jim Crow and slavery. That’s not an excuse for black folks. And I think the overwhelming majority of black people understand it’s not an excuse. They’re working hard. They’re out there hustling and trying to get an education, trying to send their kids to college. But they’re starting behind, oftentimes, in the race.

And what’s true for all Americans is we should be willing to provide people a hand up -- not a handout, but help folks get that good early childhood education, help them graduate from high school, help them afford college. If they do, they’re going to be able to succeed, and that’s going to be good for all of us.

And we’ve seen some progress. The education reforms that we’ve initiated are showing measurable results. We have the highest high school graduation that we’ve seen in a very long time. We are seeing record numbers of young people attending college. In many states that have initiated reforms, you’re seeing progress in math scores and reading scores for African American and Latino students as well as the broader population. But we’ve still got more work to go.

Now, obviously, how we’re thinking about race relations right now has been colored by Ferguson, the Garner case in New York, a growing awareness in the broader population of what I think many communities of color have understood for some time, and that is that there are specific instances at least where law enforcement doesn’t feel as if it’s being applied in a colorblind fashion.

The task force that I formed is supposed to report back to me in 90 days -- not with a bunch of abstract musings about race relations, but some really concrete, practical things that police departments and law enforcement agencies can begin implementing right now to rebuild trust between communities of color and the police department.

And my intention is to, as soon as I get those recommendations, to start implementing them. Some of them we’ll be able to do through executive action. Some of them will require congressional action. Some of them will require action on the part of states and local jurisdictions.

But I actually think it’s been a healthy conversation that we’ve had. These are not new phenomenon. The fact that they’re now surfacing, in part because people are able to film what have just been, in the past, stories passed on around a kitchen table, allows people to make their own assessments and evaluations. And you’re not going to solve a problem if it’s not being talked about.

In the meantime, we’ve been moving forward on criminal justice reform issues more broadly. One of the things I didn’t talk about in my opening statement is the fact that last year was the first time in 40 years where we had the federal prison population go down and the crime rate go down at the same time, which indicates the degree to which it’s possible for us to think smarter about who we’re incarcerating, how long we’re incarcerating, how are we dealing with nonviolent offenders, how are we dealing with drug offenses, diversion programs, drug courts. We can do a better job of -- and save money in the process by initiating some of these reforms. And I’ve been really pleased to see that we’ve had Republicans and Democrats in Congress who are interested in these issues as well.

The one thing I will say -- and this is going to be the last thing I say -- is that one of the great things about this job is you get to know the American people. I mean, you meet folks from every walk of life and every region of the country, and every race and every faith. And what I don’t think is always captured in our political debates is the vast majority of people are just trying to do the right thing, and people are basically good and have good intentions. Sometimes our institutions and our systems don’t work as well as they should. Sometimes you've got a police department that has gotten into bad habits over a period of time and hasn’t maybe surfaced some hidden biases that we all carry around. But if you offer practical solutions, I think people want to fix these problems. It’s not -- this isn’t a situation where people feel good seeing somebody choked and dying. I think that troubles everybody. So there’s an opportunity of all of us to come together and to take a practical approach to these problems.

And I guess that's my general theme for the end of the year -- which is we’ve gone through difficult times. It is your job, press corps, to report on all the mistakes that are made and all the bad things that happen and the crises that look like they're popping. And I understand that. But through persistent effort and faith in the American people, things get better. The economy has gotten better. Our ability to generate clean energy has gotten better. We know more about how to educate our kids. We solved problems. Ebola is a real crisis; you get a mistake in the first case because it’s not something that's been seen before -- we fix it. You have some unaccompanied children who spike at a border, and it may not get fixed in the time frame of the news cycle, but it gets fixed.

And part of what I hope as we reflect on the New Year this should generate is some confidence. America knows how to solve problems. And when we work together, we can't be stopped.

And now I’m going to go on vacation. Mele Kalikimaka, everybody. Mahalo.

Thank you, everybody.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Free Community College Plan Speech

Hello, everybody! Hey! Thank you! Thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you, everybody. Thank you. Everybody, please have a seat. Please have a seat. Well, it is good to be back in Tennessee. I hope you guys aren’t getting tired of me. I’ve been coming around a lot lately, because there’s a lot of good stuff happening here.

I want to begin by thanking Joe and Jill Biden. They’re not just good friends and good partners, but they really believe in the power of education and they really believe in creating those kinds of ladders of opportunity that gave all three of us and Michelle the chances, the incredible opportunities that we’ve had today. And they understand the promise of America’s community colleges. Well, Jill really understands it, and Joe -- he doesn’t really have a choice.

Before I get into the reason that I’m here today, I want to begin by saying just a few words about the tragic events that we’ve watched unfold in France over the last several hours and days. And because events have been fast-moving this morning, I wanted to make sure to comment on them.

I just spoke to my counterterrorism advisor. We have been in close touch with the French government throughout this tragedy. The moment that the outrageous attack took place, we directed all of our law enforcement and counterintelligence operations to provide whatever support that our ally needs in confronting this challenge. We’re hopeful that the immediate threat is now resolved, thanks to the courage and professionalism of the French personnel on the ground.

But the French government continues to face the threat of terrorism and has to remain vigilant. The situation is fluid. President Hollande has made it clear that they’re going to do whatever is necessary to protect their people. And I think it’s important for us to understand: France is our oldest ally. I want the people of France to know that the United States stands with you today, stands with you tomorrow. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families who have been directly impacted. We grieve with you. We fight alongside you to uphold our values, the values that we share -- universal values that bind us together as friends and as allies.

And in the streets of Paris, the world has seen once again what terrorists stand for. They have nothing to offer but hatred and human suffering. And we stand for freedom and hope and the dignity of all human beings. And that’s what the city of Paris represents to the world, and that spirit will endure forever -- long after the scourge of terrorism is banished from this world.

Now, I’m in Knoxville not only because I just like Knoxville, but I’m here today because one of my resolutions is to make sure that folks across this great country feel like they are coming back. And there is no doubt: Thanks to the steps we took early on to rescue our economy and to rebuild it on a new foundation, America is coming back.

Now, I’m not running for office anymore, so let me just present the facts. I promised that 2014 would be a breakthrough year for America. This morning, we got more evidence to back that up. In December, our businesses created 240,000 new jobs. Our unemployment rate fell to 5.6 percent, which is the lowest in six and a half years. What that means is, 2014 was the strongest year for job growth since the 1990s. Unemployment fell in 2014 faster than any year since 1984. Now, think about that. It’s been 30 years since unemployment fell as fast as it did last year. And most importantly, we’re seeing faster job growth in industries that provide good-paying jobs, traditionally middle-class jobs, than anything else.

Since 2010, the United States of America has create more jobs than Europe, Japan, and every other advanced economy combined. American manufacturing is in its best stretch of job growth since the 1990s. We’re actually seeing companies insourcing instead of outsourcing. They’re realizing, we want to be here with American workers making American products. America is now the world’s number-one producer in oil, gas. We’ve doubled the production of clean energy. And, by the way, you’re saving about a buck-ten a gallon at the pump over this time last year.

Although I keep on reminding folks, gas prices, they go up and they come down and then they go up. So I just want everybody to know that you should enjoy this. Take the money you’re saving, pay off the credit card or go get a new appliance, or buy a fuel-efficient car -- so that when prices go back up, you’re still well-positioned.

Thanks to the Affordable Care Act, about 10 million Americans have gained health insurance over the past year. And, by the way, we’ve done this while cutting our deficits by about two-thirds. Everybody thinks that -- they did a survey -- in every survey, they ask, is the deficit going up or going down? And 70 percent of Americans say that the deficit is going up. The deficit has come down by two-thirds since I took office.

Meanwhile, thanks to the hard work of students and educators, dropout rates are down, graduation rates are up. And after 13 long years, our war in Afghanistan has come to a responsible end, and we’ve got more troops that were home this holiday season.

So I say all this because these six years have demanded a lot of hard work and a lot of sacrifice on everybody’s part. And as a country, we’ve got every right to be proud of what we’ve got to show for it. America’s resurgence is real. And now that we’ve seen calmer waters economically, if we all do our part, if we all pitch in, then we can start making sure that all boats are actually lifted again, and wages and incomes start rising again. And we can make sure that the middle class is the engine that powers America’s prosperity just as it always has.

So that’s going to be the focus of my State of the Union address in a couple weeks. I wanted to give you a little preview. Don’t tell anybody I said this. I’m giving you the inside scoop. That’s going to be the essence of my message: How do we build on the progress that we’ve made? And I figured, why wait for the State of the Union? Why stand on formalities; let’s get the ball rolling right now.

Two days ago, I visited Michigan, where workers have brought the auto industry roaring back. And we talked about what else we can do around advanced manufacturing. Yesterday, I was in Arizona, where I announced new actions to make the dream of homeownership a reality for more middle-class families. Later today, Joe and I are going to head to a company in Clinton to take action that will develop high-tech industry even further here in Tennessee. And right here, right now, at Pellissippi State, I’m going to announce one of my most important State of the Union proposals, and that’s helping every American afford a higher education.

Now, part of the reason I wanted to come here was because Tennessee is at the forefront of doing some really smart stuff. And we’ve got some proud Tennesseans who can take some credit for the great work that’s been done. First, your Governor, Bill Haslam, who’s here. Your two very fine senators, -- you’ve got Bob Corker -- and your senior Senator, Lamar Alexander, who’s a former Secretary of Education himself, so he knows a little bit about this. You’ve got Congressman John Duncan. Your Mayor, Madeline Rogero. And we've got Pellissippi’s president, Anthony Wise. Hey! And we've got all of you.

Now, Joe and Jill both already touched on these themes, but let me just amplify them a little bit. Here in America we don't guarantee equal outcomes. Some folks work harder; some folks don't. Some folks take advantage of opportunities; some folks don't. Some people have good luck; some people have bad luck and things don't always work out where everything is perfectly equal. But we do expect that everybody gets an equal shot. We do expect everybody can go as far as their dreams and hard work will take them.

We don't expect anybody to be bound by the circumstances of their birth. If they were, I wouldn't be here, and neither would Joe. Jill -- she’s so accomplished she would have succeeded no matter what. But we expect everybody to get a fair shot. And in exchange, we do our fair share. That's the basic bargain at the heart of this country: If you work hard, you can get ahead. It shouldn’t matter what your last name is, or what we look like, or what family we were born into, or how we worship. What matters is effort and merit. That's the promise of America.

And the way we deliver on that is making sure that our education system works on behalf of every person who lives here. America thrived in the 20th century in large part because we made high school the norm, and then we sent a generation to college on the GI Bill -- including my grandfather. Then we dedicated ourselves to cultivating the most educated workforce in the world and we invested in what’s one of the crown jewels of this country, and that's our higher education system. And dating back to Abraham Lincoln, we invested in land-grant colleges. We understood that this was a hallmark of America, this investment in education.

But eventually, the world caught on and the world caught up. And that’s why we have to lead the world in education again. That’s why my administration is working to make high-quality early childhood education available to all of our kids. We know if we invest in them early, that it pays dividends on the backend.

That's why we're working to bring high-speed broadband to 99 percent of America’s students within the next four years. We want to make sure every child is plugged in. That's why we're recruiting more highly trained math and science teachers. That's why we’re working to raise standards and invest more in our elementary and middle and high schools, so that every young person is prepared for a competitive world.

And this work is not easy. Sometimes it's controversial. It's not going to be the same in every state. But in places like Tennessee, we're seeing incredible strides as a consequence of these efforts. Over the past few years, Tennessee students have improved their reading scores and math scores more than any other state in the country. That’s a credit to their hard work, their teachers’ hard work, to Governor Haslam’s hard work, leaders from both parties. It's been a bipartisan effort. Every Tennessean should be proud of that.

And today, in a 21st century economy, where your most valuable asset is your knowledge, the single most important way to get ahead is not just to get a high school education, you’ve got to get some higher education. That’s why all of you are here.

Now, the value of an education is not purely instrumental. Education helps us be better people. It helps us be better citizens. You came to college to learn about the world and to engage with new ideas and to discover the things you’re passionate about -- and maybe have a little fun. And to expand your horizons. That’s terrific -- that’s a huge part of what college has to offer.

But you’re also here, now more than ever, because a college degree is the surest ticket to the middle class. It is the key to getting a good job that pays a good income -- and to provide you the security where even if you don't have the same job for 30 years, you're so adaptable and you have a skill set and the capacity to learn new skills, it ensures you're always employable.

And that is the key not just for individual Americans, that’s the key for this whole country’s ability to compete in the global economy. In the new economy, jobs and businesses will go wherever the most skilled, best-educated workforce resides. Because businesses are mobile now. Technology means they can locate anywhere. And where they have the most educated, most adaptable, most nimble workforce, that's where they’re going to locate. And I want them to look no further than the United States of America. I want them coming right here. I want those businesses here, and I want the American people to be able to get those businesses -- or get those jobs that those businesses create.

So that’s why we’ve increased grants and took on a student loan system that was funneling billions of taxpayer dollars through big banks, and said let’s cut out the middleman, let’s give them directly to students instead, we can help more students.

We’ve increased scholarships. We've cut taxes for people paying tuition. We've let students cap their federal student loan payments at 10 percent of income so that they can borrow with confidence, particularly if you're going into a job like nursing or teaching that may not pay a huge salary but that's where your passions are.

We’re creating a new college ratings system that will give parents and students the kind of clear, concise information you need to shop around for a school with the best value for you -- and gives us the capacity to recognize schools that offer a great education at a reasonable price.

On the flight over here, Lamar and I were talking about how we can do more to simplify the application process for federal student loans, which is still too complicated.

So we've done a lot of good work over the last six years; we're going to keep at it. But today, I want to focus on a centerpiece of my education agenda -- and that’s the community colleges, like this one.

For millions of Americans, community colleges are essential pathways to the middle class because they’re local, they’re flexible. They work for people who work full-time. They work for parents who have to raise kids full-time. They work for folks who have gone as far as their skills will take them and want to earn new ones, but don’t have the capacity to just suddenly go study for four years and not work. Community colleges work for veterans transitioning back into civilian life. Whether you’re the first in your family to go to college, or coming back to school after many years away, community colleges find a place for you. And you can get a great education.

Now, Jill has been teaching English at community colleges for 20 years. She started when she was like 15. And she’s still full-time today. And she sees -- I talk to her and she talks about her students, and she can see the excitement and the promise, and sometimes the fear of being a 32-year-old mom who’s going back to school and never finished the degree that she had started, and life got in the way and now she’s coming back and suddenly getting a whole new skills set and seeing a whole range of career options opening up to her. It’s exciting.

And that’s what community colleges are all about -- the idea that no one with drive and discipline should be left out, should be locked out of opportunity, and certainly that nobody with that drive and discipline should be denied a college education just because they don’t have the money. Every American, whether they’re young or just young at heart, should be able to earn the skills and education necessary to compete and win in the 21st century economy.

So today I’m announcing an ambitious new plan to bring down the cost of community college tuition in America. I want to bring it down to zero. We’re going to -- I want to make it free. I want to make it free. Community colleges should be free for those willing to work for it -- because in America, a quality education cannot be a privilege that is reserved for a few. I think it’s a right for everybody who’s willing to work for it.

Now, the good news is, you already do something like this in Tennessee. You call it Tennessee Promise. So you call it Tennessee Promise, and we thought why not just build on what works. So we’re going to call it “America’s College Promise.”

And the concept is simple: America’s College Promise will make two years of community college free to responsible students who are willing to work for it. Now, I want to underscore that last clause -- everybody who’s working hard for it. There are no free rides in America. You would have to earn it. Students would have to do their part by keeping their grades up. Colleges would have to do their part by offering high-quality academics and helping students actually graduate. States would have to do their part too. This isn’t a blank check. It’s not a free lunch. But for those willing to do the work, and for states and local communities that want to be a part of this, it can be a game-changer.

Think about it: Students who started at community colleges during those two years, and then go on to a four-year institution, they essentially get the first half of their bachelor’s degree for free. People who enroll for skills training will graduate already ready to work, and they won’t have a pile of student debt. Two years of college will become as free and universal as high school is today.

Now, we’re also taking another page out of Tennessee’s playbook and making investments to expand technical training programs at community colleges, much like you do through your 27 Colleges of Applied Technology. Joe did a terrific job running a task force that we put together just to look at the job training and technical training systems all around the country. And at a time when jobs are changing, and higher wages call for higher skills, we’ve got to make sure workers have a chance to get those skills.

We want young people to graduate with real-world training that leads directly to good jobs, and we want older workers to get retrained so they can compete. And we want more women and minorities to get jobs in fields that traditionally they’ve been left out of, like science and technology, and engineering and math. And we want to connect community colleges with employers, because when that’s done right, these partnerships pay off for everybody: Students learn on the job, employers get access to talent, colleges get help designing courses that actually prepare people for the workplace, all of which creates better pathways to today’s middle class. So we’re going to find the programs that work and we’re going to help them grow.

Now, in a few weeks, I’m going to send to Congress my plan for free community college. I hope that Congress will come together to support it, because opening the doors of higher education shouldn’t be a Democratic issue or a Republican issue. This is an American issue.

Governor Haslam is a Republican. And thanks to his leadership, last year Democrats and Republicans came together and made Tennessee the first state in decades to offer free community college to its students. Meanwhile, up in my hometown of Chicago, Mayor Rahm Emanuel, who is a Democrat, is now offering free community college, and they’re pairing students with growing sectors of the economy so they graduate with good jobs. So if a state with Republican leadership is doing this and a city with Democratic leadership is doing this, then how about we all do it? Let’s do it for our future.

And as I said before, there are a bunch of good bipartisan ideas out there. A few days ago, Senator Alexander joined forces with a Democratic Senator, Michael Bennet, to introduce the legislation that would make financial aid forms simpler. I noticed a lot of people applauded, because it’s been a while since I filled it out -- but I understand there’s more than 100 questions on it. It just shouldn’t be that hard to apply for aid for college. And so I’ve committed to working with Senator Alexander. Let’s shrink it down. Let’s make life a little easier for millions of families. The point is, we’re not going to agree on everything. But simplifying that form, that’s something we should be able to agree on. Let’s get that done this year.

Because in the end, nothing is more important to our country than you, our people. That’s our asset. We’ve got very nice real estate here. We’ve got this incredible bounty, the God-given resources that we enjoy in this country. But our greatest resources are people.

And I want to say to the students here and the staff and faculty how proud I am of what you guys are doing. A lot of students here, I know you had to overcome some obstacles to get here. Many of you are the first in your families to go to college. Some of you are working full time while you’re going to school. But you’re making this investment in you, and by doing that, you’re making an investment in this country’s future.

And I just want to use one person’s story as an example, Caitlin McLawhorn. Where’s Caitlin? Where is she? Is she here? I thought she was here a second ago, but I’m going to tell her story anyway.

She was raised by a single mom. She helped make ends meet, getting her first job almost the minute she could, two days after her 16th birthday. When it came time for college, the money wasn’t there. But Caitlin lives in Tennessee, so she knew she had a great, free option. She completed two years at this institution. Now she’s a senior at Maryville College. She’s working full-time, just like she has since her first day of college. And Caitlin says, “A lot of people like me got discouraged. I get discouraged. But I can look back and say, you’ve made it so far. I’ve learned that things aren’t always what you want, but you can make them what you want.” That’s wisdom.

“Things aren’t always what you want, but you can make them what you want.” That’s what America is about. We can make of our lives what we will. And there are going to be bumps, and there are going to be challenges. And we’ve come through some very hard times. Things aren’t always what we wanted, but we have overcome discouragement and we have overcome division and, sometimes, some discord. And we don’t give up. We get up, we fight back, we come back stronger than before.

Thanks to the hard work of the American people, the United States of America is coming back. And I’ve never been as confident as -- in my entire life that we’re going to make of our future what we want of it thanks to you.

Appreciate it, Tennessee. God bless you. God bless America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Federal Trade Commission Address

Thank you so much. Thank you. Everybody have a seat. Well, thank you, Edith, for your introduction. Edith and I go a long way back. In law school we served on the law review together. I will not say who edited who. I will say she looks exactly the same. And I do not. And it's upsetting.

Edith, in your career, you’ve stood up for citizens and communities. I was proud to nominate you -- first as a commissioner, and then as chairwoman of the FTC. You are doing an outstanding job, as are your fellow commissioners, and we very much appreciate your outstanding efforts.

And Edith’s story, from the daughter of Mexican immigrants to the head of the FTC, we see a central part of the American story. And that's worth remembering at a time when those are issues that we're debating all the time. It's a reminder that what makes this country special is the incredible talent that we draw from all around the world and somehow it all merges into something unique: America.

To Edith, to the fellow commissioners, to all of you who work at the FTC -- thanks for welcoming me. I’m told I may be the first President to come to the FTC in nearly 80 years, since FDR in -- first time apparently since FDR in 1937, which is a little surprising. I mean, you’d think like one of the Presidents would just come here by accident. They ended up in the wrong building, we're already at the FTC.

Anyway, I figured it was time to correct that. Plus, I know sometimes your name confuses folks. They don’t always understand what your mission is. One person who does understand is David Letterman. A few months ago he thanked you for standing up to the companies that were trying to pitch a new weight-loss product -- “caffeine-laced undergarments.” I’m actually not making this up. You ruled that these products were “not substantiated by scientific evidence.” So, thank you for saving America from caffeine-laced undergarments. These companies owed consumers a refund.

And that was just the latest example, because, as Edith said, you recently celebrated your 100th anniversary. And I want to thank you for 100 proud years of protecting American consumers. I also want to thank some of the members of Congress who are here today and many of our partners from not just government but the private sector, and consumer and privacy and advocacy groups.

Next week, just up the street, I will deliver the State of the Union address. And it will be a chance to talk about America’s resurgence, including something we can all be proud of, which is the longest stretch of private sector job growth in American history -- 58 straight months and more than 11 million new jobs. In the speech, I’m going to focus on how we can build on that progress and help more Americans feel that resurgence in their own lives, through higher wages and rising incomes and a growing middle class.

But since I’ve only got two years left in this job, I tend to be impatient and I didn’t want to wait for the State of the Union to start sharing my plans. So I’ve been traveling across the country rolling out some of the ideas that we’ll be talking about, a little bit of a sneak preview.

And in the 21st century -- in this dizzying age of technology and innovation -- so much of the prosperity that we seek, so many of the jobs that we create, so much of the opportunity that’s available for the next generation depends on our digital economy. It depends on our ability to search and connect and shop and do business and create and discover and learn online, in cyberspace. And as we’ve all been reminded over the past year, including the hack of Sony, this extraordinary interconnection creates enormous opportunities, but also creates enormous vulnerabilities for us as a nation and for our economy, and for individual families.

So this week, I’m laying out some new proposals on how we can keep seizing the possibilities of an Information Age, while protecting the security and prosperity and values that we all cherish. Today, I’m focusing on how we can better protect American consumers from identity theft and ensure our privacy, including for our children at school. And then tomorrow, at the Department of Homeland Security, I’ll focus on how we can work with the private sector to better defend ourselves against cyber-attacks. And final, on Wednesday, in Iowa, I’ll talk about how we can give families and communities faster, cheaper access to broadband so they can succeed in the digital economy.

But I wanted to start here, at the FTC, because every day you take the lead in making sure that Americans, their hard-earned money and their privacy are protected, especially when they go online. And these days, that’s pretty much for everything: managing our bank accounts, paying our bills, handling everything from medical records to movie tickets, controlling our homes -- smart houses, from smart phones. Secret Service does not let me do that. But I know other people do.

And with these benefits come risks -- major companies get hacked; America’s personal information, including financial information, gets stolen. And the problem is growing, and it costs us billions of dollars. In one survey, 9 out of 10 Americans say they feel like they’ve lost control of their personal information. In recent breaches, more than 100 million Americans have had their personal data compromised, like credit card information. When these cyber criminals start racking up charges on your card, it can destroy your credit rating. It can turn your life upside down. It may take you months to get your finances back in order. So this is a direct threat to the economic security of American families and we’ve got to stop it.

If we’re going to be connected, then we need to be protected. As Americans, we shouldn’t have to forfeit our basic privacy when we go online to do our business. And that’s why, since I took office, we’ve been working with the private sector to strengthen our cyber defenses. A few months ago, we launched our BuySecure initiative. The federal government and companies across the country are moving to stronger chip-and-pin technology for credit cards. Here at the FTC, you’re working with credit bureaus so that victims can recover their stolen identities faster, and every day you’re helping consumers with IdentityTheft.gov

So today I’m announcing new steps to protect the identities and privacy of the American people. Let me list them for you. First, we’re introducing new legislation to create a single, strong national standard so Americans know when their information has been stolen or misused. Right now, almost every state has a different law on this, and it’s confusing for consumers and it’s confusing for companies -- and it’s costly, too, to have to comply to this patchwork of laws. Sometimes, folks don’t even find out their credit card information has been stolen until they see charges on their bill, and then it’s too late. So under the new standard that we’re proposing, companies would have to notify consumers of a breach within 30 days. In addition, we’re proposing to close loopholes in the law so we can go after more criminals who steal and sell the identities of Americans —- even when they do it overseas.

Second, I’m pleased that more banks, credit card issuers and lenders are stepping up and equipping Americans with another weapon against identity theft, and that’s access to their credit scores, free of charge. This includes JPMorgan Chase, Bank of America, USAA, State Employees’ Credit Union, Ally Financial. Some of them are here today. I want to thank them for their participation. This means that a majority of American adults will have free access to their credit score, which is like an early warning system telling you that you’ve been hit by fraud so you can deal with it fast. And we’re encouraging more companies to join this effort every day.

Third, we’re going to be introducing new legislation -- a Consumer Privacy Bill of Rights. Working with many of you -- from the private sector and advocacy groups -- we’ve identified some basic principles to both protect personal privacy and ensure that industry can keep innovating. For example, we believe that consumers have the right to decide what personal data companies collect from them and how companies use that data, that information; the right to know that your personal information collected for one purpose can’t then be misused by a company for a different purpose; the right to have your information stored securely by companies that are accountable for its use. We believe that there ought to be some basic baseline protections across industries. So we're going to be introducing this legislation by the end of next month, and I hope Congress joins us to make the Consumer Privacy Bill of Rights the law of the land.

And finally, we’re taking a series of actions to protect the personal information and privacy of our children. Those of us with kids know how hard this can be. Whether they are texting or tweeting, or on Facebook, or Instagram, or Vine, our children are meeting up -- and they are growing up -- in cyberspace. It is all-pervasive. And here at the FTC, you’ve pushed back on companies and apps that collect information on our kids without permission.

And Michelle and I are like parents everywhere -- we want to make sure that our children are being smart and safe online. That's a responsibility of ours as parents. But we need partners. And we need a structure that ensures that information is not being gathered without us as parents or the kids knowing it. We want our kids’ privacy protected -- wherever they sign in or log on, including at school.

Now, the good news is we’ve got new educational technologies that are transforming how our children learn. You've got innovative websites and apps and tablets, digital textbooks and tutors. Students are getting lessons tailored to their unique learning needs. We want to encourage that information. And it also facilitates teachers and parents tracking student progress and grades in real-time. And all this is part of what our ConnectED initiative is about -- connecting 99 percent of American students to high-speed Internet so that we’re empowering students, teachers, and parents, and giving them access to worlds they may never have had access to before.

But we’ve already seen some instances where some companies use educational technologies to collect student data for commercial purposes, like targeted advertising. And parents have a legitimate concern about those kinds of practices.

So, today, we’re proposing the Student Digital Privacy Act. That's pretty straightforward. We’re saying that data collected on students in the classroom should only be used for educational purposes -- to teach our children, not to market to our children. We want to prevent companies from selling student data to third parties for purposes other than education. We want to prevent any kind of profiling that outs certain students at a disadvantage as they go through school.

And we believe that this won’t just give parents more peace of mind. We're confident that it will make sure the tools we use in the classroom will actually support the breakthrough research and innovations that we need to keep unlocking new educational technologies.

Now, we didn't have to completely reinvent the wheel on this proposal. Many states have proposed similar legislation. California just passed a landmark law. And I hope Congress joins us in this national movement to protect the privacy of our children.

We won’t wait for legislation, though. The Department of Education is going to offer new tools to help schools and teachers work with tech companies to protect the privacy of students. As of today, 75 companies across the country have signed on to a Student Privacy Pledge. And among other things, they’re committing not to sell student information or use educational technologies to engage in targeted advertising to students.

Some of those companies are here today. We want to thank you for your leadership. I want to encourage every company that provides these technologies to our schools to join this effort. It’s the right thing to do. And if you don’t join this effort, then we intend to make sure that those schools and those parents know you haven’t joined this effort.

So, this mission, protecting our information and privacy in the Information Age, this should not be a partisan issue. This should be something that unites all of us as Americans. It’s one of those new challenges in our modern society that crosses the old divides -- transcends politics, transcends ideology. Liberal, conservative, Democrat, Republican, everybody is online, and everybody understands the risks and vulnerabilities as well as opportunities that are presented by this new world.

Business leaders want their privacy and their children’s privacy protected, just like everybody else does. Consumer and privacy advocates also want to make sure that America keeps leading the world in technology and innovation and apps. So there are some basic, common-sense, pragmatic steps that we ought to all be able to support.

And rather than being at odds, I think that much of this work actually reinforces each other. The more we do to protect consumer information and privacy, the harder it is for hackers to damage our businesses and hurt our economy. Meanwhile, the more companies strengthen their cybersecurity, the harder it is for hackers to steal consumer information and hurt American families. So we’ve got to all be working together in the same direction, and I'm confident if we do we’ll be making progress.

We are the country that invented the Internet. And we’re also the pioneers of this Information Age -- the creators, the designers, the innovators. Our children are leaving us in the dust, if you haven’t noticed. They’re connecting and they’re collaborating like never before, and imagining a future we can only dream of. When we Americans put our minds together and our shoulder to the wheel, there’s nothing we can’t do. So I’m confident, if we keep at this, we can deliver the prosperity and security and privacy that all Americans deserve.

We pioneered the Internet, but we also pioneered the Bill of Rights, and a sense that each of us as individuals have a sphere of privacy around us that should not be breached, whether by our government, but also by commercial interests. And since we’re pioneers in both these areas, I'm confident that we can be pioneers in crafting the kind of architecture that will allow us to both grow, innovate, and preserve those values that are so precious to us as Americans.

Thank you very much. And thanks to the FTC -- for all the great work you do to protect the American people.

Thank you.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# National Cybersecurity Communications Integration Center

Good afternoon, everybody. I want to thank Secretary Johnson, Deputy Secretary Mayorkas, and the dedicated public servants of the Department of Homeland Security for welcoming me here today. I’ve kind of taken over your work space. I apologize for that, but just pretend that I’m not here. I want you to keep working. I did ask who dressed up for this event, and apparently, a few were brave enough to admit it.

But in advance of my State of the Union address next week, I’ve been rolling out my proposals for keeping our economy on track, keeping it growing, making sure we're creating jobs and opportunity for the American people. And that includes the extraordinary opportunities that exist in our digital economy.

Yesterday, I announced new proposals to better protect Americans from identity theft and to ensure our privacy, including making sure that our kids are safe from digital marketing and intrusions on their privacy based on what they’re doing at school. Tomorrow in Iowa, I’ll talk about how we can give more families and communities faster, cheaper access to the broadband that allows them to successfully compete in this global economy. And on Thursday, the Vice President will be in Norfolk to highlight the need to continue to invest in the education and skills for our cybersecurity professionals. But today I am here at DHS to highlight how we can work with the private sector to better protect American companies against cyber threats.

Shortly after I took office, I declared that cyber threats pose an enormous challenge for our country. It's one of the most serious economic and national security challenges we face as a nation. Foreign governments, criminals and hackers probe America’s computer networks every single day. We saw that again with the attack at Sony, which actually destroyed data and computer hardware that is going to be very costly for that company to clean up. Just yesterday, we saw the hack of a military Twitter account and You Tube channel. No military operations were impacted. So far, it appears that no classified information was released. But the investigation is ongoing, and it’s a reminder that cyber threats are an urgent and growing danger.

Moreover, much of our critical infrastructure -- our financial systems, power grids, pipelines, health care systems --run on networks connected to the Internet. So this is a matter of public safety and of public health. And most of this infrastructure is owned and operated by the private sector. So neither government, nor the private sector can defend the nation alone. It’s going to have to be a shared mission -- government and industry working hand in hand, as partners.

And that’s why I’ve said that protecting our digital infrastructure is a national security priority and a national economic priority. Over the past six years, we’ve pursued a comprehensive strategy, boosting our defenses in government, sharing more information with the private sector to help them defend themselves, working with industry through what we call the Cybersecurity Framework not just to respond to threats and recover from attacks but to prevent and disrupt them in the first place.

And that’s where these good folks come in. We are currently at the National Cybersecurity Communications Integration Center -- also known as NCCIC. I just got a tour and a briefing. I want to thank everybody here, not just from DHS but from across government and the private sector, because, again, this is a shared responsibility.

This center is one of the critical lines of America’s cyber defenses. These men and women work around the clock, 24/7, monitoring threats, issuing warnings, sharing information with the private sector, and keeping Americans safe. So, as a nation, we owe them thanks, and as a nation, we are making progress. We’re more prepared to defend against cyber attacks. But every day, our adversaries are getting more sophisticated and more determined, and more plentiful. So every day, we’ve got to keep upping our game at the same time. We’ve got to stay ahead of those who are trying to do us harm.

The problem is that government and the private sector are still not always working as closely together as we should. Sometimes it’s still too hard for government to share threat information with companies. Sometimes it’s still too hard for companies to share information about cyber threats with the government. There are legal issues involved and liability issues. Sometimes, companies are reluctant to reveal their vulnerabilities or admit publicly that they have been hacked. At the same time, the American people have a legitimate interest in making sure that government is not potentially abusing information that it's received from the private sector.

So all of us -- government and industry -- are going to have to keep doing better. The new legislation and proposals I put forward yesterday will help, especially for a strong, single national standard for notifying Americans when their information has been breached. Today, I want to announce some additional steps.

First, we’re proposing new cybersecurity legislation to promote the greater information sharing we need between government and the private sector. This builds and improves upon legislation that we’ve put forward in the past. It reflects years of extensive discussions with industry. It includes liability protections for companies that share information on cyber threats. It includes essential safeguards to ensure that government protects privacy and civil liberties even as we're doing our job of safeguarding America’s critical information networks.

I raised this issue again and the need for this legislation with congressional leaders this morning, including Speaker Boehner and Leader McConnell, and we all agree that this is a threat that has to be addressed, and I am confident that we should be able to craft bipartisan legislation soon to put these systems in place. We’re going to keep on working with Congress to get this done. And in the meantime, we’re going to do everything we can with our existing authorities to make sure industry gets the information it needs to better defend itself.

Second, we’re proposing to update the authorities that law enforcement uses to go after cyber criminals. We want to be able to better prosecute those who are involved in cyber attacks, those who are involved in the sale of cyber weapons like botnets and spyware. We want to ensure that we’re able to prosecute insiders who steal corporate secrets or individuals’ private information. And we want to expand the authority of courts to shut down botnets and other malware. The bottom line, we want cyber criminals to feel the full force of American justice, because they are doing as much damage, if not more, these days as folks who are involved in more conventional crime.

Finally, and since this is a challenge that we can only meet together, I’m announcing that next month we’ll convene a White House summit on cybersecurity and consumer protection. It’s a White House summit where we're not going to do it at the White House; we're going to go to Stanford University. And it’s going to bring everybody together -- industry, tech companies, law enforcement, consumer and privacy advocates, law professors who are specialists in the field, as well as students -- to make sure that we work through these issues in a public, transparent fashion.

Because they’re hard and they’re complicated issues. But if we keep on working on them together, and focus on concrete and pragmatic steps that we can take to boost our cybersecurity and our privacy, I'm confident that both our privacy will be more secure and our information, our networks, public health, public safety will be more secure. We’re going to keep on at this as a government, but we're also going to be working with the private sector to detect, prevent, defend, deter against attacks, and to recover quickly from any disruptions or damage. And as long as I’m President, protecting America’s digital infrastructure is going to remain a top national security priority.

In closing, I want to say one of the areas I’ll be working with Congress is to ensure that we don’t let any disagreements keep us from fulfilling our most basic responsibilities. Last week’s attack in Paris was a painful reminder that we have no greater duty than the security of the American people. And our national security should never be subject to partisan political games. Congress needs to fully fund our Department of Homeland Security, without delay, so that the dedicated public servants working here can operate with the certainty and confidence they need to keep the American people safe. And that's true across the board in the Department of Homeland Security.

So, again, I want to thank Jeh and Deputy Secretary Mayorkas, and everybody here at NCCIC and DHS for the great job you are doing. You are helping to keep the nation safe and secure.

And with that, we're going to get out of here so you can get back to work. Who knows what’s been happening while you’ve been paying attention to me? All right?

Thank you very much, everybody.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Sixth Presidential State of the Union Address

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, Members of Congress, my fellow Americans:

We are 15 years into this new century. Fifteen years that dawned with terror touching our shores; that unfolded with a new generation fighting two long and costly wars; that saw a vicious recession spread across our nation and the world. It has been, and still is, a hard time for many.

But tonight, we turn the page. Tonight, after a breakthrough year for America, our economy is growing and creating jobs at the fastest pace since 1999. Our unemployment rate is now lower than it was before the financial crisis. More of our kids are graduating than ever before. More of our people are insured than ever before. And we are as free from the grip of foreign oil as we’ve been in almost 30 years.

Tonight, for the first time since 9/11, our combat mission in Afghanistan is over. Six years ago, nearly 180,000 American troops served in Iraq and Afghanistan. Today, fewer than 15,000 remain. And we salute the courage and sacrifice of every man and woman in this 9/11 Generation who has served to keep us safe. We are humbled and grateful for your service.

America, for all that we have endured; for all the grit and hard work required to come back; for all the tasks that lie ahead, know this: The shadow of crisis has passed, and the State of the Union is strong.

At this moment -- with a growing economy, shrinking deficits, bustling industry, booming energy production -- we have risen from recession freer to write our own future than any other nation on Earth. It’s now up to us to choose who we want to be over the next 15 years and for decades to come.

Will we accept an economy where only a few of us do spectacularly well? Or will we commit ourselves to an economy that generates rising incomes and chances for everyone who makes the effort?

Will we approach the world fearful and reactive, dragged into costly conflicts that strain our military and set back our standing? Or will we lead wisely, using all elements of our power to defeat new threats and protect our planet?

Will we allow ourselves to be sorted into factions and turned against one another? Or will we recapture the sense of common purpose that has always propelled America forward?

In two weeks, I will send this Congress a budget filled with ideas that are practical, not partisan. And in the months ahead, I’ll crisscross the country making a case for those ideas. So tonight, I want to focus less on a checklist of proposals, and focus more on the values at stake in the choices before us.

It begins with our economy. Seven years ago, Rebekah and Ben Erler of Minneapolis were newlyweds. She waited tables. He worked construction. Their first child, Jack, was on the way. They were young and in love in America. And it doesn’t get much better than that. “If only we had known,” Rebekah wrote to me last spring, “what was about to happen to the housing and construction market.”

As the crisis worsened, Ben’s business dried up, so he took what jobs he could find, even if they kept him on the road for long stretches of time. Rebekah took out student loans and enrolled in community college, and retrained for a new career. They sacrificed for each other. And slowly, it paid off. They bought their first home. They had a second son, Henry. Rebekah got a better job and then a raise. Ben is back in construction -- and home for dinner every night.

“It is amazing,” Rebekah wrote, “what you can bounce back from when you have to…we are a strong, tight-knit family who has made it through some very, very hard times.” We are a strong, tight-knit family who has made it through some very, very hard times.

America, Rebekah and Ben’s story is our story. They represent the millions who have worked hard and scrimped, and sacrificed and retooled. You are the reason that I ran for this office. You are the people I was thinking of six years ago today, in the darkest months of the crisis, when I stood on the steps of this Capitol and promised we would rebuild our economy on a new foundation. And it has been your resilience, your effort that has made it possible for our country to emerge stronger.

We believed we could reverse the tide of outsourcing and draw new jobs to our shores. And over the past five years, our businesses have created more than 11 million new jobs.

We believed we could reduce our dependence on foreign oil and protect our planet. And today, America is number one in oil and gas. America is number one in wind power. Every three weeks, we bring online as much solar power as we did in all of 2008. And thanks to lower gas prices and higher fuel standards, the typical family this year should save about $750 at the pump.

We believed we could prepare our kids for a more competitive world. And today, our younger students have earned the highest math and reading scores on record. Our high school graduation rate has hit an all-time high. More Americans finish college than ever before.

We believed that sensible regulations could prevent another crisis, shield families from ruin, and encourage fair competition. Today, we have new tools to stop taxpayer-funded bailouts, and a new consumer watchdog to protect us from predatory lending and abusive credit card practices. And in the past year alone, about 10 million uninsured Americans finally gained the security of health coverage.

At every step, we were told our goals were misguided or too ambitious; that we would crush jobs and explode deficits. Instead, we’ve seen the fastest economic growth in over a decade, our deficits cut by two-thirds, a stock market that has doubled, and health care inflation at its lowest rate in 50 years. This is good news, people.

So the verdict is clear. Middle-class economics works. Expanding opportunity works. And these policies will continue to work as long as politics don’t get in the way. We can’t slow down businesses or put our economy at risk with government shutdowns or fiscal showdowns. We can’t put the security of families at risk by taking away their health insurance, or unraveling the new rules on Wall Street, or refighting past battles on immigration when we’ve got to fix a broken system. And if a bill comes to my desk that tries to do any of these things, I will veto it. It will have earned my veto.

Today, thanks to a growing economy, the recovery is touching more and more lives. Wages are finally starting to rise again. We know that more small business owners plan to raise their employees’ pay than at any time since 2007. But here’s the thing: Those of us here tonight, we need to set our sights higher than just making sure government doesn’t screw things up; that government doesn’t halt the progress we’re making. We need to do more than just do no harm. Tonight, together, let’s do more to restore the link between hard work and growing opportunity for every American.

Because families like Rebekah’s still need our help. She and Ben are working as hard as ever, but they’ve had to forego vacations and a new car so that they can pay off student loans and save for retirement. Friday night pizza, that’s a big splurge. Basic childcare for Jack and Henry costs more than their mortgage, and almost as much as a year at the University of Minnesota. Like millions of hardworking Americans, Rebekah isn’t asking for a handout, but she is asking that we look for more ways to help families get ahead.

And in fact, at every moment of economic change throughout our history, this country has taken bold action to adapt to new circumstances and to make sure everyone gets a fair shot. We set up worker protections, Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid to protect ourselves from the harshest adversity. We gave our citizens schools and colleges, infrastructure and the Internet -- tools they needed to go as far as their effort and their dreams will take them.

That’s what middle-class economics is -- the idea that this country does best when everyone gets their fair shot, everyone does their fair share, everyone plays by the same set of rules. We don’t just want everyone to share in America’s success, we want everyone to contribute to our success.

So what does middle-class economics require in our time?

First, middle-class economics means helping working families feel more secure in a world of constant change. That means helping folks afford childcare, college, health care, a home, retirement. And my budget will address each of these issues, lowering the taxes of working families and putting thousands of dollars back into their pockets each year.

Here’s one example. During World War II, when men like my grandfather went off to war, having women like my grandmother in the workforce was a national security priority -- so this country provided universal childcare. In today’s economy, when having both parents in the workforce is an economic necessity for many families, we need affordable, high-quality childcare more than ever.

It’s not a nice-to-have -- it’s a must-have. So it’s time we stop treating childcare as a side issue, or as a women’s issue, and treat it like the national economic priority that it is for all of us. And that’s why my plan will make quality childcare more available and more affordable for every middle-class and low-income family with young children in America -- by creating more slots and a new tax cut of up to $3,000 per child, per year.

Here’s another example. Today, we are the only advanced country on Earth that doesn’t guarantee paid sick leave or paid maternity leave to our workers. Forty-three million workers have no paid sick leave -- 43 million. Think about that. And that forces too many parents to make the gut-wrenching choice between a paycheck and a sick kid at home. So I’ll be taking new action to help states adopt paid leave laws of their own. And since paid sick leave won where it was on the ballot last November, let’s put it to a vote right here in Washington. Send me a bill that gives every worker in America the opportunity to earn seven days of paid sick leave. It’s the right thing to do. It’s the right thing to do.

Of course, nothing helps families make ends meet like higher wages. That’s why this Congress still needs to pass a law that makes sure a woman is paid the same as a man for doing the same work. It’s 2015. It’s time. We still need to make sure employees get the overtime they’ve earned. And to everyone in this Congress who still refuses to raise the minimum wage, I say this: If you truly believe you could work full-time and support a family on less than $15,000 a year, try it. If not, vote to give millions of the hardest-working people in America a raise.

Now, these ideas won’t make everybody rich, won’t relieve every hardship. That’s not the job of government. To give working families a fair shot, we still need more employers to see beyond next quarter’s earnings and recognize that investing in their workforce is in their company’s long-term interest. We still need laws that strengthen rather than weaken unions, and give American workers a voice.

But you know, things like childcare and sick leave and equal pay; things like lower mortgage premiums and a higher minimum wage -- these ideas will make a meaningful difference in the lives of millions of families. That’s a fact. And that’s what all of us, Republicans and Democrats alike, were sent here to do.

Second, to make sure folks keep earning higher wages down the road, we have to do more to help Americans upgrade their skills. America thrived in the 20th century because we made high school free, sent a generation of GIs to college, trained the best workforce in the world. We were ahead of the curve. But other countries caught on. And in a 21st century economy that rewards knowledge like never before, we need to up our game. We need to do more.

By the end of this decade, two in three job openings will require some higher education -- two in three. And yet, we still live in a country where too many bright, striving Americans are priced out of the education they need. It’s not fair to them, and it’s sure not smart for our future. That’s why I’m sending this Congress a bold new plan to lower the cost of community college -- to zero.

Keep in mind 40 percent of our college students choose community college. Some are young and starting out. Some are older and looking for a better job. Some are veterans and single parents trying to transition back into the job market. Whoever you are, this plan is your chance to graduate ready for the new economy without a load of debt. Understand, you’ve got to earn it. You’ve got to keep your grades up and graduate on time.

Tennessee, a state with Republican leadership, and Chicago, a city with Democratic leadership, are showing that free community college is possible. I want to spread that idea all across America, so that two years of college becomes as free and universal in America as high school is today. Let’s stay ahead of the curve. And I want to work with this Congress to make sure those already burdened with student loans can reduce their monthly payments so that student debt doesn’t derail anyone’s dreams.

Thanks to Vice President Biden’s great work to update our job training system, we’re connecting community colleges with local employers to train workers to fill high-paying jobs like coding, and nursing, and robotics. Tonight, I’m also asking more businesses to follow the lead of companies like CVS and UPS, and offer more educational benefits and paid apprenticeships -- opportunities that give workers the chance to earn higher-paying jobs even if they don’t have a higher education.

And as a new generation of veterans comes home, we owe them every opportunity to live the American Dream they helped defend. Already, we’ve made strides towards ensuring that every veteran has access to the highest quality care. We’re slashing the backlog that had too many veterans waiting years to get the benefits they need. And we’re making it easier for vets to translate their training and experience into civilian jobs. And Joining Forces, the national campaign launched by Michelle and Jill Biden -- thank you, Michelle; thank you, Jill -- has helped nearly 700,000 veterans and military spouses get a new job. So to every CEO in America, let me repeat: If you want somebody who’s going to get the job done and done right, hire a veteran.

Finally, as we better train our workers, we need the new economy to keep churning out high-wage jobs for our workers to fill. Since 2010, America has put more people back to work than Europe, Japan, and all advanced economies combined.

Our manufacturers have added almost 800,000 new jobs. Some of our bedrock sectors, like our auto industry, are booming. But there are also millions of Americans who work in jobs that didn’t even exist 10 or 20 years ago -- jobs at companies like Google, and eBay, and Tesla.

So no one knows for certain which industries will generate the jobs of the future. But we do know we want them here in America. We know that. And that’s why the third part of middle-class economics is all about building the most competitive economy anywhere, the place where businesses want to locate and hire.

Twenty-first century businesses need 21st century infrastructure -- modern ports, and stronger bridges, faster trains and the fastest Internet. Democrats and Republicans used to agree on this. So let’s set our sights higher than a single oil pipeline. Let’s pass a bipartisan infrastructure plan that could create more than 30 times as many jobs per year, and make this country stronger for decades to come. Let’s do it. Let’s get it done. Let’s get it done.

Twenty-first century businesses, including small businesses, need to sell more American products overseas. Today, our businesses export more than ever, and exporters tend to pay their workers higher wages. But as we speak, China wants to write the rules for the world’s fastest-growing region. That would put our workers and our businesses at a disadvantage. Why would we let that happen? We should write those rules. We should level the playing field. That’s why I’m asking both parties to give me trade promotion authority to protect American workers, with strong new trade deals from Asia to Europe that aren’t just free, but are also fair. It’s the right thing to do.

Look, I’m the first one to admit that past trade deals haven’t always lived up to the hype, and that’s why we’ve gone after countries that break the rules at our expense. But 95 percent of the world’s customers live outside our borders. We can’t close ourselves off from those opportunities. More than half of manufacturing executives have said they’re actively looking to bring jobs back from China. So let’s give them one more reason to get it done.

Twenty-first century businesses will rely on American science and technology, research and development. I want the country that eliminated polio and mapped the human genome to lead a new era of medicine -- one that delivers the right treatment at the right time.

In some patients with cystic fibrosis, this approach has reversed a disease once thought unstoppable. So tonight, I’m launching a new Precision Medicine Initiative to bring us closer to curing diseases like cancer and diabetes, and to give all of us access to the personalized information we need to keep ourselves and our families healthier. We can do this.

I intend to protect a free and open Internet, extend its reach to every classroom, and every community -- and help folks build the fastest networks so that the next generation of digital innovators and entrepreneurs have the platform to keep reshaping our world.

I want Americans to win the race for the kinds of discoveries that unleash new jobs -- converting sunlight into liquid fuel; creating revolutionary prosthetics, so that a veteran who gave his arms for his country can play catch with his kids again. Pushing out into the solar system not just to visit, but to stay. Last month, we launched a new spacecraft as part of a reenergized space program that will send American astronauts to Mars. And in two months, to prepare us for those missions, Scott Kelly will begin a year-long stay in space. So good luck, Captain. Make sure to Instagram it. We’re proud of you.

Now, the truth is, when it comes to issues like infrastructure and basic research, I know there’s bipartisan support in this chamber. Members of both parties have told me so. Where we too often run onto the rocks is how to pay for these investments. As Americans, we don’t mind paying our fair share of taxes as long as everybody else does, too. But for far too long, lobbyists have rigged the tax code with loopholes that let some corporations pay nothing while others pay full freight. They’ve riddled it with giveaways that the super-rich don’t need, while denying a break to middle-class families who do.

This year, we have an opportunity to change that. Let’s close loopholes so we stop rewarding companies that keep profits abroad, and reward those that invest here in America. Let’s use those savings to rebuild our infrastructure and to make it more attractive for companies to bring jobs home. Let’s simplify the system and let a small business owner file based on her actual bank statement, instead of the number of accountants she can afford. And let’s close the loopholes that lead to inequality by allowing the top one percent to avoid paying taxes on their accumulated wealth. We can use that money to help more families pay for childcare and send their kids to college. We need a tax code that truly helps working Americans trying to get a leg up in the new economy, and we can achieve that together. We can achieve it together.

Helping hardworking families make ends meet. Giving them the tools they need for good-paying jobs in this new economy. Maintaining the conditions of growth and competitiveness. This is where America needs to go. I believe it’s where the American people want to go. It will make our economy stronger a year from now, 15 years from now, and deep into the century ahead.

Of course, if there’s one thing this new century has taught us, it’s that we cannot separate our work here at home from challenges beyond our shores.

My first duty as Commander-in-Chief is to defend the United States of America. In doing so, the question is not whether America leads in the world, but how. When we make rash decisions, reacting to the headlines instead of using our heads; when the first response to a challenge is to send in our military -- then we risk getting drawn into unnecessary conflicts, and neglect the broader strategy we need for a safer, more prosperous world. That’s what our enemies want us to do.

I believe in a smarter kind of American leadership. We lead best when we combine military power with strong diplomacy; when we leverage our power with coalition building; when we don’t let our fears blind us to the opportunities that this new century presents. That’s exactly what we’re doing right now. And around the globe, it is making a difference.

First, we stand united with people around the world who have been targeted by terrorists -- from a school in Pakistan to the streets of Paris. We will continue to hunt down terrorists and dismantle their networks, and we reserve the right to act unilaterally, as we have done relentlessly since I took office to take out terrorists who pose a direct threat to us and our allies.

At the same time, we’ve learned some costly lessons over the last 13 years. Instead of Americans patrolling the valleys of Afghanistan, we’ve trained their security forces, who have now taken the lead, and we’ve honored our troops’ sacrifice by supporting that country’s first democratic transition. Instead of sending large ground forces overseas, we’re partnering with nations from South Asia to North Africa to deny safe haven to terrorists who threaten America.

In Iraq and Syria, American leadership -- including our military power -- is stopping ISIL’s advance. Instead of getting dragged into another ground war in the Middle East, we are leading a broad coalition, including Arab nations, to degrade and ultimately destroy this terrorist group. We’re also supporting a moderate opposition in Syria that can help us in this effort, and assisting people everywhere who stand up to the bankrupt ideology of violent extremism.

Now, this effort will take time. It will require focus. But we will succeed. And tonight, I call on this Congress to show the world that we are united in this mission by passing a resolution to authorize the use of force against ISIL. We need that authority.

Second, we’re demonstrating the power of American strength and diplomacy. We’re upholding the principle that bigger nations can’t bully the small -- by opposing Russian aggression, and supporting Ukraine’s democracy, and reassuring our NATO allies.

Last year, as we were doing the hard work of imposing sanctions along with our allies, as we were reinforcing our presence with frontline states, Mr. Putin’s aggression it was suggested was a masterful display of strategy and strength. That's what I heard from some folks. Well, today, it is America that stands strong and united with our allies, while Russia is isolated with its economy in tatters. That’s how America leads -- not with bluster, but with persistent, steady resolve.

In Cuba, we are ending a policy that was long past its expiration date. When what you’re doing doesn’t work for 50 years, it’s time to try something new. And our shift in Cuba policy has the potential to end a legacy of mistrust in our hemisphere. It removes a phony excuse for restrictions in Cuba. It stands up for democratic values, and extends the hand of friendship to the Cuban people. And this year, Congress should begin the work of ending the embargo.

As His Holiness, Pope Francis, has said, diplomacy is the work of “small steps.” These small steps have added up to new hope for the future in Cuba. And after years in prison, we are overjoyed that Alan Gross is back where he belongs. Welcome home, Alan. We're glad you're here.

Our diplomacy is at work with respect to Iran, where, for the first time in a decade, we’ve halted the progress of its nuclear program and reduced its stockpile of nuclear material. Between now and this spring, we have a chance to negotiate a comprehensive agreement that prevents a nuclear-armed Iran, secures America and our allies -- including Israel, while avoiding yet another Middle East conflict. There are no guarantees that negotiations will succeed, and I keep all options on the table to prevent a nuclear Iran.

But new sanctions passed by this Congress, at this moment in time, will all but guarantee that diplomacy fails -- alienating America from its allies; making it harder to maintain sanctions; and ensuring that Iran starts up its nuclear program again. It doesn’t make sense. And that's why I will veto any new sanctions bill that threatens to undo this progress. The American people expect us only to go to war as a last resort, and I intend to stay true to that wisdom.

Third, we’re looking beyond the issues that have consumed us in the past to shape the coming century. No foreign nation, no hacker, should be able to shut down our networks, steal our trade secrets, or invade the privacy of American families, especially our kids. So we're making sure our government integrates intelligence to combat cyber threats, just as we have done to combat terrorism.

And tonight, I urge this Congress to finally pass the legislation we need to better meet the evolving threat of cyber attacks, combat identity theft, and protect our children’s information. That should be a bipartisan effort.

If we don’t act, we’ll leave our nation and our economy vulnerable. If we do, we can continue to protect the technologies that have unleashed untold opportunities for people around the globe.

In West Africa, our troops, our scientists, our doctors, our nurses, our health care workers are rolling back Ebola -- saving countless lives and stopping the spread of disease. I could not be prouder of them, and I thank this Congress for your bipartisan support of their efforts. But the job is not yet done, and the world needs to use this lesson to build a more effective global effort to prevent the spread of future pandemics, invest in smart development, and eradicate extreme poverty.

In the Asia Pacific, we are modernizing alliances while making sure that other nations play by the rules -- in how they trade, how they resolve maritime disputes, how they participate in meeting common international challenges like nonproliferation and disaster relief. And no challenge -- no challenge -- poses a greater threat to future generations than climate change.

2014 was the planet’s warmest year on record. Now, one year doesn’t make a trend, but this does: 14 of the 15 warmest years on record have all fallen in the first 15 years of this century.

I’ve heard some folks try to dodge the evidence by saying they’re not scientists; that we don’t have enough information to act. Well, I’m not a scientist, either. But you know what, I know a lot of really good scientists at NASA, and at NOAA, and at our major universities. And the best scientists in the world are all telling us that our activities are changing the climate, and if we don’t act forcefully, we’ll continue to see rising oceans, longer, hotter heat waves, dangerous droughts and floods, and massive disruptions that can trigger greater migration and conflict and hunger around the globe. The Pentagon says that climate change poses immediate risks to our national security. We should act like it.

And that’s why, over the past six years, we’ve done more than ever to combat climate change, from the way we produce energy to the way we use it. That’s why we’ve set aside more public lands and waters than any administration in history. And that’s why I will not let this Congress endanger the health of our children by turning back the clock on our efforts. I am determined to make sure that American leadership drives international action.

In Beijing, we made a historic announcement: The United States will double the pace at which we cut carbon pollution. And China committed, for the first time, to limiting their emissions. And because the world’s two largest economies came together, other nations are now stepping up, and offering hope that this year the world will finally reach an agreement to protect the one planet we’ve got.

And there’s one last pillar of our leadership, and that’s the example of our values.

As Americans, we respect human dignity, even when we’re threatened, which is why I have prohibited torture, and worked to make sure our use of new technology like drones is properly constrained. It’s why we speak out against the deplorable anti-Semitism that has resurfaced in certain parts of the world. It’s why we continue to reject offensive stereotypes of Muslims, the vast majority of whom share our commitment to peace. That’s why we defend free speech, and advocate for political prisoners, and condemn the persecution of women, or religious minorities, or people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. We do these things not only because they are the right thing to do, but because ultimately they will make us safer.

As Americans, we have a profound commitment to justice. So it makes no sense to spend $3 million per prisoner to keep open a prison that the world condemns and terrorists use to recruit. Since I’ve been President, we’ve worked responsibly to cut the population of Gitmo in half. Now it is time to finish the job. And I will not relent in my determination to shut it down. It is not who we are. It’s time to close Gitmo.

As Americans, we cherish our civil liberties, and we need to uphold that commitment if we want maximum cooperation from other countries and industry in our fight against terrorist networks. So while some have moved on from the debates over our surveillance programs, I have not. As promised, our intelligence agencies have worked hard, with the recommendations of privacy advocates, to increase transparency and build more safeguards against potential abuse. And next month, we’ll issue a report on how we’re keeping our promise to keep our country safe while strengthening privacy.

Looking to the future instead of the past. Making sure we match our power with diplomacy, and use force wisely. Building coalitions to meet new challenges and opportunities. Leading -- always -- with the example of our values. That’s what makes us exceptional. That’s what keeps us strong. That’s why we have to keep striving to hold ourselves to the highest of standards -- our own.

You know, just over a decade ago, I gave a speech in Boston where I said there wasn’t a liberal America or a conservative America; a black America or a white America -- but a United States of America. I said this because I had seen it in my own life, in a nation that gave someone like me a chance; because I grew up in Hawaii, a melting pot of races and customs; because I made Illinois my home -- a state of small towns, rich farmland, one of the world’s great cities; a microcosm of the country where Democrats and Republicans and Independents, good people of every ethnicity and every faith, share certain bedrock values.

Over the past six years, the pundits have pointed out more than once that my presidency hasn’t delivered on this vision. How ironic, they say, that our politics seems more divided than ever. It’s held up as proof not just of my own flaws -- of which there are many -- but also as proof that the vision itself is misguided, naÃ¯ve, that there are too many people in this town who actually benefit from partisanship and gridlock for us to ever do anything about it.

I know how tempting such cynicism may be. But I still think the cynics are wrong. I still believe that we are one people. I still believe that together, we can do great things, even when the odds are long.

I believe this because over and over in my six years in office, I have seen America at its best. I’ve seen the hopeful faces of young graduates from New York to California, and our newest officers at West Point, Annapolis, Colorado Springs, New London. I’ve mourned with grieving families in Tucson and Newtown, in Boston, in West Texas, and West Virginia. I’ve watched Americans beat back adversity from the Gulf Coast to the Great Plains, from Midwest assembly lines to the Mid-Atlantic seaboard. I’ve seen something like gay marriage go from a wedge issue used to drive us apart to a story of freedom across our country, a civil right now legal in states that seven in 10 Americans call home.

So I know the good, and optimistic, and big-hearted generosity of the American people who every day live the idea that we are our brother’s keeper and our sister’s keeper. And I know they expect those of us who serve here to set a better example.

So the question for those of us here tonight is how we, all of us, can better reflect America’s hopes. I’ve served in Congress with many of you. I know many of you well. There are a lot of good people here, on both sides of the aisle. And many of you have told me that this isn’t what you signed up for -- arguing past each other on cable shows, the constant fundraising, always looking over your shoulder at how the base will react to every decision.

Imagine if we broke out of these tired old patterns. Imagine if we did something different. Understand, a better politics isn’t one where Democrats abandon their agenda or Republicans simply embrace mine. A better politics is one where we appeal to each other’s basic decency instead of our basest fears. A better politics is one where we debate without demonizing each other; where we talk issues and values, and principles and facts, rather than “gotcha” moments, or trivial gaffes, or fake controversies that have nothing to do with people’s daily lives.

A politics -- a better politics is one where we spend less time drowning in dark money for ads that pull us into the gutter, and spend more time lifting young people up with a sense of purpose and possibility, asking them to join in the great mission of building America.

If we’re going to have arguments, let’s have arguments, but let’s make them debates worthy of this body and worthy of this country. We still may not agree on a woman’s right to choose, but surely we can agree it’s a good thing that teen pregnancies and abortions are nearing all-time lows, and that every woman should have access to the health care that she needs.

Yes, passions still fly on immigration, but surely we can all see something of ourselves in the striving young student, and agree that no one benefits when a hardworking mom is snatched from her child, and that it’s possible to shape a law that upholds our tradition as a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants. I’ve talked to Republicans and Democrats about that. That’s something that we can share.

We may go at it in campaign season, but surely we can agree that the right to vote is sacred; that it’s being denied to too many -- and that on this 50th anniversary of the great march from Selma to Montgomery and the passage of the Voting Rights Act, we can come together, Democrats and Republicans, to make voting easier for every single American.

We may have different takes on the events of Ferguson and New York. But surely we can understand a father who fears his son can’t walk home without being harassed. And surely we can understand the wife who won’t rest until the police officer she married walks through the front door at the end of his shift. And surely we can agree that it’s a good thing that for the first time in 40 years, the crime rate and the incarceration rate have come down together, and use that as a starting point for Democrats and Republicans, community leaders and law enforcement, to reform America’s criminal justice system so that it protects and serves all of us.

That’s a better politics. That’s how we start rebuilding trust. That’s how we move this country forward. That’s what the American people want. And that’s what they deserve.

I have no more campaigns to run. My only agenda -- I know because I won both of them. My only agenda for the next two years is the same as the one I’ve had since the day I swore an oath on the steps of this Capitol -- to do what I believe is best for America. If you share the broad vision I outlined tonight, I ask you to join me in the work at hand. If you disagree with parts of it, I hope you’ll at least work with me where you do agree. And I commit to every Republican here tonight that I will not only seek out your ideas, I will seek to work with you to make this country stronger.

Because I want this chamber, I want this city to reflect the truth -- that for all our blind spots and shortcomings, we are a people with the strength and generosity of spirit to bridge divides, to unite in common effort, to help our neighbors, whether down the street or on the other side of the world.

I want our actions to tell every child in every neighborhood, your life matters, and we are committed to improving your life chances as committed as we are to working on behalf of our own kids. I want future generations to know that we are a people who see our differences as a great gift, that we’re a people who value the dignity and worth of every citizen -- man and woman, young and old, black and white, Latino, Asian, immigrant, Native American, gay, straight, Americans with mental illness or physical disability. Everybody matters. I want them to grow up in a country that shows the world what we still know to be true: that we are still more than a collection of red states and blue states; that we are the United States of America.

I want them to grow up in a country where a young mom can sit down and write a letter to her President with a story that sums up these past six years: “It’s amazing what you can bounce back from when you have to…we are a strong, tight-knit family who’s made it through some very, very hard times.”

My fellow Americans, we, too, are a strong, tight-knit family. We, too, have made it through some hard times. Fifteen years into this new century, we have picked ourselves up, dusted ourselves off, and begun again the work of remaking America. We have laid a new foundation. A brighter future is ours to write. Let’s begin this new chapter together -- and let’s start the work right now.

Thank you. God bless you. God bless this country we love. Thank you.

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# Address to the People of India

Thank you so much. Thank you so much, Neha, for what a wonderful introduction. Everybody, please have a seat. Nothing fills me with more hope than when I hear incredible young people like Neha and all the outstanding work that she's doing on behalf of India's youth and for representing this nation's energy and its optimism and its idealism. She makes me very, very proud. And I'm sure -- I think they may be her -- is that somebody related to you? Okay. Because we just had a chance to meet, and she's beaming with pride right now sitting next to you. Give Neha a big round of applause once again.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, to all the students and young people who are here today, to the people of India watching and listening across this vast nation -- I bring the friendship and the greetings of the American people. On behalf of myself and Michelle, thank you so much for welcoming us back to India. Bahoot dhanyavad.

It has been a great honor to be the first American President to join you for Republic Day. With the tricolor waving above us, we celebrated the strength of your constitution. We paid tribute to India's fallen heroes. In yesterday's parade, we saw the pride and the diversity of this nation -- including the Dare Devils on their Royal Enfields, which was very impressive. Secret Service does not let me ride motorcycles. Especially not on my head.

I realize that the sight of an American President as your chief guest on Republic Day would have once seemed unimaginable. But my visit reflects the possibilities of a new moment. As I've said many times, I believe that the relationship between India and the United States can be one of the defining partnerships of this century. When I spoke to your Parliament on my last visit, I laid out my vision for how our two nations can build that partnership. And today, I want to speak directly to you -- the people of India -- about what I believe we can achieve together, and how we can do it.

My commitment to a new chapter between our countries flows from the deep friendship between our people. And Michelle and I have felt it ourselves. I recognized India with the first state visit of my presidency -- where we also danced to some pretty good Bhangra. For the first time, we brought Diwali to the White House. On our last celebration here, we celebrated the Festival of Lights in Mumbai. We danced with some children. Unfortunately, we were not able to schedule any dancing this visit. Senorita, bade-bade deshon mein. You know what I mean. Everybody said, by the way, how much better a dance Michelle was than me -- which hurt my feelings a little bit.

On a more personal level, India represents an intersection of two men who have always inspired me. When Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was protesting racial segregation in the United States, he said that his guiding light was Mahatma Gandhi. When Dr. King came to India, he said that being here -- in "Gandhi's land" -- reaffirmed his conviction that in the struggle for justice and human dignity, the most potent weapon of all is non-violent resistance. And those two great souls are why we can gather here together today, Indians and Americans, equal and free. And there is another link that binds us. More than 100 years ago, America welcomed a son of India -- Swami Vivekananda. And Swami Vivekananda, he helped bring Hinduism and yoga to our country. And he came to my hometown of Chicago. And there, at a great gathering of religious leaders, he spoke of his faith and the divinity in every soul, and the purity of love. And he began his speech with a simple greeting: "Sisters and brothers of America." So today, let me say: Sisters and brothers of India -- my confidence in what our nations can achieve together is rooted in the values we share. For we may have our different histories and speak different languages, but when we look at each other, we see a reflection of ourselves. Having thrown off colonialism, we created constitutions that began with the same three words -- "We the people." As societies that celebrate knowledge and innovation, we transformed ourselves into high-tech hubs of the global economy. Together, we unlock new discoveries -- from the particles of creation to outer space -- two nations to have gone to both the Moon and to Mars. And here in India, this dynamism has resulted in a stunning achievement. You've lifted countless millions from poverty and built one of the world's largest middle classes. And nobody embodies this progress and this sense of possibility more than our young people. Empowered by technology, you are connecting and collaborating like never before -- on Facebook and WhatsApp and Twitter. And chances are, you're talking to someone in America -- your friends, your cousins. The United States has the largest Indian diaspora in the world, including some three million proud Indian-Americans. And they make America stronger, and they tie us together -- bonds of family and friendship that allow us to share in each other's success. For all these reasons, India and the United States are not just natural partners. I believe America can be India's best partner. I believe that. Of course, only Indians can decide India's role in the world. But I'm here because I'm absolutely convinced that both our peoples will have more jobs and opportunity, and our nations will be more secure, and the world will be a safer and a more just place when our two democracies -- the world's largest democracy and the world's oldest democracy -- stand together. I believe that.

So here in New Delhi, Prime Minister Modi and I have begun this work anew. And here's what I think we can do together. America wants to be your partner as you lift up the lives of the Indian people and provide greater opportunity. So working together, we're giving farmers new techniques and data -- from our satellites to their cell phones -- to increase yields and boost incomes. We're joining you in your effort to empower every Indian with a bank account. And with the breakthroughs we achieved on this visit, we can finally move toward fully implementing our civil nuclear agreement, which will mean more reliable electricity for Indians and cleaner, non-carbon energy that helps fight climate change. And I don't have to describe for you what more electricity means. Students being able to study at night; businesses being able to stay open longer and hire more workers; farmers being able to use mechanized tools that increase their productivity; whole communities seeing more prosperity. In recent years, India has lifted more people out of poverty than any other country. And now we have a historic opportunity with India leading the way to end the injustice of extreme poverty all around the world. America wants to be your partner as you protect the health of your people and the beauty of this land, from the backwaters of Kerala to the banks of Ganges. As we deliver more energy, more electricity, let's do it with clean, renewable energy, like solar and wind. And let's put cleaner vehicles on the road and more filtration systems on farms and villages. Because every child should be able to drink clean water, and every child should be able to breathe clean air. We need our young people healthy for their futures. And we can do it. We have the technology to do it.

America wants to be your partner in igniting the next wave of Indian growth. As India pursues more trade and investment, we want to be first in line. We're ready to join you in building new infrastructure -- the roads and the airports, the ports, the bullet trains to propel India into the future. We're ready to help design "smart cities" that serve citizens better, and we want to develop more advanced technologies with India, as we do with our closest allies. We believe we can be even closer partners in ensuring our mutual security. And both our nations have known the anguish of terrorism, and we stand united in the defense of our people. And now we're deepening our defense cooperation against new challenges. The United States welcomes a greater role for India in the Asia Pacific, where the freedom of navigation must be upheld and disputes must be resolved peacefully. And even as we acknowledge the world as it is, we must never stop working for the world as it should be -- a world without nuclear weapons. That should be a goal for all of us. I believe that if we're going to be true global partners, then our two nations must do more around the world together. So to ensure international security and peace, multilateral institutions created in the 20th century have to be updated for the 21st. And that's why I support a reformed United Nations Security Council that includes India as a permanent member. Of course, as I've said before, with power comes responsibility. In this region, India can play a positive role in helping countries forge a better future, from Burma to Sri Lanka, where today there's new hope for democracy. With your experience in elections, you can help other countries with theirs. With your expertise in science and medicine, India can do more around the world to fight disease and develop new vaccines, and help us end the moral outrage of even a single child dying from a preventable disease. Together, we can stand up against human trafficking and work to end the scourge of modern day slavery. And being global partners means confronting the urgent global challenge of climate change. With rising seas, melting Himalayan glaciers, more unpredictable monsoons, cyclones getting stronger -- few countries will be more affected by a warmer planet than India. And the United States recognizes our part in creating this problem, so we're leading the global effort to combat it. And today, I can say that America's carbon pollution is near its lowest level in almost two decades. I know the argument made by some that it's unfair for countries like the United States to ask developing nations and emerging economies like India to reduce your dependence on the same fossil fuels that helped power our growth for more than a century. But here's the truth: Even if countries like the United States curb our emissions, if countries that are growing rapidly like India -- with soaring energy needs -- don't also embrace cleaner fuels, then we don't stand a chance against climate change. So we welcome India's ambitious targets for generating more clean energy. We'll continue to help India deal with the impacts of climate change -- because you shouldn't have to bear that burden alone. As we keep working for a strong global agreement on climate change, it's young people like you who have to speak up, so we can protect this planet for your generation. I'll be gone when the worst effects happen. It's your generation and your children that are going to be impacted. That's why it's urgent that we begin this work right now. Development that lifts up the lives and health of our people. Trade and economic partnerships that reduce poverty and create opportunity. Leadership in the world that defends our security, and advances human dignity, and protects our planet -- that's what I believe India and America can do together. So with the rest of my time, I want to discuss how we can do it. Because in big and diverse societies like ours, progress ultimately depends on something more basic, and that is how we see each other. And we know from experience what makes nations strong. And Neha I think did a great job of describing the essence of what's important here. We are strongest when we see the inherent dignity in every human being. Look at our countries -- the incredible diversity even here in this hall. India is defined by countless languages and dialects, and every color and caste and creed, gender and orientations. And likewise, in America, we're black and white, and Latino and Asian, and Indian-American, and Native American. Your constitution begins with the pledge to uphold "the dignity of the individual." And our Declaration of Independence proclaims that "all men are created equal." In both our countries, generations have worked to live up to these ideals. When he came to India, Martin Luther King, Jr. was introduced to some schoolchildren as a "fellow untouchable." My grandfather was a cook for the British army in Kenya. The distant branches of Michelle's family tree include both slaves and slave owners. When we were born, people who looked like us still couldn't vote in some parts of the country. Even as America has blessed us with extraordinary opportunities, there were moments in my life where I've been treated differently because of the color of my skin. Many countries, including the United States, grapple with questions of identity and inequality, and how we treat each other, people who are different than us, how we deal with diversity of beliefs and of faiths. Right now, in crowded neighborhoods not far from here, a man is driving an auto-rickshaw, or washing somebody else's clothes, or doing the hard work no one else will do. And a woman is cleaning somebody else's house. And a young man is on a bicycle delivering lunch. A little girl is hauling a heavy bucket of water. And I believe their dreams, their hopes, are just as important, just as beautiful, just as worthy as ours. And so even as we live in a world of terrible inequality, we're also proud to live in countries where even the grandson of a cook can become President, or even a Dalit can help write a constitution, and even a tea seller can become Prime Minister. The point is, is that the aim of our work must be not to just have a few do well, but to have everybody have a chance, everybody who is willing to work for it have the ability to dream big and then reach those dreams. Our nations are strongest when we uphold the equality of all our people -- and that includes our women. Now, you may have noticed, I'm married to a very strong and talented woman. Michelle is not afraid to speak her mind, or tell me when I'm wrong -- which happens frequently. And we have two beautiful daughters, so I'm surrounded by smart, strong women. And in raising our girls, we've tried to instill in them basic values -- a sense of compassion for others, and respect for themselves, and the confidence that they can go as far as their imaginations and abilities will carry them. And as part of Michelle's work as First Lady, she's met with women and girls around the world, including here in India, to let them know that America believes in them, too. In the United States, we're still working to make sure that women and girls have all the opportunities they deserve, and that they're treated equally. And we have some great role models, including here today the former speaker of our House of Representatives -- Nancy Pelosi -- the first woman speaker of the House, and my great partner. And here in India, it's the wives and the mothers who so often hold families and communities together. Indian women have shown that they can succeed in every field -- including government, where many of your leaders are women. And the young women who are here today are part of a new generation that is making your voice heard, and standing up and determined to play your part in India's progress. And here's what we know. We know from experience that nations are more successful when their women are successful. When girls go to school -- this is one of the most direct measures of whether a nation is going to develop effectively is how it treats its women. When a girl goes to school, it doesn't just open up her young mind, it benefits all of us -- because maybe someday she'll start her own business, or invent a new technology, or cure a disease. And when women are able to work, families are healthier, and communities are wealthier, and entire countries are more prosperous. And when young women are educated, then their children are going to be well educated and have more opportunity. So if nations really want to succeed in today's global economy, they can't simply ignore the talents of half their people. And as husbands and fathers and brothers, we have to step up -- because every girl's life matters. Every daughter deserves the same chance as our sons. Every woman should be able to go about her day -- to walk the streets or ride the bus -- and be safe, and be treated with respect and dignity. She deserves that. And one of the favorite things about this trip for me has been to see all these incredible Indian women in the armed forces, including the person who commanded the Guard that greeted me when I arrived. It's remarkable, and it's a sign of great strength and great progress.

Our nations are strongest when we see that we are all God's children -- all equal in His eyes and worthy of His love. Across our two great countries we have Hindus and Muslims, Christians and Sikhs, and Jews and Buddhists and Jains and so many faiths. And we remember the wisdom of Gandhiji, who said, "for me, the different religions are beautiful flowers from the same garden, or they are branches of the same majestic tree." Branches of the same majestic tree. Our freedom of religion is written into our founding documents. It's part of America's very first amendment. Your Article 25 says that all people are "equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion." In both our countries -- in all countries -- upholding this fundamental freedom is the responsibility of government, but it's also the responsibility of every person. In our lives, Michelle and I have been strengthened by our Christian faith. But there have been times where my faith has been questioned -- by people who don't know me -- or they've said that I adhere to a different religion, as if that were somehow a bad thing. Around the world, we've seen intolerance and violence and terror perpetrated by those who profess to be standing up for their faith, but, in fact, are betraying it. No society is immune from the darkest impulses of man. And too often religion has been used to tap into those darker impulses as opposed to the light of God. Three years ago in our state of Wisconsin, back in the United States, a man went to a Sikh temple and, in a terrible act of violence, killed six innocent people -- Americans and Indians. And in that moment of shared grief, our two countries reaffirmed a basic truth, as we must again today -- that every person has the right to practice their faith how they choose, or to practice no faith at all, and to do so free of persecution and fear and discrimination. The peace we seek in the world begins in human hearts. And it finds its glorious expression when we look beyond any differences in religion or tribe, and rejoice in the beauty of every soul. And nowhere is that more important than India. Nowhere is it going to be more necessary for that foundational value to be upheld. India will succeed so long as it is not splintered along the lines of religious faith -- so long as it's not splintered along any lines -- and is unified as one nation.

And it's when all Indians, whatever your faith, go to the movies and applaud actors like Shah Rukh Khan. And when you celebrate athletes like Milkha Singh or Mary Kom. And every Indian can take pride in the courage of a humanitarian who liberates boys and girls from forced labor and exploitation -- who is here today -- Kailash Satyarthi. Our most recent winner of the Nobel Prize for Peace. So that's what unifies us: Do we act with compassion and empathy. Are we measured by our efforts -- by what Dr. King called "the content of our character" rather than the color of our skin or the manner in which we worship our God. In both our countries, in India and in America, our diversity is our strength. And we have to guard against any efforts to divide ourselves along sectarian lines or any other lines. And if we do that well, if America shows itself as an example of its diversity and yet the capacity to live together and work together in common effort, in common purpose; if India, as massive as it is, with so much diversity, so many differences is able to continually affirm its democracy, that is an example for every other country on Earth. That's what makes us world leaders -- not just the size of our economy or the number of weapons we have, but our ability to show the way in how we work together, and how much respect we show each other.

And, finally, our nations are strongest when we empower our young people –- because ultimately, you're the one who has to break down these old stereotypes and these old barriers, these old ways of thinking. Prejudices and stereotypes and assumptions -- those are what happens to old minds like mine. I'm getting gray hair now. I was more youthful when I first started this office. And that's why young people are so important in these efforts. Here in India, most people are under 35 years old. And India is on track to become the world's most populous country. So young Indians like you aren't just going to define the future of this nation, you're going to shape the world. Like young people everywhere, you want to get an education, and find a good job, and make your mark. And it's not easy, but in our two countries, it's possible. Remember, Michelle and I don't come from wealthy backgrounds or famous families. Our families didn't have a lot of money. We did have parents and teachers and communities that cared about us. And with the help of scholarships and student loans, we were able to attend some of best schools of the world. Without that education, we wouldn't be here today. So whether it's in America, or here in India, or around the world, we believe young people like you ought to have every chance to pursue your dreams, as well. So as India builds new community colleges, we'll link you with our own, so more young people graduate with the skills and training to succeed. We'll increase collaborations between our colleges and universities, and help create the next India institute of technology. We'll encourage young entrepreneurs who want to start a business. And we'll increase exchanges, because I want more American students coming to India, and more Indian students coming to America. And that way, we can learn from each other and we can go further. Because one other thing we have in common Indians and Americans are some of the hardest working people on Earth. And I've seen that -- Michelle and I have seen that in a family here in India. I just want to tell you a quick story. On our last visit here, we visited Humayun's Tomb. And while we were there, we met some of the laborers who are the backbone of this nation's progress. We met their children and their families as well -- and some wonderful young children with bright smiles, sparks in their eyes. And one of the children we met was a boy named Vishal. And today, Vishal is 16 years old. And he and his family live in South Delhi, in the village of Mor Band. And his mother works hard in their modest home, and his sister is now in university; she wants to become a teacher. His brother is a construction worker earning his daily wage. And his father works as a stone layer, farther away, but sends home what little he makes so Vishal can go to school. And Vishal loves math, and mostly, he studies. And when he's not studying, he likes watching kabaddi. And he dreams of someday joining the Indian armed forces. And we're grateful that Vishal and his family joined us today. We're very proud of him, because he's an example of the talent that's here. And Vishal's dreams are as important as Malia and Sasha's dreams, our daughters. And we want him to have the same opportunities.

Sisters and brothers of India, we are not perfect countries. And we've known tragedy and we've known triumph. We're home to glittering skyscrapers, but also terrible poverty; and new wealth, but also rising inequality. We have many challenges in front of us. But the reason I stand here today, and am so optimistic about our future together, is that, despite our imperfections, our two nations possess the keys to progress in the century ahead. We vote in free elections. We work and we build and we innovate. We lift up the least among us. We reach for heights previous generations could not even imagine. We respect human rights and human dignity, and it is recorded in our constitutions. And we keep striving to live up to those ideals put to paper all those years ago. And we do these things because they make our lives better and safer and more prosperous. But we also do them because our moral imaginations extend beyond the limits of our own lives. And we believe that the circumstances of our birth need not dictate the arc of our lives. We believe in the father working far from home sending money back so his family might have a better life. We believe in the mother who goes without so that her children might have something more. We believe in the laborer earning his daily wage, and the student pursuing her degree. And we believe in a young boy who knows that if he just keeps studying, if he's just given the chance, his hopes might be realized, too. We are all "beautiful flowers from the same garden…branches of the same majestic tree." And I'm the first American President to come to your country twice, but I predict I will not be the last. Because, as Americans, we believe in the promise of India. We believe in the people of India. We are proud to be your friend. We are proud to be your partner as you build the country of your dreams. Jai Hind! Thank you.

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# Address at the 63rd National Prayer Breakfast

Thank you very much. Please, please. Thank you. Well, good morning. Giving all praise and honor to God. It is wonderful to be back with you here. I want to thank our co-chairs, Bob and Roger. These two don't always agree in the Senate, but in coming together and uniting us all in prayer, they embody the spirit of our gathering today.

I also want to thank everybody who helped organize this breakfast. It's wonderful to see so many friends and faith leaders and dignitaries. And Michelle and I are truly honored to be joining you here today.

I want to offer a special welcome to a good friend, His Holiness the Dalai Lama -- who is a powerful example of what it means to practice compassion, who inspires us to speak up for the freedom and dignity of all human beings. I've been pleased to welcome him to the White House on many occasions, and we're grateful that he's able to join us here today.

There aren't that many occasions that bring His Holiness under the same roof as NASCAR. This may be the first. But God works in mysterious ways. And so I want to thank Darrell [Waltrip] for that wonderful presentation. Darrell [Waltrip] knows that when you're going 200 miles an hour, a little prayer cannot hurt. I suspect that more than once, Darrell has had the same thought as many of us have in our own lives -- Jesus, take the wheel. Although I hope that you kept your hands on the wheel when you were thinking that.

He and I obviously share something in having married up. And we are so grateful to Stevie for the incredible work that they've done together to build a ministry where the fastest drivers can slow down a little bit, and spend some time in prayer and reflection and thanks. And we certainly want to wish Darrell a happy birthday. Happy birthday.

I will note, though, Darrell, when you were reading that list of things folks were saying about you, I was thinking, well, you're a piker. I mean, that -- I mean, if you really want a list, come talk to me. Because that ain't nothing. That's the best they can do in NASCAR?

Slowing down and pausing for fellowship and prayer -- that's what this breakfast is about. I think it's fair to say Washington moves a lot slower than NASCAR. Certainly my agenda does sometimes. But still, it's easier to get caught up in the rush of our lives, and in the political back-and-forth that can take over this city. We get sidetracked with distractions, large and small. We can't go 10 minutes without checking our smartphones -- and for my staff, that's every 10 seconds. And so for 63 years, this prayer tradition has brought us together, giving us the opportunity to come together in humility before the Almighty and to be reminded of what it is that we share as children of God.

And certainly for me, this is always a chance to reflect on my own faith journey. Many times as President, I've been reminded of a line of prayer that Eleanor Roosevelt was fond of. She said, "Keep us at tasks too hard for us that we may be driven to Thee for strength." Keep us at tasks too hard for us that we may be driven to Thee for strength. I've wondered at times if maybe God was answering that prayer a little too literally. But no matter the challenge, He has been there for all of us. He's certainly strengthened me "with the power through his Spirit," as I've sought His guidance not just in my own life but in the life of our nation.

Now, over the last few months, we've seen a number of challenges -- certainly over the last six years. But part of what I want to touch on today is the degree to which we've seen professions of faith used both as an instrument of great good, but also twisted and misused in the name of evil.

As we speak, around the world, we see faith inspiring people to lift up one another -- to feed the hungry and care for the poor, and comfort the afflicted and make peace where there is strife. We heard the good work that Sister has done in Philadelphia, and the incredible work that Dr. [Kent] Brantly and his colleagues have done. We see faith driving us to do right.

But we also see faith being twisted and distorted, used as a wedge -- or, worse, sometimes used as a weapon. From a school in Pakistan to the streets of Paris, we have seen violence and terror perpetrated by those who profess to stand up for faith, their faith, professed to stand up for Islam, but, in fact, are betraying it. We see ISIL, a brutal, vicious death cult that, in the name of religion, carries out unspeakable acts of barbarism -- terrorizing religious minorities like the Yazidis, subjecting women to rape as a weapon of war, and claiming the mantle of religious authority for such actions.

We see sectarian war in Syria, the murder of Muslims and Christians in Nigeria, religious war in the Central African Republic, a rising tide of anti-Semitism and hate crimes in Europe, so often perpetrated in the name of religion.

So how do we, as people of faith, reconcile these realities -- the profound good, the strength, the tenacity, the compassion and love that can flow from all of our faiths, operating alongside those who seek to hijack religious for their own murderous ends?

Humanity has been grappling with these questions throughout human history. And lest we get on our high horse and think this is unique to some other place, remember that during the Crusades and the Inquisition, people committed terrible deeds in the name of Christ. In our home country, slavery and Jim Crow all too often was justified in the name of Christ. Michelle and I returned from India -- an incredible, beautiful country, full of magnificent diversity -- but a place where, in past years, religious faiths of all types have, on occasion, been targeted by other peoples of faith, simply due to their heritage and their beliefs -- acts of intolerance that would have shocked Gandhiji, the person who helped to liberate that nation.

So this is not unique to one group or one religion. There is a tendency in us, a sinful tendency that can pervert and distort our faith. In today's world, when hate groups have their own Twitter accounts and bigotry can fester in hidden places in cyberspace, it can be even harder to counteract such intolerance. But God compels us to try. And in this mission, I believe there are a few principles that can guide us, particularly those of us who profess to believe.

And, first, we should start with some basic humility. I believe that the starting point of faith is some doubt -- not being so full of yourself and so confident that you are right and that God speaks only to us, and doesn't speak to others, that God only cares about us and doesn't care about others, that somehow we alone are in possession of the truth.

Our job is not to ask that God respond to our notion of Truth -- our job is to be true to Him, His word, and His commandments. And we should assume humbly that we're confused and don't always know what we're doing and we're staggering and stumbling towards Him, and have some humility in that process. And that means we have to speak up against those who would misuse His name to justify oppression, or violence, or hatred with that fierce certainty. No God condones terror. No grievance justifies the taking of innocent lives, or the oppression of those who are weaker or fewer in number.

And so, as people of faith, we are summoned to push back against those who try to distort our religion -- any religion -- for their own nihilistic ends. And here at home and around the world, we will constantly reaffirm that fundamental freedom -- freedom of religion -- the right to practice our faith how we choose, to change our faith if we choose, to practice no faith at all if we choose, and to do so free of persecution and fear and discrimination.

There's wisdom in our founders writing in those documents that help found this nation the notion of freedom of religion, because they understood the need for humility. They also understood the need to uphold freedom of speech, that there was a connection between freedom of speech and freedom of religion. For to infringe on one right under the pretext of protecting another is a betrayal of both.

But part of humility is also recognizing in modern, complicated, diverse societies, the functioning of these rights, the concern for the protection of these rights calls for each of us to exercise civility and restraint and judgment. And if, in fact, we defend the legal right of a person to insult another's religion, we're equally obligated to use our free speech to condemn such insults -- and stand shoulder-to-shoulder with religious communities, particularly religious minorities who are the targets of such attacks. Just because you have the right to say something doesn't mean the rest of us shouldn't question those who would insult others in the name of free speech. Because we know that our nations are stronger when people of all faiths feel that they are welcome, that they, too, are full and equal members of our countries.

So humility I think is needed. And the second thing we need is to uphold the distinction between our faith and our governments: between Church and between State. The United States is one of the most religious countries in the world -- far more religious than most Western developed countries. And one of the reasons is that our founders wisely embraced the separation of church and state. Our government does not sponsor a religion, nor does it pressure anyone to practice a particular faith, or any faith at all. And the result is a culture where people of all backgrounds and beliefs can freely and proudly worship, without fear, or coercion -- so that when you listen to Darrell talk about his faith journey you know it's real. You know he's not saying it because it helps him advance, or because somebody told him to. It's from the heart.

That's not the case in theocracies that restrict people's choice of faith. It's not the case in authoritarian governments that elevate an individual leader or a political party above the people, or in some cases, above the concept of God Himself. So the freedom of religion is a value we will continue to protect here at home and stand up for around the world, and is one that we guard vigilantly here in the United States.

Last year, we joined together to pray for the release of Christian missionary Kenneth Bae, held in North Korea for two years. And today, we give thanks that Kenneth is finally back where he belongs -- home, with his family.

Last year, we prayed together for Pastor Saeed Abedini, detained in Iran since 2012. And I was recently in Boise, Idaho, and had the opportunity to meet with Pastor Abedini's beautiful wife and wonderful children and to convey to them that our country has not forgotten brother Saeed and that we're doing everything we can to bring him home. And then, I received an extraordinary letter from Pastor Abedini. And in it, he describes his captivity, and expressed his gratitude for my visit with his family, and thanked us all for standing in solidarity with him during his captivity.

And Pastor Abedini wrote,

Nothing is more valuable to the Body of Christ than to see how the Lord is in control, and moves ahead of countries and leadership through united prayer.

And he closed his letter by describing himself as [a]

prisoner for Christ, who is proud to be part of this great nation of the United States of America that cares for religious freedom around the world.

We're going to keep up this work -- for Pastor Abedini and all those around the world who are unjustly held or persecuted because of their faith. And we're grateful to our new Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, Rabbi David Saperstein -- who has hit the ground running, and is heading to Iraq in a few days to help religious communities there address some of those challenges. Where's David? I know he's here somewhere. Thank you, David, for the great work you're doing.

Humility; a suspicion of government getting between us and our faiths, or trying to dictate our faiths, or elevate one faith over another. And, finally, let's remember that if there is one law that we can all be most certain of that seems to bind people of all faiths, and people who are still finding their way towards faith but have a sense of ethics and morality in them -- that one law, that Golden Rule that we should treat one another as we wish to be treated. The Torah says "Love thy neighbor as yourself." In Islam, there is a Hadith that states: "None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself." The Holy Bible tells us to "put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." Put on love.

Whatever our beliefs, whatever our traditions, we must seek to be instruments of peace, and bringing light where there is darkness, and sowing love where there is hatred. And this is the loving message of His Holiness, Pope Francis. And like so many people around the world, I've been touched by his call to relieve suffering, and to show justice and mercy and compassion to the most vulnerable; to walk with The Lord and ask "Who am I to judge?" He challenges us to press on in what he calls our "march of living hope." And like millions of Americans, I am very much looking forward to welcoming Pope Francis to the United States later this year.

His Holiness expresses that basic law: Treat thy neighbor as yourself. The Dalai Lama -- anybody who's had an opportunity to be with him senses that same spirit. Kent Brantly expresses that same spirit. Kent was with Samaritan's Purse, treating Ebola patients in Liberia, when he contracted the virus himself. And with world-class medical care and a deep reliance on faith -- with God's help, Kent survived.

And then by donating his plasma, he helped others survive as well. And he continues to advocate for a global response in West Africa, reminding us that "our efforts needs to be on loving the people there." And I could not have been prouder to welcome Kent and his wonderful wife Amber to the Oval Office. We are blessed to have him here today -- because he reminds us of what it means to really "love thy neighbor as thyself." Not just words, but deeds.

Each of us has a role in fulfilling our common, greater purpose -- not merely to seek high position, but to plumb greater depths so that we may find the strength to love more fully. And this is perhaps our greatest challenge -- to see our own reflection in each other; to be our brother's keepers and sister's keepers, and to keep faith with one another. As children of God, let's make that our work, together.

As children of God, let's work to end injustice -- injustice of poverty and hunger. No one should ever suffer from such want amidst such plenty. As children of God, let's work to eliminate the scourge of homelessness, because, as Sister Mary [Scullion] says, "None of us are home until all of us are home." None of us are home until all of us are home.

As children of God, let's stand up for the dignity and value of every woman, and man, and child, because we are all equal in His eyes, and work to send the scourge and the sin of modern-day slavery and human trafficking, and "set the oppressed free."

If we are properly humble, if we drop to our knees on occasion, we will acknowledge that we never fully know God's purpose. We can never fully fathom His amazing grace. "We see through a glass, darkly" -- grappling with the expanse of His awesome love. But even with our limits, we can heed that which is required: "To do justice, and love kindness, and walk humbly with our God."

I pray that we will. And as we journey together on this "march of living hope," I pray that, in His Name, we will run and not be weary, and walk and not be faint, and we'll heed those words and "put on love."

May the Lord bless you and keep you, and may He bless this precious country that we love.

Thank you all very much.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# On Force Authorization Request Against ISIL

Good afternoon. Today, as part of an international coalition of some 60 nations -- including Arab countries -- our men and women in uniform continue the fight against ISIL in Iraq and in Syria.

More than 2,000 coalition airstrikes have pounded these terrorists. We’re disrupting their command and control and supply lines, making it harder for them to move. We’re destroying their fighting positions, their tanks, their vehicles, their barracks, their training camps, and the oil and gas facilities and infrastructure that fund their operations. We’re taking out their commanders, their fighters, and their leaders.

In Iraq, local forces have largely held the line and in some places have pushed ISIL back. In Syria, ISIL failed in its major push to take the town of Kobani, losing countless fighters in the process -- fighters who will never again threaten innocent civilians. And we’ve seen reports of sinking morale among ISIL fighters as they realize the futility of their cause.

Now, make no mistake -- this is a difficult mission, and it will remain difficult for some time. It’s going to take time to dislodge these terrorists, especially from urban areas. But our coalition is on the offensive, ISIL is on the defensive, and ISIL is going to lose. Its barbaric murders of so many people, including American hostages, are a desperate and revolting attempt to strike fear in the hearts of people it can never possibly win over by its ideas or its ideology -- because it offers nothing but misery and death and destruction. And with vile groups like this, there is only one option: With our allies and partners, we are going to degrade and ultimately destroy this terrorist group.

And when I announced our strategy against ISIL in September, I said that we are strongest as a nation when the President and Congress work together. Today, my administration submitted a draft resolution to Congress to authorize the use of force against ISIL. I want to be very clear about what it does and what it does not do.

This resolution reflects our core objective to destroy ISIL. It supports the comprehensive strategy that we have been pursuing with our allies and partners: A systemic and sustained campaign of airstrikes against ISIL in Iraq and Syria. Support and training for local forces on the ground, including the moderate Syrian opposition. Preventing ISIL attacks, in the region and beyond, including by foreign terrorist fighters who try to threaten our countries. Regional and international support for an inclusive Iraqi government that unites the Iraqi people and strengthens Iraqi forces against ISIL. Humanitarian assistance for the innocent civilians of Iraq and Syria, who are suffering so terribly under ISIL’s reign of horror.

I want to thank Vice President Biden, Secretaries Kerry and Hagel, and General Marty Dempsey for their leadership in advancing our strategy. Even as we meet this challenge in Iraq and Syria, we all agree that one of our weapons against terrorists like ISIL -- a critical part of our strategy -- is the values we live here at home. One of the best antidotes to the hateful ideologies that try to recruit and radicalize people to violent extremism is our own example as diverse and tolerant societies that welcome the contributions of all people, including people of all faiths.

The resolution we’ve submitted today does not call for the deployment of U.S. ground combat forces to Iraq or Syria. It is not the authorization of another ground war, like Afghanistan or Iraq. The 2,600 American troops in Iraq today largely serve on bases -- and, yes, they face the risks that come with service in any dangerous environment. But they do not have a combat mission. They are focused on training Iraqi forces, including Kurdish forces.

As I’ve said before, I’m convinced that the United States should not get dragged back into another prolonged ground war in the Middle East. That’s not in our national security interest and it’s not necessary for us to defeat ISIL. Local forces on the ground who know their countries best are best positioned to take the ground fight to ISIL -- and that’s what they’re doing.

At the same time, this resolution strikes the necessary balance by giving us the flexibility we need for unforeseen circumstances. For example, if we had actionable intelligence about a gathering of ISIL leaders, and our partners didn’t have the capacity to get them, I would be prepared to order our Special Forces to take action, because I will not allow these terrorists to have a safe haven. So we need flexibility, but we also have to be careful and deliberate. And there is no heavier decision than asking our men and women in uniform to risk their lives on our behalf. As Commander in Chief, I will only send our troops into harm’s way when it is absolutely necessary for our national security.

Finally, this resolution repeals the 2002 authorization of force for the invasion of Iraq and limits this new authorization to three years. I do not believe America’s interests are served by endless war, or by remaining on a perpetual war footing. As a nation, we need to ask the difficult and necessary questions about when, why and how we use military force. After all, it is our troops who bear the costs of our decisions, and we owe them a clear strategy and the support they need to get the job done. So this resolution will give our armed forces and our coalition the continuity we need for the next three years.

It is not a timetable. It is not announcing that the mission is completed at any given period. What it is saying is that Congress should revisit the issue at the beginning of the next President’s term. It’s conceivable that the mission is completed earlier. It’s conceivable that after deliberation, debate and evaluation, that there are additional tasks to be carried out in this area. And the people’s representatives, with a new President, should be able to have that discussion.

In closing, I want to say that in crafting this resolution we have consulted with, and listened to, both Republicans and Democrats in Congress. We have made a sincere effort to address difficult issues that we’ve discussed together. In the days and weeks ahead, we’ll continue to work closely with leaders and members of Congress on both sides of the aisle. I believe this resolution can grow even stronger with the thoughtful and dignified debate that this moment demands. I’m optimistic that it can win strong bipartisan support, and that we can show our troops and the world that Americans are united in this mission.

Today, our men and women in uniform continue the fight against ISIL, and we salute them for their courageous service. We pray for their safety. We stand with their families who miss them and who are sacrificing here at home. But know this: Our coalition is strong, our cause is just, and our mission will succeed. And long after the terrorists we face today are destroyed and forgotten, America will continue to stand free and tall and strong.

May God bless our troops, and may God bless the United States of America.

Thank you very much, everybody.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Cybersecurity and Consumer Protection Summit Address

Hello Stanford! Thank you so much! Thank you! Thank you so much. Than you, everybody. Have a seat. Have a seat.

"Yes we can."

First of all, let me thank President Hennessy for not just the introduction but for your outstanding leadership at one of the great universities of the world. I’ve got to admit, like, I kind of want to go here. I was trying to figure out why it is that a really nice place like this is wasted on young people -- who don’t fully appreciate what you got. It’s really nice. And everybody here is so friendly and smart, and it’s beautiful. And what’s there not to like?

I want to thank you and everyone at Stanford for hosting this summit, especially Amy Zegart, George Triantis, and someone who served as a great advisor to me at the White House and as an outstanding ambassador to Russia before coming back to The Farm -- Mike McFaul.

It is great to be here at Leland Stanford Junior University. And I’m pleased to be joined by members of my team who bleed Cardinal red. We’re infiltrated with Stanford people. We’ve got Senior Advisor Valerie Jarrett, National Security Advisor Susan Rice, Secretary of Commerce Penny Pritzker. And, let’s face it, I like Stanford grads. I noticed Steve Chu was around here, who helped lead our Energy Department for a while. And he’s now hanging out. I’m also pleased to be joined by other members of my Cabinet -- our Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson is here, and our Small Business Administrator, Maria Contreras-Sweet. And I want to acknowledge my tireless Homeland Security Advisor who helped, and continues to shape, our cybersecurity efforts -- Lisa Monaco. Thank you, Lisa.

So I’d always heard about this campus, and everybody is riding bikes, and people hopping into fountains -- and the current holder of The Axe. This is the place that made “nerd” cool. I was thinking about wearing some black-rimmed glasses, some tape in the middle, but I guess that’s not what you do anymore. Ambassador McFaul told me if I came to Stanford, you’d “talk nerdy to me.”

But I’m not just here to enjoy myself. As we gather here today, America is seeing incredible progress that we can all be proud of. We just had the best year of job growth since the 1990s. Over the past 59 months, our businesses have created nearly 12 million new jobs, which is the longest streak of private sector job growth on record. And in a hopeful sign for middle-class families, wages are beginning to rise again.

And, meanwhile, we’re doing more to prepare our young people for a competitive world. Our high school graduation rate has hit an all-time high. More Americans are finishing college than ever before. Here at Stanford and across the country, we’ve got the best universities, we’ve got the best scientists, the best researchers in the world. We’ve got the most dynamic economy in the world. And no place represents that better than this region. So make no mistake, more than any other nation on Earth, the United States is positioned to lead in the 21st century.

And so much of our economic competitiveness is tied to what brings me here today, and that is America’s leadership in the digital economy. It’s our ability -- almost unique across the planet -- our ability to innovate and to learn, and to discover, and to create, and build, and do business online, and stretch the boundaries of what’s possible. That’s what drives us. And so when we had to decide where to have this summit, the decision was easy, because so much of our Information Age began right here, at Stanford.

It was here where two students, Bill Hewlett and Dave Packard, met and then, in a garage not far from here, started a company that eventually built one of the first personal computers, weighing in at 40 pounds. It was from here, in 1968, where a researcher, Douglas Englebart, astonished an audience with two computers, connected “online,” and hypertext you could click on with something called a “mouse.”

A year later, a computer here received the first message from another computer 350 miles away -- the beginnings of what would become the Internet. And, by the way, it’s no secret that many of these innovations built on government-funded research is one of the reasons that if we want to maintain our economic leadership in the world, America has to keep investing in basic research in science and technology. It's absolutely critical.

So here at Stanford, pioneers developed the protocols and architecture of the Internet, DSL, the first webpage in America, innovations for cloud computing. Student projects here became Yahoo and Google. Those were pretty good student projects. Your graduates have gone on to help create and build thousands of companies that have shaped our digital society -- from Cisco to Sun Microsystems, YouTube to Instagram, StubHub, Bonobos. According to one study, if all the companies traced back to Stanford graduates formed their own nation, you’d be one the largest economies in the world and have a pretty good football team as well.

And today, with your cutting-edge research programs and your new cyber initiatives, you’re helping us navigate some of the most complicated cyber challenges that we face as a nation. And that’s why we’re here. I want to thank all of you who have joined us today -- members of Congress, representatives from the private sector, government, academia, privacy and consumer groups, and especially the students who are here. Just as we’re all connected like never before, we have to work together like never before, both to seize opportunities but also meet the challenges of this Information Age.

And it’s one of the great paradoxes of our time that the very technologies that empower us to do great good can also be used to undermine us and inflict great harm. The same information technologies that help make our military the most advanced in the world are targeted by hackers from China and Russia who go after our defense contractors and systems that are built for our troops. The same social media we use in government to advocate for democracy and human rights around the world can also be used by terrorists to spread hateful ideologies. So these cyber threats are a challenge to our national security.

Much of our critical infrastructure -- our financial systems, our power grid, health systems -- run on networks connected to the Internet, which is hugely empowering but also dangerous, and creates new points of vulnerability that we didn’t have before. Foreign governments and criminals are probing these systems every single day. We only have to think of real-life examples -- an air traffic control system going down and disrupting flights, or blackouts that plunge cities into darkness -- to imagine what a set of systematic cyber attacks might do. So this is also a matter of public safety. As a nation, we do more business online than ever before -- trillions of dollars a year. And high-tech industries, like those across the Valley, support millions of American jobs. All this gives us an enormous competitive advantage in the global economy. And for that very reason, American companies are being targeted, their trade secrets stolen, intellectual property ripped off. The North Korean cyber attack on Sony Pictures destroyed data and disabled thousands of computers, and exposed the personal information of Sony employees. And these attacks are hurting American companies and costing American jobs. So this is also a threat to America’s economic security.

As consumers, we do more online than ever before. We manage our bank accounts. We shop. We pay our bills. We handle our medical records. And as a country, one of our greatest resources are the young people who are here today --digitally fearless and unencumbered by convention, and uninterested in old debates. And they’re remaking the world every day. But it also means that this problem of how we secure this digital world is only going to increase.

I want more Americans succeeding in our digital world. I want young people like you to unleash the next waves of innovation, and launch the next startups, and give Americans the tools to create new jobs and new businesses, and to expand connectivity in places that we currently can't imagine, to help open up new world and new experiences and empower individuals in ways that would seem unimaginable 10, 15, 20 years ago.

And that’s why we’re working to connect 99 percent of America’s students to high-speed Internet -- because when it comes to educating our children, we can’t afford any digital divides. It’s why we’re helping more communities get across to the next generation of broadband faster, with cheaper Internet, so that students and entrepreneurs and small businesses across America, not just in pockets of America, have the same opportunities to learn and compete as you do here in the Valley. It’s why I’ve come out so strongly and publicly for net neutrality, for an open and free Internet -- because we have to preserve one of the greatest engines for creativity and innovation in human history.

So our connectivity brings extraordinary benefits to our daily lives, but it also brings risks. And when companies get hacked, Americans’ personal information, including their financial information, gets stolen. Identity theft can ruin your credit rating and turn your life upside down. In recent breaches, more than 100 million Americans had their personal data compromised, including, in some cases, credit card information. We want our children to go online and explore the world, but we also want them to be safe and not have their privacy violated. So this is a direct threat to the economic security of American families, not just the economy overall, and to the wellbeing of our children, which means we’ve got to put in place mechanisms to protect them.

So shortly after I took office, before I had gray hair -- I said that these cyber threats were one of the most serious economic national security challenges that we face as a nation, and I made confronting them a priority. And given the complexity of these threats, I believe we have to be guided by some basic principles. So let me share those with you today.

First, this has to be a shared mission. So much of our computer networks and critical infrastructure are in the private sector, which means government cannot do this alone. But the fact is that the private sector can’t do it alone either, because it’s government that often has the latest information on new threats. There’s only one way to defend America from these cyber threats, and that is through government and industry working together, sharing appropriate information as true partners.

Second, we have to focus on our unique strengths. Government has many capabilities, but it’s not appropriate or even possible for government to secure the computer networks of private businesses. Many of the companies who are here today are cutting-edge, but the private sector doesn’t always have the capabilities needed during a cyber attack, the situational awareness, or the ability to warn other companies in real time, or the capacity to coordinate a response across companies and sectors. So we’re going to have to be smart and efficient and focus on what each sector does best, and then do it together.

Third, we’re going to have to constantly evolve. The first computer viruses hit personal computers in the early 1980s, and essentially, we’ve been in a cyber arms race ever since. We design new defenses, and then hackers and criminals design new ways to penetrate them. Whether it’s phishing or botnets, spyware or malware, and now ransomware, these attacks are getting more and more sophisticated every day. So we’ve got to be just as fast and flexible and nimble in constantly evolving our defenses.

And fourth, and most importantly, in all our work we have to make sure we are protecting the privacy and civil liberty of the American people. And we grapple with these issues in government. We’ve pursued important reforms to make sure we are respecting peoples’ privacy as well as ensuring our national security. And the private sector wrestles with this as well. When consumers share their personal information with companies, they deserve to know that it’s going to be protected. When government and industry share information about cyber threats, we’ve got to do so in a way that safeguards your personal information. When people go online, we shouldn’t have to forfeit the basic privacy we’re entitled to as Americans.

In recent years, we’ve worked to put these principles into practice. And as part of our comprehensive strategy, we’ve boosted our defenses in government, we’re sharing more information with the private sector to help those companies defend themselves, we’re working with industry to use what we call a Cybersecurity Framework to prevent, respond to, and recover from attacks when they happen.

And, by the way, I recently went to the National Cybersecurity Communications Integration Center, which is part of the Department of Homeland Security, where representatives from government and the private sector monitor cyber threats 24/7. And so defending against cyber threats, just like terrorism or other threats, is one more reason that we are calling on Congress, not to engage in politics -- this is not a Republican or Democratic issue -- but work to make sure that our security is safeguarded and that we fully fund the Department of Homeland Security, because it has great responsibilities in this area.

So we’re making progress, and I’ve recently announced new actions to keep up this momentum. We’ve called for a single national standard so Americans know within 30 days if your information has been stolen. This month, we’ll be proposing legislation that we call a Consumer Privacy Bill of Rights to give Americans some baseline protections, like the right to decide what personal data companies collect from you, and the right to know how companies are using that information. We’ve proposed the Student Digital Privacy Act, which is modeled on the landmark law here in California -- because today’s amazing educational technologies should be used to teach our students and not collect data for marketing to students.

And we’ve also taken new steps to strengthen our cybersecurity -- proposing new legislation to promote greater information sharing between government and the private sector, including liability protections for companies that share information about cyber threats. Today, I’m once again calling on Congress to come together and get this done.

And this week, we announced the creation of our new Cyber Threat Intelligence Integration Center. Just like we do with terrorist threats, we’re going to have a single entity that’s analyzing and integrating and quickly sharing intelligence about cyber threats across government so we can act on all those threats even faster. And today, we’re taking an additional step -- which is why there’s a desk here. You were wondering, I'm sure. I’m signing a new executive order to promote even more information sharing about cyber threats, both within the private sector and between government and the private sector. And it will encourage more companies and industries to set up organizations -- hubs -- so you can share information with each other. It will call for a common set of standards, including protections for privacy and civil liberties, so that government can share threat information with these hubs more easily. And it can help make it easier for companies to get the classified cybersecurity threat information that they need to protect their companies.

I want to acknowledge, by the way, that the companies who are represented here are stepping up as well. The Cyber Threat Alliance, which includes companies like Palo Alto Networks and Symantec, are going to work with us to share more information under this new executive order. You’ve got companies from Apple to Intel, from Bank of America to PG&E, who are going to use the Cybersecurity Framework to strengthen their own defenses. As part of our BuySecure Initiative, Visa and MasterCard and American Express and others are going to make their transactions more secure. Nationstar is joining companies that are giving their companies [customers] another weapon to battle identity theft, and that's free access to their credit scores. And more companies are moving to new, stronger technologies to authenticate user identities, like biometrics -- because it’s just too easy for hackers to figure out usernames and passwords, like “password.” Or “12345 -- 7.” Those are some of my previous passwords. I've changed them since then.

So this summit is an example of what we need more of -- all of us working together to do what none of us can achieve alone. And it is difficult. Some of the challenges I’ve described today have defied solutions for years. And I want to say very clearly that, as somebody who is a former constitutional law teacher, and somebody who deeply values his privacy and his family’s privacy -- although I chose the wrong job for that -- but will be a private citizen again, and cares deeply about this -- I have to tell you that grappling with how government protects the American people from adverse events while, at the same time, making sure that government itself is not abusing its capabilities is hard.

The cyber world is sort of the wild, wild West. And to some degree, we're asked to be the sheriff. When something like Sony happens, people want to know what can government do about this. If information is being shared by terrorists in the cyber world and an attack happens, people want to know are there ways of stopping that from happening. By necessity, that means government has its own significant capabilities in the cyber world. But then people, rightly, ask, well, what safeguards do we have against government intruding on our own privacy? And it's hard, and it constantly evolves because the technology so often outstrips whatever rules and structures and standards have been put in place, which means that government has to be constantly self-critical and we have to be able to have an open debate about it.

But we’re all here today because we know that we're going to have to break through some of these barriers that are holding us back if we are going to continue to thrive in this remarkable new world. We all know what we need to do. We have to build stronger defenses and disrupt more attacks. We have to make cyberspace safer. We have to improve cooperation across the board. And, by the way, this is not just here in America, but internationally -- which also, by the way, makes things complicated because a lot of countries don't necessarily share our investment -- or our commitment to openness, and we have to try to navigate that.

But this should not be an ideological issue. And that’s one thing I want to emphasize: This is not a Democratic issue, or a Republican issue. This is not a liberal or conservative issue. Everybody is online, and everybody is vulnerable. The business leaders here want their privacy and their children protected, just like the consumer and privacy advocates here want America to keep leading the world in technology and be safe from attacks. So I’m hopeful that through this forum and the work that we do subsequently, that we're able to generate ideas and best practices, and that the work of this summit can help guide our planning and execution for years to come.

After all, we are just getting started. Think about it. Tim Berners-Lee, from his lab in Switzerland, invented the World Wide Web in 1989, which was only 26 years ago. The great epochs in human history -- the Bronze Age, Iron Age, Agricultural Revolution, Industrial Revolution -- they spanned centuries. We’re only 26 years into this Internet Age. We’ve only scratched the surface. And as I guess they say at Google, “The future is awesome.” We haven’t even begun to imagine the discoveries and innovations that are going to be unleashed in the decades to come. But we know how we’ll get there.

Reflecting on his work in the 1960s on ARPANET, the precursor of the Internet, the late Paul Baran said this: “The process of technological developments is like building a cathedral. Over the course of several hundred years, new people come along and each lays down a block on top of the old foundations, each saying, ‘I built the cathedral.’ And then comes along an historian who asks, ‘Well, who built the cathedral?’” And Baran said, “If you’re not careful, you can con yourself into believing that you did the most important part. But the reality is that each contribution has to follow on to previous work. Everything is tied to everything else.”

Everything is tied to everything else. The innovations that first appeared on this campus all those decades ago -- that first mouse, that first message -- helped lay a foundation. And in the decades since, on campuses like this, in companies like those that are represented here, new people have come along, each laying down a block, one on top of the other. And when future historians ask who built this Information Age, it won’t be any one of us who did the most important part alone. The answer will be, “We all did, as Americans.”

And I’m absolutely confident that if we keep at this, if we keep working together in a spirit of collaboration, like all those innovators before us, our work will endure, like a great cathedral, for centuries to come. And that cathedral will not just be about technology, it will be about the values that we’ve embedded in the architecture of this system. It will be about privacy, and it will be about community. And it will be about connection. What a magnificent cathedral that all of you have helped to build. We want to be a part of that, and we look forward to working with you in the future.

Thank you for your partnership. With that, I’m going to sign this executive order.

Thank you.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# On Countering Violent Religious Extremism

Thank you so much. Everybody, please have a seat.

Well, thank you, Lisa, for the introduction. Lisa is an example of the countless dedicated public servants across our government, a number of who are here today, who are working tirelessly every single day on behalf of the security and safety of the American people. So we very much appreciate her. And thanks to all of you for your attendance and participation in this important summit.

For more than 238 years, the United States of America has not just endured, but we have thrived and surmounted challenges that might have broken a lesser nation. After a terrible civil war, we repaired our union. We weathered a Great Depression, became the world’s most dynamic economy. We fought fascism, liberated Europe. We faced down communism -- and won. American communities have been destroyed by earthquakes and tornadoes and fires and floods -- and each time we rebuild.

The bombing that killed 168 people could not break Oklahoma City. On 9/11, terrorists tried to bring us to our knees; today a new tower soars above New York City, and America continues to lead throughout the world. After Americans were killed at Fort Hood and the Boston Marathon, it didn’t divide us; we came together as one American family.

In the face of horrific acts of violence -- at a Sikh temple near Milwaukee, or at a Jewish community center outside Kansas City -- we reaffirmed our commitment to pluralism and to freedom, repulsed by the notion that anyone should ever be targeted because of who they are, or what they look like, or how they worship.

Most recently, with the brutal murders in Chapel Hill of three young Muslim Americans, many Muslim Americans are worried and afraid. And I want to be as clear as I can be: As Americans, all faiths and backgrounds, we stand with you in your grief and we offer our love and we offer our support.

My point is this: As Americans, we are strong and we are resilient. And when tragedy strikes, when we take a hit, we pull together, and we draw on what’s best in our character -- our optimism, our commitment to each other, our commitment to our values, our respect for one another. We stand up, and we rebuild, and we recover, and we emerge stronger than before. That’s who we are.

And I say all this because we face genuine challenges to our security today, just as we have throughout our history. Challenges to our security are not new. They didn’t happen yesterday or a week ago or a year ago. We've always faced challenges. One of those challenges is the terrorist threat from groups like al Qaeda and ISIL. But this isn't our challenge alone. It's a challenge for the world. ISIL is terrorizing the people of Syria and Iraq, beheads and burns human beings in unfathomable acts of cruelty. We’ve seen deadly attacks in Ottawa and Sydney and, Paris, and now Copenhagen.

So, in the face of this challenge, we have marshaled the full force of the United States government, and we’re working with allies and partners to dismantle terrorist organizations and protect the American people. Given the complexities of the challenge and the nature of the enemy -- which is not a traditional army -- this work takes time, and will require vigilance and resilience and perspective. But I'm confident that, just as we have for more than two centuries, we will ultimately prevail.

And part of what gives me that confidence is the overwhelming response of the world community to the savagery of these terrorists -- not just revulsion, but a concrete commitment to work together to vanquish these organizations.

At the United Nations in September, I called on the international community to come together and eradicate this scourge of violent extremism. And I want to thank all of you -- from across America and around the world -- for answering this call. Tomorrow at the State Department, governments and civil society groups from more than 60 countries will focus on the steps that we can take as governments. And I’ll also speak about how our nations have to remain relentless in our fight -- our counterterrorism efforts -- against groups that are plotting against our counties.

But we are here today because of a very specific challenge -- and that’s countering violent extremism, something that is not just a matter of military affairs. By "violent extremism," we don’t just mean the terrorists who are killing innocent people. We also mean the ideologies, the infrastructure of extremists --the propagandists, the recruiters, the funders who radicalize and recruit or incite people to violence. We all know there is no one profile of a violent extremist or terrorist, so there’s no way to predict who will become radicalized. Around the world, and here in the United States, inexcusable acts of violence have been committed against people of different faiths, by people of different faiths -- which is, of course, a betrayal of all our faiths. It's not unique to one group, or to one geography, or one period of time.

But we are here at this summit because of the urgent threat from groups like al Qaeda and ISIL. And this week we are focused on prevention -- preventing these groups from radicalizing, recruiting or inspiring others to violence in the first place. I’ve called upon governments to come to the United Nations this fall with concrete steps that we can take together. And today, what I want to do is suggest several areas where I believe we can concentrate our efforts. First, we have to confront squarely and honestly the twisted ideologies that these terrorist groups use to incite people to violence. Leading up to this summit, there’s been a fair amount of debate in the press and among pundits about the words we use to describe and frame this challenge. So I want to be very clear about how I see it. Al Qaeda and ISIL and groups like it are desperate for legitimacy. They try to portray themselves as religious leaders -- holy warriors in defense of Islam. That’s why ISIL presumes to declare itself the "Islamic State." And they propagate the notion that America -- and the West, generally -- is at war with Islam. That’s how they recruit. That’s how they try to radicalize young people. We must never accept the premise that they put forward, because it is a lie. Nor should we grant these terrorists the religious legitimacy that they seek. They are not religious leaders -- they’re terrorists. And we are not at war with Islam. We are at war with people who have perverted Islam. Now, just as those of us outside Muslim communities need to reject the terrorist narrative that the West and Islam are in conflict, or modern life and Islam are in conflict, I also believe that Muslim communities have a responsibility as well. Al Qaeda and ISIL do draw, selectively, from the Islamic texts. They do depend upon the misperception around the world that they speak in some fashion for people of the Muslim faith, that Islam is somehow inherently violent, that there is some sort of clash of civilizations. Of course, the terrorists do not speak for over a billion Muslims who reject their hateful ideology. They no more represent Islam than any madman who kills innocents in the name of God represents Christianity or Judaism or Buddhism or Hinduism. No religion is responsible for terrorism. People are responsible for violence and terrorism. And to their credit, there are respected Muslim clerics and scholars not just here in the United States but around the world who push back on this twisted interpretation of their faith. They want to make very clear what Islam stands for. And we’re joined by some of these leaders today. These religious leaders and scholars preach that Islam calls for peace and for justice, and tolerance toward others; that terrorism is prohibited; that the Koran says whoever kills an innocent, it is as if he has killed all mankind. Those are the voices that represent over a billion people around the world. But if we are going to effectively isolate terrorists, if we're going to address the challenge of their efforts to recruit our young people, if we're going to lift up the voices of tolerance and pluralism within the Muslim community, then we've got to acknowledge that their job is made harder by a broader narrative that does exist in many Muslim communities around the world that suggests the West is at odds with Islam in some fashion. The reality -- which, again, many Muslim leaders have spoken to -- is that there’s a strain of thought that doesn’t embrace ISIL’s tactics, doesn’t embrace violence, but does buy into the notion that the Muslim world has suffered historical grievances -- sometimes that's accurate -- does buy into the belief that so many of the ills in the Middle East flow from a history of colonialism or conspiracy; does buy into the idea that Islam is incompatible with modernity or tolerance, or that it's been polluted by Western values. So those beliefs exist. In some communities around the world they are widespread. And so it makes individuals -- especially young people who already may be disaffected or alienated -- more ripe for radicalization. And so we've got to be able to talk honestly about those issues. We've got to be much more clear about how we're rejecting certain ideas. So just as leaders like myself reject the notion that terrorists like ISIL genuinely represent Islam, Muslim leaders need to do more to discredit the notion that our nations are determined to suppress Islam, that there’s an inherent clash in civilizations. Everybody has to speak up very clearly that no matter what the grievance, violence against innocents doesn't defend Islam or Muslims, it damages Islam and Muslims. And when all of us, together, are doing our part to reject the narratives of violent extremists, when all of us are doing our part to be very clear about the fact that there are certain universal precepts and values that need to be respected in this interconnected world, that’s the beginnings of a partnership. As we go forward, we need to find new ways to amplify the voices of peace and tolerance and inclusion -- and we especially need to do it online. We also need to lift up the voices of those who know the hypocrisy of groups like ISIL firsthand, including former extremists. Their words speak to us today. And I know in some of the discussions these voices have been raised: "I witnessed horrible crimes committed by ISIS." "It’s not a revolution or jihad…it’s a slaughter…I was shocked by what I did." "This isn’t what we came for, to kill other Muslims." "I’m 28 -- is this the only future I’m able to imagine?" That's the voice of so many who were temporarily radicalized and then saw the truth. And they’ve warned other young people not to make the same mistakes as they did. "Do not run after illusions." "Do not be deceived." "Do not give up your life for nothing." We need to lift up those voices. And in all this work, the greatest resource are communities themselves, especially like those young people who are here today. We are joined by talented young men and women who are pioneering new innovations, and new social media tools, and new ways to reach young people. We’re joined by leaders from the private sector, including high-tech companies, who want to support your efforts. And I want to challenge all of us to build new partnerships that unleash the talents and creativity of young people -- young Muslims -- not just to expose the lies of extremists but to empower youth to service, and to lift up people’s lives here in America and around the world. And that can be a calling for your generation. So that’s the first challenge -- we've got to discredit these ideologies. We have to tackle them head on. And we can't shy away from these discussions. And too often, folks are, understandably, sensitive about addressing some of these root issues, but we have to talk about them, honestly and clearly. And the reason I believe we have to do so is because I'm so confident that when the truth is out we'll be successful. Now, a second challenge is we do have to address the grievances that terrorists exploit, including economic grievances. Poverty alone does not cause a person to become a terrorist, any more than poverty alone causes somebody to become a criminal. There are millions of people -- billions of people -- in the world who live in abject poverty and are focused on what they can do to build up their own lives, and never embrace violent ideologies. Conversely, there are terrorists who’ve come from extraordinarily wealthy backgrounds, like Osama bin Laden. What’s true, though, is that when millions of people -- especially youth -- are impoverished and have no hope for the future, when corruption inflicts daily humiliations on people, when there are no outlets by which people can express their concerns, resentments fester. The risk of instability and extremism grow. Where young people have no education, they are more vulnerable to conspiracy theories and radical ideas, because it's not tested against anything else, they’ve got nothing to weigh. And we've seen this across the Middle East and North Africa.

And terrorist groups are all too happy to step into a void. They offer salaries to their foot soldiers so they can support their families. Sometimes they offer social services -- schools, health clinics -- to do what local governments cannot or will not do. They try to justify their violence in the name of fighting the injustice of corruption that steals from the people -- even while those terrorist groups end up committing even worse abuses, like kidnapping and human trafficking.

So if we’re going to prevent people from being susceptible to the false promises of extremism, then the international community has to offer something better. And the United States intends to do its part. We will keep promoting development and growth that is broadly shared, so more people can provide for their families. We’ll keep leading a global effort against corruption, because the culture of the bribe has to be replaced by good governance that doesn’t favor certain groups over others. Countries have to truly invest in the education and skills and job training that our extraordinary young people need. And by the way, that's boys and girls, and men and women, because countries will not be truly successful if half their populations -- if their girls and their women are denied opportunity. And America will continue to forge new partnerships in entrepreneurship and innovation, and science and technology, so young people from Morocco to Malaysia can start new businesses and create more prosperity. Just as we address economic grievances, we need to face a third challenge -- and that's addressing the political grievances that are exploited by terrorists. When governments oppress their people, deny human rights, stifle dissent, or marginalize ethnic and religious groups, or favor certain religious groups over others, it sows the seeds of extremism and violence. It makes those communities more vulnerable to recruitment. Terrorist groups claim that change can only come through violence. And if peaceful change is impossible, that plays into extremist propaganda.

So the essential ingredient to real and lasting stability and progress is not less democracy; it’s more democracy. It’s institutions that uphold the rule of law and apply justice equally. It’s security forces and police that respect human rights and treat people with dignity. It’s free speech and strong civil societies where people can organize and assemble and advocate for peaceful change. It’s freedom of religion where all people can practice their faith without fear and intimidation. All of this is part of countering violent extremism.

Fourth, we have to recognize that our best partners in all these efforts, the best people to help protect individuals from falling victim to extremist ideologies are their own communities, their own family members. We have to be honest with ourselves. Terrorist groups like al Qaeda and ISIL deliberately target their propaganda in the hopes of reaching and brainwashing young Muslims, especially those who may be disillusioned or wrestling with their identity. That’s the truth. The high-quality videos, the online magazines, the use of social media, terrorist Twitter accounts -- it’s all designed to target today’s young people online, in cyberspace.

And by the way, the older people here, as wise and respected as you may be, your stuff is often boring -- compared to what they’re doing. You're not connected. And as a consequence, you are not connecting. So these terrorists are a threat, first and foremost, to the communities that they target, which means communities have to take the lead in protecting themselves. And that is true here in America, as it's true anywhere else. When someone starts getting radicalized, family and friends are often the first to see that something has changed in their personality. Teachers may notice a student becoming withdrawn or struggling with his or her identity, and if they intervene at that moment and offer support, that may make a difference.

Faith leaders may notice that someone is beginning to espouse violent interpretations of religion, and that’s a moment for possible intervention that allows them to think about their actions and reflect on the meaning of their faith in a way that’s more consistent with peace and justice. Families and friends, coworkers, neighbors, faith leaders -- they want to reach out; they want to help save their loved ones and friends, and prevent them from taking a wrong turn.

But communities don’t always know the signs to look for, or have the tools to intervene, or know what works best. And that’s where government can play a role -- if government is serving as a trusted partner. And that’s where we also need to be honest. I know some Muslim Americans have concerns about working with government, particularly law enforcement. And their reluctance is rooted in the objection to certain practices where Muslim Americans feel they’ve been unfairly targeted. So, in our work, we have to make sure that abuses stop, are not repeated, that we do not stigmatize entire communities. Nobody should be profiled or put under a cloud of suspicion simply because of their faith. Engagement with communities can’t be a cover for surveillance. We can’t "securitize" our relationship with Muslim Americans -- dealing with them solely through the prism of law enforcement. Because when we do, that only reinforces suspicions, makes it harder for us to build the trust that we need to work together. As part of this summit, we’re announcing that we’re going to increase our outreach to communities, including Muslim Americans. We’re going to step up our efforts to engage with partners and raise awareness so more communities understand how to protect their loved ones from becoming radicalized. We’ve got to devote more resources to these efforts. And as government does more, communities are going to have to step up as well. We need to build on the pilot programs that have been discussed at this summit already -- in Los Angeles, in Minneapolis, in Boston. These are partnerships that bring people together in a spirit of mutual respect and create more dialogue and more trust and more cooperation. If we’re going to solve these issues, then the people who are most targeted and potentially most affected -- Muslim Americans -- have to have a seat at the table where they can help shape and strengthen these partnerships so that we’re all working together to help communities stay safe and strong and resilient. And finally, we need to do what extremists and terrorists hope we will not do, and that is stay true to the values that define us as free and diverse societies. If extremists are peddling the notion that Western countries are hostile to Muslims, then we need to show that we welcome people of all faiths.

Here in America, Islam has been woven into the fabric of our country since its founding. Generations of Muslim immigrants came here and went to work as farmers and merchants and factory workers, helped to lay railroads and build up America. The first Islamic center in New York City was founded in the 1890s. America’s first mosque -- this was an interesting fact -- was in North Dakota.

Muslim Americans protect our communities as police officers and firefighters and first responders, and protect our nation by serving in uniform, and in our intelligence communities, and in homeland security. And in cemeteries across our country, including at Arlington, Muslim American heroes rest in peace having given their lives in defense of all of us. And of course that’s the story extremists and terrorists don’t want the world to know -- Muslims succeeding and thriving in America. Because when that truth is known, it exposes their propaganda as the lie that it is. It’s also a story that every American must never forget, because it reminds us all that hatred and bigotry and prejudice have no place in our country. It’s not just counterproductive; it doesn’t just aid terrorists; it’s wrong. It’s contrary to who we are. I’m thinking of a little girl named Sabrina who last month sent me a Valentine’s Day card in the shape of a heart. It was the first Valentine I got. I got it from Sabrina before Malia and Sasha and Michelle gave me one. So she’s 11 years old. She’s in the 5th grade. She’s a young Muslim American. And she said in her Valentine, "I enjoy being an American." And when she grows up, she wants to be an engineer -- or a basketball player. Which are good choices. But she wrote, "I am worried about people hating Muslims…If some Muslims do bad things, that doesn’t mean all of them do." And she asked, "Please tell everyone that we are good people and we’re just like everyone else." Now, those are the words -- and the wisdom -- of a little girl growing up here in America, just like my daughters are growing up here in America. "We’re just like everybody else." And everybody needs to remember that during the course of this debate. As we move forward with these challenges, we all have responsibilities, we all have hard work ahead of us on this issue. We can’t paper over problems, and we’re not going to solve this if we’re always just trying to be politically correct. But we do have to remember that 11-year-old girl. That’s our hope. That’s our future. That’s how we discredit violent ideologies, by making sure her voice is lifted up; making sure she’s nurtured; making sure that she’s supported -- and then, recognizing there are little girls and boys like that all around the world, and us helping to address economic and political grievances that can be exploited by extremists, and empowering local communities, and us staying true to our values as a diverse and tolerant society even when we’re threatened -- especially when we’re threatened. There will be a military component to this. There are savage cruelties going on out there that have to be stopped. ISIL is killing Muslims at a rate that is many multiples the rate that they’re killing non-Muslims. Everybody has a stake in stopping them, and there will be an element of us just stopping them in their tracks with force. But to eliminate the soil out of which they grew, to make sure that we are giving a brighter future to everyone and a lasting sense of security, then we're going to have to make it clear to all of our children -- including that little girl in 5th grade -- that you have a place. You have a place here in America. You have a place in those countries where you live. You have a future. Ultimately, those are the antidotes to violent extremism. And that's work that we're going to have to do together. It will take time. This is a generational challenge. But after 238 years, it should be obvious -- America has overcome much bigger challenges, and we’ll overcome the ones that we face today. We will stay united and committed to the ideals that have shaped us for more than two centuries, including the opportunity and justice and dignity of every single human being. Thank you very much, everybody.

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# On Ash Carter Briefing, Iran, and PM Netanyahu's Address

Well, this is going to be the first opportunity that I have to get an extensive debriefing from Secretary Carter, who took a trip last week to Afghanistan and other parts of the region. He’ll be giving me some impressions about how we’re planning our drawdown and transition in Afghanistan, and talk about some other regional issues. One issue that we will be discussing is Iran. And obviously that’s been a topic of great interest today, so let me just make a couple comments on that. I did not have a chance to watch Prime Minister Netanyahu’s speech -- I was on a video conference with our European partners with respect to Ukraine. I did have a chance to take a look at the transcript and as far as I can tell, there was nothing new. The Prime Minister appropriately pointed out that the bond between the United States of America is unbreakable, and on that point I thoroughly agree. He also pointed out that Iran has been a dangerous regime and continues to engage in activities that are contrary to the interests of the United States, to Israel, and to the region. And on that, we agree. He also pointed out the fact that Iran has repeatedly threatened Israel and engaged in the most venomous of anti-Semitic statements. And no one can dispute that. But on the core issue, which is how do we prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, which would make it far more dangerous and would give it scope for even greater action in the region, the Prime Minister didn’t offer any viable alternatives. So let’s be clear about what exactly the central concern should be, both for the United States and for Israel. I’ve said since before I became President that one of my primary goals in foreign policy would be preventing Iran from getting nuclear weapons. And with the help of Congress and our international partners, we constructed an extraordinarily effective sanctions regime that pressured Iran to come to the table to negotiate in a serious fashion. They have now been negotiating over the last year, and during that period, Iran has, in fact, frozen its program, rolled back some of its most dangerous highly enriched uranium, and subjected itself to the kinds of verifications and inspections that we had not previously seen.

Keep in mind that when we shaped that interim deal, Prime Minister Netanyahu made almost the precise same speech about how dangerous that deal was going to be. And yet, over a year later, even Israeli intelligence officers and, in some cases, members of the Israeli government, have to acknowledge that, in fact, it has kept Iran from further pursuing its nuclear program. Now, the deal that we are trying to negotiate that is not yet completed would cut off the different pathways for Iran to advance its nuclear capabilities. It would roll back some elements of its program. It would ensure that it did not have what we call a breakout capacity that was shorter than a year’s time. And it would subject Iran to the most vigorous inspections and verifications regimes that have ever been put in place. And the alternative that the Prime Minister offers is no deal, in which case Iran will immediately begin once again pursuing its nuclear program, accelerate its nuclear program, without us having any insight into what they’re doing, and without constraint. And his essential argument is that if we just double down on sanctions, Iran won’t want to do that. Well, we have evidence from the past decade that sanctions alone are not sufficient to prevent Iran from pursuing its nuclear ambitions. And if it, in fact, does not have some sense that sanctions will be removed, it will not have an interest in avoiding the path that it’s currently on. So the bottom line is this: We don’t yet have a deal.

It may be that Iran cannot say yes to a good deal. I have repeatedly said that I would rather have no deal than a bad deal. But if we’re successful in negotiating, then, in fact, this will be the best deal possible to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. Nothing else comes close. Sanctions won’t do it. Even military action would not be as successful as the deal that we have put forward. And I think it is very important not to be distracted by the nature of the Iranian regime’s ambitions when it comes to territory or terrorism -- all issues which we share a concern with Israel about and are working consistently with Israel on. Because we know that if, in fact, they obtain a nuclear weapon, all those problems would be worse. So we’re staying focused on the central issue here: How do we prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon. The path that we’ve proposed, if successful, by far is the best way to do that. That’s demonstrable. And Prime Minister Netanyahu has not offered any kind of viable alternative that would achieve the same verifiable mechanism to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon. So I would urge the members of Congress who were there to continue to express their strong support for Israel’s security, to continue to express their strong interest in providing the assistance Israel needs to repel attacks. I think it's important for members of Congress, on a bipartisan basis, to be unified in pushing back against terrorism in the region and the destabilizing efforts that Iran may have engaged in with our partners. Those are all things in which this administration and Israel agree. But when it comes to this nuclear deal, let’s wait until there’s actually a deal on the table that Iran has agreed to, at which point everybody can evaluate it; we don’t have to speculate. And what I can guarantee is that if it's a deal I’ve signed off on, I will be able to prove that it is the best way for us to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon. And for us to pass up on that potential opportunity would be a great mistake. It's not one that I intend to make, and I will take that case to every member of Congress once we actually have a deal. I’ll take one question from Julie. Go ahead.

Question: Now that you’ve had a chance to read the Prime Minister’s remarks at least, do you feel like the speech he gave was appropriate, considering his upcoming elections and the upcoming deadline? And you also talked to other foreign leaders today -- the call on Ukraine. Did Iran come up at all, and are you expecting any signs of support from them vis-Ã -vis your position versus the Prime Minister? President Obama: No. All the folks on the call today share my position that we should see if we can get this deal done. It was not a topic of conversation. With respect to the decision of the Speaker to offer up the House Chamber two weeks before Mr. Netanyahu’s election to make this case, I think that question should be directed to Mr. Boehner. As I said, it is very important for us not to politicize the relationship between Israel and the United States. It's very important for all of us Americans to realize that we have a system of government in which foreign policy runs through the executive branch and the President, not through other channels. And I think it's important for us to stay focused on the problem at hand. And the specific problem that is being debated right now is not whether we trust the Iranian regime or not -- we don’t trust them. It's not whether Iran engages in destabilizing activities -- everybody agrees with that.

The central question is, how can we stop them from getting a nuclear weapon. And what we know is that if we’re able to get a deal, not only do we cut off all the various pathways for Iran getting a nuclear weapon, but we also know that we’ll have a verification mechanism and an inspection mechanism where if they cheat and if they engage in a covert program we are far more likely to see it in time to do something about it. What I also know is if we don’t have a deal, as Prime Minster Netanyahu suggested -- if, in fact, he’s right that they’re not trustworthy, they intend to pursue a covert program, and they cheat, we’ll be far less aware of it until it is potentially too late. What I also know is, is that he made the same argument before this current interim deal, and even officials in his own government had to acknowledge that Iran has, in fact, maintained their end of the bargain. So what I'm focused on right now is solving this problem. I’m not focused on the politics of it, I'm not focused on the theater of it. And my strong suggestion would be that members of Congress, as they evaluate it, stay similarly focused. All right. Thank you, guys.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address on the 50th Anniversary of the Selma, Alabama March

It is a rare honor in this life to follow one of your heroes. And John Lewis is one of my heroes.

Now, I have to imagine that when a younger John Lewis woke up that morning 50 years ago and made his way to Brown Chapel, heroics were not on his mind. A day like this was not on his mind. Young folks with bedrolls and backpacks were milling about. Veterans of the movement trained newcomers in the tactics of non-violence -- the right way to protect yourself when attacked. A doctor described what tear gas does to the body, while marchers scribbled down instructions for contacting their loved ones. The air was thick with doubt, anticipation and fear. And they comforted themselves with the final verse of the final hymn they sung:

No matter what may be the test, God will take care of you;lean, weary one, upon His breast, God will take care of you.

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And then, his knapsack stocked with an apple, a toothbrush, and a book on government -- all you need for a night behind bars -- John Lewis led them out of the church on a mission to change America.

President and Mrs. Bush, Governor Bentley, Mayor Evans, Sewell, Reverend Strong, members of Congress, elected officials, foot soldiers, friends, fellow Americans:

As John noted, there are places and moments in America where this nation’s destiny has been decided. Many are sites of war -- Concord and Lexington, Appomattox, Gettysburg. Others are sites that symbolize the daring of America’s character -- Independence Hall and Seneca Falls, Kitty Hawk and Cape Canaveral.

Selma is such a place. In one afternoon 50 years ago, so much of our turbulent history -- the stain of slavery and anguish of civil war; the yoke of segregation and tyranny of Jim Crow; the death of four little girls in Birmingham; and the dream of a Baptist preacher -- all that history met on this bridge.

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It was not a clash of armies, but a clash of wills; a contest to determine the true meaning of America. And because of men and women like John Lewis, Joseph Lowery, Hosea Williams, Amelia Boynton, Diane Nash, Ralph Abernathy, C.T. Vivian, Andrew Young, Fred Shuttlesworth, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and so many others, the idea of a just America and a fair America, an inclusive America, and a generous America -- that idea ultimately triumphed.

As is true across the landscape of American history, we cannot examine this moment in isolation. The march on Selma was part of a broader campaign that spanned generations; the leaders that day part of a long line of heroes.

We gather here to celebrate them. We gather here to honor the courage of ordinary Americans willing to endure billy clubs and the chastening rod; tear gas and the trampling hoof; men and women who despite the gush of blood and splintered bone would stay true to their North Star and keep marching towards justice.

They did as Scripture instructed: “Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.” And in the days to come, they went back again and again. When the trumpet call sounded for more to join, the people came -- black and white, young and old, Christian and Jew, waving the American flag and singing the same anthems full of faith and hope. A white newsman, Bill Plante, who covered the marches then and who is with us here today, quipped that the growing number of white people lowered the quality of the singing. To those who marched, though, those old gospel songs must have never sounded so sweet.

In time, their chorus would well up and reach President Johnson. And he would send them protection, and speak to the nation, echoing their call for America and the world to hear: “We shall overcome.” What enormous faith these men and women had. Faith in God, but also faith in America.

The Americans who crossed this bridge, they were not physically imposing. But they gave courage to millions. They held no elected office. But they led a nation. They marched as Americans who had endured hundreds of years of brutal violence, countless daily indignities -- but they didn’t seek special treatment, just the equal treatment promised to them almost a century before.

What they did here will reverberate through the ages. Not because the change they won was preordained; not because their victory was complete; but because they proved that nonviolent change is possible, that love and hope can conquer hate.

As we commemorate their achievement, we are well-served to remember that at the time of the marches, many in power condemned rather than praised them. Back then, they were called Communists, or half-breeds, or outside agitators, sexual and moral degenerates, and worse -- they were called everything but the name their parents gave them. Their faith was questioned; their lives were threatened; their patriotism challenged.

And yet, what could be more American than what happened in this place? What could more profoundly vindicate the idea of America than plain and humble people -- unsung, the downtrodden, the dreamers not of high station, not born to wealth or privilege, not of one religious tradition but many, coming together to shape their country’s course?

What greater expression of faith in the American experiment than this, what greater form of patriotism is there than the belief that America is not yet finished, that we are strong enough to be self-critical, that each successive generation can look upon our imperfections and decide that it is in our power to remake this nation to more closely align with our highest ideals?

That’s why Selma is not some outlier in the American experience. That’s why it’s not a museum or a static monument to behold from a distance. It is instead the manifestation of a creed written into our founding documents: “We the People…in order to form a more perfect union.” “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.”

These are not just words. They’re a living thing, a call to action, a roadmap for citizenship and an insistence in the capacity of free men and women to shape our own destiny. For founders like Franklin and Jefferson, for leaders like Lincoln and FDR, the success of our experiment in self-government rested on engaging all of our citizens in this work. And that’s what we celebrate here in Selma. That’s what this movement was all about, one leg in our long journey toward freedom.

The American instinct that led these young men and women to pick up the torch and cross this bridge, that’s the same instinct that moved patriots to choose revolution over tyranny. It’s the same instinct that drew immigrants from across oceans and the Rio Grande; the same instinct that led women to reach for the ballot, workers to organize against an unjust status quo; the same instinct that led us to plant a flag at Iwo Jima and on the surface of the Moon.

It’s the idea held by generations of citizens who believed that America is a constant work in progress; who believed that loving this country requires more than singing its praises or avoiding uncomfortable truths. It requires the occasional disruption, the willingness to speak out for what is right, to shake up the status quo. That’s America.

That’s what makes us unique. That’s what cements our reputation as a beacon of opportunity. Young people behind the Iron Curtain would see Selma and eventually tear down that wall. Young people in Soweto would hear Bobby Kennedy talk about ripples of hope and eventually banish the scourge of apartheid. Young people in Burma went to prison rather than submit to military rule. They saw what John Lewis had done. From the streets of Tunis to the Maidan in Ukraine, this generation of young people can draw strength from this place, where the powerless could change the world’s greatest power and push their leaders to expand the boundaries of freedom.

They saw that idea made real right here in Selma, Alabama. They saw that idea manifest itself here in America.

Because of campaigns like this, a Voting Rights Act was passed. Political and economic and social barriers came down. And the change these men and women wrought is visible here today in the presence of African Americans who run boardrooms, who sit on the bench, who serve in elected office from small towns to big cities; from the Congressional Black Caucus all the way to the Oval Office.

Because of what they did, the doors of opportunity swung open not just for black folks, but for every American. Women marched through those doors. Latinos marched through those doors. Asian Americans, gay Americans, Americans with disabilities -- they all came through those doors. Their endeavors gave the entire South the chance to rise again, not by reasserting the past, but by transcending the past.

What a glorious thing, Dr. King might say. And what a solemn debt we owe. Which leads us to ask, just how might we repay that debt?

First and foremost, we have to recognize that one day’s commemoration, no matter how special, is not enough. If Selma taught us anything, it’s that our work is never done. The American experiment in self-government gives work and purpose to each generation.

Selma teaches us, as well, that action requires that we shed our cynicism. For when it comes to the pursuit of justice, we can afford neither complacency nor despair.

Just this week, I was asked whether I thought the Department of Justice’s Ferguson report

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shows that, with respect to race, little has changed in this country. And I understood the question; the report’s narrative was sadly familiar. It evoked the kind of abuse and disregard for citizens that spawned the Civil Rights Movement. But I rejected the notion that nothing’s changed. What happened in Ferguson may not be unique, but it’s no longer endemic. It’s no longer sanctioned by law or by custom. And before the Civil Rights Movement, it most surely was.

We do a disservice to the cause of justice by intimating that bias and discrimination are immutable, that racial division is inherent to America. If you think nothing’s changed in the past 50 years, ask somebody who lived through the Selma or Chicago or Los Angeles of the 1950s. Ask the female CEO who once might have been assigned to the secretarial pool if nothing’s changed. Ask your gay friend if it’s easier to be out and proud in America now than it was thirty years ago. To deny this progress, this hard-won progress -- our progress -- would be to rob us of our own agency, our own capacity, our responsibility to do what we can to make America better.

Of course, a more common mistake is to suggest that Ferguson is an isolated incident; that racism is banished; that the work that drew men and women to Selma is now complete, and that whatever racial tensions remain are a consequence of those seeking to play the “race card” for their own purposes. We don’t need the Ferguson report to know that’s not true. We just need to open our eyes, and our ears, and our hearts to know that this nation’s racial history still casts its long shadow upon us.

We know the march is not yet over. We know the race is not yet won. We know that reaching that blessed destination where we are judged, all of us, by the content of our character requires admitting as much, facing up to the truth. “We are capable of bearing a great burden,” James Baldwin once wrote, “once we discover that the burden is reality and arrive where reality is.”

There’s nothing America can’t handle if we actually look squarely at the problem. And this is work for all Americans, not just some. Not just whites. Not just blacks. If we want to honor the courage of those who marched that day, then all of us are called to possess their moral imagination. All of us will need to feel as they did the fierce urgency of now. All of us need to recognize as they did that change depends on our actions, on our attitudes, the things we teach our children. And if we make such an effort, no matter how hard it may sometimes seem, laws can be passed, and consciences can be stirred, and consensus can be built.

With such an effort, we can make sure our criminal justice system serves all and not just some. Together, we can raise the level of mutual trust that policing is built on -- the idea that police officers are members of the community they risk their lives to protect, and citizens in Ferguson and New York and Cleveland, they just want the same thing young people here marched for 50 years ago -– the protection of the law. Together, we can address unfair sentencing and overcrowded prisons, and the stunted circumstances that rob too many boys of the chance to become men, and rob the nation of too many men who could be good dads, and good workers, and good neighbors.

With effort, we can roll back poverty and the roadblocks to opportunity. Americans don’t accept a free ride for anybody, nor do we believe in equality of outcomes. But we do expect equal opportunity. And if we really mean it, if we’re not just giving lip service to it, but if we really mean it and are willing to sacrifice for it, then, yes, we can make sure every child gets an education suitable to this new century, one that expands imaginations and lifts sights and gives those children the skills they need. We can make sure every person willing to work has the dignity of a job, and a fair wage, and a real voice, and sturdier rungs on that ladder into the middle class.

And with effort, we can protect the foundation stone of our democracy for which so many marched across this bridge -- and that is the right to vote. Right now, in 2015, 50 years after Selma, there are laws across this country designed to make it harder for people to vote. As we speak, more of such laws are being proposed. Meanwhile, the Voting Rights Act, the culmination of so much blood, so much sweat and tears, the product of so much sacrifice in the face of wanton violence, the Voting Rights Act stands weakened, its future subject to political rancor.

How can that be? The Voting Rights Act was one of the crowning achievements of our democracy, the result of Republican and Democratic efforts. President Reagan signed its renewal when he was in office. President George W. Bush signed its renewal when he was in office. One hundred members of Congress have come here today to honor people who were willing to die for the right to protect it. If we want to honor this day, let that hundred go back to Washington and gather four hundred more, and together, pledge to make it their mission to restore that law this year. That’s how we honor those on this bridge.

Of course, our democracy is not the task of Congress alone, or the courts alone, or even the President alone. If every new voter-suppression law was struck down today, we would still have, here in America, one of the lowest voting rates among free peoples. Fifty years ago, registering to vote here in Selma and much of the South meant guessing the number of jellybeans in a jar, the number of bubbles on a bar of soap. It meant risking your dignity, and sometimes, your life.

What’s our excuse today for not voting? How do we so casually discard the right for which so many fought? How do we so fully give away our power, our voice, in shaping America’s future? Why are we pointing to somebody else when we could take the time just to go to the polling places? We give away our power.

Fellow marchers, so much has changed in 50 years. We have endured war and we’ve fashioned peace. We’ve seen technological wonders that touch every aspect of our lives. We take for granted conveniences that our parents could have scarcely imagined. But what has not changed is the imperative of citizenship; that willingness of a 26-year-old deacon, or a Unitarian minister, or a young mother of five to decide they loved this country so much that they’d risk everything to realize its promise.

That’s what it means to love America. That’s what it means to believe in America. That’s what it means when we say America is exceptional.

For we were born of change. We broke the old aristocracies, declaring ourselves entitled not by bloodline, but endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights. We secure our rights and responsibilities through a system of self-government, of and by and for the people. That’s why we argue and fight with so much passion and conviction -- because we know our efforts matter. We know America is what we make of it.

Look at our history:

We are Lewis and Clark and Sacajawea, pioneers who braved the unfamiliar, followed by a stampede of farmers and miners, and entrepreneurs and hucksters. That’s our spirit. That’s who we are.

We are Sojourner Truth and Fannie Lou Hamer, women who could do as much as any man and then some. And we’re Susan B. Anthony, who shook the system until the law reflected that truth. That is our character.

We’re the immigrants who stowed away on ships to reach these shores, the huddled masses yearning to breathe free -- Holocaust survivors, Soviet defectors, the Lost Boys of Sudan. We’re the hopeful strivers who cross the Rio Grande because we want our kids to know a better life. That’s how we came to be.

We’re the slaves who built the White House and the economy of the South. We’re the ranch hands and cowboys who opened up the West, and countless laborers who laid rail, and raised skyscrapers, and organized for workers’ rights.

We’re the fresh-faced GIs who fought to liberate a continent. And we’re the Tuskeegee Airmen, and the Navajo code-talkers, and the Japanese Americans who fought for this country even as their own liberty had been denied.

We’re the firefighters who rushed into those buildings on 9/11, the volunteers who signed up to fight in Afghanistan and Iraq. We’re the gay Americans whose blood ran in the streets of San Francisco and New York, just as blood ran down this bridge.

We are storytellers, writers, poets, artists who abhor unfairness, and despise hypocrisy, and give voice to the voiceless, and tell truths that need to be told.

We’re the inventors of gospel and jazz and blues, bluegrass and country, and hip-hop and rock and roll, and our very own sound with all the sweet sorrow and reckless joy of freedom.

We are Jackie Robinson, enduring scorn and spiked cleats and pitches coming straight to his head, and stealing home in the World Series anyway.

We are the people Langston Hughes wrote of who “build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how.” We are the people Emerson wrote of, “who for truth and honor’s sake stand fast and suffer long;” who are “never tired, so long as we can see far enough.”

That’s what America is. Not stock photos or airbrushed history, or feeble attempts to define some of us as more American than others. We respect the past, but we don’t pine for the past. We don’t fear the future; we grab for it. America is not some fragile thing. We are large, in the words of Whitman, containing multitudes. We are boisterous and diverse and full of energy, perpetually young in spirit. That’s why someone like John Lewis at the ripe old age of 25 could lead a mighty march.

And that’s what the young people here today and listening all across the country must take away from this day. You are America. Unconstrained by habit and convention. Unencumbered by what is, because you’re ready to seize what ought to be.

For everywhere in this country, there are first steps to be taken, there’s new ground to cover, there are more bridges to be crossed. And it is you, the young and fearless at heart, the most diverse and educated generation in our history, who the nation is waiting to follow.

Because Selma shows us that America is not the project of any one person. Because the single-most powerful word in our democracy is the word “We.” “We The People.” “We Shall Overcome.” “Yes We Can.” That word is owned by no one. It belongs to everyone. Oh, what a glorious task we are given, to continually try to improve this great nation of ours.

Fifty years from Bloody Sunday, our march is not yet finished, but we’re getting closer. Two hundred and thirty-nine years after this nation’s founding our union is not yet perfect, but we are getting closer. Our job’s easier because somebody already got us through that first mile. Somebody already got us over that bridge. When it feels the road is too hard, when the torch we’ve been passed feels too heavy, we will remember these early travelers, and draw strength from their example, and hold firmly the words of the prophet Isaiah:

Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not be faint.

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We honor those who walked so we could run. We must run so our children soar. And we will not grow weary. For we believe in the power of an awesome God, and we believe in this country’s sacred promise.

May He bless those warriors of justice no longer with us, and bless the United States of America.

Thank you, everybody.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Student Aid Bill of Rights Announcement

Let’s give it up for Buzz and the Georgia Tech Band for getting us fired up. Also give it up for Governor Nathan Deal, who is here. Congressmen Hank Johnson and David Scott. Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed. And the President of this great institution, Georgia Tech, Bud Peterson. That’s good. You’ve got a high approval rating. You do. Absolutely.

We also have a special guest with us -- this is a proud Georgia Tech alum, who just happens also to be the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Sandy Winnefeld is here. Where’s Sandy? There he is. Before he was the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he was a Navy fighter pilot, which is cooler. Now he just goes to meetings. What’s up with that? I told him he’s got to get back on a plane.

It is great to be at one of the finest technical institutes in the world. One of the finest in the world. I mean, you’ve got to be if the Ramblin’ Wreck is still running after all these years. That’s a Georgia Tech reference that some of you may not know. I also know that Georgia Tech is terrific because we’ve actually worked with you on several fronts -– from promoting advanced manufacturing to unlocking the mysteries of the brain to helping more students become entrepreneurs.

And the reason I wanted to come here today is because I believe that higher education, as you believe, is one of the best investments that anybody can make in their future. And it’s also one of the best investments you can make in our country’s future. So I’m here to say thank you and to tell you I’m proud of you, because I know that it’s not always easy to do what you’re doing. It takes perseverance. A lot of late nights in the library and the lab, and you’re wrapping your minds around complex formulas and concepts that, frankly, I don’t understand. But I know they’re complex. And some of you are holding jobs down at the same time, which makes it even harder.

But as frustrating as it may be, and Tiffany expressed some frustrations on occasion, it is worth it. Higher education has never been more important. And the message I want to deliver today, not just to you but to the entire country, is the entire nation has to treat it as a priority.

Right now, our economy is growing steadily. It's creating new jobs. You’re going to be going into a job market that’s much better than the one that existed when I came into office six years ago. After the worst economic crisis of our lifetimes, over the past five years, our businesses have now created 12 million new jobs. Unemployment continues to come down, and obviously that’s good news for those of you who are graduating soon. Yes, that’s right, you want a job. Your parents also want you to have a job. They don’t want you on the couch.

But I didn’t run for President just to get us back to where we were -– I ran for President to get us to where we need to go. And where we need to go is a growing middle class with rising incomes and opportunities for everybody who’s willing to work hard. An America where no matter who you are, what you look like, where you came from, how you started, who you love, what faith you’re a part of, you can make it in this country if you try. That’s what America is all about.

And today, a college degree is the surest ticket to the middle class and beyond. It’s the key to getting a good job that pays a good income. And it offers a measure of security, because a college degree tells employers that you don’t just have one set of skills; that you’ve got the continuous capacity to learn new skills, which is going to be particularly important for your generation because the economy is going to churn and change in ways that none of us can even anticipate.

Before we came out here, I was talking to a group, including Sandy Winnefeld, and your Mayor Kasim Reed, Tyler Perry buddies -- he wasn’t in Madea, he was Tyler. And we were talking about how rapidly the technology is transforming everything we understand, everything we know --everything from drones, to artificial intelligence, to driver-less cars. And we don’t yet know how all that is going to shape the nation that you inherit, but we know it's going to shape it dramatically. And in order for you to be able to be successful, you’re going to have to adapt, continuously. The days where you work at one place for 30, 40 years, those days are over.

And so the skillsets you are getting now are going to keep you in that job market. You’re going to have multiple jobs before you’re 30. Some of you will have multiple careers. And we live in a 21st-century economy, where your most valuable asset is your imagination, your knowledge, your ability to analyze tough problems. And that’s not just true for individual Americans, it’s true for our whole country.

The ability to compete in the global economy depends on us having the world’s most skilled, best-educated workforce. And by the way, let me just add, it’s also going to be critical for us to maintain our democracy in a complex, diverse society.

Understandably, when I come to college campuses, there’s a lot of just bread and butter, nuts and bolts, how does this translate into jobs, careers. But part of what has made America the exceptional nation that it is, is our diversity and our ability to draw from every corner of the world -- all the talent, all the ideas -- and create this amazing stew. And the more complex this society, the tougher that becomes.

And so to have all of you possess the ability to listen and to learn from people who aren’t like you -- that’s also what you’re learning here, and that’s going to make you more effective to every employer out there. But it’s also -- it’s going to make you better citizens, and it’s going to make our democracy function better.

But back to the jobs thing. Jobs and businesses will go wherever the best workers are. And I don’t want them to have to look any further than the United States of America. I want businesses investing here. I want Americans getting those new jobs. That’s how we’re going to lead the world in this century just like we did in the 20th century.

So here’s the challenge: Higher education has never been more important, but it’s also never been more expensive. The average undergrad who borrows money to pay for college graduates with about $28,000 in student loan debt. That’s just the average; some students end up with a lot more than that -- you know who you are. I’m not telling you anything you don’t know.

And let me say that it’s been established time and time again that Georgia Tech is one of the best bargains around. You are getting a great education for a great value. Which is one of the reasons I’m here; obviously, I wouldn’t go to a place that was a bad bargain and really expensive and no value. That would not make sense.

But even here at Georgia Tech, even with the great value it is, it’s expensive. And I’m here to tell you, I’m with you. I believe that America is not a place where higher education is a privilege that is reserved for the few. America needs to be a place where higher education has to be available for every single person who’s willing to strive for it -- who’s willing to work for it.

And I’ve said this before: I take this personally. My grandfather had a chance to go to college because this country decided that when veterans returned home from World War II, they should be able to go to college. And this government stepped up.

My mother was able to raise two kids by herself, in part because she got grants that helped pay for her education. And I am only standing here -– and Michelle is only where she is today –- because of scholarships and student loans and work study. We did not come from families of means. We didn't come from families of means, but we knew that if we worked hard, there was help out there to make sure we got a great education. That’s what this country gave to us.

And that’s why this has been such a priority for me. I take it personally because when I look out at all of you, I see myself. And I remember the fact that it took me 10 years to pay off all our student loans. We were paying more for our student loans than our mortgage, even after Malia and Sasha were born. We were supposed to be saving for their college education; we were still paying off ours.

And that's why we’ve acted again and again to make college more affordable. Five years ago this month, we enacted the largest reforms to the student loan program in history. We cut out the big banks that were taking taxpayer dollars and serving as middlemen in the student loan game, and we said, well, let’s just give the money directly to the students like you.

So as a result of that change, we saved billions of dollars. We were to expand tax credits and Pell grants, and put college within reach for millions more middle-class and low-income students across the country. Then we fought to keep interest rates on student rates -- interest rates on student loans low and capped how high those rates can rise. And as a result, the typical undergrad is saving about $1,500. We also acted to let millions of graduates cap their loan payments at 10 percent of their incomes, so they don’t have to choose between paying the rent and paying back their debt.

And by the way, everybody here, if you don't already know about the Income-Based Repayment Program, you need to learn about it because it’s still under-utilized. But it gives you an opportunity to make sure that if you make a career choice that doesn't make tons of money, you're still able to do the responsible thing and pay back your loans at a pace that also allows you to build a family and buy a home and live your lives.

And graduates who go into lower-paying fields like social work or teaching, they're not going to pay a price for following their dreams because they're going to have even better options in terms of how they repay their loans. So that's what we did on the student loan side.

Meanwhile, we’re working to hold down the cost of a college education. So we’re partnering with schools like Georgia Tech on innovative ways to increase value -– like your online master’s program in computer science -- which costs just a fraction of the price of an in-classroom program. And I sent Congress a bold new plan to bring down the cost of community college to zero. Because not everybody may be prepared right away to start a four-year university. But also, in some cases, even if they could, they may choose to get two years of college free, and then be able to transfer the credits for their four-year education. We want to make community college, at minimum, just as free and universal as high school is today. That should be our new baseline. We want to get out ahead of the curve in terms of where we need to go.

Earlier today, I took a new action to make it easier for students to pay for college and pay off their loans. We’re creating a way for you to ask questions about your loans, file a complaint, cut through the bureaucracy, get a faster response. That’s not just from the government, that’s also from the contractors who sometimes service your loans. We’re going to require that the businesses that service your loans provide clear information about how much you owe, what your options are for repaying it, and if you’re falling behind, help you get back in good standing with reasonable fees on a reasonable timeline. And if you’re paying stuff off, you should be paying off the high-interest loans first, not the low-interest ones. We’re going to take a hard look at whether we need new laws to strengthen protections for all borrowers, wherever you get your loans from.

So we’re trying to tackle this problem from every angle. There’s no silver bullet. But we’re trying to make sure that across the board, more and more young people can afford to go to college, and then afterwards, aren’t so burdened with debt that you can’t do anything else. We want to make this experience more affordable because you’re not just investing in yourselves, you’re investing in your nation.

But here’s the thing: We’ve got more to do, all of us -- universities, students, parents, financial institutions and, yes, the government, to make sure that you’re not saddled with debt before you even get started in life. That’s something that’s in all of our interests.

Now, my friends, the Republicans in Congress, are planning to unveil their budget soon. I’m hoping they have something to offer that will help hardworking young people. So far, the education bill that they put forward a couple weeks ago is not a good template, it’s not a good start. I’m hoping it will improve because right now, the way it’s structured, it would let states and cities shuffle education dollars into things like sports stadiums or tax cuts for the wealthy instead of schools. And it would allow states to make even deeper cuts into school districts that need the most support, send even more money to the most well-off school districts. We’d invest less per child by the end of the decade than we do now. So it’s the wrong approach. We’ve got to be working to make sure every child gets a quality education, every student can afford college.

And so we’re going to be reaching out to them, trying to get them to see this is a good investment in our economy, it’s a good investment in our national security. The way that you keep America safe, one of the best, most important ways is to make sure we’ve got a strong economy with a strong workforce. And all of us have a role to play in making that happen.

So in order to spur more of a conversation to get more folks engaged, we’re going to try something new to help do this. It’s not a fancy new program. It’s not -- it doesn’t have a complicated acronym. It doesn’t involve new spending or bureaucracy. It’s just a simple organizing principle that I want all of us to sign onto, a declaration of values –- what I’m calling a Student Aid Bill of Rights.

And it says every student deserves access to a quality, affordable education. Every student should be able to access the resources to pay for college. Every borrower has the right to an affordable repayment plan. Every borrower has the right to quality customer service, reliable information, and fair treatment, even if they struggle to repay their loans.

It’s a simple set of principles that if everybody signed onto -- Republicans, Democrats, state legislators, university presidents, members of Congress -- it can focus our attention, all these different things that we’re doing, into one simple, basic idea, which is, make sure that when you’re doing the right thing, that your society has got your back and is looking out for you.

So based on this principle, we’re going to make sure universities are using technology to help students learn at lower costs. We’re going to make sure that loan servicers can find better ways to help borrowers keep up with monthly payments that they can afford. We as a country can do more to invest in Pell grants and community college to make sure quality education is affordable for everybody.

So we’re going to just keep on moving on every front. And we want everybody who agrees with these principles to sit down and work with us, and figure out how they can make these student rights real. And you’ve got a part to play as well.

We had the great honor of being at Selma this past weekend for the 50th anniversary of the March from Selma. And one of the main points I think that all of us made was change doesn’t happen by itself; it happens because people get organized and mobilized and focused, and they push, and sometimes they disrupt and they make folks uncomfortable, and they ask questions about why is it this way instead of that way.

And I want us to think about access to higher education and affordability of higher education in that same way. I want us to all organize together -- not on a partisan basis, it’s not organizing around an election, it’s organizing around a simple idea that everybody should be able to get behind.

And you’re going to have to play the part. Because what we also made the point of this past weekend is young people typically lead the pack with new ideas, with new initiatives, with new focus, with a new vision.

So if you agree with the basic values that I outlined, if you believe in a Student Aid Bill of Rights that will help more Americans pay for a quality education, then sign your name to this declaration.

You can go to a website, because you guys like tech stuff. You go to: WhiteHouse.gov/CollegeOpportunity -- WhiteHouse.gov/CollegeOpportunity. Tell your families and classmates and professors to do it. I’m going to ask members of Congress, and lenders, and as many business leaders as I can find to sign up.

We’re going to mobilize a coalition around this country to get this process moving, because there are a lot of good ideas right now but they’re stalled, or they’re happening piecemeal, or they’re happening in one university, or they’re happening in one state, and they have to happen everywhere. And we’ve got to mobilize the entire nation to make that happen. And it's going to start with students themselves, because if you aren’t asking for something different, if you aren’t asking for help, if you’re not getting mobilized, then folks aren’t going to help you, and then you’ll just be complaining -- especially once you graduate and you start having to write those checks.

So don’t stop engaging in this issue, even after you graduate, because you’ll be still impacted by it. And in the meantime, you’ve got to study hard, and work hard, and have fun. Make some new discoveries. Inspire us. Lead us. Be the Americans that we need you to be.

Every American should have the right to go as far as their talents and hard work will take them. That is what college is all about. That is what America is all about. And you embody that basic notion. You are that talent. You are an embodiment of what we hope for: A country that says that everybody, rich, poor, black, white, Hispanic, Asian, gay, straight, man, woman, with disabilities, without -- no matter who you are or where you come from, not only can you succeed but you can help everybody else succeed. That’s the promise that helped us become the greatest nation in the world. That’s the promise that I need you working for.

Thank you, everybody. God bless you. Thank you, Georgia.

# Edward M. Kennedy Institute Dedication Address

To Vicki, Ted, Patrick, Curran, Caroline, Ambassador Smith, members of the Kennedy family -- thank you so much for inviting me to speak today. Your Eminence, Cardinal O’Malley; Vice President Biden; Governor Baker; Mayor Walsh; members of Congress, past and present; and pretty much every elected official in Massachusetts -- it is an honor to mark this occasion with you.

Boston, know that Michelle and I have joined our prayers with yours these past few days for a hero -- former Army Ranger and Boston Police Officer John Moynihan, who was shot in the line of duty on Friday night. I mention him because, last year, at the White House, the Vice President and I had the chance to honor Officer Moynihan as one of America’s “Top Cops” for his bravery in the line of duty, for risking his life to save a fellow officer. And thanks to the heroes at Boston Medical Center, I’m told Officer Moynihan is awake, and talking, and we wish him a full and speedy recovery. I also want to single out someone who very much wanted to be here, just as he was every day for nearly 25 years as he represented this commonwealth alongside Ted in the Senate -- and that's Secretary of State John Kerry. As many of you know, John is in Europe with our allies and partners, leading the negotiations with Iran and the world community, and standing up for a principle that Ted and his brother, President Kennedy, believed in so strongly: “Let us never negotiate out of fear, but let us never fear to negotiate.”

And, finally, in his first years in the Senate, Ted dispatched a young aide to assemble a team of talent without rival. The sell was simple: Come and help Ted Kennedy make history. So I want to give a special shout-out to his extraordinarily loyal staff -- 50 years later a family more than one thousand strong. This is your day, as well. We're proud of you. Of course, many of you now work with me. So enjoy today, because we got to get back to work.

Distinguished guests, fellow citizens -- in 1958, Ted Kennedy was a young man working to reelect his brother, Jack, to the United States Senate. On election night, the two toasted one another: “Here’s to 1960, Mr. President,” Ted said, “If you can make it.” With his quick Irish wit, Jack returned the toast: “Here’s to 1962, Senator Kennedy, if you can make it.” They both made it. And today, they’re together again in eternal rest at Arlington.

But their legacies are as alive as ever together right here in Boston. The John F. Kennedy Library next door is a symbol of our American idealism; the Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate as a living example of the hard, frustrating, never-ending, but critical work required to make that idealism real. What more fitting tribute, what better testament to the life of Ted Kennedy, than this place that he left for a new generation of Americans -- a monument not to himself but to what we, the people, have the power to do together. Any of us who have had the privilege to serve in the Senate know that it’s impossible not to share Ted’s awe for the history swirling around you -- an awe instilled in him by his brother, Jack. Ted waited more than a year to deliver his first speech on the Senate floor. That's no longer the custom. It's good to see Trent and Tom Daschle here, because they remember what customs were like back then.

And Ted gave a speech only because he felt there was a topic -- the Civil Rights Act -- that demanded it. Nevertheless, he spoke with humility, aware, as he put it, that “a freshman Senator should be seen, not heard; should learn, and not teach.” Some of us, I admit, have not always heeded that lesson. But fortunately, we had Ted to show us the ropes anyway. And no one made the Senate come alive like Ted Kennedy. It was one of the great pleasures of my life to hear Ted Kennedy deliver one of his stem winders on the Floor. Rarely was he more animated than when he’d lead you through the living museums that were his offices. He could -- and he would -- tell you everything that there was to know about all of it.

And then there were more somber moments. I still remember the first time I pulled open the drawer of my desk. Each senator is assigned a desk, and there’s a tradition of carving the names of those who had used it before. And those names in my desk included Taft and Baker, Simon, Wellstone, and Robert F. Kennedy.

The Senate was a place where you instinctively pulled yourself up a little bit straighter; where you tried to act a little bit better. “Being a senator changes a person,” Ted wrote in his memoirs. As Vicki said, it may take a year, or two years, or three years, but it always happens; it fills you with a heightened sense of purpose. That’s the magic of the Senate. That’s the essence of what it can be. And who but Ted Kennedy, and his family, would create a full-scale replica of the Senate chamber, and open it to everyone?

We live in a time of such great cynicism about all our institutions. And we are cynical about government and about Washington, most of all. It’s hard for our children to see, in the noisy and too often trivial pursuits of today’s politics, the possibilities of our democracy -- our capacity, together, to do big things.

And this place can help change that. It can help light the fire of imagination, plant the seed of noble ambition in the minds of future generations. Imagine a gaggle of school kids clutching tablets, turning classrooms into cloakrooms and hallways into hearing rooms, assigned an issue of the day and the responsibility to solve it. Imagine their moral universe expanding as they hear about the momentous battles waged in that chamber and how they echo throughout today’s society. Great questions of war and peace, the tangled bargains between North and South, federal and state; the original sins of slavery and prejudice; and the unfinished battles for civil rights and opportunity and equality. Imagine the shift in their sense of what’s possible. The first time they see a video of senators who look like they do -- men and women, blacks and whites, Latinos, Asian-Americans; those born to great wealth but also those born of incredibly modest means. Imagine what a child feels the first time she steps onto that floor, before she’s old enough to be cynical; before she’s told what she can’t do; before she’s told who she can’t talk to or work with; what she feels when she sits at one of those desks; what happens when it comes her turn to stand and speak on behalf of something she cares about; and cast a vote, and have a sense of purpose. It’s maybe just not for kids. What if we all carried ourselves that way? What if our politics, our democracy, were as elevated, as purposeful, as she imagines it to be right here? Towards the end of his life, Ted reflected on how Congress has changed over time. And those who served earlier I think have those same conversations. It’s a more diverse, more accurate reflection of America than it used to be, and that is a grand thing, a great achievement. But Ted grieved the loss of camaraderie and collegiality, the face-to-face interaction. I think he regretted the arguments now made to cameras instead of colleagues, directed at a narrow base instead of the body politic as a whole; the outsized influence of money and special interests -- and how it all leads more Americans to turn away in disgust and simply choose not to exercise their right to vote. Now, since this is a joyous occasion, this is not the time for me to suggest a slew of new ideas for reform. Although I do have some. Maybe I’ll just mention one.

What if we carried ourselves more like Ted Kennedy? What if we worked to follow his example a little bit harder? To his harshest critics, who saw him as nothing more than a partisan lightning rod -- that may sound foolish, but there are Republicans here today for a reason. They know who Ted Kennedy was. It’s not because they shared Ted’s ideology or his positions, but because they knew Ted as somebody who bridged the partisan divide over and over and over again, with genuine effort and affection, in an era when bipartisanship has become so very rare.

They knew him as somebody who kept his word. They knew him as somebody who was willing to take half a loaf and endure the anger of his own supporters to get something done. They knew him as somebody who was not afraid. And fear so permeates our politics, instead of hope. People fight to get in the Senate and then they’re afraid. We fight to get these positions and then don’t want to do anything with them. And Ted understood the only point of running for office was to get something done -- not to posture; not to sit there worrying about the next election or the polls -- to take risks. He understood that differences of party or philosophy could not become barriers to cooperation or respect. He could howl at injustice on the Senate floor like a force of nature, while nervous aides tried to figure out which chart to pull up next. But in his personal dealings, he answered Edmund Randolph’s call to keep the Senate a place to “restrain, if possible, the fury of democracy.” I did not know Ted as long as some of the speakers here today. But he was my friend. I owe him a lot. And as far as I could tell, it was never ideology that compelled him, except insofar as his ideology said, you should help people; that you should have a life of purpose; that you should be empathetic and be able to put yourself in somebody else’s shoes, and see through their eyes. His tirelessness, his restlessness, they were rooted in his experience.

By the age of 12, he was a member of a Gold Star Family. By 36, two of his brothers were stolen from him in the most tragic, public of ways. By 41, he nearly lost a beloved child to cancer. And that made suffering something he knew. And it made him more alive to the suffering of others. While his son was sleeping after treatment, Ted would wander the halls of the hospital and meet other parents keeping vigil over their own children. They were parents terrified of what would happen when they couldn’t afford the next treatment; parents working out what they could sell or borrow or mortgage just to make it just a few more months -- and then, if they had to, bargain with God for the rest. There, in the quiet night, working people of modest means and one of the most powerful men in the world shared the same intimate, immediate sense of helplessness. He didn't see them as some abstraction. He knew them. He felt them. Their pain was his as much as they might be separated by wealth and fame. And those families would be at the heart of Ted’s passions. Just like the young immigrant, he would see himself in that child. They were his cause -- the sick child who couldn’t see a doctor; the young soldier sent to battle without armor; the citizen denied her rights because of what she looked like or where she came from or who she loves.

He quietly attended as many military funerals in Massachusetts as he could for those who fell in Iraq and Afghanistan. He called and wrote each one of the 177 families in this commonwealth who lost a loved one on 9/11, and he took them sailing, and played with their children, not just in the days after, but every year after. His life’s work was not to champion those with wealth or power or connections; they already had enough representation. It was to give voice to the people who wrote and called him from every state, desperate for somebody who might listen and help. It was about what he could do for others. It’s why he’d take his hearings to hospitals in rural towns and inner cities, and push people out of their comfort zones, including his colleagues. Because he had pushed himself out of his comfort zone. And he tried to instill in his colleagues that same sense of empathy. Even if they called him, as one did, “wrong at the top of his lungs.” Even if they might disagree with him 99 percent of the time. Because who knew what might happen with that other 1 percent? Orrin Hatch was sent to Washington in part because he promised to fight Ted Kennedy. And they fought a lot. One was a conservative Mormon from Utah, after all; the other one was, well, Ted Kennedy. But once they got to know one another, they discovered certain things in common -- a devout faith, a soft spot for health care, very fine singing voices.

In 1986, when Republicans controlled the Senate, Orrin held the first hearing on the AIDS epidemic, even hugging an AIDS patient -- an incredible and very important gesture at the time. The next year, Ted took over the committee, and continued what Orrin started. When Orrin’s father passed away, Ted was one of the first to call. It was over dinner at Ted’s house one night that they decided to try and insure the 10 million children who didn’t have access to health care. As that debate hit roadblocks in Congress, as apparently debates over health care tend to do, Ted would have his Chief of Staff serenade Orrin to court his support. When hearings didn’t go Ted’s way, he might puff on a cigar to annoy Orrin, who disdained smoking. When they didn’t go Orrin’s way, he might threaten to call Ted’s sister, Eunice. And when it came time to find a way to pay for the Children’s Health Insurance Program that they, together, had devised, Ted pounced, offering a tobacco tax and asking, “Are you for Joe Camel and the Marlboro Man, or millions of children who lack adequate health care?” It was the kind of friendship unique to the Senate, calling to mind what John Calhoun once said of Henry Clay: “I don’t like Clay. He is a bad man, an imposter, a creator of wicked schemes. I wouldn’t speak to him, but, by God, I love him!”

So, sure, Orrin Hatch once called Ted “one of the major dangers to the country.” But he also stood up at a gathering in Ted’s last months, and said, “I’m asking you all to pray for Ted Kennedy.” The point is, we can fight on almost everything. But we can come together on some things. And those “somethings” can mean everything to a whole lot of people.

It was common ground that led Ted and Orrin to forge a compromise that covered millions of kids with health care. It was common ground, rooted in the plight of loved ones, that led Ted and Chuck Grassley to cover kids with disabilities; that led Ted and Pete Domenici to fight for equal rights for Americans with a mental illness.

Common ground, not rooted in abstractions or stubborn, rigid ideologies, but shared experience, that led Ted and John McCain to work on a Patient’s Bill of Rights, and to work to forge a smarter, more just immigration system. A common desire to fix what’s broken. A willingness to compromise in pursuit of a larger goal. A personal relationship that lets you fight like heck on one issue, and shake hands on the next -- not through just cajoling or horse-trading or serenades, but through Ted’s brand of friendship and kindness, and humor and grace. “What binds us together across our differences in religion or politics or economic theory,” Ted wrote in his memoirs, “[is] all we share as human beings -- the wonder that we experience when we look at the night sky; the gratitude that we know when we feel the heat of the sun; the sense of humor in the face of the unbearable; and the persistence of suffering. And one thing more -- the capacity to reach across our differences to offer a hand of healing.” For all the challenges of a changing world, for all the imperfections of our democracy, the capacity to reach across our differences is something that’s entirely up to us. May we all, in our own lives, set an example for the kids who enter these doors, and exit with higher expectations for their country.

May we all remember the times this American family has challenged us to ask what we can do; to dream and say why not; to seek a cause that endures; and sail against the wind in its pursuit, and live our lives with that heightened sense of purpose. Thank you. May God bless you. May He continue to bless this country we love. Thank you.

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# Statement on Historic Nuclear Agreement with Iran

Good afternoon, everybody. Today, the United States -- together with our allies and partners -- has reached a historic understanding with Iran, which, if fully implemented, will prevent it from obtaining a nuclear weapon.

As President and Commander-in-Chief, I have no greater responsibility than the security of the American people. And I am convinced that if this framework leads to a final, comprehensive deal, it will make our country, our allies, and our world safer.

This has been a long time coming. The Islamic Republic of Iran has been advancing its nuclear program for decades. By the time I took office, Iran was operating thousands of centrifuges, which can produce the materials for a nuclear bomb -- and Iran was concealing a covert nuclear facility. I made clear that we were prepared to resolve this issue diplomatically, but only if Iran came to the table in a serious way. When that did not happen, we rallied the world to impose the toughest sanctions in history -- sanctions which had a profound impact on the Iranian economy.

Now, sanctions alone could not stop Iran’s nuclear program. But they did help bring Iran to the negotiating table. Because of our diplomatic efforts, the world stood with us and we were joined at the negotiating table by the world’s major powers -- the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia, and China, as well as the European Union.

Over a year ago, we took the first step towards today’s framework with a deal to stop the progress of Iran’s nuclear program and roll it back in key areas. And recall that at the time, skeptics argued that Iran would cheat, and that we could not verify their compliance and the interim agreement would fail. Instead, it has succeeded exactly as intended. Iran has met all of its obligations. It eliminated its stockpile of dangerous nuclear material. Inspections of Iran’s program increased. And we continued negotiations to see if we could achieve a more comprehensive deal.

Today, after many months of tough, principled diplomacy, we have achieved the framework for that deal. And it is a good deal, a deal that meets our core objectives. This framework would cut off every pathway that Iran could take to develop a nuclear weapon. Iran will face strict limitations on its program, and Iran has also agreed to the most robust and intrusive inspections and transparency regime ever negotiated for any nuclear program in history. So this deal is not based on trust, it’s based on unprecedented verification.

Many key details will be finalized over the next three months, and nothing is agreed to until everything is agreed. But here are the basic outlines of the deal that we are working to finalize.

First, Iran will not be able to pursue a bomb using plutonium, because it will not develop weapons-grade plutonium. The core of its reactor at Arak will be dismantled and replaced. The spent fuel from that facility will be shipped out of Iran for the life of the reactor. Iran will not build a new heavy-water reactor. And Iran will not reprocess fuel from its existing reactors -- ever.

Second, this deal shuts down Iran’s path to a bomb using enriched uranium. Iran has agreed that its installed centrifuges will be reduced by two-thirds. Iran will no longer enrich uranium at its Fordow facility. Iran will not enrich uranium with its advanced centrifuges for at least the next 10 years. The vast majority of Iran’s stockpile of enriched uranium will be neutralized.

Today, estimates indicate that Iran is only two or three months away from potentially acquiring the raw materials that could be used for a single nuclear bomb. Under this deal, Iran has agreed that it will not stockpile the materials needed to build a weapon. Even if it violated the deal, for the next decade at least, Iran would be a minimum of a year away from acquiring enough material for a bomb. And the strict limitations on Iran’s stockpile will last for 15 years.

Third, this deal provides the best possible defense against Iran’s ability to pursue a nuclear weapon covertly -- that is, in secret. International inspectors will have unprecedented access not only to Iranian nuclear facilities, but to the entire supply chain that supports Iran’s nuclear program -- from uranium mills that provide the raw materials, to the centrifuge production and storage facilities that support the program. If Iran cheats, the world will know it. If we see something suspicious, we will inspect it. Iran’s past efforts to weaponize its program will be addressed. With this deal, Iran will face more inspections than any other country in the world.

So this will be a long-term deal that addresses each path to a potential Iranian nuclear bomb. There will be strict limits on Iran’s program for a decade. Additional restrictions on building new facilities or stockpiling materials will last for 15 years. The unprecedented transparency measures will last for 20 years or more. Indeed, some will be permanent. And as a member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Iran will never be permitted to develop a nuclear weapon.

In return for Iran’s actions, the international community has agreed to provide Iran with relief from certain sanctions -- our own sanctions, and international sanctions imposed by the United Nations Security Council. This relief will be phased as Iran takes steps to adhere to the deal. If Iran violates the deal, sanctions can be snapped back into place. Meanwhile, other American sanctions on Iran for its support of terrorism, its human rights abuses, its ballistic missile program, will continue to be fully enforced.

Now, let me reemphasize, our work is not yet done. The deal has not been signed. Between now and the end of June, the negotiators will continue to work through the details of how this framework will be fully implemented, and those details matter. If there is backsliding on the part of the Iranians, if the verification and inspection mechanisms don’t meet the specifications of our nuclear and security experts, there will be no deal. But if we can get this done, and Iran follows through on the framework that our negotiators agreed to, we will be able to resolve one of the greatest threats to our security, and to do so peacefully.

Given the importance of this issue, I have instructed my negotiators to fully brief Congress and the American people on the substance of the deal, and I welcome a robust debate in the weeks and months to come. I am confident that we can show that this deal is good for the security of the United States, for our allies, and for the world.

For the fact is, we only have three options for addressing Iran’s nuclear program. First, we can reach a robust and verifiable deal -- like this one -- and peacefully prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.

The second option is we can bomb Iran’s nuclear facilities, thereby starting another war in the Middle East, and setting back Iran’s program by a few years -- in other words, setting it back by a fraction of the time that this deal will set it back. Meanwhile we’d ensure that Iran would race ahead to try and build a bomb.

Third, we could pull out of negotiations, try to get other countries to go along and continue sanctions that are currently in place or add additional ones, and hope for the best -- knowing that every time we have done so, Iran has not capitulated but instead has advanced its program, and that in very short order, the breakout timeline would be eliminated and a nuclear arms race in the region could be triggered because of that uncertainty. In other words, the third option leads us very quickly back to a decision about whether or not to take military action, because we’d have no idea what was going on inside of Iran.

Iran is not going to simply dismantle its program because we demand it to do so. That’s not how the world works, and that’s not what history shows us. Iran has shown no willingness to eliminate those aspects of their program that they maintain are for peaceful purposes, even in the face of unprecedented sanctions. Should negotiations collapse because we, the United States, rejected what the majority of the world considers a fair deal, what our scientists and nuclear experts suggest would give us confidence that they are not developing a nuclear weapon, it’s doubtful that we can even keep our current international sanctions in place.

So when you hear the inevitable critics of the deal sound off, ask them a simple question: Do you really think that this verifiable deal, if fully implemented, backed by the world’s major powers, is a worse option than the risk of another war in the Middle East? Is it worse than doing what we’ve done for almost two decades, with Iran moving forward with its nuclear program and without robust inspections? I think the answer will be clear.

Remember, I have always insisted that I will do what is necessary to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, and I will. But I also know that a diplomatic solution is the best way to get this done, and offers a more comprehensive -- and lasting -- solution. It is our best option, by far. And while it is always a possibility that Iran may try to cheat on the deal in the future, this framework of inspections and transparency makes it far more likely that we’ll know about it if they try to cheat -- and I, or future Presidents, will have preserved all of the options that are currently available to deal with it.

To the Iranian people, I want to reaffirm what I’ve said since the beginning of my presidency. We are willing to engage you on the basis of mutual interests and mutual respect. This deal offers the prospect of relief from sanctions that were imposed because of Iran’s violation of international law. Since Iran’s Supreme Leader has issued a fatwa against the development of nuclear weapons, this framework gives Iran the opportunity to verify that its program is, in fact, peaceful. It demonstrates that if Iran complies with its international obligations, then it can fully rejoin the community of nations, thereby fulfilling the extraordinary talent and aspirations of the Iranian people. That would be good for Iran, and it would be good for the world.

Of course, this deal alone -- even if fully implemented -- will not end the deep divisions and mistrust between our two countries. We have a difficult history between us, and our concerns will remain with respect to Iranian behavior so long as Iran continues its sponsorship of terrorism, its support for proxies who destabilize the Middle East, its threats against America’s friends and allies -- like Israel. So make no mistake: We will remain vigilant in countering those actions and standing with our allies.

It’s no secret that the Israeli Prime Minister and I don't agree about whether the United States should move forward with a peaceful resolution to the Iranian issue. If, in fact, Prime Minister Netanyahu is looking for the most effective way to ensure Iran doesn’t get a nuclear weapon, this is the best option. And I believe our nuclear experts can confirm that.

More importantly, I will be speaking with the Prime Minister today to make clear that there will be no daylight, there is no daylight, when it comes to our support for Israel’s security and our concerns about Iran’s destabilizing policies and threats toward Israel. That’s why I've directed my national security team to consult closely with the new Israeli government in the coming weeks and months about how we can further strengthen our long-term security cooperation with Israel, and make clear our unshakeable commitment to Israel’s defense.

Today, I also spoke with the King of Saudi Arabia to reaffirm our commitment to the security of our partners in the Gulf. And I’m inviting the leaders of the six countries who make up the Gulf Cooperation Council -- Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and Bahrain -- to meet me at Camp David this spring to discuss how we can further strengthen our security cooperation, while resolving the multiple conflicts that have caused so much hardship and instability throughout the Middle East.

Finally, it’s worth remembering that Congress has, on a bipartisan basis, played a critical role in our current Iran policy, helping to shape the sanctions regime that applied so much pressure on Iran and ultimately forced them to the table. In the coming days and weeks, my administration will engage Congress once again about how we can play -- how it can play a constructive oversight role. I’ll begin that effort by speaking to the leaders of the House and Senate today.

In those conversations, I will underscore that the issues at stake here are bigger than politics. These are matters of war and peace, and they should be evaluated based on the facts and what is ultimately best for the American people and for our national security. For this is not simply a deal between my administration and Iran. This is a deal between Iran, the United States of America, and the major powers in the world -- including some of our closest allies. If Congress kills this deal -- not based on expert analysis, and without offering any reasonable alternative -- then it’s the United States that will be blamed for the failure of diplomacy. International unity will collapse, and the path to conflict will widen.

The American people understand this, which is why solid majorities support a diplomatic resolution to the Iranian nuclear issue. They understand instinctively the words of President Kennedy, who faced down the far greater threat of communism, and said: “Let us never negotiate out of fear, but let us never fear to negotiate.”

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The American people remember that at the height of the Cold War, Presidents like Nixon and Reagan struck historic arms control agreements with the Soviet Union, a far more dangerous adversary -- despite the fact that that adversary not only threatened to destroy our country and our way of life, but had the means to do so. Those agreements were not perfect. They did not end all threats. But they made our world safer. A good deal with Iran will do the same.

Today, I’d like to express my thanks to our international partners for their steadfastness and their cooperation. I was able to speak earlier today with our close allies, Prime Minister Cameron and President Hollande and Chancellor Merkel, to reaffirm that we stand shoulder-to-shoulder in this effort.

And most of all, on behalf of our nation, I want to express my thanks to our tireless -- and I mean tireless -- Secretary of State John Kerry and our entire negotiating team. They have worked so hard to make this progress. They represent the best tradition of American diplomacy. Their work -- our work -- is not yet done and success is not guaranteed. But we have an historic opportunity to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons in Iran, and to do so peacefully, with the international community firmly behind us. We should seize that chance.

Thank you. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

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# Young Leaders of the Americas Town Hall in Jamaica

Greetings, massive! Wah gwaan, Jamaica? Can everybody please give Aubrey a big round of applause for the great introduction? I want to thank the University of the West Indies for hosting us. Big up, You-Wee! Thank you. I’ve been making myself at home here.

It is great to be in beautiful Jamaica -- not only because I’m proud to be the first President of the United States to visit in more than 30 years, but because I just like the vibe here. I was born on an island, and it was warm, and so I feel right at home.

And I’m grateful for the warm Jamaican hospitality that I received this morning, including from Prime Minister Simpson-Miller. I also had the chance to meet with leaders from across the Caribbean, where we focused on issues of shared prosperity and shared security. And tomorrow, I’ll meet with leaders from across the hemisphere at the Summit of the Americas in Panama.

But before my trip became all business, I wanted to come here and hear from young people like you. Because it is your generation who will shape the future of our countries and our region and this planet that we share long after those of us who are currently in public service are gone from the stage.

So I’m going to only speak for a few minutes at the top, because I’d rather spend time taking questions from you, and also because after we have a chance for our town hall, I get a chance to say hi to Usain Bolt and Shelly Ann Fraser-Pryce. When you have the fastest people on the planet, you’ve got to say hi to them, right? Because that’s fast. There are a lot of people out there, and they’re the fastest.

Now, we are not just nations, we’re also neighbors. Tens of millions of Americans are bound to the Caribbean and the Americas through ties of commerce, but also ties of kin. More than one million Americans trace their ancestry to Jamaica. More than one million Americans visit Jamaica each year. So we’re committed to you and this region. And as I’ve said before, in our foreign policy there are no senior or junior partners in the Americas; there are just partners.

And that’s one reason why the United States has started a new chapter in our relations with the people of Cuba. We will continue to have some differences with the Cuban government, but we don’t want to be imprisoned by the past. When something doesn’t work for 50 years, you don’t just keep on doing it; you try something new. And we are as committed as ever to supporting human rights and political freedom in Cuba and around the world. But I believe that engagement is a more powerful force than isolation, and the changes we are making can help improve the lives of the Cuban people. And I also believe that this new beginning will be good for the United States and the entire hemisphere.

My point is, I believe we can move past some of the old debates that so often define the region, and move forward in a way that benefits your generation with new thinking -- an energetic, impatient, dynamic and diverse generation that you represent, both in the United States and across this hemisphere. More than 100 million people in Latin America and the Caribbean are between the ages of 15 and 24. Most of the region is under 35.

And what gives me so much hope about your generation is that you’re more interested in the hard work of waging peace than resorting to the quick impulses of conflict. You’re more interested in the hard work of building prosperity through entrepreneurship, not cronyism or corruption. You’re more eager for progress that comes not by holding down any segment of society, but by holding up the rights of every human being, regardless of what we look like, or how we pray, or who we love.

You care less about the world as it has been, and more about the world as it should be and can be. And unlike any other time in our history, the technology at your disposal means that you don’t have to wait for the change that you’re looking for; you have the freedom to create it in your own in powerful and disruptive ways. Many of you already have, whether by starting your own enterprises or by helping others start theirs.

And I’m going to just single out two remarkable young leaders who are here today because I think they’re an example of what is possible, even in the most difficult of circumstances.

So Angeline Jackson is here today. Where is Angeline? There she is, right there.

Several years ago, when Angeline was 19, she and a friend were kidnapped, held at gunpoint and sexually assaulted. And as a woman, and as a lesbian, justice and society were not always on her side. But instead of remaining silent, she chose to speak out and started her own organization to advocate for women like her, and get them treatment and get them justice, and push back against stereotypes, and give them some sense of their own power.

And she became a global activist. But more than anything, she cares about her Jamaica, and making it a place where everybody, no matter their color, or their class, or their sexual orientation, can live in equality and opportunity. That’s the power of one person, what they can do.

Jerome Cowans grew up in a tough part of Kingston. Where’s Jerome? When Jerome was 12, he saw a friend gunned down. And when he looked at the shooters, he said, “I realized that wasn’t a life I wanted to live. They had expensive machinery, but they had nothing else.” So at the ripe old age of 13, he founded a youth group to help others like him stay on the right path. And he started small, with only six people, but they had one big thing in common and they believed that change was possible.

And like Angeline, he was threatened for his work, but he kept at it. And he said, “Things won’t get any better if no one does anything.” And today, the LEAD Youth Club he started has six chapters, including one in Colombia. His work has taken him to five continents. Last year, he became the first Jamaican to receive the Nelson Mandela Innovation Award. He’s just 25 years old.

So individuals like those two young people -- the young people here today -- you remind me of something that Bob Marley once said. You know I went to his house yesterday. I thought, I'm only five minutes from his house, I got to go check it out. And one of the displays has to do when he was shot right before a concert he was supposed to give, trying to bring the political factions in Jamaica together. And he was treated for his wounds and he went ahead with the program, went ahead with the show. And somebody asked, well, why would you do that? He said, “The people who are trying to make this world worse are not taking the day off. Why should I?” Why should I?

So none of us can afford to take the day off. And I want you to have every chance, every tool you need to make this world better. So today I’m announcing nearly $70 million in U.S. investments in education, training, and employment programs for our young people throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. And these investments will help young people in unemployed and impoverished and marginalized communities, and give them a chance to gain the skills they need to compete and succeed in the 21st century economy.

And that’s not all. As President, some of the initiatives I’m most proud of are ones that increase my country’s engagement with the next generation of leaders like Angeline and Jerome and all of you -- leaders in government and civil society, and entrepreneurship and the private sector. Four years ago, I launched an initiative called “100,000 Strong in the Americas.” And the goal was to have 100,000 U.S. students studying in this region, and 100,000 of this region’s students studying in the United States by the end of this decade. And we are on track to meet that goal.

So today, to build on that progress, I’m proud to launch the Young Leaders of the Americas Initiative right here in Kingston. Let me say this. This is not your traditional exchange. We’re going to seek out the most innovative young entrepreneurs and civil society leaders in the Caribbean, Latin America, and we're going to give them a chance to earn a substantial continuum of the training and the resources and the connections, the networks and the capital that you need to make a difference.

So this year, we’ll bring two dozen entrepreneurs and civil society leaders from Latin America and the Caribbean -- including young Cuban leaders -- to the United States. Then next year, we’ll increase this fellowship to 250 young leaders. And we’ll help you to expand your commercial and social ventures; we'll embed you in an American business and incubators. We’ll give U.S. participants the chance to continue their collaboration with you in your home countries.

So the idea is that you’ll get a chance to implement your ideas but now have linkages that give you access to capital and research and all the things you need to mobilize and implement the kinds of things that you're doing.

And this isn't charity for us. This is an investment in your future, because that means it's an investment in our future -- a future where climate researchers in the Amazon can collaborate with scientists in Alaska. An idea in Barbados suddenly can be developed in an incubator in Boston. Anti-gang activities in Honduras can be connected to similar activities in Houston, Texas. It’s a future where any kid from Kingston can choose a path that opens his or her horizons beyond their neighborhood to the wider world.

And that impulse to make the world better, to push back on those who try to make it worse, that’s something that your generation has to hold on to. And you have to remember, it’s never easy; there are no days off. But if there’s one thing that I know from my own life, it’s that with hard work and with hope, change is always within our reach.

The Jamaican-American poet Claude McKay, who was a central figure of the Harlem renaissance, once wrote something along those lines: “We must strive on to gain the height although it may not be in sight.” As long as we’ve got young strivers like you -- and I hope to see you in Washington as part of this Young Leaders of the Americas Initiative -- I’m confident that a brighter future will always be in sight.

So thank you very much. With that, let’s take some questions. Alright? So....

[off mic....transmission problems]

President Obama: All right, since we’re getting to work I’m going to take my jacket off and get comfortable. All right. There...are no rules to this except that there are people with microphones in the audience, so wait for them to come when I call on you. We’re going to go boy, girl, boy, girl so everybody gets a chance, so it’s fair.

Before your question, please introduce yourself and tell us where you are from, okay? And try to keep your question or comment relatively short so we can get more questions or comments in, okay? We’ll start with this young lady right here in the white blouse. It’s a little tight here.

Question: Thank you. Yani Campbell [ph], a lecturer at the University of the West Indies. Thank you so much for your talk, very interesting. And I wondered as well, on the Cuban issue, now that your policy has actually changed towards Cuba, I wondered about your views on how it is that we should approach -- CARICOM should approach its relationship with Cuba in terms of deepening that relationship. Should they now perhaps move to join in CARICOM? Thank you.

President Obama:

Well, first of all, I think CARICOM can make its own decisions and we’ll respect it. Cuba will be participating in the Summit of the Americas, and I think -- it is my strong belief that if we engage, that that offers the greatest prospect for escaping some of the constraints of the past.

I think the Cuban people are extraordinary and have huge potential. And what’s encouraging is, is that the overwhelming majority of Cubans are interested in ending the Cold War -- the last vestige of the Cold War -- and moving forward. It’s going to take some time for the United States to fully implement some of the things that have already been agreed to, and it’s going to take a little bit longer before you actually have complete normal relations between the United States and Cuba.

What I would say to Caribbean countries is, absolutely, you should continue to engage in Cuba in the ways that you’ve already doing -- you’ve already done in the past. I do think that it is important for all of us to be able to speak honestly where we see concerns about issues of human rights and political freedom. And I’m not saying anything publicly that I haven’t said directly to Raul Castro. There are still constraints on the ability of the Cuban people to express themselves, or to organize political parties, or to start a business. And sometimes, the same things we expect for ourselves and our country, somehow we think other people don’t want.

But I believe that each country -- I believe each country has its own unique cultures, its own unique traditions. I don’t expect every country to pursue the same policies or have the same political practices as the United States. And I am certainly aware of the flaws that exist in our own country that we have to fix. But I do believe there are certain principles that are universal. I think that all people want basic dignity and want basic freedom, and want to be able to worship as they please without being discriminated against, or they should be able to speak their mind about an important issue pertaining to their community without being arrested. And so wherever we see that, we try to speak out.

But what we also try to do is engage and recognize that even with countries that we have differences, there’s also going to be commonality and overlap. And the United States and Cuba should both have an interest in dealing with climate change, for example, because when the oceans start lapping upon Miami or on Havana, nobody is going to distinguish, well, where do they stand on this or that ideological issue. And so we have to find where there are areas of cooperation, but I will continue to try to be consistent in speaking out on behalf of the issues that are important to all people, not just some.

All right, it’s a gentleman’s turn. This gentleman right here. He looks very serious; he’s got glasses. Looking sharp. Plus, he’s got a copy of my book. So he’s clearly a wise man.

Question: Thank you very much. My name is Chef Brian Lumley -- I’m a young Jamaican chef here. And I own a restaurant -- 689 by Brian Lumley. Just saying. My question to you -- I’m going to stay a little bit off the politics for a bit. And I’ve witnessed your journey a lot, and the question is kind of two-part. If you go back and give yourself one piece of advice before the start of you 2008 term, what would it be? And the second part is if you can sign this book when you’re finished. Thank you very much.

President Obama:

I’ll sign the book. So the question was, for those couldn’t hear: If I were to go back and give myself advice before I started in 2008, what would the advice be?

I suppose I could have started dying my hair earlier -- so then people wouldn’t say, man, he’s getting old. You’re going like this -- at least I got hair, man. I’m teasing you. I’m messing with you.

I think that -- keep in mind that when I came into office we were going through the worst global financial crisis since the 1930s, and so we had to make a series of decisions very quickly, many of which were unpopular. Overall, I think we got it right. I think we did the right thing. And because, I think, we took these steps, not only were we able to avoid the kind of Great Depression that we saw in the 1930s, not only was America able to bounce back and start growing more rapidly than most of our peers, drive down unemployment faster, create more jobs faster, but that also had an impact on the global economy and it had an impact on the Caribbean economy, that we were able to bounce back quicker than we might have if we hadn't taken those steps.

But it was, I think, costly politically. And what I would have probably advised was that I might have needed to warn the American people and paint a picture for them that was more accurate about the fact that it would take some time to dig ourselves out of a very big hole. Because FDR, when he came into office, the Great Depression had already been going on for two, three years, and so people understood how serious it was. With us, we came in just as people were really starting to feel the impacts. And trying to paint a picture that we'll make it but it's going to take some time, and here are the steps that we need to take -- I think I would have advised myself to do a better job spending more time not just getting the policy right, but also describing it in ways that people understood, that gave them confidence in their own future. I think that would probably be the most important advice that I would have given myself.

All right, it's a young lady’s turn. That young lady right there. Yes, you. You, yes. Oh, well, I'll call on both of you. I'll call on you later. Go ahead.

Question: Okay, so we're here and we’re looking at you, and we're all very honored to be here and very taken about by your leadership qualities. And seeing that you are the President of the United States of America and you’re so influential, I want to know how you handle the mental strain that comes with being in charge of so much.

President Obama:

What’s your name?

Question: Kimberly -- from the University of the West Indies.

President Obama:

Fantastic. How do I handle stress? You know, I'll be honest with you. One of the things that happens as you get older is you start appreciating both your strengths and your weaknesses. Hopefully you gain a little wisdom about what you're good at and what you're not. And Michelle can give you a long list of things I'm not good at. But one thing that I've always had, which has served me well, is a pretty good temperament. And I attribute that partly from growing up on an island with trade winds and beaches, and it makes you calm. But I try not to get too high when things are going well so that I don't get too low when things are going badly, and try to keep a long view of how the process of social change takes place, and how the trajectory of your own life is going to proceed.

We get caught up in the day-to-day so much, and it’s interesting now when I’m talking to my daughters and “somebody said something at school,” or there’s -- “well, I didn’t do quite as well on that test as I wanted.” And you want them to take it seriously, but you also want to say to them, you know what, this, too, shall pass; I promise you three months from now, much less 30 years from now, you will not remember.

And so I think that trying to keep your eye on the prize of where it is that you want to go and not be discouraged or overly impressed with yourself on a day-to-day basis I think is very important. And then you have to get some exercise in the morning. I don’t run as fast as these folks, but I get a little exercise, which does help in terms of stress relief.

All right. It’s a gentleman’s turn. Let’s see, somebody from this side. This young man right here in the sharp-looking checkered shirt.

Question: Good afternoon again, Mr. President. Especially as it relates to human rights and social change -- I’m Jomain McKenzie and I’m a focal point with the Global Fund Board. As it relates to human rights and social change, how do you make the decision to allow societies to go through the natural evolutionary process of having change occur on their own versus having governments exert policies to make these same political social changes?

President Obama:

That’s a really interesting question. It’s an interesting question and it’s one that I have to struggle with all the time.

Every society, as I said, is at a different phase in development, in their own history; they have different cultural traditions. And so the way I think about it is, is that the United States has certain core values and principles that we believe deeply in. And we don’t necessarily expect that every country will formulate how to secure those ideals and those principles. We don’t expect it to be done exactly as we do any more than we expect every -- obviously, our democracy is not the same as a Jamaican democracy or a British democracy or Australian democracy. But we believe in democracy. We think that if people have the ability to speak out about their own lives, some sense of agency, then that society will be stronger. And that doesn’t mean that we won’t work with a country that doesn’t precisely abide by those principles, but we will still speak out.

There are times where a country is clearly engaging in activities that are so egregious that it’s not culturally specific; it typically has to do with a government wanting to exert control over people and oppress them. And in those instances, I think it is entirely appropriate for us to speak out forcibly and, in some cases, to not do business with them.

Look at a country like North Korea. I mean, obviously, Korean culture is different than American culture. On the other hand, you look at what’s happening in South Korea and you look at what’s happening in North Korea and those are two entirely different societies. And I can tell you which one you’d rather live in.

And if you have a situation in which people are being murdered simply because they didn’t agree with the government on something or didn’t want their economic fate to be entirely determined by the whims of some government bureaucrat, and suddenly they’re sent to a labor camp -- that’s something where we as an international community have to speak out on.

And then there are some issues that may be culturally specific, but you know what, I think they’re wrong. I won’t -- we’re not going to try to force that country to change, but I may try to shame that country. There are nations where slavery still exists. And that may be part of the ancient culture in that society, but slavery is wrong. And I’m not going to give them the excuse that, well, this is who we are.

In Africa -- and I can speak I think fairly as somebody who is the son of an African father -- there are practices like female genital mutilation that may be part of the tradition there, but it’s wrong. And I’m going to say so. And it will be U.S. policy to say that it’s wrong.

So the tools we use to try to bring about change around the world may vary. And as I said earlier, we’re not always perfectly consistent. There are times where we’ve got allies who are not observing all the human rights we would like, and there are times where there are countries that are adversaries of ours where they do some things quite well. And you can’t expect us, or any country, to be perfectly consistent in every circumstance. But what I’ve tried to do is be fairly consistent in terms of what we believe, what we stand for, and then we use different tools depending on what we think will bring about the most change. In some cases, it will just be a diplomatic statement; in some cases, it may be serious enough that we will organize -- try to organize the United Nations or other multilateral forums to speak out against certain practices. In some cases, it may be so egregious that we need to sanction them, and we will try to organize the international community in that way.

And then finally, in the ultimate circumstance, where the violations of our values are so severe that they start spilling over and -- in the instance of, for example, genocide -- we may be say to ourselves, in concert with the international community, we need to intervene because this government is so brutal and so unacceptable that we need to protect people. But we do that in the context of an international conversation so that we’re not simply making these decisions -- or we’re not so arrogant that we’re not paying attention to what the rest of the world community is saying.

This young lady who I originally had called on and got skipped over. No, no, this one right here. Yes. Right here. I’m sorry, I love you, too, though.

Question: Good afternoon, Mr. President. My name is Katrina King-Smith. I’m from the Turks and Caicos Islands. My question is two-part, as well. Firstly, in countries such as the Turks and Caicos Islands where the population is small and our main sources of revenue are tourism and foreign direct investment, I was wondering if you can suggest two ways that the government may better generate and regulate sustainable revenue, especially with regulations currently being put in place to close off-shore financial centers.

And secondly, I was wondering if after your term has ended, would you mind coming to the Turks and Caicos to vacation?

President Obama:

On the second question, absolutely. I’ll do some island-hopping once I’m out of office. And you guys can show me all the good places to go.

On this issue of off-shore financial centers, we respect each country to set up its own financial regulations. And we recognize that for small countries, that providing services -- including financial services -- may be an important source of revenue.

The one thing that we have to make sure of is that these financial centers are not either used for illicit money laundering or tax avoidance by large U.S. corporations that set up cut-outs or front organizations, but as a practical matter are operating in the United States, employing folks in the United States, essentially headquartered in the United States and yet, somehow, their mailing address is such-and-such island where they have to pay no taxes.

Those are the kinds of egregious concerns that we’re trying to deal with. I think we try to take it on a case-by-case basis. And in my CARICOM meeting that I just had, this issue was brought up. There were a number of leaders who expressed concern that maybe they were being unfairly labeled as areas of high financial risk. And what I committed to them is we will examine their complaints and go through in very concrete ways where our concerns are and how our governments can work together.

More broadly, I think that the -- if you look at some of the most successful countries in the world, they’re actually pretty small countries -- like Singapore, for example -- that on paper look like they have no assets, and yet, if you go to Singapore, it has one of the highest standards of living in the world. What is it that Singapore did that might be replicable?

Well, one of the most important things they did was they made an enormous investment in their people. And if you’ve got a highly skilled, highly educated workforce, if you’ve set up rules of law and governance that are transparent and non-corrupt, then you can attract actually a lot of service industries to supplement the tourist industry, because people would want to locate in your country. You could envision people wanting to operate and have offices there where you’ve got a trained workforce. And these days, so many businesses are operating over the Internet that if you’ve got a really skilled workforce that provides value added, you will attract companies and you’ll attract businesses.

What deters people from investing in most countries is conflict, corruption, and a lack of skills or infrastructure. And those countries that are able to address those problems have rule of law and eliminate corruption. Make sure that you are investing in the education of your people and it’s a continuous education; it doesn’t just stop at the lower grades, but you give people constant opportunities to upgrade their skills. You have a decent infrastructure -- you’re going to be able to succeed. That’s the recipe, the formula for a 21st-century economy.

All right. Uh oh, they’re starting to holler at me. Let’s see, I haven’t gone back here in a while. This gentleman in the blue shirt right here.

Question: Thanks so much, Mr. President. We know that there’s been an increasing military assertiveness of China, especially in the South China Sea. And it seems that the U.S. has responded to that by pledging to increase its military presence because it recognizes the danger that that military increase of China poses to its friends and allies there. Now, China’s growing power isn’t just military, it’s economic. On this side of the world, China has used this soft power, this economic power especially to woo Caribbean governments.

My questions are, how does the U.S. view China’s influence in its own backyard, especially since you’ve just talked about the Cold War and alliances? And secondly, what plan does the U.S. have, if any, to contribute more to economic life in the Caribbean to ward off China in terms of foreign direct investment? Thank you very much, Mr. President.

President Obama:

What’s your name?

Question: Oh, sorry. My name is Newton Harris from the University of Technology-Jamaica.

President Obama:

Fantastic. Well, first of all, let me say that it is U.S. official policy and it is my strong belief that we should welcome China’s peaceful rise. What China has done in the last 20, 30 years is remarkable. More people have been lifted out of poverty in a shorter period of time than perhaps any time in human history. And that’s good for the world. I mean, we should be more fearful of a poorer, collapsing China than a China that is participating in the world marketplace and trading and is getting along with its neighbors and part of the international order, because there are a really large number of Chinese people and we want them to be doing well.

So our policy is not to fear China’s peaceful rise. Where we get concerned with China is where it is not necessarily abiding by international norms and rules, and is using its size and muscle to force countries into subordinate positions. And that's the concern we have around maritime issues. We think this can be solved diplomatically, but just because the Philippines or Vietnam are not as large as China doesn’t mean that they can just be elbowed aside.

And, by the way, we don't have a particular view on the territorial disputes, the maritime disputes. Our attitude is simply, let’s use the mechanisms that we have in place internationally to resolve them.

Now, with respect to Chinese investment in the Caribbean or in the Americas, in the Western Hemisphere, my response is the same one that I gave when I was asked this question in Africa, which is, if China is making investments that are building up infrastructure, or improving education, or helping the people, then we welcome that. We think that's great. The only thing is you got to make sure you look at what strings may be attached. If the investments are made and it's solely to build a road to a mine to extract raw materials that are going to then be immediately going to a port and shipped to China, and if Chinese workers are shipped in to build the road -- and if you don't know exactly what the deal was with the government that led to China getting the contract -- in those situations, it may not be, in fact, serving the long-term interests of the country.

Now, I would say -- by the way, I'd say the same thing about the United States. So if we come in with an aid package to your country, and we say we got this great deal, we're going to give you $100 million for such and such, but if when you evaluate the actual benefits, it's U.S. companies that are disproportionately benefitting from it, and it's creating a situation where over the long term the United States is making a whole lot of profits but is not leaving behind a sustainable industrial base or ways in which that country can develop, then you have to evaluate that and try to get a better deal.

So what I'm saying is not unique to China. I think that's how all countries should be operating. Your government should be transparent; it should be clear about what you're getting. There should be an accounting of how the money flows. There should be a sense that over the long term, Jamaican businesses or somebody from Belize is getting a job, or -- right? I mean, there should be some sense of how is this benefitting us over the long term. And that's I think the only criteria that we're going to lay out.

Now, last thing I'll say -- because you asked -- you kind of posed, is there like a bidding war going on here for affections. The Chinese are giving us flowers and chocolates -- what are you doing for us lately? And so what I would say is this. The United States, I think historically, has been an enormous provider of development aid. Not always, by the way, has it followed the rule I just laid out in terms of whether or not the local recipients are benefitting, but I think we've gotten a lot better at that.

And if you look at institutions like the World Bank or other multilateral institutions, we remain the largest contributors by far. So sometimes when you get money from a multilateral institution -- you look at who’s doing what; if you look at what happens in terms of when Haiti gets decimated, who’s raising the money -- we tend to look pretty good. It turns out we're doing more than our fair share. And we will continue to do that.

We do have some fiscal constraints. And sometimes, I think -- when I travel to the Americas, to the region, people ask, why don't we have sort of the kinds of Alliance for Progress programs with huge sums of money. Well, part of it is, is that right after World War II, the United States was so large relative to the rest of the world. Japan was decimated; Europe was decimated. Huge chunks of the world were behind the Iron Curtain. And so it was natural that we gave fivefold or tenfold more than anybody else could do. Well, things have evened out, in case you haven't noticed.

We're still, by far, the most powerful nation on Earth and we still do more than everybody else, but we do expect others to step up and do their fair share. But I can guarantee you this: We will always do our fair share. And nowhere is that truer than in the Caribbean and in the Americas, because you are our neighbors and some of our closest friends.

Let’s see. It's a young lady’s turn. This young lady right here. Right here.

Question: Welcome, Mr. President. I lived a block away from you in Chicago when I went to the University of Chicago.

President Obama:

Is that right?

Question: And my college sweetheart, Sam Kass, was your private chef until very recently.

President Obama:

Oh, wow! Well, you're just putting Sam’s business all out there. All right. What’s your name?

Question: Lisandra Rickards. I work for the Branson Centre of Entrepreneurship.

President Obama:

Cassandra?

Question: Lisandra.

President Obama:

Lisandra. All right. Well, I'll tease Sam about this one.

Question: Please do.

President Obama:

Everybody knows about you now. Go ahead.

Question: My question is around immigration. We've heard a lot about your immigration policy for undocumented immigrants who are currently living in the U.S. But what about hopeful families that are seeking a legal pathway for immigration into the U.S. but are finding seven- to ten-year delays before they even can get to apply? I'd love to hear you talk some more about your policy regarding shortening that timeline and making it less onerous on the applicants.

President Obama:

Good. That's a great question. That's a great question. The United States is a nation of immigrants. And this region has contributed to the remarkable progress that the United States has made over the last two centuries. And my goal during the course of my presidency has been to make sure we continue to be a nation of immigrants as well as a nation of laws, and that we're attracting talent from all around the world.

Part of what makes us special is you walk in Brooklyn and there are folks from everywhere. But they’re all striving, they’re all talented, they’re all trying to make their dreams come true. And that is what gives us the energy and the strength to be able to accomplish everything we've accomplished.

So we need to fix what is, right now, a broken immigration system. Part of it is dealing with those who are undocumented but who have been living there a long time, are part of the community, providing them with a pathway in which they have to earn a legal status, but recognizing that they’re there and we're not going to be separating out families. That's not who we are. That's not true to our values. And ultimately, it's not good for our economy.

But you are absolutely right that part of the reason that some people take the illegal route is because we make the legal route so difficult. And so we're trying to identify ways to streamline that process.

Now, I have to be honest. A lot of people want to come to America. So unless we just had no borders, there’s always going to be a wait. There’s always going to be background checks. There’s always going to be some prioritization in terms of who’s admitted and who’s not. But I do think that there are practices we have -- for example, where someone has a relation in the United States, is clearly qualified to become at some point a legal resident and maybe in the future a citizen, but in order to do it they have to first leave the country, wait, and now they’re separated from their families. I mean, there have to be ways in which we can make the system clearer and less burdensome.

Some of those changes we wanted to make were in the legislation that was proposed and passed the United States Senate. I think there is still the opportunity to get that done before my presidency is over, but it does require the Republican Party I think to engage with me in a more serious effort, and to put aside the politics.

Thank you very much for the question. All right, this side has been neglected right here. I'm going to go with this guy with the beard, man, because he looks a little bit like -- he looks a little bit like Marshawn Lynch.

Question: Greetings, Mr. President.

President Obama:

How are you?

Question: More life and blessings on you and your family.

President Obama:

What’s your name?

Question: My name is Miguel Williams, but you can call -- I am Steppa.

President Obama:

Steppa.

Question: Ya mon, that is quite sufficient. My question has to do and surrounds U.S. policy as it regards the -- the legalization, the decriminalization of marijuana.

President Obama:

How did I anticipate this question?

Question: Ya mon...Ya mon...Ya mon.

President Obama: How did I guess this question?

Question: Yes. And, Mr. President, it really comes on the foreground of -- we face economic challenges with the IMF, et cetera. And and we find realistically that the hemp industry, the marijuana industry provides a highly feasible alternative to rise above poverty. So I am wanting to over stand and to understand how U.S. is envisioning and how you would you see Jamaica pushing forward on a decriminalization, legalization emphasis on the hemp industry.

President Obama:

Okay. Well. Let me -- I do want to separate out what are serious issues in the United States and then how that relates to our foreign policy and our interactions with the region. There is the issue of legalization of marijuana, and then there is the issue of decriminalizing or dealing with the incarceration and, in some cases, devastation of communities as a consequence of nonviolent drug offenses.

I am a very strong believer that the path that we have taken in the United States in the so-called “War on Drugs” has been so heavy in emphasizing incarceration that it has been counterproductive. You have young people who did not engage in violence who get very long penalties, get placed in prison, and then are rendered economically unemployable, are almost pushed into, then, the underground economy, learn crime more effectively in prison, families are devastated.

So it’s been very unproductive. And what we’re trying to do is to reform our criminal justice system. And the good news is there has actually been some interest on the part of unlikely allies like the evangelical community or some otherwise very conservative Republicans, because it’s very expensive to incarcerate people, and a recognition that this may not be the best approach. So that’s one issue.

There’s then the second issue of legalizing marijuana, whether it’s medical marijuana or recreational use. There are two states in the United States that have embarked on an experiment to decriminalize or legalize marijuana -- Colorado and Washington State. And we will see how that experiment works its way through the process.

Right now, that is not federal policy, and I do not foresee anytime soon Congress changing the law at a national basis. But I do think that if there are states that show that they are not suddenly a magnet for additional crime, that they have a strong enough public health infrastructure to push against the potential of increased addiction, then it’s conceivable that that will spur on a national debate. But that is going to be some time off.

And then the third issue is what will U.S. international policy be. And we had some discussion with the CARICOM countries about this. I know on paper a lot of folks think, you know what, if we just legalize marijuana, then it’ll reduce the money flowing into the transnational drug trade, there are more revenues and jobs created.

I have to tell you that it’s not a silver bullet, because, first of all, if you are legalizing marijuana, then how do you deal with other drugs, and where do you draw the line? Second of all, as is true in the global economy generally, if you have a bunch of small medium-sized marijuana businesses scattered across the Caribbean and this is suddenly legal, if you think that big multi-national companies are not going to suddenly come in and market and try to control and profit from the trade -- that’s I think a very real scenario.

And so I think we have to have a conversation about this, but our current policy continues to be that in the United States, we need to decrease demand. We need to focus on a public health approach to decreasing demand. We have to stop the flow of guns and cash into the Caribbean and Central America and Latin America. And at the same time, I think the Caribbean, Latin America have to -- Central America -- have to cooperate with us to try to shrink the power of the transnational drug organizations that are vicious and hugely destructive.

And if we combine a public health perspective, a focus on not simply throwing every low-level person with possession into prison by trying to get them treatment, if we combine that with economic development and alternative opportunities for youth, then I think we can strike the right balance. It may not comport with your -- completely with your vision for the future, but I think that we could certainly have a smarter approach to it than we currently do.

Got time for one more question. One more question. Let’s see -- this is always hard. It’s always hard to be that last -- it’s a lady’s turn, so all the guys just have to put down their hands. It’s too late for you. Let’s see. You know what, I’m just going to go with this young lady right here. She’s just right in front. Go ahead, yes, you. Hold on a second, wait for the mic.

Question: Afternoon, Mr. President. I’m Alana Williams [ph], I’m from the South Side of Chicago.

President Obama:

Wait, you’re from Chicago?

Question: Yes!

President Obama:

Well, what are you doing here? This is supposed to be for Caribbean young ladies.

Question: Actually, I attend Olivet Nazarene University and I’m studying abroad, so I’m here.

President Obama:

I see, okay. Well, you’re cheating a little bit. I’ll have to call on somebody else after you. But I’m going to go ahead and let you ask a question real quick. Because I’ll see you in Chicago.

Question: Most definitely. My question is really more so about home. I love my city, but the violence is terrible, specifically amongst young black men. And I know we’re talking a lot about police brutality, but I’ve lost a lot of friends from people who look just like me. And that’s the problem. And so I would like to know what you believe is the true source of the violence, and what is one solution to an extreme problem. Thank you.

President Obama:

Well, look, I know you asked it about Chicago but I know there are neighborhoods right here in Jamaica that have the same problems, and in every place all across the Caribbean; certainly in Central America.

I don’t think there is just one single factor. Obviously, a contributor is one that we just talked about, which is the drug trade. If you have an illicit trade that generates huge amounts of money and is not regulated above board, that is going to attract ultimately people trying to carve out turf, trying to control markets, and violence ensues. So that’s point number one.

Point number two is the easy accessibility of weapons. And we were talking earlier about different traditions; the United States has a tradition of gun ownership that is deep; dates back to the pioneer past. And I think it is a mistake that we do not do a better job of putting in place common-sense gun-safety regulations that would keep guns out of the hands of criminals, but unfortunately a majority of Congress does not agree with me. Even after six-year-olds were gunned down viciously in their classroom, we could not get action done. But what we are doing is cooperating with the region as we are cooperating with local jurisdictions to try to stem at least the flow of guns using the administrative tools that I have. So that’s number two.

Number three is providing alternative paths for young people. If a young person is reading by the age -- by the third grade and at grade level, if they are enjoying school, if they see a path for success, then they are less likely to get involved in criminal activity and that will reduce gun violence, and that will reduce crime, and that will reduce death. Which means investing in things like early childhood education and improving our schools -- those things are absolutely vital.

But there is a fourth element to this, and that is our own responsibility. And particularly, as I speak to young people here today, we always talk about what can we do about the violence as if it’s like just separate and apart. But we have control in our communities of our immediate friends, our immediate family. We influence our peers. And I do think that the power that all of you have as young leaders to be able to not make excuses for violence -- because there are a whole bunch of folks who have really tough backgrounds and come from terrible circumstances, and are really poor, but they don’t go around shooting somebody. They don’t beat somebody over the head because of sneakers or because they looked at them the wrong way.

And so there is an element of us retaking our communities and being willing to speak out against violence in our midst. That doesn’t ignore all the social factors. But Dr. King used to say it’s not an either/or situation, it’s a both/and situation.

Government has to act. We have to have effective policing, which means policing that is actually protecting as opposed to some of the things that we’ve been seeing of late in the United States, and I’m sure is true in other countries. And I say that saying that police have an extraordinarily difficult job, and the overwhelming majority do a great job under severe circumstances. But there’s got to be trust built between the communities, and I had to put a task force together that put together some excellent reports in the wake of Ferguson around how we can do that.

But ultimately, what happens in the home, what happens in the school -- some of you are parents already; some of you will be parents -- what we teach our children in terms of values, valuing themselves, valuing others, that’s important, too.

So there’s no single solution. But all of us have to do better. Because the tragedy of what we see in the United States but also in cities and towns all across the Caribbean and Central America, is terrible. And there’s no excuse for it.

All right. Because I called accidentally on a Chicagoan, I’ve got to call on one more person. Look, this young lady stood up, so she showed -- that wasn’t fair, but I called on her, go ahead. You’re not from Chicago are you?

Question: No.

President Obama:

You promise? Okay. All right, get the mic -- oh, I’m sorry. You know what, I confess, even though I was going to call on you, she thought she was going to be called on. I’m going to call on both of you now, but each of you get a really short question. Really short, quick.

Question: Well, I’m the team leader for the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor and I want to thank you for the initiatives that you’re planning to do here. And I wanted to invite you to our annual general meeting that’s going to be held in Babson in the States, so we want you to come because you are part of a global team. So I’m representing Jamaica as the youngest female team leader, and I’m inviting you to come so we can talk about Startup America and we can collaborate on different projects. So I’m inviting you to come to that event.

President Obama:

Okay, that was good. And I can say I’ll await your invitation. And what I will say very quickly is entrepreneurship, small- and medium-sized businesses, that is a priority and that means that we’ve got to create channels for access to capital, technical training. These are areas where a lot of our development aid is shifting.

Instead of just giving somebody a fish, we want to teach them how to fish. And what you’re seeing -- what you see among young people all around the world is, is that instead of just finding a job in a big organization, they may want to create something of their own, a new vision. And that kind of creativity has to be tapped. So we’re shifting a lot of the work that we do around issues of entrepreneurship, so I’ll be interested in seeing what you have to say.

All right. This young lady right here, go ahead.

Question: Hello, everyone. Hi, Mr. President. My name is Davianne Tucker, and I’m the Guild president-elect for the University of the West Indies. Thank you. So my question is, the Jamaican government has been holding firmly to the stipulations of the IMF agreement. There are many who would like to know if the debt write-offs for Jamaica are being considered as a means of improving the livelihood of our people. So is that being considered?

President Obama:

Well, this came up in my bilateral with your Prime Minister. And, look, historically, I think there has been times where the IMF or the international multilateral organizations worked with governments in ways that weren’t always productive, got them deep into debt, and then suddenly you’ve got a lot more flowing out than was going in. And in some cases there were governments around the world that were corrupt, lent money, money goes into a Swiss bank account, suddenly the people are paying off for decades.

In Jamaica, some of it just had to do with tough circumstances, not always the best fiscal management. I think that the current government has been wise to work hard to abide by the IMF provisions. That’s not been easy. And I think that has been the right thing to do.

But what I also agreed with, when I spoke to the Prime Minister, is the need to try to address in a more systematic fashion how we can spur growth and not just put the squeeze on folks. Because what it turns out is, is that if a -- the best way for a country to reduce its debt is to grow really fast, and to generate more income.

Now, that does require development plans and approaches that are productive. And it is true that sometimes that requires some short-term sacrifice. And I think the question that the people of Jamaica, just like the people of the United States and everywhere else, should be asking is: If the government is spending money right now, is it on something that is going to help create long-term growth and help people succeed? If the answer is no, you shouldn’t spend that money.

Spending money just for the sake of spending money is not -- that’s not the formula for success. But if the money is being spent on what we talked about -- early childhood education; if it’s being spent on infrastructure; if it’s being spent on research; if it’s being spent on building skills for workers -- those are good investments. And I do think that the international financial institutions have to accommodate the interests of countries who have a sound plan for growth so that they can not just stay in this static state but can, over time, thrive and succeed. And the way that’s going to happen is because of outstanding young leaders like you.

I’ve had a great conversation.

Thank you, Jamaica. Thank you. Appreciate it, young leaders.

God bless you.

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# Civil Society Forum Address

Thank you, President Varela. Thank you very much, Panama, for hosting this Summit of the Americas. And I thank everybody who’s traveled here from across the region for the courageous work that you do to defend freedom and human rights, and to promote equality and opportunity and justice across our hemisphere and around the world.

I am proud to be with you at this first-ever official gathering of civil society leaders at the Summit of the Americas. And I’m pleased to have Cuba represented with us at this summit for the very first time.

We’re here for a very simple reason. We believe that strong, successful countries require strong and vibrant civil societies. We know that throughout our history, human progress has been propelled not just by famous leaders, not just by states, but by ordinary men and women who believe that change is possible; by citizens who are willing to stand up against incredible odds and great danger not only to protect their own rights, but to extend rights to others.

I had a chance to reflect on this last month when I was in the small town of Selma, Alabama. Some of you may have heard of it. It’s a place where, 50 years ago, African-Americans marched in peaceful, nonviolent protest -- not to ask for special treatment but to be treated equally, in accordance with the founding documents of our Declaration of Independence, our Bill of Rights. They were part of a Civil Rights Movement that had endured violence and repression for decades, and would endure it again that day, as many of the marchers were beaten.

But they kept marching. And despite the beatings of that day, they came back, and more returned. And the conscience of a nation was stirred. Their efforts bent, in the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, the arc of the moral universe towards justice. And it was their vision for a more fair and just and inclusive and generous society that ultimately triumphed. And the only reason I stand here today as the President of the United States is because those ordinary people -- maids, and janitors, and schoolteachers -- were willing to endure hardship on my behalf.

And that's why I believe so strongly in the work that you do. It's the dreamers -- no matter how humble or poor or seemingly powerless -- that are able to change the course of human events. We saw it in South Africa, where citizens stood up to the scourge of apartheid. We saw it in Europe, where Poles marched in Solidarity to help bring down the Iron Curtain. In Argentina, where mothers of the disappeared spoke out against the Dirty War. It’s the story of my country, where citizens worked to abolish slavery, and establish women’s rights and workers’ rights, and rights for gays and lesbians.

It’s not to say that my country is perfect -- we are not. And that’s the point. We always have to have citizens who are willing to question and push our government, and identify injustice. We have to wrestle with our own challenges -- from issues of race to policing to inequality. But what makes me most proud about the extraordinary example of the United States is not that we’re perfect, but that we struggle with it, and we have this open space in which society can continually try to make us a more perfect union.

We’ve stood up, at great cost, for freedom and human dignity, not just in our own country, but elsewhere. I’m proud of that. And we embrace our ability to become better through our democracy. And that requires more than just the work of government. It demands the hard and frustrating, sometimes, but absolutely vital work of ordinary citizens coming together to make common cause.

So civil society is the conscience of our countries. It’s the catalyst of change. It’s why strong nations don’t fear active citizens. Strong nations embrace and support and empower active citizens. And by the way, it’s not as if active citizens are always right -- they’re not. Sometimes people start yelling at me or arguing at me, and I think, you don’t know what you’re talking about. But sometimes they do. And the question is not whether they’re always right; the question is, do you have a society in which that conversation, that debate can be tested and ideas are tested in the marketplace.

And because of the efforts of civil society, now, by and large, there’s a consensus in the Americas on democracy and human rights, and social development and social inclusiveness. I recognize there’s strong differences about the role of civil society, but I believe we can all benefit from open and tolerant and inclusive dialogue. And we should reject violence or intimidation that’s aimed at silencing people’s voices.

The freedom to be heard is a principle that the Americas at large is committed to. And that doesn’t mean, as I said, that we’re going to agree on every issue. But we should address those issue candidly and honestly and civilly, and welcome the voices of all of our people into the debates that shape the future of the hemisphere.

Just to take one example: As the United States begins a new chapter in our relationship with Cuba, we hope it will create an environment that improves the lives of the Cuban people -– not because it’s imposed by us, the United States, but through the talent and ingenuity and aspirations, and the conversation among Cubans from all walks of life so they can decide what the best course is for their prosperity.

As we move toward the process of normalization, we’ll have our differences, government to government, with Cuba on many issues -- just as we differ at times with other nations within the Americas; just as we differ with our closest allies. There’s nothing wrong with that. But I’m here to say that when we do speak out, we’re going to do so because the United States of America does believe, and will always stand for, a certain set of universal values. And when we do partner with civil society, it’s because we believe our relationship should be with governments and with the peoples that they represent.

It’s also because we believe that your work is more important than ever. Here in the Americas, inequality still locks too many people out of our economies. Discrimination still locks too many out of our societies. Around the world, there are still too many places where laws are passed to stifle civil society, where governments cut off funding for groups that they don’t agree with. Where entrepreneurs are crushed under corruption. Where activists and journalists are locked up on trumped-up charges because they dare to be critical of their governments. Where the way you look, or how you pray, or who you love can get you imprisoned or killed.

And whether it’s crackdowns on free expression in Russia or China, or restrictions on freedom of association and assembly in Egypt, or prison camps run by the North Korean regime -- human rights and fundamental freedoms are still at risk around the world. And when that happens, we believe we have a moral obligation to speak out.

We also know that our support for civil society is not just about what we’re against, but also what we’re for. Because we’ve noticed that governments that are more responsive and effective are typically governments where the people are free to assemble, and speak their minds, and petition their leaders, and hold us accountable.

We know that our economies attract more trade and investment when citizens are free to start a new business without paying a bribe. We know that our societies are more likely to succeed when all our people -- regardless of color, or class, or creed, or sexual orientation, or gender -- are free to live and pray and love as they choose. That’s what we believe.

And, increasingly, civil society is a source of ideas -- about everything from promoting transparency and free expression, to reversing inequality and rescuing our environment. And that’s why, as part of our Stand with Civil Society Initiative, we’ve joined with people around the world to push back on those who deny your right to be heard. I’ve made it a mission of our government not only to protect civil society groups, but to partner with you and empower you with the knowledge and the technology and the resources to put your ideas into action. And the U.S. supports the efforts to establish a permanent, meaningful role for civil societies in future Summits of the Americas.

So let me just say, when the United States sees space closing for civil society, we will work to open it. When efforts are made to wall you off from the world, we’ll try to connect you with each other. When you are silenced, we’ll try to speak out alongside you. And when you’re suppressed, we want to help strengthen you. As you work for change, the United States will stand up alongside you every step of the way. We are respectful of the difference among our countries. The days in which our agenda in this hemisphere so often presumed that the United States could meddle with impunity, those days are past.

But what it does mean -- but we do have to be very clear that when we speak out on behalf of somebody who’s been imprisoned for no other reason than because they spoke truth to power, when we are helping an organization that is trying to empower a minority group inside a country to get more access to resources, we’re not doing that because it serves our own interests; we’re doing it because we think it’s the right thing to do. And that’s important.

And I hope that all the other countries at the Summit of the Americas will join us in seeing that it’s important. Because sometimes, as difficult as it is, it’s important for us to be able to speak honestly and candidly on behalf of people who are vulnerable and people who are powerless, people who are voiceless. I know, because there was a time in our own country where there were groups that were voiceless and powerless. And because of world opinion, that helped to change those circumstance. We have a debt to pay, because the voices of ordinary people have made us better. That’s a debt that I want to make sure we repay in this hemisphere and around the world.

Thank you very much, everybody.

God bless you.

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# Post Summit of Americas Press Conference

I want to begin by once again thanking President Varela and the people of Panama City and all the Panamanian people for being such excellent hosts at this Summit of the Americas. Given its strategic location -- a place where cultures and commerce of our hemisphere have long intersected -- Panama has often been called the “crossroads of the world.” And with Panama’s leadership, our nations have come together to focus on the world, on the future, and on what we can build for the one billion people of the Americas.

This has been my third Summit of the Americas and my eighth visit to Latin America. And my trip reflects, as I mentioned earlier, a new era of U.S. engagement in the region. Over the past few days we’ve advanced our engagement across the board.

In keeping with the Inter-American Democratic Charter, we continue to stand up strongly for democracy and human rights. This was the first Summit of the Americas to include a formal role for civil society. As I said at yesterday’s forum, the United States will continue to deepen our support for civil society groups across the Americas and around the world. I’m pleased that there was widespread agreement among the nations here that civil society groups have a permanent role in future summits. And the United States will support this work through the new innovation center we’re creating to empower civil society groups across Latin America.

How to promote greater opportunity for the Cuban people was also a major focus of my meeting with President Castro, the first between leaders of our two nations in more than half a century. I told President Castro in private what I’ve have said in public -- that our governments will continue to have differences and the United States will continue to stand firmly for universal values and human rights. At the same time, we agreed that we can continue to take steps forward that advance our mutual interests. We’ll continue to work toward reestablishing diplomatic relations, reopening embassies in Havana and Washington, and encouraging greater contacts and commerce and exchanges between our citizens.

I’m optimistic that we’ll continue to make progress and that this can indeed be a turning point -- not just between the United States and Cuba, but for greater cooperation among countries across the region.

Second, we continued our work to create more prosperity and opportunity for our people. At our meeting yesterday, Central American leaders reaffirmed their commitment to pursue the good governance and economic and security reforms that are needed, and I reiterated my commitment to working with Congress to secure the $1 billion I’ve proposed for our engagement with Central America. Yesterday’s deal between Boeing and Copa Airlines will support jobs in the United States, in Panama, and across the region, and I think is representative of the commercial opportunities that allow both north and southern hemispheres -- both North and South America, as well as Central America to prosper if we deepen those trade ties.

I was encouraged by the support of many leaders here for the WTO Trade Facilitation agreement, which would boost regional trade, and for the Trans-Pacific Partnership, with its high standards for trade and strong protections for workers and the environment.

Thanks to Panama’s leadership, this summit included a special focus on how countries can expand access to education. I want to thank our private sector partners who pledged to continue their support of our 100,000 Strong in the Americas initiative to encourage more exchanges between our students. The nearly $70 million in investments that I’ve announced in Jamaica will expand education and training and employment programs for young people across Latin America and the Caribbean, including in impoverished and marginalized communities. And the Young Leaders of the Americas initiative that I launched will help young entrepreneurs and civil society leaders across the entire region access the training and the resources and connections they need to start new ventures, including the small businesses that create so many jobs in the region.

Finally, we took new steps to invest in clean energy and combat climate change. The new fund I announced with our Caribbean and Central American partners will help mobilize private sector investment in clean energy projects and reduce carbon emissions across the region, and our new energy task force will identify additional steps we can take together. A number of our countries committed to doubling our collective share of non-hydro renewable energy by 2030. I reaffirmed that, through our $3 billion pledge to the Green Climate Fund, the United States will continue to help developing nations deal with the impacts of climate change. And I reiterated our commitment to ensure that all countries in the hemisphere have open access to climate data as we meet this challenge together.

So, continued progress on Cuba; new commitments to help lift up young people in the region; new partnerships to protect this beautiful land and our planet. As I said this morning, the United States is more deeply engaged across the region than we have been in decades, and I believe the relationship between the United States and the Americas is as good as it has ever been. We’re focused on the future and what we can build and achieve together. And our engagement with the countries and peoples of the Americas is going to continue throughout the remainder of my presidency.

So, with that, let me take some questions. I'll start with Jim Kuhnhenn.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Sir, you head back to the United States with the task of convincing the American people and Congress on two major foreign policy initiatives -- the framework for a nuclear deal with Iran, and likely soon, the decision to remove Cuba from a list of state sponsors of terror. Recent remarks by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini have raised doubts among some as to whether that deal can occur in Iran. And Senator Schumer, an ally of yours, has -- wants Congress to have the right to vote on removal of sanctions. Presidential politics are likely to play a part in this Cuba decision inevitably. So I’m wondering if it would take a lot of political capital just to get one done, let alone two. Have you bitten off more than you can chew?

President Obama: No. You may be surprised by that response, Jim. Let me take them in turn.

First of all, with respect to Cuba, there is majority support of our policy in the United States, and there’s overwhelming support for our policy in Cuba. I think people recognize that if you keep on doing something for 50 years and it doesn’t work, you should try something new.

And so the American people don’t need to be persuaded that this is, in fact, the right thing to do. I recognize that there are still concerns and questions that Congress may have; we’ve got concerns and questions about specific activities that are taking place in Cuba, and human rights and reform. And there were two members of the Cuban civil society that were in attendance at the meeting that I had yesterday who expressed much of what they have to go through on a day-to-day basis. They were supportive of our policy of engagement with Cuba.

And so I don’t think that it’s so much we have to persuade anybody. The issue of the State Sponsor of Terrorism list -- as you know, the State Department has provided a recommendation; it’s gone through our interagency process. I’ll be honest with you, I have been on the road, and I want to make sure that I have a chance to read it, study it, before we announce publicly what the policy outcome is going to be.

But in terms of the overall direction of Cuba policy, I think there is a strong majority both in the United States and in Cuba that says our ability to engage, to open up commerce and travel and people-to-people exchanges is ultimately going to be good for the Cuban people.

Now, with respect to Iran, I have always been clear: We are not done yet. What we were able to obtain was a political framework between the P5+1 nations and Iran that provided unprecedented verification of what is taking place in Iran over the next two decades that significantly cuts back on its centrifuges, that cuts of pathways for it to obtain a nuclear weapon, and that calls for, in return, the rolling back of sanctions in a phased way that allows us to snap back if Iran violates the agreement. That’s the political framework. That was not just something that the United States and Iran agreed to, but Iran agreed to a political framework with the other P5+1 nations.

Now, what’s always been clear is, is that Iran has its own politics around this issue. They have their own hardliners. They have their own countervailing impulses in terms of whether or not to go forward with something, just as we have in our country. And so it’s not surprising to me that the Supreme Leader or a whole bunch of other people are going to try to characterize the deal in a way that protects their political position. But I know what was discussed at -- in arriving at the political agreement.

What I’ve always said, though, is that there’s the possibility of backsliding. There’s the possibility that it doesn’t get memorialized in a way that satisfies us that we’re able to verify that, in fact, Iran is not getting a nuclear weapon, and that we are preserving the capacity to snap back sanctions in the event that they are breaking any deal.

And that’s why the work is going to be so important between now and the end of June to memorialize this so that we can all examine it. And we don’t have to speculate on what the meaning of a deal is going to be. Either there’s going to be a document that Iran agrees with the world community about and a series of actions that have to be taken, or there’s not. Part of the challenge in this whole process has been opponents of basically any deal with Iran have constantly tried to characterize what the deal is without seeing it.

Now, if we are able to obtain a final deal that comports with the political agreement -- and I say “if” because that’s not yet final -- then I’m absolutely positive that that is the best way to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon. And that’s not my opinion; that’s the opinion of people like Ernie Moniz, my Secretary of Energy, who is a physicist from MIT and actually knows something about this stuff. That’s the opinion of a whole bunch of nuclear experts who examined the deal.

Very rarely do you see a consensus -- “consensus” is too strong a word -- a large majority of people who are experts in the field saying this is actually a realistic, plausible, meaningful approach to cut off the pathways for Iran getting a nuclear weapon, and that it is more likely to succeed not only than maintaining current sanctions or additional sanctions, but more likely to succeed than if we took a military approach to solving the problem.

Again, that’s not uniquely my opinion. That is -- talk to people who are not affiliated with the administration, some of whom were skeptical about our capacity to get a deal done and have now looked at it and said if we’re able to actually get what was discussed in the political framework, it’s absolutely the right thing to do.

Now, there’s politics and political pressure inside of the United States. We all know that. The Prime Minister of Israel is deeply opposed to it. I think he’s made that very clear. I have repeatedly asked, what is the alternative that you present that you think makes it less likely for Iran to get a nuclear weapon, and I have yet to obtain a good answer on that that.

And the narrow question that’s going to be presented next week when Congress comes back is what’s Congress’s appropriate role in looking at a final deal. And I’ve talked to not only Bob Corker, but I’ve talked to Ben Cardin, the Ranking Member on the Democratic side. And I want to work with them so that Congress can look at this deal when it’s done. What I’m concerned about is making sure that we don’t prejudge it, or those who are opposed to any deal whatsoever try to use a procedural argument essentially to screw up the possibility of a deal.

Last comment I’m going to make on this. When I hear some, like Senator McCain recently, suggest that our Secretary of State, John Kerry, who served in the United States Senate, a Vietnam veteran, who’s provided exemplary service to this nation, is somehow less trustworthy in the interpretation of what’s in a political agreement than the Supreme Leader of Iran -- that’s an indication of the degree to which partisanship has crossed all boundaries. And we’re seeing this again and again. We saw it with the letter by the 47 senators who communicated directly to the Supreme Leader of Iran -- the person that they say can’t be trusted at all -- warning him not to trust the United States government.

We have Mitch McConnell trying to tell the world, oh, don’t have confidence in the U.S. government’s abilities to fulfill any climate change pledge that we might make. And now we have a senator suggesting that our Secretary of State is purposely misinterpreting the deal and giving the Supreme Leader of Iran the benefit of the doubt in the interpretations.

That’s not how we’re supposed to run foreign policy, regardless of who’s President or Secretary of State. We can have arguments, and there are legitimate arguments to be had. I understand why people might be mistrustful of Iran. I understand why people might oppose the deal -- although the reason is not because this is a bad deal per se, but they just don’t trust any deal with Iran, and may prefer to take a military approach to it.

But when you start getting to the point where you are actively communicating that the United States government and our Secretary of State is somehow spinning presentations in a negotiation with a foreign power, particularly one that you say is your enemy, that’s a problem. It needs to stop.

Jim Acosta. Oh, I’m sorry -- where’s Jim?

Question: Right here.

President Obama: There you are.

Question: Thank you very much, Mr. President. I was wondering if you were struck by Raul Castro’s warm words for you today. He said he admired you; said he had read some of your autobiographies; described you as an honest man. I’m just curious what you thought about that. And do you feel that Raul Castro is an honest man and can be trusted?

And I would be remiss if I didn’t ask you about another Secretary of State -- Hillary Clinton -- who is expected to announce her campaign for the presidency tomorrow. Do you foresee being involved in her campaign? And do you hope that she runs on your record? Thank you very much.

President Obama: It was a candid and fruitful conversation between me and Raul Castro. I can tell you that, in the conversations I’ve had so far with him -- two on the phone and, most recently, face-to-face -- that we are able to speak honestly about our differences and our concerns in ways that I think offer the possibility of moving the relationship between our two countries in a different and better direction.

We have very different views of how society should be organized. And I was very direct with him that we are not going to stop talking about issues like democracy and human rights and freedom of assembly and freedom of the press -- not because we think we are perfect and that every country has to mimic us exactly, but because there are a set of universal principles for which we stand.

And one of the goals of my administration is to have some consistency in speaking out on behalf of those who oftentimes don’t have a voice. And I think during his speech in the plenary session, he was pretty clear about areas of U.S. policy he doesn’t like, and I suspect he’s going to continue to speak out on those.

What’s been clear from this entire summit, though, is the unanimity with which, regardless of their ideological predispositions, the leaders of Latin America think this is the right thing to do. Because what they see is the possibility of a more constructive dialogue that ultimately benefits the Cuban people, and removes what too often has been a distraction or an excuse from the hemisphere acting on important challenges that we face.

So I am cautiously optimistic that over the coming months and coming years that the process that we’ve initiated, first announced in December, reaffirmed here at the Summit of the Americas, will lead to a different future for the Cuban people and a different relationship between the United States and Cuba.

With respect to Hillary Clinton, I’ll make my comments very brief. She was a formidable candidate in 2008. She was a great supporter of mine in the general election. She was an outstanding Secretary of State. She is my friend. I think she would be an excellent President. And I’m not on the ballot. So I’m not going to step on her lines. When she makes a decision to announce, I’m confident that she will be very clear about her vision for the country moving forward, if she announces.

And in terms of her relationship with my administration, she was focused and working on really important foreign policy initiatives. And the one thing I can say is that she’s going to be able to handle herself very well in any conversations or debates around foreign policy. And her track record with respect to domestic policy is I think one that cares about working families. If she decides to run and she makes an announcement, she’s going to have some strong messages to deliver.

Jim Avila.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. First of all, on Cuba, if I could, two questions. The Cuban government has frequently said that it cannot allow more political or personal freedoms, or press freedoms, because the United States has used both covert and otherwise actions to try to overthrow the Castros. Does your new era, in fact, end regime-change efforts by the United States? And should the Cubans then respond by allowing free elections and tolerance of dissent now because of the changed policy?

And secondly, on the issue of Hillary Clinton, Vice President Biden, of course, said that the Democratic race is wide open. The polls seem to say otherwise. What is your opinion on that? Is the race still wide open?

President Obama: Not only have I run my last election, but I am not in the business of prognosticating future elections. That is your job. (Laughter.) And there’s no shortage of people who are happy to opine on that. I will not be one of them.

On Cuba, we are not in the business of regime change. We are in the business of making sure the Cuban people have freedom and the ability to participate and shape their own destiny and their own lives, and supporting civil society.

And there’s going to be an evolution, regardless of what we do, inside of Cuba. Partly it's going to be generational. If you listened to President Castro’s comments earlier this morning, a lot of the points he made referenced actions that took place before I was born, and part of my message here is the Cold War is over. There’s still a whole lot of challenges that we face and a lot of issues around the world, and we're still going to have serious issues with Cuba on not just the Cuban government’s approach to its own people, but also regional issues and concerns. There are going to be areas where we cooperate as well. Cuban doctors deployed during the Ebola crisis made a difference; Cuban activity in Haiti in the wake of the earthquake made a difference. And so there may be areas of collaboration as well.

What I said to President Castro is the same thing that I've said to leaders throughout the region. We have a point of view and we won't be shy about expressing it. But I'm confident that the way to lift up the values that we care about is through persuasion. And that's going to be the primary approach that we take on a whole host of these issues -- primarily because they don't implicate our national security in a direct way.

And I think that we have to be very clear if Cuba is not a threat to the United States. That doesn’t mean we don't have differences with it. But on the list of threats that I'm concerned about, I think it's fair to say that between ISIL and Iran getting a nuclear weapon, and activities in Yemen and Libya, and Boko Haram, Russian aggression in Ukraine and the impact on our allies there -- I could go down a pretty long list -- climate change -- so I think our approach has to be one of trying to work with the region and other countries, and be very clear about what we believe and what we stand for, and what we think works and what doesn’t.

And so often, when we insert ourselves in ways that go beyond persuasion, it's counterproductive. It backfires. That's been part of our history -- which is why countries keep on trying to use us as an excuse for their own governance failures. Let’s take away the excuse. And let’s be clear that we're prepared to partner and engage with everybody to try to lift up opportunity and prosperity and security for people in the region.

Major Garrett.

Question: Good afternoon, Mr. President. Allow me, if you will, to correct -- to quote the Supreme Leader directly.

President Obama: Yes.

Question: The United States activity since the announcement of the framework has been deceptive, it is lying, it is devilish. And on two particular points, he said -- direct quotes -- “Iran’s military sites cannot be inspected under the excuse of nuclear supervision,” and “all sanctions should be removed when the deal is signed.”

Is it your opinion, Mr. President, that this is pure posturing and it should be disregarded by your government and by you and your Secretary of State? And if so, could you help me understand to whom the Supreme Leader would be posturing? Because under my limited understanding of Iranian politics, that's not a job description usually applied to the Supreme Leader.

President Obama: That was a well-crafted question, Major. And let me just suggest that even a guy with the title “Supreme Leader” has to be concerned about his own constituencies. And the issue is not whether I have to take his word for whether that's his understanding -- because we've got work until the end of June to see if we've got a document that works. And if that is his understanding and his position, in ways that can't be squared with our concern about being able to embark on vigorous inspections to assure that Iran isn't cheating under any program, and that we don't have the capacity to snap back sanctions when we see a potential violation, then we're probably not going to get a deal.

So part of the concern that I have in this debate here, Major, is I don't understand why it is that everybody is working so hard to anticipate failure. The opponents of the deal don't seem to be focused on how do we get to a good deal as much as they’re focused on how can we show that it's not possible to get a good deal. And my simple point is let’s wait and see what the deal is, and we'll be able to look. And if, in fact, we're not satisfied that it cuts off the pathways for Iran obtaining a nuclear weapon, then we won't sign it.

If, on the other hand, it does, then I will strongly argue, and I believe the American people will support and the international community will support, that it’s far preferable to the other alternatives.

Now, Major, it's not going to be perfect, in the sense that if you asked Prime Minister Netanyahu or some members of the Republican caucus, or even some Democrats. If you ask me, would I prefer that Iran never had, never did have, will never have even a single nut, bolt, anything related to nuclear power, don't have any nuclear scientists, don't have any capacity to develop it, that would be great. But that's not possible. That's not achievable. That's not achievable through sanctions; it's not achievable through military means.

They’re going to have some form of peaceful nuclear power, and that will then pose a challenge for the international community, which is why the political agreement calls for unprecedented framework of inspections that allows us to assure that it’s not being used or diverted in ways that could be weaponized.

But we’re going to have to see whether or not we can get a deal or not. My only question is why we keep on trying to short-circuit the actual negotiations. Nobody is -- we’re not disarming. We’re not getting rid of our nuclear weapons. We’re not getting rid of our Navy. We’re not giving anything up. We are simply waiting to see what it is that the negotiators come up with. And if, in fact, we are able to come up with something that works, then we’ll know.

And with respect to the Supreme Leader, yes, it’s a pretty important title. It seems a little more clear-cut than President. On the other hand, there may be ways of structuring a final deal that satisfy their pride, their optics, their politics, but meet our core practical objectives. And that’s what we’ve got to give the negotiators room to determine.

Last question. Karen DeYoung. Where’s Karen? There she is.

Question: Thank you. Just to belabor the point on that question, Mr. President, your people have said that the framework agreement, that what’s in it stands, that they are not renegotiable points, although the implementation of them can be renegotiated in some way. And I wonder how, within that framework that’s already been agreed, how we can come up with something that satisfies the kinds of concerns that he raised -- no inspection of military sites, immediate lifting of all sanctions the day that the thing is signed.

And also on Cuba, I wanted to ask, as you discussed the State Sponsor of Terrorism list with President Castro, the Cubans have raised some issues about the 45-day waiting period. I wondered if that came up. I know that your government is eager, assuming that the recommendation is approved -- is to remove it and is approved by you -- that we move ahead quickly with embassies. The Cubans have raised concerns about that 45 days and how something could go wrong in those 45 days. And it really doesn’t give them access to the kinds of things they think they can have once they’re -- if and when they’re removed from the list. Did that come up? And is it your belief that once they’re removed from the list, then there is no impediment to go ahead with opening embassies, once you approve their removal from the list?

President Obama: Okay. So I’ll make one last run at Iran here. There’s a political framework, the outlines of which were established between Iran and the P5+1. In some cases, there was great specificity around, for example, the reductions that need to take place in the number of centrifuges in Natanz, or the conversion of Fordow into a facility that does not permit the potential production of weapons-grade uranium. And in other cases, there were -- there was language of intent, but the details matter. And how those details are interpreted are going to be subject to negotiation.

So it’s not accurate to suggest that -- and I don’t think my team has ever suggested that somehow everything is all done and it’s just a matter of writing it up. This is a situation in which we have a framework that is, if implemented, powerful, and will achieve our goal of making sure that Iran doesn’t have a nuclear weapon. But the details make a big difference, how they’re structured. And I guarantee you there will be some tough negotiations around that.

And that’s what I said the first day when we announced that we had an agreement, and that’s what we’ve continued to say. So there’s really no contradiction here. And keep in mind that when we started this process off, even with the interim agreement, when we signed the JPOA way back at the beginning of this whole thing, there was a similar back-and-forth in terms of interpretation of how this was going to be implemented. And the Iranians were saying that’s not true, and we were saying this. But once we actually got through negotiations, it turned out that we had something that was substantial, that was subject to review by everybody involved, and that has proven to be highly effective, even by the assessments of critics of the policy like the Israelis. They’ve said, yes, this actually has worked, Iran has abided by the agreement. In fact, now they’re suggesting, why don’t we just stay here, it’s worked so well -- despite the fact that they had made almost the precise same argument they’re making now about the final deal. But consistency is the hobgoblin of narrow minds.

Cuba. I will tell you, we did not get into the level of detail, Karen, that you just described. And I’m impressed with how many details you seem to be aware of. As I said before, the State Sponsor of Terrorism recommendation will be coming to me. I will read it; I’ll review it. There’s a process whereby if, in fact, I accept those recommendations, Congress has an opportunity to review it, as well, and it will be there for people to see.

I think that the concerns around the embassy are going to be mostly on the Cuban side. They haven’t dealt with an American embassy in Cuba in quite some time. And changing in this way is, I’m sure, an unsettling process. We’re accustomed to this. I mean, we’ve gone through now a number of times where, with China and with Vietnam and other countries, we reopened diplomatic relations, and we understand I think, are familiar with how that gets done in a way that’s consistent with improving diplomatic relations over the long term. This is probably a more profound shift for them than it is for us.

But we stand ready to move forward. We’re confident that it can lead to an improved dialogue. And our bottom line at the end is, is that it can lead to an improved set of prospects for the Cuban people.

And I’ll say just in closing, to all the people here from Latin American countries, thank you for this extraordinary opportunity. I want to thank the people of Panama. I am very optimistic about this region, and the main reason I’m optimistic about this region is because of its people. They are extraordinary. And it is a great gift to the United States to be able to have such strong friends and partners in tackling many of the challenges that we have in common.

Thank you very much.

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# Summit of the Americas First Plenary Session Address

Let me begin by thanking President Varela and the Panamanian government for their leadership in hosting this 7th Summit of the Americas. Mr. President, to you and the people of Panama City and all the people of Panama -- thank you for your extraordinary hospitality and your outstanding arrangements.

I, too, want to express my thoughts and prayers are with the people of Chile as they’re managing through a very difficult time. And I look forward to seeing President Bachelet at a future summit.

When I came to my first Summit of the Americas six years ago, I promised to begin a new chapter of engagement in this region. I believed that our nations had to break free from the old arguments, the old grievances that had too often trapped us in the past; that we had a shared responsibility to look to the future and to think and act in fresh ways. I pledged to build a new era of cooperation between our countries, as equal partners, based on mutual interest and mutual respect. And I said that this new approach would be sustained throughout my presidency; it has, including during this past year. I’ve met that commitment.

We come together at a historic time. As has already been noted, the changes that I announced to U.S. policy toward Cuba mark the beginning of a new relationship between the people of the United States and the people of Cuba. It will mean, as we’re already seeing, more Americans traveling to Cuba, more cultural exchanges, more commerce, more potential investment. But most of all, it will mean more opportunity and resources for the Cuban people. And we hope to be able to help on humanitarian projects, and provide more access to telecommunications and the Internet, and the free flow of information.

We continue to make progress towards fulfilling our shared commitments to formally reestablish diplomatic relations, and I have called on Congress to begin working to lift the embargo that’s been in place for decades. The point is, the United States will not be imprisoned by the past. We’re looking to the future and to policies that improve the lives of the Cuban people and advance the interests of cooperation in the hemisphere.

This shift in U.S. policy represents a turning point for our entire region. The fact that President Castro and I are both sitting here today marks a historic occasion. This is the first time in more than half a century that all the nations of the Americas are meeting to address our future together. I think it’s no secret -- and President Castro, I’m sure, would agree -- that there will continue to be significant differences between our two countries. We will continue to speak out on behalf of universal values that we think are important. I’m sure President Castro will continue to speak out on the issues he thinks are important.

But I firmly believe that if we can continue to move forward and seize this momentum in pursuit of mutual interests, then better relations between the United States and Cuba will create new opportunities for cooperation across our region -- for the security and prosperity and health and dignity of all our people.

Now, alongside our shift toward Cuba, the United States has deepened our engagement in the Americas across the board. Since I took office, we’ve boosted U.S. exports and also U.S. imports from the rest of the hemisphere by over 50 percent. And that supports millions of jobs in all of our countries. I’ve proposed $1 billion to help the people of Central America strengthen governance, and improve security and help to spark more economic growth and, most importantly, provide new pathways for young people who too often see their only prospects an underground economy that too often leads to violence.

We’re partnering with countries across the region to develop clean, more affordable and reliable energy that helps nations to combat the urgent threat of climate change, as President Rousseff already noted. Our 100,000 Strong in the Americas initiative is working to bring 100,000 students from Latin America to the United States and 100,000 students from the United States to Latin America. The new initiatives that I announced in Jamaica will help empower a new generation of young people across the Americas with the skills and job training that they need to compete in the global economy.

During the course of my meetings with CARICOM, as well as my meetings with SICA, as well as the discussions that I’ve had with many of you bilaterally, there have been additional ideas that we’re very interested in -- finding ways in which we can expand access to the Internet and broadband; how we can structure private-public partnerships to rebuild infrastructure across the region; and to expand our commercial ties in a broad-based and inclusive way. Because I am firmly of the belief that we will only succeed if everybody benefits from the economic growth, not just a few at the top.

At home, I've taken executive actions to fix as much of our broken immigration system as I can, which includes trying to help people come out of the shadows so that they can live and work in a country that they call home. And that includes hundreds of thousands of young people we call DREAMers, who have already received temporary relief. And I’m remaining committed to working with our Congress on comprehensive immigration reform.

So the bottom line is this: The United States is focused on the future. We’re not caught up in ideology -- at least I’m not. I’m interested in progress and I’m interested in results. I’m not interested in theoretic arguments; I’m interested in actually delivering for people. We are more deeply engaged across the region than we have been in decades. And those of you have interacted with me know that if you bring an issue to my attention, I will do my best to try to address it. I will not always be able to fix it right away, but I will do my best.

I believe the relationship between the United States and the Americas is as good as it has ever been. I’m here today to work with you to build on this progress. Let me just mention a few areas in which I think we can make more progress.

First, we will continue to uphold the Inter-American Democratic Charter, which states that “the peoples of the Americas have a right to democracy.” I believe our governments, together, have an obligation to uphold the universal freedoms and rights of all our citizens. I want to again commend President Varela and Panama for making civil society groups from across the region formal partners in this summit for the first time. I believe the voices of our citizens must be heard. And I believe going forward, civil society should be a permanent part of these summits.

Second, we have to focus on reigniting economic growth that can fuel progress further in those communities that have not been reached. And that means making the Americas more competitive. We still have work to do to harmonize regulations; encourage good governance and transparency that attracts investment; invest in infrastructure; address some of the challenges that we have with respect to energy. The cost of energy in many communities -- in many countries, particularly in Central American and the Caribbean, are so high that it presents a great challenge to economic development, and we think that we can help particularly around clean energy issues.

We have to confront the injustice of economic inequality and poverty. I think that collectively we are starting to identify what programs work and which programs do not work. And we should put more money in those things that do work, and stop doing those things that don’t. We don’t have money to waste because of too many young people out there with enormous needs. I think President Varela is right to focus particularly on education and skills building. And this is an agenda which we should all tackle collectively.

Third, we have to keep investing in the clean energy that creates jobs and combats climate change. The United States is today leading this global effort, along with many of you. And I should point out that America's carbon pollution is near its lowest level in almost two decades. Across the Americas, I think we have the opportunity to expand our clean energy partnerships and increase our investments in renewables.

And finally, we have to stand firm for the security of our citizens. We must continue to join with our partners across the region, especially in Central America, but also in the Caribbean, to promote an approach, a holistic approach that applies rule of law, respects human rights, but also tackles the narco-traffickers that devastate so many communities. This is a shared responsibility. And I’ve said before that the United States has a responsibility to reduce the demand for drugs and to reduce the flow of weapons south, even as we partner with you to go after the networks that can cause so much violence.

So, a new relationship with Cuba. More trade and economic partnerships that reduce poverty and creates opportunity, particularly focusing on education. Increased people-to-people exchanges. More investment in our young people. Clean energy that combats climate change. Security cooperation to protect our citizens and our communities. That’s the new chapter of engagement that the United States is pursuing across the Americas.

I want to make one last comment addressing some of the points that President Correa raised and I’m sure will be raised by a few others during this discussion. I always enjoy the history lessons that I receive when I’m here. I’m a student of history, so I tend to actually be familiar with many of these episodes that have been mentioned. I am the first one to acknowledge that America’s application of concern around human rights has not always been consistent. And I’m certainly mindful that there are dark chapters in our own history in which we have not observed the principles and ideals upon which the country was founded.

Just a few weeks ago, I was in Selma, Alabama celebrating the 50th anniversary of a march across a bridge that resulted in horrific violence. And the reason I was there, and the reason it was a celebration, is because it was a triumph of human spirit in which ordinary people without resort to violence were able to overcome systematic segregation. Their voices were heard, and our country changed.

America never makes a claim about being perfect. We do make a claim about being open to change. So I would just say that we can, I suppose, spend a lot of time talking about past grievances, and I suppose that it’s possible to use the United States as a handy excuse every so often for political problems that may be occurring domestically. But that’s not going to bring progress. That’s not going to solve the problems of children who can’t read, who don’t have enough to eat. It’s not going to make our countries more productive or more competitive in a global economy.

So I just want to make very clear that when we speak out on something like human rights, it’s not because we think we are perfect, but it is because we think the ideal of not jailing people if they disagree with you is the right ideal.

Perhaps President Correa has more confidence than I do in distinguishing between bad press and good press. There are a whole bunch of press that I think is bad, mainly because it criticizes me, but they continue to speak out in the United States because I don’t have confidence in a system in which one person is making that determination. I think that if we believe in democracy it means that everybody has the chance to speak out and offer their opinions, and stand up for what they believe is right, and express their conscience, and pray as they would, and organize and assemble as they believe is appropriate -- as long as they’re not operating violently.

So we will continue to speak out on those issues not because we’re interested in meddling, but because we know from our own history. It’s precisely because we’re imperfect that we believe it’s appropriate for us to stand up. When Dr. King was in jail, people outside the United States spoke up on his behalf. And I would be betraying our history if I did not do the same.

The Cold War has been over for a long time. And I’m not interested in having battles that, frankly, started before I was born. What I am interested in is solving problems, working with you. That’s what the United States is interested in doing. That’s why we’ve invested so much in our bilateral relationships, and that’s why I will continue to invest in creating the kind of spirit of equal partnership and mutual interest and mutual respect upon which I believe progress can advance.

Thank you very much.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Drone Deaths of Warren Weinstein and Giovanni Lo Porto

This morning, I want to express our grief and condolences to the families of two hostages. One American, Dr. Warren Weinstein, and an Italian, Giovanni Lo Porto, who were tragically killed in a U.S. counterterrorism operation.

Warren and Giovanni were aid workers in Pakistan devoted to improving the lives of the Pakistani people. After Warren was abducted by al Qaeda in 2011, I directed my national security team to do everything possible to find him and to bring him home safely to his family. And dedicated professionals across our government worked tirelessly to do so. We also worked closely with our Italian allies on behalf of Giovanni, who was kidnapped in 2012.

Since 9/11, our counterterrorism efforts have prevented terrorist attacks and saved innocent lives both here in America, and around the world. And that determination to protect innocent life only makes the loss of these two men especially painful for all of us. Based on information and intelligence we have obtained, we believe that a U.S. counterterrorism operation targeting an al Qaeda compound in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region accidently killed Warren and Giovanni this past January.

Yesterday, I spoke with Warren’s wife Elaine and Prime Minister Renzi of Italy. As a husband and as a father, I cannot begin to imagine the anguish that the Weinstein and Lo Porto families are enduring today. I realize that there are no words that can ever equal their loss. I know that there is nothing that I can ever say or do to ease their heartache. And today, I simply want to say this:

As President and as Commander-in-Chief, I take full responsibility for all our counterterrorism operations, including the one that inadvertently took the lives of Warren and Giovanni. I profoundly regret what happened. On behalf of the United States government, I offer our deepest apologies to the families.

As soon as we determined the cause of their deaths, I directed that the existence of this operation be declassified and disclosed publicly. I did so because the Weinstein and Lo Porto families deserve to know the truth. And I did so because even as certain aspects of our national security efforts have to remain secret in order to succeed, the United States is a democracy committed to openness in good times and in bad.

Our initial assessment indicates that this operation was fully consistent with the guidelines under which we conduct counterterrorism efforts in the region, which has been our focus for years because it is the home of al Qaeda’s leadership. And based on the intelligence that we had obtained at the time, including hundreds of hours of surveillance, we believed that this was an al Qaeda compound; that no civilians were present; and that capturing these terrorists was not possible. And we do believe that the operation did take out dangerous members of al Qaeda. What we did not know, tragically, is that al Qaeda was hiding the presence of Warren and Giovanni in this same compound.

It is a cruel and bitter truth that in the fog of war generally and our fight against terrorists specifically, mistakes -- sometimes deadly mistakes -- can occur. But one of the things that sets America apart from many other nations, one of the things that makes us exceptional is our willingness to confront squarely our imperfections and to learn from our mistakes.

Already, I have directed a full review of what happened. We will identify the lessons that can be learned from this tragedy, and any changes that should be made. We will do our utmost to ensure it is not repeated. And we will continue to do everything we can to prevent the loss of innocent lives -- not just innocent Americans, but all innocent lives in our counterterrorism operations.

Today we join their families and friends in honoring Warren and Giovanni -- two humanitarians who came from different countries but who were united by a spirit of service. For decades, Warren lived the ideals of our country, serving with the Peace Corps and later with the United States Agency for International Development. He devoted his life to people across Africa and South Asia. He was a loving husband, father and grandfather who willingly left the comforts of home to help the people of Pakistan. At the time of his abduction, he was a USAID contractor focused on helping Pakistani families escape poverty and give a better life to their children.

Giovanni’s humanitarianism also took him around the world to the Central African Republic, to Haiti and ultimately Pakistan. Like Warren, he fell in love with Pakistan and its people, and believed passionately that he could made a difference in their lives. Giovanni’s service reflected the commitment of the Italian people, our great allies and friends, to the security and dignity of people around the world. And today is a reminder of the bonds of friendship between our countries and the shared values that bind Americans and Italians together.

There could be no starker contrast between these two selfless men and their al Qaeda captors. Warren’s work benefited people across faiths. Meanwhile, al Qaeda boasted to the world that it held Warren, citing his Jewish faith. Al Qaeda held both men for years, even as Warren’s health deteriorated. They deprived these men of precious, irreplaceable years with family who missed them terribly.

Amid grief that is unimaginable, I pray that these two families will find some small measure of solace in knowing that Warren and Giovanni’s legacy will endure. Their service will be remembered by the Pakistani men, women and children whose lives they touched and made better. Their spirit will live on in the love of their families, who are in our thoughts and prayers today, especially Warren’s wife Elaine, their daughters Alisa and Jennifer, and their families.

And the shining example of these two men will stand as a light to people the world over who see suffering and answer with compassion, who see hatred and offer their love, who see war and work for peace.

May God bless these two brave men, and may He watch over and comfort their families for all the years to come.

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# White House Correspondents' Dinner Address 2015

Good evening, everybody. Welcome to the White House Correspondents Dinner -- the night when Washington celebrates itself. Somebody's got to do it.

And welcome to the fourth quarter of my presidency. It's true -- that was Michelle cheering. The fact is, I feel more loose and relaxed than ever. Those Joe Biden shoulder massages, they're like magic. You should try one. Oh, you have.

I am determined to make the most of every moment I have left. After the midterm elections, my advisors asked me, "Mr. President, do you have a bucket list?" And I said, "Well, I have something that rhymes with bucket list.'"

Take executive action on immigration? Bucket. New climate regulations? Bucket. It's the right thing to do.

And my new attitude is paying off. Look at my Cuba policy. The Castro brothers are here tonight. Welcome to America, amigos! Que pasa? What? It's the Castros from Texas? Oh. Hi Joaquin. Hi Julian.

Anyway, being President is never easy. I still have to fix a broken immigration system, issue veto threats, negotiate with Iran -- all while finding time to pray five times a day. Which is strenuous.

And it is no wonder that people keep pointing out how the presidency has aged me. I look so old, John Boehner has already invited Netanyahu to speak at my funeral.

Meanwhile, Michelle hasn't aged a day. I ask her what her secret is, she just says "fresh fruits and vegetables." It's aggravating.

The fact is, though, at this point, my legacy is finally beginning to take shape. The economy is getting better. Nine in ten Americans now have health coverage. Today, thanks to Obamacare, you no longer have to worry about losing your insurance if you lose your job. You're welcome, Senate Democrats.

Now, look, it is true I have not managed to make everybody happy. Six years into my presidency, some people still say I'm arrogant and aloof, condescending. Some people are so dumb. No wonder I don't meet with them.

And that's not all people say about me. A few weeks ago, Dick Cheney says he thinks I'm the worst President of his lifetime. Which is interesting, because I think Dick Cheney is the worst President of my lifetime. It's quite a coincidence.

I mean, everybody has got something to say these days. Mike Huckabee recently said people shouldn't join our military until a true conservative is elected President. Think about that. It was so outrageous, 47 Ayatollahs wrote us a letter trying to explain to Huckabee how our system works.

It gets worse. Just this week, Michele Bachmann actually predicted that I would bring about the biblical end of days. Now that's a legacy! That's big. I mean, Lincoln, Washington -- they didn't do that.

But I just have to put this stuff aside, I've got to stay focused on my job, because for many Americans, this is still a time of deep uncertainty. For example, I have one friend -- just a few weeks ago, she was making millions of dollars a year. And she's now living out of a van in Iowa.

Meanwhile, back here in our nation's capital, we're always dealing with new challenges. I'm happy to report that the Secret Service, thanks to some excellent reporting by White House correspondents, they're really focusing on some of the issues that have come up. And they finally figured out a full-proof way to keep people off my lawn.

It works. And it's not just fence-jumpers. As some of you know, a few months ago, a drone crash-landed out back. That was pretty serious, but don't worry, we've installed a new, state-of-the-art security system.

You know what, let me set the record straight. I tease Joe sometimes, but he has been at my side for seven years now. I love that man. He's not just a great Vice President, he is a great friend. We've gotten so close, in some places in Indiana, they won't serve us pizza anymore.

I want to thank our host for the evening, a Chicago girl, the incredibly talented Cecily Strong. On "Saturday Night Live," Cecily impersonates CNN anchor Brooke Baldwin. Which is surprising, because usually the only people impersonating journalists on CNN are journalists on CNN.

ABC is here with some of the stars from their big new comedy, "Black-ish. "It's a great show, but I have to give ABC fair warning -- being "Black-ish" only makes you popular for so long. Trust me. There's a shelf life to that thing.

As always, the reporters here had a lot to cover over the last year. Here on the East Coast, one big story was the brutal winter. The polar vortex caused so many record lows, they renamed it "MSNBC."

But of course, let's face it, there is one issue on every reporter's mind and that is 2016. Already, we've seen some missteps. It turns out Jeb Bush identified himself as "Hispanic" back in 2009. Which you know what, look, I understand. It's an innocent mistake. Reminds me of when I identified myself as "American" back in 1961.

Ted Cruz said that denying the existence of climate change made him like Galileo. Now that's not really an apt comparison. Galileo believed the Earth revolves around the sun. Ted Cruz believes the Earth revolves around Ted Cruz. And just as an aside, I want to point out, when a guy who has his face on a "Hope" poster calls you self-centered, you know you've got a problem. The narcissism index is creeping up a little too high.

Meanwhile, Rick Santorum announced that he would not attend the same-sex wedding of a friend or a loved one. To which gays and lesbians across the country responded, that's not going to be a problem. Don't sweat that one.

And Donald Trump is here. Still.

Anyway. It's amazing how time flies. Soon, the first presidential contest will take place. And I for one cannot wait to see who the Koch brothers pick.

It's exciting. Marco Rubio, Rand Paul, Ted Cruz, Jeb Bush, Scott Walker. Who will finally get that red rose? The winner gets a billion-dollar war chest. The runner up gets to be the bachelor on the next season of "The Bachelor. "I mean, seriously, a billion dollars. From just two guys. Is it just me, or does that feel a little excessive? I mean, it's almost insulting to the candidates. The Koch brothers think they need to spend a billion dollars to get folks to like one of these people. It's got to hurt their feelings a little bit.

And, look, I know I've raised a lot of money too. But in all fairness, my middle name is "Hussein. "What's their excuse?

The trail hasn't been easy for my fellow Democrats either. As we all know, Hillary's private emails got her in trouble. Frankly, I thought it was going to be her private Instagram account that was going to cause her bigger problems.

Hillary kicked things off by going completely unrecognized at a Chipotle. Not to be outdone, Martin O'Malley kicked things off by going completely unrecognized at a Martin O'Malley campaign event.

And Bernie Sanders might run. I like Bernie. Bernie is an interesting guy. Apparently some folks really want to see a pot-smoking socialist in the White House. We could get a third Obama term after all. It could happen.

Anyway, as always, I want to close on a more serious note. I often joke about tensions between me and the press, but honestly, what they say doesn't bother me. I understand we've got an adversarial system. I'm a mellow sort of guy.

And that's why I invited Luther, my anger translator, to join me here tonight.

[Enter Luther]

Luther: Hold on to your lily-white butts.

President Obama: In our fast-changing world, traditions like the White House Correspondents' Dinner are important.

Luther: I mean, really, what is this dinner? And why am I required to come to it? Jeb Bush, do you really want to do this?

President Obama: Because despite our differences, we count on the press to shed light on the most important issues of the day.

Luther: And we can count on Fox News to terrify old white people with some nonsense!" Sharia law is coming to Cleveland. Run for the damn hills! "Y'all, it's ridiculous.

President Obama: We won't always see eye to eye.

Luther: Oh, and CNN, thank you so much for the wall-to-wall Ebola coverage. For two whole weeks, we were one step away from the Walking Dead. And then you all got up and just moved on to the next day. That was awesome. Oh, and by the way, just if you haven't noticed, you don't have Ebola!

President Obama: But I still deeply appreciate the work that you do.

Luther: Ya'll remember when I had that big, old hole in the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico and then I plugged it? Remember that? Which "Obama's Katrina" was that one? Was that 19? Or was it 20? Because I can't remember.

President Obama: Protecting our democracy is more important than ever. For example, the Supreme Court ruled that the donor who gave Ted Cruz 6 million dollars was just exercising free speech.

Luther: Yeah, that's the kind of speech like this, "I just wasted six million dollars."

President Obama: And it's not just Republicans. Hillary will have to rage [raise] huge sums of money, too.

Luther: Oh, yes. She's going to get that money. She's going to get all the money. Khaleesi is coming to Westeros. So watch out!

President Obama: The nonstop focus on billionaire donors creates real problems for our democracy.

Luther: And that's why we're running for a third term!

President Obama: No, we're not.

Luther: We're not?

President Obama: No.

Luther: Who the hell said that?

President Obama: But we do need to stay focused on some big challenges, like climate change.

Luther: Hey, listen, ya'll, if you haven't noticed, California is bone dry. It looks like a trailer for the new "Mad Max" movie up in there. Ya'll think that Bradley Cooper came here because he wants to talk to Chuck Todd? He needed a glass of water. Come on!

President Obama: The science is clear. Nine of the ten hottest years ever came in the last decade.

Luther: Now, I'm not a scientist, but I do know how to count to 10.

President Obama: Rising seas, more violent storms.

Luther: We've got mosquitoes. Sweaty people on the train, stinking it up. It's just nasty.

President Obama: I mean, look at what's happening right now. Every serious scientist says we need to act. The Pentagon says it's a national security risk. Miami floods on a sunny day, and instead of doing anything about it, we've got elected officials throwing snowballs in the Senate!

Luther: Okay, Mr. President. Okay, I think they've got it, bro.

President Obama: It is crazy! What about our kids? What kind of stupid, shortsighted, irresponsible bull --

Luther: Wow! Hey!

President Obama: What?!

Luther: All due respect, sir. You don't need an anger translator. You need counseling. So I'm out of here, man. I ain't trying to get into all this.

President Obama: Go.

Luther: He crazy.

President Obama: Luther, my anger translator, ladies and gentlemen.

Now that I got that off my chest. Investigative journalism; explanatory journalism; journalism that exposes corruption and injustice and gives a voice to the different, the marginalized, the voiceless -- that's power. It's a privilege. It's as important to America's trajectory -- to our values, our ideals -- than anything that we could do in elected office.

We remember journalists we lost over the past year -- journalists like Steven Sotloff and James Foley, murdered for nothing more than trying to shine a light into some of the world's darkest corners. We remember the journalists unjustly imprisoned around the world, including our own Jason Rezaian. For nine months, Jason has been imprisoned in Tehran for nothing more than writing about the hopes and the fears of the Iranian people, carrying their stories to the readers of the Washington Post in an effort to bridge our common humanity. As was already mentioned, Jason's brother, Ali, is here tonight and I have told him personally we will not rest until we bring him home to his family, safe and sound.

These journalists and so many others view their work as more than just a profession, but as a public good; an indispensable pillar of our society. So I want to give a toast to them. I raise a glass to them and all of you, with the words of the American foreign correspondent Dorothy Thompson: "It is not the fact of liberty, but the way in which liberty is exercised, that ultimately determines whether liberty itself survives."

Thank you for your devotion to exercising our liberty, and to telling our American story.

God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Trans-Pacific Trade Pact Address at Nike Headquarters

Hello, Oregon! Well, who arranged this day? Every time I come to Oregon this is what it looks like. Yeah! It never rains in Oregon, does it?

Audience: No!

President Obama: Never.

Audience Member: Don't come to California.

President Obama: All right. Well, listen, it is wonderful to see all of you. First of all, please give Mark another round of applause for his hospitality. And thanks to everyone at Nike for hosting us today, here in “Federer Platz.” You know, the White House is cool. We’ve got a basketball court -- actually, it's a tennis court that we repainted some lines -- when I came into office. So it's a combination basketball-tennis court. There is a putting green that President Eisenhower put in. Can you imagine, by the way, if I had put in a putting green? Things have changed.

But you’ve got all that and the 18th tee box from Pebble Beach. Come on. I’m sure some of my staff is running around right now in the Michael Jordan and Mia Hamm buildings -- they want to be lab rats for your new gear.

But it is wonderful to be here. Please give it up for two people who fight every single day for Oregon workers -- your Representatives in Congress -- they do a great job -- Earl Blumenauer and Suzanne Bonamici. They are both here. Give them a big round of applause. Yay! And there are two people who couldn't make it here today, but they’re doing a great job and you should give them a round of applause as well, and that's Senator Ron Wyden and Representative Kurt Schrader.

So it is great to be at the world headquarters of such an iconic company -- a company that helps athletes succeed from the individual to the world stage. And as you’ve heard, I’ve come to Oregon to talk a little bit about trade -- which initially may have had some people thinking, what, is Mariota going someplace that we didn’t know about? He’s going to be great. He’s an outstanding young man. He’s going to be terrific -- and from Hawaii, by the way. Local boy.

But this is important, and I want to tell you why I think trade deals and our willingness to go out there and compete on the global stage is so important.

Before I came out here, I had a chance to meet with some small business owners from across Oregon, whose workers make everything from bikes to tea to stationery to wine. And they know how important this is to them. Sometimes when we talk about trade, we think of Nike, or we think of Boeing, or we think of G.E. -- we think about these big multinational companies. But those small business leaders came here today because they understood that these markets outside the United States will help them grow, and will help them hire more folks -- just as all the suppliers to Nike or Boeing or G.E. or any of these other companies understand this is going to be critical to their growth and their ability to create new jobs.

In fact, that’s why Ron Wyden is not here -- because he’s in Washington, D.C. as we speak quarterbacking this effort on behalf of Oregon’s small business owners and workers.

Now, small businesses are the backbone of our economy. Eventually, like Nike, they grow sometimes into really, really big companies. They employ millions of people; 98 percent of exporters are small businesses. They’re the ones who make Made in Oregon and Made in the USA mean something. And they represent something essential about this country -- the notion that if you’ve got a good idea and you’re willing to work at it, you can turn that idea into a business, you can growth that business, and eventually, who knows what might happen. You can give other people a chance to earn a living even as you do well. That’s America’s promise. And it’s up to us to keep that promise alive.

Now, that promise was threatened for almost everybody just about seven years ago, when the economy nearly collapsed, and millions of Americans lost their jobs and their homes and their life savings. But thanks to the hard work of the American people and entrepreneurs like the ones who are here today -- and some pretty good policies from my Administration -- we’re in a different place today. We're in a different place today.

This morning, we learned that our economy created 223,000 new jobs last month. The unemployment rate ticked down again to 5.4 percent -- which is the lowest it’s been in almost seven years. That’s 3 million new jobs over the past 12 months -- nearly the fastest pace in over a decade. And all told, over the past 62 months in a row, America’s businesses have created 12.3 million new jobs.

I should add, by the way, 62 months ago is when I signed the Affordable Care Act. So, obviously, it hasn’t done too bad in terms of employment in this country. I just thought I’d mention that. Since there were a lot of predictions of doom and gloom, I would just suggest those who were making those predictions go back and check the statistics. Just saying.

So small businesses deserve a lot of credit for that. In fact, over the past several years, small businesses have created nearly two out of every three new American jobs. And the question is, how do we build on that success? We’ve got to be relentless in our efforts to support small businesses who are creating jobs and helping to grow the economy.

And that’s been the purpose behind many of the policies I’ve fought for as President. I’ve cut taxes for small businesses more than a dozen times. I’ve pushed for investments in infrastructure and faster Internet. It’s why we’ve made health care more accessible, affordable, portable -- to give people the freedom to change jobs or launch that startup without worrying about losing their health insurance.

And passing trade agreements is part of that agenda if those trade agreements are the right kinds of trade agreements; if they make sure that they’re growing our businesses, and helping American workers by selling goods Made in America across the rest of the world.

And I’ve been talking a lot about this lately, because I view smart trade agreements as a vital piece of middle-class economics. Not a contradiction to middle-class economics, it’s a part and parcel of it.

I believe that our country does best when everyone gets a fair shot, everyone does their fair share, everybody plays by the same set of rules. And that means making sure everybody has got a good education. It means making sure that women are getting paid the same as men for doing the same work. It means making sure that folks have to have sick leave and family leave and that they can balance work and family in a fair way. It means, working to increase the minimum wage all across this country -- because folks who have some of the toughest jobs oftentimes get the lowest pay.

That’s all part of middle-class economics, but, you know what, so is trade. We strive to make sure our own economy lives up to high standards, but in a lot of parts of the world, the rules are unfair. The playing field is uneven. That puts American businesses and American workers at a disadvantage. So the question is, what should we do about it?

Some folks think we should just withdraw and not even try to engage in trade with these countries. I disagree. We have to make sure America writes the rules of the global economy. And we should do it today, while our economy is in the position of global strength. Because if we don’t write the rules for trade around the world -- guess what -- China will. And they’ll write those rules in a way that gives Chinese workers and Chinese businesses the upper hand, and locks American-made goods out.

That’s the choice we face. We're not going to be able to isolate ourselves from world markets. We got to be in there and compete. And the question is, are we going to make sure that the rules are fair so that our businesses and our workers are on a level playing field. Because when they are, we win every time. When the rules are fair, we win every time.

So this is why I’m such a strong supporter of new trade agreements. They're going to help our workers compete and our businesses compete. This is not a left issue or a right issue, or a business or a labor issue. It is about fairness and equity and access. And like other issues that we’ve waged slow, steady fights on over the last seven years, this is also a question of the past versus the future.

So the Trans-Pacific Partnership that we’re working on, it’s the biggest trade deal that we're working on right now -- has to do with the Asia Pacific region. And it reflects our values in ways that, frankly, some previous trade agreements did not. It’s the highest-standard, most progressive trade deal in history. It’s got strong, enforceable provisions for workers, preventing things like child labor. It’s got strong, enforceable provisions on the environment, helping us to do things that haven’t been done before, to prevent wildlife trafficking, or deforestation, or dealing with our oceans. And these are enforceable in the agreement.

And Nike operates in the Pacific region, so they understand the competitive pressures they're under. Nike has factories all around the world. And let’s face it, Mark I think doesn't mind me saying it that some of these countries, they don't have the standards for wages and labor conditions that we have here.

So when you look at a country like Vietnam, under this agreement, Vietnam would actually, for the first time, have to raise its labor standards. It would have to set a minimum wage. It would have to pass safe workplace laws to protect its workers. It would even have to protect workers’ freedom to form unions -- for the very first time. That would make a difference. That helps to level the playing field -- and it would be good for the workers in Vietnam, even as it helps make sure that they’re not undercutting competition here in the United States.

So that’s progress. It doesn’t mean that suddenly working conditions in Vietnam will be like they are here at Nike. Or here in Portland right away. But it moves us in the right direction.

And if Vietnam, or any of the other countries in this trade agreement don’t meet these requirements, they’ll face meaningful consequences. If you’re a country that wants in to this agreement, you have to meet higher standards. If you don’t, you’re out. If you break the rules, there are actual repercussions. And that’s good for American businesses and American workers, because we already meet higher standards than most of the rest of the world, and that helps level the playing field.

And this deal would strengthen our hand overseas by giving us the tools to open other markets to our goods and services and make sure they play by the fair rules we help write. The truth is, we have one of the most open markets in the world. Folks are already selling stuff here. We got to be able to sell there. That requires us to enter into trade agreements to open up their markets.

I hear Oregon wine is actually pretty good. Somebody told me that the pinot noir in Oregon is top-notch, right? I’ve got some winemakers right here. Well, I want to make sure Japanese wine consumers have the opportunity to partake -- in our excellent Oregon wine.

We got some Oregon beef producers and ranchers around here. Beef is really expensive in Japan. Let’s make sure they try some Oregon steaks. It’s good stuff.

And that’s one of the best things that can happen for our businesses and our workers -- opening up markets that have previously been closed, particularly markets where they’re already selling stuff here. There’s a lack of reciprocity. It’s not a fair deal right now. We want to make it fair.

Now, I want to acknowledge -- because this looks like a very well-read and informed crowd -- that there have been a bunch of critics about trade deals generally and the Trans-Pacific Partnership. And what’s interesting is typically they’re my friends, coming from my party, and they’re my fellow travelers on minimum wage and on job training and on clean energy. On every progressive issue, they’re right there with me. And then on this one, they’re like whooping on me.

But I tell you what. I’ve run my last election, and the only reason I do something is because I think it’s good for American workers and the American people and the American economy. I don’t have any other rationale for doing what I do than I think it’s the best thing for the American people. And on this issue, on trade, I actually think some of my dearest friends are wrong. They’re just wrong. And here’s why.

First of all, they say that this trade agreement will cost American jobs. And they’re really basing this on some past experience, looking at what happened in the ‘90s, over the last 20 years, as there was a lot of outsourcing going on. And you know what, past trade agreements, it’s true, didn’t always reflect our values or didn’t always do enough to protect American workers. But that’s why we’re designing a different kind of trade deal.

And the truth is that companies that only care about low wages, they’ve already moved. They don’t need new trade deals to move. They’ve already outsourced. They’ve already located in search of low wages.

What this trade agreement would do is open the doors to the higher-skill, higher-wage jobs of the future -- jobs that we excel at. It would make sure our manufacturers who are operating at the higher end of the value chain are able to access these growing markets. And the fact is, over the past few years, our manufacturers have been steadily creating jobs for the first time since the 1990s -- under my Administration. After more than a decade away from the top spot, business leaders around the world have declared the United States is the world’s number one place to invest for a third year in a row. Third year in a row.

So the point is, outsourcing is already giving way to insourcing. Companies are starting to move back here to do more advanced manufacturing, and this is a trend we expect to continue. This trade deal would help that.

Just this morning, as Mark may have mentioned, Nike announced that, with the Trans-Pacific Partnership, it will make new investments in advanced manufacturing -- not overseas, but right here in the United States. And far more Nike products would be made in the U.S.A. And that means thousands of new jobs in manufacturing and engineering and design at Nike facilities across the country, and potentially tens of thousands of new jobs along Nike’s supply chain here at home. That’s what trade can do.

Look, I’ve spent six and a half years trying to rescue this economy -- six and a half years of trying to revitalize American manufacturing, including rescuing an American auto industry that was on its back and is now fully recovered. So I would not risk any of that if I thought the trade deals were going to undermine it. The reason I’m for this is because I think it will enhance it and advance it. So that’s point number one.

Point number two -- when you ask folks specifically, what do you oppose about this trade deal, they just say “NAFTA.” NAFTA was passed 20 years ago. That was a different agreement. And in fact, this agreement fixes some of what was wrong with NAFTA by making labor and environmental provisions actually enforceable. I was just getting out of law school when NAFTA got passed.

Number three -- you’ve got some critics saying that any deal would be rushed through; it’s a secret deal, people don’t know what’s in it. This is not true. Any agreement that we finalize with the other 11 countries will have to be posted online for at least 60 days before I even sign it. Then it would go to Congress -- and you know they’re not going to do anything fast. So there will be months of review. Every T crossed, every I dotted. Everybody is going to be able to see exactly what’s in it.

There’s nothing fast-track about this. This is a very deliberate track -- which will be fully subject to scrutiny. And I’m confident when people read the agreement for themselves, they’ll see that this is the most progressive trade deal in history.

Number four -- critics warn that parts of this deal would undermine American regulation -- food safety, worker safety, even financial regulations. They’re making this stuff up. This is just not true. No trade agreement is going to force us to change our laws. This agreement would make sure our companies aren’t discriminated against in other countries.

We already treat companies from other countries fairly here. But our companies don’t always get treated fairly there. So sometimes they need to have some way to settle disputes where it’s not subject to the whims of some government bureaucrat in that country. That’s important. We want our businesses to succeed in selling over there because that's how our workers will get more jobs here in the United States.

And then finally, some critics talk about currency manipulation. Now, this has been a problem in the past. Some countries, they try to lower their currency so that it makes their goods cheaper, makes our more expensive. There was a time when China was pretty egregious about this. When I came into office, I started pounding on them. Every time I meet with them, I’d be talking about currency. And we pushed back hard, and China moved. In real terms, their currency has appreciated about 30 percent since I came into office. And we're going to keep on going after it. But that’s not an argument against this trade agreement. If we give up the chance to help our businesses sell their stuff in the world’s fastest-growing markets, that doesn't do anything to stop currency manipulation.

So the fact is, some folks are just opposed to trade deals out of principle, a reflexive principle. And what I tell them is, you know what, if you're opposed to these smart, progressive trade deals, then that means you must be satisfied with the status quo. And the status quo hasn’t been working for our workers. It hasn’t been working for our businesses. And there are people here who will tell you why.

I’m going to just give you a couple of examples of small businesses who I had a chance to meet with today. Egg Press is a Portland-based greeting card company. Really nice. They sell their cards in Australia, which is a member of this Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement. Their CEO, Tess Darrow -- where’s Tess? Raise your hand. I saw her. There she is. So Tess says that if they could more easily reach customers in Japan, as well, they’d sell half the volume that they do here in America. That’s a lot.

Right now, the logistics of exporting to Japan are too complicated. Products end up being held up for months at the border. This agreement would help solve some of those problems so Tess can sell more greeting cards in Japan -- presumably in Japanese. Is there going to be -- there will be a translation process, I assume. Yes, absolutely. I’m teasing.

So the trade deal would help eliminate barriers, and simplify customs, and hold countries accountable for getting products delivered swiftly. The more Tess sells, the more she can grow, the more she can hire here in Oregon, here in the United States.

Oregon Fruit Products -- makes canned fruits, berries, other products -- depends on exports for 20 percent of its annual sales. Right now, it exports to four members of this partnership that we're putting together: Japan, Australia, Singapore, and Canada. Unfortunately, selling in these countries right now can mean dealing with unfair rules designed to prevent our products from being offered in their markets. Under this agreement, that would change. Exporting becomes simpler, more consistent. That means more people around the world eating Oregon berries all year long. Berry tasty.

Sokol Blosser Winery -- we got a lot of drinkers here. It’s a winery, family-run in Dayton, Oregon. One of its top export markets is Japan. Right now, there are high tariffs on American wine in that country. Under this trade partnership, those tariffs would be eliminated, and wineries across America could see their sales grow overseas. The brother --and-sister team that runs this vineyard -- wave, guys -- they say, “If we can make it easier to do business with countries that are already our trading partners, countries that are allies, that’s a good thing.”

They’re right. This deal would be a good thing. So let’s “just do it.” It took a while for you to catch that, didn’t it? I thought that was pretty obvious.

So, listen, I know a lot of folks who are skeptical about trade. Past trade deals didn’t always live up to the hype. Labor and environmental protections weren’t always strong enough. I saw for years, in Chicago and towns across Illinois, manufacturing collapsing, jobs drying up. Outsourcing is real. Folks didn’t just make that up. Some of our manufacturing base shifted over the last 25 years, and it wasn’t good for manufacturing and it wasn’t good for those communities, and it wasn’t good for workers. That’s the truth. It had benefits -- other jobs were created, we got cheaper goods. But there was real displacement and real pain. And so, for many Americans, this is not an abstraction; this is real.

But we’ve got to learn the right lessons from that. The lesson is not that we pull up the drawbridge and build a moat around ourselves. The lesson is, is that we’ve got to make sure that the trade deals that we do shape are ones that allow us to compete fairly.

So when I took office, I decided we could rethink the way we do trade in a way that actually works for working Americans. I didn’t think this was the right thing to do just for companies. If I didn’t think this was the right thing to do for working families, I would not be fighting for it. If any agreement undercuts working families, I won’t sign it. I ran for office to expand opportunity for everybody -- the all-American idea that no matter who you are, or where you come from, or how you started out, or who you love, in America you can make it if you try.

So, yes, we should be mindful of the past, but we can’t ignore the realities of the new economy. We can’t stand on the beaches and stop the global economy at our shores. We’ve got to harness it on our terms. This century is built for us. It’s about innovation. It’s about dynamism and flexibility and entrepreneurship, and information and knowledge and science and research. That’s us. So we can’t be afraid of it; we’ve got to seize it. We’ve got to give every single American who wakes up, sends their kids to school, rolls up their sleeves, punches in every day the chance to do what they do best: dream up, innovate, build, sell the best products and ideas in the world to every corner of the world.

Because, Nike, we do not just have the best athletes in the world. We also have the best workers in the world. We also have the best businesses in the world. And when the playing field is level, nobody beats the United States of America. Nobody beats the United States of America.

Just do it, everybody. Thank you. God bless you.

Thank you, Oregon. Thank you.

God bless America.

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# Jewish American Heritage Month Address

Well, good morning, everybody!

Audience: Good morning!

President Obama:

A slightly early Shabbat Shalom. I want to thank Rabbi Steinlauf for the very kind introduction. And to all the members of the congregation, thank you so much for such an extraordinary and warm welcome.

I want to thank a couple of outstanding members of Congress who are here. Senator Michael Bennet -- where did Michael Bennet go? There he is. And Representative Sandy Levin, who is here. I want to thank our special envoy to combat anti-Semitism, Ira Forman, for his important work. There he is. But as I said, most of all I want to thank the entire congregation of Adas Israel for having me here today.

Earlier this week, I was actually interviewed by one of your members, Jeff Goldberg. And Jeff reminded me that he once called me “the first Jewish President.” Now, since some people still seem to be wondering about my faith -- I should make clear this was an honorary title. But I was flattered.

And as an honorary member of the tribe, not to mention somebody who’s hosted seven White House Seders and been advised by -- and been advised by two Jewish chiefs of staff, I can also proudly say that I’m getting a little bit of the hang of the lingo. But I will not use any of the Yiddish-isms that Rahm Emanuel taught me because -- I want to be invited back. Let’s just say he had some creative new synonyms for “Shalom.”

Now, I wanted to come here to celebrate Jewish American Heritage Month because this congregation, like so many around the country, helps us to tell the American story. And back in 1876, when President Grant helped dedicate Adas Israel, he became the first sitting President in history to attend a synagogue service. And at the time, it was an extraordinarily symbolic gesture -- not just for America, but for the world.

And think about the landscape of Jewish history. Tomorrow night, the holiday of Shavuot marks the moment that Moses received the Torah at Mount Sinai, the first link in a chain of tradition that stretches back thousands of years, and a foundation stone for our civilization. Yet for most of those years, Jews were persecuted -- not embraced -- by those in power. Many of your ancestors came here fleeing that persecution. The United States could have been merely another destination in that ongoing Diaspora. But those who came here found that America was more than just a country. America was an idea. America stood for something. As George Washington wrote to the Jews of Newport, Rhode Island: The United States “gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance.”

It’s important for us to acknowledge that too often in our history we fell short of those lofty ideals -- in the legal subjugation of African Americans, through slavery and Jim Crow; the treatment of Native Americans. And far too often, American Jews faced the scourge of anti-Semitism here at home. But our founding documents gave us a North Star, our Bill of Rights; our system of government gave us a capacity for change. And where other nations actively and legally might persecute or discriminate against those of different faiths, this nation was called upon to see all of us as equal before the eyes of the law. When other countries treated their own citizens as “wretched refuse,” we lifted up our lamp beside the golden door and welcomed them in. Our country is immeasurably stronger because we did.

From Einstein to Brandeis, from Jonas Salk to Betty Friedan, American Jews have made contributions to this country that have shaped it in every aspect. And as a community, American Jews have helped make our union more perfect. The story of Exodus inspired oppressed people around the world in their own struggles for civil rights. From the founding members of the NAACP to a freedom summer in Mississippi, from women’s rights to gay rights to workers' rights, Jews took the heart of Biblical edict that we must not oppress a stranger, having been strangers once ourselves.

Earlier this year, when we marked the 50th anniversary of the march in Selma, we remembered the iconic images of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel marching with Dr. King, praying with his feet. To some, it must have seemed strange that a rabbi from Warsaw would take such great risks to stand with a Baptist preacher from Atlanta. But Heschel explained that their cause was one and the same. In his essay, “No Religion is an Island,” he wrote, “We must choose between interfaith and inter-nihilism.” Between a shared hope that says together we can shape a brighter future, or a shared cynicism that says our world is simply beyond repair.

So the heritage we celebrate this month is a testament to the power of hope. Me standing here before you, all of you in this incredible congregation is a testament to the power of hope. It’s a rebuke to cynicism. It’s a rebuke to nihilism. And it inspires us to have faith that our future, like our past, will be shaped by the values that we share. At home, those values compel us to work to keep alive the American Dream of opportunity for all. It means that we care about issues that affect all children, not just our own; that we’re prepared to invest in early childhood education; that we are concerned about making college affordable; that we want to create communities where if you’re willing to work hard, you can get ahead the way so many who fled and arrived on these shores were able to get ahead. Around the world, those values compel us to redouble our efforts to protect our planet and to protect the human rights of all who share this planet.

It’s particularly important to remember now, given the tumult that is taking place in so many corners of the globe, in one of the world’s most dangerous neighborhoods, those shared values compel us to reaffirm that our enduring friendship with the people of Israel and our unbreakable bonds with the state of Israel -- that those bonds, that friendship cannot be broken. Those values compel us to say that our commitment to Israel’s security -- and my commitment to Israel’s security -- is and always will be unshakeable.

And I’ve said this before: It would be a moral failing on the part of the U.S. government and the American people, it would be a moral failing on my part if we did not stand up firmly, steadfastly not just on behalf of Israel’s right to exist, but its right to thrive and prosper. Because it would ignore the history that brought the state of Israel about. It would ignore the struggle that’s taken place through millennia to try to affirm the kinds of values that say everybody has a place, everybody has rights, everybody is a child of God.

As many of you know, I’ve visited the houses hit by rocket fire in Sderot. I’ve been to Yad Vashem and made that solemn vow: “Never forget. Never again.” When someone threatens Israel’s citizens or its very right to exist, Israelis necessarily that seriously. And so do I. Today, the military and intelligence cooperation between our two countries is stronger than ever. Our support of the Iron Dome’s rocket system has saved Israeli lives. And I can say that no U.S. President, no administration has done more to ensure that Israel can protect itself than this one.

As part of that commitment, there’s something else that the United States and Israel agrees on: Iran must not, under any circumstances, be allowed to get a nuclear weapon. Now, there’s a debate about how to achieve that -- and that's a healthy debate. I’m not going to use my remaining time to go too deep into policy -- although for those of you who are interested -- we have a lot of material out there. But I do want everybody to just remember a few key things.

The deal that we already reached with Iran has already halted or rolled back parts of Iran’s nuclear program. Now we’re seeking a comprehensive solution. I will not accept a bad deal. As I pointed out in my most recent article with Jeff Goldberg, this deal will have my name on it, so nobody has a bigger personal stake in making sure that it delivers on its promise. I want a good deal.

I'm interested in a deal that blocks every single one of Iran’s pathways to a nuclear weapon -- every single path. A deal that imposes unprecedented inspections on all elements of Iran’s nuclear program, so that they can’t cheat; and if they try to cheat, we will immediately know about it and sanctions snap back on. A deal that endures beyond a decade; that addresses this challenge for the long term. In other words, a deal that makes the world and the region -- including Israel -- more secure. That’s how I define a good deal.

I can’t stand here today and guarantee an agreement will be reached. We’re hopeful. We’re working hard. But nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. And I’ve made clear that when it comes to preventing Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, all options are and will remain on the table.

Moreover, even if we do get a good deal, there remains the broader issue of Iran’s support for terrorism and regional destabilization, and ugly threats against Israel. And that’s why our strategic partnership with Israel will remain, no matter what happens in the days and years ahead. And that’s why the people of Israel must always know America has its back, and America will always have its back. Now, that does not mean that there will not be, or should not be, periodic disagreements between our two governments. There will be disagreements on tactics when it comes to how to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, and that is entirely appropriate and should be fully aired. Because the stakes are sufficiently high that anything that's proposed has to be subjected to scrutiny -- and I welcome that scrutiny.

But there are also going to be some disagreements rooted in shared history that go beyond tactics, that are rooted in how we might remain true to our shared values. I came to know Israel as a young man through these incredible images of kibbutzim, and Moshe Dayan, and Golda Meir, and Israel overcoming incredible odds in the ’67 war. The notion of pioneers who set out not only to safeguard a nation, but to remake the world. Not only to make the desert bloom, but to allow their values to flourish; to ensure that the best of Judaism would thrive. And those values in many ways came to be my own values. They believed the story of their people gave them a unique perspective among the nations of the world, a unique moral authority and responsibility that comes from having once been a stranger yourself.

And to a young man like me, grappling with his own identity, recognizing the scars of race here in this nation, inspired by the civil rights struggle, the idea that you could be grounded in your history, as Israel was, but not be trapped by it, to be able to repair the world -- that idea was liberating. The example of Israel and its values was inspiring.

So when I hear some people say that disagreements over policy belie a general lack of support of Israel, I must object, and I object forcefully. For us to paper over difficult questions, particularly about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or about settlement policy, that’s not a true measure of friendship.

Before I came out here, the Rabbi showed me the room that’s been built to promote scholarship and dialogue, and to be able to find how we make our shared values live. And the reason you have that room is because applying those values to our lives is often hard, and it involves difficult choices. That’s why we study. That’s why it’s not just a formula. And that’s what we have to do as nations as well as individuals. We have to grapple and struggle with how do we apply the values that we care about to this very challenging and dangerous world.

And it is precisely because I care so deeply about the state of Israel -- it’s precisely because, yes, I have high expectations for Israel the same way I have high expectations for the United States of America -- that I feel a responsibility to speak out honestly about what I think will lead to long-term security and to the preservation of a true democracy in the Jewish homeland. And I believe that’s two states for two peoples, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. Just as Israelis built a state in their homeland, Palestinians have a right to be a free people on their land, as well.

Now, I want to emphasize -- that’s not easy. The Palestinians are not the easiest of partners. The neighborhood is dangerous. And we cannot expect Israel to take existential risks with their security so that any deal that takes place has to take into account the genuine dangers of terrorism and hostility.

But it is worthwhile for us to keep up the prospect, the possibility of bridging divides and being just, and looking squarely at what’s possible but also necessary in order for Israel to be the type of nation that it was intended to be in its earliest founding.

And that same sense of shared values also compel me to speak out -- compel all of us to speak out -- against the scourge of anti-Semitism wherever it exists. I want to be clear that, to me, all these things are connected. The rights I insist upon and now fight for, for all people here in the United States compels me then to stand up for Israel and look out for the rights of the Jewish people. And the rights of the Jewish people then compel me to think about a Palestinian child in Ramallah that feels trapped without opportunity. That’s what Jewish values teach me. That’s what the Judeo-Christian tradition teaches me. These things are connected.

And in recent years, we’ve seen a deeply disturbing rise in anti-Semitism in parts of the world where it would have seemed unthinkable just a few years or decades ago. This is not some passing fad; these aren’t just isolated phenomenon. And we know from our history they cannot be ignored. Anti-Semitism is, and always will be, a threat to broader human values to which we all must aspire. And when we allow anti-Semitism to take root, then our souls are destroyed, and it will spread.

And that’s why, tonight, for the first time ever, congregations around the world are celebrating a Solidarity Shabbat. It’s a chance for leaders to publicly stand against anti-Semitism and bigotry in all of its forms. And I’m proud to be a part of this movement, and I’m proud that six ambassadors from Europe are joining us today. And their presence here -- our presence together -- is a reminder that we are not doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past. Our traditions, our history, can help us chart a better course as long as we are mindful of that history and those traditions, and we are vigilant in speaking out and standing up against what is wrong. It’s not always easy, I think, to speak out against what is wrong, even for good people.

So I want to close with the story of one more of the many rabbis who came to Selma 50 years ago. A few days after David Teitelbaum arrived to join the protests, he and a colleague were thrown in jail. And they spent a Friday night in custody, singing Adon Olam to the tune of “We Shall Overcome.” And that in and of itself is a profound statement of faith and hope. But what’s wonderful is, is that out of respect many of their fellow protestors began wearing what they called “freedom caps” -- yarmulkes -- as they marched.

And the day after they were released from prison, Rabbi Teitelbaum watched Dr. King lead a prayer meeting before crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge. And Dr. King said, “We are like the children of Israel, marching from slavery to freedom.”

That’s what happens when we’re true to our values. It’s not just good for us, but it brings the community together. Tikkun Olam -- it brings the community together and it helps repair the world. It bridges differences that once looked unbridgeable. It creates a future for our children that once seemed unattainable. This congregation -- Jewish American life is a testimony to the capacity to make our values live. But it requires courage. It requires strength. It requires that we speak the truth not just when it’s easy, but when it’s hard.

So may we always remember that our shared heritage makes us stronger, that our roots are intertwined. May we always choose faith over nihilism, and courage over despair, and hope over cynicism and fear. As we walk our own leg of a timeless, sacred march, may we always stand together, here at home and around the world.

Thank you. God bless you.

God bless the United States of America.

Thank you.

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# Young Southeast Asian Youth Initiative Fellows Town Hall at the White House

Thank you. Thank you. Everybody, please have a seat.

Well, thank you so much, Zin Mar [Aung], for your introduction and for your example and your commitment to build a free and open press in Myanmar, and all the hope that you represent. Please give her a big round of applause. She did an outstanding job.

Well, to all of you, welcome to Washington. Welcome to the White House. And while I know that you’ve been here a few weeks, let me just say again, on behalf of the American people, welcome to the United States of America. We are thrilled to have you here.

I’m not going to give a long speech because what I really want to do is have a conversation with you like the one that I had when I was in Myanmar. So this is a town hall meeting; the less I speak the more questions you get to ask. But I do want to take a few minutes to explain why I believe so strongly in the work that brings us together today and why your presence here is so important.

I think all of you know I have a special attachment to Southeast Asia. As a boy, I lived in Jakarta. My mother spent years working in villages to help women improve their lives. So Southeast Asia helped shape who I am and how I see the world. And as President, I’ve made it a pillar of my foreign policy to make sure that the United States is more deeply engaged in the Asia Pacific region, including Southeast Asia. And I want to welcome the ambassadors from across ASEAN -- thank you for being here and for your partnership. Give them a big round of applause. So I’ve deepened America’s ties with Southeast Asia because your region is critical to our shared future. There are more than 600 million people who live in the ASEAN countries, and you reflect an incredible diversity of faiths and ethnic groups and backgrounds and cultures. And that diversity has to be celebrated and it has to be protected. We have incredible economic engines like Singapore. We’ve got growing economies like the Philippines and Vietnam and Malaysia. And we can see growth that is lifting people out of poverty and creating more jobs and trade and opportunity for all our countries.

We’ve seen a historic democratic transition in Indonesia. We’ve got elections coming later this year in Myanmar. Communities in Laos and Brunei are working for development that’s sustainable and protecting the environment. And we’re seeing new commitments to the education of young women and girls, as is true in Cambodia. The people of Thailand played a critical role in the global response to the earthquake in Nepal. And we are mindful of the King of Thailand’s health issues lately and we wish him the best, and our hopes and prayers are with him. So Southeast Asia is stepping up. It’s on the move.

And today, America’s relationship with the region is stronger than ever. I’m proud to be the first American President to meet regularly with all 10 ASEAN leaders. I will continue to do so until I am no longer President.

We’ve strengthened our alliances, including with the Philippines. We’ve forged new partnerships with Indonesia and Malaysia and Vietnam. Our trade with ASEAN has been growing. We’re pursuing the Trans-Pacific Partnership. We’re working with ASEAN to bind the region more closely together and confront shared challenges, and uphold international rules and norms, including freedom of navigation, and to ensure that disputes are resolved peacefully. At the moment, several of our nations are working to rescue desperate Rohingya migrants who are at sea, which reflects our commitment to the security and dignity and human rights of every human being.

But despite all the work I’ve been doing and the ambassadors have been doing, building these stronger ties is not just the work of government. They have to be rooted in partnerships between our peoples -- and especially young people like you. All across Southeast Asia, almost two-thirds of the population is under 35 years old. So this is a young part of the world. Technology is giving you more power to communicate and organize like never before. In Vietnam, tens of millions of people are connected on Facebook. Across the region, you are civil society leaders working for democracy and human rights and religious tolerance. You are entrepreneurs who are turning your ideas into new businesses; activists fighting for the environment and against climate change. And that’s the power that young people have, and the spirit of optimism and idealism that you represent. So you're inspiring to me. And I’ve made it clear that America wants to be your partner. We want to help you succeed.

So two years ago, we launched the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative -- YSEALI -- to help empower young people like you, to give you more of the skills and resources and networks that you need to turn your ideas into action. And since then, we’ve offered workshops, online networking, exchanges, professional development, hands-on training. And today, the YSEALI network includes nearly 35,000 young people like you.

Last year in Myanmar, at the town hall meeting that Zin Mar mentioned, I announced our fellowship program to bring young leaders from across the region to the United States to help develop their skills. And for this first class of 75, more than 1,000 people applied. The competition was intense.

Today, I’m proud to welcome you as the first class of YSEALI Fellows. We’re very proud of you. And I’ve had a chance to read about some of you and the amazing things that you’ve been doing. And I suspect that Niema Remejoso, from the Philippines -- there she is right there -- she spoke for a lot of you. She said, “Am I dreaming, or is this really happening?” So it’s really happening.

You come from all 10 ASEAN nations, from capital cities and rural towns. You represent different faiths and backgrounds, and different beliefs. Obviously, there are men and women here -- in fact, the majority are women -- because one of the best measures of a country’s success is whether it empowers women and girls. And you’re all bound together by a common belief that you have the talent and the drive and the power to improve the lives of your fellow human beings. So for the last five weeks, you’ve been all across America. You’ve experienced state legislatures and city councils. You’ve seen how our day-to-day democracy works. You’ve worked at nonprofits, learning how to organize and advocate for change. You’ve interned in some American companies, seeing how to build and manage a business. And I want to thank all of our leaders and partners who are here -- we’ve got universities and academic institutions, we’ve got businesses -- all who have been very generous in their support of this overall process.

So you’ve been experiencing America. Some of you were very lucky and had a chance to go to my home state of Hawaii. I heard that some of you tried to hula dance. Some of you went to my hometown of Chicago, and you saw American ingenuity at its best, including -- I hear that you saw ATMs that give cupcakes.

And I also know that Americans have learned from you as well. You shared your culture and traditions and foods. You discovered American foods like Jell-O. I hear somebody had Jell-O, which -- I was very excited about that. And the friendships and the understanding that you have forged will help to bring our countries together for a long time.

And soon you’ll return home. Each of you has developed a project, an action plan, and you’ll take what you’ve learned here and put it into practice. And we’re going to be with you during this process as you build your ventures, expand your networks, and -- mentoring young people that are coming behind you. We’re going to welcome 500 Fellows like you every single year. So this may be the end of your visit to America, but you’ve really begun this process of building partnerships that will last a lifetime.

And we want you to make sure that you are realizing your dreams. I just want to take a couple of examples. We’ve got Seth Suonvisal. Where’s Seth? Here’s Seth. So in Cambodia, Seth works with parliament. So in Tulsa, he witnessed city government at work, the legislative process in Tulsa, Oklahoma. And, Seth, we’re proud to be your partner as you strive to ensure that governments deliver for all of the Cambodian people. We have Muchamad Dafip. Where’s Muchamad? There he is. He is an advocate for the environment in Indonesia. Apa kabar? And at the East-West Center -- there aren’t two of you, is there? So at the East-West Center in Hawaii, he learned new ways to empower citizens and effect change. So we’re proud to be your partner. Together, we can promote sustainable development and help our -- help the next generation meet the urgent challenges of climate change.

We’ve got Khine Muang -- there’s Khine, and -- is a doctor in Myanmar where she offers free surgeries to children for cleft palates and lips, and gives them a new smile and new confidence. So we’re very proud. At the Oklahoma University School of Community Medicine, she focused on ways to expand outreach and free clinics. And we are so proud to be your partner, working for the health and dignity of children across Myanmar. Although, I have to say that you are the youngest doctor I’ve ever seen. I mean, she looks like she’s 14. It’s very impressive. So thank you.

And where is Pern Phansiri? There’s Pern, from Thailand, a tireless fighter against human trafficking. And at the city manager’s office in Lee’s Summit, Missouri, she saw how a community takes a comprehensive approach to social services. So we’re proud to be your partner in standing up for the rights of women and children. We have to end the outrage of human trafficking, and we so appreciate the work that you do. So this just gives you an example of the incredible talent and commitment that these young people represent. And I want to close with a quick story that captures the spirit of our work together. Thongvone Sosamphan is here from Laos. Where’s -- please, stand up. So she’s here from Laos. In Atlanta, she visited the memorial and center honoring the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. And she was struck by one of Dr. King’s quotes, which says, “Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, ‘What are you doing for others?’”

And that prompted her to think about the true meaning of leadership. And she wrote something very beautiful that I want everybody to hear. “Leadership is inside you,” she said. “Everyone can be a leader, because everybody can serve. You don’t have to have a college degree to lead. You don’t need to know more than the others. All you need is a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love.” That’s pretty good.

So that’s what I see in all of you. That’s why I believe so strongly that you’re going to keep answering that question Dr. King asked: What are you doing for others? It’s why I’m confident that all of you will be extraordinary leaders. Already you’re doing great work in your communities and your countries, with hearts full of grace and souls generated by love. And you will continue to have a friend and partner in the United States of America.

So we are very, very proud of you. And with that, let’s -- I want to hear from you, both questions or you can tell me a story about the exciting food that you’ve had -- all across the country.

So we have some microphones in the audience, and what I’ll do is I’ll just call on people and I’m going to go boy, girl, boy, girl so that it’s very fair. So we’ll start with this young lady here. Please introduce yourself and tell us where you’re from. Question: Hi, Mr. President. I am an elected representative from Malaysia. My question to you is, what is your view on the democracy in Malaysia with the recent jailing of Anwar Ibrahim, the opposition leader, and the crackdown on opposition? Thank you. President Obama: Well, Malaysia has a history of democracy that has to be preserved. And I have a very good relationship with Prime Minister Najib and we are close partners and cooperating on a whole host of issues. I think that Malaysia, like all our countries, not just ASEAN countries but countries here in the United States, have to recognize that democracy is not just elections but it’s how open and transparent and accountable government is between elections. And it’s important that free speech, freedom of the press, an independent judiciary, the right to assemble peacefully -- that all those rights are observed to make democracy work. So as a general rule, I don’t comment on even individual cases in this country, much less another country, because I think it’s important for the legal system to work. But I do know that it is important if an opposition leader who is well known has been charged with a crime, that that process of how that is adjudicated and how open it is, and how clear the evidence is, that that is all subject to scrutiny. Because what you don’t want is a situation in which the legitimacy of the process is questioned. That has an adverse impact on democracy as a whole. And I think we all have to guard against making sure that there’s not a chilling effect on potential opposition in government. So as I always point out, democracy is hard. I mean, I think that many of the things that are said about me are terribly unfair. But the reason American democracy has survived for so long is because people -- even if they’re wrong -- have a right to say what they think. George Washington, our first President, he complained terribly about some of the foolishness that was said about him. But part of the reason he is considered one of our greatest Presidents is because he set an example of recognizing that if democracy was to work then you had to respect the rights of even those people who you disagreed most with, because otherwise there’s no way that a democracy can flourish over the long term. So these are things that I said publicly when I was in Myanmar -- when I was in Malaysia, rather. I had an opportunity to meet with some community activists and civil society leaders there. And this is something that I say everywhere we go. And it’s important for America to recognize that we’re not perfect, either, and so we have to make sure that we are constantly seeing how do we improve our democracy. I mean, the amounts of money, for example, that are involved in our elections these days is disturbing because it makes it seem as if a few people have more influence in the democracy than the many. And so I will continue to speak out about these issues, even with friends. Maybe sometimes we are even more willing to say something when it’s friends because we know that they can do better. Thank you. Yes, sir. Question: Hello, Mr. President. I am from Indonesia. I am working with the ministry of finance. My YSEALI theme is economic empowerment. My question is, what is your expectation about economic relationship between United States and ASEAN countries in the future? Thank you. President Obama: Well, we already have a very strong economic relationship. As I pointed out, this is a region that is growing fast. It has a big population. You have very hardworking people, entrepreneurial people. I expect it will continue to grow. And the United States wants to be a partner in all sorts of ways. Trade is the most obvious and important relationship, economically. And so one of the reasons why I think the Trans-Pacific Partnership is so important is because it sets up a set of principles to ensure fair trade between countries. It calls for higher labor standards for all countries, higher environmental standards for all countries. It makes sure that countries are being treated -- companies are being treated fairly when they are operating in a foreign market. And there’s the potential, I think, if we get this right and completed in the next few months, to be able to ensure that the United States and ASEAN countries that already have a massive amount of trade, that that’s able to increase and that there’s more opportunity for everybody. But it’s at a high standard rather than a low standard. Part of the goal for ASEAN countries, most of them are now entering into a stage of development where they don’t want to just be sending raw materials to someplace else to have them developed, they want to be creating value starting their own businesses, making sure that they are part of the 21st century economy. And that requires upgrading skills, education for their populations. We think we can be helpful in those areas. And we want to encourage high educational levels in ASEAN countries because then it’s less likely that workers are exploited. And that means then that you’re competing with us because you have the best ideas and the best products, as opposed to just you have the cheapest labor. And if all that ASEAN countries are offering are cheap labor, then what happens is U.S. workers get hurt and you don’t necessarily see an improvement in standards of living for those ASEAN countries. If everybody is operating at a higher level then we’re all competing on an even playing field, and over time that will result in more growth and more development in ASEAN countries. But I think skills training is the most important thing. I think that the power of the Internet to access markets and ideas will be particularly important for ASEAN countries. Infrastructure is something that still needs to get done. I think there is still under-investment of infrastructure in that region. I know there was some controversy a while back because China wanted to start an Asia infrastructure bank; we haven’t yet signed on to participate. I want to be very clear -- we actually want China to invest in infrastructure in that region. We want to make sure that the investments are actually good for the people in those countries, which means transparency in terms of how decisions are made at this new bank. But we’ll continue with the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank and other institutions, and try to encourage not only investment in human capital, but also the infrastructure that’s needed. And finally, I think sustainability is going to be critical. I worry about the great forests of Indonesia and Malaysia. If those all just become palm oil plantations, and deforestation continues at the same pace it has, then the prospects of additional accelerated climate change are very powerful, not to mention the loss of species and biodiversity. The oceans, if you get overfishing, that’s a problem; pollution. Given how populated these areas are, it's very important that economic development ties in with sustainable development. Otherwise, I think we’ll all have problems. Okay. That’s good. So, young lady right here. Question: Mabuhay. President Obama: Mabuhay. Question: Mabuhay, Mr. President. I'm a city council member of Davao City, the Philippines. There are a handful -- or a there are a few elected officials, some are YSEALI fellows. I really would like to know what is your word of advice for a young, budding political leader, young legislator, elected official like me in a developing democracy like the Philippines? Thank you. President Obama: That's great. Well, I think -- my first advice is don't be shy, and obviously you're okay. I think you're doing to do great. I think that when I think about my own political career, when I look at other political careers that I admire, I think the most important thing is to have a sense of principle and why you're in public service. I think sometimes people want to be in public service just because they like seeing their name up in lights, they like being important. And that's a bad reason to go into politics; you should be like an actress or a singer, or make a lot of money. But if you're going into politics and public service, there’s only one good reason to do it, and that is because you want to help people. And you should know what it is that you stand for and what you believe in. It doesn't mean that you won’t have to compromise. It doesn't mean that you might not change your mind about an issue as you go forward and you learn more and you have more experience. But you should have something inside of you that says, these are the things that are really important to me that I will not compromise on, all right? So for me, throughout my political career, even before I was in politics and I was just working as a community organizer, I knew that I wanted to work to create more opportunity for all people; that my orientation was always how does this help the poor or the marginalized, or somebody who has less opportunity then me; how is this going to help them if they work hard to get ahead. I know that one of the important principles for me has always been treating everybody fairly. So whether that's women or people of different races or different religious faiths or different sexual orientations, that one of my core principles is that I will never engage in a politics in which I’m trying to divide people or make them less than me because they look different or have a different religion. That's a core principle. That's not something I would violate, right? So if you have a clear view of what you stand for, then as you move forward, you’ll have setbacks. There will be times where you didn't succeed. There will be times where you're frustrated. There will be times you might even lose an election sometimes. But at least you’ll know every morning when you wake up and you look at yourself in the mirror, I know who I am and why I’m doing what I’m doing. And I think those are the people who eventually end up having successful careers because people sense that integrity and that leadership. Even if they don't agree with you, at least they know you believe in something. And unfortunately, too many politicians, they're just climbing the ladder but they don't know why. And when they get there, then they're not very effective leaders. Or they become much more subject to the temptations of corruption because all they're worried about is I want to hang on to my power, and I’m willing to give up anything in You have to be willing to lose something for your principles. You have to be willing to lose an election because you think that there’s something that's more important than you just winning an election. And if you do that now -- but you have to -- you should try to win. I’m not saying you should try to lose. But you have to stand for something. That's my most important advice. Gentleman in the gray suit right there. Yes, you. Question: Thank you. I come from Vietnam. Like many others, I look forward to seeing you and the First Lady visiting my country, Vietnam, in the near future. I have a question. Mr. President, what do you expect the young people in the Southeast Asian countries doing in dealing with the current challenges to the peace, stability, respect to international law like the [inaudible], while promoting the cooperation between the 10 countries with others, including especially with the United States? Thank you. President Obama: Especially with? I’m sorry, the last part? Question: Especially with the United States. President Obama: Oh, with the United States. Well, look, I think that -- I’ve seen already significant progress with ASEAN countries over the last six years that I’ve been attending the ASEAN meetings and the East Asia Summit. And I think initially the meetings would oftentimes just be symbolic, and there would be a lot of pleasantries and a lot of meetings and cultural events. But we didn’t always have an agenda. And I think one of the things that you’ve started to see is people working much more concretely on what are we trying to accomplish here. How do we develop more capacity, for example, in the region around disaster relief so that if, heaven forbid, there’s another typhoon of the sort that we saw in the Philippines, or if, in fact, that we see some other natural tragedy that all the countries assets can be brought to bear, and we’ve done the training ahead of time to know who can help and how they can help? I think the -- trying to work on coming up with standards around maritime law is a big challenge. And obviously, there’s significant tension right now between many of the ASEAN countries and China, as well as the United States with China, around the South China Sea and how those issues are going to be resolved. ASEAN has been very constructive in trying to put together a code of conduct that all countries should abide by so that disputes around maritime boundaries are resolved through law and an impartial process, rather than just based on who’s the biggest. And that I think is going to be very important. ASEAN can play an important role in those areas. Environmental issues I’ve already mentioned. This is a very fast-growing region, and it is important to make sure that there’s a lot of cooperation between countries because small fisheries, et cetera -- those don’t always observe national boundaries. And so, working together, you can accomplish more. And then human rights issues, and democracy issues, reinforcing good habits among the countries is very important. I think it’s fair to say that the elections that will be taking place in Myanmar would not have happened if it hadn’t been for the good example that Indonesia set with its transition, and other ASEAN countries showing the path from military rule towards democracy, and how, through all the lessons that have been learned, that could be accomplished. And that I think created more space within Myanmar to -- and President Thein Sein to feel that this is possible. So part of the goal here is to make sure that each country is reinforcing the best habits and laws, and observing human rights, and being critical when one country slips but in a constructive way that allows for a path to improvement. And I think ASEAN can do that uniquely. And the United States will be a partner. We have, obviously, bilateral relationships with each of these countries, but we also want to be a partner with the group as a whole to encourage this cooperative model going forward. Okay. Young lady right there, yes. Question: Good afternoon, Mr. President. I’m from Indonesia. I work as a data analyst in the World Bank Indonesia Country Office. My YSEALI theme is civic engagement. My question to you: Now that your second term in the office is about to end, how do you want the world to remember you? Thank you. President Obama: Fondly, I hope. I still have 20 months in office so I’ve got a lot of work still to do before I can start thinking about looking backwards. I’m still very much focused on what’s in front of me. But obviously there are things that I’ve been proud of. When I came into office, the United States and the world was going through a terrible economic crisis -- the worst, really, since the 1930s. And it was hard but we ended up avoiding a terrible depression. And within a year, the economy was growing again. Here in the United States now, we’re back to the pre-crisis employment levels. Our auto industry was saved. But also, internationally, we averted a much worse crisis because of, in part, the leadership the United States showed along with international institutions and central banks managing -- that was very important. That’s an important legacy for me. I think that the work that I’ve done to provide health insurance for people here in the United States and to provide more educational opportunity is consistent with the principles that I talked about, the reason I got into politics. Internationally, we’ve reinvigorated diplomacy in a whole variety of ways. People don’t remember -- when I came into office, the United States in world opinion ranked below China and just barely above Russia. And today, once again, the United States is the most respected country on Earth. And part of that, I think, is because of the work that we did to reengage the world and say that we want to work with you as partners with mutual interest and mutual respect. It’s on that basis that we were able to end two wars while still focusing on the very real threat of terrorism and to try to work with our partners on the ground in places like Iraq and Afghanistan. It’s the reason why we are moving in the direction of normalizing relations with Cuba. The nuclear deal that we’re trying to negotiate with Iran. Our efforts to help encourage democracy in Myanmar. I think the people of Myanmar deserve the credit for this new opening. But my visit there didn’t hurt in trying to reinforce the possibilities of freedom for 40 million people. And so that direct engagement, the work that we’ve done to build and strengthen international organizations -- including on issues like public health and the fight against Ebola is just the most recent example of that -- I think we’ve been able to put our international relationships on a very strong footing that allows us then to work more cooperatively with other countries moving forward to meet the important challenges ahead. But I’ve still got a lot of work to do. So maybe in 18 months, I’ll check back with you and I’ll let you know. All right. Gentleman right here with the sash. Question: Hello, Mr. President Obama. I’m from Burma. And firstly, I would like to say hello on behalf of my family. And my question is, I work in tourism business in Burma, and my question is that -- what do you see critical areas in where the U.S. can contribute economic development in Burma? Thank you so much. President Obama: Well, Burma, Myanmar, you know, it lost a lot of time over the last 40 years because of the very tight controls on the economy and the discouragement of entrepreneurship and new businesses. Part of the reason why I was so struck when I traveled to Myanmar was it reminded me of when I first arrived in Indonesia back in 1967 -- whereas when I go to Jakarta now, or Singapore or Bangkok, it looks completely different. This looked like the past. So there’s a lot of catching up to do. The good news is, though, countries that are still at those early stages of development, they can grow very fast because there’s so much pent-up energy and opportunity. And I think the most important thing is going to be establishing rule of law and systems and practices where if you start a business, you can feel confident that you don’t have to pay 100 bribes and you don’t have to hire somebody’s son, and that you can make a profit; that if there’s a foreign investor, that they can invest and be treated fairly, and that their rights and their intellectual property and their property are protected. Those basic systems of law where those are established, those countries can do well because the natural talents of the people and the incredible resources and hard work of the people then pay off. I mean, look at Singapore. Singapore is a tiny, little place. It has really nothing -- no resources to speak of. But today, when you travel to Singapore, it is as prosperous as any place in the world. Why is that? Well, part of it is that it’s set up a set of systems where if businesses were started or investors came in, they knew that they could find a very skilled workforce; they knew that the rules were international-standard rules in terms of operations. So it will take some time for I think Myanmar to move in that direction. But you have your own models even in -- among the ASEAN countries. You don’t have to look to the United States; you can look at just your -- some of your neighbors to see what is required for success. And what the United States will try to do is to provide technical assistance, and we will also try to provide direct assistance, particularly around building skills and education. Because one of the keys is to make sure that you have a workforce that can add value. In the age of the Internet, when companies can locate anywhere, the most important thing is to find someplace where there is security -- so there’s no conflict -- where there’s rule of law, and the people are highly skilled. And if you have those three things, then people will invest. Yes, go ahead. Question: Good afternoon, Mr. President. I’m from Thailand. And now I work on the anti-human-trafficking issue in Thailand and neighboring country. So today, I would like to ask you if you were a Rohingya, which country would you prefer to live with and why? Thank you so much. President Obama: That’s an interesting question. Let me speak more broadly, and then I’ll answer your question. We were talking earlier about what’s required for Myanmar to succeed. I think one of the most important things is to put an end to discrimination against people because of what they look like or what their faith is. And the Rohingya have been discriminated against significantly, and that’s part of the reason they’re fleeing. I think if I were a Rohingya, I would want to stay where I was born. I’d want to stay in the land where my parents had lived. But I’d want to make sure that my government was protecting me, and that people were treating me fairly. That’s what I’d want. And that’s why it’s so important I think, as part of the democratic transition, to take very seriously this issue of how the Rohingya are treated. One of the things about discriminating against people or treating people differently is, by definition, that means that people will treat you differently, and you never know when you will find yourself in a situation in which you are a minority, where you are vulnerable, where you’re not being treated fairly. And right now, obviously, our focus is on making sure that those who are being subject to human trafficking and are, in some cases right now, still in a very perilous situation out in the open sea, that they are relocated. I want to commend Indonesia and Malaysia for their willingness to take on thousands of these displaced persons. The United States, as part of our refugee process, will take some. We put over $100 million over the last several years in Burma to make sure that minority groups, including the Rohingya, are protected against. But, ultimately, this is going to be a great test for the democracy of the future. Not just in Burma and Myanmar, but in areas all throughout the country. When I was -- and I know this directly because when I was young and I was living in Indonesia, there were times where there were anti-Chinese riots that were very violent and vicious. And, in fact, sometimes the Chinese Indonesians were treated very similarly to how Jewish Europeans were treated in Europe, and subject to stereotypes and resentments. And the truth of the matter is, one of the reasons that Singapore, I mentioned earlier, has been successful, is that it has been able to bring together people who may look different but they all think of themselves as part of Singapore. And that has to be a strength, not a weakness. But that requires leadership and government being true to those principles. To their credit, the Indonesian government when I was growing up was very good about not discriminating on the base of religion despite the fact that it was 98 percent Muslim. And I think that the tolerance towards other faiths historically in Indonesia has been part of what’s contributed to progress there. You haven’t seen the same kind of sectarian animosity that you’ve seen in parts of the Middle East. But the one thing I know is countries that divide themselves on racial or religious lines, they do not succeed. They do not succeed. That’s rule number one. Rule number two is nations that suppress their women do not succeed. They don’t succeed. Not only is it bad because half of the country is not successful -- because they’re not getting education and opportunity -- but it’s women who teach children, which means the children are less educated, if you’re not teaching the moms. So there are some -- each country is different, but there are some rules if you look at development patterns around the world that are pretty consistent. And those are two pretty good rules. Don’t divide yourself on religious and ethnic lines and racial lines. And don’t discriminate against women. If you do those two things, you’re not guaranteed success but at least you’re not guaranteed failure. I’ve got time for one more, two more. I definitely don’t have time for 30 more. Two more. I’ve got time for two more. It’s a gentleman’s turn. Question: Good afternoon, Mr. President. I’m from Malaysia. I work at Department of Irrigation and Drainage in Malaysia. My YSEALI theme is environmental sustainability. And my question for you is, what have you learned about leadership and life as being President in comparison to what you have might not learned if you were not a President? President Obama: As President you -- I think probably what makes this job unique is that you are the ultimate decision-maker. So there are other people who work as hard as I do. My staff works very, very hard. They're just as smart or smarter than I am. They care just as much or more than I do. They have wonderful qualities. But the one thing as President is that ultimately there’s nobody you can pass it on to. Harry Truman, one of our best Presidents, once said, the buck stops here. He meant at his desk. And it’s true. And usually by the time a decision comes to my desk, you know that it’s a very hard problem because if it was easy somebody else would have solved it. And so probably the thing that I uniquely have had to learn in the presidency that is -- I hadn’t learned as well in other jobs is the ability to look at all the information that you have, listen to all the advice that's there, and the different viewpoints that may exist about an issue, to try to make a decision based not on what is easiest, but what I think is the best long-term solution; and then feel comfortable in the knowledge that I may be wrong, and that there will be significant consequences if I am wrong, to have to have the courage then maybe six months later or a year later to admit this didn't work, and then to try something new. But being willing to take responsibility for making hard decisions, not be paralyzed because you know there are big consequences to them, and then being able to adapt based on the evidence as to whether it worked or not I think is the most important lesson I’ve learned. And that's not something that you have to -- is just unique to being President. I think in whatever your job is you should be willing to take responsibility for getting the best information, to listening to everybody, but then you have to just -- you have to make a decision and understand then that you have to continue to evaluate it. And I think that that's been very important. The second lesson, which is something that you just learn more of as President, but all of you have already learned in some ways in your work is to surround yourself with the best people. Your most important job is to create a team of people, some of whom have talents that you don't have, to make up for your weaknesses; and then to want to make them better, and make them successful. Because if they're successful, then the team is successful. So you're not a good leader if you don't want somebody who is smarter than you because you think, oh, well, maybe they’ll shine more than you do. Then you're not a very good leader because your team won’t succeed. So I’m always looking for -- who are people who are much smarter than me, or much more organized than I am, or much better analysts. And my job then is just to be able to weave them together so they're all working together effectively. And if you're doing that, then you're a good leader. And you should be constantly thinking how can I help this person do their jobs even better. And the good news is if you do that and people recognize that you care about them being successful, then they’ll work harder, and they’ll want to do even better. And they’ll appreciate you because they know that you're helping them, instead of trying to keep them subordinate to you. Last question. And all the men should put down their hands because it’s a woman’s turn. No, all the guys have to put their hands down. This young lady in the yellow right here, right in the corner, right here. Question: Thank you, President. Good afternoon, sir. I’m from Vietnam. Currently, I’m working for the Da Nang Institute for Socio-Economic Development. And first of all, I would like to say thank you to you for giving us this unique opportunity to come to the United States and to meet you today. My question for you is, what is your opinion about disputes and China’s action in the East Sea or so-called the South China Sea? President Obama: Well, as I already mentioned, what has allowed all of Asia to prosper over the last two, three decades -- including China -- is there’s been relative peace and stability, freedom of navigation, freedom of commerce. And all of that has been underwritten, all of that has been because there have been certain rules that everybody has followed. Freedom of navigation requires that people observe basic conduct about, this far off, your territory is your territory; after that, it’s international waters. If there’s a dispute, then there’s international mechanisms to adjudicate that dispute. If you start losing that approach and suddenly conflicts arise and claims are made based on how big the country is or how powerful its navy is instead of based on law, then I think Asia will be less prosperous and the Pacific region will be less prosperous. And that’s why we’ve said directly to China and to other claimant countries, we don’t have a claim to these areas. We’re not parties in the dispute. But we do have a stake in making sure that they are resolved peacefully, diplomatically, and in accordance with internationally established standards. And for that reason, we think that land reclamation, aggressive actions by any party in that area are counterproductive. And we will continue as an Asia Pacific power to support all countries who are prepared to work with us to establish and enforce norms and rules that can continue growth and prosperity in the region. And the truth is, is that China is going to be successful. It’s big, it’s powerful, its people are talented and they work hard. And it may be that some of their claims are legitimate, but they shouldn’t just try to establish that based on throwing elbows and pushing people out of the way. If, in fact, their claims are legitimate, people will recognize them. I will say this, though, that I am very confident -- much more confident in the future of Southeast Asia, the Asia Pacific and the world, because I’ve had the opportunity to spend time with you. I think all of you are going to do outstanding work. And I want to make sure that you know that not only will this administration and the United States government continue to support the work that you do, but I personally, even after I leave office, will continue to have a great interest in seeing not only you succeed but those coming behind you -- young people like yourself succeed. And I think you should be interested in making sure to promote YSEALI and the network and try to provide similar opportunities to other young people as you become more important in whatever your fields are in the future. Congratulations. Good luck.

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# Eulogy for Beau Biden III

“A man,” wrote an Irish poet, “is original when he speaks the truth that has always been known to all good men.” Beau Biden was an original. He was a good man. A man of character. A man who loved deeply, and was loved in return.

Your Eminences, your Excellencies, General Odierno, distinguished guests; to Hallie, Natalie and Hunter; to Hunter, Kathleen, Ashley, Howard; the rest of Beau’s beautiful family, friends, colleagues; to Jill and to Joe -- we are here to grieve with you, but more importantly, we are here because we love you.

Without love, life can be cold and it can be cruel. Sometimes cruelty is deliberate -- the action of bullies or bigots, or the inaction of those indifferent to another’s pain. But often, cruelty is simply born of life, a matter of fate or God’s will, beyond our mortal powers to comprehend. To suffer such faceless, seemingly random cruelty can harden the softest hearts, or shrink the sturdiest. It can make one mean, or bitter, or full of self-pity. Or, to paraphrase an old proverb, it can make you beg for a lighter burden.

But if you’re strong enough, it can also make you ask God for broader shoulders; shoulders broad enough to bear not only your own burdens, but the burdens of others; shoulders broad enough to shield those who need shelter the most.

To know Beau Biden is to know which choice he made in his life. To know Joe and the rest of the Biden family is to understand why Beau lived the life he did. For Beau, a cruel twist of fate came early -- the car accident that took his mom and his sister, and confined Beau and Hunter, then still toddlers, to hospital beds at Christmastime.

But Beau was a Biden. And he learned early the Biden family rule: If you have to ask for help, it’s too late. It meant you were never alone; you don’t even have to ask, because someone is always there for you when you need them.

And so, after the accident, Aunt Valerie rushed in to care for the boys, and remained to help raise them. Joe continued public service, but shunned the parlor games of Washington, choosing instead the daily commute home, maintained for decades, that would let him meet his most cherished duty -- to see his kids off to school, to kiss them at night, to let them know that the world was stable and that there was firm ground under their feet.

As Joe himself confessed to me, he did not just do this because the kids needed him. He did it because he needed those kids. And somehow, Beau sensed that -- how understandably and deeply hurt his family and his father was. And so, rather than use his childhood trauma as justification for a life of self-pity or self-centeredness, that very young boy made a very grown-up decision: He would live a life of meaning. He would live a life for others. He would ask God for broader shoulders.

Beau would guide and look out for his younger brother. He would embrace his new mom -- apparently, the two boys sheepishly asking their father when they could all marry Jill -- and throughout his life, no one would make Jill laugh harder. He would look after their baby sister, Ashley. He would forever be the one to do the right thing, careful not to give his family or his friends cause for concern.

It’s no secret that a lot of what made Beau the way he was was just how much he loved and admired his dad. He studied law, like his dad, even choosing the same law school. He chased public service, like his dad, believing it to be a noble and important pursuit. From his dad, he learned how to get back up when life knocked him down. He learned that he was no higher than anybody else, and no lower than anybody else -- something Joe got from his mom, by the way. And he learned how to make everybody else feel like we matter, because his dad taught him that everybody matters.

He even looked and sounded like Joe, although I think Joe would be first to acknowledge that Beau was an upgrade -- Joe 2.0. But as much as Beau reminded folks of Joe, he was very much his own man. He was an original.

Here was a scion of an incredible family who brushed away the possibility of privilege for the harder, better reward of earning his own way. Here was a soldier who dodged glory, and exuded true humility. A prosecutor who defended the defenseless. The rare politician who collected more fans than foes, and the rarer public figure who prioritized his private life above all else.

Beau didn’t cut corners. He turned down an appointment to be Delaware’s attorney general so he could win it fair and square. When the field was clear for him to run for the Senate, he chose to finish his job as A.G. instead. He didn’t do these things to gain favor with a cynical public -- it’s just who he was. In his twenties, he and a friend were stopped for speeding outside Scranton. And the officer recognized the name on the license, and because he was a fan of Joe’s work with law enforcement he wanted to let Beau off with a warning. But Beau made him write that ticket. Beau didn’t trade on his name.

After 9/11, he joined the National Guard. He felt it was his obligation -- part of what those broader shoulders are for. He did his duty to his country and deployed to Iraq, and General Odierno eloquently spoke to Major Biden’s service. What I can tell you is when he was loading up to ship out at Dover, there was a lot of press that wanted to interview him. Beau refused. He was just another soldier.

I saw him when I visited Iraq; he conducted himself the same way. His deployment was hard on Hallie and the kids, like it was for so many families over the last 14 years. It was hard on Joe, hard on Jill. That’s partly why Jill threw herself into her work with military families with so much intensity. That’s how you know when Joe thunders “may God protect our troops” in every speech he does, he means it so deeply.

Like his father, Beau did not have a mean bone in his body. The cruelty he’d endured in his life didn’t make him hard, it made him compassionate, empathetic. But it did make him abhor bullies.

Beau’s grandfather, Joe’s father, believed that the most egregious sin was to abuse your power to inflict pain on another. So Beau squared his broad shoulders to protect people from that kind of abuse. He fought for homeowners who were cheated, seniors who were scammed. He even went after bullying itself. He set up a Child Protector -- Predator Task Force, convicted more than 200 of those who targeted vulnerable children. And in all this, he did it in a way that was alive to the suffering of others, bringing in experts to help spare both the children and their parents further trauma.

That’s who Beau was. Someone who cared. Someone who charmed you, and disarmed you, and put you at ease. When he’d have to attend a fancy fundraiser with people who took themselves way too seriously, he’d walk over to you and whisper something wildly inappropriate in your ear. The son of a senator, a Major in the Army, the most popular elected official in Delaware -- I’m sorry, Joe -- but he was not above dancing in nothing but a sombrero and shorts at Thanksgiving if it would shake loose a laugh from the people he loved. And through it all, he was the consummate public servant, a notebook in his back pocket at all times so he could write down the problems of everyone he met and go back to the office to get them fixed.

Because he was a Biden, the titles that come with family -- husband, father, son, brother, uncle -- those were the ones Beau valued above any other. This was a man who, at the Democratic National Convention, didn’t spend all his time in backrooms with donors or glad-handing. Instead, he rode the escalators in the arena with his son, up and down, up and down, again and again, knowing, just like Joe had learned, what ultimately mattered in life.

You know, anyone can make a name for themselves in this reality TV age, especially in today’s politics. If you’re loud enough or controversial enough, you can get some attention. But to make that name mean something, to have it associated with dignity and integrity -- that is rare. There’s no shortcut to get it. It’s not something you can buy. But if you do right by your children, maybe you can pass it on. And what greater inheritance is there? What greater inheritance than to be part of a family that passes on the values of what it means to be a great parent; that passes on the values of what it means to be a true citizen; that passes on the values of what it means to give back, fully and freely, without expecting anything in return?

That’s what our country was built on -- men like Beau. That’s who built it -- families like this. We don’t have kings or queens or lords. We don’t have to be born into money to have an impact. We don’t have to step on one another to be successful. We have this remarkable privilege of being able to earn what we get out of life, with the knowledge that we are no higher than anybody else, or lower than anybody else. We know this not just because it is in our founding documents, but because families like the Bidens have made it so, because people like Beau have made it so.

He did in 46 years what most of us couldn’t do in 146. He left nothing in the tank. He was a man who led a life where the means were as important as the ends. And the example he set made you want to be a better dad, or a better son, or a better brother or sister, better at your job, the better soldier. He made you want to be a better person. Isn’t that finally the measure of a man -- the way he lives, how he treats others, no matter what life may throw at him?

We do not know how long we’ve got here. We don’t know when fate will intervene. We cannot discern God’s plan. What we do know is that with every minute that we’ve got, we can live our lives in a way that takes nothing for granted. We can love deeply. We can help people who need help. We can teach our children what matters, and pass on empathy and compassion and selflessness. We can teach them to have broad shoulders.

To the Biden family, this sprawling, intimate clan -- I know that Beau’s passing has left a gaping void in the world. Hallie, I can only imagine the burdens that you’ve been carrying on your shoulders these past couple of years. And it’s because you gave him everything that he could give everything to us. And just as you were there for him, we’ll be there for you.

To Natalie and Hunter -- there aren’t words big enough to describe how much your dad loved you, how much he loved your mom. But I will tell you what, Michelle and I and Sasha and Malia, we’ve become part of the Biden clan. We’re honorary members now. And the Biden family rule applies. We’re always here for you, we always will be -- my word as a Biden.

To Joe and Jill -- just like everybody else here, Michelle and I thank God you are in our lives. Taking this ride with you is one of the great pleasures of our lives. Joe, you are my brother. And I’m grateful every day that you’ve got such a big heart, and a big soul, and those broad shoulders. I couldn’t admire you more.

I got to know Joe’s mom, Catherine Eugenia Finnegan Biden, before she passed away. She was on stage with us when we were first elected. And I know she told Joe once that out of everything bad that happens to you, something good will come if you look hard enough. And I suppose she was channeling that same Irish poet with whom I began today, Patrick Kavanagh, when he wrote, “And I said, let grief be a fallen leaf at the dawning of the day.”

As hard as it is right now, through all the heartache and through all the tears, it is our obligation to Beau to think not about what was and what might have been, but instead to think about what is, because of him. Think about the day that dawns for children who are safer because of Beau, whose lives are fuller, because of him. Think about the day that dawns for parents who rest easier, and families who are freer, because of him. Some folks may never know that their lives are better because of Beau Biden. But that’s okay. Certainly for Beau, acclaim was never the point of public service.

But the lines of well-wishers who’ve been here all week -- they know. The White House mailroom that’s been overflowing with letters from people -- those folks know. The soldiers who served with Beau, who joined the National Guard because of him. The workers at Verdi’s who still have their home because of him, and who thanked him for helping them bus tables one busy night. The students in Newark who remember the time he talked with them for hours, inexhaustible, even after giving a speech, even after taking his National Guard fitness test. The Rehoboth woman who’s saved a kind voicemail from him for five years, and wrote to say “I loved the way he loved his family.” And the stranger who wrote from halfway across this great country just to say, “The only thing we can hope for is that our children make us proud by making a difference in the world. Beau has done that and then some. The world noticed.”

Jill, Joe, Hallie, Hunter and Natalie -- the world noticed. They noticed. They felt it, his presence. And Beau lives on in the lives of others. And isn’t that the whole point of our time here? To make this country we love fairer and more just, not just for Natalie and Hunter, or Naomi, or Finnegan, or Maisy, or Malia, or Sasha, but for every child? Isn’t that what this amazing journey we’ve been on is all about -- to make life better for the next generation?

Beau figured that out so early in life. What an inheritance Beau left us. What an example he set.

“Through our great good fortune, in our youth our hearts were touched with fire,” said Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. “But, above all, we have learned that whether a man accepts from Fortune her spade, and will look downward and dig, or from Aspiration her axe and cord, and will scale the ice, the one and only success which it is his to command is to bring to his work a mighty heart.”

Beau Biden brought to his work a mighty heart. He brought to his family a mighty heart. What a good man. What an original.

May God bless his memory, and the lives of all he touched.

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# Post G7 Conference Presser

Good afternoon. Let me begin by once again thanking Chancellor Merkel and the people of Bavaria and Germany for their extraordinary hospitality here at the G7. My stay here has been extraordinary. I wish I could stay longer. And one of the pleasures of being President is scouting out places that you want to come back to, where you don't have to spend all your time in a conference room. The setting is breathtaking. Our German friends have been absolutely wonderful, and the success of this summit is a tribute to their outstanding work. The G7 represents some of the largest economies in the world. But in our G7 partners, the United States also embraces some of our strongest allies and closest friends in the world. So, even as we work to promote the growth that creates jobs and opportunity, we’re also here to stand up for the fundamental principles that we share as democracies: for freedom; for peace; for the right of nations and peoples to decide their own destiny; for universal human rights and the dignity of every human being. And I’m pleased that here in KrÃ¼n, we showed that on the most pressing global challenges, America and our allies stand united. We agree that the best way to sustain the global economic recovery is by focusing on jobs and growth. That’s what I’m focused on in the United States. On Friday, we learned that our economy created another 280,000 jobs in May -- the strongest month of the year so far -- and more than 3 million new jobs over the past year, nearly the fastest pace in over a decade. We’ve now seen five straight years of private sector job growth -- 12.6 million new jobs created -- the longest streak on record. The unemployment rate is near its lowest level in seven years. Wages for American workers continue to rise. And since I took office, the United States has cut our deficit by two-thirds. So, in the global economy, America is a major source of strength. At the same time, we recognize that the global economy, while growing, is still not performing at its full potential, And we agreed on a number of necessary steps. Here in Europe, we support efforts to find a path that enables Greece to carry out key reforms and return to growth within a strong, stable and growing Eurozone. I updated my partners on our effort with Congress to pass trade promotion authority so we can move ahead with TPP in the Asia Pacific region, and T-TIP here in Europe --agreements with high standards to protect workers, public safety and the environment. We continue to make progress toward a strong global climate agreement this year in Paris. All the G7 countries have now put forward our post-2020 targets for reducing carbon emissions, and we’ll continue to urge other significant emitters to do so as well. We’ll continue to meet our climate finance commitments to help developing countries transition to low-carbon growth. As we’ve done in the U.S., the G7 agreed on the need to integrate climate risks into development assistance and investment programs across the board, and to increase access to risk insurance to help developing countries respond to and recover from climate-related disasters. And building on the Power Africa initiative I launched two years ago, the G7 will work to mobilize more financing for clean-energy projects in Africa. With respect to security, the G7 remains strongly united in support for Ukraine. We’ll continue to provide economic support and technical assistance that Ukraine needs as it moves ahead on critical reforms to transform its economy and strengthen its democracy. As we’ve seen again in recent days, Russian forces continue to operate in eastern Ukraine, violating Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. This is now the second year in a row that the G7 has met without Russia -- another example of Russia’s isolation -- and every member of the G7 continues to maintain sanctions on Russia for its aggression against Ukraine. Now, it’s important to recognize the Russian economy has been seriously weakened. The ruble and foreign investment are down; Inflation is up. The Russian central bank has lost more than $150 billion in reserves. Russian banks and firms are virtually locked out of the international markets. Russian energy companies are struggling to import the services and technologies they need for complex energy projects. Russian defense firms have been cut off from key technologies. Russia is in deep recession. So Russia’s actions in Ukraine are hurting Russia and hurting the Russian people. Here at the G7, we agreed that even as we will continue to seek a diplomatic solution, sanctions against Russia will remain in place so long as Russia continues to violate its obligations under the Minsk agreements. Our European partners reaffirmed that they will maintain sanctions on Russia until the Minsk agreements are fully implemented, which means extending the EU's existing sectoral sanctions beyond July. And the G7 is making it clear that, if necessary, we stand ready to impose additional, significant sanctions against Russia. Beyond Europe, we discussed the negotiations over Iran’s nuclear program, and we remain united heading into the final stages of the talks. Iran has a historic opportunity to resolve the international community’s concerns about its nuclear program, and we agreed that Iran needs to seize that opportunity. Our discussions with Prime Minister Abadi of Iraq, President Caid Essebsi of Tunisia and President Buhari of Nigeria were a chance to address the threats of ISIL and Boko Haram. The G7 countries, therefore, agreed to work -- together and with our partners -- to further coordinate our counterterrorism efforts. As many of the world’s leading partners in global development -- joined by leaders of Ethiopia, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal and the African Union -- we discussed how to maximize the impact of our development partnerships. We agreed to continue our landmark initiative to promote food security and nutrition -- part of our effort to lift 500 million people in developing countries out of hunger and malnutrition by 2030. We’ll continue to work with our partners in West Africa to get Ebola cases down to zero. And as part of our Global Health Security Agenda, I’m pleased that the G7 made a major commitment to help 60 countries over the next five years achieve specific targets to better prevent, detect and respond to future outbreaks before they become epidemics. And finally, I want to commend Chancellor Merkel for ensuring that this summit included a focus on expanding educational and economic opportunities for women and girls. The G7 committed to expanding career training for women in our own countries, and to increase technical and vocational training in developing countries, which will help all of our nations prosper. So, again, I want to thank Angela and the people of Germany for their extraordinary hospitality. I leave here confident that when it comes to the key challenges of our time, America and our closest allies stand shoulder to shoulder. So with that, I will take some questions. And I will start off with Jeff Mason of Reuters.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. After your meetings here, you mentioned Greece in your opening statement. Do you believe that the Europeans are being too tough on Greece in these talks? And what else needs to be done on both sides to ensure there’s a deal and to ensure that there isn’t the undue harm to financial markets that you’ve warned about? And on a separate and somewhat related topic, the French told reporters today that you said to G7 leaders that you’re concerned that the dollar is too strong. What did you say exactly? And are you concerned that the dollar is too strong? President Obama: First of all, don’t believe unnamed quotes. I did not say that. And I make a practice of not commenting on the daily fluctuations of the dollar or any other currency. With respect to Greece, I think that not only our G7 partners but the IMF and other institutions that were represented here feel a sense of urgency in finding a path to resolve the situation there. And what it’s going to require is Greece being serious about making some important reforms not only to satisfy creditors, but, more importantly, to create a platform whereby the Greek economy can start growing again and prosper. And so the Greeks are going to have to follow through and make some tough political choices that will be good for the long term. I also think it’s going to be important for the international community and the international financial agencies to recognize the extraordinary challenges that Greeks face. And if both sides are showing a sufficient flexibility, then I think we can get this problem resolved. But it will require some tough decisions for all involved, and we will continue to consult with all the parties involved to try to encourage that kind of outcome. Question: Are you confident it will happen before the deadline? President Obama: I think that everybody wants to make it happen and they’re working hard to get it done. Nedra. Question: Thank you, Mr. President. How frustrated are you that after you personally raised your concerns about cybersecurity with the Chinese President that a massive attack on U.S. personnel files seems to have originated from China? Was the Chinese government involved? And separately, as a sports fan, can you give us your reaction to the FIFA bribery scandal? Thank you. President Obama: With respect to FIFA, I cannot comment on a pending case by our Attorney General. I will say that in conversations I’ve had here in Europe, people think it is very important for FIFA to be able to operate with integrity and transparency and accountability. And so as the investigation and charges proceed, I think we have to keep in mind that although football -- soccer -- depending on which side of the Atlantic you live on, is a game, it’s also a massive business. It is a source of incredible national pride, and people want to make sure that it operates with integrity. The United States, by the way, since we keep on getting better and better at each World Cup, we want to make sure that a sport that’s gaining popularity is conducted in an upright manner. I don’t want to discuss -- because we haven’t publicly unveiled who we think may have engaged in these cyber-attacks -- but I can tell you that we have known for a long time that there are significant vulnerabilities and that these vulnerabilities are going to accelerate as time goes by, both in systems within government and within the private sector. This is why it’s so important that Congress moves forward on passing cyber legislation -- cybersecurity legislation that we’ve been pushing for; why, over the last several years, I’ve been standing up new mechanisms inside of government for us to investigate what happens and to start finding more effective solutions. Part of the problem is, is that we’ve got very old systems. And we discovered this new breach in OPM precisely because we’ve initiated this process of inventorying and upgrading these old systems to address existing vulnerabilities. And what we are doing is going agency by agency, and figuring out what can we fix with better practices and better computer hygiene by personnel, and where do we need new systems and new infrastructure in order to protect information not just of government employees or government activities, but also, most importantly, where there’s an interface between government and the American people. And this is going to be a big project and we’re going to have to keep on doing it, because both state and non-state actors are sending everything they’ve got at trying to breach these systems. In some cases, it’s non-state actors who are engaging in criminal activity and potential theft. In the case of state actors, they’re probing for intelligence or, in some cases, trying to bring down systems in pursuit of their various foreign policy objectives. In either case, we’re going to have to be much more aggressive, much more attentive than we have been. And this problem is not going to go away. It is going to accelerate. And that means that we have to be as nimble, as aggressive, and as well-resourced as those who are trying to break into these systems. Justin Sink. Question: Thanks, Mr. President. I wanted to ask about two things that were on the agenda at the G7 this weekend. The first was the Islamic State. You said yesterday, ahead of your meeting with Prime Minister Cameron, that you’d assess what was working and what wasn’t. So I’m wondering, bluntly, what is not working in the fight against the Islamic State. And in today’s bilateral with Prime Minister Abadi, you pledged to step up assistance to Iraq. I’m wondering if that includes additional U.S. military personnel. Separately, on trade, Chancellor Merkel said today that she was pleased you would get fast track authority. I’m wondering if that means that you gave her or other leaders here assurance that it would go through the House. And if it doesn’t, what does it say about your ability to achieve meaningful agreements with Congress for the remainder of your time in office? President Obama: Well, on the latter question, I’m not going to hypothesize about not getting it done. I intend to get it done. And, hopefully, we’re going to get a vote soon because I think it’s the right thing to do. With respect to ISIL, we have made significant progress in pushing back ISIL from areas in which they had occupied or disrupted local populations, but we’ve also seen areas like in Ramadi where they’re displaced in one place and then they come back in, in another. And they’re nimble, and they’re aggressive, and they’re opportunistic. So one of the areas where we’re going to have to improve is the speed at which we’re training Iraqi forces. Where we’ve trained Iraqi forces directly and equipped them, and we have a train-and-assist posture, they operate effectively. Where we haven’t, morale, lack of equipment, et cetera, may undermine the effectiveness of Iraqi security forces. So we want to get more Iraqi security forces trained, fresh, well-equipped and focused. And President Abadi wants the same thing. So we’re reviewing a range of plans for how we might do that, essentially accelerating the number of Iraqi forces that are properly trained and equipped and have a focused strategy and good leadership. And when a finalized plan is presented to me by the Pentagon, then I will share it with the American people. We don’t yet have a complete strategy because it requires commitments on the part of the Iraqis, as well, about how recruitment takes place, how that training takes place. And so the details of that are not yet worked out. Question: Is it fair to say that additional military personnel -- U.S. military personnel are of what’s under consideration? President Obama: I think what is fair to say is that all the countries in the international coalition are prepared to do more to train Iraqi security forces if they feel like that additional work is being taken advantage of. And one of the things that we’re still seeing is -- in Iraq -- places where we’ve got more training capacity than we have recruits. So part of my discussion with Prime Minister Abadi was how do we make sure that we get more recruits in. A big part of the answer there is our outreach to Sunni tribes. We’ve seen Sunni tribes who are not only willing and prepared to fight ISIL, but have been successful at rebuffing ISIL. But it has not been happening as fast as it needs to. And so one of the efforts that I'm hoping to see out of Prime Minister Abadi, and the Iraqi legislature when they’re in session, is to move forward on a National Guard law that would help to devolve some of the security efforts in places like Anbar to local folks, and to get those Sunni tribes involved more rapidly. This is part of what helped defeat AQI -- the precursor of ISIL -- during the Iraq War in 2006. Without that kind of local participation, even if you have a short-term success, it’s very hard to hold those areas. The other area where we’ve got to make a lot more progress is on stemming the flow of foreign fighters. Now, you’ll recall that I hosted a U.N. General Security Council meeting specifically on this issue, and we’ve made some progress, but not enough. We are still seeing thousands of foreign fighters flowing into, first, Syria, and then, oftentimes, ultimately into Iraq. And not all of that is preventable, but a lot of it is preventable -- if we’ve got better cooperation, better coordination, better intelligence, if we are monitoring what’s happening at the Turkish-Syria border more effectively. This is an area where we’ve been seeking deeper cooperation with Turkish authorities who recognize it’s a problem but haven’t fully ramped up the capacity they need. And this is something that I think we got to spend a lot of time on. If we can cut off some of that foreign fighter flow then we’re able to isolate and wear out ISIL forces that are already there. Because we’re taking a lot of them off the battlefield, but if they’re being replenished, then it doesn’t solve the problem over the long term. The final point that I emphasized to Prime Minister Abadi is the political agenda of inclusion remains as important as the military fight that’s out there. If Sunnis, Kurds, and Shia all feel as if they’re concerns are being addressed, and that operating within a legitimate political structure can meet their need for security, prosperity, non-discrimination, then we’re going to have much easier time. And the good news is Prime Minister Abadi is very much committed to that principle. But, obviously, he’s inheriting a legacy of a lot of mistrust between various groups in Iraq -- he’s having to take a lot of political risks. In some cases, there are efforts to undermine those efforts by other political factions within Iraq. And so we’ve got to continue to monitor that and support those who are on the right side of the issue there. Colleen Nelson. Question: Thank you, Mr. President. You mentioned that the U.S. and its European allies have reached a consensus on extending the sanctions against Russia. Is there a consensus, though, about what specifically the next step should be if Russia continues to violate the Minsk agreement? And also, can you deter Russian aggression in other parts of Eastern Europe without a permanent U.S. troop presence? And separately, I wanted to ask you about the possibility that the court battle over your actions on immigration could extend late into your term. Do you think that there’s anything more that you can do for the people who would have benefitted from that program and now are in limbo? And how do you view the possibility of your term ending without accomplishing your goals on immigration? President Obama: On Ukraine and Russia and Minsk, there is strong consensus that we need to keep pushing Russia to abide by the terms of the Minsk agreement; we need to continue to support and encourage Ukraine to meet its obligations under Minsk -- that until that's completed, sanctions remain in place. There was discussion about additional steps that we might need to take if Russia, working through separatists, doubled down on aggression inside of Ukraine. Those discussions are taking place at a technical level, not yet at a political level -- because I think the first goal here going into a European Council meeting that's coming up is just rolling over the existing sanctions. But I think at a technical level, we want to be prepared. Our hope is, is that we don't have to take additional steps because the Minsk agreement is met. And I want to give enormous credit to Chancellor Merkel, along with President Hollande, who have shown extraordinary stick-to-itiveness and patience in trying to get that done. Ultimately, this is going to be an issue for Mr. Putin. He’s got to make a decision: Does he continue to wreck his country’s economy and continue Russia’s isolation in pursuit of a wrong-headed desire to re-create the glories of the Soviet empire? Or does he recognize that Russia’s greatness does not depend on violating the territorial integrity and sovereignty of other countries? And as I mentioned earlier, the costs that the Russian people are bearing are severe. That’s being felt. It may not always be understood why they’re suffering, because of state media inside of Russia and propaganda coming out of state media in Russia and to Russian speakers. But the truth of the matter is, is that the Russian people would greatly benefit. And, ironically, one of the rationales that Mr. Putin provided for his incursions into Ukraine was to protect Russian speakers there. Well, Russian speakers inside of Ukraine are precisely the ones who are bearing the brunt of the fighting. Their economy has collapsed. Their lives are disordered. Many of them are displaced. Their homes may have been destroyed. They’re suffering. And the best way for them to stop suffering is if the Minsk agreement is fully implemented. Oh, immigration. With respect to immigration, obviously, I’m frustrated by a district court ruling that now is winding its way through the appeals process. We are being as aggressive as we can legally to, first and foremost, appeal that ruling, and then to implement those elements of immigration executive actions that were not challenged in court. But, obviously, the centerpiece, one of the key provisions for me was being able to get folks who are undocumented to go through a background check -- criminal background check -- pay back taxes, and then have a legal status. And that requires an entire administrative apparatus and us getting them to apply and come clean. I made a decision, which I think is the right one, that we should not accept applications until the legal status of this is clarified. I am absolutely convinced this is well within my legal authority, Department of Homeland Security’s legal authority. If you look at the precedent, if you look at the traditional discretion that the executive branch possesses when it comes to applying immigration laws, I am convinced that what we’re doing is lawful, and our lawyers are convinced that what we’re doing is lawful. But the United States is a government of laws and separations of power, and even if it’s an individual district court judge who’s making this determination, we’ve got to go through the process to challenge it. And until we get clarity there, I don’t want to bring people in, have them apply and jump through a lot of hoops only to have it deferred and delayed further. Of course, there’s one really great way to solve this problem, and that would be Congress going ahead and acting, which would obviate the need for executive actions. The majority of the American people I think still want to see that happen. I suspect it will be a major topic of the next presidential campaign. And so we will continue to push as hard as we can on all fronts to fix a broken immigration system. Administratively, we’ll be prepared if and when we get the kind of ruling that I think we should have gotten in the first place about our authorities to go ahead and implement. But ultimately, this has never fully replaced the need for Congress to act. And my hope is, is that after a number of the other issues that we’re working on currently get cleared, that some quiet conversations start back up again, particularly in the Republican Party, about the shortsighted approach that they’re taking when it comes to immigration. Okay. Christi Parsons. Question: Thank you, Mr. President. More than six million Americans may soon lose health insurance if the Supreme Court this month backs the latest challenge to the Affordable Care Act. A growing number of states are looking for assistance as they face the prospect that their residents may lose federal insurance subsidies and their insurance markets may collapse. Yet, your administration has given very little to no guidance on how states can prepare. What can you tell state leaders and advocates who worry that health care markets in half the country may be thrown into chaos? President Obama: What I can tell state leaders is, is that under well-established precedent, there is no reason why the existing exchanges should be overturned through a court case. It has been well documented that those who passed this legislation never intended for folks who were going through the federal exchange not to have their citizens get subsidies. That’s not just the opinion of me; that’s not just the opinion of Democrats; that’s the opinion of the Republicans who worked on the legislation. The record makes it clear. And under well-established statutory interpretation, approaches that have been repeatedly employed -- not just by liberal, Democratic judges, but by conservative judges like some on the current Supreme Court -- you interpret a statute based on what the intent and meaning and the overall structure of the statute provides for. And so this should be an easy case. Frankly, it probably shouldn’t even have been taken up. And since we’re going to get a ruling pretty quick, I think it’s important for us to go ahead and assume that the Supreme Court is going to do what most legal scholars who’ve looked at this would expect them to do. But, look, I’ve said before and I will repeat again: If, in fact, you have a contorted reading of the statute that says federal-run exchanges don’t provide subsidies for folks who are participating in those exchanges, then that throws off how that exchange operates. It means that millions of people who are obtaining insurance currently with subsidies suddenly aren’t getting those subsidies; many of them can’t afford it; they pull out; and the assumptions that the insurance companies made when they priced their insurance suddenly gets thrown out the window. And it would be disruptive -- not just, by the way, for folks in the exchanges, but for those insurance markets in those states, generally. So it’s a bad idea. It’s not something that should be done based on a twisted interpretation of four words in -- as we were reminded repeatedly -- a couple-thousand-page piece of legislation. What’s more, the thing is working. I mean, part of what’s bizarre about this whole thing is we haven’t had a lot of conversation about the horrors of Obamacare because none of them come to pass. You got 16 million people who’ve gotten health insurance. The overwhelming majority of them are satisfied with the health insurance. It hasn’t had an adverse effect on people who already had health insurance. The only effect it’s had on people who already had health insurance is they now have an assurance that they won’t be prevented from getting health insurance if they’ve got a preexisting condition, and they get additional protections with the health insurance that they do have. The costs have come in substantially lower than even our estimates about how much it would cost. Health care inflation overall has continued to be at some of the lowest levels in 50 years. None of the predictions about how this wouldn’t work have come to pass. And so I’m -- A, I’m optimistic that the Supreme Court will play it straight when it comes to the interpretation. And, B, I should mention that if it didn't, Congress could fix this whole thing with a one-sentence provision. But I’m not going to go into a long speculation anticipating disaster. Question: But you’re a plan-ahead kind of guy. Why not have a plan B? President Obama: Well, you know, I want to just make sure that everybody understands that you have a model where all the pieces connect. And there are a whole bunch of scenarios not just in relation to health care, but all kinds of stuff that I do, where if somebody does something that doesn't make any sense, then it’s hard to fix. And this would be hard to fix. Fortunately, there’s no reason to have to do it. It doesn't need fixing. All right? Thank you very much.

Thank you to the people of Germany and Bavaria.

You guys were wonderful hosts.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Loretta Lynch Investiture Ceremony Address

I was telling Loretta backstage, a little pomp and circumstance never hurts.

Justice Sonia Sotomayor is here. I want to congratulate Deputy Attorney General Sally Yates on her confirmation. She is here somewhere. There she is. And I want to thank the elected officials who are here today, the family and the friends, colleagues. At long last, I'm so proud to be here for the installation of our 83rd Attorney General of the United States, Loretta Lynch. We want to welcome Loretta's family -- her husband, Stephen Hargrove -- her father, Reverend Lorenzo Lynch. We want to say to Mrs. Lynch as well, thank you so much for your appearance.

As I said when I nominated Loretta, in a country built on the rule of law, there are few, perhaps no offices more important than that of Attorney General. The person in this position is the American people's lawyer, tasked with enforcing our federal laws and making sure they're applied evenly and equally. That's the legacy of Eric Holder. We are grateful for his outstanding service -- as one of the longest-serving Attorney Generals in our history.

And I want to thank his wonderful wife, Dr. Sharon Malone, who's here today. Where's Sharon at? There she is. As Attorney General, Eric was driven by his fundamental belief that justice is not an abstraction, it's a very real and tangible way that our laws interact with people in their daily lives. And the good news is Loretta shares that belief.

She brings her own unique style of leadership. She brings a wealth of experience to the Justice Department at a time when there is so much work to be done -- from keeping us safe from terrorist attacks, to protecting our financial system, to safeguarding our environment, to upholding civil rights. And all of you at the Justice Department, public servants who do incredible work day in and day out, could not ask for a better leader.

Many of you know Loretta's story. Born in segregated Greensboro, North Carolina, Loretta was raised by a fourth-generation Baptist minister and a school librarian -- both of whom don't seem to mind speaking their minds. That's just my quick impression -- and more importantly, taught Loretta the value of speaking up for what's right. As a young girl, she'd go to the Durham courthouse with her father and watch court proceedings, and he'd tell her stories about her grandfather, who risked everything to protect black people who found themselves caught up with the law but had almost no recourse under Jim Crow. And he did this with only a third grade education -- proving to Loretta that, no matter what our circumstances, we all have the power to make a difference in the lives of others. So it's clear that both her parents had a huge influence on Loretta. They are her biggest cheerleaders. Apparently, when she applied to work at the U.S. Attorney's office and a FBI agent went to their house to conduct a routine background check, her parents pulled out a bunch of scrapbooks of Loretta's accomplishments -- made the agents look through them. I'm sure Loretta was mortified. "And here in third grade, she got the prize." "And here's one of her old poems." I can just picture the FBI agent sitting there, "Yes, ma'am." The agent later told Loretta that she probably wasn't a threat to America because if she were, "her parents would have documented it in some way." That's something I can appreciate as a father. So Loretta seized the opportunities that her family gave her to build a distinguished life in public service. After Harvard College and Harvard Law School, she rose to become a strong, independent prosecutor. Loretta spent years in the trenches battling terrorism, and financial fraud, and cybercrime. She went from the Assistant U.S. Attorney's Office in the Eastern District of New York to Chief of the Long Island Office, Chief Assistant U.S. Attorney. Long Island in the House! And then U.S. Attorney. She chased public corruption. She helped secure billions in settlements from some of the world's biggest banks accused of fraud. She jailed some of New York's most notorious and violent mobsters and gang members. She pursued some of the world's most dangerous terrorists and cyber criminals. The law is her map; justice, her compass. She is tough, but she is fair. She is firm, but kind. Her intelligence and her judgment, her grace under fire have earned the trust and admiration of those she works with and those she serves -- and even those she goes up against. In fact, it's funny that we are "installing" Loretta today -- it's not like she's been waiting around for the embossed invitation.

She hit the ground running from day one. She's already made her mark here at home and abroad because of her laser focus on the core mission of the justice the protection of the American people. And she understands the importance of policing and improving relationships between law enforcement and communities. She went on a six-city tour to spotlight the challenges in community policing and the progress that's being made. She understands the importance of criminal justice reform. That we have to be smart on crime, not just tough.

That's why she is committed to working as a partner to leaders with both parties who want to pursue reform that continues the trend of a falling crime rate and a falling incarceration rate. She understands the importance of protecting our national security while also securing our civil liberties.

That's why she will safeguard the programs that are critical to protecting American lives and Americans' privacy. I see our FBI director, Jim Comey who's here, and I know he's committed to doing the same thing.

She lives out the words of one of our greatest attorney generals, Robert F. Kennedy. The glory of justice and the majesty of the law are created not just by the constitution nor by the courts nor by the officers of the law nor by the lawyers, but by the men and women who constitute our society, who are protectors of the law as they are themselves protected by the law.

That's always been the story of our nation. Our strength does not come from the words we've written on the page or the laws we've put down on the books. It comes from ordinary citizens, generation after generation, who do their part to uphold our founding ideals.

It comes from an unshakable faith in our ability to stand up for what is right. And to admit where we've fallen short. And then choose a better way forward. That was the cause to which Loretta dedicated her life long before she became America's top law enforcement officer.

Today, the American people can have no greater advocate for their right to equality under the law, no greater partner in securing justice for all than our Attorney General, Loretta Lynch.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# On the Mass Shooting at Charleston Emanuel AME Church

Good afternoon, everybody. This morning, I spoke with, and Vice President Biden spoke with, Mayor Joe Riley and other leaders of Charleston to express our deep sorrow over the senseless murders that took place last night.

Michelle and I know several members of Emanuel AME Church. We knew their pastor, Reverend Clementa Pinckney, who, along with eight others, gathered in prayer and fellowship and was murdered last night. And to say our thoughts and prayers are with them and their families, and their community doesn’t say enough to convey the heartache and the sadness and the anger that we feel.

Any death of this sort is a tragedy. Any shooting involving multiple victims is a tragedy. There is something particularly heartbreaking about the death happening in a place in which we seek solace and we seek peace, in a place of worship.

Mother Emanuel is, in fact, more than a church. This is a place of worship that was founded by African Americans seeking liberty. This is a church that was burned to the ground because its worships -- worshipers worked to end slavery. When there were laws banning all-black church gatherings, they conducted services in secret. When there was a nonviolent movement to bring our country closer in line with our highest ideals, some of our brightest leaders spoke and led marches from this church’s steps. This is a sacred place in the history of Charleston and in the history of America.

The FBI is now on the scene with local police, and more of the Bureau’s best are on the way to join them. The Attorney General has announced plans for the FBI to open a hate crime investigation. We understand that the suspect is in custody. And I’ll let the best of law enforcement do its work to make sure that justice is served.

Until the investigation is complete, I’m necessarily constrained in terms of talking about the details of the case. But I don’t need to be constrained about the emotions that tragedies like this raise. I’ve had to make statements like this too many times. Communities like this have had to endure tragedies like this too many times. We don’t have all the facts, but we do know that, once again, innocent people were killed in part because someone who wanted to inflict harm had no trouble getting their hands on a gun. Now is the time for mourning and for healing.

But let’s be clear: At some point, we as a country will have to reckon with the fact that this type of mass violence does not happen in other advanced countries. It doesn’t happen in other places with this kind of frequency. And it is in our power to do something about it. I say that recognizing the politics in this town foreclose a lot of those avenues right now. But it would be wrong for us not to acknowledge it. And at some point it’s going to be important for the American people to come to grips with it, and for us to be able to shift how we think about the issue of gun violence collectively.

The fact that this took place in a black church obviously also raises questions about a dark part of our history. This is not the first time that black churches have been attacked. And we know that hatred across races and faiths pose a particular threat to our democracy and our ideals.

The good news is I am confident that the outpouring of unity and strength and fellowship and love across Charleston today, from all races, from all faiths, from all places of worship indicates the degree to which those old vestiges of hatred can be overcome. That, certainly, was Dr. King’s hope just over 50 years ago, after four little girls were killed in a bombing in a black church in Birmingham, Alabama.

He said they lived meaningful lives, and they died nobly. “They say to each of us,” Dr. King said:

...black and white alike, that we must substitute courage for caution. They say to us that we must be concerned not merely with [about] who murdered them, but about the system, the way of life, the philosophy which produced the murderers. Their death says to us that we must work passionately and unrelentingly for the realization of the American Dream.

And if one will hold on, he will discover that God walks with him, and that God is able to lift you from the fatigue of despair to the buoyancy of hope, and transform dark and desolate valleys into sunlit paths of inner peace.

Reverend Pinckney and his congregation understood that spirit. Their Christian faith compelled them to reach out not just to members of their congregation, or to members of their own communities, but to all in need. They opened their doors to strangers who might enter a church in search of healing or redemption.

Mother Emanuel church and its congregation have risen before -- from flames, from an earthquake, from other dark times -- to give hope to generations of Charlestonians. And with our prayers and our love, and the buoyancy of hope, it will rise again now as a place of peace.

Thank you.

# U.S. Conference of Mayors Address

Thank you so much. I love being with mayors. It is great to be here -- although I did worry a little bit that Dennis Johnson would introduce me again. At the White House, he had the old Bulls theme song, and it set a very high bar, as if I was Michael Jordan coming out. And he is a great friend and I very much appreciate him, as I do so many of the mayors here. I saw a lot of you in Washington in January. I thought I had such a good time, let’s meet this summer, as well. And this time, I thought I’d come to you.

I want to thank our host, San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee. He was just in the White House for the San Francisco Giants’ championship visit. I know how excited the Bay Area is over the Golden State Warriors’ championship.

I want to thank two outstanding public servants -- Governor Jerry Brown and Leader Nancy Pelosi, who are here with us today. And I want to thank this year’s leaders of the Conference of Mayors -- Kevin Johnson, Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, and Oklahoma City Mayor Mick Cornett.

I also want to mention a few outstanding mayors who are getting ready to step down. Michael Nutter of Philadelphia has done outstanding work. Greg Ballard of Indianapolis, an outstanding mayor, doing great work with My Brother’s Keeper. Annise Parker of Houston. And my dear, old friend, Michael Coleman of Columbus, Ohio.

And finally, a great mayor, one of my favorite people, and I know one of the people all of you admire so much -- a great mayor, Joe Riley of Charleston. Joe is back home doing one of a mayor’s sadder, more important duties today.

Obviously, the entire country has been shocked and heartbroken by what happened in Charleston. The nature of this attack -- in a place of worship, where congregants invite in a stranger to worship with them, only to be gunned down -- adds to the pain. The apparent motivations of the shooter remind us that racism remains a blight that we have to combat together. We have made great progress, but we have to be vigilant because it still lingers. And when it's poisoning the minds of young people, it betrays our ideals and tears our democracy apart.

But as much as we grieve this particular tragedy, I think it's important, as I mentioned at the White House, to step back and recognize these tragedies have become far too commonplace.

Few people understand the terrible toll of gun violence like mayors do. Whether it’s a mass shooting like the one in Charleston, or individual attacks of violence that add up over time, it tears at the fabric of a community. It costs you money and it costs resources. It costs this country dearly.

More than 11,000 Americans were killed by gun violence in 2013 alone -- 11,000. If Congress had passed some common-sense gun safety reforms after Newtown, after a group of children had been gunned down in their own classroom -- reforms that 90 percent of the American people supported -- we wouldn’t have prevented every act of violence, or even most. We don’t know if it would have prevented what happened in Charleston. No reform can guarantee the elimination of violence. But we might still have some more Americans with us. We might have stopped one shooter. Some families might still be whole. You all might have to attend fewer funerals.

And we should be strong enough to acknowledge this. At the very least, we should be able to talk about this issue as citizens, without demonizing all gun owners who are overwhelmingly law-abiding, but also without suggesting that any debate about this involves a wild-eyed plot to take everybody’s guns away.

I know today’s politics makes it less likely that we see any sort of serious gun safety legislation. I remarked that it was very unlikely that this Congress would act. And some reporters, I think, took this as resignation. I want to be clear -- I am not resigned. I have faith we will eventually do the right thing. I was simply making the point that we have to move public opinion. We have to feel a sense of urgency.

Ultimately, Congress will follow the people. And we have to stop being confused about this. At some point, as a country, we have to reckon with what happens. It is not good enough simply to show sympathy.

You don’t see murder on this kind of scale, with this kind of frequency, in any other advanced nation on Earth. Every country has violent, hateful, or mentally unstable people. What’s different is not every country is awash with easily accessible guns. And so I refuse to act as if this is the new normal, or to pretend that it’s simply sufficient to grieve, and that any mention of us doing something to stop is somehow politicizing the problem.

We need a change in attitudes among everybody -- lawful gun owners, those who are unfamiliar with guns. We have to have a conversation about it and fix this.

And ultimately, Congress acts when the public insists on action. And we’ve seen how public opinion can change. We’ve seen it change on gay marriage. We’ve seen it beginning to change on climate change. We’ve got to shift how we think about this issue. And we have the capacity to change, but we have to feel a sense of urgency about it. We, as a people, have got to change. That’s how we honor those families. That’s how we honor the families in Newtown. That’s how we honor the families in Aurora.

Now, the first time I spoke at this conference, in 2008, I said that American cities shouldn’t be succeeding despite Washington, they should be succeeding with some help from Washington. And as President, I’ve made it a priority to partner with mayors like you. That's why I’ve named three former mayors to my Cabinet. That's why I asked a former president of this conference, Jerry Abramson, to be one of my top advisors. That's why my staff and I work with mayors across the country just about every day, on just about every issue under the sun -– from school reform to community policing, from business development to veterans homelessness.

Because mayors have to get the job done. If you're a mayor, it’s not sufficient to just blather on. You actually have to do something. It’s not enough to figure out how do I position myself on a particular issue to minimize the possibility that I might get in trouble or criticized -- because people expect to trim the trees and pave the roads, and pick up the garbage, and educate our kids, and police our streets.

Whatever the problem, large or small, you got to do everything you can to solve it. You don’t let partisanship stop you. You don’t let cynicism stop you. You’re always in the hunt for good ideas, no matter where they come from.

And I’m going to embarrass Jerry for a second. He took his wife, Madeline, to Paris a few years after they got married. And she took in all the splendor of the Champs-Ã‰lysÃ©es. And he took photos of garbage cans. That's a mayor for you. So she teased him about it. She said, there’s the Eiffel Tower. There’s the Seine. And he said, “Those are some beautiful garbage cans.” And soon enough, downtown Louisville had garbage cans that looked a lot like the Parisian garbage cans.

That’s a mayor, right there. Somebody who’s always thinking about how to make his or her city better -- even on vacation in Paris -- and stops at nothing to get it done.

Now, as President, I’m constantly thinking about how we, together, can keep growing the economy and growing new pathways of opportunity for the American people to get ahead. And across the country, the good news is we’re making progress. And you're seeing it in your cities. More than 12 million new private sector jobs in the past five years; more than 16 million Americans who’ve gained health insurance; more jobs creating more clean energy. Here in California, solar is going crazy. We're producing 10 times as much solar power today as we did when I came into office -- 10 times; three times as much wind power; double the amount of clean energy. More kids graduating from high school and college than ever before.

I’m proud of that record. And by the way we’ve done it while reducing the deficit by two-thirds. You don't hear that that much, but let me just point that out. And I’m proud of it particularly when it’s so hard to get anything through Congress -– even when we’re talking about issues that most Americans outside of Washington agree on.

But that’s also why we’ve partnered with many of you over the past couple of years -- to make real progress on the economic priorities that matter to middle-class Americans. We’re working with many of you to help working families make ends meet and feel more secure in a changing economy. So far, 19 cities have enacted paid sick days; five states have enacted paid sick days or paid family leave. Oregon is set to join them soon. Seventeen states have raised their minimum wage; 27 cities and counties have taken action to raise the wage, as well.

We’re working with many of you to help working families earn higher wages down the road with skills and education they need. Seattle, a city with a Democratic mayor, Ed Murray, just passed universal pre-K. Indianapolis, a city with a Republican mayor, Greg Ballard, is starting citywide preschool scholarships. Thirty-four states have increased funding for preschool as well, which means even more young people getting the early enrichment that can pay off over a lifetime.

Three months ago, I launched an initiative called TechHire to help train workers for the high-skill, high-wage jobs of tomorrow. Twenty-one communities have signed up for TechHire so far, and we’re looking to double that number. So if your town has tech jobs that need filling to people who want to fill them, come join us.

We’re working with many of you to generate more high-wage jobs for our workers to fill. Eleven cities have joined a new initiative called “Startup in a Day” to help entrepreneurs apply for all the licenses and permits they need to start a business in just one day. Cut the red tape.

We’re working with cities to create a network of high-tech manufacturing hubs to keep America at the forefront of innovation. The first hub in Youngstown, Ohio is doing cutting-edge research in 3-D printing and has already attracted tens of millions of dollars in investment to the region.

So we’re creating jobs, we’re training folks for jobs. We’re also working with many of you to make our streets safer and our communities stronger. More than 230 local and tribal leaders have joined the My Brother’s Keeper initiative, and are taking meaningful steps to change the odds for young people in tough circumstances. Together, you’re working to curb juvenile arrests, reduce absenteeism -- and you’re helping these kids imagine a bigger future for themselves.

Today, at the Lawrence Livermore National Lab just down the road, more than 100 students from Oakland and San Francisco are participating in the first “MBK Day at the Lab,” where they can learn about STEM careers.

And meanwhile, from police holding impromptu town hall meetings in barbershops in Charlotte, to the Boston Police Academy improving how it trains cops to deal with young people on the job, cities like yours are striving to rebuild trust between law enforcement and communities, making sure police have the resources they need to do their job, and making sure that every police officer who has an incredibly tough job is trained in making the kinds of connections with communities that engender trust and ensure that everybody is treated equally under the law -- which makes for smart law enforcement and vindicates our values.

So these are just a few of the examples of the work that’s being done. And I’d name every single way that we’re working together to open new doors of opportunity for the American people, but we’d be here all day. So here’s the bottom line.

On America’s most important economic priorities -- from supporting working families to improving education, to creating good new jobs, to getting people to those new jobs, to improving affordable housing, to dealing with homelessness -- cities are not standing still. You are moving forward. So I want to say two things to you. Number one -- thank you. Thank you for your leadership and your vision. And I particularly want to thank you because more than just about any other office in the land, those who occupy the office of mayor, are approaching it in a practical way. Democrats aren’t clinging to dogmas, and are partnering with businesses anywhere they can. And Republicans aren’t clinging to their dogmas; they’re recognizing that government has a role to play in helping make for a vibrant city and expanding opportunity.

And that common-sense, problem-solving, can-do attitude -- that’s what the American people are looking for. That’s what they need. So I want to say thank you to all of you. You’re setting a good example.

Now, second, I also want to say don’t stop now, because we’ve still got a lot more work to do. We’ve got to keep pushing to grow our economy so that more Americans who work hard feel like their hard work is paying off -- which is why I’m working with Congress to pass new 21st century trade agreements with higher standards and tougher protections than past agreements. And I appreciate the help of many of the mayors here to get that done, because you know it’s important to your cities. I believe it’s the right thing to do for American workers and families, or I would not be doing it. I want to thank all of you who helped me make that case, that this matters to your cities.

We’ve got to keep pushing to put people to work rebuilding our infrastructure. There’s not a mayor here who can’t reel off 10 infrastructure projects right now that you’d love to get funding for, and that would put people to work right away and improve your competitiveness, and help businesses move their products and help people get to their jobs. We can keep paying the costs of patching over our existing infrastructure -- more expensive, less efficient, leading to higher commute times, more waste. That’s an option. Or we can create tens of thousands of jobs right now building a 21st century infrastructure that makes us competitive well into the 21st century. That’s what we need to do. We just got to convince Congress to make it happen. And I need mayors to help, from all across the country. Put some pressure on Congress to get this done.

We’ve got to keep pushing to prepare for the impacts of climate change -- because it’s science. It’s a fact. It’s like gravity.

Audience Member: Yes, it is.

President Obama: It is.

A lot of cities have gone far ahead of states on this issue -- along with states. You’re making a difference right now. You’re not waiting for Congress. Mayor Roy Buol is here from Dubuque, Iowa. They’ve set a target to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions 50 percent from 2003 levels by the end of the next decade. Just met with Governor Jerry Brown. He’s talking about how California, which so often has been a leader on environmental issues, is looking to partner and make a difference internationally.

Today, my administration proposed new fuel standards for buses and tractor-trailers and other heavy-duty vehicles -- another important step towards reducing harmful carbon pollution and protecting our planet.

But a lot of this does come down to Congress. I know many of you are worried about Congress cutting programs that are important to your city’s economic growth. But the battle we should be having with Congress isn’t just about individual programs. It’s about the foolish, self-destructive cuts that in Washington are known as the sequester -- because with the sequester, the whole pie is smaller, so protecting one program means cutting another one.

That’s why you’re facing cuts that don’t make any sense to things like TIGER grants, which you all know are so important to putting our people to work rebuilding our infrastructure. That’s the reason why it’s so hard for us to get the funding we need to get homeless assistance grants, which help some of our most vulnerable neighbors and get them off the streets. That’s why it’s been so difficult to fund the preschool development grants, which help educate our children -- which we know if we make that investment will pay off for your cities, your states, and for our country.

I’ve been clear, I will not sign bills at sequestration levels. I will not sign bills that seek to increase defense spending before addressing any of our needs here at home.

And I need your help. I need your help, Mayors, to talk to your members of Congress to get rid of the sequester once and for all -- because it is harming our cities and harming our country. There is no business -- no successful business -- that if it needed to reduce spending, would simply lop off 10 percent of everything. Or 15 percent of everything. That’s not how any of us would run our household budget. You’d cut out things you don’t need, but you’d still keep the college fund going. You’d still pay your health insurance bill and your mortgage note. There are things we have to do as a country to stay ahead.

Once again, mayors understand that if there’s a conflict between ideology and reality, you should opt for reality. Reality is a stubborn thing -- facts, evidence, reason.

So, thanks for your partnership. I want you to know that as long as I’m in the White House, I’ve got your back. I love the country, I love the suburbs, but I’m a city guy. And I know that when cities thrive, suburbs thrive. And when cities thrive, farmlands thrive. And when cities thrive, states thrive. And when cities thrive, America thrives.

You guys are making it happen. I enjoy working with each and every one of you. And I know that each of you takes pride in what makes your hometown unique. You may be proud of your pizza, or your hoagies, or your barbeque -- even though everybody knows Chicago has the best pizza. You may be proud of your city’s victory parades, even though we got a Blackhawk parade that’s pretty good. I’m sure you’re all very proud of your parks. We’ve got nice parks. Or the number of sunny days you’ve got -- which we enjoy half the year. Chances are you’ve got a few superlatives ready in case somebody asks, “What makes your city so special?” That’s what mayors do. You’re boosters.

Yet as unique as your cities are, as proud as you should be of your cities, we always remind ourselves we’re also Americans. And we all want America to be a place where our zip code does not determine our destiny -- where every kid, in whatever city, whatever hamlet, whatever town, has an equal shot at life when they grow up. No matter who you are or where you come from, you can make it if you try.

That’s what America is about. That’s what you’re fighting for every day. And I’m going to fight right there alongside with you. Thank you, everybody. God bless you. God bless America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# U.S. Government's Hostage Policy Review Statement

Good afternoon. Since 9/11, more than 80 Americans have been taken hostage by murderous groups engaged in terrorism or privacy [piracy]. For these innocent men and women -- tourists, journalists, humanitarians -- it’s a horror, and cruelty, beyond description. For their families and for their friends, it’s an unrelenting nightmare that the rest of us cannot even begin to imagine.

As a government, we should always do everything in our power to bring these Americans home safe and to support their families. Dedicated public servants across our government work tirelessly to do so. Our military personnel risk their lives in dangerous missions, such as the operation I authorized last year that attempted to rescue Americans held in Syria and Yemen. And there have been successes, such as the rescue of Captain Richard Phillips, held by Somali pirates, and Jessica Buchanan, rescued from Somalia.

Of these more than 80 Americans taken hostage since 9/11, more than half have ultimately come home, some after many years. Tragically, too many others have not. And at this very moment, Americans continue to be held by terrorist groups or detained unjustly by foreign governments. For them, the nightmare goes on -- and so does our work, day and night, to reunite them with their loved ones.

As I’ve said before, the terrorist threat is evolving. The world has been appalled by ISIL’s barbaric murder of innocent hostages, including Americans. Moreover, the families of hostages have told us -- and they’ve told me directly about their frequent frustrations in dealing with their own government: How different departments and agencies aren’t always coordinated. How there’s been confusion and conflicting information about what the government is prepared to do to help. How they’ve often felt lost in the bureaucracy. And how, in some cases, families feel that they’ve been threatened for exploring certain options to bring their loved ones home.

That’s totally unacceptable. As I’ve gotten to know some of these families and heard some of these stories, it has been my solemn commitment to make sure that they feel fully supported in their efforts to get their families home, and that there is a syncing-up of what I know to be sincere, relentless efforts within government and the families who obviously have one priority and one priority only, and that’s getting their loved ones back.

These families have already suffered enough, and they should never feel ignored or victimized by their own government. Diane Foley, whose son Jim was killed by ISIL last year, said, “As Americans, we can do better.” I totally agree. We must do better. And that’s why I ordered a comprehensive review of our hostage policy.

I want to thank everybody who contributed to this review -- inside and outside of government, some of whom are here today. I especially want to thank the former hostages and families who contributed. I’ve come to know some of these families, often under the most heartbreaking of circumstances. When her son, Peter -- also known as Abdul-Rahman -- was being held in Syria, his mother Paula Kassig wrote me a letter. And in it, she described how on clear nights she and her husband would look up at the stars and the moon and wonder if, perhaps, their son might be able to see them, too -- a reminder of the bond they might still share.

I’ve called these families to offer our condolences after they’ve received gut-wrenching news no parents ever want to hear. I’ve visited with them. I've hugged them. I've grieved with them. I just spent time with some of the families, as well as some former hostages here at the White House. And needless to say, it was a very emotional meeting. Some are still grieving.

I thanked them for sharing their experiences and their ideas with our review team. In fact, many of the changes we’re announcing today are a direct result of their recommendations. I acknowledged to them in private what I want to say publicly -- that it is true that there have been times where our government, regardless of good intentions, has let them down. I promised them that we can do better. Here’s how.

Today, I’m formally issuing a new presidential policy directive to improve how we work to bring home American hostages and how we support their families. I’ve signed a new executive order to ensure our government is organized to do so. And we’re releasing the final report of our review, which describes the two dozen specific steps that we’re taking. Broadly speaking, they fall into three areas.

First, I’m updating our hostage policy. I’m making it clear that our top priority is the safe and rapid recovery of American hostages. And to do so, we will use all elements of our national power. I am reaffirming that the United States government will not make concessions, such as paying ransom, to terrorist groups holding American hostages. And I know this can be a subject of significant public debate. It’s a difficult and emotional issue, especially for the families. As I said to the families who are gathered here today, and as I've said to families in the past, I look at this not just as a President, but also as a husband and a father. And if my family were at risk, obviously I would move heaven and earth to get those loved ones back.

As President, I also have to consider our larger national security. I firmly believe that the United States government paying ransom to terrorists risks endangering more Americans and funding the very terrorism that we’re trying to stop. And so I firmly believe that our policy ultimately puts fewer Americans at risk.

At the same time, we are clarifying that our policy does not prevent communication with hostage-takers -- by our government, the families of hostages, or third parties who help these families. And, when appropriate, our government may assist these families and private efforts in those communications -- in part, to ensure the safety of family members and to make sure that they’re not defrauded. So my message to these families was simple: We’re not going to abandon you. We will stand by you.

Second, we’re making changes to ensure that our government is better organized around this mission. Every department that is involved in our national security apparatus cares deeply about these hostages, prioritizes them and works really hard. But they’re not always as well coordinated as they need to be. Under the National Security Council here at the White House, we're setting up a new Hostage Response Group, comprised of senior officials from across our government who will be responsible for ensuring that our hostage policies are consistent and coordinated and implemented rapidly and effectively. And they will be accountable at the highest levels; they’ll be accountable to me.

Soon I’ll be designating, as well, a senior diplomat as my Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs, who will be focused solely on leading our diplomatic efforts with other countries to bring our people home.

At the operational level, we’re creating for the first time one central hub where experts from across government will work together, side-by-side, as one coordinated team to find American hostages and bring them home safely. In fact, this fusion cell, located at the FBI, is already up and running. And we’re designating a new official in the intelligence community to be responsible for coordinating the collection, analysis and rapid dissemination of intelligence related to American hostages so we can act on that intelligence quickly.

Third -- and running through all these efforts -- we are fundamentally changing how our government works with families of hostages. Many of the families told us that they at times felt like an afterthought or a distraction; that, too often, the law enforcement, or military and intelligence officials they were interacting with were begrudging in giving them information. And that ends today. I’m making it clear that these families are to be treated like what they are -- our trusted partners and active partners in the recovery of their loved ones. We are all on the same team, and nobody cares more about bringing home these Americans than their own families, and we have to treat them as partners.

So, specifically, our new fusion cell will include a person dedicated to coordinating the support families get from the government. This coordinator will ensure that we communicate with families better, with one clear voice, and that families get information that is timely and accurate. Working with the intelligence community, we will be sharing more intelligence with families.

And this coordinator will be the family’s voice within government -- making sure that when decisions are made about their loved ones, their concerns are front and center. Everyone who deals with these families on a regular basis will be given additional training to ensure families are treated with the dignity and compassion that they deserve. In particular, I want to point out that no family of an American hostage has ever been prosecuted for paying a ransom for the return of their loved ones. The last thing that we should ever do is to add to a family’s pain with threats like that.

So the bottom line is this: When it comes to how our government works to recover Americans held hostage and how we work with their families, we are changing how we do business. After everything they’ve endured, these families are right to be skeptical, and that’s why it’s so important -- as I told them today -- that we will be setting up mechanisms to ensure accountability and implementation. I’ve directed my national security team to report back to me, including getting feedback from the families to make sure that these reforms are being put in place and that they are working.

And in the course of our review, several families told us they wanted to spare other families the frustrations they endured. Some have even created new organizations to support families like theirs or to honor their loved ones, such as the memorial foundation for Steven Sotloff, who wrote, “Everyone has two lives. The second one begins when you realize you only have one.” As a government, and as a nation, we can learn from the example and the strength of their lives -- the kind of strength we’ve seen in all these held hostages, including Kayla Mueller.

Kayla devoted her life to serving those in need around the world. To refugees in Syria who had lost everything, she was a source of comfort and hope. Before her tragic death, she was held by ISIL in Syria for a year and a half. And during her captivity, Kayla managed to smuggle a letter to her family. She said, “None of us could have known it would be this long but I know I am also fighting from my side in the ways that I am able, and I have a lot of fight left in me. I am not breaking down and I will not give in no matter how long it takes.”

Today, my message to anyone who harms Americans is that we do not forget. Our reach is long. Justice will be done. My message to every American being held unjustly around the world who is fighting from the inside to survive another day, my message to their families who long to hold them once more, is that the United States of America will never stop working to reunite you with your family. We will not give up -- no matter how long it takes.

Thank you very much, everybody.

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# On the US Supreme Court's Decision on the Affordable Care Act

Good morning, everybody. Have a seat. Five years ago, after nearly a century of talk, decades of trying, a year of bipartisan debate -- we finally declared that in America, health care is not a privilege for a few, but a right for all.

Over those five years, as we’ve worked to implement the Affordable Care Act, there have been successes and setbacks. The setbacks I remember clearly. But as the dust has settled, there can be no doubt that this law is working. It has changed, and in some cases saved, American lives. It set this country on a smarter, stronger course.

And today, after more than 50 votes in Congress to repeal or weaken this law; after a presidential election based in part on preserving or repealing this law; after multiple challenges to this law before the Supreme Court -- the Affordable Care Act is here to stay.

This morning, the Court upheld a critical part of this law -– the part that’s made it easier for Americans to afford health insurance regardless of where you live. If the partisan challenge to this law had succeeded, millions of Americans would have had thousands of dollars’ worth of tax credits taken from them. For many, insurance would have become unaffordable again. Many would have become uninsured again. Ultimately, everyone’s premiums could have gone up. America would have gone backwards. And that’s not what we do. That’s not what America does. We move forward.

So today is a victory for hardworking Americans all across this country whose lives will continue to become more secure in a changing economy because of this law.

If you’re a parent, you can keep your kids on your plan until they turn 26 -- something that has covered millions of young people so far. That’s because of this law.

If you’re a senior, or an American with a disability, this law gives you discounts on your prescriptions -- something that has saved 9 million Americans an average of $1,600 so far.

If you’re a woman, you can’t be charged more than anybody else -- even if you’ve had cancer, or your husband had heart disease, or just because you’re a woman. Your insurer has to offer free preventive services like mammograms. They can’t place annual or lifetime caps on your care because of this law.

Because of this law, and because of today’s decision, millions of Americans who I hear from every single day will continue to receive the tax credits that have given about eight in ten people who buy insurance on the new marketplaces the choice of a health care plan that costs less than $100 a month.

And when it comes to preexisting conditions -- someday, our grandkids will ask us if there was really a time when America discriminated against people who get sick. Because that is something this law has ended for good. That affects everybody with health insurance -- not just folks who got insurance through the Affordable Care Act. All of America has protections it didn’t have before.

As the law’s provisions have gradually taken effect, more than 16 million uninsured Americans have gained coverage so far. Nearly one in three Americans who was uninsured a few years ago is insured today. The uninsured rate in America is the lowest since we began to keep records. And that is something we can all be proud of.

Meanwhile, the law has helped hold the price of health care to its slowest growth in 50 years. If your family gets insurance through your job -- so you’re not using the Affordable Care Act -- you’re still paying about $1,800 less per year on average than you would be if we hadn’t done anything. By one leading measure, what business owners pay out in wages and salaries is now finally growing faster than what they spend on health insurance. That hasn’t happened in 17 years -- and that’s good for workers and it’s good for the economy.

The point is, this is not an abstract thing anymore. This is not a set of political talking points. This is reality. We can see how it is working. This law is working exactly as it’s supposed to. In many ways, this law is working better than we expected it to. For all the misinformation campaigns, all the doomsday predictions, all the talk of death panels and job destruction, for all the repeal attempts -- this law is now helping tens of millions of Americans.

And they’ve told me that it has changed their lives for the better. I’ve had moms come up and say, my son was able to see a doctor and get diagnosed, and catch a tumor early, and he’s alive today because of this law. This law is working. And it’s going to keep doing just that.

Five years in, this is no longer about a law. This is not about the Affordable Care Act as legislation, or Obamacare as a political football. This is health care in America.

And unlike Social Security or Medicare, a lot of Americans still don’t know what Obamacare is beyond all the political noise in Washington. Across the country, there remain people who are directly benefitting from the law but don’t even know it. And that’s okay. There’s no card that says “Obamacare” when you enroll. But that’s by design, for this has never been a government takeover of health care, despite cries to the contrary. This reform remains what it’s always been: a set of fairer rules and tougher protections that have made health care in America more affordable, more attainable, and more about you -- the consumer, the American people. It’s working.

And with this case behind us, let’s be clear -- we’ve still got work to do to make health care in America even better. We’ll keep working to provide consumers with all the tools you need to make informed choices about your care. We’ll keep working to increase the use of preventive care that avoids bigger problems down the road. We’ll keep working to boost the steadily improving quality of care in hospitals, and bring down costs even lower, make the system work even better. Already we’ve seen reductions, for example, in the number of readmissions at hospitals. That saves our society money, it saves families money, makes people healthier.

We’re making progress. We’re going to keep working to get more people covered. I’m going to work as hard as I can to convince more governors and state legislatures to take advantage of the law, put politics aside, and expand Medicaid and cover their citizens. We’ve still got states out there that, for political reasons, are not covering millions of people that they could be covering, despite the fact that the federal government is picking up the tab.

So we’ve got more work to do. But what we’re not going to do is unravel what has now been woven into the fabric of America. And my greatest hope is that rather than keep refighting battles that have been settled again and again and again, I can work with Republicans and Democrats to move forward. Let’s join together, make health care in America even better.

Three generations ago, we chose to end an era when seniors were left to languish in poverty. We passed Social Security, and slowly it was woven into the fabric of America and made a difference in the lives of millions of people. Two generations ago, we chose to end an age when Americans in their golden years didn’t have the guarantee of health care. Medicare was passed, and it helped millions of people.

This generation of Americans chose to finish the job -- to turn the page on a past when our citizens could be denied coverage just for being sick. To close the books on a history where tens of millions of Americans had no hope of finding decent, affordable health care; had to hang their chances on fate. We chose to write a new chapter, where in a new economy, Americans are free to change their jobs or start a business, chase a new idea, raise a family, free from fear, secure in the knowledge that portable, affordable health care is there for us and always will be. And that if we get sick, we’re not going to lose our home. That if we get sick, that we’re going to be able to still look after our families.

That’s when America soars -- when we look out for one another. When we take care of each other. When we root for one another’s success. When we strive to do better and to be better than the generation that came before us, and try to build something better for generations to come. That’s why we do what we do. That’s the whole point of public service.

So this was a good day for America. Let’s get back to work.

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# Eulogy for Reverend Clementa C. Pinckney

Giving all praise and honor to God.

The Bible calls us to hope. To persevere, and have faith in things not seen.

“They were still living by faith when they died,” Scripture tells us:

They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on Earth.

1

We are here today to remember a man of God who lived by faith. A man who believed in things not seen. A man who believed there were better days ahead, off in the distance. A man of service who persevered, knowing full well he would not receive all those things he was promised, because he believed his efforts would deliver a better life for those who followed.

To Jennifer, his beloved wife; to Eliana and Malana, his beautiful, wonderful daughters; to the Mother Emanuel family and the people of Charleston, the people of South Carolina.

I cannot claim to have the good fortune to know Reverend Pinckney well. But I did have the pleasure of knowing him and meeting him here in South Carolina, back when we were both a little bit younger. Back when I didn’t have visible grey hair. The first thing I noticed was his graciousness, his smile, his reassuring baritone, his deceptive sense of humor -- all qualities that helped him wear so effortlessly a heavy burden of expectation.

Friends of his remarked this week that when Clementa Pinckney entered a room, it was like the future arrived; that even from a young age, folks knew he was special. Anointed. He was the progeny of a long line of the faithful -- a family of preachers who spread God’s word, a family of protesters who sowed change to expand voting rights and desegregate the South. Clem heard their instruction, and he did not forsake their teaching.

He was in the pulpit by 13, pastor by 18, public servant by 23. He did not exhibit any of the cockiness of youth, nor youth’s insecurities; instead, he set an example worthy of his position, wise beyond his years, in his speech, in his conduct, in his love, faith, and purity.

As a senator, he represented a sprawling swath of the Lowcountry, a place that has long been one of the most neglected in America. A place still wracked by poverty and inadequate schools; a place where children can still go hungry and the sick can go without treatment. A place that needed somebody like Clem.

His position in the minority party meant the odds of winning more resources for his constituents were often long. His calls for greater equity were too often unheeded, the votes he cast were sometimes lonely. But he never gave up. He stayed true to his convictions. He would not grow discouraged. After a full day at the capitol, he’d climb into his car and head to the church to draw sustenance from his family, from his ministry, from the community that loved and needed him. There he would fortify his faith, and imagine what might be.

Reverend Pinckney embodied a politics that was neither mean, nor small. He conducted himself quietly, and kindly, and diligently. He encouraged progress not by pushing his ideas alone, but by seeking out your ideas, partnering with you to make things happen. He was full of empathy and fellow feeling, able to walk in somebody else’s shoes and see through their eyes. No wonder one of his Senate colleagues remembered Senator Pinckney as “the most gentle of the 46 of us -- the best of the 46 of us.”

Clem was often asked why he chose to be a pastor and a public servant. But the person who asked probably didn’t know the history of the AME church. As our brothers and sisters in the AME church know, we don't make those distinctions. “Our calling,” Clem once said, “is not just within the walls of the congregation, but…the life and community in which our congregation resides.”

He embodied the idea that our Christian faith demands deeds and not just words; that the “sweet hour of prayer” actually lasts the whole week long -- that to put our faith in action is more than individual salvation, it's about our collective salvation; that to feed the hungry and clothe the naked and house the homeless is not just a call for isolated charity but the imperative of a just society.

What a good man. Sometimes I think that's the best thing to hope for when you're eulogized -- after all the words and recitations and resumes are read, to just say someone was a good man.

You don’t have to be of high station to be a good man. Preacher by 13. Pastor by 18. Public servant by 23. What a life Clementa Pinckney lived. What an example he set. What a model for his faith. And then to lose him at 41 -- slain in his sanctuary with eight wonderful members of his flock, each at different stages in life but bound together by a common commitment to God.

Cynthia Hurd. Susie Jackson. Ethel Lance. DePayne Middleton-Doctor. Tywanza Sanders. Daniel L. Simmons. Sharonda Coleman-Singleton. Myra Thompson. Good people. Decent people. God-fearing people. People so full of life and so full of kindness. People who ran the race, who persevered. People of great faith.

To the families of the fallen, the nation shares in your grief. Our pain cuts that much deeper because it happened in a church. The church is and always has been the center of African-American life -- a place to call our own in a too often hostile world, a sanctuary from so many hardships.

Over the course of centuries, black churches served as “hush harbors” where slaves could worship in safety; praise houses where their free descendants could gather and shout hallelujah -- rest stops for the weary along the Underground Railroad; bunkers for the foot soldiers of the Civil Rights Movement. They have been, and continue to be, community centers where we organize for jobs and justice; places of scholarship and network; places where children are loved and fed and kept out of harm’s way, and told that they are beautiful and smart -- and taught that they matter. That’s what happens in church.

That’s what the black church means. Our beating heart. The place where our dignity as a people is inviolate. When there’s no better example of this tradition than Mother Emanuel -- a church built by blacks seeking liberty, burned to the ground because its founder sought to end slavery, only to rise up again, a Phoenix from these ashes.

When there were laws banning all-black church gatherings, services happened here anyway, in defiance of unjust laws. When there was a righteous movement to dismantle Jim Crow, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. preached from its pulpit, and marches began from its steps. A sacred place, this church. Not just for blacks, not just for Christians, but for every American who cares about the steady expansion -- of human rights and human dignity in this country; a foundation stone for liberty and justice for all. That’s what the church meant.

We do not know whether the killer of Reverend Pinckney and eight others knew all of this history. But he surely sensed the meaning of his violent act. It was an act that drew on a long history of bombs and arson and shots fired at churches, not random, but as a means of control, a way to terrorize and oppress. An act that he imagined would incite fear and recrimination; violence and suspicion. An act that he presumed would deepen divisions that trace back to our nation’s original sin. Oh, but God works in mysterious ways. God has different ideas.

He didn’t know he was being used by God. Blinded by hatred, the alleged killer could not see the grace surrounding Reverend Pinckney and that Bible study group -- the light of love that shone as they opened the church doors and invited a stranger to join in their prayer circle. The alleged killer could have never anticipated the way the families of the fallen would respond when they saw him in court -- in the midst of unspeakable grief, with words of forgiveness. He couldn’t imagine that.

The alleged killer could not imagine how the city of Charleston, under the good and wise leadership of Mayor Riley -- how the state of South Carolina, how the United States of America would respond -- not merely with revulsion at his evil act, but with big-hearted generosity and, more importantly, with a thoughtful introspection and self-examination that we so rarely see in public life.

Blinded by hatred, he failed to comprehend what Reverend Pinckney so well understood -- the power of God’s grace.

This whole week, I’ve been reflecting on this idea of grace. The grace of the families who lost loved ones. The grace that Reverend Pinckney would preach about in his sermons. The grace described in one of my favorite hymnals -- the one we all know: Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I’m found; was blind but now I see.

According to the Christian tradition, grace is not earned. Grace is not merited. It’s not something we deserve. Rather, grace is the free and benevolent favor of God -- as manifested in the salvation of sinners and the bestowal of blessings. Grace.

As a nation, out of this terrible tragedy, God has visited grace upon us, for he has allowed us to see where we’ve been blind. He has given us the chance, where we’ve been lost, to find our best selves. We may not have earned it, this grace, with our rancor and complacency, and short-sightedness and fear of each other -- but we got it all the same. He gave it to us anyway. He’s once more given us grace. But it is up to us now to make the most of it, to receive it with gratitude, and to prove ourselves worthy of this gift.

For too long, we were blind to the pain that the Confederate flag stirred in too many of our citizens. It’s true, a flag did not cause these murders. But as people from all walks of life, Republicans and Democrats, now acknowledge -- including Governor Haley, whose recent eloquence on the subject is worthy of praise -- as we all have to acknowledge, the flag has always represented more than just ancestral pride. For many, black and white, that flag was a reminder of systemic oppression and racial subjugation. We see that now.

Removing the flag from this state’s capitol would not be an act of political correctness; it would not be an insult to the valor of Confederate soldiers. It would simply be an acknowledgment that the cause for which they fought -- the cause of slavery -- was wrong -- the imposition of Jim Crow after the Civil War, the resistance to civil rights for all people was wrong. It would be one step in an honest accounting of America’s history; a modest but meaningful balm for so many unhealed wounds. It would be an expression of the amazing changes that have transformed this state and this country for the better, because of the work of so many people of goodwill, people of all races striving to form a more perfect union. By taking down that flag, we express God’s grace.

But I don't think God wants us to stop there. For too long, we’ve been blind to the way past injustices continue to shape the present. Perhaps we see that now. Perhaps this tragedy causes us to ask some tough questions about how we can permit so many of our children to languish in poverty, or attend dilapidated schools, or grow up without prospects for a job or for a career.

Perhaps it causes us to examine what we’re doing to cause some of our children to hate. Perhaps it softens hearts towards those lost young men, tens and tens of thousands caught up in the criminal justice system -- and leads us to make sure that that system is not infected with bias; that we embrace changes in how we train and equip our police so that the bonds of trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve make us all safer and more secure.

Maybe we now realize the way racial bias can infect us even when we don't realize it, so that we're guarding against not just racial slurs, but we're also guarding against the subtle impulse to call Johnny back for a job interview but not Jamal. So that we search our hearts when we consider laws to make it harder for some of our fellow citizens to vote. By recognizing our common humanity by treating every child as important, regardless of the color of their skin or the station into which they were born, and to do what’s necessary to make opportunity real for every American -- by doing that, we express God’s grace.

For too long --

Audience: For too long!

President Obama: For too long, we’ve been blind to the unique mayhem that gun violence inflicts upon this nation. Sporadically, our eyes are open: When eight of our brothers and sisters are cut down in a church basement, 12 in a movie theater, 26 in an elementary school. But I hope we also see the 30 precious lives cut short by gun violence in this country every single day; the countless more whose lives are forever changed -- the survivors crippled, the children traumatized and fearful every day as they walk to school, the husband who will never feel his wife’s warm touch, the entire communities whose grief overflows every time they have to watch what happened to them happen to some other place.

The vast majority of Americans -- the majority of gun owners -- want to do something about this. We see that now. And I'm convinced that by acknowledging the pain and loss of others, even as we respect the traditions and ways of life that make up this beloved country -- by making the moral choice to change, we express God’s grace.

We don’t earn grace. We're all sinners. We don't deserve it. But God gives it to us anyway. And we choose how to receive it. It's our decision how to honor it.

None of us can or should expect a transformation in race relations overnight. Every time something like this happens, somebody says we have to have a conversation about race. We talk a lot about race. There’s no shortcut. And we don’t need more talk. None of us should believe that a handful of gun safety measures will prevent every tragedy. It will not. People of goodwill will continue to debate the merits of various policies, as our democracy requires -- this is a big, raucous place, America is. And there are good people on both sides of these debates. Whatever solutions we find will necessarily be incomplete.

But it would be a betrayal of everything Reverend Pinckney stood for, I believe, if we allowed ourselves to slip into a comfortable silence again. Once the eulogies have been delivered, once the TV cameras move on, to go back to business as usual -- that’s what we so often do to avoid uncomfortable truths about the prejudice that still infects our society. To settle for symbolic gestures without following up with the hard work of more lasting change -- that’s how we lose our way again.

It would be a refutation of the forgiveness expressed by those families if we merely slipped into old habits, whereby those who disagree with us are not merely wrong but bad; where we shout instead of listen; where we barricade ourselves behind preconceived notions or well-practiced cynicism.

Reverend Pinckney once said, “Across the South, we have a deep appreciation of history -- we haven’t always had a deep appreciation of each other’s history.” What is true in the South is true for America. Clem understood that justice grows out of recognition of ourselves in each other. That my liberty depends on you being free, too. That history can’t be a sword to justify injustice, or a shield against progress, but must be a manual for how to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past -- how to break the cycle. A roadway toward a better world. He knew that the path of grace involves an open mind -- but, more importantly, an open heart.

That’s what I’ve felt this week -- an open heart. That, more than any particular policy or analysis, is what’s called upon right now, I think -- what a friend of mine, the writer Marilyn Robinson, calls “that reservoir of goodness, beyond, and of another kind, that we are able to do each other in the ordinary cause of things.”

That reservoir of goodness. If we can find that grace, anything is possible. If we can tap that grace, everything can change.

Amazing grace. Amazing grace.

[Begins to sing] -- Amazing grace -- how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me; I once was lost, but now I’m found; was blind but now I see.

Clementa Pinckney found that grace.

Cynthia Hurd found that grace.

Susie Jackson found that grace.

Ethel Lance found that grace.

DePayne Middleton-Doctor found that grace.

Tywanza Sanders found that grace.

Daniel L. Simmons, Sr. found that grace.

Sharonda Coleman-Singleton found that grace.

Myra Thompson found that grace.

Through the example of their lives, they’ve now passed it on to us.

May we find ourselves worthy of that precious and extraordinary gift, as long as our lives endure.

May grace now lead them home.

May God continue to shed His grace on the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Pentagon Address on the Progress Toward Defeating ISIL

Good afternoon, everybody. I hope everyone had a wonderful holiday weekend -- especially our men and women in uniform. This Fourth of July we were honored to once again welcome some of our incredible troops and their families to share Fourth of July and fireworks at the White House. It was another chance for us, on behalf of the American people, to express our gratitude for their extraordinary service around the world every day.

And that includes the work that brings me here today -- our mission to degrade and ultimately destroy the terrorist group ISIL. This is a cause, a coalition, that’s united countries across the globe -- some 60 nations, including Arab partners. Our comprehensive strategy against ISIL is harnessing all elements of American power, across our government -- military, intelligence, diplomatic, economic, development and perhaps most importantly, the power of our values.

Last month, I ordered additional actions in support of our strategy. I just met with my national security team as part of our regular effort to assess our efforts -- what’s working and what we can do better. Secretary Carter, Chairman Dempsey, I want to thank you and your team for welcoming us and for your leadership, including General Austin who’s leading the military campaign. And I want to summarize briefly where we stand.

I want to start by repeating what I’ve said since the beginning. This will not be quick. This is a long-term campaign. ISIL is opportunistic and it is nimble. In many places in Syria and Iraq, including urban areas, it’s dug in among innocent civilian populations. It will take time to root them out -- and doing so must be the job of local forces on the ground, with training and air support from our coalition.

As with any military effort, there will be periods of progress, but there are also going to be some setbacks -- as we’ve seen with ISIL’s gains in Ramadi in Iraq and central and southern Syria. But today, it’s also important for us to recognize the progress that's been made.

Our coalition has now hit ISIL with more than 5,000 airstrikes. We’ve taken out thousands of fighting positions, tanks, vehicles, bomb factories, and training camps. We’ve eliminated thousands of fighters, including senior ISIL commanders. And over the past year, we’ve seen that when we have an effective partner on the ground, ISIL can be pushed back.

In Iraq, ISIL lost at the Mosul Dam. ISIL lost at Mount Sinjar. ISIL has lost repeatedly across Kirkuk Province. ISIL lost at Tikrit. Altogether, ISIL has lost more than a quarter of the populated areas that it had seized in Iraq. In Syria, ISIL lost at Kobani. It’s recently endured losses across northern Syria, including the key city of Tal Abyad, denying ISIL a vital supply route to Raqqa, its base of operations in Syria.

So these are reminders that ISIL’s strategic weaknesses are real. ISIL is surrounded by countries and communities committed to its destruction. It has no air force; our coalition owns the skies. ISIL is backed by no nation. It relies on fear, sometimes executing its own disillusioned fighters. Its unrestrained brutality often alienates those under its rule, creating new enemies. In short, ISIL’s recent losses in both Syria and Iraq prove that ISIL can and will be defeated.

Indeed, we’re intensifying our efforts against ISIL’s base in Syria. Our airstrikes will continue to target the oil and gas facilities that fund so much of their operations. We’re going after the ISIL leadership and infrastructure in Syria -- the heart of ISIL that pumps funds and propaganda to people around the world. Partnering with other countries -- sharing more information, strengthening laws and border security -- allows us to work to stem the flow of foreign fighters to Syria as well as Iraq, and to stem, obviously, the flow of those fighters back into our own countries. This continues to be a challenge, and, working together, all our nations are going to need to do more, but we're starting to see some progress.

We’ll continue cracking down on ISIL’s illicit finance around the world. By the way, if Congress really wants to help in this effort, they can confirm Mr. Adam Szubin, our nominee for Treasury Under Secretary to lead this effort. This is a vital position to our counterterrorism efforts. Nobody suggests Mr. Szubin is not qualified. He’s highly qualified. Unfortunately, his nomination has been languishing up on the Hill, and we need the Senate to confirm him as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, we continue to ramp up our training and support of local forces that are fighting ISIL on the ground. As I’ve said before, this aspect of our strategy was moving too slowly. But the fall of Ramadi has galvanized the Iraqi government. So, with the additional steps I ordered last month, we’re speeding up training of ISIL [Iraqi] forces, including volunteers from Sunni tribes in Anbar Province.

More Sunni volunteers are coming forward. Some are already being trained, and they can be a new force against ISIL. We continue to accelerate the delivery of critical equipment, including anti-tank weapons, to Iraqi security forces, including the Peshmerga and tribal fighters. And I made it clear to my team that we will do more to train and equip the moderate opposition in Syria.

Now, all this said, our strategy recognizes that no amount of military force will end the terror that is ISIL unless it’s matched by a broader effort -- political and economic -- that addresses the underlying conditions that have allowed ISIL to gain traction. They have filled a void, and we have to make sure that as we push them out that void is filled. So, as Iraqi cities and towns are liberated from ISIL, we’re working with Iraq and the United Nations to help communities rebuild the security, services and governance that they need. We continue to support the efforts of Prime Minister Abadi to forge an inclusive and effective Iraqi government that unites all the people of Iraq -- Shia, Sunnis, Kurds and all minority communities.

In Syria, the only way that the civil war will end -- and in a way so that the Syrian people can unite against ISIL -- is an inclusive political transition to a new government, without Bashar Assad -- a government that serves all Syrians. I discussed this with our Gulf Cooperation Council partners at Camp David and during my recent call with President Putin. I made it clear the United States will continue to work for such a transition.

And a glimmer of good news is I think an increasing recognition on the part of all the players in the region that given the extraordinary threat that ISIL poses it is important for us to work together, as opposed to at cross-purposes, to make sure that an inclusive Syrian government exists.

While the focus of our discussions today was on Iraq and Syria, ISIL and its ideology also obviously pose a grave threat beyond the region. In recent weeks we’ve seen deadly attacks in Tunisia, Kuwait and Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula. We see a growing ISIL presence in Libya and attempts to establish footholds across North Africa, the Middle East, the Caucasus, and Southeast Asia. We’ve seen attacks in Ottawa, Sydney, France and Copenhagen.

So I’ve called on the international community to unite against this scourge of violent extremism. In this fight, the United States continues to lead. When necessary to prevent attacks against our nation, we’ll take direct action against terrorists. We’ll continue to also partner with nations from Afghanistan to Nigeria to build up their security forces. We’re going to work day and night with allies and partners to disrupt terrorist networks and thwart attacks, and to smother nascent ISIL cells that may be trying to develop in other parts of the world.

This also includes remaining vigilant in protecting against attacks here in the homeland. Now, I think it's important for us to recognize the threat of violent extremism is not restricted to any one community. Here in the United States, we’ve seen all kinds of homegrown terrorism. And tragically, recent history reminds us how even a single individual motivated by a hateful ideology with access to dangerous weapons can inflict horrendous harm on Americans. So our efforts to counter violent extremism must not target any one community because of their faith or background, including patriotic Muslim Americans who are our partners in keeping our country safe.

That said, we also have to acknowledge that ISIL has been particularly effective at reaching out to and recruiting vulnerable people around the world, including here in the United States. And they are targeting Muslim communities around the world. Numerous individuals have been arrested across the country for plotting attacks or attempting to join ISIL in Syria and Iraq. Two men apparently inspired by ISIL opened fire in Garland, Texas. And because of our success over the years in improving our homeland security, we’ve made it harder for terrorists to carry out large-scale attacks like 9/11 here at home.

But the threat of lone wolves or small cells of terrorists is complex -- it's harder to detect and harder to prevent. It’s one of the most difficult challenges that we face. And preventing these kinds of attacks on American soil is going to require sustained effort.

So I just want to repeat, the good news is that because of extraordinary efforts from law enforcement as well as our military intelligence, we are doing a better job at preventing any large-scale attacks on the homeland. On the other hand, the small, individual lone wolf attacks or small cells become harder to detect and they become more sophisticated, using new technologies. And that means that we're going to have to pick up our game to prevent these attacks.

It's also true why, ultimately, in order for us to defeat terrorist groups like ISIL and al Qaeda it's going to also require us to discredit their ideology -- the twisted thinking that draws vulnerable people into their ranks. As I’ve said before -- and I know our military leaders agree -- this broader challenge of countering violent extremism is not simply a military effort. Ideologies are not defeated with guns; they’re defeated by better ideas -- a more attractive and more compelling vision.

So the United States will continue to do our part, by working with partners to counter ISIL’s hateful propaganda, especially online. We’ll constantly reaffirm through words and deeds that we will never be at war with Islam. We’re fighting terrorists who distort Islam and whose victims are mostly Muslims. But around the world, we’re also going to insist on partnering with Muslim communities as they seek security, prosperity and the dignity that they deserve. And we're going to expect those communities to step up in terms of pushing back as hard as they can, in conjunction with other people of goodwill, against these hateful ideologies in order to discredit them more effectively, particularly when it comes to what we're teaching young people.

And this larger battle for hearts and minds is going to be a generational struggle. It's ultimately not going to be won or lost by the United States alone. It will be decided by the countries and the communities that terrorists like ISIL target. It’s going to be up to Muslim communities, including scholars and clerics, to keep rejecting warped interpretations of Islam, and to protect their sons and daughters from recruitment. It will be up to all people -- leaders and citizens -- to reject the sectarianism that so often fuels the resentments and conflicts upon which terrorists are currently thriving. It will be up to governments to address the political and economic grievances that terrorists exploit.

Nations that empower citizens to decide their own destiny, that uphold human rights for all their people, that invest in education and create opportunities for their young people -- those can be powerful antidotes to extremist ideologies. Those are the countries that will find a true partner in the United States.

In closing, let me note that this Fourth of July we celebrated 239 years of American independence. Across more than two centuries, we’ve faced much bigger, much more formidable challenges than this -- Civil War, a Great Depression, fascism, communism, terrible natural disasters, 9/11. And every time, every generation, our nation has risen to the moment. We don’t simply endure; we emerge stronger than before. And that will be the case here.

Our mission to destroy ISIL and to keep our country safe will be difficult. It will take time. There will be setbacks as well as progress. But as President and Commander-in-Chief, I want to say to all our men and women in uniform who are serving in this operation -- our pilots, the crews on the ground, our personnel not only on the ground but at sea, our intelligence teams and our diplomatic teams -- I want to thank you. We are proud of you, and you have my total confidence that you’re going to succeed.

To the American people, I want to say we will continue to be vigilant. We will persevere. And just as we have for more than two centuries, we will ultimately prevail.

Thank you very much, everybody. And thanks to the team up on the stage here with me -- they’re doing an outstanding job.

Question: Take a question?

President Obama: You know what, I will take a question. Go ahead.

Question: Every servicemember who is listening to you today, Mr. President, is wondering, are you going to veto the defense bills that are going to pay me? What is your latest thinking on that? Because we've heard secondhand through statements of policy that your advisors would threaten a veto. What’s your take, sir? Would you veto the appropriations bills?

President Obama: Our men and women are going to get paid. And if you’ll note that I've now been President for six and a half years and we've had some wrangling with Congress in the past -- our servicemembers haven't missed a paycheck.

But what is also important in terms of our budget is making sure that we are not short-changing all the elements of American power that allow us to secure the nation and to project our power around the world. So what we're not going to do is to accept a budget that short-changes our long-term requirements for new technologies, for readiness. We're not going to eat our seed corn by devoting too much money on things we don't need now and robbing ourselves of the capacity to make sure that we're prepared for future threats.

I've worked very closely with the Chairman and the members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to develop a budget that is realistic and that looks out into the future and says this is how we're going to handle any possible contingency. And we can't do that if we've got a budget that short-changes vital operations and continues to fund things that are not necessary.

We also have to remind ourselves that the reason we have the best military in the world is, first and foremost, because we've got the best troops in history. But it's also because we've got a strong economy, and we've got a well-educated population. And we've got an incredible research operation and universities that allow us to create new products that then can be translated into our military superiority around the world. We short-change those, we're going to be less secure.

So the way we have to look at this budget is to recognize that, A, we can't think short term, we've got to think long term; and B, part of our national security is making sure that we continue to have a strong economy and that we continue to make the investments that we need in things like education and research that are going to be vital for us to be successful long term.

Question: As an Army reservist, I'm curious to know if you have any plans to send any more American troops overseas right now, any additional forces.

President Obama: There are no current plans to do so. That's not something that we currently discussed. I've always said that I'm going to do what’s necessary to protect the homeland.

One of the principles that we all agree on, though, and I pressed folks pretty hard because in these conversations with my military advisors I want to make sure I'm getting blunt and unadultered [sic] uncensored advice. But in every one of the conversations that we've had, the strong consensus is that in order for us to succeed long-term in this fight against ISIL we have to develop local security forces that can sustain progress.

It is not enough for us to simply send in American troops to temporarily set back organizations like ISIL, but to then, as soon as we leave, see that void filled once again with extremists. It is going to be vital for us to make sure that we are preparing the kinds of local ground forces and security forces with our partners that can not only succeed against ISIL, but then sustain in terms of security and in terms of governance.

Because if we try to do everything ourselves all across the Middle East, all across North Africa, we'll be playing Whack-a-Mole and there will be a whole lot of unintended consequences that ultimately make us less secure.

All right? Thank you. I didn’t even plan to do this. You guys got two bonus questions.

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# Address at the White House Conference on Aging

Welcome to the White House Conference on Aging, everybody. And please give Vicki a big round of applause for the outstanding work she’s doing to help women and families prepare for retirement.

I want to thank the members of Congress who are here, those in my administration who’ve been working on this issue. I want to especially point out one of my favorite former members of Congress, a legend who’s here today -- John Dingell. John, thank you.

John was elected to Congress when he was just 29 -- an over-achiever. Ten years later, he presided over the House chamber for the vote to pass Medicare into law -- an achievement for which he and his father can take some credit. Last week, John turned 89 -- so we want to wish John a happy birthday. He’s been a retiree for six months, but he’s keeping busy -- just check out his Twitter feed if you don’t believe me. So he’s still got some pretty strong opinions.

It is wonderful to be here with all of you. Many of you have devoted your careers to advocating for older Americans. You understand the whole terrain -- not just the challenges, but also the opportunities; not only the questions we’re asking today but the questions that we have to start thinking about for tomorrow. And because this conference takes place just once a decade, we’ve got to make it count.

So one of the best measures of a country is how it treats its older citizens. And by that measure, the United States has a lot to be proud of. Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security are some of our greatest triumphs as a nation. When Social Security was signed into law, far too many seniors were living in poverty. When Medicare was created, only a little more than half of all seniors had some form of insurance. Before Medicaid came along, families often had no help paying for nursing home costs. Today, the number of seniors in poverty has fallen dramatically. Every American over 65 has access to affordable health care. And, by the way, since the Affordable Care Act was signed into law, the uninsured rate for all Americans has fallen by about one-third. Just thought I'd mention that.

Together we declared that every citizen of this country deserves a basic measure of security and dignity. That choice saved millions upon millions of our people from poverty, allowed them to live longer and better lives. So we got to be proud of that. These American endeavors didn’t just make our country better, it reaffirmed our greatness as a country. And it’s hard to find a single American whose life hasn’t been enriched by these covenants in some fashion.

My grandmother was a fiercely independent woman. She helped to raise me. She didn’t have a college degree. She worked her way up, working on bomber assembly lines -- Rosie the Riveter -- during the war, and then went on, got a job as a secretary and then kept on working her way up until she was vice president of a local bank. And after my grandfather died, she chose to live independently. And Medicare and Social Security allowed her to make that choice.

She had the confidence that, having worked hard, played by the rules, she was rewarded with a safe foundation for retirement and she could not fall through those cracks. That was a promise this country made to her and all its citizens. And as a grateful grandson -- who happens to be President -- that is a promise I'm going to make sure we're going to keep for future generations. We've got to make sure that it's there for people who are working today.

But we’re going to have work for it. We have to work to do more to ensure that every older American has the resources and the support that they need to thrive. That challenge -- protecting our seniors, dealing with the rising costs of an aging generation, ensuring we have enough home care workers looking out for our family members -- maximizing the contributions that older Americans can make to our country -- these challenges are just becoming more urgent.

And here’s why. When we won World War II, everyone came home and had babies. I mean, not literally, everyone, but a lot of people had babies. And now, each and every day, almost 10,000 of those babies turn 65 years old. So more than 250,000 Americans turn 65 every month. They’re living longer and they’re living healthier. We’re seeing people break athletic records in their 60s.

Diana Nyad is here today, by the way. You do not want to race her in anything. Arguably the toughest justice on the Supreme Court is the oldest -- Ruth Bader Ginsburg -- also known as the Notorious R.B.G. She’s tough.

In just about every field, Americans who once might have been dismissed as out of touch or past their primes are making vital contributions in every field. And all of us, as a consequence, are able to raise our own ambitions about what we hope to achieve in our golden years. And since I’m living out dog years here in the presidency -- this is something I’m paying a lot of attention to. Look at this hair. Although I do have hair. Crowley was laughing a little bit too much over here.

So since these golden years are coming pretty fast, I want to make sure that we briefly focus on what we’ve done to strengthen already Medicare, and take a longer look at what we have to do to strengthen retirement even more.

Now, we’re often told that Medicare and Social Security are in crisis. We hear that all the time. And usually, that’s used as an excuse to try to cut spending on those bedrock programs. But here’s the truth. Medicare and Social Security are not in crisis, nor have they kept us from cutting our deficits by two-thirds since I took office. Both programs are facing challenges because of the demographic trends I just talked about. And for Medicare, that means we’ve got to keep slowing the growth of health care costs, and keep building on the progress we’ve already made in the past few years.

Since I signed the Affordable Care Act -- also known as Obamacare -- since we signed the ACA into law, we’ve extended the life of the Medicare Trust Fund by 13 years. We’re moving Medicare towards payment models that require quality of care instead of quantity of care as the measure of what you get paid, creating a different set of incentives. And that’s something that will keep older Americans healthy and Medicare healthy as well. What’s more, this law has saved over 9 million people on Medicare currently more than $15 billion on their prescriptions.

Now, that doesn’t get a lot of notice, but I want everybody to understand. Built into the Affordable Care Act, 9 million seniors have gotten significant discounts on their prescription drugs. They don’t always know that it’s because of Obamacare, but that’s why they’ve been paying cheaper drug prices. It’s also given nearly 40 million people on Medicare free preventive health services. And we’ve expanded the options for home- and community-based services offered by Medicaid, which means that more older Americans are able to make the same choice that my grandmother did and live independently.

So those are some areas we’ve made progress. And Sylvia Burwell, who’s here, our Secretary of Health and Human Services, I’m sure at some point during this conference will be talking about additional steps that we need to be taking to further improve a delivery system.

And understand, the goal here is not to cut back on services. The goal is to make sure that you’re getting more of the services that you need, less of the services you don’t, so you’ve got more money left over to do even more stuff that you need to keep you healthy and active and thriving. Because we have too much waste in the system that’s not benefiting patients, but oftentimes just has to do with a really inefficient system or, in some cases, works really well for providers but doesn’t work well for the consumer.

Now, even as we’re dealing with the health care side, we also know that too many older Americans leave the workforce without having saved enough for a dignified retirement. And it’s not as if they haven’t tried -- Vicki touched on this issue. There are a lot of folks out here who work really, really hard, but at the end of the day just still don’t have enough of a nest egg. In today’s economy, preparing for retirement has gotten tougher.

First of all, most workers don’t have a traditional pension -- what we used to understand as a defined benefit pension where you were guaranteed a certain amount every year once you retired. A Social Security check on its own oftentimes is not enough. And even though, as a consequence of some of the steps that we took, we pulled ourselves out of a terrible financial crisis and the stock market has now doubled since I took office -- which means that it’s replenished the 401(k)s for millions of families -- so that’s been important for millions of families across the country, but a lot of people don’t have any kind of retirement account at all.

So we’re going to have to work hard to deal with these issues. Number one, we have to keep Social Security strong, protecting its future solvency. And I think there are ways, creative ways that people are talking about to protect its future solvency, but also strengthen retirement security for our most vulnerable neighbors. So that’s step number one.

Step number two -- for Americans who are doing the hard work of saving for retirement, let’s make sure that they get a fair deal. Earlier this year, I announced new steps we’re taking to protect Americans by cracking down on conflicts of interest in retirement advice. The goal here is to put an end to Wall Street brokers who benefit from backdoor payments or hidden fees at the expense of their clients. If they are advising you on how to save your money, they should be looking out for you -- not for somebody who’s selling a product that may not be best for you. And for the many brokers out there who are doing the right thing, this rule levels the playing field for them and their customers. The notion here is, is we want to make sure responsibility is rewarded and not exploited. So there’s a consumer protection element to this whole thing.

Number three -- we’ve got to make it easier for people to save for retirement. And today, I’m pleased to announce an important step that we’re taking to do just that. Right now, about one-third of American workers do not have access to a retirement plan at work -- one-third. That’s why every budget request I’ve submitted since taking office has included a common-sense proposal to automatically enroll workers without access to a workplace retirement plan in an IRA, which would provide an additional 30 million Americans with access to a retirement plan at work.

Now, unfortunately, Congress has repeatedly failed to act on this idea. The good news is states are stepping up -– just like they’re stepping up in other areas where Congress is not doing its work, like raising the minimum wage or making paid sick leave available for working families. So far, a handful of states have passed laws to create new ways for people without a workplace plan to save for retirement. And more than 20 states are thinking about doing the same.

We want to do everything we can to encourage more states to take this step. So I’ve called on the Department of Labor and Tom Perez to propose a set of rules by the end of the year to provide a clear path forward for states to create retirement savings programs. And if every state did this, tens of millions more Americans could save for retirement at work.

I want to emphasize this point. It is perverse that in this country it is just easier to save if you’ve already got money. And I’m talking about not just the fact that you’ve got money to save; I’m talking about just the mechanics, the mechanisms of being able to save, and then take advantage of the tax benefits of saving. So if we can just make sure that everybody, even if your employer doesn’t provide those mechanisms, you still have a way of accessing it, every dollar you put in, that’s going to be a dollar that also then benefits from the same kinds of tax advantages that somebody with a million dollars is able to take advantage of all the time.

And that’s just fair. That’s only fair. And that’s all we’re trying to do here, is make sure that if you’re working hard out there, even if you’re not making goo-gobs of money and don’t have fancy financial advisors and all that, that you can still put away a little nest egg so that you’re protected when you get older.

So this is just one of a number of steps that we’re going to be taking to improve the lives of older Americans. As many of you know, over the past year, we’ve held regional forums with AARP across the country, heard lots of ideas from people, including folks in this room, about how we can make things better -- especially for families and caregivers. So we’re going to be moving ahead with several of the ideas that you’ve given us.

For example, we’re going to make it easier for folks who are homebound to get nutritional assistance. We’re going to update quality and safety requirements for thousands of nursing homes -- the first major overhaul in nearly 25 years. We’re going to train more prosecutors in how to combat elder abuse. We’re going to work with Congress to reauthorize the Older Americans Act -- because we know it will provide critical support to families and communities.

We’re going to help federal workers and their supervisors better understand how our policies on workplace flexibility can support employees who are also caregivers to aging parents. That’s important. And I’m going to keep fighting to make family leave and workplace flexibility available to every American, no matter where they work. It’s the right thing to do.

Every study shows that the kind of workplace flexibility we’re talking about isn’t just good for the employees; ultimately, it ends up being good for the employers, because you get more loyal, more productive employees with less turnover. And it’s the right thing to do. And with the technologies that we have today, there’s no reason why we can’t make this happen.

So this year, we mark the 80th anniversary of Social Security. We mark the 50th anniversary of Medicare. We’ve grown so accustomed to these programs being a part of American life -- these bedrock, foundation stones of our society -- sometimes it’s easy to forget how revolutionary they were at the time. They were hard to get done. When FDR tried to pass Social Security, critics called it “socialism.” When President Kennedy and President Johnson -- and the Dingells -- worked to create Medicare, cynics raised the alarm about government takeover of health care. And now we’ve got signs saying, “Get your government hands off of my Medicare.”

The point is change has always been hard. Detractors always are trying to maximize people’s fear of the unknown. But ultimately, hope triumphs over fear. We choose to do big things here in America. Like I said a couple weeks back -- three generations ago, we chose to end the era where seniors were left to languish in poverty. Two generations ago, we chose to end an age when Americans in their golden years didn’t have the guarantee of health care. This generation, we chose to go even further, and now health care in America is more affordable and available than ever before.

In this anniversary of those incredible achievements, we need to recommit ourselves to finishing the work that earlier generations began-- make sure this is a country that remains one where no matter who you are or where you started off, you’re treated with dignity, your hard work is rewarded, your contributions are valued, you have a shot to achieve your dreams whatever your age.

That’s the America we’re all working for. And I’m proud to work alongside you.

Thank you so much. Congratulations. Have a wonderful conference.

Thank you.

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# Address to the NAACP Convention

Hello, NAACP! Ah, it’s good to be back. How you all doing today? You doing fine?

Audience: Yes!

President Obama: You look fine. All right, everybody have a seat. I got some stuff to say. I've got some stuff to say.

Audience Member: We love you!

President Obama: I love you back. You know that.

So, see, now, whenever people have, like, little signs, you all got to write it bigger, because I'm getting old now. And I like that picture of me. That's very nice. Thank you.

Let’s get something out of the way up front. I am not singing today.

Audience: Awww --

President Obama: Not singing. Although I will say your board sang to me as I came in for the photograph. So I know there’s some good voices in the auditorium.

Let me also say what everybody knows but doesn’t always want to say out loud -- you all would rather have Michelle here. I understand. I don't blame you. But I will do my best to fill her shoes. And she sends everybody her love. And Malia and Sasha say hi, as well.

I want to thank your chair, Roslyn Brock. I want to thank your president, Cornell Brooks. I want to thank your Governor, Tom Wolf, who’s doing outstanding work and was here. The Mayor of Philadelphia, Michael Nutter, who’s been a great friend and ally. Governor Dan Malloy of Connecticut, who’s here today. And some outstanding members of Congress who are here. I want to just say thank you to all of you for your love, for your support, but most importantly, for the work that you are doing in your communities all across the country every single day.

It's not always received with a lot of fanfare. Sometimes it's lonely work; sometimes it's hard work; sometimes it's frustrating work. But it's necessary work. And it builds on a tradition of this organization that reshaped the nation.

For 106 years, the NAACP has worked to close the gaps between the words of our founding that we are all created equal, endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights -- those words try to match those with the realities that we live each and every day.

In your first century, this organization stood up to lynching and Jim Crow and segregation; helped to shepherd a Civil Rights Act and a Voting Rights Act. I would not be here, and so many others would not be here, without the NAACP.

In your second century, we’ve worked together to give more of our children a shot at a quality education; to help more families rise up out of poverty; to protect future generations from environmental damage; to create fair housing; to help more workers find the purpose of a good job. And together, we’ve made real progress -- including a My Brother’s Keeper initiative to give more young people a fair shot in life; including the passage of a law that declares health care is not a privilege for the few, but a right for all of us.

We made progress, but our work is not done. By just about every measure, the life chances for black and Hispanic youth still lag far behind those of their white peers. Our kids, America’s children, so often are isolated, without hope, less likely to graduate from high school, less likely to earn a college degree, less likely to be employed, less likely to have health insurance, less likely to own a home.

Part of this is a legacy of hundreds of years of slavery and segregation, and structural inequalities that compounded over generations. It did not happen by accident. Partly it’s a result of continuing, if sometimes more subtle, bigotry -- whether in who gets called back for a job interview, or who gets suspended from school, or what neighborhood you are able to rent an apartment in -- which, by the way, is why our recent initiative to strengthen the awareness and effectiveness of fair housing laws is so important. So we can’t be satisfied or not satisfied until the opportunity gap is closed for everybody in America. Everybody.

But today, I want to focus on one aspect of American life that remains particularly skewed by race and by wealth, a source of inequity that has ripple effects on families and on communities and ultimately on our nation -- and that is our criminal justice system.

Now, this is not a new topic. I know sometimes folks discover these things like they just happened. There’s a long history of inequity in the criminal justice system in America. When I was in the state legislature in Illinois, we worked to make sure that we had videotaping of interrogations because there were some problems there. We set up racial profiling laws to prevent the kind of bias in traffic stops that too many people experience. Since my first campaign, I’ve talked about how, in too many cases, our criminal justice system ends up being a pipeline from underfunded, inadequate schools to overcrowded jails.

What has changed, though, is that, in recent years the eyes of more Americans have been opened to this truth. Partly because of cameras, partly because of tragedy, partly because the statistics cannot be ignored, we can’t close our eyes anymore. And the good news -- and this is truly good news -- is that good people of all political persuasions are starting to think we need to do something about this.

So let’s look at the statistics. The United States is home to 5 percent of the world’s population, but 25 percent of the world’s prisoners. Think about that. Our incarceration rate is four times higher than China’s. We keep more people behind bars than the top 35 European countries combined. And it hasn’t always been the case -- this huge explosion in incarceration rates. In 1980, there were 500,000 people behind bars in America -- half a million people in 1980. I was in college in 1980. Many of you were not born in 1980 -- that’s okay. I remember 1980 -- 500,000. Today there are 2.2 million. It has quadrupled since 1980. Our prison population has doubled in the last two decades alone.

Now, we need to be honest. There are a lot of folks who belong in prison. If we’re going to deal with this problem and the inequities involved then we also have to speak honestly. There are some folks who need to be in jail. They may have had terrible things happen to them in their lives. We hold out the hope for redemption, but they’ve done some bad things. Murderers, predators, rapists, gang leaders, drug kingpins -- we need some of those folks behind bars. Our communities are safer, thanks to brave police officers and hardworking prosecutors who put those violent criminals in jail.

And the studies show that up to a certain point, tougher prosecutors and stiffer sentences for these violent offenders contributed to the decline in violent crime over the last few decades. Although the science also indicates that you get a point of diminishing returns. But it is important for us to recognize that violence in our communities is serious and that historically, in fact, the African American community oftentimes was under-policed rather than over-policed. Folks were very interested in containing the African American community so it couldn’t leave segregated areas, but within those areas there wasn’t enough police presence.

But here’s the thing: Over the last few decades, we’ve also locked up more and more nonviolent drug offenders than ever before, for longer than ever before. And that is the real reason our prison population is so high. In far too many cases, the punishment simply does not fit the crime. If you’re a low-level drug dealer, or you violate your parole, you owe some debt to society. You have to be held accountable and make amends. But you don’t owe 20 years. You don’t owe a life sentence. That's disproportionate to the price that should be paid.

And by the way, the taxpayers are picking up the tab for that price. Every year, we spend $80 billion to keep folks incarcerated -- $80 billion. Now, just to put that in perspective, for $80 billion, we could have universal preschool for every 3-year-old and 4-year-old in America. That's what $80 billion buys. For $80 billion, we could double the salary of every high school teacher in America. For $80 billion, we could finance new roads and new bridges and new airports, job training programs, research and development. We're about to get in a big budget debate in Washington -- what I couldn’t do with $80 billion. It’s a lot of money. For what we spend to keep everyone locked up for one year, we could eliminate tuition at every single one of our public colleges and universities.

As Republican Senator and presidential candidate Rand Paul has said -- no, and to his credit, he’s been consistent on this issue -- imprisoning large numbers of nonviolent drug offenders for long periods of time, “costs the taxpayers money, without making them any safer.”

Roughly one-third of the Justice Department’s budget now goes toward incarceration -- one-third. And there are outstanding public servants at our Justice Department, starting with our outstanding Attorney General, Loretta Lynch -- and we’ve got some great prosecutors here today -- and they do outstanding work -- so many of them. But every dollar they have to spend keeping nonviolent drug offenders in prison is a dollar they can’t spend going after drug kingpins, or tracking down terrorists, or hiring more police and giving them the resources that would allow them to do a more effective job community policing.

And then, of course, there are costs that can’t be measured in dollars and cents. Because the statistics on who gets incarcerated show that by a wide margin, it disproportionately impacts communities of color. African Americans and Latinos make up 30 percent of our population; they make up 60 percent of our inmates. About one in every 35 African American men, one in every 88 Latino men is serving time right now. Among white men, that number is one in 214. The bottom line is that in too many places, black boys and black men, Latino boys and Latino men experience being treated differently under the law.

And I want to be clear -- this is not just anecdote. This is not just barbershop talk. A growing body of research shows that people of color are more likely to be stopped, frisked, questioned, charged, detained. African Americans are more likely to be arrested. They are more likely to be sentenced to more time for the same crime. And one of the consequences of this is, around one million fathers are behind bars. Around one in nine African American kids has a parent in prison.

What is that doing to our communities? What’s that doing to those children? Our nation is being robbed of men and women who could be workers and taxpayers, could be more actively involved in their children’s lives, could be role models, could be community leaders, and right now they’re locked up for a non-violent offense.

So our criminal justice system isn’t as smart as it should be. It’s not keeping us as safe as it should be. It is not as fair as it should be. Mass incarceration makes our country worse off, and we need to do something about it.

But here’s the good news.

Audience Member All right, good news.

President Obama: Good news. Don’t get me preaching now. I am feeling more hopeful today because even now, when, let’s face it, it seems like Republicans and Democrats cannot agree on anything -- a lot of them agree on this. In fact, today, back in Washington, Republican senators from Utah and Texas are joining Democratic senators from New Jersey and Rhode Island to talk about how Congress can pass meaningful criminal justice reform this year. That’s good news. That is good news. Good news.

That doesn’t happen very often. And it’s not just senators. This is a cause that’s bringing people in both houses of Congress together. It’s created some unlikely bedfellows. You’ve got Van Jones and Newt Gingrich. You’ve got Americans for Tax Reform and the ACLU. You’ve got the NAACP and the Koch brothers. No, you’ve got to give them credit. You’ve got to call it like you see it. There are states from Texas and South Carolina to California and Connecticut who have acted to reduce their prison populations over the last five years and seen their crime rates fall. That’s good news.

My Administration has taken steps on our own to reduce our federal prison population. So I signed a bill reducing the 100-1 sentencing disparity between crack and powder cocaine. I’ve commuted the sentences of dozens of people sentenced under old drug laws that we now recognize were unfair, and yesterday I announced that I’m commuting dozens more.

Under the leadership of Attorney General Eric Holder -- now continued by Loretta Lynch -- federal prosecutors got what he called “Smart on Crime,” which is refocusing efforts on the worst offenders, pursuing mandatory minimum sentences 20 percent less often than they did the year before. The idea is you don’t always have to charge the max. To be a good prosecutor, you need to be proportionate. And it turns out that we're solving just as many cases and there are just as many plea bargains, and it’s working. It’s just that we’ve eliminated some of the excess.

And recently, something extraordinary happened. For the first time in 40 years, America’s crime rate and incarceration rate both went down at the same time. That happened last year.

So there’s some momentum building for reform. There’s evidence mounting for why we need reform. Now I want to spend the rest of my time just laying out some basic principles, some simple ideas for what reform should look like, because we're just at the beginning of this process and we need to make sure that we stay with it. And I’m going to focus on what happens in three places -- in the community, in the courtroom, and in the cell block.

So I want to begin with the community because I believe crime is like any other epidemic –- the best time to stop it is before it even starts. And I’m going to go ahead and say what I’ve said a hundred times before or a thousand times before, and what you've heard me say before, if we make investments early in our children, we will reduce the need to incarcerate those kids.

So one study found that for every dollar we invest in pre-K, we save at least twice that down the road in reduced crime. Getting a teenager a job for the summer costs a fraction of what it costs to lock him up for 15 years. Investing in our communities makes sense. It saves taxpayer money if we are consistent about it, and if we recognize that every child deserve opportunity -- not just some, not just our own.

What doesn’t make sense is treating entire neighborhoods as little more than danger zones where we just surround them. We ask police to go in there and do the tough job of trying to contain the hopelessness when we are not willing to make the investments to help lift those communities out of hopelessness. That's not just a police problem; that's a societal problem.

Places like West Philly, or West Baltimore, or Ferguson, Missouri -- they’re part of America, too. They're not separate. They’re part of America like anywhere else. The kids there are American kids, just like your kids and my kids. So we’ve got to make sure boys and girls in those communities are loved and cherished and supported and nurtured and invested in. And we have to have the same standards for those children as we have for our own children.

If you are a parent, you know that there are times where boys and girls are going to act out in school. And the question is, are we letting principals and parents deal with one set of kids and we call the police on another set of kids. That's not the right thing to do.

We’ve got to make sure our juvenile justice system remembers that kids are different. Don't just tag them as future criminals. Reach out to them as future citizens.

And even as we recognize that police officers do one of the toughest, bravest jobs around -- and as we do everything in our power to keep those police officers safe on the job -- I’ve talked about this -- we have to restore trust between our police and some of the communities where they serve. And a good place to start is making sure communities around the country adopt the recommendations from the task force I set up -- that included law enforcement, but also included young people from New York and from Ferguson, and they were able to arrive at a consensus around things like better training, better data collection -- to make sure that policing is more effective and more accountable, but is also more unbiased.

So these are steps in the community that will lead to fewer folks being arrested in the first place. Now, they won’t eliminate crime entirely. There’s going to be crime. That’s why the second place we need to change is in the courtroom.

For nonviolent drug crimes, we need to lower long mandatory minimum sentences -- or get rid of them entirely. Give judges some discretion around nonviolent crimes so that, potentially, we can steer a young person who has made a mistake in a better direction.

We should pass a sentencing reform bill through Congress this year. We need to ask prosecutors to use their discretion to seek the best punishment, the one that's going to be most effective, instead of just the longest punishment. We should invest in alternatives to prison, like drug courts and treatment and probation programs -- which ultimately can save taxpayers thousands of dollars per defendant each year.

Now, even if we’re locking up fewer people, even if we are reforming sentencing guidelines, as I’ve said before, some criminals still deserve to go to jail. And as Republican Senator John Cornyn has reminded us, “virtually all of the people incarcerated in our prisons will eventually someday be released.” And that’s why the third place we need to reform is in the cell block.

So on Thursday, I will be the first sitting President to visit a federal prison. And I’m going to shine a spotlight on this issue, because while the people in our prisons have made some mistakes -- and sometimes big mistakes -- they are also Americans, and we have to make sure that as they do their time and pay back their debt to society that we are increasing the possibility that they can turn their lives around.

That doesn’t mean that we will turn everybody’s life around. That doesn’t mean there aren’t some hard cases. But it does mean that we want to be in a position in which if somebody in the midst of imprisonment recognizes the error of their ways, is in the process of reflecting about where they’ve been and where they should be going, we’ve got to make sure that they’re in a position to make the turn.

And that’s why we should not tolerate conditions in prison that have no place in any civilized country. We should not be tolerating overcrowding in prison. We should not be tolerating gang activity in prison. We should not be tolerating rape in prison. And we shouldn’t be making jokes about it in our popular culture. That’s no joke. These things are unacceptable.

What’s more, I’ve asked my Attorney General to start a review of the overuse of solitary confinement across American prisons. The social science shows that an environment like that is often more likely to make inmates more alienated, more hostile, potentially more violent. Do we really think it makes sense to lock so many people alone in tiny cells for 23 hours a day, sometimes for months or even years at a time? That is not going to make us safer. That’s not going to make us stronger. And if those individuals are ultimately released, how are they ever going to adapt? It’s not smart.

Our prisons should be a place where we can train people for skills that can help them find a job, not train them to become more hardened criminals.

Look, I don’t want to pretend like this is all easy. But some places are doing better than others. Montgomery County, Maryland put a job training center inside the prison walls -- to give folks a head start in thinking about what might you do otherwise than committing crime. That’s a good idea.

Here’s another good idea -- one with bipartisan support in Congress: Let’s reward prisoners with reduced sentences if they complete programs that make them less likely to commit a repeat offense. Let's invest in innovative new approaches to link former prisoners with employers and help them stay on track. Let’s follow the growing number of our states and cities and private companies who have decided to “Ban the Box” on job applications -- so that former prisoners who have done their time and are now trying to get straight with society have a decent shot in a job interview. And if folks have served their time, and they’ve reentered society, they should be able to vote.

Communities that give our young people every shot at success; courts that are tough but fair; prisons that recognize eventually the majority will be released and so seek to prepare these returning citizens to grab that second chance -- that’s where we need to build.

But I want to add this. We can’t ask our police, or our prosecutors, or our prison guards, or our judges to bear the entire burden of containing and controlling problems that the rest of us are not facing up to and willing to do something about.

So, yes, we have to stand up to those who are determined to slash investments in our communities at any cost -- cutting preschool programs, cutting job-training programs, cutting affordable housing programs, cutting community policing programs. That’s shortsighted. Those investments make this country strong. We’ve got to invest in opportunity more than ever.

An African American man born roughly 25 years ago has just a one-in-two chance of being employed today. More than one in three African American children are growing up in poverty. When America’s unemployment rate was 9.5 percent, when I first came into office, as it was going up, we properly recognized this is a crisis. Right now, the unemployment rate among African Americans is 9.5 percent. What should we call that? It is a crisis. And we have to be just as concerned about continuing to lift up job opportunities for these young people.

So today, I’ve been talking about the criminal justice system, but we have to recognize that it’s not something we can view in isolation. Any system that allows us to turn a blind eye to hopelessness and despair, that’s not a justice system, it is an injustice system. But that is an extension and a reflection of some broader decisions that we’re making as a society. And that has to change. That has to change.

What the marchers on Washington knew, what the marchers in Selma knew, what folks like Julian Bond knew, what the marchers in this room still know, is that justice is not only the absence of oppression, it is the presence of opportunity.

Justice is giving every child a shot at a great education no matter what zip code they’re born into. Justice is giving everyone willing to work hard the chance at a good job with good wages, no matter what their name is, what their skin color is, where they live.

Fifty years after the Voting Rights Act, justice is protecting that right for every American. Justice is living up to the common creed that says, I am my brother’s keeper and my sister’s keeper. Justice is making sure every young person knows they are special and they are important and that their lives matter -- not because they heard it in a hashtag, but because of the love they feel every single day -- not just love from their parents, not just love from their neighborhood, but love from police, love from politicians. Love from somebody who lives on the other side of the country, but says, that young person is still important to me. That’s what justice is.

And in the American tradition and in the immigrant tradition of remaking ourselves, in the Christian tradition that says none of us is without sin and all of us need redemption, justice and redemption go hand in hand.

Right before I came out here, I met with four former prisoners, four ex-offenders. Two of them were African American, one of them was Latino, one of them was white. All of them had amazing stories. One of them dropped out of school when he was a young kid. Now he’s making film about his experience in the prison system.

One of them served 10 years in prison, then got a job at Five Guys -- which is a tasty burger -- and they gave him an opportunity, and he rose up and became a general manager there, and now is doing anti-violence work here in the community.

One of them, the young Latino man, he came out of prison and was given an opportunity to get trained on green jobs that are helping the environment but also gave him a marketable skill. And he talked about how the way he’s staying out of trouble is he just keeps on thinking about his two daughters. And I could relate to that, because you don’t want to disappoint your daughters. You don’t want to disappoint those baby girls. And so he says, I go to work and I come home, and I grab that little baby and get a kiss, and that’s keeping me focused.

And then one of them, Jeff Copeland, was arrested six times before his 38th birthday. He was drinking, using drugs, racked up DUI after DUI, sentence after sentence. And he admits that the sentences he was getting for DUI weren’t reflective of all the trouble he was causing, could have been worse. And Jeff spent so much time jogging in place in his cell that inmates nicknamed him “The Running Man.” And he was literally going nowhere, running in place.

And then, somehow, Jeff started examining his life. And he said, “This isn’t me.” So he decided to hold himself accountable. He quit drinking. He went to AA. Met a recruiter from the re-entry program at the Community College of Philadelphia, enrolled in classes once he was released -- made sure to show up every day. Graduated summa cum laude -- with a 3.95 GPA. And this fall he’ll graduate from Temple University with a major in criminal justice and a minor in social work. And he volunteers helping former inmates get their lives back on track.

And “it’s sort of a clichÃ©,” he says, “but we can do anything.” And just two years ago, “The Running Man” ran his first marathon -- because he’s going somewhere now. “You never look at crossing the finishing line,” he says of his journey, “you attack it by putting one mile after the other. It takes steps.” It takes steps. That’s true for individuals. It’s true for our nation.

Sometimes I get in debates about how to think about progress or the lack of progress when it comes to issues of race and inequality in America. And there are times where people say, “Oh, the President, he’s too optimistic.” Or “he’s not talking enough about how bad things are.” Oh, let me tell you something, I see what happens. My heart breaks when I see families who are impacted. I spend time with those families and feel their grief. I see those young men on street corners and eventually in prisons, and I think to myself, they could be me; that the main difference between me and them is I had a more forgiving environment so that when I slipped up, when I made a mistake, I had a second chance. And they’ve got no margin for error.

I know -- I know -- how hard things are for a lot of folks. But I also know that it takes steps. And if we have the courage to take that first step, then we take a second step. And if we have the courage to take the second step then suddenly we’ve taken 10 steps. The next thing you know, you’ve taken 100 steps. And that’s true not just for us as individuals, but that is true for us as a nation.

We are not perfect, but we have the capacity to be more perfect. Mile after mile; step after step. And they pile up one after the other and pretty soon that finish line starts getting into sight, and we are not where we were. We’re in a better place because we had the courage to move forward. So we cannot ignore the problems that we have, but we can’t stop running the race. That’s how you win the race. That’s how you fix a broken system. That’s how you change a country.

The NAACP understands that. Think about the race that you have run. Think about the race ahead. If we keep taking steps toward a more perfect union, and close the gaps between who we are and who we want to be, America will move forward. There’s nothing we can’t do.

Thank you. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Iran Nuclear Accord Announcement

Today, after two years of negotiations, the United States, together with our international partners, has achieved something that decades of animosity has not -- a comprehensive, long-term deal with Iran that will prevent it from obtaining a nuclear weapon.

This deal demonstrates that American diplomacy can bring about real and meaningful change -- change that makes our country, and the world, safer and more secure. This deal is also in line with a tradition of American leadership. It’s now more than 50 years since President Kennedy stood before the American people and said, “Let us never negotiate out of fear, but let us never fear to negotiate.”

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He was speaking then about the need for discussions between the United States and the Soviet Union, which led to efforts to restrict the spread of nuclear weapons.

In those days, the risk was a catastrophic nuclear war between two super powers. In our time, the risk is that nuclear weapons will spread to more and more countries, particularly in the Middle East, the most volatile region in our world.

Today, because America negotiated from a position of strength and principle, we have stopped the spread of nuclear weapons in this region. Because of this deal, the international community will be able to verify that the Islamic Republic of Iran will not develop a nuclear weapon.

This deal meets every single one of the bottom lines that we established when we achieved a framework earlier this spring. Every pathway to a nuclear weapon is cut off. And the inspection and transparency regime necessary to verify that objective will be put in place. Because of this deal, Iran will not produce the highly enriched uranium and weapons-grade plutonium that form the raw materials necessary for a nuclear bomb.

Because of this deal, Iran will remove two-thirds of its installed centrifuges -- the machines necessary to produce highly enriched uranium for a bomb -- and store them under constant international supervision. Iran will not use its advanced centrifuges to produce enriched uranium for the next decade. Iran will also get rid of 98 percent of its stockpile of enriched uranium.

To put that in perspective, Iran currently has a stockpile that could produce up to 10 nuclear weapons. Because of this deal, that stockpile will be reduced to a fraction of what would be required for a single weapon. This stockpile limitation will last for 15 years.

Because of this deal, Iran will modify the core of its reactor in Arak so that it will not produce weapons-grade plutonium. And it has agreed to ship the spent fuel from the reactor out of the country for the lifetime of the reactor. For at least the next 15 years, Iran will not build any new heavy-water reactors.

Because of this deal, we will, for the first time, be in a position to verify all of these commitments. That means this deal is not built on trust; it is built on verification. Inspectors will have 24/7 access to Iran’s key nuclear facilities.

Iran [Inspectors]

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will have access to Iran’s entire nuclear supply chain -- its uranium mines and mills, its conversion facility, and its centrifuge manufacturing and storage facilities. This ensures that Iran will not be able to divert materials from known facilities to covert ones. Some of these transparency measures will be in place for 25 years.

Because of this deal, inspectors will also be able to access any suspicious location. Put simply, the organization responsible for the inspections, the IAEA, will have access where necessary, when necessary. That arrangement is permanent. And the IAEA has also reached an agreement with Iran to get access that it needs to complete its investigation into the possible military dimensions of Iran’s past nuclear research.

Finally, Iran is permanently prohibited from pursuing a nuclear weapon under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which provided the basis for the international community’s efforts to apply pressure on Iran.

As Iran takes steps to implement this deal, it will receive relief from the sanctions that we put in place because of Iran’s nuclear program -- both America’s own sanctions and sanctions imposed by the United Nations Security Council. This relief will be phased in. Iran must complete key nuclear steps before it begins to receive new sanctions relief. And over the course of the next decade, Iran must abide by the deal before additional sanctions are lifted, including five years for restrictions related to arms, and eight years for restrictions related to ballistic missiles.

All of this will be memorialized and endorsed in a new United Nations Security Council resolution. And if Iran violates the deal, all of these sanctions will snap back into place. So there’s a very clear incentive for Iran to follow through, and there are very real consequences for a violation.

That’s the deal. It has the full backing of the international community. Congress will now have an opportunity to review the details, and my administration stands ready to provide extensive briefings on how this will move forward.

As the American people and Congress review the deal, it will be important to consider the alternative. Consider what happens in a world without this deal. Without this deal, there is no scenario where the world joins us in sanctioning Iran until it completely dismantles its nuclear program. Nothing we know about the Iranian government suggests that it would simply capitulate under that kind of pressure. And the world would not support an effort to permanently sanction Iran into submission. We put sanctions in place to get a diplomatic resolution, and that is what we have done.

Without this deal, there would be no agreed-upon limitations for the Iranian nuclear program. Iran could produce, operate and test more and more centrifuges. Iran could fuel a reactor capable of producing plutonium for a bomb. And we would not have any of the inspections that allow us to detect a covert nuclear weapons program. In other words, no deal means no lasting constraints on Iran’s nuclear program.

Such a scenario would make it more likely that other countries in the region would feel compelled to pursue their own nuclear programs, threatening a nuclear arms race in the most volatile region of the world. It would also present the United States with fewer and less effective options to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.

I’ve been President and Commander-in-Chief for over six years now. Time and again, I have faced decisions about whether or not to use military force. It’s the gravest decision that any President has to make. Many times, in multiple countries, I have decided to use force. And I will never hesitate to do so when it is in our national security interest. I strongly believe that our national security interest now depends upon preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon -- which means that without a diplomatic resolution, either I or a future U.S. President would face a decision about whether or not to allow Iran to obtain a nuclear weapon or whether to use our military to stop it.

Put simply, no deal means a greater chance of more war in the Middle East. Moreover, we give nothing up by testing whether or not this problem can be solved peacefully. If, in a worst-case scenario, Iran violates the deal, the same options that are available to me today will be available to any U.S. President in the future. And I have no doubt that 10 or 15 years from now, the person who holds this office will be in a far stronger position with Iran further away from a weapon and with the inspections and transparency that allow us to monitor the Iranian program.

For this reason, I believe it would be irresponsible to walk away from this deal. But on such a tough issue, it is important that the American people and their representatives in Congress get a full opportunity to review the deal. After all, the details matter. And we’ve had some of the finest nuclear scientists in the world working through those details. And we’re dealing with a country -- Iran -- that has been a sworn adversary of the United States for over 35 years. So I welcome a robust debate in Congress on this issue, and I welcome scrutiny of the details of this agreement.

But I will remind Congress that you don’t make deals like this with your friends. We negotiated arms control agreements with the Soviet Union when that nation was committed to our destruction. And those agreements ultimately made us safer.

I am confident that this deal will meet the national security interest of the United States and our allies. So I will veto any legislation that prevents the successful implementation of this deal.

We do not have to accept an inevitable spiral into conflict. And we certainly shouldn’t seek it. And precisely because the stakes are so high, this is not the time for politics or posturing. Tough talk from Washington does not solve problems. Hard-nosed diplomacy, leadership that has united the world’s major powers offers a more effective way to verify that Iran is not pursuing a nuclear weapon.

Now, that doesn’t mean that this deal will resolve all of our differences with Iran. We share the concerns expressed by many of our friends in the Middle East, including Israel and the Gulf States, about Iran’s support for terrorism and its use of proxies to destabilize the region. But that is precisely why we are taking this step -- because an Iran armed with a nuclear weapon would be far more destabilizing and far more dangerous to our friends and to the world.

Meanwhile, we will maintain our own sanctions related to Iran’s support for terrorism, its ballistic missile program, and its human rights violations. We will continue our unprecedented efforts to strengthen Israel’s security -- efforts that go beyond what any American administration has done before. And we will continue the work we began at Camp David to elevate our partnership with the Gulf States to strengthen their capabilities to counter threats from Iran or terrorist groups like ISIL.

However, I believe that we must continue to test whether or not this region, which has known so much suffering, so much bloodshed, can move in a different direction.

Time and again, I have made clear to the Iranian people that we will always be open to engagement on the basis of mutual interests and mutual respect. Our differences are real and the difficult history between our nations cannot be ignored. But it is possible to change. The path of violence and rigid ideology, a foreign policy based on threats to attack your neighbors or eradicate Israel -- that’s a dead end. A different path, one of tolerance and peaceful resolution of conflict, leads to more integration into the global economy, more engagement with the international community, and the ability of the Iranian people to prosper and thrive.

This deal offers an opportunity to move in a new direction. We should seize it.

We have come a long way to reach this point -- decades of an Iranian nuclear program, many years of sanctions, and many months of intense negotiation. Today, I want to thank the members of Congress from both parties who helped us put in place the sanctions that have proven so effective, as well as the other countries who joined us in that effort.

I want to thank our negotiating partners -- the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia, China, as well as the European Union -- for our unity in this effort, which showed that the world can do remarkable things when we share a vision of peacefully addressing conflicts. We showed what we can do when we do not split apart.

And finally, I want to thank the American negotiating team. We had a team of experts working for several weeks straight on this, including our Secretary of Energy, Ernie Moniz. And I want to particularly thank John Kerry, our Secretary of State, who began his service to this country more than four decades ago when he put on our uniform and went off to war. He’s now making this country safer through his commitment to strong, principled American diplomacy.

History shows that America must lead not just with our might, but with our principles. It shows we are stronger not when we are alone, but when we bring the world together. Today’s announcement marks one more chapter in this pursuit of a safer and more helpful and more hopeful world.

Thank you. God bless you. And God bless the United States of America.

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# Post Iran Nuclear Accord Announcement Press Conference

Please have a seat. Good afternoon, everybody. Yesterday was a historic day. The comprehensive, long-term deal that we achieved with our allies and partners to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon represents a powerful display of American leadership and diplomacy. It shows what we can accomplish when we lead from a position of strength and a position of principle, when we unite the international community around a shared vision, and we resolve to solve problems peacefully.

As I said yesterday, it’s important for the American people and Congress to get a full opportunity to review this deal. That process is now underway. I’ve already reached out to leaders in Congress on both sides of the aisle. My national security team has begun offering extensive briefings. I expect the debate to be robust -- and that’s how it should be. This is an important issue. Our national security policies are stronger and more effective when they are subject to the scrutiny and transparency that democracy demands.

And as I said yesterday, the details of this deal matter very much. That’s why our team worked so hard for so long to get the details right. At the same time, as this debate unfolds, I hope we don’t lose sight of the larger picture -- the opportunity that this agreement represents. As we go forward, it’s important for everybody to remember the alternative and the fundamental choice that this moment represents.

With this deal, we cut off every single one of Iran’s pathways to a nuclear program -- a nuclear weapons program, and Iran’s nuclear program will be under severe limits for many years. Without a deal, those pathways remain open; there would be no limits on Iran’s nuclear program, and Iran could move closer to a nuclear bomb.

With this deal, we gain unprecedented, around-the-clock monitoring of Iran’s key nuclear facilities and the most comprehensive and intrusive inspection and verification regime ever negotiated. Without a deal, those inspections go away, and we lose the ability to closely monitor Iran’s program and detect any covert nuclear weapons program.

With this deal, if Iran violates its commitments, there will be real consequences. Nuclear-related sanctions that have helped to cripple the Iranian economy will snap back into place. Without a deal, the international sanctions regime will unravel, with little ability to re-impose them.

With this deal, we have the possibility of peacefully resolving a major threat to regional and international security. Without a deal, we risk even more war in the Middle East, and other countries in the region would feel compelled to pursue their own nuclear programs, threatening a nuclear arms race in the most volatile region in the world.

As I said yesterday, even with this deal, we will continue to have profound differences with Iran -- its support for terrorism and its use of proxies to destabilize parts of the Middle East. Therefore, the multilateral arms embargo on Iran will remain in place for an additional five years, and restrictions on ballistic missile technology will remain for eight years. In addition, the United States will maintain our own sanctions related to Iran’s support for terrorism, its ballistic missile program, and its human rights violations. And we’ll continue our unprecedented security cooperation with Israel and continue to deepen our partnerships with the Gulf States.

But the bottom line is this: This nuclear deal meets the national security interests of the United States and our allies. It prevents the most serious threat -- Iran obtaining a nuclear weapon, which would only make the other problems that Iran may cause even worse. That’s why this deal makes our country, and the world, safer and more secure. It’s why the alternative -- no limits on Iran’s nuclear program, no inspections, an Iran that’s closer to a nuclear weapon, the risk of a regional nuclear arms race and a greater risk of war -- all that would endanger our security. That’s the choice that we face. If we don’t choose wisely, I believe future generations will judge us harshly for letting this moment slip away.

And no one suggests that this deal resolves all the threats that Iran poses to its neighbors or the world. Moreover, realizing the promise of this deal will require many years of implementation and hard work. It will require vigilance and execution. But this deal is our best means of assuring that Iran does not get a nuclear weapon. And, from the start, that has been my number-one priority, our number-one priority. We’ve got a historic chance to pursue a safer and more secure world -- an opportunity that may not come again in our lifetimes. As President and as Commander-in-Chief, I am determined to seize that opportunity.

So with that, I’m going to take some questions. And let me see who I’m starting off with. Here you go. I got it.

Andrew Beatty, AFP.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Yesterday, you said the deal offered a chance at a new direction in relations with Iran. What steps will you take to enable a more moderate Iran? And does this deal allow you to more forcefully counter Iran’s destabilizing actions in the region quite aside from the nuclear question? Thank you.

President Obama: Andrew, if you don’t mind, just because I suspect that there’s going to be a common set of questions that are touched on -- I promise I will get to your question, but I want to start off just by stepping back and reminding folks of what is at stake here. And I already did in my opening statement, but I just want to reiterate it because I’ve heard already some of the objections to the deal.

The starting premise of our strategy with respect to Iran has been that it would be a grave threat to the United States and to our allies if they obtained a nuclear weapon. And so everything that we’ve done over the last six and a half years has been designed to make sure that we address that number-one priority. That’s what the sanctions regime was all about. That’s how we were able to mobilize the international community, including some folks that we are not particularly close to, to abide by these sanctions. That’s how these crippling sanctions came about, was because we were able to gain global consensus that Iran having a nuclear weapon would be a problem for everybody.

That’s the reason that Iran’s accounts got frozen and they were not able to get money for the oil sales that they’ve made. That’s the reason that they had problems operating with respect to international commerce -- because we built that international consensus around this very specific, narrow, but profound issue -- the possibility of Iran getting a nuclear weapon.

And, by the way, that was not simply my priority. If you look back at all the debates that have taken place over the last five, six years, this has been a Democratic priority, this has been a Republican priority, this has been Prime Minister Netanyahu’s priority. It’s been our Gulf allies’ priority -- is making sure Iran does not get a nuclear weapon.

The deal negotiated by John Kerry, Wendy Sherman, Ernie Moniz, our allies, our partners, the P5+1 achieves that goal. It achieves our top priority -- making sure that Iran does not get a nuclear weapon. But we have always recognized that even if Iran doesn’t get a nuclear weapon, Iran still poses challenges to our interests and our values, both in the region and around the world.

So when this deal gets implemented, we know that we will have dismantled the immediate concerns around Iran’s nuclear program. We will have brought their stockpiles down to 98 percent. We will have significantly reduced the number of centrifuges that they operate. We will have installed an unprecedented inspections regime, and that will remain in place not just for 10 years but, for example, on the stockpiles, will continue to 15 years.

Iran will have pledged to the international community that it will not develop a nuclear weapon and now will be subject to an Additional Protocol, a more vigorous inspection and monitoring regime that lasts in perpetuity. We will have disabled a facility like Arak, the Arak facility, from allowing Iran to develop plutonium that could be used for a bomb. We will have greatly reduced the stockpile of uranium that’s enriched. And we will have put in place inspections along the entire supply chain so that if uranium was diverted into a covert program we would catch it.

So I can say with confidence but, more importantly, nuclear experts can say with confidence that Iran will not be in a position to develop a nuclear bomb. We will have met our number-one priority.

Now, we’ll still have problems with Iran’s sponsorship of terrorism; its funding of proxies like Hezbollah that threaten Israel and threaten the region; the destabilizing activities that they're engaging in, including in places like Yemen. And my hope is that building on this deal we can continue to have conversations with Iran that incentivize them to behave differently in the region, to be less aggressive, less hostile, more cooperative, to operate the way we expect nations in the international community to behave. But we're not counting on it. So this deal is not contingent on Iran changing its behavior. It’s not contingent on Iran suddenly operating like a liberal democracy.

It solves one particular problem, which is making sure they don't have a bomb. And the point I’ve repeatedly made -- and is, I believe, hard to dispute -- is that it will be a lot easier for us to check Iran’s nefarious activities, to push back against the other areas where they operate contrary to our interests or our allies’ interests, if they don't have a bomb.

And so will they change their behavior? Will we seek to gain more cooperation from them in resolving issues like Syria, or what’s happening in Iraq, to stop encouraging Houthis in Yemen? We’ll continue to engage with them. Although, keep in mind that unlike the Cuba situation, we're not normalizing diplomatic relations here. So the contacts will continue to be limited. But will we try to encourage them to take a more constructive path? Of course. But we're not betting on it.

And in fact, having resolved the nuclear issue, we will be in a stronger position to work with Israel, work with the Gulf countries, work with our other partners, work with the Europeans to bring additional pressure to bear on Iran around those issues that remain of concern.

But the argument that I’ve been already hearing -- and this was foreshadowed even before the deal was announced -- that because this deal does not solve all those other problems, that that's an argument for rejecting this deal, defies logic. It makes no sense. And it loses sight of what was our original number-one priority, which is making sure that they don't have a bomb.

Jon Karl.

Question: Mr. President, does it give you any pause to see this deal praised by Syrian dictator Assad as a “great victory for Iran,” or praised by those in Tehran who still shout “death to America,” and yet our closest ally in the Middle East calls it “a mistake of historic proportions”? And here in Congress, it looks like a large majority will vote to reject this deal. I know you can veto that rejection, but do you have any concerns about seeing a majority of the people’s representatives in Congress saying that this is a bad deal?

And if I can just ask you quick political question, a very quick one.

President Obama: Jon, I think --

Question: Donald --

President Obama: Let me answer the question that you asked. It does not give me pause that Mr. Assad or others in Tehran may be trying to spin the deal in a way that they think is favorable to what their constituencies want to hear. That’s what politicians do. And that’s been the case throughout. I mean, you’ll recall that during the course of these negotiations over the last couple of months every time the Supreme Leader or somebody tweeted something out, for some reason we all bought into the notion, well, the Obama administration must be giving this or capitulating to that. Well, now we have a document so you can see what the deal is.

We don’t have to speculate, we don’t have to engage in spin, you can just read what it says and what is required. And nobody has disputed that as a consequence of this agreement Iran has to drastically reduce its stockpiles of uranium, is cut off from plutonium; the Fordow facility that is underground is converted; that we have an unprecedented inspections regime; that we have snap-back provisions if they cheat. The facts are the facts. And I'm not concerned about what others say about it.

Now, with respect to Congress, my hope -- I won’t prejudge this -- my hope is, is that everyone in Congress also evaluates this agreement based on the facts -- not on politics, not on posturing, not on the fact that this is a deal I bring to Congress as opposed to a Republican President, not based on lobbying, but based on what’s in the national interest of the United States of America.

And I think that if Congress does that, then, in fact, based on the facts, the majority of Congress should approve of this deal. But we live in Washington and politics do intrude. And as I said in an interview yesterday, I am not betting on the Republican Party rallying behind this agreement. I do expect the debate to be based on facts and not speculation or misinformation. And that I welcome -- in part because, look, there are legitimate real concerns here. We’ve already talked about it. We have huge differences with Iran. Israel has legitimate concerns about its security relative to Iran. You have a large country with a significant military that has proclaimed that Israel shouldn’t exist, that has denied the Holocaust, that has financed Hezbollah, and as a consequence there are missiles that are pointed towards Tel Aviv.

And so I think there are very good reasons why Israelis are nervous about Iran’s position in the world generally. And I’ve said this to Prime Minister Netanyahu, I’ve said it directly to the Israeli people. But what I’ve also said is that all those threats are compounded if Iran gets a nuclear weapon. And for all the objections of Prime Minister Netanyahu, or, for that matter, some of the Republican leadership that’s already spoken, none of them have presented to me, or the American people, a better alternative.

I'm hearing a lot of talking points being repeated about “this is a bad deal” -- “this is a historically bad deal,” “this will threaten Israel and threaten the world and threaten the United States.” I mean, there’s been a lot of that.

What I haven’t heard is, what is your preferred alternative? If 99 percent of the world community and the majority of nuclear experts look at this thing and they say, this will prevent Iran from getting a nuclear bomb, and you are arguing either that it does not, or that even if it does it’s temporary, or that because they’re going to get a windfall of their accounts being unfrozen that they’ll cause more problems, then you should have some alternative to present. And I haven’t heard that. And the reason is because there really are only two alternatives here: Either the issue of Iran obtaining a nuclear weapon is resolved diplomatically through a negotiation, or it’s resolved through force, through war. Those are the options.

Now, you’ll hear some critics say, well, we could have negotiated a better deal. Okay. What does that mean? I think the suggestion among a lot of the critics has been that a better deal, an acceptable deal would be one in which Iran has no nuclear capacity at all, peaceful or otherwise. The problem with that position is that there is nobody who thinks that Iran would or could ever accept that, and the international community does not take the view that Iran can’t have a peaceful nuclear program. They agree with us that Iran cannot have a nuclear weapon.

And so we don’t have diplomatic leverage to eliminate every vestige of a peaceful nuclear program in Iran. What we do have the leverage to do is to make sure they don’t have a weapon. That’s exactly what we’ve done.

So to go back to Congress, I challenge those who are objecting to this agreement, number one, to read the agreement before they comment on it; number two, to explain specifically where it is that they think this agreement does not prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, and why they’re right and people like Ernie Moniz, who is an MIT nuclear physicist and an expert in these issues, is wrong, why the rest of the world is wrong, and then present an alternative.

And if the alternative is that we should bring Iran to heel through military force, then those critics should say so. And that will be an honest debate.

All right.

Question: Mr. President, if I can --

President Obama: No, no --

Question: Prime Minister Netanyahu said that you have a situation where Iran can delay 24 days before giving access to military facilities --

President Obama: I’m happy to -- that’s a good example. So let’s take the issue of 24 days. This has been I think swirling today, the notion that this is insufficient in terms of inspections.

Now, keep in mind, first of all, that we’ll have 24/7 inspections of declared nuclear facilities -- Fordow, Natanz, Arak, their uranium mines; facilities that are known to produce centrifuges, parts. That entire infrastructure that we know about we will have sophisticated, 24/7 monitoring of those facilities.

So then the issue is, what if they try to develop a covert program? Now, one of the advantages of having inspections across the entire production chain is that it makes it very difficult to set up a covert program. There are only so many uranium mines in Iran. And if, in fact, we’re counting the amount of uranium that’s being mined and suddenly some is missing on the back end, they got some explaining to do.

So we’re able to track what’s happening along the existing facilities to make sure that there is not diversion into a covert program. But let’s say that Iran is so determined that it now wants to operate covertly. The IAEA, the international organization charged with implementing the non-proliferation treaty and monitoring nuclear activities in countries around the world -- the IAEA will have the ability to say, that undeclared site we’re concerned about, we see something suspicious. And they will be able to say to Iran, we want to go inspect that.

Now, if Iran objects, we can override it. In the agreement, we’ve set it up so we can override Iran’s objection. And we don’t need Russia or China in order for us to get that override. And if they continue to object, we’re in a position to snap back sanctions and declare that Iran is in violation and is cheating.

As for the fact that it may take 24 days to finally get access to the site, the nature of nuclear programs and facilities is such, this is not something you hide in a closet. This is not something you put on a dolly and kind of wheel off somewhere. And, by the way, if we identify an undeclared site that we’re suspicious about, we’re going to be keeping eyes on it. So we’re going to be monitoring what the activity is, and that’s going to be something that will be evidence if we think that some funny business was going on there that we can then present to the international community.

So we’ll be monitoring that that entire time. And, by the way, if there is nuclear material on that site, high school physics will remind us that that leaves a trace. And so we’ll know that, in fact, there was a violation of the agreement.

So the point is, Jonathan, that this is the most vigorous inspection and verification regime by far that has ever been negotiated. Is it possible that Iran decides to try to cheat despite having this entire inspection verification mechanism? It’s possible. But if it does, first of all, we’ve built in a one-year breakout time, which gives us a year to respond forcefully. And we’ve built in a snap-back provision so we don't have to go through lengthy negotiations at the U.N. to put the sanctions right back in place.

And so really the only argument you can make against the verification and inspection mechanism that we’ve put forward is that Iran is so intent on obtaining a nuclear weapon that no inspection regime and no verification mechanism would be sufficient because they’d find some way to get around it because they're untrustworthy.

And if that's your view, then we go back to the choice that you have to make earlier. That means, presumably, that you can't negotiate. And what you're really saying is, is that you've got to apply military force to guarantee that they don't have a nuclear program. And if somebody wants to make that debate -- whether it’s the Republican leadership, or Prime Minister Netanyahu, or the Israeli Ambassador or others, they're free to make it. But it’s not persuasive.

Carol Lee.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. I want to ask you about the arms and ballistic missile embargo. Why did you decide -- agree to lift those even with the five- and eight-year durations? It’s obviously emerging as a sticking point on the Hill. And are you concerned that arms to Iran will go to Hezbollah or Hamas? And is there anything that you or a future President can do to stop that?

And if you don't mind, I wanted to see if you could step back a little bit, and when you look at this Iran deal and all the other issues and unrest that's happening in the Middle East, what kind of Middle East do you want to leave when you leave the White House in a year and a half?

President Obama: So the issue of the arms embargo and ballistic missiles is of real concern to us -- has been of real concern to us. And it is in the national security interest of the United States to prevent Iran from sending weapons to Hezbollah, for example, or sending weapons to the Houthis in Yemen that accelerate a civil war there.

We have a number of mechanisms under international law that give us authority to interdict arms shipments by Iran. One of those mechanisms is the U.N. security resolution related to Iran’s nuclear program. Essentially, Iran was sanctioned because of what had happened at Fordow, its unwillingness to comply with previous U.N. security resolutions about their nuclear program. And as part of the package of sanctions that was slapped on them, the issue of arms and ballistic missiles were included.

Now, under the terms of the original U.N. resolution, the fact is that once an agreement was arrived at that gave the international community assurance Iran didn't have a nuclear weapon, you could argue just looking at the text that those arms and ballistic missile prohibitions should immediately go away.

But what I said to our negotiators was given that Iran has breached trust, and the uncertainty of our allies in the region about Iran’s activities, let’s press for a longer extension of the arms embargo and the ballistic missile prohibitions. And we got that. We got five years in which, under this new agreement, arms coming in and out of Iran are prohibited. And we got eight years with respect to ballistic missiles.

But part of the reason why we were willing to extend it only for five, let’s say, as opposed to a longer period of time, is because we have other U.N. resolutions that prohibit arms sales by Iran to organizations like Hezbollah. We have other U.N. resolutions and multilateral agreements that give us authority to interdict arms shipments from Iran throughout the region. And so we’ve had belts and suspenders and buttons, a whole bunch of different legal authorities. These legal authorities under the nuclear program may lapse after five or eight years, but we’ll still be in possession of other legal authorities that allow us to interdict those arms.

And truthfully, these prohibitions are not self-enforcing. It’s not like the U.N. has the capacity to police what Iran is doing.

What it does is it gives us authority under international law to prevent arms shipments from happening in concert with our allies and our partners. And the real problem, if you look at how, for example, Hezbollah got a lot of missiles that are a grave threat to Israel and many of our friends in the region, it’s not because they were legal. It’s not because somehow that was authorized under international law. It was because there was insufficient intelligence, or capacity, to stop those shipments.

So the bottom line is, Carol, I share the concerns of Israel, Saudis, Gulf partners about Iran shipping arms and causing conflict and chaos in the region. And that’s why I’ve said to them, let’s double down and partner much more effectively to improve our intelligence capacity and our interdiction capacity so that fewer of those arms shipments are getting through the net.

But the legal authorities, we’ll still possess. And obviously, we’ve got our own unilateral prohibitions and sanctions in place around non-nuclear issues, like support for Hezbollah. And those remain in place.

Now, in terms of the larger issues of the Middle East, obviously that’s a longer discussion. I think my key goal when I turn over the keys to the President -- the next President -- is that we are on track to defeat ISIL; that they are much more contained and we’re moving in the right direction there. That we have jumpstarted a process to resolve the civil war in Syria, which is like an open sore in the region and is giving refuge to terrorist organizations who are taking advantage of that chaos. To make sure that in Iraq not only have we pushed back ISIL, but we’ve also created an environment in which Sunni, Shia and Kurd are starting to operate and function more effectively together. And to be in a conversation with all our partners in the region about how we have strengthened our security partnerships so that they feel they can address any potential threats that may come, including threats from Iran. And that includes providing additional security assurances and cooperation to Israel, building on the unprecedented cooperation that we have already put in place and support that we’ve already put in place. It includes the work that we’ve done with the GCC up at Camp David, making sure that we execute that.

If we’ve done those things, then the problems in the Middle East will not be solved. And ultimately, it’s not the job of the President of the United States to solve every problem in the Middle East. The people of the Middle East are going to have to solve some of these problems themselves. But I think we can provide that next President at least a foundation for continued progress in these various areas.

The last thing I would say -- and this is a longer-term issue -- is we have to address the youth in the region with jobs and opportunity and a better vision for the future so that they are not tempted by the nihilistic, violent dead-end that organizations like ISIL offer. Again, we can’t do that entirely by ourselves, but we can partner with well-intentioned organizations, states, NGOs, religious leaders in the region. We have to do a better job of that than we’ve been doing so far.

Michael Crowley.

Question: Thank you. You alluded earlier to Iran’s role in Syria, just to focus on that for a moment. Many analysts and some former members of your administration believe that the kind of negotiated political settlement that you say is necessary in Syria will require working directly with Iran and giving Iran an important role. Do you agree? And is that a dialogue you’ll be actively seeking?

And what about the fight against ISIS? What would it take for there to be explicit cooperation between the U.S. and Iran?

President Obama: I do agree that we’re not going to solve the problems in Syria unless there’s buy-in from the Russians, the Iranians, the Turks, our Gulf partners. It’s too chaotic. There are too many factions. There’s too much money and too many arms flooding into the zone. It’s gotten caught up in both sectarian conflict and geopolitical jockeying. And in order for us to resolve it, there’s going to have to be agreement among the major powers that are interested in Syria that this is not going to be won on the battlefield. So Iran is one of those players, and I think that it’s important for them to be part of that conversation.

I want to repeat what I said earlier. We have not -- and I don’t anticipate any time in the near future -- restored normal diplomatic relations with Iran. And so I do not foresee a formal set of agreements with Iran in terms of how we’re conducting our counter-ISIL campaign.

But clearly, Iran has influence in Iraq. Iraq has a majority Shia population. They have relationships to Iran. Some are natural. We expect somebody like Prime Minister Abadi to meet with and negotiate and work with Iran as its neighbor. Some are less legitimate, where you see Iran financing Shia militias that in the past have killed American soldiers and in the future may carry out atrocities when they move into Sunni areas.

And so we’re working with our diplomats on the ground, as well as our military teams on the ground to asses where can we appropriately at least de-conflict, and where can we work with Prime Minister Abadi around an overall strategy for Iraq to regain its sovereignty, and where do we tell Abadi, you know what, what Iran is doing there is a problem, and we can’t cooperate in that area, for example, unless you get those folks out of there because we’re not going to have our troops, even in an advisory or training role, looking over their shoulders because they’re not sure of what might happen to them. And those conversations have been ongoing. I think they will continue.

The one thing you can count on is that any work that the U.S. government does, or the U.S. military does in Iraq with other partners on the ground is premised on the idea that they are reporting to -- under the chain of command of the Iraqi government and Iraqi security forces. If we don’t have confidence that ultimately Abadi is directing those soldiers, then it’s tough for us to have any kind of direct relationship.

Major Garrett.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. As you well know, there are four Americans in Iran -- three held on trumped-up charges, according to your administration; one, whereabouts unknown. Can you tell the country, sir, why you are content, with all the fanfare around this deal, to leave the conscience of this nation and the strength of this nation unaccounted for in relation to these four Americans?

And last week, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said, under no circumstances should there be any relief for Iran in terms of ballistic missiles or conventional weapons. It is perceived that that was a last-minute capitulation in these negotiations. Many in the Pentagon feel you’ve left the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff hung out to dry. Could you comment?

President Obama: I got to give you credit, Major, for how you craft those questions. The notion that I am content as I celebrate with American citizens languishing in Iranian jails -- Major, that’s nonsense, and you should know better.

I’ve met with the families of some of those folks. Nobody is content. And our diplomats and our teams are working diligently to try to get them out.

Now, if the question is why we did not tie the negotiations to their release, think about the logic that that creates. Suddenly, Iran realizes, you know what, maybe we can get additional concessions out of the Americans by holding these individuals. It makes it much more difficult for us to walk away if Iran somehow thinks that a nuclear deal is dependent in some fashion on the nuclear deal. And, by the way, if we had walked away from the nuclear deal, we’d still be pushing them just as hard to get these folks out. That’s why those issues are not connected. But we are working every single day to try to get them out, and won’t stop until they’re out and rejoined with their families.

With respect to the Chairman’s testimony, to some degree I already answered this with Carol. We are not taking the pressure off Iran with respect to arms and with respect to ballistic missiles. As I just explained, not only do we keep in place for five years the arms embargo under this particular new U.N. resolution, not only do we maintain the eight years on the ballistic missiles under this particular U.N. resolution, but we have a host of other multilateral and unilateral authorities that allow us to take action where we see Iran engaged in those activities whether it’s six years from now or 10 years from now.

So we have not lost those legal authorities. And in fact, part of my pitch to the GCC countries, as well as to Prime Minister Netanyahu, is we should do a better job making sure that Iran is not engaged in sending arms to organizations like Hezbollah. And as I just indicated, that means improving our intelligence capacity and our interdiction capacity with our partners.

April Ryan.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. I want to change the subject a bit. Earlier this year, on the flight to Selma, you said, on matters of race, as President your job is to close the remaining gaps that are left in state and federal government. Now, how does criminal justice reform fit into that equation? And what gaps remain for you towards the end of your presidency? And also, what does it mean to travel to Kenya, your father’s homeland, in the next couple of weeks as President to the United States? And lastly, would you revoke the Medal of Freedom from Bill Cosby?

President Obama: You stuffed a lot in there, April.

Question: I learned from my colleagues.

President Obama: Say, who did you learn from? Jonathan Karl? Is that what you said?

Question: On criminal justice reform, obviously I gave a lengthy speech yesterday, but this is something that I’ve been thinking about a lot; been working first with Eric Holder, now with Loretta Lynch about -- we’ve been working on along with other prosecutors of the U.S. Attorney’s Office. It’s an outgrowth of the task force that we put together, post-Ferguson and the Garner case in New York.

And I don’t think that the criminal justice system is obviously the sole source of racial tension in this country, or the key institution to resolving the opportunity gap. But I think it is a part of the broader set of challenges that we face in creating a more perfect union.

And the good news is, is that this is one of those rare issues where we’ve got some Republican and Democratic interest, as well as federal, state, and local interest in solving the problem. I think people recognize that there are violent criminals out there and they’ve got to be locked up. We’ve got to have tough prosecutors, we have to support our law enforcement officials. Police are in a tough job and they are helping to keep us safe, and we are grateful and thankful to them.

But what we also know is this huge spike in incarcerations is also driven by non-violent drug offenses where the sentencing is completely out of proportion with the crime. And that costs taxpayers enormous amounts of money. It is debilitating communities who are seeing huge proportions of the young men in their communities finding themselves with a criminal record, rendering them oftentimes unemployable. So it compounds problems that these communities already have.

And so I am very appreciative of folks like Dick Durbin and Cory Booker, alongside Mike Lee and Rand Paul and other folks in the House who are working together to see if we can both reduce some of these mandatory minimums around non-violent drug offenses. Because again, I tend not to have a lot of sympathy when it comes to violent crime. But when it comes to non-violent drug offenses, is there work that we can do to reduce mandatory minimums, create more diversion programs like drug courts? Then, can we do a better job on the rehabilitation side inside of prisons so that we are preparing these folks who are eventually going to be released to reenter the workforce? On the back end, are we doing more to link them up with reentry programs that are effective?

And this may be an area where we could have some really significant bipartisan legislation that doesn't eliminate all the other challenges we’ve got. Because the most important goal is keeping folks from getting in the criminal justice system in the first place, which means early childhood education and good jobs, and making sure that we're not segregating folks in impoverished communities that have no contact with opportunity.

But this can make a difference. I met these four ex-offenders, as I said, yesterday, and what was remarkable was how they had turned their lives around. And these were some folks who had been some pretty tough criminals. One of them had served 10 years; another was a repeat offender that had served a lot of time. And in each instance, somebody intervened at some point in their lives -- once they had already been in the criminal justice system, once they had already gotten in trouble -- and said, you know what, I think you can live a different way, and I’m willing to help you.

And that one person, an art teacher, or a GED teacher, or somebody who was willing to offer a guy a job -- I want to give a shout-out to Five Guys, because one of the guys there was an ex-felon, and Five Guys gave him a job. And he ended up becoming a manager at the store and was able to completely turn his life around. But the point was, somebody reached out to that person and gave him a chance.

And so part of our question should be, how about somebody reaching out to these guys when they’re 10, or 11, or 12, or eight, as opposed to waiting until they’ve already gone through a criminal justice program. That’s part of why we’re doing My Brother’s Keeper. But this is an area where I feel modestly optimistic.

I think in the meantime we’ve got to stay on top of keeping the crime rate down, because part of the reason I think there’s a conversation taking place is violent crime has significantly dropped. Last year, we saw both incarcerations and the crime rate drop, and this can always turn if we start seeing renewed problems in terms of violent crime. And there’s parts of the country where violent crime is still a real problem, including my hometown of Chicago, and in Baltimore.

And part of what I’ve asked Attorney General Lynch to do is to figure out how can we refocus attention. If we’re going to do a package of criminal justice reforms, part of it would be actually having a greater police presence and more law enforcement in the communities that are really getting hit hard and haven’t seen some of the drops in violent crime that we’ve seen in places like Manhattan, for example.

With respect to the visit to Kenya, it’s obviously something I’m looking forward to. I’ll be honest with you, visiting Kenya as a private citizen is probably more meaningful to me than visiting as President because I can actually get outside of a hotel room or a conference center. And just the logistics of visiting a place are always tough as President, but it’s obviously symbolically important. And my hope is, is that we can deliver a message that the U.S. is a strong partner not just for Kenya, but for Sub-Saharan Africa generally; build on the progress that’s been made around issues of health and education; focus on counterterrorism issues that are important in East Africa because of al-Shabaab and some of the tragedies that have happened inside of Kenya; and continue to encourage democracy and the reduction of corruption inside that country that sometimes has held back this incredibly gifted and blessed country.

And with respect to the Medal of Freedom, there’s no precedent for revoking a medal. We don’t have that mechanism. And as you know, I tend to make it a policy not to comment on the specifics of cases where there might still be, if not criminal, then civil issues involved.

I’ll say this: If you give a woman -- or a man, for that matter -- without his or her knowledge, a drug, and then have sex with that person without consent, that’s rape. And I think this country -- any civilized country -- should have no tolerance for rape.

All right. Have we exhausted Iran questions here? I think there’s a helicopter that’s coming. But I really am enjoying this Iran debate. Topics that may not have been touched upon, criticisms that you’ve heard that I did not answer? Go ahead. I know Josh is getting a little stressed here -- but I just want to make sure that we’re not leaving any stones unturned here. Go ahead.

Question: Thanks, Mr. President. I’ll be brief. The argument has been made that Iran now has a cash windfall, billions to spend. Your people seem confident they’re going to spend it at home. Why are you confident they’re not going to spend it on arming Hezbollah, arming Bashar al-Assad, et cetera?

President Obama: I think that’s a great question and I’m glad you brought it up. I think it is a mistake to characterize our belief that they will just spend it on daycare centers, and roads, and paying down debt. We think that they have to do some of that, because Rouhani was elected specifically on the premise of improving the economic situation inside of Iran. That economy has tanked since we imposed sanctions.

So the notion that they're just immediately going to turn over $100 billion to the IRGC or the Quds Force I think runs contrary to all the intelligence that we’ve seen and the commitments that the Iranian government has made.

Do we think that with the sanctions coming down, that Iran will have some additional resources for its military and for some of the activities in the region that are a threat to us and a threat to our allies? I think that is a likelihood that they’ve got some additional resources. Do I think it’s a game-changer for them? No.

They are currently supporting Hezbollah, and there is a ceiling -- a pace at which they could support Hezbollah even more, particularly in the chaos that's taking place in Syria. So can they potentially try to get more assistance there? Yes. Should we put more resources into blocking them from getting that assistance to Hezbollah? Yes. Is the incremental additional money that they’ve got to try to destabilize the region or send to their proxies, is that more important than preventing Iran from getting a nuclear weapon? No. So I think -- again, this is a matter of us making a determination of what is our priority.

The other problem with the argument that folks have been making about, oh, this is a windfall and suddenly Iran is flushed with cash, and they're going to take over the world. And I say that not tongue-in-cheek, because if you look at some of the statements by some of our critics, you would think that Iran is, in fact, going to take over the world as a consequence of this deal -- which I think would be news to the Iranians.

That argument is also premised on the notion that if there is no deal, if Congress votes down this deal, that we're able to keep sanctions in place with the same vigor and effectiveness as we have right now. And that, I can promise you, is not true. That is absolutely not true. I want to repeat: We're not writing Iran a check. This is Iran’s money that we were able to block from them having access to. That required the cooperation of countries all around the world, many of whom really want to purchase oil from Iran. The imposition of sanctions -- their cooperation with us -- has cost them billions of dollars, made it harder for them. They’ve been willing to do that because they’ve believed we were sincere about trying to resolve the nuclear issue peacefully, and they considered that a priority -- a high enough priority that they were willing to cooperate with us on sanctions.

If they saw us walking away, or more specifically, if they saw the U.S. Congress effectively vetoing the judgment of 99 percent of the world community that this is a deal that resolves the Iranian weapons program -- nuclear weapons program in an equitable way, the sanctions system unravels. And so we could still maintain some of our unilateral sanctions, but it would be far less effective -- as it was before we were able to put together these multilateral sanctions.

So maybe they don't get $100 billion; maybe they get $60 billion or $70 billion instead. The price for that that we’ve paid is that now Iran is pursuing a nuclear weapon. We have no inspectors on the ground. We don't know what’s going on. They’re still getting some cash windfall. We’ve lost credibility in the eyes of the world. We will have effectively united Iran and divided ourselves from our allies. A terrible position to be in.

I'm just going to look -- I made some notes about any of the arguments -- the other arguments that I’ve heard here.

Question: What about -- [off-mic] -- the end of the deal?

President Obama: Okay, yes, that’s a good one. The notion --

Question: At the end of the deal they could go back --

President Obama: Right. Well, so let’s address this issue of -- because that’s the other big argument that’s been made. All right, let’s assume that the deal holds for 10 years, Iran doesn’t cheat. Now, at the end of 10 years, some of the restrictions have been lifted -- although, remember, others stay in place for 15 years. So for example, they’ve still got to keep their stockpiles at a minimal level for 15 years. The inspections don’t go away; those are still in place 15, 20 years from now. Their commitment under the Non-Proliferation Treaty does not go away; that’s still in place. The additional protocol that they have to sign up for under this deal, which requires a more extensive inspection and verification mechanism -- that stays in place.

So there’s no scenario in which a U.S. President is not in a stronger position 12, 13, 15 years from now if, in fact, Iran decided at that point they still wanted to get a nuclear weapon. Keep in mind, we will have maintained a one-year breakout time, we will have rolled back their program, frozen their facilities, kept them under severe restrictions, had observers. They will have made international commitments supported by countries around the world.

And -- hold on a second -- and if at that point they finally decided, you know what, we’re going to cheat, or not even cheat -- at that point, they decide openly we’re now pursuing a nuclear weapon -- they’re still in violation of this deal and the commitments they’ve made internationally.

And so we are still in a position to mobilize the world community to say, no, you can’t have a nuclear weapon. And they’re not in a stronger position to get a nuclear weapon at that point; they’re in a weaker position than they are today. And, by the way, we haven’t given away any of our military capabilities. We’re not in a weaker position to respond.

So even if everything the critics were saying was true -- that at the end of 10 years, or 12 years, or 15 years, Iran now is in a position to decide it wants a nuclear weapon, that they’re at a breakout point -- they won’t be at a breakout point that is more dangerous than the breakout point they’re in right now. They won’t be at a breakout point that is shorter than the one that exists today. And so why wouldn’t we at least make sure that for the next 10, 15, years they are not getting a nuclear weapon and we can verify it; and afterwards, if they decide if they’ve changed their mind, we are then much more knowledgeable about what their capabilities are, much more knowledgeable about what their program is, and still in a position to take whatever actions we would take today?

Question: So none of this is holding out hope that they’ll change their behavior?

President Obama: No.

Question: Nothing different --

President Obama: No. Look, I'm always hopeful that behavior may change for the sake of the Iranian people as well as people in the region. There are young people there who are not getting the opportunities they deserve because of conflict, because of sectarianism, because of poor governance, because of repression, because of terrorism. And I remain eternally hopeful that we can do something about that, and it should be part of U.S. foreign policy to do something about that. But I'm not banking on that to say that this deal is the right thing to do.

Again, it is incumbent on the critics of this deal to explain how an American President is in a worse position 12, 13, 14, 15 years from now if, in fact, at that point Iran says we’re going to pull out of the NPT, kick out inspectors and go for a nuclear bomb. If that happens, that President will be in a better position than what happened if Iran, as a consequence of Congress rejecting this deal, decides that’s it, we’re done negotiating, we’re going after a bomb right now.

The choices would be tougher today than they would be for that President 15 years from now. And I have not yet heard logic that refutes that.

All right. I really have to go now. I think we’ve hit the big themes. But I promise you, I will address this again. All right? I suspect this is not the last that we’ve heard of this debate.

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# Kenyan Civil Society Members Conversation

President Obama: Well, hello everybody. Jambo. It's good to see you. The -- Well, this is a very good-looking group. So it's wonderful to be with all of you. My name is Barack Obama. In case you didn’t know. I want to, first of all, begin by thanking Kenyatta University for hosting us here today. We are very grateful. And the Vice Chancellor is here -- Madam Vice Chancellor, thank you.

And before we get started, I want to point out that this is one of our first regional centers for the Young African Leaders program -- the Young African Leaders Initiative -- or YALI -- that we're doing. As many of you know, this is one of my labors of love here in Africa, an outgrowth of some of the work that we had been doing. Seeing the incredible contributions that young leaders were making in so many countries, we thought let’s bring them together and give them opportunities to learn from each other, and network and access resources, so that they can, then, in their home countries, be able to accomplish remarkable things. And so we're really excited about that. So we thank the university for allowing us to use these facilities for these outstanding people.

I just gave a very long speech.

Audience Comment: We saw it.

President Obama: You're saying it was also too long? Is that what you're saying? She nodded. She was all like, yes, it was very long.

So because you just saw my speech, it doesn’t make sense for me to give a whole ‘nother speech. I'm really here more to listen and to learn. But I do want to just make a couple of brief remarks at the top. And then what I'm going to do is I'm going to call on a number of you. I've got a few names already to get us started, and then depending on how much time we have, then I'll try to see if I can call on some additional persons.

America has historically been a country of people who participate in the lives of their communities and their societies. And it's one of the things that make us, I believe, a great nation. There’s a famous French writer named Alec de Tocqueville, who traveled to the United States, and wrote a very famous book called “Democracy in America.” And the point that he made in this book during the course of his travels was that what made America a democracy was not just that it had elections, but that it was a society of joiners and volunteers, and people who wanted constantly to be involved in making their communities better. And if there was an injustice, they wanted to do something about it. And they would form organizations and they would form town halls, and disseminate information -- so that what the government did was obviously important, but what was just as important was what individual citizens were able to do to create a fabric of mutual concern and regard and advocacy that would shape government policy and would shape how societies were organized.

And almost all the progress that America has made in expanding freedom and opportunity has grown as a result of that bottom-up civic participation. The civil rights movement, the women’s rights movement, the movement most recently to make sure that our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters have equal rights, the movement to end wars, in some cases, the movement to provide better resources for poor children. And there’s the halfway house movement, and the movement to -- the settlement house movement, rather, and to make sure that children and orphans were properly cared for. The movement to public education and public universities. The environmental movement.

So many of these things arose because ordinary citizens started to get together and speak out and press their demands on their government. And eventually, politicians responded.

And I got my start in public life not as an elected official but as a community organizer in a poor neighborhood in Chicago. And I would work with churches and community groups to try to improve the school system, or bring affordable housing. And we weren't always completely successful, but it taught me the importance of the voices of ordinary people when they come together to create a better vision for the future.

And that's why I think civil society is so important. And that's why I emphasized it in the speech that I made today. And this is something that I emphasize wherever I go -- democracy does not stop on Election Day. For a real democracy to work, and for a society to thrive and continually improve, it requires that people continue to participate. And there have to be laws in place to protect that space and facilitate people’s ability to participate.

Now, the good news is, here in Kenya, you now have a constitution that creates the space for such participation. Alongside freedom of the press, and freedom of assembly, and the ability to organize politically, these are precious freedoms that have to be protected.

Because Kenya is a young democracy there’s always a concern that it might slip back and that space might narrow, despite what the constitution says. And I just want to say part of the reason why it's important for me to be here today is to send a message that we in the United States at least believe that civil society is important and we want to continue to affirm it, and we want to listen and hear what it is that ordinary citizens, working together, have to say about their communities and about their lives.

And if Kenya can continue to cultivate those habits of participation and citizenship and freedom, then the country is going to be better off, and it's going to continue to make progress for all people and not just some.

So with those opening remarks, what I want to do now is just open it up for conversation. And I have in my hand some names to call on. I may not get through all of them. I think you’ve been instructed to try to be relatively brief. In some cases, what I'll do is I'll respond right away to the comments. In some cases, I may wait and respond at the end. But this is designed not so much as a town hall, to ask me questions, it's more designed for you to give me a sense of the things that are important to you, so that I can learn -- and because I think this is going to be televised -- so that the Kenya people as a whole can hear as well.

And the only thing I would ask is that everybody be respectful. And one of the rules of good civil society I believe is that you’re respectful of the people who disagree with you. And that's part of what makes civil society work. If you can have civil disagreements, and you can listen to each other and not just shout, that's what creates an environment that leads to progress over the long term.

And the only other thing I'm going to do is, because it's warm, I'm going to take off my jacket. You're free to do so as well. This is pretty relaxed.

Okay, so -- and we've got a few topics where we've got some civil society organizations that are already working on some of these issues. And one of the topics that hasn’t gotten a lot of attention during my trip but I consider very important because it's part of Kenya’s heritage, but it's also part of global heritage -- and that is the issue of wildlife trafficking, where active citizens are really making a difference.

And I'm going to call on Tom Lalampaa of the Northern Rangelands Trust, to tell us about what he’s doing.

Mr. Lalampaa: Thank you very much, Mr. President. I work for Northern Rangelands Trust Entity, an umbrella community organization currently supporting over 30 community-based conservancies.

We've had a lot of successes on the trafficking as well. But I just want to mention two high-level impacts. One is that we've been able to develop a model of a community conservancy that is unique, that has proven very successful, now widely accepted by the national government and the county governments. And all the model has is that, first and foremost, is that it is grassroots-rooted. It's formed by the local communities -- by the elders, the women and the youth in the villages. And so these institutions help to anchor good governance, gender matters, awareness, micro-finance for our youth and our women, s well, and many, many more programs, including the -- getting water. It's become an entry point for the national government and the county governments to deliver services to the local communities.

It's also structured in such a way that the political leaders take part in those institutions. So they are local community institutions that are registered with the government. And it's just amazing, because they are creating a platform for dialogue -- a platform for communities to decide where they want water, where they want help, where they want -- what they want to do in matters.

The second high-level impact, Mr. President, is getting conservation to drive peace and conflict resolution in northern Kenya. In northern Kenya, peace and security is quite elusive for many reasons. One is because of illegal firearms. Secondly, it's just because of the nature of the mistrust among our ethic communities. And thirdly, also because of the natural resources -- pasture, water for our cattle. And so we've managed to get the conservation to drive peace and conflict resolution in northern Kenya.

I was telling my friend, Paula, here that when communities, local communities -- they want peace. There’s no way the elephants live in peace. So that's what I'm saying, Mr. President, that all that has been made possible through the support of the U.S. government, and in particular, through the USAID Kenya.

Mr. President, we have a number of challenges, but I'll put them in terms of a kind request to you. One, we’d appreciate the U.S. government support to protect and conserve the remaining African elephants. I'm saying the remaining because we have lost many. You can help us in three ways. First and foremost is to crush demand and market, Mr. President. Not even reducing it. if we can, let’s crush it once and for all.

The Kenya government -- the civil society, ourselves, and the local communities can only prevent poaching from the source, from being poached. But the markets and the demand, Mr. President, are far outside our borders. We are helpless. Please help us.

The other way you can help us protect and conserve the remaining African elephants, Mr. President, is to get the U.S. government be a member of the African-led elephants protection initiative. Currently, nine African states have signed to it. So it would just bring enormous support and recognition if your government can join it and also be a part of it.

Thirdly, in terms of helping us conserve and protect our elephants, the remaining, is to help us deal with the ivory. The second request that I think would benefit all of us here, Mr. President, my request also is that if possible -- we notice this is discussed all the time, but our humble request of the U.S. government is to increase the international support for the international programs. And I have in mind, I talk about the U.S. aid that's involved, and any other U.S. government-related development agencies -- because it's from that pot that we are going to support conservation, that we can improve livelihoods, that we can support governance.

I always have a feeling that the USAID office, wherever they are in Africa, and in the world, they get massive applications, and they can only deal with so much. Lastly, Mr. President, I must admit the fact that the embassy’s office -- the USAID offices have been very good with us and extremely supportive.

Thank you so much, Mr. President.

President Obama: Let me just say, first of all, Tom, you’re an eloquent spokesman for your cause and that was an excellent presentation. The second thing I have to say is that everybody is going to have to be briefer than Tom. Just because I want to make sure that I get as many comments as possible.

The third point is, with respect to conservation, you said the elephants that have been lost -- 20,000 elephants have been lost in recent years. And part of the reason why civil society has to be mobilized around conservation is that if people have a choice -- if they see a false choice between their own livelihoods and conserving animals then the animals will lose. If they’re organized so that they see that preservation and conservation enhances their lives, then we win, because they feel ownership and they will participate.

And that's why the organizations that you're putting together are so important.

Now, we've got another person just on this issue before we move to another issue -- Paula Kahumbu, right here. I could tell because she’s got an arm band that says, “Hands Off Our Elephants.” With the Wildlife Trust.

Ms. Kahumbu: Thank you, Mr. President. First, on behalf of all the conservation community -- and there are several people in the room -- thank you so much for your initiatives on the African elephant in particular.

More than 30,000 elephants --

President Obama: 30,000.

Ms. Kahumbu: -- are being killed every year in Africa. That's one every 15 minutes. Your grandchildren elephants. I love elephants. I want the whole world to fall in love with elephants. And I started this campaign, “Hands Off Our Elephants,” under the organization, Wildlife Direct, with the First Lady Margaret Kenyatta, to empower and mobilize Kenyans, Africans across the entire continent to save elephants. They are our heritage. They are our identity. And it's our duty. And it's not just Africans who benefit from this. The whole world benefits.

It's not been easy, but our work has really led to a change in the hearts and minds of Kenyans, and also the laws. We've been at the center of judicial reforms in this country. Our work has led to the arrest of one of the most -- what do I say --notorious suspected ivory kingpins, Feisal Mohamed Ali. For the first time in Kenya, an ivory trafficker is behind bars. And that's thanks to support from your embassy, through Ambassador Godec, and many other organizations.

And while we're succeeding locally in Kenya, poaching is down, the problem across Africa is escalating, and the demand for ivory is actually exploding. We're dealing with a wildlife crisis alone. We're dealing with international wildlife crime. And that's why my organization goes after traffickers. We're dealing with people who are funding terrorism, and we're dealing with a crime that is fueled by corruption.

So we have two requests. The first is that you take this message back to the American people. We're often asked, how can we help. It's very simple: Tell the American people, don't buy ivory. It's the simplest way to help. Secondly, we request that the USA takes a lead in pursuing international wildlife traffickers with the same vigor and rigor that you apply to money laundering and drug crimes. And we believe that this can be done through strengthening your legal assistance role not just in the demand countries, but source countries and transit countries.

Because we know that the number of people involved in this crime is actually relatively small compared to those other crimes. And so we can crush this very quickly and end the war and save elephants for all of humanity.

Thank you.

President Obama: Thank you. Well, as you may have noted, yesterday one of our announcements was to be even stricter with respect to any ivory sales inside the United States. I mean, we really are cracking down on that.

And with respect to the international networks, you're absolutely right that there’s a connection between corrupt officials getting paid, criminals being armed, and the ivory trade. You have this linkage that should be of concern to all of us. And it's international in scope.

Most recently, the United States is involved in negotiations with the Asian countries, the Asia Pacific region -- something called the Trans-Pacific Partnership. One of the things we're trying to accomplish in the trade agreement is for many of these countries with still strong demand for ivory to start getting much more serious about the enforcement of their laws, and have it embedded in the trade agreements that we initiate.

So, hopefully, we'll be able to influence not just what happens in the United States, but also in some of the areas where the demand is heaviest.

Another topic where we've seen some progress, and this is something that's close to my heart because I've got two daughters, and close to Michelle’s heart -- she’s been involved internationally, trying to highlight the issue of girls’ education with what we're calling the Let Girls Learn initiative that involves many of our international agencies -- is the issue of girls’ education. Obviously I've made it a big emphasis in my speech here today.

So we've got a couple of people to talk about some of the work that's being done through civil society on this issue. And I'm going to start with Kennedy Odede of Shining Hope for Communities.

Mr. Odede: Mr. President, it's my pleasure and privilege to meet someone like you who believes in grassroots change. You and I, we share one background that you did social work in Chicago and I'm doing it in Kibera where I grew up. I grew us whereby it's really hard to make it. There’s no hope, no dream. Many young men end up being -- go to crime. It's easy for them -- if they’re not able to enjoy even tourism because they don't have a dream. There’s no hope in them.

Mr. President, I was really having a hard time in my community, but we said, enough is enough -- and, yes, we can! We came together with a soccer ball and that became a movement that really circled around girls’ education. We built the first school in Kibera called Kibera School for Girls and then started providing social services to men, too. And that became world-changing.

But my challenge is that how do you take a grassroots thing like this across Africa, and by having more partners joining that? Thank you so much.

President Obama: You know, organizations like yours, if you show that it works and you're creating a model of success, then it's more likely that it gets adopted in other places. People learn from seeing something succeed that people might not have believed before could happen. And if they see that a school for girls in Kibera, with all the poverty there, is successful, that means it can succeed anywhere.

So we're very encouraged by the good work that you're doing. Now, we also have with us Linet Momposhi. Linet is right there. Now, Linet is a student and she’s here from Pangani Girls Form Two. Linet.

Ms. Momposhi: Thank you, Mr. President, for giving me this chance. Let me speak with you actually of a friend of mine. At the age of 12, this friend -- she dropped out of school and underwent genital mutilation. In my community, after undergoing such this, the [inaudible] said, she is ready for marriage. She was married to a man older than her, twice her age. And now at the age of 15, she has three children. She’s not able to care for them, for their education. She milks the cows in the morning and sells the milk so that she can have something to give to her children.

For me, I got an opportunity to be at a boarding school in Kakenya Center. I had all the chance to study and I had all the time. I learned to milk the cows for my mom and prepare my siblings to go back to school. But now I'm studying in Pangani Girls, and become the first girl in the center. And now I would like to be a cardiologist and study at Harvard University.

President Obama: That sounds good.

Ms. Momposhi: And also I would like to set an example to the girls in my community that a girl can really become a cardiologist. Thank you.

President Obama: That's wonderful. Linet, hold on. You were so inspiring. Give Linet the mic back. Linet, how old are you right now?

Ms. Momposhi: I'm 16 years old.

President Obama: You’re 16 years old. And how did you come to be able to go to the boarding school?

Ms. Momposhi: I was helped by Kakenya, the Kakenya Center. And that's how I go to study in Kakenya Center. And my dreams started working in that center where I had a chance to go to Maryhill but I went to Pangani Girls.

President Obama: So there was a center there, and by you coming into the center, then you started having bigger dreams about what you might be able to do?

Ms. Momposhi: Okay, I never used to have big dreams like now. Before joining the center, I never knew what I was going to do because I never had any hope in life.

President Obama: Yes. So, Linet, I'm sure you're going to be an excellent cardiologist. So we're very proud of you. But it just sends a message in terms of why civil society is so important. So many of our young people who have a lot of talent, but they just don't know what’s possible. And sometimes the most important thing is just to show them that this is what could happen in your life if you work hard. And when they have a vision about what could happen, then suddenly they’re motivated, the same way that Linet is motivated. And she stars having bigger ambitions about what’s possible.

That's part of the reason why civil society organizations that create mentorship programs and programs for young people to interact in different professions and talk to people who have succeeded is so important. And in fact, in the United States I've set up something called My Brother’s Keeper, designed to target disadvantaged youth so that they are connected to mentorship programs very similar to some of the work that resulted in Linet being inspired.

In fact, we have young people who are mentors at the White House and we connect them with all of our senior staff. And I have dinner with them and give them advice. I don't know if they listen to the advice, but I think they do.

Linet, you're a very find young woman. Congratulations. We're very proud of you.

So one of the issues, obviously, that’s been of concern lately in Kenya is terrorism. This is an area where I'm working extensively with the government. This is something that we're concerned about internationally. And obviously given what happened in places like Westgate and Garissa, Kenya is a source of concern as well. But as I said in the press conference yesterday, one of the important lessons that we've learned is that you can't just fight terrorism through military and the police. You also have to change people’s hearts and minds, and give them a sense that they’re included in the society and enlist them in assisting in fighting against terrorism.

And so I actually think that it's important to include civil society in the fight against terrorism. That's what we're doing in the United States. That's what we need to do here in Kenya as well. And so we've got a couple of organizations that are here that I want to call on just to talk about the kind of work they’re doing and what they’re finding on the ground in dealing with this very important issue.

And I'm going to start with Hassan Ole Nado, who is with SUPKEM. He's the deputy secretary general -- which is a very important title. But, please, go ahead. And describe for us what SUPKEM does. Is it regionally located? Is it national? Or is it more along the coast? Tell me about what it’s doing.

Mr. Ole Nado: Thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity and also for having time with civil society in Kenya. The Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims is an umbrella organization of Muslim organizations in the country, particularly mosque and Muslim committees all over the country. And also, we now have community-based organizations that are working at the community level, but they found time to advocate and to be part of the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims.

We are here, and we have been doing this work for the last two years because we are a little bit late in the journey, but we realize that it’s very important for the community to be engaged. We have worked before by developing a Countering Violent Extremism advocacy chapter. That calls for community leaderships, calls for government engagement, and also brings other civil society organizations onboard so that we can be able to deal with this issue.

As you have already said, terrorism is not about military or the police or other things. It’s more of community issues. So it has both security and social aspect of it. And I really thank you because of the White House summit, which I was privileged to attend with Hussein Khalid of Haki Africa. And after that particular meeting, when we came back to Kenya we found an opportunity to engage with government. Because before that White House summit, the engagement or relationship between civil society was a little bit lower. But thanks to that conference, that really opened up the government to engage with civil society.

Through that meeting, actually, we have been able, as civil society, to engage government in the development of a national counter-violent extremism strategy. And I hope the government will [inaudible] the strategy very soon.

We know a number of organizations who have been involved in this part of community projects, like Haki Africa and MUHURI are currently facing some problems. And I hope through your engagement with the government, you’d be able to raise concerns of these institutions. I know that the American government cannot engage organizations that have relationships with terrorist organizations. And I that is one of the things that really think it is important to protect institutions or individuals who engaged in this particular work.

At the moment, we are also working with the returnees in this country -- we have young men and women who are somehow misadvised and found themselves in terrorist organizations. They found a way of getting back to their country, and there are not clear ways of engagement. I work with the government of Kenya because they gave amnesty to those who are willing to be given the amnesty. At the moment, we are really engaging them, and the government is also opening up -- because at the moment now, they are also creating what they call interagency coordination centers at the county level where all arms of government are talking together before they take actions against suspected terrorists.

The Muslim community, the leadership are also now onboard and they are really working on the areas of counter-narrative, because there are two narratives here. There is the ideological narrative and there is the old narrative of marginalization and other aspects. We talk about perceptions in the narrative of marginalization -- they are real issues that we are calling the government to address those issues.

One of the issues is the lack of identification documents for young people. I think it is very important that that should too should be addressed. We have a collapse of the education system in the northeast because of terror organizations. And I hope, as struggle to find ways and answers of how to deal with this problem, it is important for USAID, which I know they’ve done quite a lot of work in this country, to consider getting into education much more by engaging communities so that communities can run community-based organization education systems in the northeast so that we are avoid getting terrorists of tomorrow. Because we have over 400,000 young children who are not going to school because everybody else is pulled from there, from the region.

Maybe if I could speak for many days, but I really thank you for this opportunity and also for having time with the civil society organizations.

President Obama: Thank you. Before you give up the mic, let me just ask you a question. I’m glad that because of the White House summit that we had on countering violent extremism, that there was a more constructive conversation that was taking place.

I think that point that you make is so important, which is reaching young people early. What I hear you saying is, is that one of the problems that exists in certain parts of the country now is because of fear, in some cases, and some of the existing structures not operating as well as they should, that you just have children who don’t have access to educational resources and a structure, and then that makes them more vulnerable to recruitment into an organization that can give them some sense of purpose or meaning, even if it ends up being a very negative one. Is that what’s I’m understanding?

Mr. Ole Nado: Yes, it’s actually -- that is what it is. Because after the unfortunate terror attacks of Mandera, and later on the university in Garissa, those who were targeted -- because those are targeting were doing it deliberately to create interreligious tension in the country. So we have those people, who are non-Muslims from the region, pulling out of the region because they feel it’s no longer safe for them to remain in that region.

But by pulling out, the region has been exposed because it doesn’t haven't adequate resources to address this gap that has emanated. So to me, I think one of the things that need to consider is we need to build local organizations that can really break that gap at the community level, it’s more sustainable because they’re communities at a lower level.

President Obama: Thank you. That’s very useful. Somebody else I want to hear from is Fauzia Abdi Ali, who’s with Women International Society.

Ms. Abdi Ali: Thank you. I must start by congratulating you. The speech was really, really good because it really advocated for issues of women, which is an area of passion. I’m not speaking as WIS today, I’m actually speaking as Sisters Without Borders, because I chair a platform of very inspirational women who work every single day in the field of peace and security, in particular countering violent extremism.

So the women come from different parts of the country -- from northern Kenya, from the coastal region, and even here in Nairobi. And now I engage mentees all towards ensuring we have a peaceful society. We empower women from the household level to understand prevention, to understand early warning signs of radicalization of their kids, to look at prevention towards stigma that is associated with those mothers whose kids have actually joined violent extremism, or even their spouses. We also look at empowering them through support groups where they can have a space to engage with other like-minded people and even learn from each other. And we also ensure that this cross-border engagement between those within northern Kenya and those within the coastal region so that they don’t feel alone in this whole concept of violent extremism.

What is normally important for me is, when it comes to issues of peace and security, engagement with women is still minimal, and we’re still playing catchup. When we are pushing for two-thirds, even within our own parliamentary systems, we are not looking at what these two-thirds will be doing. And for us, we are pushing towards them having some concrete things that they will talk about within parliament. And in particular is the issue of education. Because for the women in northern Kenya, their children are actually not going to school; they’re not getting quality education. And as Hassan has said, this ends up becoming a society that has young people who are not well educated and are more susceptible to violent extremism.

Secondly, it’s the issue of the economy. In places such as the coast region, this has affected the economy. And this trickles down to the household level, and it affects the woman’s old economy within that structure. So how can we have even this conversation going on? And we try and link this to the national level.

We also ensure that these discussions around policy on prevention has a gender lens. Because the reasons why boys join and the reason why girls join is very different. But when we are searching for solutions in policy, we try and group them together. So sometimes, even when we are looking at issues of amnesty, we are not really opening up that space to understand if we are going to put a rehabilitation center, how do we make it different from when engaging with a boy and when engaging with a girl. So that is very critical for us.

One key thing I would love to put across is you started the first -- the conversation -- the White House conference in February, and it brought a lot more conversation here through the regional conference we had. And I wanted to elevate that. In terms of ensuring it’s more sustainable so that it pushes away from just discussion is to push for a hub that can be placed in Africa. The hub we have is actually in the UAE, the United Arab Emirates -- which is useful for research and ensuring there’s more conversation around how private sector gets involved, how civil society and governments can come together.

But we don’t have such hubs in Africa. So in most cases, when you hear about capacity-building of CVE, we have to go outside Africa to get this capacity-building. So why not actually start thinking about either expanding the global center to have a hub in Kenya, or somewhere in Africa for easy access for even the grassroots initiatives and civil society to also be engaged.

Thank you.

President Obama: Thank you. That was an excellent presentation. Thank you.

And I will very much take your remarks under advisement in terms of the possibilities of setting up a hub. The idea of women being actively engaged in countering violent extremism is absolutely critical. Mothers tend to be more sensible. I’m just telling the truth. And obviously the younger we’re reaching children and giving them the sense that violence is not the right path, and that’s being reinforced by their primary caregiver, which typically is the mother, and the idea of peer-to-peer support but also some peer pressure in terms of making sure that mothers are involved in steering their children in the right way -- I think that’s a wonderful model. Very exciting. I just learned something there.

So I’ve got a little bit more time. What I’d like to do now is I’m just going to call on some people. But I’m not going to be able to call on everybody, so I just want to say in advance. But I’m going to start with this young lady right there, in the sweater. And please introduce yourself.

Comment: Thank you, Mr. President. I am the CEO for Kamak [ph] Girls Initiative. Kamak Girls came about because of a problem -- I came from a family that had 45 children; out of it, 35 who are living. Out of the 35, 20 were girls, 15 were boys. And out of the 20 girls, only 11 went to school, four of them up to secondary, and one now up to the PhD level. So my father was really for education. He really tried his best. But when he passed away in 2004, I realized as a bigger girl, number three, that I had work to do -- follow these girls who dropped out of school and see that they can live a more meaningful life towards education, health and economic development.

So I gathered the four girls who are with me, and we started visiting them and find out how they are living. Right now, I managed with my three sisters to take two to the university. One has completed and has gotten a job. One is in third form. Two to diploma level; one of them we pushed and we opened at a city school where she was married. And the other one went to forest school. And to point, one of them where she was staying, she reached a class 8 and she has opened an inner-city school.

President Obama: Excellent.

Comment Continued: Our next step is to evaluate -- when we evaluate, we get girls of their range so that they can see what these girls have done, and also help the girls in the particular area.

President Obama: Okay.

Comment Continued: Yes. And apart from that, I’ve worked for 34 years, but I’ve not gone very far because I started building our children from the [inaudible] and I started working and continue to. I have three children. They have not gone very far because I’m taking care of these people.

So my request is that this group can move further so that whenever these girls are married, I can -- not only those girls of ours, but also the girls in that area can also see that they can do it. Thank you so much.

President Obama: Okay. Well, thank you for your good efforts.

This young lady right there. I ask everybody to try to be as brief as possible so I can get as many additional question as possible.

Comment: Thank you very much, Mr. President. I am here on behalf of the Devolution Forum. That’s a civil society coalition that was set up early last year because we were very concerned about challenges to the implementation of devolution in Kenya. And so I’ll speak to just, very briefly, four points. I have a more comprehensive memorandum.

But one is, we’re very concerned about the structure development assistance on devolution. A lot of it is being channeled through the national government to go to the county governments, and this is contrary to the constitution which recognizes the two levels of government as having shared serenity.

Now, this is a ploy by the government to keep power centralized. It’s really a method of controlling the governance structure. So we find that even with the U.S., some of your programs are being channeled in this way, through the national government, for the county government. And we find that this is bad for devolution. We find also the World Bank very much is channeling -- they are funding in this direction.

The other thing that I’d like to address is -- to do with the war on terror. We’ve noted that this an intergovernmental aspect to the war on terror. And because the security reforms have not been implemented to the pace that was supposed to be, we find that these intergovernmental institutions, such as the county policing authorities, the community policing, ideologically and even structurally have not been set up. Ideologically, we find that they are being taken as more information-gathering rather than community policing where communities get actively involved in their community policing. So we are very concerned that as the U.S. assists the U.S. government, are you going to look at the ideological foundations of the structures that will engage citizens and the country governments in the security process? Because if we don’t do that, then it will undermine the war on terror and security.

I’ll pick one more because I --

President Obama: Because you’re running out of time.

Question: I’m out of time. There’s a trend in Africa where the civic space is being closed. And we’re looking at countries like Rwanda, Ethiopia. We’re looking at our country. And we’re wondering, what’s the response of the U.S. government? We heard your excellent remarks and sentiments, but of course you are working with a government that has demonstrated an intent to close the civic space. So what’s your approach going to be as you consolidate your work with the Kenyan government in terms of supporting civil society? We’re finding even support for civil society is not as rigorous as it should have been. Thank you.

President Obama: Well, those are all excellent remarks. Let me just broadly talk about devolution and then we’ll talk about how we are interacting with the national government on civil society issues.

With respect to devolution, Kenya now has a constitution and it has laid out how devolution is supposed to proceed. That will be subject to interpretation and legal challenges and political arguments. That’s probably not an issue that the United States will be weighing in on deeply. And the reason I say that is because we have a system of government with a national -- or federal government, and then state governments and then local governments. And the relationship between the federal government and the states, the relationship between federal law and local laws is extremely complicated and has been the source of constant democratic debate, argument, challenges, court cases. And that’s been going on for 250 years now. I mean, that was part of the original issue in the formation of the United States of America -- how much power remained with the states and how much power went to the federal government.

So the challenge that we would have as an international -- or as an outside party as the United States of America is that how that plays itself out within Kenya is ultimately up to the Kenyan people. Because there are arguments actually on both sides when it comes to national versus state power. In the United States, for example, those who wanted to maintain racial segregation consistently used the argument that states have the right to do what they want, and the federal government doesn’t have the authority to enforce civil rights laws that are discriminating against minorities at the state level.

And I actually think, in that situation, the national government needed to say to states that had segregation laws -- you have to stop. And national law and the rights of individuals that are in the bill of rights are superior to whatever challenges -- or whatever claims are being made for states’ rights.

Now, on the other hand, there are times where the national government is involving itself in states unnecessarily, and imposing views that may not be properly adapted to the local region.

So I guess what I’m saying is, is that that’s an issue that’s -- it would be very difficult for us as outsiders to try to figure out. What we can do is to say, consistent with democracy, you have a constitution; you should abide by what’s in your constitution. And you can make your own decisions about the systems that you want to arrange and the balance between federal and state power, or local power or counties. And as long as it’s proceeding in a legal process consistent with the constitution, we’re okay with that.

So I just wanted to be honest, that’s not probably an issue where I’m going to be asking the ambassador of the United States to get deeply involved in because it’s just too complicated. Every country is going to be different in terms of finding that balance.

Now, the issue of civil society is different, because we do believe that if you have laws that restrict people’s ability to organize and speak out peacefully, and participate in their government and petition their government -- if those become too restrictive, then that, in any society, contradicts the basic premise of democracy.

And I recognize that there have been some concerns about some of the laws that have either been proposed or are being interpreted in ways that appear to restrict the legality of certain activities by certain groups. Rather than to say specifically what we’re for and against -- because frankly, I don’t know all the details -- what I will say is this: We will look suspiciously on laws that say certain peaceful groups can’t operate just because they might be critical of the government, for example. I mean, our bias as a country and in our foreign policy is to say that if a group is peacefully organizing and advocating for issues, that they should be able to do so without excessive government interference. Now, if the groups are violent, then that’s a different issue.

But you heard me in my press conference yesterday -- I don’t counterterrorism to be used as an excuse then to crush legitimate dissent. And we will guard against that as well.

So we have every intention to work on a whole range of common interests with the Kenyan government. There are areas where we have a complete agreement, and we will work through the Kenyan government in order to accomplish those common goals. We want to be helpful and supportive of the national agenda, but we’ll also be working with NGOs and local organizations at the local level. Many of the organizations that area we have been supporting. And what we’ll do is we’ll make sure that in all of our interactions and engagements with the government, when we see an organization, for example, that we have determined is, in fact, legitimate and is peaceful, that it is in some ways being suppressed, we will speak up and we’ll be very clear about it. So we’re going to be engaged, we’re going to be involved.

But as I was telling -- I met with some of the opposition leaders very briefly -- those who are not in government -- after the speech. And I told them, you have a legally elected government and we’re going to work with that government, but we’re also always going to be listening to all elements of Kenyan society. It was funny, though -- one of the opposition leaders -- I won’t mention who -- was saying, you know, we really need you to press the Kenyan government on some issues. And I had to say to him, I said, I remember when you were in government -- you kept on saying, why are you trying to interfere with Kenya’s business; you should mind your own business.

So everybody wants the United States to be very involved when they’re not in power. And when they’re in power, they want the United States to mind their own business.

I think the way that we are going to operate is just to continue to be honest and to promote the kinds of policies and interests that we believe in. But ultimately -- and this is probably a good way to close -- ultimately I just want to remind everybody that Kenya’s prosperity, its freedom, its opportunity, the strength of its democracy is going to depend on Kenyans. It’s not going to depend on somebody else.

There was a time, post-Colonial, Cold War, when the big major powers were constantly interfering and determining what was happening in other countries. And frankly, the United States sometimes was involved in trying to decide who should be in charge of countries. But that honestly has changed. Our policy is to respect the sovereignty of nations and to recognize that it’s ultimately up to the people of those countries to determine who leads them and their form of government. But we are not going to apologize for believing in certain values and ideals. And I may interact with a government, out of necessity, where we have common interests. But if there are areas where I disagree, I will also be very blunt in my disagreement. And that’s true whether it’s Russia or China, or some of our European friends, or a great friend like Kenya.

The good news is that, over all, the United States and Kenya have so much in common, so much shared history, such strong people-to-people ties, that the disagreements we have, regardless of who’s in power, tend to be far fewer than all the areas where we have work to do together.

But I’m very encouraged to see that we’ve got such a strong civil society that’s going to help move Kenya forward, and also help create a stronger relationship between the United States and Kenya for years to come.

So thank you for being here. This was a great conversation.

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# Address to the People of Kenya

President Obama: Hey

!

Audience: Hey!

President Obama: Habari Zenu? ["How are you?"]

Audience: Nzuri sana! ["Very good!"]

President Obama: Wakenya mpo? It is great to be back in Kenya. Thank you so much for this extraordinary welcome. I know it took a few years, but as President I try to keep my promises, and I said I was going to come, and I'm here.

Everybody, go ahead and have a seat. I'm going to be talking for a while. Relax.

I want to thank my sister, [Dr.] Auma [Obama], for a wonderful introduction. I’m so glad that she could be with us here today. And it was -- as she said, it was Auma who first guided me through Kenya almost 30 years ago.

To President Kenyatta, I want to thank you once again for the hospitality that you’ve shown to me -- and for our work together on this visit, and for being here today. It's a great honor.

I am proud to be the first American President to come to Kenya -- and, of course, I'm the first Kenyan-American to be President of the United States. That goes without saying.

Audience Member: I love you, Obama!

President Obama: I love you back. I do.

But, as Auma was saying, the first time I came to Kenya, things were a little different. When I arrived at Kenyatta Airport, the airline lost my bags. That doesn’t happen on Air Force One. They always have my luggage on Air Force One. As she said, Auma picked me up in an old Volkswagon Beetle, and think the entire stay I was here it broke down four or five times. We’d be on the highway, we’d have to call the jua kali -- he’d bring us tools. We’d be sitting there, waiting. And I slept on a cot in her apartment. Instead of eating at fancy banquets with the President, we were drinking tea and eating Ugali -- and Sukuma Wiki.

So there wasn’t a lot of luxury. Sometimes the lights would go out. They still do -- is that what someone said? But there was something more important than luxury on that first trip, and that was a sense of being recognized, being seen. I was a young man and I was just a few years out of University. I had worked as a community organizer in low-income neighborhoods in Chicago. I was about to go to law school. And when I came here, in many ways I was a Westerner, I was an American, unfamiliar with my father and his birthplace, really disconnected from half of my heritage. And at that airport, as I was trying to find my luggage, there was a woman there who worked for the airlines, and she was helping fill out the forms, and she saw my name and she looked up and she asked if I was related to my father, who she had known. And that was the first time that my name meant something. And that was recognized.

And over the course of several weeks, I’d meet my brothers and aunts and uncles. I traveled to Alego, the village where my family was from. I saw the graves of my father and my grandfather. And I learned things about their lives that I could have never learned through books. And in many ways, their lives offered snapshots of Kenya’s history, but they also told us something about the future.

My grandfather, for example, he was a cook for the British. And as I went through some of his belongings when I went up-country, I found the passbook he had had to carry as a domestic servant. It listed his age and his height, his tribe, listed the number of teeth he had missing. And he was referred to as a boy, even though he was a grown man, in that passbook.

And he was in the King’s African Rifles during the Second World War, and was taken to the far reaches of the British Empire -- all the way to Burma. And back home after the war, he was eventually detained for a time because he was linked to a group that opposed British rule. And eventually he was released. He forged a home for himself and his family. He earned the respect of his village, lived a life of dignity -- although he had a well-earned reputation for being so strict that everybody was scared of him and he became estranged from part of his family.

So that was his story. And then my father came of age as Kenyans were pursuing independence, and he was proud to be a part of that liberation generation. And next to my grandfather’s papers, I found letters that he had written to 30 American universities asking for a chance to pursue his dream and get a scholarship. And ultimately, one university gave him that chance -- the University in Hawaii. And he would go on to get an education and then return home.

And here, at first he found success as an economist and worked with the government. But ultimately, he found disappointment -- in part because he couldn't reconcile the ideas that he had for his young country with the hard realities that had confronted him.

And I think sometimes about what these stories tell us, what the history and the past tell us about the future. They show the enormous barriers to progress that so many Kenyans faced just one or two generations ago. This is a young country. We were talking last night at dinner -- the President’s father was the first President. We're only a generation removed. And the daily limitations -- and sometimes humiliations -- of colonialism -- that's recent history. The corruption and cronyism and tribalism that sometimes confront young nations -- that's recent history.

But what these stories also tell us is an arch of progress -- from foreign rule to independence; from isolation to education, and engagement with a wider world. It speaks of incredible progress. So we have to know the history of Kenya, just as we Americans have to know our American history. All people have to understand where they come from. But we also have to remember why these lessons are important.

We know a history so that we can learn from it. We learn our history because we understand the sacrifices that were made before, so that when we make sacrifices we understand we're doing it on behalf of future generations.

There’s a proverb that says, “We have not inherited this land from our forebears, we have borrowed it from our children.” In other words, we study the past so it can guide us into the future, and inspire us to do better.

And when it comes to the people of Kenya -- particularly the youth -- I believe there is no limit to what you can achieve. A young, ambitious Kenyan today should not have to do what my grandfather did, and serve a foreign master. You don't need to do what my father did, and leave your home in order to get a good education and access to opportunity. Because of Kenya’s progress, because of your potential, you can build your future right here, right now.

Now, like any country, Kenya is far from perfect, but it has come so far in just my lifetime. After a bitter struggle, Kenyans claimed their independence just a few years after I was born. And after decades of one party-rule, Kenya embraced a multi-party system in the 1990s, just as I was beginning my own political career in the United States.

Tragically, just under a decade ago, Kenya was nearly torn apart by violence at the same time that I was running for my first campaign for President. And I remember hearing the reports of thousands of innocent people being killed or driven from their homes. And from a distance, it seemed like the Kenya that I knew -- a Kenya that was able to reach beyond ethnic and tribal lines -- that it might split apart across those lines of tribe and ethnicity.

But look what happened. The people of Kenya chose not to be defined by the hatreds of the past -- you chose a better history. The voices of ordinary people, and political leaders and civil society did not eliminate all these divisions, but you addressed the divisions and differences peacefully. And a new constitution was put in place, declaring that “every person has inherent dignity -- and the right to have that dignity respected and protected.” A competitive election went forward -- not without problems, but without the violence that so many had feared. In other words, Kenyans chose to stay together. You chose the path of Harambee.

And in part because of this political stability, Kenya’s economy is also emerging -- and the entrepreneurial spirit that people rely on to survive in the streets of Kibera can now be seen in new businesses across the country. From the city square to the smallest villages, MPesa is changing the way people use money. New investment is making Kenya a hub for regional trade. When I came here as a U.S. senator, I pointed out that South Korea’s economy was the same as Kenya’s when I was born, and then was 40 times larger than Kenya’s. Think about that. It started at the same place -- South Korea had gone here, and Kenya was here. But today, that gap has been cut in half just in the last decade. Which means Kenya is making progress.

And meanwhile, Kenya continues to carve out a distinct place in the community of nations: As a source of peacekeepers for places torn apart by conflict, a host for refugees driven from their homes. A leader for conservation, following the footprints of Wangari Maathai. Kenya is one of the places on this continent that truly observes freedom of the press, and their fearless journalists and courageous civil society members. And in the United States, we see the legacy of Kip Keino every time a Kenyan wins one of our marathons. And maybe the First Lady of Kenya is going to win one soon. I told the President he has to start running with his wife. We want him to stay fit.

So there’s much to be proud of -- much progress to lift up. It's a good-news story. But we also know the progress is not complete. There are still problems that shadow ordinary Kenyans every day -- challenges that can deny you your livelihood, and sometimes deny you lives.

As in America -- and so many countries around the globe -- economic growth has not always been broadly shared. Sometimes people at the top do very well, but ordinary people still struggle. Today, a young child in Nyanza Province is four times more likely to die than a child in Central Province -- even though they are equal in dignity and the eyes of God. That's a gap that has to be closed. A girl in Rift Valley is far less likely to attend secondary school than a girl in Nairobi. That's a gap that has to be closed. Across the country, one study shows corruption costs Kenyans 250,000 jobs every year -- because every shilling that’s paid as a bribe could be put into the pocket of somebody who’s actually doing an honest day’s work.

And despite the hard-earned political progress that I spoke of, those political gains still have to be protected. New laws and restrictions could close off the space where civil society gives individual citizens a voice and holds leaders accountable. Old tribal divisions and ethnic divisions can still be stirred up. I want to be very clear here -- a politics that’s based solely on tribe and ethnicity is a politics that's doomed to tear a country apart. It is a failure -- a failure of imagination.

Of course, here, in Kenya, we also know the specter of terrorism has touched far too many lives. And we remember the Americans and Kenyans who died side by side in the attack on our embassy in the ‘90s. We remember the innocent Kenyans who were taken from us at Westgate Mall. We weep for the nearly 150 people slaughtered at Garissa -- including so many students who had such a bright future before them. We honor the memory of so many other innocent Kenyans whose lives have been lost in this struggle.

So Kenya is at a crossroads -- a moment filled with peril, but also enormous promise. And with the rest of my time here today, I’d like to talk about how you can seize the moment, how you can make sure we leave behind a world that’s better -- a world that we borrowed from our children.

When I first came to sub-Saharan Africa as President, I made clear my strong belief that the future of Africa is up to Africans. For too long, I think that many looked to the outside for salvation and focused on somebody else being at fault for the problems of the continent. And as my sister said, ultimately we are each responsible for our own destiny. And I'm here as President of a country that sees Kenya as an important partner. I’m here as a friend who wants Kenya to succeed.

And the pillars of that success are clear: Strong democratic governance; development that provides opportunity for all people and not just some; a sense of national identity that rejects conflict for a future of peace and reconciliation.

And today, we can see that future for Kenya on the horizon. But tough choices are going to have to be made in order to arrive at that destination. In the United States, I always say that what makes America exceptional is not the fact that we’re perfect, it's the fact that we struggle to improve. We're self-critical. We work to live up to our highest values and ideals, knowing that we're not always going to achieve them perfectly, but we keep on trying to perfect our union.

And what’s true for America is also true for Kenya. You can't be complacent and accept the world just as it is. You have to imagine what the world might be and then push and work toward that future. Progress requires that you honestly confront the dark corners of our own past; extend rights and opportunities to more of your citizens; see the differences and diversity of this country as a strength, just as we in America try to see the diversity of our country as a strength and not a weakness. So you can choose the path to progress, but it requires making some important choices.

First and foremost, it means continuing down the path of a strong, more inclusive, more accountable and transparent democracy.

Democracy begins with a peacefully-elected government. It begins with elections. But it doesn’t stop with elections. So your constitution offers a road map to governance that’s more responsive to the people -- through protections against unchecked power, more power in the hands of local communities. For this system to succeed, there also has to be space for citizens to exercise their rights.

And we saw the strength of Kenya’s civil society in the last election, when groups collected reports of incitement so that violence could be stopped before it spun out of control. And the ability of citizens to organize and advocate for change -- that's the oxygen upon which democracy depends. Democracy is sometimes messy, and for leaders, sometimes it's frustrating. Democracy means that somebody is always complaining about something. Nobody is ever happy in a democracy about their government. If you make one person happy, somebody else is unhappy. Then sometimes somebody who you made happy, later on, now they’re not happy. They say, what have you done for me lately? But that's the nature of democracy. That's why it works, is because it's constantly challenging leaders to up their game and to do better.

And such civic participation and freedom is also essential for rooting out the cancer of corruption. Now, I want to be clear. Corruption is not unique to Kenya. I mean, I want everybody to understand that there’s no country that's completely free of corruption. Certainly here in the African continent there are many countries that deal with this problem. And I want to assure you I speak about it wherever I go, not just here in Kenya. So I don't want everybody to get too sensitive.

But the fact is, too often, here in Kenya -- as is true in other places -- corruption is tolerated because that’s how things have always been done. People just think that that is sort of the normal state of affairs. And there was a time in the United States where that was true, too. My hometown of Chicago was infamous for Al Capone and the Mob and organized crime corrupting law enforcement. But what happened was that over time people got fed up, and leaders stood up and they said, we're not going to play that game anymore. And you changed a culture and you changed habits.

Here in Kenya, it's time to change habits, and decisively break that cycle. Because corruption holds back every aspect of economic and civil life. It’s an anchor that weighs you down and prevents you from achieving what you could. If you need to pay a bribe and hire somebody’s brother -- who’s not very good and doesn’t come to work -- in order to start a business, well, that’s going to create less jobs for everybody. If electricity is going to one neighborhood because they’re well-connected, and not another neighborhood, that’s going to limit development of the country as a whole. If someone in public office is taking a cut that they don't deserve, that’s taking away from those who are paying their fair share.

So this is not just about changing one law -- although it's important to have laws on the books that are actually being enforced. It’s important that not only low-level corruption is punished, but folks at the top, if they are taking from the people, that has to be addressed as well. But it's not something that is just fixed by laws, or that any one person can fix. It requires a commitment by the entire nation -- leaders and citizens -- to change habits and to change culture.

Tough laws need to be on the books. And the good news is, your government is taking some important steps in the right direction. People who break the law and violate the public trust need to be prosecuted. NGOs have to be allowed to operate who shine a spotlight on what needs to change. And ordinary people have to stand up and say, enough is enough. It's time for a better future.

And as you take these steps, I promise that America will continue to be your partner in supporting investments in strong, democratic institutions.

Now, we're also going to work with you to pursue the second pillar of progress, and that is development that extends economic opportunity and dignity for all of Kenya’s people.

America partners with Kenya in areas where you’re making enormous progress, and we focus on what Kenyans can do for themselves and building capacity; on entrepreneurship, where Kenya is becoming an engine for innovation; on access to power, where Kenya is developing clean energy that can reach more people; on the important issue of climate change, where Kenya’s recent goal to reduce its emissions has put it in the position of being a leader on the continent; on food security, where Kenyan crops are producing more to meet the demands of your people and a global market; and on health, where Kenya has struck huge blows against HIV/AIDS and other diseases, while building up the capacity to provide better care in your communities.

America is also partnering with you on an issue that’s fundamental to Kenya’s future: We are investing in youth. We are investing in the young people of Kenya and the young people of this continent. Robert F. Kennedy once said, “It is a revolutionary world that we live in,” and “it is the young people who must take the lead.”1 It's the young people who must take the lead.

So through our Young African Leaders Initiative -- we are empowering and connecting young people from across the continent who are filled with energy and optimism and idealism, and are going to take Africa to new heights. And these young people, they’re not weighted down by the old ways. They’re creating a new path. And these are the elements for success in this 21st century.

To continue down this path of progress, it will be vital for Kenya to recognize that no country can achieve its full potential unless it draws on the talents of all its people -- and that must include the half of Kenyans -- maybe a little more than half --who are women and girls. Now, I'm going to spend a little time on this just for a second. Every country and every culture has traditions that are unique and help make that country what it is. But just because something is a part of your past doesn’t make it right. It doesn’t mean that it defines your future.

Look at us in the United States. Recently, we've been having a debate about the Confederate flag. Some of you may be familiar with this. This was a symbol for those states who fought against the Union to preserve slavery. Now, as a historical artifact, it's important. But some have argued that it's just a symbol of heritage that should fly in public spaces. The fact is it was a flag that flew over an army that fought to maintain a system of slavery and racial subjugation. So we should understand our history, but we should also recognize that it sends a bad message to those who were liberated from slavery and oppression.

And in part because of an unspeakable tragedy that took place recently, where a young man who was a fan of the Confederate flag and racial superiority shot helpless people in a church, more and more Americans of all races are realizing now that that flag should come down. Just because something is a tradition doesn’t make it right.

Well, so around the world, there is a tradition of repressing women and treating them differently, and not giving them the same opportunities, and husbands beating their wives, and children not being sent to school. Those are traditions. Treating women and girls as second-class citizens, those are bad traditions. They need to change. They’re holding you back.

Treating women as second-class citizens is a bad tradition. It holds you back. There’s no excuse for sexual assault or domestic violence. There’s no reason that young girls should suffer genital mutilation. There’s no place in civilized society for the early or forced marriage of children. These traditions may date back centuries; they have no place in the 21st century.

These are issues of right and wrong -- in any culture. But they’re also issues of success and failure. Any nation that fails to educate its girls or employ its women and allowing them to maximize their potential is doomed to fall behind in a global economy.

You know, we're in a sports center. Imagine if you have a team and you don't let half of the team play. That's stupid. That makes no sense. And the evidence shows that communities that give their daughters the same opportunities as their sons, they are more peaceful, they are more prosperous, they develop faster, they are more likely to succeed. That's true in America. That's true here in Kenya. It doesn’t matter.

And that's why one of the most successful development policies you can pursue is giving girls and education, and removing the obstacles that stand between them and their dreams. And by the way, if you educate girls -- they grow up to be moms -- and they, because they’re educated, are more likely to produce educated children. So Kenya will not succeed if it treats women and girls as second-class citizens. I want to be very clear about that.

Now, this leads me to the third pillar of progress, and that's choosing a future of peace and reconciliation.

There are real threats out there. President Kenyatta and I spent a lot of time discussing the serious threat from al-Shabaab that Kenya faces. The United States faces similar threats of terrorism. We are grateful for the sacrifices made by Kenyans on the front lines as part of AMISOM. We’re proud of the efforts that we're making to strengthen Kenya’s capabilities through our new Security Governance Initiative. We're going to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with you in this fight against terrorism for as long as it takes.

But, as I mentioned yesterday, it is important to remember that violent extremists want us to turn against one another. That's what terrorists typically try to exploit. They know that they are a small minority; they know that they can't win conventionally. So what they try to do is target societies where they can exploit divisions. That's what happens in Iraq. That's what happens around the world. That's what happened in Northern Ireland. Terrorists who try to sow chaos, they must be met with force and they must also be met, though, with a forceful commitment to uphold the rule of law, and respect for human rights, and to treat everybody who’s peaceful and law-abiding fairly and equally.

Extremists who prey on distrust must be defeated by communities who stand together and stand for something different. And the most important example here is, is that the United States and Kenya both have Muslim minorities, but those minorities make enormous contributions to our countries. These are our brothers, they are our sisters. And so in both our countries, we have to reject calls that allow us to be divided.

This is true for any diverse society. And Kenya is rich with diversity -- with many dozens of tribes and ethnicities, and languages and religious groups. And time and again, just as we’ve seen the dangers of religious or ethnic violence, we’ve seen that Kenya is stronger when Kenyans stand united -- with a sense of national identity. That was the case on December 12, 1963, when cities and villages across this country celebrated the birth of a nation. It was true in 2010, when Kenya replaced the anarchy of ethnic violence with the order of a new constitution.

So we can all appreciate our own identities, our bloodlines, our beliefs, our backgrounds -- that tapestry is what makes us who we are. But the history of Africa -- which is both the cradle of human progress and a crucible of conflict -- shows us that when define ourselves narrowly, in opposition to somebody just because they’re of a different tribe, or race, or religion -- and we ignore who is a good person or a bad person, are they working hard or not, are they honest or not, are they peaceful or violent -- when we start making distinctions solely based on status and not what people do, then we're taking the wrong path and we inevitably suffer in the end.

This is why Martin Luther King called on people to be judged not by the color of their skin but the content of their character. And in the same way, people should not be judged by their last name, or their religious faith, but by their content of their character and how they behave. Are they good citizens? Are they good people?

In the United States, we embrace the motto: E Pluribus Unum. In Latin, that means, "out of many, one." In Kenya, Harambee -- "we are in this together." Whatever the challenge, you will be stronger if you face it not as Christians or Muslims, Masai, Kikuyu, Luo, any other tribe -- but as Kenyans. And ultimately, that unity is the source of strength that will empower you to seize this moment of promise. That's what will help you root out corruption. That's what will strengthen democratic institutions. That's what will help you combat inequality. That's what will help you extend opportunity, and educate youth, and face down threats, and embrace reconciliation.

So I want to say particularly to the young people here today, Kenya is on the move. Africa is on the move. You are poised to play a bigger role in this world -- as the shadows of the past are replaced by the light that you offer an increasingly interconnected world. And in the light of this new day, we have to learn to see ourselves in one another. We have to see that we are connected, our fates are bound together. Because, in the end, we're all part of one tribe -- the human tribe. And no matter who we are, or where we come from, or what we look like, or who we love, or what God we worship, we're connected. Our fates are bound up with one another.

Kenya holds within it all that diversity. And with diversity, sometimes comes difficulty. But I look to Kenya’s future filled with hope. And I'm hopeful because of you, the people of Kenya, especially the young people.

There are some amazing examples of what’s going on right now with young people. I’m hopeful because of a young man named Richard Ruto Todosia. Richard helped build Yes Youth Can -- I like the phrase, Yes Youth Can -- It became one of the most prominent civil society organizations in Kenya, with over one million members. And after the violence of 2007, 2008, Yes Youth Can stood up to incitement, helped bring opportunity to young people in places that were scarred by conflict. That's the kind of young leadership that we need.

I’m hopeful because of a young woman named Josephine Kulea. So Josephine founded Samburu Girls Foundation. And she’s already helped to rescue over 1,000 girls from abuse and forced marriage, and helped place them in schools. A member of the Samburu tribe herself, she’s personally planned rescue missions to help girls as young as 6 years old. And she explains that, “The longer a girl is in school, everything for her -- for her income, for her family, for this country -- everything changes.” She gives me hope.

I’m hopeful because of a young woman named Jamila Abass. So Jamila founded Mfarm, which is a mobile platform that is already used by over 14,000 people across Kenya. Mfarm makes it easy for farmers to get information that lets them match their crops with what the market demands. And studies show that it can help farmers double their sales. So here’s what Jamila said: “I love Kenya because you feel you are home anywhere you go.”

Home anywhere you go -- that's the Kenya that welcomed me nearly 30 years ago as a young man. You helped make me feel at home. And standing here today as President of the United States, when I think about those young people and all the young people in attendance here, you still make me feel at home. And I’m confident that your future is going to be written across this country and across this continent by young people like you -- young men and women who don’t have to struggle under a colonial power; who don’t have to look overseas to realize your dreams. Yes, you can realize your dreams right here, right now.

“We have not inherited this land from our forebears, we have borrowed it from our children.” So now is the time for us to do the hard work of living up to that inheritance; of building a Kenya where the inherent dignity of every person is respected and protected, and there’s no limit to what a child can achieve.

I am here to tell you that the United States of America will be a partner for you every step of the way.

God bless you. Thank you. Asante sana. ["Thank you very much."]

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# Address to Representatives of the African Union

Thank you. Thank you so much. Madam Chairwoman [Dlamini-Zuma], thank you so much for your kind words and your leadership. To Prime Minister Hailemariam, and the people of Ethiopia -- once again, thank you for your wonderful hospitality and for hosting this pan-African institution. To members of the African Union, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen -- thank you for welcoming me here today. It is a great honor to be the first President of the United States to address the African Union.

I’m grateful for this opportunity to speak to the representatives of more than one billion people of the great African continent. We’re joined today by citizens, by leaders of civil society, by faith communities, and I’m especially pleased to see so many young people who embody the energy and optimism of today’s Africa. Hello! Thank you for being here.

I stand before you as a proud American. I also stand before you as the son of an African. Africa and its people helped to shape America and allowed it to become the great nation that it is. And Africa and its people have helped shape who I am and how I see the world. In the villages in Kenya where my father was born, I learned of my ancestors, and the life of my grandfather, the dreams of my father, the bonds of family that connect us all as Africans and Americans.

As parents, Michelle and I want to make sure that our two daughters know their heritage -- European and African, in all of its strengths and all of its struggle. So we’ve taken our daughters and stood with them on the shores of West Africa, in those doors of no return, mindful that their ancestors were both slaves and slave owners. We’ve stood with them in that small cell on Robben Island where Madiba showed the world that, no matter the nature of his physical confinement, he alone was the master of his fate. For us, for our children, Africa and its people teach us a powerful lesson -- that we must uphold the inherent dignity of every human being.

Dignity -- that basic idea that by virtue of our common humanity, no matter where we come from, or what we look like, we are all born equal, touched by the grace of God. Every person has worth. Every person matters. Every person deserves to be treated with decency and respect. Throughout much of history, mankind did not see this. Dignity was seen as a virtue reserved to those of rank and privilege, kings and elders. It took a revolution of the spirit, over many centuries, to open our eyes to the dignity of every person. And around the world, generations have struggled to put this idea into practice in laws and in institutions. So, too, here in Africa. This is the cradle of humanity, and ancient African kingdoms were home to great libraries and universities. But the evil of slavery took root not only abroad, but here on the continent. Colonialism skewed Africa’s economy and robbed people of their capacity to shape their own destiny. Eventually, liberation movements grew. And 50 years ago, in a great burst of self-determination, Africans rejoiced as foreign flags came down and your national flags went up. As South Africa’s Albert Luthuli said at the time, “the basis for peace and brotherhood in Africa is being restored by the resurrection of national sovereignty and independence, of equality and the dignity of man.” A half-century into this independence era, it is long past time to put aside old stereotypes of an Africa forever mired in poverty and conflict. The world must recognize Africa’s extraordinary progress. Today, Africa is one of the fastest-growing regions in the world. Africa’s middle class is projected to grow to more than one billion consumers. With hundreds of millions of mobile phones, surging access to the Internet, Africans are beginning to leapfrog old technologies into new prosperity. Africa is on the move, a new Africa is emerging. Propelled by this progress, and in partnership with the world, Africa has achieved historic gains in health. The rate of new HIV/AIDS infections has plummeted. African mothers are more likely to survive childbirth and have healthy babies. Deaths from malaria have been slashed, saving the lives of millions of African children. Millions have been lifted from extreme poverty. Africa has led the world in sending more children to school. In other words, more and more African men, women and children are living with dignity and with hope.

And Africa’s progress can also be seen in the institutions that bring us together today. When I first came to Sub-Saharan Africa as a President, I said that Africa doesn’t need strongmen, it needs strong institutions. And one of those institutions can be the African Union. Here, you can come together, with a shared commitment to human dignity and development. Here, your 54 nations pursue a common vision of an “integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa.” As Africa changes, I’ve called on the world to change its approach to Africa. So many Africans have told me, we don’t want just aid, we want trade that fuels progress. We don’t want patrons, we want partners who help us build our own capacity to grow. We don’t want the indignity of dependence, we want to make our own choices and determine our own future. As President, I’ve worked to transform America’s relationship with Africa -- so that we’re truly listening to our African friends and working together, as equal partners. And I’m proud of the progress that we’ve made. We’ve boosted American exports to this region, part of trade that supports jobs for Africans and Americans. To sustain our momentum -- and with the bipartisan support of some of the outstanding members of Congress who are here today -- 20 of them who are here today -- I recently signed the 10-year renewal of the African Growth and Opportunity Act. And I want to thank them all. Why don't they stand very briefly so you can see them, because they’ve done outstanding work.

We’ve launched major initiatives to promote food security, and public health and access to electricity, and to prepare the next generation of African leaders and entrepreneurs --investments that will help fuel Africa’s rise for decades to come. Last year, as the Chairwoman noted, I welcomed nearly 50 African presidents and prime ministers to Washington so we could begin a new chapter of cooperation. And by coming to the African Union today, I’m looking to build on that commitment.

I believe Africa’s rise is not just important for Africa, it's important to the entire world. We will not be able to meet the challenges of our time -- from ensuring a strong global economy to facing down violent extremism, to combating climate change, to ending hunger and extreme poverty -- without the voices and contributions of one billion Africans.

Now, even with Africa’s impressive progress, we must acknowledge that many of these gains rest on a fragile foundation. Alongside new wealth, hundreds of millions of Africans still endure extreme poverty. Alongside high-tech hubs of innovation, many Africans are crowded into shantytowns without power or running water -- a level of poverty that’s an assault on human dignity.

Moreover, as the youngest and fastest-growing continent, Africa’s population in the coming decades will double to some two billion people, and many of them will be young, under 18. Now, on the one hand, this could bring tremendous opportunities as these young Africans harness new technologies and ignite new growth and reforms. Economists will tell you that countries, regions, continents grow faster with younger populations. It's a demographic edge and advantage -- but only if those young people are being trained. We need only to look at the Middle East and North Africa to see that large numbers of young people with no jobs and stifled voices can fuel instability and disorder. I suggest to you that the most urgent task facing Africa today and for decades ahead is to create opportunity for this next generation. And this will be an enormous undertaking. Africa will need to generate millions more jobs than it’s doing right now. And time is of the essence. The choices made today will shape the trajectory of Africa, and therefore, the world for decades to come. And as your partner and your friend, allow me to suggest several ways that we can meet this challenge together.

Africa’s progress will depend on unleashing economic growth -- not just for the few at the top, but for the many, because an essential element of dignity is being able to live a decent life. That begins with a job. And that requires trade and investment.

Many of your nations have made important reforms to attract investment -- it’s been a spark for growth. But in many places across Africa, it’s still too hard to start a venture, still too hard to build a business. Governments that take additional reforms to make doing business easier will have an eager partner in the United States.

And that includes reforms to help Africa trade more with itself -- as the Chairwoman and I discussed before we came out here today -- because the biggest markets for your goods are often right next door. You don't have to just look overseas for growth, you can look internally. And our work to help Africa modernize customs and border crossings started with the East African Community -- now we’re expanding our efforts across the continent, because it shouldn’t be harder for African countries to trade with each other than it is for you to trade with Europe and America.

Now, most U.S. trade with the region is with just three countries -- South Africa, Nigeria and Angola -- and much of that is in the form of energy. I want Africans and Americans doing more business together in more sectors, in more countries. So we’re increasing trade missions to places like Tanzania, Ethiopia Mozambique. We’re working to help more Africans get their goods to market. Next year, we’ll host another U.S.-Africa Business Forum to mobilize billions of dollars in new trade and investment -- so we’re buying more of each other’s products and all growing together.

Now, the United States isn’t the only country that sees your growth as an opportunity. And that is a good thing. When more countries invest responsibly in Africa, it creates more jobs and prosperity for us all. So I want to encourage everybody to do business with Africa, and African countries should want to do business with every country. But economic relationships can’t simply be about building countries’ infrastructure with foreign labor or extracting Africa’s natural resources. Real economic partnerships have to be a good deal for Africa -- they have to create jobs and capacity for Africans.

And that includes the point that Chairwoman Zuma made about illicit flows with multinationals -- which is one of the reasons that we've been a leading advocate, working with the G7, to assist in making sure that there’s honest accounting when businesses are investing here in Africa, and making sure that capital flows are properly accounted for. That's the kind of partnership America offers.

Nothing will unlock Africa’s economic potential more than ending the cancer of corruption. And you are right that it is not just a problem of Africa, it is a problem of those who do business with Africa. It is not unique to Africa -- corruption exists all over the world, including in the United States. But here in Africa, corruption drains billions of dollars from economies that can't afford to lose billions of dollars -- that's money that could be used to create jobs and build hospitals and schools. And when someone has to pay a bribe just to start a business or go to school, or get an official to do the job they’re supposed to be doing anyway -- that’s not “the African way.” It undermines the dignity of the people you represent.

Only Africans can end corruption in their countries. As African governments commit to taking action, the United States will work with you to combat illicit financing, and promote good governance and transparency and rule of law. And we already have strong laws in place that say to U.S. companies, you can't engage in bribery to try to get business -- which not all countries have. And we actually enforce it and police it.

And let me add that criminal networks are both fueling corruption and threatening Africa’s precious wildlife -- and with it, the tourism that many African economies count on. So America also stands with you in the fight against wildlife trafficking. That's something that has to be addressed.

But, ultimately, the most powerful antidote to the old ways of doing things is this new generation of African youth. History shows that the nations that do best are the ones that invest in the education of their people. You see, in this information age, jobs can flow anywhere, and they typically will flow to where workers are literate and highly skilled and online. And Africa’s young people are ready to compete. I've met them -- they are hungry, they are eager. They’re willing to work hard. So we've got to invest in them. As Africa invests in education, our entrepreneurship programs are helping innovators start new businesses and create jobs right here in Africa. And the men and women in our Young African Leaders Initiative today will be the leaders who can transform business and civil society and governments tomorrow.

Africa’s progress will depend on development that truly lifts countries from poverty to prosperity -- because people everywhere deserve the dignity of a life free from want. A child born in Africa today is just as equal and just as worthy as a child born in Asia or Europe or America. At the recent development conference here in Addis, African leadership helped forge a new global compact for financing that fuels development. And under the AU’s leadership, the voice of a united Africa will help shape the world’s next set of development goals, and you’re pursuing a vision of the future that you want for Africa.

And America’s approach to development -- the central focus of our engagement with Africa -- is focused on helping you build your own capacity to realize that vision. Instead of just shipping food aid to Africa, we’ve helped more than two million farmers use new techniques to boost their yields, feed more people, reduce hunger. With our new alliance of government and the private sector investing billions of dollars in African agriculture, I believe we can achieve our goal and lift 50 million Africans from poverty.

Instead of just sending aid to build power plants, our Power Africa initiative is mobilizing billions of dollars in investments from governments and businesses to reduce the number of Africans living without electricity. Now, an undertaking of this magnitude will not be quick. It will take many years. But working together, I believe we can bring electricity to more than 60 million African homes and businesses and connect more Africans to the global economy.

Instead of just telling Africa, you’re on your own, in dealing with climate change, we’re delivering new tools and financing to more than 40 African nations to help them prepare and adapt. By harnessing the wind and sun, your vast geothermal energy and rivers for hydropower, you can turn this climate threat into an economic opportunity. And I urge Africa to join us in rejecting old divides between North and South so we can forge a strong global climate agreement this year in Paris. Because sparing some of the world’s poorest people from rising seas, more intense droughts, shortages of water and food is a matter of survival and a matter of human dignity. Instead of just sending medicine, we’re investing in better treatments and helping Africa prevent and treat diseases. As the United States continues to provide billions of dollars in the fight against HIV/AIDS, and as your countries take greater ownership of health programs, we’re moving toward a historic accomplishment -- the first AIDS-free generation. And if the world learned anything from Ebola, it’s that the best way to prevent epidemics is to build strong public health systems that stop diseases from spreading in the first place. So America is proud to partner with the AU and African countries in this mission. Today, I can announce that of the $1 billion that the United States is devoting to this work globally, half will support efforts here in Africa.

I believe Africa’s progress will also depend on democracy, because Africans, like people everywhere, deserve the dignity of being in control of their own lives. We all know what the ingredients of real democracy are. They include free and fair elections, but also freedom of speech and the press, freedom of assembly. These rights are universal. They’re written into African constitutions. The African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights declares that “every individual shall have the right to the respect of the dignity inherent in a human being.” From Sierra Leone, Ghana, Benin, to Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, democracy has taken root. In Nigeria, more than 28 million voters bravely cast their ballots and power transferred as it should -- peacefully.

Yet at this very moment, these same freedoms are denied to many Africans. And I have to proclaim, democracy is not just formal elections. When journalists are put behind bars for doing their jobs, or activists are threatened as governments crack down on civil society -- then you may have democracy in name, but not in substance. And I'm convinced that nations cannot realize the full promise of independence until they fully protect the rights of their people.

And this is true even for countries that have made important democratic progress. As I indicated during my visit to Kenya, the remarkable gains that country has made with a new constitution, with its election, cannot be jeopardized by restrictions on civil society. Likewise, our host, Ethiopians have much to be proud of -- I've been amazed at all the wonderful work that's being done here -- and it's true that the elections that took place here occurred without violence. But as I discussed with Prime Minister Hailemariam, that’s just the start of democracy. I believe Ethiopia will not fully unleash the potential of its people if journalists are restricted or legitimate opposition groups can't participate in the campaign process. And, to his credit, the Prime Minister acknowledged that more work will need to be done for Ethiopia to be a full-fledged, sustainable democracy. So these are conversations we have to have as friends. Our American democracy is not perfect. We've worked for many years -- but one thing we do is we continually reexamine to figure out how can we make our democracy better. And that's a force of strength for us, being willing to look and see honestly what we need to be doing to fulfill the promise of our founding documents. And every country has to go through that process. No country is perfect, but we have to be honest, and strive to expand freedoms, to broaden democracy. The bottom line is that when citizens cannot exercise their rights, the world has a responsibility to speak out. And America will, even if it’s sometimes uncomfortable -- even when it’s sometimes directed toward our friends.

And I know that there’s some countries that don't say anything -- and maybe that's easier for leaders to deal with. But you're kind of stuck with us -- this is how we are. We believe in these things and we're going to keep on talking about them.

And I want to repeat, we do this not because we think our democracy is perfect, or we think that every country has to follow precisely our path. For more than two centuries since our independence, we’re still working on perfecting our union. We're not immune from criticism. When we fall short of our ideals, we strive to do better. But when we speak out for our principles, at home and abroad, we stay true to our values and we help lift up the lives of people beyond our borders. And we think that's important. And it's especially important, I believe, for those of us of African descent, because we've known what it feels like to be on the receiving end of injustice. We know what it means to be discriminated against. We know what it means to be jailed. So how can we stand by when it's happening to somebody else?

I'll be frank with you, it can't just be America that's talking about these things. Fellow African countries have to talk about these things. Just as other countries championed your break from colonialism, our nations must all raise our voices when universal rights are being denied. For if we truly believe that Africans are equal in dignity, then Africans have an equal right to freedoms that are universal -- that’s a principle we all have to defend. And it's not just a Western idea; it's a human idea. I have to also say that Africa’s democratic progress is also at risk when leaders refuse to step aside when their terms end. Now, let me be honest with you -- I do not understand this. I am in my second term. It has been an extraordinary privilege for me to serve as President of the United States. I cannot imagine a greater honor or a more interesting job. I love my work. But under our Constitution, I cannot run again. I can't run again. I actually think I'm a pretty good President -- I think if I ran I could win. But I can't. So there’s a lot that I'd like to do to keep America moving, but the law is the law. And no one person is above the law. Not even the President. And I'll be honest with you -- I’m looking forward to life after being President. I won't have such a big security detail all the time. It means I can go take a walk. I can spend time with my family. I can find other ways to serve. I can visit Africa more often. The point is, I don't understand why people want to stay so long. Especially when they’ve got a lot of money. When a leader tries to change the rules in the middle of the game just to stay in office, it risks instability and strife -- as we’ve seen in Burundi. And this is often just a first step down a perilous path. And sometimes you’ll hear leaders say, well, I'm the only person who can hold this nation together. If that's true, then that leader has failed to truly build their nation.

You look at Nelson Mandela -- Madiba, like George Washington, forged a lasting legacy not only because of what they did in office, but because they were willing to leave office and transfer power peacefully. And just as the African Union has condemned coups and illegitimate transfers of power, the AU’s authority and strong voice can also help the people of Africa ensure that their leaders abide by term limits and their constitutions. Nobody should be President for life.

And your country is better off if you have new blood and new ideas. I'm still a pretty young man, but I know that somebody with new energy and new insights will be good for my country. It will be good for yours, too, in some cases.

Africa’s progress will also depend on security and peace -- because an essential part of human dignity is being safe and free from fear. In Angola, Mozambique, Liberia, Sierra Leone, we’ve seen conflicts end and countries work to rebuild. But from Somalia and Nigeria to Mali and Tunisia, terrorists continue to target innocent civilians. Many of these groups claim the banner of religion, but hundreds of millions of African Muslims know that Islam means peace. And we must call groups like al Qaeda, ISIL, al-Shabaab, Boko Haram -- we must call them what they are -- murderers.

In the face of threats, Africa -- and the African Union --has shown leadership. Because of the AU force in Somalia, al-Shabaab controls less territory and the Somali government is growing stronger. In central Africa, the AU-led mission continues to degrade the Lord’s Resistance Army. In the Lake Chad Basin, forces from several nations -- with the backing of the AU -- are fighting to end Boko Haram’s senseless brutality. And today, we salute all those who serve to protect the innocent, including so many brave African peacekeepers.

Now, as Africa stands against terror and conflict, I want you to know that the United States stands with you. With training and support, we’re helping African forces grow stronger. The United States is supporting the AU’s efforts to strengthen peacekeeping, and we’re working with countries in the region to deal with emerging crises with the African Peacekeeping Rapid Response Partnership. The world must do more to help as well. This fall at the United Nations, I will host a summit to secure new commitments to strengthen international support for peacekeeping, including here in Africa. And building on commitments that originated here in the AU, we’ll work to develop a new partnership between the U.N. and the AU that can provide reliable support for AU peace operations. If African governments and international partners step up with strong support, we can transform how we work together to promote security and peace in Africa.

Our efforts to ensure our shared security must be matched by a commitment to improve governance. Those things are connected. Good governance is one of the best weapons against terrorism and instability. Our fight against terrorist groups, for example, will never be won if we fail to address legitimate grievances that terrorists may try to exploit, if we don’t build trust with all communities, if we don’t uphold the rule of law. There’s a saying, and I believe it is true -- if we sacrifice liberty in the name of security, we risk losing both.

This same seriousness of purpose is needed to end conflicts. In the Central African Republic, the spirit of dialogue recently shown by ordinary citizens must be matched by leaders committed to inclusive elections and a peaceful transition. In Mali, the comprehensive peace agreement must be fulfilled. And leaders in Sudan must know their nation will never truly thrive so long as they wage war against their own people -- the world will not forget about Darfur.

In South Sudan, the joy of independence has descended into the despair of violence. I was there at the United Nations when we held up South Sudan as the promise of a new beginning. And neither Mr. Kiir, nor Mr. Machar have shown, so far, any interest in sparing their people from this suffering, or reaching a political solution.

Yesterday, I met with leaders from this region. We agree that, given the current situation, Mr. Kiir and Mr. Machar must reach an agreement by August 17th -- because if they do not, I believe the international community must raise the costs of intransigence. And the world awaits the report of the AU Commission of Inquiry, because accountability for atrocities must be part of any lasting peace in Africa’s youngest nation.

And finally, Africa’s progress will depend on upholding the human rights of all people -- for if each of us is to be treated with dignity, each of us must be sure to also extend that same dignity to others. As President, I make it a point to meet with many of our Young African Leaders. And one was a young man from Senegal. He said something wonderful about being together with so many of his African brothers and sisters. He said, “Here, I have met Africa, the [Africa] I’ve always believed in. She’s beautiful. She’s young. She’s full of talent and motivation and ambition.” I agree.

Africa is the beautiful, talented daughters who are just as capable as Africa’s sons. And as a father, I believe that my two daughters have to have the same chance to pursue their dreams as anybody’s son -- and that same thing holds true for girls here in Africa. Our girls have to be treated the same.

We can’t let old traditions stand in the way. The march of history shows that we have the capacity to broaden our moral imaginations. We come to see that some traditions are good for us, they keep us grounded, but that, in our modern world, other traditions set us back. When African girls are subjected to the mutilation of their bodies, or forced into marriage at the ages of 9 or 10 or 11 -- that sets us back. That's not a good tradition. It needs to end.

When more than 80 percent of new HIV cases in the hardest-hit countries are teenage girls, that’s a tragedy; that sets us back. So America is beginning a partnership with 10 African countries -- Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe -- to keep teenage girls safe and AIDS-free. And when girls cannot go to school and grow up not knowing how to read or write -- that denies the world future women engineers, future women doctors, future women business owners, future women presidents -- that sets us all back. That's a bad tradition -- not providing our girls the same education as our sons.

I was saying in Kenya, nobody would put out a football team and then just play half the team. You’d lose. the same is true when it comes to getting everybody and education. You can't leave half the team off -- our young women. So as part of America’s support for the education and the health of our daughters, my wife, Michelle, is helping to lead a global campaign, including a new effort in Tanzania and Malawi, with a simple message -- Let Girls Learn -- let girls learn so they grow up healthy and they grow up strong. And that will be good for families. And they will raise smart, healthy children, and that will be good for every one of your nations.

Africa is the beautiful, strong women that these girls grow up to become. The single best indicator of whether a nation will succeed is how it treats its women. When women have health care and women have education, families are stronger, communities are more prosperous, children do better in school, nations are more prosperous. Look at the amazing African women here in this hall. If you want your country to grow and succeed, you have to empower your women. And if you want to empower more women, America will be your partner. Let’s work together to stop sexual assault and domestic violence. Let’s make clear that we will not tolerate rape as a weapon of war -- it’s a crime. And those who commit it must be punished. Let’s lift up the next generation of women leaders who can help fight injustice and forge peace and start new businesses and create jobs -- and some might hire some men, too. We’ll all be better off when women have equal futures. And Africa is the beautiful tapestry of your cultures and ethnicities and races and religions. Last night, we saw this amazing dance troupe made up of street children who had formed a dance troupe and they performed for the Prime Minister and myself. And there were 80 different languages and I don't know how many ethnic groups. And there were like 30 different dances that were being done. And the Prime Minister was trying to keep up with -- okay, I think that one is -- and they were moving fast. And that diversity here in Ethiopia is representative of diversity all throughout Africa. And that's a strength.

Now, yesterday, I had the privilege to view Lucy -- you may know Lucy -- she’s our ancestor, more than 3 million years old. In this tree of humanity, with all of our branches and diversity, we all go back to the same root. We’re all one family -- we're all one tribe. And yet so much of the suffering in our world stems from our failure to remember that -- to not recognize ourselves in each other.

We think because somebody’s skin is slightly different, or their hair is slightly different, or their religious faith is differently expressed, or they speak a different language that it justifies somehow us treating them with less dignity. And that becomes the source of so many of our problems. And we think somehow that we make ourselves better by putting other people down. And that becomes the source of so many of our problems. When we begin to see other as somehow less than ourselves -- when we succumb to these artificial divisions of faith or sect or tribe or ethnicity -- then even the most awful abuses are justified in the minds of those who are thinking in those ways. And in the end, abusers lose their own humanity, as well.

Nelson Mandela taught us, “to be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.”

Every one of us is equal. Every one of us has worth. Every one of us matters. And when we respect the freedom of others -- no matter the color of their skin, or how they pray or who they are or who they love -- we are all more free. Your dignity depends on my dignity, and my dignity depends on yours. Imagine if everyone had that spirit in their hearts. Imagine if governments operated that way. Just imagine what the world could look like -- the future that we could bequeath these young people.

Yes, in our world, old thinking can be a stubborn thing. That's one of the reasons why we need term limits -- old people think old ways. And you can see my grey hair, I'm getting old. The old ways can be stubborn. But I believe the human heart is stronger. I believe hearts can change. I believe minds can open. That’s how change happens. That’s how societies move forward. It's not always a straight line -- step by halting step -- sometimes you go forward, you move back a little bit. But I believe we are marching, we are pointing towards ideals of justice and equality.

That’s how your nations won independence -- not just with rifles, but with principles and ideals. That's how African Americans won our civil rights. That's how South Africans -- black and white -- tore down apartheid. That's why I can stand before you today as the first African American President of the United States.

New thinking. Unleashing growth that creates opportunity. Promoting development that lifts all people out of poverty. Supporting democracy that gives citizens their say. Advancing the security and justice that delivers peace. Respecting the human rights of all people. These are the keys to progress -- not just in Africa, but around the world. And this is the work that we can do together.

And I am hopeful. As I prepare to return home, my thoughts are with that same young man from Senegal, who said: Here, I have met Africa, the [Africa] I’ve always believed in. She’s beautiful and young, full of talent and motivation and ambition. To which I would simply add, as you build the Africa you believe in, you will have no better partner, no better friend than the United States of America.

God bless Africa. God bless the United States of America.

Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you.

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# Clean Power Plan Announcement

Well, good afternoon everybody.

Gina, I want to thank you not just for the introduction, but for the incredible work that you and your team have been doing -- not just on this issue, but on generally making sure that we've got clean air, clean water, a great future for our kids.

I want to thank all the members of Congress who are here, as well, who have been fighting this issue, and sometimes at great odds with others, but are willing to take on what is going to be one of the key challenges of our lifetimes and future generations. I want to thank our Surgeon General, who’s just been doing outstanding work and is helping to make the connection between this critical issue and the health of our families.

Over the past six and a half years, we've taken on some of the toughest challenges of our time -- from rebuilding our economy after a devastating recession, to ending our wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and bringing almost all of our troops home, to strengthening our security through tough and principled diplomacy. But I am convinced that no challenge poses a greater threat to our future and future generations than a changing climate. And that's what brings us here today.

Now, not everyone here is a scientist -- but some of you are among the best scientists in the world. And what you and your colleagues have been showing us for years now is that human activities are changing the climate in dangerous ways. Levels of carbon dioxide, which heats up our atmosphere, are higher than they’ve been in 800,000 years; 2014 was the planet’s warmest year on record. And we've been setting a lot of records in terms of warmest years over the last decade. One year doesn’t make a trend, but 14 of the 15 warmest years on record have fallen within the first 15 years of this century.

Climate change is no longer just about the future that we're predicting for our children or our grandchildren; it's about the reality that we're living with every day, right now.

The Pentagon says that climate change poses immediate risks to our national security. While we can't say any single weather event is entirely caused by climate change, we've seen stronger storms, deeper droughts, longer wildfire seasons. Charleston and Miami now flood at high tide. Shrinking ice caps forced National Geographic to make the biggest change in its atlas since the Soviet Union broke apart.

Over the past three decades, nationwide asthma rates have more than doubled, and climate change puts those Americans at greater risk of landing in the hospital. As one of America’s governors has said, “We're the first generation to feel the impact of climate change and the last generation that can do something about it.”

And that's why I committed the United States to leading the world on this challenge, because I believe there is such a thing as being too late.

Most of the issues that I deal with -- and I deal with some tough issues that cross my desk -- by definition, I don't deal with issues if they’re easy to solve because somebody else has already solved them. And some of them are grim. Some of them are heartbreaking. Some of them are hard. Some of them are frustrating. But most of the time, the issues we deal with are ones that are temporally bound and we can anticipate things getting better if we just kind of plug away at it, even incrementally. But this is one of those rare issues -- because of its magnitude, because of its scope -- that if we don't get it right we may not be able to reverse, and we may not be able to adapt sufficiently. There is such a thing as being too late when it comes to climate change.

Now, that shouldn’t make us hopeless; it's not as if there’s nothing we can do about it. We can take action. Over the past several years, America has been working to use less dirty energy, more clean energy, waste less energy throughout our economy. We've set new fuel economy standards that mean our cars will go twice as far on a gallon of gas by the middle of the next decade. Combined with lower gas prices, these standards are on pace to save drivers an average of $700 at the pump this year. We doubled down on our investment in renewable energy. We're generating three times as much wind power, 20 times as much solar power as we did in 2008.

These steps are making a difference. Over the past decade, even as our economy has continued to grow, the United States has cut our total carbon pollution more than any other nation on Earth. That's the good news. But I am here to say that if we want to protect our economy and our security and our children’s health, we're going to have to do more. The science tells us we have to do more.

This has been our focus these past six years. And it's particularly going to be our focus this month. In Nevada, later in August, I'll talk about the extraordinary progress we've made in generating clean energy -- and the jobs that come with it -- and how we can boost that even further. I'll also be the first American President to visit the Alaskan Arctic, where our fellow Americans have already seen their communities devastated by melting ice and rising oceans, the impact on marine life. We're going to talk about what the world needs to do together to prevent the worst impacts of climate change before it's too late.

And today, we're here to announce America’s Clean Power Plan -- a plan two years in the making, and the single most important step America has ever taken in the fight against global climate change.

Right now, our power plants are the source of about a third of America’s carbon pollution. That's more pollution than our cars, our airplanes and our homes generate combined. That pollution contributes to climate change, which degrades the air our kids breathe. But there have never been federal limits on the amount of carbon that power plants can dump into the air. Think about that. We limit the amount of toxic chemicals like mercury and sulfur and arsenic in our air or our water -- and we're better off for it. But existing power plants can still dump unlimited amounts of harmful carbon pollution into the air.

For the sake of our kids and the health and safety of all Americans, that has to change. For the sake of the planet, that has to change.

So, two years ago, I directed Gina and the Environmental Protection Agency to take on this challenge. And today, after working with states and cities and power companies, the EPA is setting the first-ever nationwide standards to end the limitless dumping of carbon pollution from power plants.

Here’s how it works. Over the next few years, each state will have the change to put together its own plan for reducing emissions -- because every state has a different energy mix. Some generate more of their power from renewables; some from natural gas, or nuclear, or coal. And this plan reflects the fact that not everybody is starting in the same place. So we're giving states the time and the flexibility they need to cut pollution in a way that works for them.

And we'll reward the states that take action sooner instead of later -- because time is not on our side here. As states work to meet their targets, they can build on the progress that our communities and businesses are already making.

A lot of power companies have already begun modernizing their plants, reducing their emissions -- and by the way, creating new jobs in the process. Nearly a dozen states have already set up their own market-based programs to reduce carbon pollution. About half of our states have set energy efficiency targets. More than 35 have set renewable energy targets. Over 1,000 mayors have signed an agreement to cut carbon pollution in their cities. And last week, 13 of our biggest companies, including UPS and Walmart and GM, made bold, new commitments to cut their emissions and deploy more clean energy.

So the idea of setting standards and cutting carbon pollution is not new. It's not radical. What is new is that, starting today, Washington is starting to catch up with the vision of the rest of the country. And by setting these standards, we can actually speed up our transition to a cleaner, safer future.

With this Clean Power Plan, by 2030, carbon pollution from our power plants will be 32 percent lower than it was a decade ago. And the nerdier way to say that is that we’ll be keeping 870 million tons of carbon dioxide pollution out of our atmosphere. The simpler, layman’s way of saying that is it’s like cutting every ounce of emission due to electricity from 108 million American homes. Or it's the equivalent of taking 166 million cars off the road.

By 2030, we will reduce premature deaths from power plant emissions by nearly 90 percent -- and thanks to this plan, there will be 90,000 fewer asthma attacks among our children each year. And by combining this with greater investment in our booming clean energy sector, and smarter investments in energy efficiency, and by working with the world to achieve a climate agreement by the end of this year, we can do more to slow, and maybe even eventually stop, the carbon pollution that’s doing so much harm to our climate.

So this is the right thing to do. I want to thank, again, Gina and her team for doing it the right way. Over the longest engagement process in EPA history, they fielded more than 4 million public comments; they worked with states, they worked with power companies, and environmental groups, and faith groups, and people across our country to make sure that what we were doing was realistic and achievable, but still ambitious.

And some of those people are with us here today. So, Tanya Brown -- Tanya, wave, go ahead -- there’s Tanya. Tanya Brown has joined up with moms across America to spread the word about the dangers climate change pose to the health of our children -- including Tanya’s daughter, Sanaa. There’s Sanaa, right there.

Dr. Sumita Khatri has spent her career researching the health impacts of pollution at the Cleveland Clinic, and helping families whose lives are impacted every single day. Doctor, thank you.

Sister Joan Marie Steadman has helped rally Catholic women across America to take on climate. Sister, thank you so much for your leadership. And she’s got a pretty important guy on her side -- as Pope Francis made clear in his encyclical this summer, taking a stand against climate change is a moral obligation. And Sister Steadman is living up to that obligation every single day.

Now, let’s be clear. There will be critics of what we’re trying to do. There will be cynics that say it cannot be done. Long before the details of this Clean Power Plan were even decided, the special interests and their allies in Congress were already mobilizing to oppose it with everything they’ve got. They will claim that this plan will cost you money -- even though this plan, the analysis shows, will ultimately save the average American nearly $85 a year on their energy bills.

They’ll claim we need to slash our investments in clean energy, it's a waste of money -- even though they’re happy to spend billions of dollars a year in subsidizing oil companies. They’ll claim this plan will kill jobs -- even though our transition to a cleaner energy economy has the solar industry, to just name one example, creating jobs 10 times faster than the rest of the economy.

They’ll claim this plan is a “war on coal,” to scare up votes -- even as they ignore my plan to actually invest in revitalizing coal country, and supporting health care and retirement for coal miners and their families, and retraining those workers for better-paying jobs and healthier jobs. Communities across America have been losing coal jobs for decades. I want to work with Congress to help them, not to use them as a political football. Partisan press releases aren’t going to help those families.

Even more cynical, we've got critics of this plan who are actually claiming that this will harm minority and low-income communities -- even though climate change hurts those Americans the most, who are the most vulnerable. Today, an African-American child is more than twice as likely to be hospitalized from asthma; a Latino child is 40 percent more likely to die from asthma. So if you care about low-income, minority communities, start protecting the air that they breathe, and stop trying to rob them of their health care. You could also expand Medicaid in your states, by the way.

Here’s the thing. We've heard these same stale arguments before. Every time America has made progress, it's been despite these kind of claims. Whenever America has set clear rules and smarter standards for our air, our water, our children’s health, we get the same scary stories about killing jobs and businesses and freedom. It's true.

I'm going to go off script here just for a second. Because this is important -- because sometimes I think we feel as if there’s nothing we can do. Tomorrow is my birthday, so I'm starting to reflect on age. And in thinking about what we were doing here today, I was reminded about landing in Los Angeles to attend a college as a freshman, as an 18-year-old. And it was late August. I was moving from Hawaii. And I got to the campus, and I decided -- I had a lot of pent-up energy and I wanted to go take a run. And after about five minutes, suddenly I had this weird feeling, I couldn't breathe. And the reason was, back in 1979, Los Angeles still was so full of smog that there were days where people who were vulnerable just could not go outside. And they were fairly frequent.

And folks who are older than me can remember the Cayuga River burning because of pollution, and acid rain threatening to destroy all the great forests of the Northeast. And you fast-forward 30, 40 years later, and we solved those problems. But at the time, the same characters who are going to be criticizing this plan were saying, this is going to kill jobs, this is going to destroy businesses, this is going to hurt low-income people, it's going to be wildly expensive. And each time, they were wrong.

And because we pushed through, despite those scaremongering tactics, you can actually run in Los Angeles without choking. And folks can actually take a boat out on that river. And those forests are there.

So we got to learn lessons. We got to know our history. The kinds of criticisms that you're going to hear are simply excuses for inaction. They’re not even good business sense. They underestimate American business and American ingenuity.

In 1970, when Republican President Richard Nixon decided to do something about the smog that was choking our cities, they warned that the new pollution standards would decimate the auto industry. It didn’t happen. Catalytic converters worked. Taking the lead out of gasoline worked. Our air got cleaner.

In 1990, when Republican President George H.W. Bush decided to do something about acid rain, they said the bills would go up, our lights would go off, businesses would suffer “a quiet death.” It didn’t happen. We cut acid rain dramatically, and it cost much less than anybody expected -- because businesses, once incentivized, were able to figure it out.

When we restricted leaded fuel in our cars, cancer-causing chemicals in plastics, it didn’t end the oil industry, it didn’t end the plastics industry; American chemists came up with better substitutes. The fuel standards we put in place a couple of years ago didn’t cripple automakers. The American auto industry retooled. Today, our automakers are selling the best cars in the world at a faster pace than they have in almost a decade. They’ve got more hybrids, and more plug-ins, and more high fuel-efficient cars, giving consumers more choice than ever before, and saving families at the pump.

We can figure this stuff out as long as we're not lazy about it; as long as we don't take the path of least resistance. Scientists, citizens, workers, entrepreneurs -- together as Americans, we disrupt those stale, old debates, upend old ways of thinking. Right now, we’re inventing whole new technologies, whole new industries -- not looking backwards, we're looking forwards.

And if we don't do it, nobody will. The only reason that China is now looking at getting serious about its emissions is because they saw that we were going to do it, too. When the world faces its toughest challenges, America leads the way forward. That’s what this plan is about.

Now, I don't want to fool you here. This is going to be hard; dealing with climate change in its entirety, it's challenging. No single action, no single country will change the warming of the planet on its own. But today, with America leading the way, countries representing 70 percent of the carbon pollution from the world’s energy sector have announced plans to cut their greenhouse gas emissions. In December, with America leading the way, we have a chance to put in place one of the most ambitious international climate agreements in human history.

And it’s easy to be cynical and to say climate change is the kind of challenge that’s just too big for humanity to solve. I am absolutely convinced that’s wrong. We can solve this thing. But we have to get going. It's exactly the kind of challenge that's big enough to remind us that we’re all in this together.

Last month, for the first time since 1972, NASA released a “blue marble,” a single snapshot of the Earth taken from outer space. And so much has changed in the decades between that first picture and the second. Borders have shifted, generations have come and gone, our global population has nearly doubled. But one thing hasn’t changed -- our planet is as beautiful as ever. It still looks blue. And it's as vast, but also as fragile, as miraculous as anything in this universe.

This “blue marble” belongs to all of us. It belongs to these kids who are here. There are more than 7 billion people alive today; no matter what country they’re from, no matter what language they speak, every one of them can look at this image and say, “That’s my home.” And “we’re the first generation to feel the impact of climate change; we're the last generation that can do something about it.” We only get one home. We only get one planet. There’s no plan B.

I don't want my grandkids not to be able to swim in Hawaii, or not to be able to climb a mountain and see a glacier because we didn’t do something about it. I don't want millions of people’s lives disrupted and this world more dangerous because we didn’t do something about it. That would be shameful of us. This is our moment to get this right and leave something better for our kids. Let’s make most of that opportunity.

Thank you, everybody. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

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# Address on Iran at American University

I apologize for the slight delay. Even Presidents have problems with toner.

It is a great honor to be back at American University, which has prepared generations of young people for service in public life. I want to thank President Kerwin and the American University family for hosting us here today.

Fifty-two years ago, President Kennedy, at the height of the Cold War, addressed this same university on the subject of peace. The Berlin Wall had just been built. The Soviet Union had tested the most powerful weapons ever developed. China was on the verge of acquiring a nuclear bomb. Less than 20 years after the end of World War II, the prospect of nuclear war was all too real. With all of the threats that we face today, it’s hard to appreciate how much more dangerous the world was at that time.

In light of these mounting threats, a number of strategists here in the United States argued that we had to take military action against the Soviets, to hasten what they saw as inevitable confrontation. But the young President offered a different vision. Strength, in his view, included powerful armed forces and a willingness to stand up for our values around the world. But he rejected the prevailing attitude among some foreign policy circles that equated security with a perpetual war footing. Instead, he promised strong, principled American leadership on behalf of what he called a “practical” and “attainable peace” -- a peace “based not on a sudden revolution in human nature but on a gradual evolution in human institutions -- on a series of concrete actions and effective agreements.”

Such wisdom would help guide our ship of state through some of the most perilous moments in human history. With Kennedy at the helm, the Cuban Missile Crisis was resolved peacefully. Under Democratic and Republican Presidents, new agreements were forged -- a Non-Proliferation Treaty that prohibited nations from acquiring nuclear weapons, while allowing them to access peaceful nuclear energy; the SALT and START Treaties which bound the United States and Soviet Union to cooperation on arms control. Not every conflict was averted, but the world avoided nuclear catastrophe, and we created the time and the space to win the Cold War without firing a shot at the Soviets.

The agreement now reached between the international community and the Islamic Republic of Iran builds on this tradition of strong, principled diplomacy. After two years of negotiations, we have achieved a detailed arrangement that permanently prohibits Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. It cuts off all of Iran’s pathways to a bomb. It contains the most comprehensive inspection and verification regime ever negotiated to monitor a nuclear program. As was true in previous treaties, it does not resolve all problems; it certainly doesn’t resolve all our problems with Iran. It does not ensure a warming between our two countries. But it achieves one of our most critical security objectives. As such, it is a very good deal.

Today, I want to speak to you about this deal, and the most consequential foreign policy debate that our country has had since the invasion of Iraq, as Congress decides whether to support this historic diplomatic breakthrough, or instead blocks it over the objection of the vast majority of the world. Between now and the congressional vote in September, you’re going to hear a lot of arguments against this deal, backed by tens of millions of dollars in advertising. And if the rhetoric in these ads, and the accompanying commentary, sounds familiar, it should -- for many of the same people who argued for the war in Iraq are now making the case against the Iran nuclear deal.

Now, when I ran for President eight years ago as a candidate who had opposed the decision to go to war in Iraq, I said that America didn’t just have to end that war -- we had to end the mindset that got us there in the first place. It was a mindset characterized by a preference for military action over diplomacy; a mindset that put a premium on unilateral U.S. action over the painstaking work of building international consensus; a mindset that exaggerated threats beyond what the intelligence supported. Leaders did not level with the American people about the costs of war, insisting that we could easily impose our will on a part of the world with a profoundly different culture and history. And, of course, those calling for war labeled themselves strong and decisive, while dismissing those who disagreed as weak -- even appeasers of a malevolent adversary.

More than a decade later, we still live with the consequences of the decision to invade Iraq. Our troops achieved every mission they were given. But thousands of lives were lost, tens of thousands wounded. That doesn’t count the lives lost among Iraqis. Nearly a trillion dollars was spent. Today, Iraq remains gripped by sectarian conflict, and the emergence of al Qaeda in Iraq has now evolved into ISIL. And ironically, the single greatest beneficiary in the region of that war was the Islamic Republic of Iran, which saw its strategic position strengthened by the removal of its long-standing enemy, Saddam Hussein.

I raise this recent history because now more than ever we need clear thinking in our foreign policy. And I raise this history because it bears directly on how we respond to the Iranian nuclear program.

That program has been around for decades, dating back to the Shah’s efforts -- with U.S. support -- in the 1960s and ‘70s to develop nuclear power. The theocracy that overthrew the Shah accelerated the program after the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s, a war in which Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons to brutal effect, and Iran’s nuclear program advanced steadily through the 1990s, despite unilateral U.S. sanctions. When the Bush Administration took office, Iran had no centrifuges -- the machines necessary to produce material for a bomb -- that were spinning to enrich uranium. But despite repeated warnings from the United States government, by the time I took office, Iran had installed several thousand centrifuges, and showed no inclination to slow -- much less halt -- its program.

Among U.S. policymakers, there’s never been disagreement on the danger posed by an Iranian nuclear bomb. Democrats and Republicans alike have recognized that it would spark an arms race in the world’s most unstable region, and turn every crisis into a potential nuclear showdown. It would embolden terrorist groups, like Hezbollah, and pose an unacceptable risk to Israel, which Iranian leaders have repeatedly threatened to destroy. More broadly, it could unravel the global commitment to non-proliferation that the world has done so much to defend.

The question, then, is not whether to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, but how. Even before taking office, I made clear that Iran would not be allowed to acquire a nuclear weapon on my watch, and it’s been my policy throughout my presidency to keep all options -- including possible military options -- on the table to achieve that objective. But I have also made clear my preference for a peaceful, diplomatic resolution of the issue -- not just because of the costs of war, but also because a negotiated agreement offered a more effective, verifiable and durable resolution.

And so, in 2009, we let the Iranians know that a diplomatic path was available. Iran failed to take that path, and our intelligence community exposed the existence of a covert nuclear facility at Fordow.

Now, some have argued that Iran’s intransigence showed the futility of negotiations. In fact, it was our very willingness to negotiate that helped America rally the world to our cause, and secured international participation in an unprecedented framework of commercial and financial sanctions. Keep in mind unilateral U.S. sanctions against Iran had been in place for decades, but had failed to pressure Iran to the negotiating table. What made our new approach more effective was our ability to draw upon new U.N. Security Council resolutions, combining strong enforcement with voluntary agreements from nations like China and India, Japan and South Korea to reduce their purchases of Iranian oil, as well as the imposition by our European allies of a total oil embargo.

Winning this global buy-in was not easy -- I know. I was there. In some cases, our partners lost billions of dollars in trade because of their decision to cooperate. But we were able to convince them that absent a diplomatic resolution, the result could be war, with major disruptions to the global economy, and even greater instability in the Middle East. In other words, it was diplomacy -- hard, painstaking diplomacy -- not saber-rattling, not tough talk that ratcheted up the pressure on Iran.

With the world now unified beside us, Iran’s economy contracted severely, and remains about 20 percent smaller today than it would have otherwise been. No doubt this hardship played a role in Iran’s 2013 elections, when the Iranian people elected a new government that promised to improve the economy through engagement with the world. A window had cracked open. Iran came back to the nuclear talks. And after a series of negotiations, Iran agreed with the international community to an interim deal -- a deal that rolled back Iran’s stockpile of near 20 percent enriched uranium, and froze the progress of its program so that the P5+1 -- the United States, China, Russia, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and the European Union -- could negotiate a comprehensive deal without the fear that Iran might be stalling for time.

Now, let me pause here just to remind everybody that when the interim deal was announced, critics -- the same critics we’re hearing from now -- called it “a historic mistake.” They insisted Iran would ignore its obligations. They warned that sanctions would unravel. They warned that Iran would receive a windfall to support terrorism.

The critics were wrong. The progress of Iran’s nuclear program was halted for the first time in a decade. Its stockpile of dangerous materials was reduced. The deployment of its advanced centrifuges was stopped. Inspections did increase. There was no flood of money into Iran, and the architecture of the international sanctions remained in place. In fact, the interim deal worked so well that the same people who criticized it so fiercely now cite it as an excuse not to support the broader accord. Think about that. What was once proclaimed as a historic mistake is now held up as a success and a reason to not sign the comprehensive deal. So keep that in mind when you assess the credibility of the arguments being made against diplomacy today.

Despite the criticism, we moved ahead to negotiate a more lasting, comprehensive deal. Our diplomats, led by Secretary of State John Kerry, kept our coalition united. Our nuclear experts -- including one of the best in the world, Secretary of Energy Ernie Moniz -- worked tirelessly on the technical details. In July, we reached a comprehensive plan of action that meets our objectives. Under its terms, Iran is never allowed to build a nuclear weapon. And while Iran, like any party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, is allowed to access peaceful nuclear energy, the agreement strictly defines the manner in which its nuclear program can proceed, ensuring that all pathways to a bomb are cut off.

Here’s how: Under this deal, Iran cannot acquire the plutonium needed for a bomb. The core of its heavy-water reactor at Arak will be pulled out, filled with concrete, and replaced with one that will not produce plutonium for a weapon. The spent fuel from that reactor will be shipped out of the country, and Iran will not build any new heavy-water reactors for at least 15 years.

Iran will also not be able to acquire the enriched uranium that could be used for a bomb. As soon as this deal is implemented, Iran will remove two-thirds of its centrifuges. For the next decade, Iran will not enrich uranium with its more advanced centrifuges. Iran will not enrich uranium at the previously undisclosed Fordow facility, which is buried deep underground, for at least 15 years. Iran will get rid of 98 percent of its stockpile of enriched uranium, which is currently enough for up to 10 nuclear bombs, for the next 15 years. Even after those 15 years have passed, Iran will never have the right to use a peaceful program as cover to pursue a weapon.

And, in fact, this deal shuts off the type of covert path Iran pursued in the past. There will be 24/7 monitoring of Iran’s key nuclear facilities. For decades, inspectors will have access to Iran’s entire nuclear supply chain -- from the uranium mines and mills where they get raw materials, to the centrifuge production facilities where they make machines to enrich it. And understand why this is so important: For Iran to cheat, it has to build a lot more than just one building or a covert facility like Fordow. It would need a secret source for every single aspect of its program. No nation in history has been able to pull off such subterfuge when subjected to such rigorous inspections. And under the terms of the deal, inspectors will have the permanent ability to inspect any suspicious sites in Iran.

And finally, Iran has powerful incentives to keep its commitments. Before getting sanctions relief, Iran has to take significant, concrete steps like removing centrifuges and getting rid of its stockpile. If Iran violates the agreement over the next decade, all of the sanctions can snap back into place. We won’t need the support of other members of the U.N. Security Council; America can trigger snapback on our own. On the other hand, if Iran abides by the deal and its economy begins to reintegrate with the world, the incentive to avoid snapback will only grow.

So this deal is not just the best choice among alternatives -– this is the strongest non-proliferation agreement ever negotiated. And because this is such a strong deal, every nation in the world that has commented publicly, with the exception of the Israeli government1, has expressed support. The United Nations Security Council has unanimously supported it. The majority of arms control and non-proliferation experts support it. Over 100 former ambassadors -- who served under Republican and Democratic Presidents -- support it. I’ve had to make a lot of tough calls as President, but whether or not this deal is good for American security is not one of those calls. It’s not even close.

Unfortunately, we’re living through a time in American politics where every foreign policy decision is viewed through a partisan prism, evaluated by headline-grabbing sound bites. And so before the ink was even dry on this deal -- before Congress even read it -- a majority of Republicans declared their virulent opposition. Lobbyists and pundits were suddenly transformed into arm-chair nuclear scientists, disputing the assessments of experts like Secretary Moniz, challenging his findings, offering multiple -- and sometimes contradictory -- arguments about why Congress should reject this deal. But if you repeat these arguments long enough, they can get some traction. So let me address just a few of the arguments that have been made so far in opposition to this deal.

First, there are those who say the inspections are not strong enough because inspectors can’t go anywhere in Iran at any time with no notice.

Well, here’s the truth: Inspectors will be allowed daily access to Iran’s key nuclear sites. If there is a reason for inspecting a suspicious, undeclared site anywhere in Iran, inspectors will get that access, even if Iran objects. This access can be with as little as 24 hours’ notice. And while the process for resolving a dispute about access can take up to 24 days, once we’ve identified a site that raises suspicion, we will be watching it continuously until inspectors get in. And by the way, nuclear material isn’t something you hide in the closet. It can leave a trace for years. The bottom line is, if Iran cheats, we can catch them -- and we will.

Second, there are those who argue that the deal isn’t strong enough because some of the limitations on Iran’s civilian nuclear program expire in 15 years. Let me repeat: The prohibition on Iran having a nuclear weapon is permanent. The ban on weapons-related research is permanent. Inspections are permanent. It is true that some of the limitations regarding Iran’s peaceful program last only 15 years. But that’s how arms control agreements work. The first SALT Treaty with the Soviet Union lasted five years. The first START Treaty lasted 15 years. And in our current situation, if 15 or 20 years from now, Iran tries to build a bomb, this deal ensures that the United States will have better tools to detect it, a stronger basis under international law to respond, and the same options available to stop a weapons program as we have today, including -- if necessary -- military options.

On the other hand, without this deal, the scenarios that critics warn about happening in 15 years could happen six months from now. By killing this deal, Congress would not merely pave Iran’s pathway to a bomb, it would accelerate it.

Third, a number of critics say the deal isn’t worth it because Iran will get billions of dollars in sanctions relief. Now, let’s be clear: The international sanctions were put in place precisely to get Iran to agree to constraints on its program. That's the point of sanctions. Any negotiated agreement with Iran would involve sanctions relief. So an argument against sanctions relief is effectively an argument against any diplomatic resolution of this issue.

It is true that if Iran lives up to its commitments, it will gain access to roughly 56 billion dollars of its own money -- revenue frozen overseas by other countries. But the notion that this will be a game-changer, with all this money funneled into Iran’s pernicious activities, misses the reality of Iran’s current situation. Partly because of our sanctions, the Iranian government has over half a trillion dollars in urgent requirements -- from funding pensions and salaries, to paying for crumbling infrastructure. Iran’s leaders have raised the expectations of their people that sanctions relief will improve their lives. Even a repressive regime like Iran’s cannot completely ignore those expectations. And that’s why our best analysts expect the bulk of this revenue to go into spending that improves the economy and benefits the lives of the Iranian people.

Now, this is not to say that sanctions relief will provide no benefit to Iran’s military. Let’s stipulate that some of that money will flow to activities that we object to. We have no illusions about the Iranian government, or the significance of the Revolutionary Guard and the Quds Force. Iran supports terrorist organizations like Hezbollah. It supports proxy groups that threaten our interests and the interests of our allies -- including proxy groups who killed our troops in Iraq. They try to destabilize our Gulf partners. But Iran has been engaged in these activities for decades. They engaged in them before sanctions and while sanctions were in place. In fact, Iran even engaged in these activities in the middle of the Iran-Iraq War -- a war that cost them nearly a million lives and hundreds of billions of dollars.

The truth is that Iran has always found a way to fund these efforts, and whatever benefit Iran may claim from sanctions relief pales in comparison to the danger it could pose with a nuclear weapon.

Moreover, there’s no scenario where sanctions relief turns Iran into the region’s dominant power. Iran’s defense budget is eight times smaller than the combined budget of our Gulf allies. Their conventional capabilities will never compare with Israel’s, and our commitment to Israel’s qualitative military edge helps guarantee that. Over the last several years, Iran has had to spend billions of dollars to support its only ally in the Arab World -- Bashar al-Assad -- even as he’s lost control of huge chunks of his country. And Hezbollah has suffered significant blows on the same battlefield. And Iran, like the rest of the region, is being forced to respond to the threat of ISIL in Iraq.

So contrary to the alarmists who claim that Iran is on the brink of taking over the Middle East, or even the world, Iran will remain a regional power with its own set of challenges. The ruling regime is dangerous and it is repressive. We will continue to have sanctions in place on Iran’s support for terrorism and violation of human rights. We will continue to insist upon the release of Americans detained unjustly. We will have a lot of differences with the Iranian regime.

But if we’re serious about confronting Iran’s destabilizing activities, it is hard to imagine a worse approach than blocking this deal. Instead, we need to check the behavior that we're concerned about directly: By helping our allies in the region strengthen their own capabilities to counter a cyber-attack or a ballistic missile; by improving the interdiction of weapons shipments that go to groups like Hezbollah; by training our allies’ special forces so that they can more effectively respond to situations like Yemen. All these capabilities will make a difference. We will be in a stronger position to implement them with this deal. And, by the way, such a strategy also helps us effectively confront the immediate and lethal threat posed by ISIL.

Now, the final criticism -- this sort of a catch-all that you may hear -- is the notion that there’s a better deal to be had. “We should get a better deal” -- that’s repeated over and over again. “It's a bad deal, need a better deal” -- one that relies on vague promises of toughness, and, more recently, the argument that we can apply a broader and indefinite set of sanctions to squeeze the Iranian regime harder.

Those making this argument are either ignorant of Iranian society, or they’re just not being straight with the American people. Sanctions alone are not going to force Iran to completely dismantle all vestiges of its nuclear infrastructure -- even those aspects that are consistent with peaceful programs. That oftentimes is what the critics are calling “a better deal.” Neither the Iranian government, or the Iranian opposition, or the Iranian people would agree to what they would view as a total surrender of their sovereignty.

Moreover, our closest allies in Europe, or in Asia -- much less China or Russia -- certainly are not going to agree to enforce existing sanctions for another 5, 10, 15 years according to the dictates of the U.S. Congress. Because their willingness to support sanctions in the first place was based on Iran ending its pursuit of nuclear weapons. It was not based on the belief that Iran cannot have peaceful nuclear power. And it certainly wasn’t based on a desire for regime change in Iran.

As a result, those who say we can just walk away from this deal and maintain sanctions are selling a fantasy. Instead of strengthening our position as some have suggested, Congress’s rejection would almost certainly result in multilateral sanctions unraveling. If, as has also been suggested, we tried to maintain unilateral sanctions, beefen them up, we would be standing alone. We cannot dictate the foreign, economic and energy policies of every major power in the world.

In order to even try to do that, we would have to sanction, for example, some of the world’s largest banks. We’d have to cut off countries like China from the American financial system. And since they happen to be major purchasers of or our debt, such actions could trigger severe disruptions in our own economy and, by the way, raise questions internationally about the dollar’s role as the world’s reserve currency.

That’s part of the reason why many of the previous unilateral sanctions were waived. What’s more likely to happen, should Congress reject this deal, is that Iran would end up with some form of sanctions relief without having to accept any of the constraints or inspections required by this deal. So in that sense, the critics are right: Walk away from this agreement and you will get a better deal -- for Iran.

Now, because more sanctions won’t produce the results that the critics want, we have to be honest. Congressional rejection of this deal leaves any U.S. Administration that is absolutely committed to preventing Iran from getting a nuclear weapon with one option -- another war in the Middle East.

I say this not to be provocative. I am stating a fact. Without this deal, Iran will be in a position -- however tough our rhetoric may be –- to steadily advance its capabilities. Its breakout time, which is already fairly small, could shrink to near zero. Does anyone really doubt that the same voices now raised against this deal will be demanding that whoever is President bomb those nuclear facilities?

And as someone who does firmly believes that Iran must not get a nuclear weapon, and who has wrestled with this issue since the beginning of my presidency, I can tell you that alternatives to military action will have been exhausted once we reject a hard-won diplomatic solution that the world almost unanimously supports.

So let’s not mince words. The choice we face is ultimately between diplomacy or some form of war -- maybe not tomorrow, maybe not three months from now, but soon. And here’s the irony. As I said before, military action would be far less effective than this deal in preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. That’s not just my supposition. Every estimate, including those from Israeli analysts, suggest military action would only set back Iran’s program by a few years at best, which is a fraction of the limitations imposed by this deal. It would likely guarantee that inspectors are kicked out of Iran. It is probable that it would drive Iran’s program deeper underground. It would certainly destroy the international unity that we’ve spent so many years building.

Now, there are some opponents -- I have to give them credit; there are opponents of this deal who accept the choice of war. In fact, they argue that surgical strikes against Iran’s facilities will be quick and painless. But if we’ve learned anything from the last decade, it’s that wars in general and wars in the Middle East in particular are anything but simple. The only certainty in war is human suffering, uncertain costs, unintended consequences. We can also be sure that the Americans who bear the heaviest burden are the less than 1 percent of us, the outstanding men and women who serve in uniform, and not those of us who send them to war.

As Commander-in-Chief, I have not shied from using force when necessary. I have ordered tens of thousands of young Americans into combat. I have sat by their bedside sometimes when they come home. I’ve ordered military action in seven countries. There are times when force is necessary, and if Iran does not abide by this deal, it’s possible that we don’t have an alternative.

But how can we in good conscience justify war before we’ve tested a diplomatic agreement that achieves our objectives; that has been agreed to by Iran; that is supported by the rest of the world; and that preserves our options if the deal falls short? How could we justify that to our troops? How could we justify that to the world or to future generations?

In the end, that should be a lesson that we’ve learned from over a decade of war. On the front end, ask tough questions. Subject our own assumptions to evidence and analysis. Resist the conventional wisdom and the drumbeat of war. Worry less about being labeled weak; worry more about getting it right.

I recognize that resorting to force may be tempting in the face of the rhetoric and behavior that emanates from parts of Iran. It is offensive. It is incendiary. We do take it seriously. But superpowers should not act impulsively in response to taunts, or even provocations that can be addressed short of war. Just because Iranian hardliners chant “Death to America” does not mean that that’s what all Iranians believe.

In fact, it’s those hardliners who are most comfortable with the status quo. It’s those hardliners chanting “Death to America” who have been most opposed to the deal. They’re making common cause with the Republican caucus.

The majority of the Iranian people have powerful incentives to urge their government to move in a different, less provocative direction -- incentives that are strengthened by this deal. We should offer them that chance. We should give them that opportunity. It’s not guaranteed to succeed. But if they take it, that would be good for Iran, it would be good for the United States. It would be good for a region that has known too much conflict. It would be good for the world.

And if Iran does not move in that direction, if Iran violates this deal, we will have ample ability to respond. The agreements pursued by Kennedy and Reagan with the Soviet Union, those agreements, those treaties involved America accepting significant constraints on our arsenal. As such, they were riskier. This agreement involves no such constraints. The defense budget of the United States is more than 600 billion dollars. To repeat, Iran’s is about 15 billion dollars. Our military remains the ultimate backstop to any security agreement that we make. I have stated that Iran will never be allowed to obtain a nuclear weapon. I have done what is necessary to make sure our military options are real. And I have no doubt that any President who follows me will take the same position.

So let me sum up here. When we carefully examine the arguments against this deal, none of them stand up to scrutiny. That may be why the rhetoric on the other side is so strident. I suppose some of it can be ascribed to knee-jerk partisanship that has become all too familiar; rhetoric that renders every decision that’s made a disaster, a surrender -- “you're aiding terrorists; you're endangering freedom.”

On the other hand, I do think it’s important to acknowledge another, more understandable motivation behind the opposition to this deal, or at least skepticism to this deal, and that is a sincere affinity for our friend and ally, Israel -- an affinity that, as someone who has been a stalwart friend to Israel throughout my career, I deeply share.

When the Israeli government is opposed to something, people in the United States take notice. And they should. No one can blame Israelis for having a deep skepticism about any dealings with a government like Iran’s -- which includes leaders who have denied the Holocaust, embrace an ideology of anti-Semitism, facilitate the flow of rockets that are arrayed on Israel’s borders, are pointed at Tel Aviv. In such a dangerous neighborhood, Israel has to be vigilant, and it rightly insists that it cannot depend on any other country -- even its great friend the United States -- for its own security. So we have to take seriously concerns in Israel.

But the fact is, partly due to American military and intelligence assistance, which my Administration has provided at unprecedented levels, Israel can defend itself against any conventional danger -- whether from Iran directly or from its proxies. On the other hand, a nuclear-armed Iran changes that equation.

And that’s why this deal ultimately must be judged by what it achieves on the central goal of preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. This deal does exactly that. I say this as someone who has done more than any other President to strengthen Israel’s security. And I have made clear to the Israeli government that we are prepared to discuss how we can deepen that cooperation even further. Already we’ve held talks with Israel on concluding another 10-year plan for U.S. security assistance to Israel. We can enhance support for areas like missile defense, information sharing, interdiction -- all to help meet Israel’s pressing security needs, and to provide a hedge against any additional activities that Iran may engage in as a consequence of sanctions relief.

But I have also listened to the Israeli security establishment, which warned of the danger posed by a nuclear-armed Iran for decades. In fact, they helped develop many of the ideas that ultimately led to this deal.

So to friends of Israel, and to the Israeli people, I say this: A nuclear-armed Iran is far more dangerous to Israel, to America, and to the world than an Iran that benefits from sanctions relief.

I recognize that Prime Minister Netanyahu disagrees -- disagrees strongly. I do not doubt his sincerity. But I believe he is wrong. I believe the facts support this deal. I believe they are in America’s interest and Israel’s interest. And as President of the United States, it would be an abrogation of my constitutional duty to act against my best judgment simply because it causes temporary friction with a dear friend and ally. I do not believe that would be the right thing to do for the United States. I do not believe it would be the right thing to do for Israel.

Over the last couple weeks, I have repeatedly challenged anyone opposed to this deal to put forward a better, plausible alternative. I have yet to hear one. What I’ve heard instead are the same types of arguments that we heard in the run-up to the Iraq War: Iran cannot be dealt with diplomatically; we can take military strikes without significant consequences; we shouldn’t worry about what the rest of the world thinks, because once we act, everyone will fall in line; tougher talk, more military threats will force Iran into submission; we can get a better deal.

I know it’s easy to play on people’s fears, to magnify threats, to compare any attempt at diplomacy to Munich. But none of these arguments hold up. They didn’t back in 2002 and 2003; they shouldn’t now. The same mindset, in many cases offered by the same people who seem to have no compunction with being repeatedly wrong, led to a war that did more to strengthen Iran, more to isolate the United States than anything we have done in the decades before or since. It’s a mindset out of step with the traditions of American foreign policy, where we exhaust diplomacy before war, and debate matters of war and peace in the cold light of truth.

“Peace is not the absence of conflict,” President Reagan once said. It is “the ability to cope with conflict by peaceful means.”

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President Kennedy warned Americans, “not to see conflict as inevitable, accommodation as impossible, and communication as nothing more than the exchange of threats.”

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It is time to apply such wisdom. The deal before us doesn’t bet on Iran changing, it doesn’t require trust; it verifies and requires Iran to forsake a nuclear weapon, just as we struck agreements with the Soviet Union at a time when they were threatening our allies, arming proxies against us, proclaiming their commitment to destroy our way of life, and had nuclear weapons pointed at all of our major cities -- a genuine existential threat.

We live in a complicated world -- a world in which the forces unleashed by human innovation are creating opportunities for our children that were unimaginable for most of human history. It is also a world of persistent threats, a world in which mass violence and cruelty is all too common, and human innovation risks the destruction of all that we hold dear. In this world, the United States of America remains the most powerful nation on Earth, and I believe that we will remain such for decades to come. But we are one nation among many.

And what separates us from the empires of old, what has made us exceptional, is not the mere fact of our military might. Since World War II, the deadliest war in human history, we have used our power to try to bind nations together in a system of international law. We have led an evolution of those human institutions President Kennedy spoke about -- to prevent the spread of deadly weapons, to uphold peace and security, and promote human progress.

We now have the opportunity to build on that progress. We built a coalition and held it together through sanctions and negotiations, and now we have before us a solution that prevents Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, without resorting to war. As Americans, we should be proud of this achievement. And as members of Congress reflect on their pending decision, I urge them to set aside political concerns, shut out the noise, consider the stakes involved with the vote that you will cast.

If Congress kills this deal, we will lose more than just constraints on Iran’s nuclear program, or the sanctions we have painstakingly built. We will have lost something more precious: America’s credibility as a leader of diplomacy; America’s credibility as the anchor of the international system.

John F. Kennedy cautioned here, more than 50 years ago, at this university, that “the pursuit of peace is not as dramatic as the pursuit of war.”

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But it’s so very important. It is surely the pursuit of peace that is most needed in this world so full of strife.

My fellow Americans, contact your representatives in Congress. Remind them of who we are. Remind them of what is best in us and what we stand for, so that we can leave behind a world that is more secure and more peaceful for our children.

Thank you very much.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Hurricane Katrina 10-Year Anniversary Address

Hello, everybody! Where y’at? It is good to be back in the Big Easy. And this is the weather in August all the time, right? As soon as I land in New Orleans, the first thing I do is get hungry. When I was here with the family a few years ago, I had a shrimp po-boy at Parkway Bakery and Tavern. I still remember it -- that’s how good it was. And one day, after I leave office, maybe I’ll finally hear Rebirth at the Maple Leaf on Tuesday night. I’ll get a chance to “see the Mardi Gras,” and somebody will tell me what’s Carnival for. -- But right now, I just go to meetings.

I want to thank Michelle for the introduction and, more importantly, for the great work she’s doing, what she symbolizes, and what she represents in terms of the city bouncing back. I want to acknowledge a great friend and somebody who has been working tirelessly on behalf of this city, and he’s following a family legacy of service -- your mayor, Mitch Landrieu. Proud of him. And his beautiful wife, Cheryl. Senator Bill Cassidy is here. Where did Senator Cassidy go? There he is. Congressman Cedric Richmond. Where’s the Congressman? There he is over there. We’ve got a lifelong champion of Louisiana in your former senator, Mary Landrieu in the house. Mary! I want to acknowledge a great supporter to the efforts to recover and rebuild, Congressman Hakeem Jeffries from New York, who has traveled down here with us.

To all the elected officials from Louisiana and Mississippi who are here today, thank you so much for your reception.

I’m here to talk about a specific recovery. But before I begin to talk just about New Orleans, I want to talk about America’s recovery, take a little moment of presidential privilege to talk about what’s been happening in our economy. This morning, we learned that our economy grew at a stronger and more robust clip back in the spring than anybody knew at the time. The data always lags. We already knew that over the past five and a half years, our businesses have created 13 million new jobs. These new numbers that came out, showing that the economy was growing at a 3.7 percent clip, means that the United States of America remains an anchor of global strength and stability in the world -- that we have recovered faster, more steadily, stronger than just about any economy after the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression.

And it’s important for us to remember that strength. It’s been a volatile few weeks around the world. And there’s been a lot of reports in the news, and the stock market swinging, and worries about China and about Europe. But the United States of America, for all the challenges that we still have, continue to have the best cards. We just got to play them right.

Our economy has been moving, and continues to grow. And unemployment continues to come down. And our work is not yet done, but we have to have that sense of steadiness and vision and purpose in order to sustain this recovery so that it reaches everybody and not just some. It’s why we need to do everything we can in government to make sure our economy keeps growing. That requires Congress to protect our momentum -- not kill it. Congress is about to come back from a six-week recess. The deadline to fund the government is, as always, the end of September. And so I want everybody just to understand that Congress has about a month to pass a budget that helps our economy grow. Otherwise, we risk shutting down the government and services that we all count on for the second time in two years. That would not be responsible. It does not have to happen.

Congress needs to fund America in a way that invests in our growth and our security, and not cuts us off at the knees by locking in mindless austerity or shortsighted sequester cuts to our economy or our military. I’ve said I will veto a budget like that. I think most Americans agree we’ve got to invest in, rather than cut, things like military readiness, infrastructure, schools, public health, the research and development that keeps our companies on the cutting edge.

That’s what great nations do. That’s what great nations do. And you know, eventually, we’re going to do it anyway, so let’s just do it without too much drama. Let’s do it without another round of threats to shut down the government. Let’s not introduce unrelated partisan issues. Nobody gets to hold the American economy hostage over their own ideological demands. You, the people who send us to Washington, expect better. Am I correct?

So my message to Congress is: Pass a budget. Prevent a shutdown. Don’t wait until the last minute. Don’t worry our businesses or our workers by contributing unnecessarily to global uncertainty. Get it done, and keep the United States of America the anchor of global strength that we are and always should be.

Now, that’s a process of national recovery that from coast to coast we’ve been going through. But there’s been a specific process of recovery that is perhaps unique in my lifetime, right here in the state of Louisiana, right here in New Orleans.

Not long ago, our gathering here in the Lower 9 probably would have seemed unlikely. As I was flying here today with a homegirl from Louisiana, Donna Brazile, she was -- she saved all the magazines, and she was whipping them out, and one of them was a picture of the Lower 9th right after the storm had happened. And the notion that there would be anything left seemed unimaginable at the time.

Today, this new community center stands as a symbol of the extraordinary resilience of this city, the extraordinary resilience of its people, the extraordinary resilience of the entire Gulf Coast and of the United States of America. You are an example of what is possible when, in the face of tragedy and in the face of hardship, good people come together to lend a hand, and, brick by brick, block by block, neighborhood by neighborhood, you build a better future.

And that, more than any other reason, is why I’ve come back here today -- plus, Mitch Landrieu asked me to. It’s been 10 years since Katrina hit, devastating communities in Louisiana and Mississippi, across the Gulf Coast. In the days following its landfall, more than 1,800 of our fellow citizens -- men, women and children -- lost their lives. Some folks in this room may have lost a loved one in that storm.

Thousands of people saw their homes destroyed, livelihoods wiped out, hopes and dreams shattered. Many scattered in exodus to cities across the country, and too many still haven’t returned. Those who stayed and lived through that epic struggle still feel the trauma sometimes of what happened. As one woman from Gentilly recently wrote me, “A deep part of the whole story is the grief.” So there’s grief then and there’s still some grief in our hearts.

Here in New Orleans, a city that embodies a celebration of life, suddenly seemed devoid of life. A place once defined by color and sound -- the second line down the street, the crawfish boils in backyards, the music always in the air -- suddenly it was dark and silent. And the world watched in horror. We saw those rising waters drown the iconic streets of New Orleans. Families stranded on rooftops. Bodies in the streets. Children crying, crowded in the Superdome. An American city dark and under water.

And this was something that was supposed to never happen here -- maybe somewhere else. But not here, not in America. And we came to realize that what started out as a natural disaster became a manmade disaster -- a failure of government to look out for its own citizens. And the storm laid bare a deeper tragedy that had been brewing for decades because we came to understand that New Orleans, like so many cities and communities across the country, had for too long been plagued by structural inequalities that left too many people, especially poor people, especially people of color, without good jobs or affordable health care or decent housing. Too many kids grew up surrounded by violent crime, cycling through substandard schools where few had a shot to break out of poverty. And so like a body weakened already, undernourished already, when the storm hit, there was no resources to fall back on.

Shortly after I visited -- shortly after the storm, I visited with folks not here because we couldn’t distract local recover efforts. Instead, I visited folks in a shelter in Houston -- many who had been displaced. And one woman told me, “We had nothing before the hurricane. And now we have less than nothing.” We had nothing before the hurricane -- now we had less than nothing.

And we acknowledge this loss, and this pain, not to dwell on the past, not to wallow in grief; we do it to fortify our commitment and to bolster our hope, to understand what it is that we’ve learned, and how far we’ve come.

Because this is a city that slowly, unmistakably, together, is moving forward. Because the project of rebuilding here wasn’t just to restore the city as it had been. It was to build a city as it should be -- a city where everyone, no matter what they look like, how much money they’ve got, where they come from, where they're born has a chance to make it.

And I’m here to say that on that larger project of a better, stronger, more just New Orleans, the progress that you have made is remarkable. The progress you've made is remarkable.

That’s not to say things are perfect. Mitch would be the first one to say that. We know that African Americans and folks in hard-hit parishes like Plaquemines and St. Bernard are less likely to feel like they’ve recovered. Certainly we know violence still scars the lives of too many youth in this city. As hard as rebuilding levees are, as hard as --

Auditor: [Inaudible] Mental health.

President Obama: I agree with that. But I’ll get to that. Thank you, ma’am.

As hard as rebuilding levees is, as hard as rebuilding housing is, real change -- real lasting, structural change -- that's even harder. And it takes courage to experiment with new ideas and change the old ways of doing things. That’s hard. Getting it right, and making sure that everybody is included and everybody has a fair shot at success -- that takes time. That's not unique to New Orleans. We’ve got those challenges all across the country.

But I’m here to say, I’m here to hold up a mirror and say because of you, the people of New Orleans, working together, this city is moving in the right direction. And I have never been more confident that together we will get to where we need to go. You inspire me.

Your efforts inspire me. And no matter how hard it’s been and how hard and how long the road ahead might seem, you’re working and building and striving for a better tomorrow. I see evidence of it all across this city. And, by the way, along the way, the people of New Orleans didn't just inspire me, you inspired all of America. Folks have been watching what’s happened here, and they’ve seen a reflection of the very best of the American spirit.

As President, I’ve been proud to be your partner. Across the board, I’ve made the recovery and rebuilding of the Gulf Coast a priority. I made promises when I was a senator that I’d help. And I’ve kept those promises.

We’re cutting red tape to help you build back even stronger. We’re taking the lessons we’ve learned here, we’ve applied them across the country, including places like New York and New Jersey after Hurricane Sandy.

If Katrina was initially an example of what happens when government fails, the recovery has been an example of what’s possible when government works together -- state and local, community -- everybody working together as true partners.

Together, we’ve delivered resources to help Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida rebuild schools and hospitals, roads, police and fire stations, restore historic buildings and museums. And we’re building smarter, doing everything from elevating homes to retrofitting buildings to improving drainage, so that our communities are better prepared for the next storm.

Working together, we’ve transformed education in this city. Before the storm, New Orleans public schools were largely broken, leaving generations of low-income kids without a decent education. Today, thanks to parents and educators, school leaders, nonprofits, we’re seeing real gains in achievement, with new schools, more resources to retain and develop and support great teachers and principals. We have data that shows before the storm, the high school graduation rate was 54 percent. Today, it’s up to 73 percent. Before the storm, college enrollment was 37 percent. Today, it’s almost 60 percent. We still have a long way to go, but that is real progress. New Orleans is coming back better and stronger.

Working together, we’re providing housing assistance to more families today than before the storm, with new apartments and housing vouchers. And we will keep working until everybody who wants to come home can come home.

Together, we’re building a New Orleans that is as entrepreneurial as any place in the country, with a focus on expanding job opportunities and making sure that more people benefit from a growing economy here. We’re creating jobs to rebuild the city’s transportation infrastructure, expanding training programs for industries like high-tech manufacturing, but also water management, because we’ve been building some good water management around here and we want to make sure everybody has access to those good, well-paying jobs. Small businesses like Michelle’s are growing. It’s small businesses like hers that are helping to fuel 65 straight months of private sector job growth in America. That’s the longest streak in American history.

Together, we’re doing more to make sure that everyone in this city has access to great health care. More folks have access to primary care at neighborhood clinics so that they can get the preventive care that they need. We’re building a brand new VA Medical Center downtown, alongside a thriving biosciences corridor that’s attracting new jobs and investment. We are working to make sure that we have additional mental health facilities across the city and across the country, and more people have access to quality, affordable health care –- some of the more than 16 million Americans who have gained health insurance over the past few years.

All of this progress is the result of the commitment and drive of the people of this region. I saw that spirit today. Mitch and I started walking around a little bit. Such a nice day outside. And we went to Faubourg Lafitte, we were in TremÃ©, and we saw returning residents living in brand new homes, mixed income -- new homes near schools and clinics and parks, child care centers; more opportunities for working families.

We saw that spirit today at Willie Mae’s Scotch House. After Katrina had destroyed that legendary restaurant, some of the best chefs from the country decided America could not afford to lose such an important place. So they came down here to help -- helped rebuild. And I just sampled some of her fried chicken. -- It was really good. -- Although I did get a grease spot on my suit. -- But that's okay. If you come to New Orleans and you don't have a grease spot somewhere -- then you didn’t enjoy the city. Just glad I didn’t get it on my tie.

We all just heard that spirit of New Orleans in the remarkable young people from Roots of Music. When the storm washed away a lot of middle school music programs, Roots of Music helped fill that gap. And today, it’s building the next generation of musical talent -- the next Irma Thomas, or the next Trombone Shorty, or the next Dr. John. There’s a Marsalis kid in here somewhere. How you doing?

And I saw it in the wonderful young men I met earlier who are part of “NOLA for Life,” which is focused on reducing the number of murders in the city of New Orleans. This is a program that works with the White House’s My Brother’s Keeper initiative to make sure that all young people, and particularly our boys and young men of color who so disproportionately are impacted by crime and violence, have the opportunity to fulfill their full potential.

In fact, after the storm, this city became a laboratory for urban innovation across the board. And we’ve been tackling with you, as a partner, all sorts of major challenges -- fighting poverty, supporting our homeless veterans. And as a result, New Orleans has become a model for the nation as the first city, the first major city to end veterans’ homelessness -- which is a remarkable achievement.

You’re also becoming a model for the nation when it comes to disaster response and resilience. We learned lessons from Katrina. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers developed stricter standards, more advanced techniques for levees. Here in Louisiana, we built a 14 billion dollar system of improved levees and pump stations and gates -- a system that stood the test of Hurricane Isaac.

We’ve revamped FEMA -- and I just have to say, by the way, there’s a man named Craig Fugate who runs FEMA --and has been doing extraordinary work, and his team, all across the country, every time there’s a disaster. I love me some Craig Fugate. -- Although it's a little disturbing -- he gets excited when there are disasters -- because he gets restless if everything is just quiet. But under his leadership, we've revamped FEMA into a stronger, more efficient agency. In fact, the whole federal government has gotten smarter at preventing and recovering from disasters, and serving as a better partner to local and state governments.

And as I’ll talk about next week, when I visit Alaska, making our communities more resilient is going to be increasingly important, because we’re going to see more extreme weather events as the result of climate change -- deeper droughts, deadlier wildfires, stronger storms. That’s why, in addition to things like new and better levees, we’ve also been investing in restoring wetlands and other natural systems that are just as critical for storm protection.

So we’ve made a lot of progress over the past 10 years. You’ve made a lot of progress. That gives us hope. But it doesn’t allow for complacency. It doesn’t mean we can rest. Our work here won’t be done when almost 40 percent of children still live in poverty in this city. That’s not a finished job. That’s not a full recovery. Our work won’t be done when a typical black household earns half the income of white households in this city. The work is not done yet.

Our work is not done when there’s still too many people who have yet to find good, affordable housing, and too many people -- especially African American men -- who can’t find a job. Not when there are still too many people who haven’t been able to come back home; folks who, around the country, every day, live the words sung by Louis Armstrong, “Do you know what it means to miss New Orleans?”

But the thing is, the people of New Orleans, there’s something in you guys that is just irrepressible. You guys have a way of making a way out of no way. You know the sun comes out after every storm. You’ve got hope -- especially your young people reflect hope -- young people like Victor York-Carter. Where’s Victor? Victor York-Carter. Stand up, Victor. I was just talking to Victor. I had some lunch with him. He’s this fine young man that I just met with. Stand up -- everybody. See, these are the guys who I ate chicken with. Really impressive -- have overcome more than their fair share of challenges, but are still focused on the future. Yes, sit down. I don’t want you to start getting embarrassed.

So I’ll just give you one example. Victor grew up in the 8th Ward. Gifted art student, loved math. He was 13 when Katrina hit. And he remembers waking up to what looked like something out of a disaster movie. He and his family waded across the city, towing his younger brother in a trash can to keep him afloat.

They were eventually evacuated to Texas. Six months later, they returned, and the city was almost unrecognizable. Victor saw his peers struggling to cope, many of them still traumatized, their lives still disordered. So he joined an organization called Rethink to help young people get more involved in rebuilding New Orleans. And recently, he finished a coding boot camp at Operation Spark; today, he’s studying to earn a high-tech job. He wants to introduce more young people to science and technology and civics so that they have the tools to change the world.

And so Victor and these young men that I just met with, they’ve overcome extraordinary odds. They’ve lived through more than most of us will ever have to endure. They’ve made some mistakes along the way. But for all that they’ve been through, they have been just as determined to improve their own lives, to take responsibility for themselves, but also to try to see if they can help others along the way.

So when I talk to young men like that, that gives me hope. It’s still hard. I told them they can't get down on themselves. Tough stuff will happen along the way. But if they’ve come this far, they can keep on going.

And Americans like you -- the people of New Orleans, young men like this -- you're what recovery has been all about. You're why I’m confident that we can recover from crisis and start to move forward. You've helped this country recover from a crisis and helped it move forward. You're the reason 13 million new jobs have been created. You're the reason the unemployment rate fell from 10 percent to 5.3. You're the reason that layoffs are near an all-time low. You're the reason the uninsured rate is at an all-time low and the high school graduation rate is at an all-time high, and the deficit has been cut by two-thirds, and two wars are over. And nearly 180,000 American troops who were serving in Iraq and Afghanistan have now gone down to 15,000. And a clean energy revolution is helping to save this planet.

You're the reason why justice has expanded and now we're focused on making sure that everybody is treated fairly under the law, and why people have the freedom to marry whoever they love from sea to shining sea.

I tell you, we're moving into the next presidential cycle and the next political season, and you will hear a lot of people telling you everything that’s wrong with America. And that's okay. That’s a proper part of our democracy. One of the things about America is we're never satisfied. We keep pushing forward. We keep asking questions. We keep challenging our government. We keep challenging our leaders. We keep looking for the next set of challenges to tackle. We find what’s wrong because we have confidence that we can fix it.

But it’s important that we remember what’s right, and what’s good, and what’s hopeful about this country. It’s worth remembering that for all the tragedy, for the all images of Katrina in those first few days, in those first few months, look at what’s happened here. It’s worth remembering the thousands of Americans like Michelle, and Victor, and Mrs. Willie Mae and the folks who rallied around her -- Americans all across this country who when they saw neighbors and friends or strangers in need came to help. And people who today still spend their time every day helping others -- rolling up their sleeves, doing the hard work of changing this country without the need for credit or the need for glory; don't get their name in the papers, don't see their day in the sun, do it because it’s right.

These Americans live the basic values that define this country -- the value we’ve been reminded of in these past 10 years as we’ve come back from a crisis that changed this city, and an economic crisis that spread throughout the nation -- the basic notion that I am my brother’s keeper, and I am my sister’s keeper, and that we look out for each other and that we're all in this together.

That’s the story of New Orleans -- but that's also the story of America -- a city that, for almost 300 years, has been the gateway to America’s soul. Where the jazz makes you cry, the funerals make you dance -- the bayou makes you believe all kinds of things. -- A place that has always brought together people of all races and religions and languages. And everybody adds their culture and their flavor into this city’s gumbo. You remind our nation that for all of our differences, in the end, what matters is we're all in the same boat. We all share a similar destiny.

If we stay focused on that common purpose, if we remember our responsibility to ourselves but also our responsibilities and obligations to one another, we will not just rebuild this city, we will rebuild this country. We’ll make sure not just these young men, but every child in America has a structure and support and love and the kind of nurturing that they need to succeed. We’ll leave behind a city and a nation that’s worthy of generations to come.

That's what you've gotten started. Now we got to finish the job.

Thank you. God bless you. God bless America.

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# Worldwide Troop Talk at the Defense Media Activity

Tech Sergeant

Nathaniel Parry [Moderator]:

Well, thank you, Mr. President, for joining us here at the Defense Media Activity. It is very exciting for us to have you here for a face-to-face conversation with U.S. service members. We’re very, very pleased to have you.

President Obama: Well, Nathan, thank you so much for your participation. I want to thank everybody who’s here in Fort Meade. There are a couple of people I want to acknowledge.

First of all, your Garrison Commander, Colonel Brian Foley. Where is he? I just rode over with him. There he is. He’s in charge of a lot of stuff. I was -- with everything that’s going on out of this incredible facility. Obviously we can’t succeed in our missions without a strong support from Congress, and we’ve got a congressman here who works very hard on behalf of our military and our intelligence -- Congressman Dutch Ruppersberger. Where’s Dutch? There he is. Thank you so much, Dutch.

I’m going to be very brief at the front, because I want to mainly take questions from folks not just here but all around the world. Today is a solemn day. I started my day commemorating 9/11 and all the people who were killed on that day. And I’ve had an opportunity as President to meet with many of the survivors, the family members of those who were killed. And on this particular day, we are constantly reminded of their loss. We want to let them know that we do not forget those who are fallen.

We are inspired by the survivors, many of whom still have the scars, both seen and unseen, of that terrible, terrible day. And it’s also a good time to remember all the people who have served and sacrificed since 9/11 in order to keep America safe and free.

We have veterans now from every state in the union who have served oftentimes in multiple tours, both in Iraq and Afghanistan. And although we have made enormous strides in degrading the core al Qaeda, including bin Laden himself that had helped to direct the plot on 9/11, we are well aware of the fact that those threats still exist out there.

And here at Fort Meade, we do some of the most important work in helping to coordinate our efforts to make sure that we are bringing to bear all elements of American power against those who would try to do us harm here in the homeland or overseas, or would threaten our allies. Despite the progress we’ve made in Afghanistan, it’s still critically important that we’ve got thousands of trainers and advisors who are supporting the Afghan military efforts there. Our combat role is complete, but we still have to make sure that they are getting the kind of help and assistance that they need.

The emergence of ISIL in Iraq and Syria has meant that we have to be present and we are pounding them every single day. Our airmen are doing extraordinary work with the support of all the other service branches. And we’re providing training and assistance and support to the Iraqi security forces on the ground as they continue to push back ISIL from territory that they had taken.

But both in Iraq and in Syria, in Afghanistan, in North Africa, what we’re very clear about is, is that we still have significant threats coming from terrorist organizations and a terrorist ideology. We also have the traditional threats that our military has to be prepared for -- from a new Pacific region where historically we have underwritten the security and prosperity of a region that came back after World War II and where we have tremendous alliances, to Europe and our role as the cornerstone of NATO.

And so we are going to continually have to work at every level to make sure that our men and women in uniform are provided the strategy they need to succeed, the resources they need to succeed, the equipment, the training. And in this new era, that’s not just a matter of tanks and rifles; as everybody I think here is aware, especially here at Fort Meade, cybersecurity is opening up a whole new era in which we have to watch out for our adversaries.

So on 9/11, I thought it was particularly appropriate for me to be able to address you directly, and to say thank you on behalf of the American people. When I look out in this audience and when I think about all the members of the armed services all around the world who serve, this represents America. You’ve got people of every race, religion, faith, every region of the country. But what we share is a common creed, a common commitment to freedom, a common commitment to rule of law, a common belief that America is an indispensable force for good around the world, and that our military is a linchpin in our ability to project our values alongside our diplomatic efforts, our economy, and the people-to-people relations that helped to spread those core beliefs that all of you are willing to sacrifice for.

So I want to say thank you to you. I want to especially say thank you to those who are serving overseas and who are watching here today because many of them are away from family right now. We are grateful for your service. I don’t have a greater honor than serving as your Commander-in-Chief. And every single day I see the extraordinary work that you do and I benefit from it as well.

So with that, why don’t we start taking some questions?

Moderator Parry:

Yes, of course, sir. As you mentioned, we do have family members and service members worldwide watching this worldwide troop talk through American Forces Network and on ships at sea. We’re going to go out there in a little bit, but the first question we do want to be represented from one of the many service members we have here. So the first question will go out to the audience if someone has one ready.

Sergeant Harvey.

Sergeant Harvey: Good morning, Mr. President -- good afternoon.

President Obama: Good afternoon.

Sergeant Harvey: I’m Sergeant Brianna Harvey [ph]. I’m from Texas. And my question is, what made you initiate MBK on the 27th of February in 2014? And will you create something similar for females? And what will you miss the most once you’re no longer President and out of the Oval Office?

President Obama: Well, those are great questions. What part of Texas you from?

Sergeant Harvey: Harker Heights, Texas.

President Obama: Harker Heights, Texas.

Sergeant Harvey: Yes, Mr. President.

President Obama: Well, tell everybody back home I said hi.

Sergeant Harvey: Yes, sir.

President Obama: For service members who aren’t aware, what we’re referring to when we talk about MBK is what we call My Brother’s Keeper. One of the most important principles I think of America is that no matter who you are, no matter what you look like, if you work hard, you can get ahead. And there are pockets of poverty in places where people don’t have an opportunity, and that’s particularly true among young men who too often are ending up in prison instead of going to school or serving in our military.

And so what we’ve been trying to do is to setup mentorship programs, make sure that they’re aware of what’s going on, provide them with job training. I had a meeting with some folks in New Orleans -- young men who just come from terrible circumstances, terrible neighborhoods -- and we want to make sure that they are aware of how they can break the cycle and do right by themselves and ultimately do right by their families.

And one of the young men who was sitting next to me was interested in enrolling in the Marines, but he was worried that he had heard a rumor that he might not be able to serve in the Marines if he had tattoos. I said, I don’t think -- I’ve met a lot of Marines, I don’t think that’s going to be a problem.

But it gives you a sense of some young people are so out of the loop and have so little exposure that they don’t know where to go and how to apply themselves in ways that allow them to succeed. So we are working diligently on that -- not just ourselves, but businesses and our military leaders are helping out on this issue.

Young women, we have a whole other set of initiatives in the White House called -- we have a White House Council on Women and Girls to provide opportunity for them as well. I have to say, generally, the young women are doing better than the young men -- that’s because you guys are a little smarter, but obviously they need opportunities as well.

In terms of what I’m going to miss the most, I meant what I said: The greatest privilege I have is serving as your Commander-in-Chief. When I travel around the world, every place I go, I see folks who are doing incredible work. And it’s not typically fighting. A lot of times it’s helping train other countries so that they can secure themselves. A lot of times it’s helping on engineering projects or development projects or helping people after a natural disaster. You are ambassadors and spread good will around the world every single day at enormous sacrifice to yourselves. And so I’ll miss that a lot.

The plane is nice, too -- I got to admit, but my lease is running out. So I’m hoping that I’m not going to have to start taking off my shoes again going through security.

What I won’t miss is the fact that I can -- I live in what’s called the bubble, right, so they don’t let me go anywhere. So if I just want to go take a walk, I’ve got to have helicopters and boats and all that stuff. And even when I cross the Potomac, they’ve got everybody in position. And I can’t just on a Saturday morning go down to Starbucks or something, not shave. It sounds pretty good to me. So those are some of the things I’ll be doing when I get out of here. And I probably won’t wear a tie for at least a month.

Thank you very much.

Sergeant Harvey: Thank you, Mr. President.

Moderator Parry:

Thank you, Sergeant Harvey for that question. I promised we were going to go worldwide, sir, and we are. Your first question from overseas is a place that you are familiar with, you’ve traveled there a few times and I’m sure our service members are familiar with it as well. Our first question is going to come from downrange. And Petty Officer Lori Bent is going to take us there.

Petty Officer Laurie Bent [Moderator]: Mr. President, we have your first live satellite question from Afghanistan. We have Sergeant Aaron Giese. Sergeant Giese, if you can hear me, go ahead and nod. You are on the line with the President. Go ahead with your question.

Sergeant Giese: Good afternoon, Mr. President. My name is Sergeant Aaron Giese, and I first want to take time to thank you for the opportunity to speak with me today.

President Obama: Thank you, Aaron.

Sergeant Giese: My question for you is, due to the recent Russian activity in Syria and the possibility of future activity, how will that affect our current military strategy within the region?

President Obama: Well, it's a great question, Aaron. First of all, let me just say thank you for your service, and please tell everybody in your unit that we appreciate them as well, that we're thinking about them and you're in our thoughts and prayers.

As I indicated in my opening remarks, we've done an incredible job in going after and systematically dismantling the core al Qaeda network that was operating primarily in the FATA region between Afghanistan and Pakistan. They still pose a threat, but it is much diminished. But what’s happened with this radical, violent extremism is that it's metastasized and it's spread to other areas. And right now, ground zero for those activities is in Syria with ISIL.

And our strategy has consistently been that we will use our airpower to support efforts by Iraqi security forces on the ground and, where we can find it, moderate opposition inside of Syria to push back on ISIL -- to put pressure on them, to go after their financing, to go after their networks, their supplies. A lot of their operations are funded by oil sales, and so blocking those, going after the infrastructure that they’ve built up.

Those strategies will all continue. The challenge we've had in Syria is that the President there, Bashar al-Assad, has been so destructive towards his own people, destroying entire cities, dropping bombs, creating a sectarian conflict between Shia and Sunni inside of Syria, that it has become a magnet for jihadists throughout the region.

And the good news is, is that Russia shares with us a concern about countering violent extremism and shares with us the view that ISIL is very dangerous. So despite our conflicts with Russia in areas like Ukraine, this is an area potentially of converging interest. The bad news is that Russia continues to believe that Assad, who is their traditional partner, is somebody that is worthy of continuing support. And it has been my view and the view of the United States government that as long as Assad is there, he has alienated so much of the Syrian population that it will not be possible to arrive at a peaceful cease-fire and political settlement, and you’ll continue to have this vacuum that's filled by extremists.

So Russia has, for many years now, provided financial support, sold arms to Assad. I remember a conversation I had with Mr. Putin four or five years ago, where I told him that was a mistake, it would make things worse as long as he continued to support Assad. He did not take my warnings, and as a consequence things have gotten worse.

It appears now that Assad is worried enough that he’s inviting Russian advisors in and Russian equipment in. And that won't change our core strategy, which is to continue to put pressure on ISIL in Iraq and Syria, but we are going to be engaging Russia to let them know that you can't continue to double-down on a strategy that’s doomed to failure. And if they are willing to work with us and the 60-nation coalition that we've put together, then there’s the possibility of a political settlement in which Assad would be transitioned out and a new coalition of moderate, secular and inclusive forces could come together and restore order in the country.

That's our goal. This is going to be a long discussion that we'll be having with the Russians, but it is not going to prevent us from continuing to go after ISIL very hard. It could prevent us from arriving at the political settlement that ultimately is needed to bring a peace back to Syria. And this is where our military efforts have to be combined with effective diplomatic efforts.

One of the things that I've said to all of our men and women in uniform is that you shouldn’t be fighting for our security and our freedom alone; you’ve got to have the support of diplomats and intelligence experts and others, because although you are vital and necessary, if you're doing it by yourselves, we can win any battle, but our main challenge right now in a lot of these countries -- like Syria and Afghanistan and Libya and North Africa -- is disorder. And the only way you restore order -- unless you're occupying every country that starts breaking down -- is through political negotiations and settlement. And that's where the Russians are going to have to start getting a little smarter than they have been. Because they are threatened in many ways more than we are by ISIL. They’ve got large Muslim populations that historically have caused a lot of problems inside of Russia. And the strategy that they’re pursuing right now of doubling down on Assad I think is a big mistake.

Moderator Parry:

Thank you, Sergeant Giese, for that question from Afghanistan. We here at the Defense Media Activity do hope that you and others downrange do stay safe. We do have thousands of members overseas watching the American Forces network, or they’re streaming live on Defense.gov, and they, too, are eager to talk to you, Mr. President. And they can through social media. In fact, Petty Officer Lori Bent is going to take us out there now.

Moderator Bent: Our next question is going to come from Twitter. Sir, we have a question from JRita2192. “Mr. President, can you share with us your personal experience and memories of when 9/11 first happened?”

President Obama: It was interesting -- Michelle and I were just talking about that this morning. Sasha, my youngest daughter, had just been born. She was four or five months old. And September 11th was Malia’s first day of preschool or kindergarten -- I think it was kindergarten. So Michelle had gone with the girls to drop Malia off at school. They were tiny. I was at the time a state senator, so I was going to downtown Chicago to a hearing on an issue.

And I remember driving on Lake Shore Drive in Chicago and hearing the reports of a plane crashing into the buildings. And at first, the reports were unclear, so you thought it was a Cessna or some accident had happened. And it wasn’t until I got downtown to where the hearing was taking place that we started realizing it was something much more serious.

And at that time, no one was sure whether this was a one-off or whether this was going to be an ongoing attack, because then you started getting reports from the Pentagon and other places. So the building was evacuated. And I remember standing downtown Chicago with thousands of other people, and there were a lot of targets, obviously, for possible action, this including -- at the time, it was called the Sears Tower. And people didn’t know what to think. And then I remember going to my law office, and that’s when we saw the images of the Twin Towers starting to come down.

And that evening, I have very vivid memories of giving Sasha a bottle and rocking her to sleep while we were watching the aftermath of those attacks. And like I think everybody here, although most of you were a lot younger, it gave you a sense, for the first time in my lifetime, that our homeland could be vulnerable in that way. We hadn’t seen an attack like that since Pearl Harbor.

And I think it inspired all of us to remember just how precious what we have is, and the need for us to defend it at any cost. And although subsequently I would have strong disagreements with the previous administration about certain decisions that were made, I remember and give great credit to President Bush for being at the site, throwing out that first pitch at Yankee Stadium, and everyone remembering that you’re not a Democrat first or a Republican first, or a Texan first or Californian first, you’re an American, and that we all have to come together.

And my hope is always on a day like today that we remember that sense that what binds us together is much more important than anything that divides us, and that what makes this country special is the fact that we are bound together -- we, or our parents, or our great-grandparents, we all come from different places, but we all have a shared creed, a shared belief system, and a shared set of commitments. And all of you in your service exemplify that every day.

Moderator Parry:

It was an excellent question from social media. And our viewers can join us and join this conversation on social media from Twitter using the hashtag #askPOTUS, or the Department of Defense’s Facebook page. We’re actually going to go back overseas for you, Mr. President, and Petty Officer Lori Bent is going to take us there.

Moderator Bent: Sir, we are headed to NATO -- Brussels, Belgium -- where we’re going to talk to Navy Commander Scot Cregan. Commander Cregan, go ahead with your question for the President.

Commander Cregan: Thank you for your time, Mr. President. I was honored to march in your inaugural parade in 2009, and we briefly met a few years later when I worked a Halloween White House event. I was a Star Wars storm trooper.

President Obama: You were great.

Commander Cregan: You may not remember what I looked like because we all kind of looked alike. On a serious note, we’re seeing more and more refugees coming to Europe by land and by sea. Do you think there should be a NATO response to this crisis?

President Obama: I think that we have to work with our European partners on this issue. The refugee crisis is not just a European problem, it's a world problem. And we have obligations.

I made certain to send through every agency that we've got to do our part, first of all, in taking our share of refugees. And those of you who saw some of these heartbreaking images of that small boy drowned -- I think anybody who’s a parent understands that -- that stirs all of our consciences, not just folks on the other side of the Atlantic.

So I've already been in discussions with people like Prime Minister Renzi of Italy, the Greeks, and others who are down south about how we can enhance maritime efforts to make sure, first of all, that people who are loading up on these rickety boats are safe and we're not seeing enormous loss of life there. We are encouraged by the efforts of the European Union to accept refugees in all countries and spread out some of the burdens and the pressure.

And as I said, the United States needs to do our share. I said that we should establish a floor of at least 10,000 refugees that we're willing to accept, and cut through some of the bureaucracy and red tape to do that.

Ultimately, though, as you well know, it is really important for us to go to the source. There’s the old story about if you see a bunch of bodies floating down a river, part of your job is to pull those folks out and save who you can, but you’ve also got to go downstream and see what exactly is happening. And this refugee crisis is prompted by the collapse of governance in Syria and the growth of ISIL and the cruelty that Assad is perpetrating on his own people.

And that's why the response I gave earlier, the importance of us continuing our military efforts against ISIL, but also trying to pull together a strong international, diplomatic effort to bring about some sort of political accord inside of Syria is going to be so important and so vital.

Last point I'll make about this, though -- and this is where NATO planning becomes critical, even as we're, in the short term, helping countries respond to the immediate crisis -- unfortunately, we can anticipate that refugees will be an ongoing problem for decades to come. And the reason is because there are too many states that are not doing well by their people. The spread of media gives people in war-torn countries or in extreme poverty a vision of a better life, and they are desperate and willing to take extraordinary risks to get there.

You then have other factors that may end up resulting in more migration and refugees -- for example, climate change. I just came back from Alaska, where you're seeing glaciers melt rapidly. And as temperatures rise, the Pentagon’s own assessment is that this will end up being a national security challenge, in part because people will be displaced from their traditional lands either by drought or by flooding, and that can create more refugee problems.

So we're going to have to work globally. And one of the topics, I'm sure, when I go to the United Nations General Assembly leaders gathering that we typically have at the end of this month is to start coming up with a more effective structure for an international response. No one country can solve these problems alone. But the United States, obviously, as the world’s leader, and NATO, as the premier alliance in the world, is going to have to play a central role.

Moderator Parry:

I want to thank the Lt. Commander for that question. Mr. President, we've been to Europe, to Afghanistan. We've gone online, so I think it's time we come back to the studio here at the Defense Media Activity for a question.

President Obama: Let’s do it.

Question: Good afternoon, Mr. President. [inaudible] from Arizona. You allude to in your opening remarks the threat that cyber currently is. And there’s been a lot of talk within the DOD and cyber community of the possibility of a separate branch of the military dedicated to cyber. I was wondering where you see cyber in the next five to ten years.

President Obama: Well, it's a great question. We initiated Cyber Command, anticipating that this is going to be a new theater for potential conflict. And what we've seen by both state and non-state actors is the increasing sophistication of hacking, the ability to penetrate systems that we previously thought would be secure. And it is moving fast. So, offense is moving a lot faster than defense.

Part of this has to do with the way the Internet was originally designed. It was not designed with the expectation that there would end up being three or four or five billion people doing commercial transactions, et cetera. It was thought this was just going to be an academic network to share papers and formulas and whatnot. And so the architecture of the Internet makes it very difficult to defend consistently.

We continue to be the best in the world at understanding and working within cyber. But other countries have caught up. The Russians are good. The Chinese are good. The Iranians are good. And you’ve got non-state hackers who are excellent. And unlike traditional conflicts and aggression, oftentimes we don't have a return address. If somebody hacks into a system and goes after critical infrastructure, for example, or penetrates our financial systems, we can't necessarily trace it directly to that state or that actor. That makes it more difficult as well.

So what we've done is to try to emphasize, number one, the need for a coordinated response. And over the last several years, what we've done is to bring together our military agencies, Cyber Command, with the NSA, with our intelligence, and working with the private sector to try to strengthen our defenses much better. And we've made progress, but we're not making enough progress. So I would anticipate that we are going to have to do more both through the Defense Department, but again, we're going to have to work -- because this is not a traditional war theater -- we're going to have to work with a whole bunch of other actors and coordinate with them much more effectively.

The bulk of vulnerable information and data isn't in our military; it's in the private sector. It's throughout our economy. It's on your smartphones. And so we're going to have to both strengthen overall networks, but we're also going to have to train millions of individual actors -- small businesses, big vendors, individuals -- in terms of basic cyber hygiene. We're going to have to be much more rapid in responding to attacks.

And this is something that we're just at the infancy of. Ultimately, one of the solutions we're going to have to come up with is to craft agreements among at least state actors about what’s acceptable and what’s not. And so, for example, I'm going to be getting a visit from President Xi of China, a state visit here coming up in a couple of weeks. We've made very clear to the Chinese that there are certain practices that they’re engaging in that we know are emanating from China and are not acceptable. And we can choose to make this an area of competition -- which I guarantee you we'll win if we have to -- or, alternatively, we can come to an agreement in which we say, this isn't helping anybody; let’s instead try to have some basic rules of the road in terms of how we operate.

Now, as I said, there’s still going to be individual actors, there are going to be terrorist networks and others, so we're still going to have to build a strong defense. But one of our first and most important efforts has to be to get the states that may be sponsoring cyber-attacks to understand that there comes a point at which we consider this a core national security threat and we will treat it as such.

Moderator Parry:

Excellent question from one of our cyber warriors here at Fort Meade, Maryland.

President Obama: He looks like he knows what he’s doing.

Moderator Parry:

Well, we are here on the East Coast, but I hear Petty Officer Lori Bent wants to take us all the way to the West Coast for your next question.

Moderator Bent: Yes, our next question comes from Joint Base Lewis-McChord from a C-17 instructor pilot, Major Jennifer Moore. Major Moore, go ahead with your question.

Major Moore: Mr. President, good afternoon. Sir, both my husband and I have been serving side-by-side as C-17 and T-6 instructor pilots for the past 11 years, and we have two amazing and thriving children. How do you and Mrs. Obama know how to balance life and work to ensure your children will grow up to be successful in their future endeavors?

President Obama: Well, first of all, thanks to you and your husband both for serving. And tell your kids I said hi and that they should do what you tell them to do. How old are your kids?

Major Moore: Well, my daughter, Gabby, is seven and my son, Robert, is four. I have a picture, sir. It would kill me if I didn’t have an opportunity to show you.

President Obama: Sure. Hold up the picture. Oh, that’s a good-looking crew right there. They’re adorable.

Major Moore: Absolutely. The happiest place on Earth, thank you, sir.

President Obama: Well, I’ll give you -- the best advice that I probably can offer is for me, at least, I just do what Michelle tells me to do and it seems to work out. And your husband may take the same approach. And those are great ages -- seven and four -- because you come home and they’re jumping on you, and so excited to see you. When they get to be 17 and 14, then they still love you, but you’re not very interesting.

But everybody here, the demands of your jobs are so extraordinary, and it’s not like you’re always on the clock, you’ve just got to get the job done. And that puts a lot of pressure on folks. One thing I know we can do is make sure that our military is supporting families, and that means making sure that housing and child care, all the things that go into supporting families when they’re stationed -- particularly given how much they’re moving -- becomes absolutely critical.

And Michelle has worked with Dr. Jill Biden on Joining Forces to make sure that we are spending a lot of time thinking about how are we supporting military families on an ongoing basis, including those spouses who are not in service but who are serving alongside, and do so much critical work -- making sure that they have the opportunity, for example, to find a job if they’re getting transferred, and have the kind of backing that they need. So that’s really important. You shouldn’t have to do this alone.

What Michelle and I did with Malia and Sasha I think early on is we just -- we’re a strong believer in structure and rules, and unconditional love but being pretty firm, too. We started real early: Here’s your bedtime. Here’s when you’re not watching TV. You’ll sit there and eat your vegetables even if we have to sit there with you, watch you chew for 10 minutes -- and we’re going to watch you swallow. And if you start early enough with just high expectations, I think kids do well with that.

And part of that involves just loving those kids to death, but also letting them know, you know what, I’m your parent, I’m not your best friend. So I’m not that interested in what your friends are doing -- they’ve got parents, their parents can make a decision. This is what you’re doing in our house. And when you leave here, you’ll be able to make your own decisions, but we’re trying to prepare you so that you’ve got some sense when you get out of here.

And I think that’s worked. I think that’s been appreciated. Sometimes they complain. They say, well, how come so-and-so is able to stay out until whatever hour? It’s like, well, that’s not really our problem, is it? And they’re getting old enough now where sometimes they appreciate it -- mainly because they also know that we just -- we adore them.

And last thing, I guess, is just, as much as possible, we try to make sure every night when we’re home that they have to sit down and eat dinner with us. I’m a big believer in not getting the TV trays out and watching the Kardashians. You sit down, leave your cell phone somewhere else, and we’ll have a conversation. And that seems to help, too.

That’s all, by the way, me just channeling Michelle. Like I said, the main thing for your husband to do is just listen to you.

Moderator Parry:

That was an excellent question and I know my wife, Jazzy, would agree. I listen to her day in and day out.

Major Moore: I’ll tell him that, sir. Thank you very much.

President Obama: Thank you.

Moderator Parry:

And I know, I’m sure all of our service members who have families would agree a large part of why we do what we do and how we can do what we do is those loved ones we have at home.

President Obama: Absolutely.

Moderator Parry:

I’m sure we all appreciate our family members there. So we do have family members watching on American Forces Network -- I know my wife, she’s watching on Defense.gov right now with my two-year-old son -- and they have an opportunity to talk to you as well through social media.

President Obama: Excellent.

Moderator Parry:

Petty Officer Lori Bent is going to take us there now.

Moderator Bent: We are headed online to Facebook. Sir, this question is coming from Michael Ong: “Mr. President, how do you keep striving for great accomplishment with a positive attitude while everyone seems to be hating and talking smack about you and all you do?”

President Obama: Yeah! You know, the truth is, is that not everyone is talking smack about me. But there is a sizable percentage in Congress that talks smack about me, no doubt about it. It’s interesting -- when you go into public service, I think there are two ways to approach it. One way to approach it is that you just want to be popular. You want to get elected, you want to stay in office, you want to be popular. Another way of approaching it is, I want a particular position because I want to get something done for the American people. And not everything that is right to do is going to be the popular thing to do.

And I made a decision early on that if I was going to do this, if I was going to run for elected office, that I had to have some core, some set of beliefs and principles, and that there would be times where I made mistakes or I made a wrong call, but that I was guided by what I thought was best for the American people, and that I couldn’t worry about short-term popularity if I was going to do my best.

So I’ll give you a good example. When I came into office, early on, we had the worst financial crisis in our history. One of the casualties of that was the U.S. auto industry. The big three automakers were on the verge of flat-lining, and were getting all these bailouts but they weren’t changing what they were doing. And a lot of folks thought that Chrysler was going to go bankrupt, and then GM was going to go next, and then all the suppliers would lose out, and pretty soon all we would be able to buy is Japanese and Korean and German cars.

And I said, this is an industry that’s too important -- one that we essentially built -- for us to be able to just let it go. And I knew that we had to put more money into it to get the industry back on its feet, but I also knew that we had to force them to make management changes so they could start building good cars and competing again.

Well, I tell you, when we put forward our plan, I think that 10 percent of people agreed with it. Even in Michigan, I think the overwhelming majority of people opposed it, opposed our plan. And if I had been thinking in terms of just looking at the poll numbers, I wouldn’t have done it. But I looked at the evidence and what I thought was going to be best, and we did it. And this year, we’re probably going to sell more U.S. cars than we have in 20 years, and they’ve hired back hundreds of thousands of workers, and it’s been driving a rebound of American manufacturing that is vital to our economy.

So the longer I’m in this office, the more committed I am to making those calls. And part of the challenge in this job is, is that if it’s an easy question it doesn’t get to my desk. The only things that come to my desk are things that somebody else hasn’t been able to solve. And my job is to make a decision based on sometimes imperfect information and you’re working on the percentages.

When I made the order for us to go in and get bin Laden at that house in Pakistan, it was probably a 50/50 proposition as to whether that was, in fact, him, and the risks obviously were enormous. If I had been making that decision based on wanting to avoid risk and not having somebody talk smack about me, then that might not be a decision that I would have been prepared to make.

And part of this is my own personal faith and prayer, and part of it is the support of an incredible family and friends. And part of it is seeing the sacrifices that all of you make. When I go to Walter Reed and I visit wounded troops, then I say to myself, well, I’ve got to be serious about what I do, and I can’t be worrying about poll numbers or what cable TV says. I’ve got to make sure that I am, to the best of my abilities, making the decisions that I think are going to be most important for American prosperity and American security over the long term.

And that way, you can at least sleep at night. That way when I go to bed, I go to bed easy, because I know that I’ve made the best decisions I could make.

Now, the only way that works is if I’m also open and listening to see if the decisions I made were the right ones, is it working. And I’ve got to be open to the fact that sometimes I may not make the right decision, and I’m willing to correct it. And I’ve got to own that. And that’s what I always tell everybody in the White House, is if somebody screws up -- because there will be some screw-ups -- own it and correct it, and learn from it. And what applies to everybody on my team applies to me, as well.

So I think some of you may recall when we passed health care, everything was working fine until there was this website that didn’t work. It was a disaster -- even though I had been asking every two weeks, how’s the website going, I hope this works. But it didn’t work. And we had to own that and double down. And we corrected it in three or four months, and now 16 million people have health insurance that didn’t have it before, and it actually costs less than people anticipated. It's working the way it should have. But that was a screw-up, and there’s no point in trying to hide things when they don’t work.

So I guess the last thing I’d say is I tend to just take the long view on things. Political polls and what the pundits say and what other politicians say -- that comes and goes. It goes up and goes down. I try to think 20 years from now, when I look back, will people say, this person operated with integrity and made decisions that were best for the country. And so far that’s working for me, anyway.

It doesn’t mean I’m not sometimes a little offended. That’s why I go to the gym, work it off.

Moderator Parry:

Well, Mr. President, your next question -- Petty Officer Lori Bent is going to take us overseas.

Moderator Bent: Sir, your next question is coming from Gunnery Sergeant Bryson Elliott, and he’s at U.S. AFRICOM Stuttgart, Germany. Gunny, go ahead with your question.

Gunnery Sergeant Elliott: First of all, sir, thank you. Good afternoon. Thank you for taking my question. Mr. President, my question is, how are military exercises like African Lion with Morocco strengthening the relationships between the U.S. and African nations?

President Obama: Well, it’s a great question. And thank you for your service. Tell everybody at AFRICOM we appreciate them.

I just came back from Africa several months ago, and there are huge challenges there, but also huge opportunities. First of all, that’s a continent that appreciates America. When you look at polls, the continent as a whole, their positive views of America are as high as any other continent in the world. So the people of the African continent admire the United States. They appreciate our values and our way of life, and there’s a real connection.

It also is the continent with some of the fastest-growing economies in the world. I think we tend to have stereotypes about Africa as Ebola and poverty and all this stuff. When you travel there, they’re moving. And you go to cities there, and everybody has got a cell phone, and everybody is hustling, and everybody is working. And that’s going to be one of the great next arenas for economic growth and trade. And that means that the United States is selling more goods there and they’re selling more here, and there are enormous opportunities. So our prosperity with them is tied together.

What is also true is, is that there are parts of Africa -- particularly North Africa, but it’s seeping down along the coasts -- where violent Islamic extremism has taken hold. And Somalia being a prime example where Al-Shabaab has been working for a long time; Boko Haram in Nigeria; al Qaeda in the Maghreb. And so we have to have a strategy to partner with those countries to ensure that our intelligence capabilities, our rapid-response capabilities, and their own capabilities for maintaining order and pushing back against extremism -- that they are a lot stronger in the years to come.

The good news is that these countries are eager for that kind of cooperation. Countries like Nigeria, countries like Kenya welcome our presence, welcome our training of their troops. We have excellent CT cooperation with them. The big problem they’ve got is capacity, but capacity is one of those things you can solve where you’ve got a willing partner.

So we’re working with the joint chiefs to develop plans so that we are continuing to build up partnership capabilities across the continent. And that will help us not only with homegrown problems inside of Africa, but those platforms then also allow us to act more effectively against deeply rooted organizations like al Qaeda on the peninsula in Yemen, because that’s right across the ocean and we want to be able to make sure that we can target those terrorist networks effectively. Having African partners helps us do that.

Moderator Parry:

Mr. President, we’re hoping to squeeze in at least one more question.

President Obama: Come on.

Moderator Parry:

Excellent. Because I promised you earlier, we have viewers out at sea -- in fact, that’s where Petty Officer Lori Bent is going to take us now.

Moderator Bent: And what do you know, this sailor is going to take you out to sea for your next question, Mr. President. This is coming from the deployed USS Theodore Roosevelt, and on the phone, we have Petty Officer Joseph Everett. Petty Officer Everett, you are on the line. Go ahead.

Petty Office Everett: Good afternoon, Mr. President. I’m Petty Officer Joseph Everett calling you from the Theodore Roosevelt. I just want to thank you for taking the time to talk to me.

President Obama: Hey, Joe.

Petty Office Everett: I’m very honored to have this opportunity.

President Obama: Hold on, Joe, we’re having trouble hearing you here. Slight technical difficulties. But if somebody can hear, they can repeat the question to us.

Moderator Parry:

Petty Officer Everett, would you like to try that question again?

Petty Office Everett: Good afternoon, Mr. President. This is Petty Officer Joseph Everett calling you from the Theodore Roosevelt. I just want to thank you for giving me this opportunity today, and I’m very honored.

President Obama: Well, I can hear you just fine now, Joe. And tell everybody on the ship we appreciate them, hope they get back home safe. You got a question for us?

Petty Office Everett: Yes, Mr. President. During your presidency, you’ve had a lot of great experiences. What would you say is your most rewarding?

President Obama: Wow. Well, that’s a big question. I tell you that there are different kinds of rewarding experiences, obviously, in this office. But across the board, what ends up being most rewarding for me is when somebody comes up to me in a rope line when I’m appearing someplace or at some event, and they say, “Mr. President, you helped me.”

I’ve had moms come up and say, Mr. President, my son, who’s 25 years old, didn’t have health insurance when you passed that law to make sure that he could stay on my health insurance. He finally got a checkup after three, four years. They found a tumor, but they were able to get it out in time and now he’s doing fine, and I appreciate it.

Or we have White House tours of wounded warriors, and once this wonderful couple was there, both the husband and wife were service members. They had two adorable little kids. And as I was coining them and shaking their hands, one of them said -- the wife said, “I just want to thank you because you saved our family.” Because the husband had had PTSD but wasn’t getting help, and she had written to us and I had had folks at DOD reach out, and he had gotten counseling and now was doing well and the family was thriving.

A lot of times, this stuff seems abstract, and there’s just a bunch of folks talking on television and it all seems like politics and arguing. But one of the things that you learn the longer you’re in this is that these decisions matter, and you’re touching people directly in some kind of way. And when you hear that something you did actually helped, then you say to yourself, all right, this was worth it, this was a good day.

And I know that everybody here feels that same way. There are going to be frustrations in our work. There are going to be challenges in our work. Many of you operate in obscurity, and people don’t always say thank you. But then every once in a while, you see that, all right, what I did helped, made a difference. Somebody is safer. Somebody who was hungry has eaten. Somebody whose home was destroyed, now they’ve got shelter. Somebody whose village had been overrun, now they’ve got a chance at some security and some freedom. And that's what keeps you going. That's what inspires you.

So those are the most gratifying moments of my presidency. And the plane is cool. And Marine One. I don’t want to leave the Marines out.

Moderator Parry:

Well, Mr. President, we know one of those challenges is that you do have other obligations and time constraints. I want to thank you on the part of Defense Media Activity, our soldiers, sailors, Marines, and airmen across the world, and the Coast Guard, and we are representing the Coast Guard here as well. Thank you. And if you have any final remarks for us.

President Obama: I just want to say thank you to all of you and to your family members for your extraordinary service. What you do is vital to our way of life. It is vital our country.

I started off talking about 9/11 and how shaken all of us were, and angry and frustrated, and moved by it. But when you travel to New York now, there’s a new tower soaring in the sky. And those first responders, the cops and the firemen and the EMTs, a lot of them are still serving and still doing great work every day. And it’s just a good reminder of the essential spirit of the American people.

We don’t always get things perfect the first time. There are times where we take a hit. There are times where, unfortunately, we have self-imposed problems because of politics or conflicts inside our own country. Our political system is not always serving people the way it should. One of the things that we haven’t had a chance to talk about is the fact that Congress has a budget that it’s supposed to be passing at the end of this month, and we’ve been operating under what’s called a sequester, which is hampering our ability to finance the kind of readiness and modernization and research and development and support for our troops that’s needed. It’s also preventing us from funding education and job training and infrastructure that is vital for our long-term economic competitiveness.

I hope Congress is paying attention to how you operate and how you do your job -- because if they were as conscientious about it and selfless about it, then that sequester would be lifted, and we would end up being in a position where we could make the investments we need to stay strong, militarily and economically.

So we’ve got challenges. But just think about how we bounced back -- from 9/11, from the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression. America is the strongest, the most prosperous and the most diverse country on Earth. And the 21st century is being shaped by our ideas of the Internet and of international trade and free markets. And the reason for all of that is because of our people.

Sometimes we hear about all the bad stuff that’s going on, especially during political season. But America is strong. And it’s strong because of all of you. And I never want you to forget that. You should be very proud of what you do, and very proud of the people that you represent in uniform every single day -- because this country is full of good, generous, hardworking people and they rely on you and they are grateful to you. All right. Tell your families I said hi back home. Thank you, everybody.

Moderator Parry:

Ladies and gentlemen, our Commander-in-Chief.

President Obama: Thank you. Appreciate it.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Congressional Black Caucus Phoenix Awards Dinner Address

Hello CBC!

I guess I get the -- the fancier lectern here. Everybody please have a seat. Have a seat. I know it’s late. You’re ready for the after parties. I should have ditched the speech and brought my playlist. Everybody looks beautiful, handsome, wonderful. Thank you, Don, for that introduction. Thank you to the CBC Foundation. And thank you to the members of the CBC.

On the challenges of our times, from giving workers a raise to getting families health coverage; on the threats of our time, from climate change to nuclear proliferation -- members of the CBC have been leaders moving America forward. With your help, our businesses have created over 13 million new jobs. With your help, we’ve covered more than 16 million Americans with health insurance -- many for the first time. Three years ago, Republicans said they’d get the unemployment rate down to 6 percent by 2017. It’s down to 5.1 right now. You didn’t hear much about that at the debate on Monday -- on Wednesday night.

The point is, though, none of this progress would have been possible without the CBC taking tough votes when it mattered most. Whatever I’ve accomplished, the CBC has been there. I was proud to be a CBC member when I was in the Senate, and I’m proud to be your partner today. But we’re not here just to celebrate -- we’re here to keep going. Because with the unemployment rate for African Americans still more than double than whites, with millions of families still working hard and still waiting to feel the recovery in their own lives, we know that the promise of this nation -- where every single American, regardless of the circumstances in which they were born, regardless of what they look like, where they come from, has the chance to succeed -- that promise is not yet fulfilled.

The good thing about America -- the great project of America is that perfecting our union is never finished. We’ve always got more work to do. And tonight’s honorees remind us of that. They remind us of the courage and sacrifices, the work that they’ve done -- and not just at the national level, but in local communities all across the country. We couldn’t be prouder of them. The heroes of the Civil Rights Movement whom we lost last month remind us of the work that remains to be done. American heroes like Louis Stokes, and Julian Bond, and Amelia Boynton Robinson.

Ms. Robinson -- as some of you know, earlier this year, my family and I joined many in Selma for the 50th anniversary of that march. And as we crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge, I held Ms. Amelia’s hand. And I thought about her and all the extraordinary women like her who were really the life force of the movement. Women were the foot soldiers. Women strategized boycotts. Women organized marches. Even if they weren’t allowed to run the civil rights organizations on paper, behind the scenes they were the thinkers and the doers making things happen each and every day -- doing the work that nobody else wanted to do. They couldn’t prophesize from the pulpits, but they led the charge from the pews. They were no strangers to violence. They were on the front lines. So often they were subject to abuse, dehumanized, but kept on going, holding families together. Mothers were beaten and gassed on Bloody Sunday. Four little girls were murdered in a Birmingham church. Women made the movement happen.

Of course, black women have been a part of every great movement in American history -- even if they weren’t always given a voice. They helped plan the March on Washington, but were almost entirely absent from the program. And when pressed, male organizers added a tribute highlighting six women -- none of them who were asked to make a speech. Daisy Bates introduced her fellow honorees in just 142 words, written by a man. Of course, Marian Anderson and Mahalia Jackson sang. But in a three-hour program, the men gave women just 142 words. That may sound familiar to some of the women in the room here tonight. The organizers even insisted on two separate parades -- male leaders marching along the main route on Pennsylvania Avenue, and leaders like Dorothy Height and Rosa Parks relegated to Independence Avenue. America’s most important march against segregation had its own version of separation.

Black women were central in the fight for women’s rights, from suffrage to the feminist movement -- and yet despite their leadership, too often they were also marginalized. But they didn’t give up, they didn’t let up. They were too fierce for that. Black women have always understood the words of Pauli Murray -- that “Hope is a song in a weary throat.”

It’s thanks to black women that we’ve come a long way since the days when a girl like Ruby Bridges couldn’t go to school. When a woman like Amelia couldn’t cast her vote. When we didn’t have a Congressional Black Caucus -- and its 20 women members.

So I’m focusing on women tonight because I want them to know how much we appreciate them, how much we admire them, how much we love them. And I want to talk about what more we have to do to provide full opportunity and equality for our black women and girls in America today.

Because all of us are beneficiaries of a long line of strong black women who helped carry this country forward. Their work to expand civil rights opened the doors of opportunity, not just for African Americans but for all women, for all of us -- black and white, Latino and Asian, LGBT and straight, for our First Americans and our newest Americans. And their contributions in every field -- as scientists and entrepreneurs, educators, explorers -- all made us stronger. Of course, they’re also a majority of my household. So I care deeply about how they’re doing.

The good news is, despite structural barriers of race and gender, women and girls of color have made real progress in recent years. The number of black women-owned businesses has skyrocketed. Black women have ascended the ranks of every industry. Teen pregnancy rates among girls of color are down, while high school and four-year college graduation rates are up. That’s good news.

But there’s no denying that black women and girls still face real and persistent challenges. The unemployment rate is over 8 percent for black women. And they’re overrepresented in low-paying jobs; underrepresented in management. They often lack access to economic necessities like paid leave and quality, affordable child care. They often don’t get the same quality health care that they need, and have higher rates of certain chronic diseases -- although that’s starting to change with Obamacare. It’s working, by the way, people. Just in case -- just in case you needed to know.

And then there are some of the challenges that are harder to see and harder to talk about -- although Michelle, our outstanding, beautiful First Lady talks about these struggles. Michelle will tell stories about when she was younger, people telling her she shouldn’t aspire to go to the very best universities. And she found herself thinking sometimes, “Well, maybe they’re right.” Even after she earned two degrees from some of the best universities in America, she still faced the doubts that were rooted in deep social prejudice and stereotypes, worrying whether she was being too assertive, or too angry, or too tall. I like tall women.

And those stereotypes and social pressures, they still affect our girls. So we all have to be louder than the voices that are telling our girls they’re not good enough -- that they’ve got to look a certain way, or they’ve got to act a certain way, or set their goals at a certain level. We’ve got to affirm their sense of self-worth, and make them feel visible and beautiful, and understood and loved. And I say this as a father who strives to do this at home, but I also say this as a citizen. This is not just about my family or yours; it’s about who we are as a people, who we want to be, and how we can make sure that America is fulfilling its promise -- because everybody is getting a chance, and everybody is told they’re important, and everybody is given opportunity. And we got to do more than just say we care, or say we put a woman on ten-dollar bill, although that’s a good idea. We’ve got to make sure they’re getting some ten-dollar bills; that they’re getting paid properly. We’ve got to let our actions do the talking.

It is an affront to the very idea of America when certain segments of our population don’t have access to the same opportunities as everybody else. It makes a mockery of our economy when black women make 30 fewer cents for every dollar a white man earns. That adds up to thousands of dollars in missed income that determines whether a family can pay for a home, or pay for college for their kids, or save for retirement, or give their kids a better life. And that’s not just a woman’s issue, that’s everybody’s issue. I want Michelle getting paid at some point. We’ve got an outstanding former Secretary of State here who is also former First Lady, and I know she can relate to Michelle when she says, how come you get paid and I don’t? How did that work?

When women of color aren’t given the opportunity to live up to their God-given potential, we all lose out on their talents; we’re not as good a country as we can be. We might miss out on the next Mae Jemison or Ursula Burns or Serena Williams or Michelle Obama. We want everybody to be on the field. We can’t afford to leave some folks off the field.

So we’re going to have to close those economic gaps so that hardworking women of all races, and black women in particular can support families, and strengthen communities, and contribute to our country’s success. So that’s why my administration is investing in job training and apprenticeships, to help everybody, but particularly help more women earn better-paying jobs, and particularly in non-traditional careers. It’s why we’re investing in getting more girls, and particularly girls of color interested in STEM fields -- math and science and engineering -- and help more of them stay on track in school.

It’s why we’re going to continue to fight to eliminate the pay gap. Equal pay for equal work. It’s an all-American idea. It’s very simple. And that’s why we’re going to keep working to raise the minimum wage -- because women disproportionately are the ones who are not getting paid what they’re worth. That’s why we’re fighting to expand tax credits that help working parents make ends meet, closing tax loopholes for folks who don’t need tax loopholes to pay for. It’s why we’re expanding paid leave to employees of federal contractors. And that’s why Congress needs to expand paid leave for more hardworking Americans. It’s good for our economy. It’s the right thing to do. No family should have to choose between taking care of a sick child or losing their job.

And just as an aside, what’s not the right thing to do, what makes no sense at all, is Congress threatening to shut down the entire federal government if they can’t shut down women’s access to Planned Parenthood. That’s not a good idea. Congress should be working on investing things that grow our economy and expand opportunity, and not get distracted and inflict the kind of self-inflicted wounds that we’ve seen before on our economy. So that’s some of the things we need to do to help improve the economic standing of all women; to help all families feel more secure in a changing economy.

And before I go tonight, I also want to say something about a topic that’s been on my mind for a while, another profound barrier to opportunity in too many communities -- and that is our criminal justice system.

I spoke about this at length earlier this year at the NAACP, and I explained the long history of inequity in our criminal justice system. We all know the statistics. And this summer, because I wanted to highlight that there were human beings behind these statistics, I visited a prison in Oklahoma -- the first President to ever visit a federal prison. And I sat down with the inmates, and I listened to their stories. And one of the things that struck me was the crushing burden their incarceration has placed not just on their prospects for the future, but also for their families, the women in their lives, children being raised without a father in the home; the crushing regret these men felt over the children that they left behind.

Mass incarceration rips apart families. It hollows out neighborhoods. It perpetuates poverty. We understand that in many of our communities, they’re under-policed. The problem is not that we don’t want active, effective police work. We want, and admire, and appreciate law enforcement. We want them in our communities. Crime hurts the African American community more than anybody. But we want to make sure that it’s done well and it’s done right, and it’s done fairly and it’s done smart. And that’s why, in the coming months, I’m going to be working with many in Congress and many in the CBC to try to make progress on reform legislation that addresses unjust sentencing laws, and encourages diversion and prevention programs, catches our young people early and tries to put them on a better path, and then helps ex-offenders, after they’ve done their time, get on the right track. It’s the right thing to do for America.

And although in these discussions a lot of my focus has been on African American men and the work we’re doing with My Brother’s Keeper, we can’t forget the impact that the system has on women, as well. The incarceration rate for black women is twice as high as the rate for white women. Many women in prison, you come to discover, have been victims of homelessness and domestic violence, and in some cases human trafficking. They’ve got high rates of mental illness and substance abuse. And many have been sexually assaulted, both before they got to prison and then after they go to prison.

And we don’t often talk about how society treats black women and girls before they end up in prison. They’re suspended at higher rates than white boys and all other girls. And while boys face the school-to-prison pipeline, a lot of girls are facing a more sinister sexual abuse-to-prison pipeline. Victims of early sexual abuse are more likely to fail in school, which can lead to sexual exploitation, which can lead to prison. So we’re focusing on boys, but we’re also investing in ways to change the odds for at-risk girls -- to make sure that they are loved and valued, to give them a chance.

And that’s why we have to make a collective effort to address violence and abuse against women in all of our communities. In every community, on every campus, we’ve got to be very clear: Women who have been victims of rape or domestic abuse, who need help, should know that they can count on society and on law enforcement to treat them with love and care and sensitivity, and not skepticism.

I want to repeat -- because somehow this never shows up on Fox News. I want to repeat -- because I’ve said it a lot, unwaveringly, all the time: Our law enforcement officers do outstanding work in an incredibly difficult and dangerous job. They put their lives on the line for our safety. We appreciate them and we love them. That’s why my Task Force on 21st Century Policing made a set of recommendations that I want to see implemented to improve their safety, as well as to make sure that our criminal justice system is being applied fairly. Officers show uncommon bravery in our communities every single day. They deserve our respect. That includes women in law enforcement. We need more of you, by the way. We’ve got an outstanding chief law enforcement officer in our Attorney General, Loretta Lynch. We want all our young ladies to see what a great role model she is.

So I just want to repeat, because somehow this never gets on the TV: There is no contradiction between us caring about our law enforcement officers and also making sure that our laws are applied fairly. Do not make this as an either/or proposition. This is a both/and proposition. We want to protect our police officers. We’ll do a better job doing it if our communities can feel confident that they are being treated fairly. I hope I’m making that clear. I hope I’m making that clear.

We need to make sure the laws are applied evenly. This is not a new problem. It’s just that in recent months, in recent years, suddenly folks have videos and body cameras, and social media, and so it’s opened our eyes to these incidents. And many of these incidents are subject to ongoing investigation, so I can’t comment on every specific one. But we can’t avoid these tough conversations altogether. That’s not going to help our police officers, the vast majority who do the right thing every day, by just pretending that these things aren’t happening. That’s not going to help build trust between them and the communities in which they serve.

So these are hard issues, but I’m confident we’re going to move forward together for a system that is fairer and more just. We’ve got good people on both sides of the aisle that are working with law enforcement and local communities to find a better way forward. And as always, change will not happen overnight. It won’t be easy. But if our history has taught us anything, it’s taught us that when we come together, when we’re working with a sense of purpose, when we are listening to one another, when we assume the best in each other rather than the worst, then change happens.

Like every parent, I can’t help to see the world increasingly through my daughters’ eyes. And on that day, when we were celebrating that incredible march in Selma, I had Ms. Amelia’s hand in one of my hands, but Michelle had Sasha’s hand, and my mother-in-law had Malia’s hand -- and it was a chain across generations. And I thought about all those women who came before us, who risked everything for life and liberty and the pursuit of happiness, so often without notice, so often without fanfare. Their names never made the history books. All those women who cleaned somebody else’s house, or looked after somebody else’s children, did somebody else’s laundry, and then got home and did it again, and then went to church and cooked -- and then they were marching.

And because of them, Michelle could cross that bridge. And because of them, they brought them along, and Malia and Sasha can cross that bridge. And that tells me that if we follow their example, we’re going to cross more bridges in the future. If we keep moving forward, hand in hand, God willing, my daughters’ children will be able to cross that bridge in an America that’s more free, and more just, and more prosperous than the one that we inherited. Your children will, too.

Thank you CBC. God bless you. God bless this country we love.

Thank you.

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# White House Welcome Address for Pope Francis

Good morning!

What a beautiful day the Lord has made!

Holy Father, on behalf of Michelle and myself, welcome to the White House. I should explain that our backyard is not typically this crowded -- but the size and spirit of today’s gathering is just a small reflection of the deep devotion of some 70 million American Catholics. It reflects, as well, the way that your message of love and hope has inspired so many people across our nation and around the world. So on behalf of the American people, it is my great honor and privilege to welcome you to the United States of America.

Today, we mark many firsts. Your Holiness, you have been celebrated as the first Pope from the Americas. This is your first visit to the United States. And you are also the first pontiff to share an encyclical through a Twitter account.

Holy Father, your visit not only allows us, in some small way, to reciprocate the extraordinary hospitality that you extended to me at the Vatican last year. It also reveals how much all Americans, from every background and every faith, value the role that the Catholic Church plays in strengthening America. From my time working in impoverished neighborhoods with the Catholic Church in Chicago, to my travels as President, I’ve seen firsthand how, every single day, Catholic communities, priests, nuns, laity are feeding the hungry, healing the sick, sheltering the homeless, educating our children, and fortifying the faith that sustains so many.

And what is true in America is true around the world. From the busy streets of Buenos Aires to the remote villages in Kenya, Catholic organizations serve the poor, minister to prisoners, build schools, build homes, operate orphanages and hospitals. And just as the Church has stood with those struggling to break the chains of poverty, the Church so often has given voice and hope to those seeking to break the chains of violence and oppression.

And yet, I believe the excitement around your visit, Holy Father, must be attributed not only to your role as Pope, but to your unique qualities as a person. In your humility, your embrace of simplicity, in the gentleness of your words and the generosity of your spirit, we see a living example of Jesus’ teachings, a leader whose moral authority comes not just through words but also through deeds.

You call on all of us, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, to put the “least of these” at the center of our concerns. You remind us that in the eyes of God our measure as individuals, and our measure as a society, is not determined by wealth or power or station or celebrity, but by how well we hew to Scripture’s call to lift up the poor and the marginalized -- to stand up for justice and against inequality, and to ensure that every human being is able to live in dignity -- because we are all made in the image of God.

You remind us that “the Lord’s most powerful message” is mercy. And that means welcoming the stranger with empathy and a truly open heart -- from the refugee who flees war-torn lands to the immigrant who leaves home in search of a better life. It means showing compassion and love for the marginalized and the outcast, to those who have suffered, and those who have caused suffering and seek redemption. You remind us of the costs of war, particularly on the powerless and defenseless, and urge us toward the imperative of peace.

Holy Father, we are grateful for your invaluable support of our new beginning with the Cuban people -- which holds out the promise of better relations between our countries, greater cooperation across our hemisphere, and a better life for the Cuban people. We thank you for your passionate voice against the deadly conflicts that ravage the lives of so many men, women and children, and your call for nations to resist the sirens of war and resolve disputes through diplomacy.

You remind us that people are only truly free when they can practice their faith freely. Here in the United States, we cherish religious liberty. It was the basis for so much of what brought us together. And here in the United States, we cherish our religious liberty, but around the world, at this very moment, children of God, including Christians, are targeted and even killed because of their faith. Believers are prevented from gathering at their places of worship. The faithful are imprisoned, and churches are destroyed. So we stand with you in defense of religious freedom and interfaith dialogue, knowing that people everywhere must be able to live out their faith free from fear and free from intimidation.

And, Holy Father, you remind us that we have a sacred obligation to protect our planet, God’s magnificent gift to us. We support your call to all world leaders to support the communities most vulnerable to changing climate, and to come together to preserve our precious world for future generations.

Your Holiness, in your words and deeds, you set a profound moral example. And in these gentle but firm reminders of our obligations to God and to one another, you are shaking us out of complacency. All of us may, at times, experience discomfort when we contemplate the distance between how we lead our daily lives and what we know to be true, what we know to be right. But I believe such discomfort is a blessing, for it points to something better. You shake our conscience from slumber; you call on us to rejoice in Good News, and give us confidence that we can come together in humility and service, and pursue a world that is more loving, more just, and more free. Here at home and around the world, may our generation heed your call to “never remain on the sidelines of this march of living hope.”

For that great gift of hope, Holy Father, we thank you, and welcome you, with joy and gratitude, to the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Joint Rose Garden Press Conference

President Obama: Good afternoon, everybody. Please have a seat.

I want to once again welcome President Xi back to the White House. We first hosted him here three years ago when he was Vice President. So this is our sixth meeting. As a result of our efforts, our two nations are working together more closely across a broader range of critical issues -- and our cooperation is delivering results, for both our nations and the world.

Since I took office, American exports to China have nearly doubled and now support nearly one million American jobs. Chinese investment in the United States helps support jobs across our country. We partner to address global challenges, whether it's promoting nuclear security, combating piracy off the Horn of Africa, encouraging development and reconciliation in Afghanistan, and helping to end the Ebola epidemic in West Africa.

The historic climate change announcements that we made last year in Beijing have encouraged other countries to step up, as well, increasing the prospects for a stronger global agreement this year. And as a member of the P5+1, China was critical to both the sanctions regime that brought Iran to the negotiating table and to the talks that produced the comprehensive deal to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.

So, greater prosperity and greater security -- that’s what American and Chinese cooperation can deliver. That’s why I want to say again, the United States welcomes the rise of a China that is peaceful, stable, prosperous, and a responsible player in global affairs. And I’m committed to expanding our cooperation, even as we address disagreements candidly and constructively. That’s what President Xi and I have done on this visit -- during our working dinner last night and our meetings today.

Let me mention some specifics. First, with respect to our economic relationship, we agreed to step up our work toward a high-standard bilateral investment treaty that would help level the playing field for American companies. We’ve committed ourselves to a set of principles for trade in information technologies, including protection of innovation and intellectual property. President Xi discussed his commitment to accelerate market reforms, avoid devaluing China’s currency, and have China play a greater role in upholding the rules-based system that underpins the global economy -- all of which are steps we very much support.

I raised once again our very serious concerns about growing cyber-threats to American companies and American citizens. I indicated that it has to stop. The United States government does not engage in cyber economic espionage for commercial gain. And today, I can announce that our two countries have reached a common understanding on the way forward. We’ve agreed that neither the U.S. or the Chinese government will conduct or knowingly support cyber-enabled theft of intellectual property, including trade secrets or other confidential business information for commercial advantage. In addition, we’ll work together, and with other nations, to promote international rules of the road for appropriate conduct in cyberspace.

So this is progress. But I have to insist that our work is not yet done. I believe we can expand our cooperation in this area, even as the United States will continue to use all of the tools at our disposal to protect American companies, citizens and interests.

Second, I’m pleased that we’re building on last year’s climate commitments. Last month, I issued our Clean Power Plan to help reduce America’s carbon emissions. Today, I want to commend China for announcing that it will begin a national market-based cap-and-trade system to limit emissions from some of its largest sectors. Last year, I announced our pledge of $3 billion to the Green Climate Fund to help developing nations deal with climate change. Today, I welcome China’s major commitment of climate finance for the most vulnerable countries as well.

Our two countries are also putting forward our common vision for the ambitious climate change agreements that we seek in Paris. When the world’s two largest economies, energy consumers and carbon emitters come together like this, then there’s no reason for other countries -- whether developed or developing -- to not do so as well. And so this is another major step towards the global agreement the world needs to reach in two months’ time.

Third, with respect to security in the Asia Pacific, we agreed to new channels of communication to reduce the risks of miscalculations between our militaries. The United States and China have reaffirmed our commitment to the complete and verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful manner. We demand the full implementation of all relevant U.N. Security Council resolutions and we will not accept North Korea as a nuclear weapon state.

We did have candid discussions on the East and South China Seas, and I reiterated the right of all countries to freedom of navigation and overflight and to unimpeded commerce. As such, I indicated that the United States will continue to sail, fly, and operate anywhere that international law allows. I conveyed to President Xi our significant concerns over land reclamation, construction, and the militarization of disputed areas, which makes it harder for countries in the region to resolve disagreements peacefully. And I encouraged a resolution between claimants in these areas. We are not a claimant; we just want to make sure that the rules of the road are upheld.

I reiterated my strong commitment, as well, to our One-China policy based on the Three Joint CommuniquÃ©s and the Taiwan Relations Act.

Fourth, we’ve agreed to do more to promote international security. At the United Nations in the coming days, the U.S. and China will bring countries together to promote development in Afghanistan, and we’ll work with our many partners to strengthen international peacekeeping. We agree that all parties, including Iran, need to fully implement the nuclear deal, and that U.N. Security Council resolutions need to be fully enforced.

For the first time, the U.S. and China will also formally partner to promote global development. Building on our efforts against Ebola, we’ll work to strengthen global health security. We’ll expand our joint efforts on humanitarian assistance, disaster response, agricultural development and food security. And given China’s success in lifting hundreds of millions of people out of poverty -- which is one of the most remarkable achievements in human history

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-- we will help rally the world this weekend around new development goals, including our goal to end extreme poverty.

Fifth, we had a frank discussion about human rights, as we have in the past. And I again affirmed America’s unwavering support for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all people, including freedom of assembly and expression, freedom of the press and freedom of religion. And I expressed in candid terms our strong view that preventing journalists, lawyers, NGOs and civil society groups from operating freely, or closing churches and denying ethnic minorities equal treatment are all problematic, in our view, and actually prevent China and its people from realizing its full potential.

Obviously, we recognize that there are real differences there. And President Xi shared his views in terms of how he can move forward in a step-by-step way that preserves Chinese unity. So we expect that we’re going to continue to consult in these areas.

Even as we recognize Tibet as part of the People’s Republic of China, we continue to encourage Chinese authorities to preserve the religious and cultural identity of the Tibetan people, and to engage the Dalai Lama or his representatives.

Finally, we’re taking more steps to expand the connections between our two peoples. We launch a new initiative to boost tourism between our countries in the coming months. And just as children across China learn English, we’re starting a new initiative called “1 Million Strong” to encourage 1 million American students to learn Mandarin Chinese over the next five years.

Vice President Biden pointed out that two of his children are already on track -- two of his grandchildren, actually. After all, if our countries are going to do more together around the world, then speaking each other’s language, truly understanding each other, is a good place to start.

So, overall, we’ve had an extremely productive meeting. The particular work that has been done by our teams shows the extraordinary progress that we can make when we’re working together. The candid conversations between President Xi and myself about areas of disagreement help us to understand each other better, to avoid misunderstandings or miscalculations, and pave the way potentially for further progress in those areas.

And, President Xi, I want to thank you again for expanding your commitment to cooperation between our nations. I believe that it’s another reminder that as we work to narrow our differences, we can continue to advance our mutual interests for the benefit not only of our two peoples, but for the benefit of the world.

Thank you very much.

President Xi: [As interpreted.] President Obama, dear friends from the press, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends -- good morning. It’s a great pleasure for me to meet with all of you together with President Obama. Let me begin by thanking again President Obama and the U.S. government for the gracious hospitality and thoughtful arrangements and warm reception accorded to me and the Chinese delegation. I also want to thank the American people for a warm welcome.

Yesterday and today, President Obama and I have had in-depth discussions on our respective domestic and foreign policies, important topics in bilateral relations, international and regional situation. Our meetings are constructive and productive, and we have reached extensive and important consensus.

During the discussions, President Obama shared with me the domestic agenda and foreign policy priorities that he has been working on. And I congratulated him on the progress that he has made in those areas. I appreciate President Obama’s reaffirmation to me that the United States welcomes the rise of a peaceful, stable and prosperous China. It supports China to play a bigger role in the international arena. And the United States supports China’s reform at opening up.

I indicated to President Obama that China is making all-around efforts to deepen comprehensive reform, to build law-based governance, to enforce strict party discipline, so as to achieve the grand goal of building a society of initial prosperity in all respects. The reform at opening up China will not stop.

China is firmly committed to the path of peaceful development. It is committed to growing friendship and cooperative relations with all countries in the world. To work with the United States to build the new model of major-country relationship without conflict, without confrontation, with mutual respect and win-win cooperation is a priority in China’s foreign policy.

We have spoken highly of the important progress made in China-U.S. relations since the Sunnylands summit in 2013. And we have agreed to follow the consensus, expand the practical cooperation in various areas at the bilateral, regional, and global level, and manage differences and sensitive issues in constructive manner, and to advance the new model of major-country relationship between China and the United States.

We have agreed to deepen the practical cooperation in various areas at the bilateral scope. We have agreed to vigorously push forward the bilateral investment treaty negotiation, speed up the pace of the work so as to achieve a high standard and balanced agreement.

We will expand mutually beneficial cooperation in energy, environmental protection, science and technology, aviation, infrastructure, agriculture, health and other areas. The two governments and relevant agencies have signed many cooperation agreements, and our businesses have signed a series of commercial contact.

China and the United States are highly complementary economically and there is huge potential for further cooperation. For the United States to recognize China’s market economy status and ease export control on civilian high-tech items, it will help expand the mutually beneficial cooperation between the two countries.

We have also had in-depth discussion on the current international, economic, and financial situation. We have agreed to step up macroeconomic policy coordination and jointly promote global economic growth and financial stability. To this end, we have established the mechanism on regular phone conversation on economic affairs between China and the United States which will be led by Vice Premier Wong Yang of China and Secretary of Treasury Jacob Lew. They will stay in close communication on respective and global major economic issues.

We will also step up cooperation within G20, the World Bank, IMF, and other multilateral mechanisms. I appreciate the U.S. supporting including the RMB into the IMF Special Drawing Rights when certain standards of the IMF are met. And I also appreciate the U.S. commitment to implement the IMF quota and governance structure reform plan adopted at the G20 Summit in 2010 at an early date.

We have truly affirmed the new progress made in the confidence-building mechanisms between the two militaries. We have agreed to step up exchanges in policy dialogues between the two militaries at all levels, hold more joint exercises and training. We believe that terrorism is the common enemy of mankind, and we have agreed to step up multilateral and bilateral counterterrorism cooperation. We have decided to increase communication and cooperation on counter-piracy, humanitarian assistance, and disaster reduction, and international peacekeeping operation, and also anti-corruption -- law enforcement cooperation to jointly fight against all kinds of transnational corruption crimes.

We have in-depth discussion on the situation of the Asia Pacific. And we believe that China and the United States have extensive common interests in this region, and we should continue to deepen dialogue and cooperation on regional affairs and work together to promote active interactions and inclusive cooperation in the Asia Pacific, and work with countries in the Asia Pacific to promote peace, stability, and prosperity in this region.

China is committed to the path of peaceful development and a neighboring foreign policy characterized by good neighborliness and partnership with our neighbors. Islands in the South China Sea since ancient times are China’s territory. We have the right to uphold our own territorial sovereignty and lawful and legitimate maritime rights and interests. We are committed to maintaining peace and stability in the South China Sea, managing differences and disputes through dialogue, and addressing disputes through negotiation, consultation, and peaceful manner, and exploring ways to achieve mutual benefit through cooperation.

We're committed to respecting and upholding the freedom of navigation and overflight that countries enjoy according to international law. Relevant construction activities that China are undertaking in the island of South -- Nansha Islands do not target or impact any country, and China does not intend to pursue militarization.

China and the United States have a lot of common interests on the issue of South China Sea. We both support peace and stability of the South China Sea. The countries directly involved should address their dispute through negotiation, consultation and in peaceful means. And we support freedom of navigation and overflight of countries according to international law and the management of differences through dialogue, and full and effective implementation of DOC and an early conclusion of the consultation of COC based on consensus-building. We have agreed to maintain constructive communication on relevant issues.

China and the United States are two major cyber countries and we should strengthen dialogue and cooperation. Confrontation and friction are not made by choice for both sides. During my visit, competent authorities of both countries have reached important consensus on joint fight against cyber-crimes. Both sides agree to step up crime cases, investigation assistance and information-sharing. And both government will not be engaged in or knowingly support online theft of intellectual properties. And we will explore the formulation of appropriate state, behavior and norms of the cyberspace. And we will establish a high-level joint dialogue mechanism on the fight against cyber-crimes and related issues, and to establish hotline links.

Democracy and human rights are the common pursuit of mankind. At the same time, we must recognize that countries have different historical processes and realities, and we need to respect people of all countries in the right to choose their own development path independently.

The Chinese people are seeking to realize the great renew of the Chinese nation, which is the Chinese history. This process in essence is a process to achieve social equity and justice and advancing human rights. China stands ready to, in the spirit of equality and mutual respect, conduct human rights dialogue with the United States, expand consensus, reduce differences, learn from each other, and progress together.

We have decided to continue to work together to tackle global challenges and provide more public good for the international community. We, again, issued a joint announcement on climate change. We have agreed to expand bilateral practical cooperation, strengthen coordination in multilateral negotiation, and work together to push the Paris climate change conference to produce important progress.

We have signed China-U.S. development cooperation MOU, and we have agreed to expand trilateral cooperation in Asia, Africa and other regions in terms of food security, public health system establishment, emergency response, and disaster reduction. And we will maintain communication and coordination in implementing the post-2015 development agenda, promote a more equitable and balanced global development partnership, and help developing countries to achieve common development.

We have agreed to firmly uphold the international nuclear non-proliferation regime. President Obama and I welcome the comprehensive Joint Plan of Action reached by relevant parties regarding the Iranian nuclear issue. We reaffirmed that all relevant parties should undertake to implement the agreement fully, and work together to implement all relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions.

We reaffirm our commitment to realize the complete and verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in peaceful way. And we oppose any action that might cause tension in the Korean Peninsula or violate U.N. Security Council resolution. We believe that the September the 19th joint statement of the Six-Party talks and relevant U.N. Security Council resolutions should be implemented in full, and all relevant parties should work together to firmly advance the denuclearization process of the Korean Peninsula, and maintain peace and stability so as to achieve enduring peace and stability in Northeast Asia.

The friendship between the two peoples is the most reliable foundation for long-term and stable development of China-U.S. relations and we should endeavor to solidify this important foundation.

We have decided to make 2016 a year of tourism for China and the United States. In the next three years, we will fund a total of 50,000 students to study in each other’s countries. We also welcome the United States’ decision to extend the 100,000 Strong initiative

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from universities to elementary and secondary schools, and by 2020, 1 million American students will learn Mandarin.

The door of friendship of China will continue to be open to the American people. I also hope that the Chinese people could come to the United States for holidays or visits more easily and conveniently.

Mr. President, with 36 years of development, the interests of China and the United States are deeply interconnected, and we have greater responsibilities for world peace and human progress. There are broad areas that the two sides should and can work together. The Chinese side stands ready to work with the United States to uphold a spirit of perseverance, and advance bilateral relations to seek further progress to the better benefits of the Chinese and American people and the people in the world.

Thank you.

President Obama: Okay, we’re going to take a few questions. We’re going to start with Margaret Talev of Bloomberg. Question: Thank you, Mr. President. President Obama and President Xi, I’d like to talk to you about cyber. If I am an American business and I’m being hacked by Chinese pirates who are trying to steal my intellectual property, what firm assurances can you give us today that things are going to get better, and when?

President Obama, are you satisfied enough about the steps that China is taking to hold off on imposing any new sanctions to this end? Or what do you still need to see?

And, President Xi, could we expect prosecutions of Chinese people and organizations who have hacked American businesses? And if the U.S. did sanction anyone in China, would you respond with sanctions?

Also, everyone will kill me if I don’t ask -- what is your reaction to House Speaker John Boehner’s decision to resign? Will this make life better or worse for you? Are you concerned it will make it more difficult to avoid a government shutdown or raise the debt limit? And do you think Boehner could just waive the rules and get immigration reform through before he leaves? Thank you.

President Obama: I’ll take them in order. With respect to cyber, this has been a serious discussion between myself and President Xi since we first met in Sunnylands. And the good news, from my perspective, is, is that in the lead-up to and then finalized during our meetings here today, we have, I think, made significant progress in agreeing to how our law enforcement and investigators are going to work together, how we’re going to exchange information, how we are going to go after individuals or entities who are engaging in cyber-crimes or cyber-attacks. And we have jointly affirmed the principle that governments don't engage in cyber-espionage for commercial gain against companies. That all, I consider to be progress.

What I’ve said to President Xi and what I say to the American people is the question now is, are words followed by actions. And we will be watching carefully to make an assessment as to whether progress has been made in this area.

With respect to the various tools that we have to go after those who are attacking our companies or trying to extract trade secrets or data, we have traditional law enforcement tools, but -- as I indicated a while back -- through executive action, I’ve also instituted the ability to impose sanctions on individuals or entities where we have proof that they’ve gone after U.S. companies or U.S. persons.

And we did not, at our level, have specific discussions of specific cases. But I did indicate to President Xi that we will apply those and whatever other tools we have in our toolkit to go after cyber criminals, either retrospectively or prospectively. Those are tools generally that are not directed at governments; they are directed at entities or individuals that we can identify. And they’re not unique to China. Those are tools that we’re going to be using for cyber criminals around the world.

And President Xi, during these discussions, indicated to me that, with 1.3 billion people, he can't guarantee the behavior of every single person on Chinese soil -- which I completely understand. I can’t guarantee the actions of every single American. What I can guarantee, though, and what I’m hoping President Xi will show me, is that we are not sponsoring these activities, and that when it comes to our attention that non-governmental entities or individuals are engaging in this stuff, that we take it seriously and we’re cooperating to enforce the law.

The last point I’ll make on the cyber issue -- because this is a global problem, and because, unlike some of the other areas of international cooperation, the rules in this area are not well developed, I think it’s going to very important for the United States and China, working with other nations and the United Nations and other -- and the private sector, to start developing an architecture to govern behavior in cyberspace that is enforceable and clear.

It doesn’t mean that we’re going it prevent every cyber-crime, but it does start to serve as a template whereby countries know what the rules are, they’re held accountable, and we’re able to jointly go after non-state actors in this area.

On John Boehner, I just heard the news as I was coming out of the meeting here, so it took me by surprise. And I took the time prior to this press conference to call John directly and talk to him.

John Boehner is a good man. He is a patriot. He cares deeply about the House, an institution in which he served for a long time. He cares about his constituents, and he cares about America. We have obviously had a lot of disagreements, and politically we’re at different ends of the spectrum. But I will tell you, he has always conducted himself with courtesy and civility with me. He has kept his word when he made a commitment. He is somebody who has been gracious.

And I think maybe most importantly, he’s somebody who understands that in government, in governance, you don't get 100 percent of what you want, but you have to work with people who you disagree with -- sometimes strongly -- in order to do the people’s business.

I’m not going to prejudge who the next Speaker will be. That's something that will have to be worked through in the House. And I will certainly reach out immediately to whoever is the new Speaker to see what his or her ideas are, and how we can make progress in the important issues that America faces.

The one thing I will say is that my hope is there’s a recognition on the part of the next Speaker -- something I think John understood, even though at times it was challenging to bring his caucus along -- that we can have significant differences on issues, but that doesn't mean you shut down the government. That doesn't mean you risk the full faith and credit of the United States. You don't invite potential financial crises. You build roads and pass transportation bills. And you do the basic work of governance that ensures that our military is operating and that our national parks are open and that our kids are learning.

And there’s no weakness in that. That's what government is in our democracy. You don't get what you want 100 percent of the time. And so sometimes you take half a loaf; sometimes you take a quarter loaf. And that's certainly something that I’ve learned here in this office.

So I’m looking forward to working with the next Speaker. In the meantime, John is not going to leave for another 30 days, so hopefully he feels like getting as much stuff done as he possibly can. And I’ll certainly be looking forward to working with him on that.

President Xi: [As interpreted.] Madam reporter has raised the cybersecurity issue. Indeed, at current, for the international community and for China and the United States, this is an issue all attach great importance to. With President Obama and I have on many occasions -- and this is a long history -- have exchange of views on this. I think it’s fair to say we’ve reached a lot of consensus on cybersecurity, including some new consensus.

Overall, the United States is the strongest country in terms of cyber strength. China is the world’s biggest cyber country in terms of the number of Web users. We have more than 600 million of netizens. Our two sides should cooperate because cooperation will benefit both, and confrontation will lead to losses on both sides. We are entirely able to carry out government department and expert levels of dialogue and exchanges to strengthen our cooperation in many respects and turn the cybersecurity between the two countries into a new growth source, rather than a point of confrontation between the two sides.

China strongly opposes and combats the theft of commercial secrets and other kinds of hacking attacks. The U.S. side, if has concerns in this respect, we can, through the exiting channels, express those concerns. The Chinese side will take seriously the U.S. provision of any information. Now, we have already, and in the future, we will still, through the law enforcement authorities, maintain communication and coordination on this matter, and appropriately address them.

So, all in all, we have broad, common interest in the field of the cyber. But we need to strengthen cooperation and avoid leading to confrontation. And nor should we politicize this issue. During my current visit, I think it’s fair to say that the two sides, concerning combating cyber-crimes, have reached a lot of consensus. Going forward, we need to, at an early date, reach further agreement on them and further put them on the ground.

Thank you.

Now I would like to propose for China’s Central Television reporter to raise a question.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President Xi. I have a question for President Obama. I have noticed that last night, during a meeting with President Xi Jinping, as well as at the welcoming ceremony this morning and the just-recently-made remarks, you’ve indicated that the U.S. welcomes the rise of a peaceful, stable, and prosperous China, and supports China to play a bigger role on the international stage. Would you please elaborate? That for your office so far, what have you done to enable reaching this target? And we are more interested for the remainder of the office, what will you do still further to reach that goal? Thank you.

President Obama: Well, first of all, I think that the United States has provided a platform in the post-World War II era in which the Asia region has been able to stabilize, and the conditions in which China was able to grow so rapidly were maintained. And we’re very proud of the work that we did after World War II to help rebuild both Asia and Europe; to help establish the international norms and rules that facilitated growing global trade and connections and travel and interactions; and to help maintain the peace.

Since I’ve been President, my goal has been to consistently engage with China in a way that is constructive, to manage our differences and to maximize opportunities for cooperation. And I’ve repeatedly said that I believe it is in the interests of the United States to see China grow, to pull people out of poverty, to expand its markets, because a successful and stable and peaceful China can then serve as an effective partner with us on a range of international challenges.

Last night, during our discussions, I mentioned to President Xi that as powerful as the United States is, the nature of the biggest challenges we face -- things like climate change, or terrorism, or pandemic, or refugees -- those are not issues that any one nation alone can solve. And we recognize, because of our strength and the size of our economy and the excellence of our military, that we can play a special role and carry a larger burden, but we can’t do it alone. China, despite its size, still has development challenges of its own, so it can’t solve these problems alone. We’ve got to work together. We’ve got to cooperate.

And I think that can happen as long as we continue to recognize that there’s a difference between friendly competition -- which we have with some of our closest friends and allies like Great Britain or Germany -- and competition that tilts the playing field unfairly in one direction or another. That’s typically where tensions between our countries arise, is our desire to uphold international norms and rules -- even as we recognize that we need to update some of these international institutions to reflect China’s growth and strength and power.

So President Xi mentioned IMF reform, quota reform. That’s an area where we fully support and want to implement a greater voice and vote for China in that institution, reflective of its strength. The same will be true when we go up to the United Nations on peacekeeping initiatives. China is able to project its capabilities in a way that can be extremely helpful in reducing conflict.

And in all of those issues, as well as education, science, technology, we think that the opportunities for cooperation are there as long as there’s reciprocity, transparency, and fairness in the relationship.

And what I have said in the past to President Xi is, is that given China’s size, we recognize there’s still a lot of development to be done and a lot of poverty inside of China, but we can't treat China as if it’s still a very poor, developing country, as it might have been 50 years ago. It is now a powerhouse. And that means it’s got responsibilities and expectations in terms of helping to uphold international rules that might not have existed before.

And that is something China should welcome. That's part of the deal of being on the world stage when you're a big country, is you've got more to do. My gray hair testifies to that.

Julie Davis.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. I know you said you didn't want to prejudge the next Speaker. But I wonder if you could tell us what Speaker Boehner’s resignation today tells you about the Republican Party and your ability to work with Congress in the remainder of your term, particularly since it’s coming at a time when you're trying to negotiate to avert a government shutdown. Does this make that easier or harder? And do you think that you’ll be able to move forward with the Congress on priorities like the budget, Planned Parenthood, immigration that you weren’t able to address with Speaker Boehner in his position?

And for President Xi, you've experienced an economic downturn in your country with the stock market crisis. And investors, globally, have been concerned about some of the actions you've taken to intervene in the stock market and with the currency exchange rate. I wonder if you could stay what you told President Obama, or what you can say today, to restore confidence that these interventions will not have spillover effects into the global economy in the future. Thank you.

President Obama: Well, Julie, I meant what I said. I’m not going to prejudge how I’ll be able to work with the next Speaker because I don't know who the next Speaker is. And I suspect that there’s going to be a lot of debate inside the Republican caucus about who they want to lead them and in what direction.

It’s not as if there’s been a multitude of areas where the House Republican caucus has sought cooperation previously, so I don't necessarily think that there’s going to be a big shift. I do think that Speaker Boehner sometimes had a tough position because there were members in his caucus who saw compromise of any sort as weakness or betrayal. And when you have divided government, when you have a democracy, compromise is necessary. And I think Speaker Boehner sometimes had difficulty persuading members of his caucus of that.

Hopefully they’ve learned some lessons from 2011, the last time that they sought to introduce a non-budget item into the budget discussions. At that it was Obamacare, and they were going to shut down the government for that purpose. It ended up really hurting the economy, slowing it down, and caused a lot of hardship and a lot of problems for a lot of people.

Because it turns out, actually, government provides a lot of vital services. Our military provides us protection. Our agencies keep our air clean and our water clean. And our people every single day are helping to respond to emergencies, and helping families get Social Security checks, and helping them deal with an ailing parent. And when you insist that unless I get my way on this one particular issue I’m going to shut down all those services -- and, by the way, leave a whole lot of really hardworking people without paychecks -- that doesn’t just hurt the economy; that hurts -- in the abstract, it hurts particular families.

And as I recall, it wasn’t particularly good for the reputation of the Republican Party either.

So, hopefully, some lessons will be drawn there. I expect we’ll continue to have significant fights around issues like Planned Parenthood, and significant fights around issues like immigration. But perhaps the visit by the Holy Father to Congress may have changed hearts and minds.

I know that Speaker Boehner was deeply moved by his encounter with Pope Francis. I want to congratulate him, by the way, on facilitating that historic visit. I know it meant a lot to John and his family.

And I would just ask members to really reflect on what His Holiness said -- not in the particulars, but in the general proposition that we should be open to each other, we should not demonize each other, we should not assume that we have a monopoly on the truth or on what’s right, that we listen to each other and show each other respect, and that we show regard for the most vulnerable in our society.

It’s not a particularly political message, but I think it’s a good one -- at a moment when, in our politics, so often the only way you get on the news is if you’re really rude or you say really obnoxious things about people, or you insist that other people’s points of views are demonic and evil, and leave no room at all for the possibilities of compromise.

I’d like to think that that spirit will continue to permeate Washington for some time to come. And I know that, in his heart, that’s who John Boehner was. It was sometimes hard to execute. But as I said, he is a good man and a reasonable man. And he’s going to be around for a while, and I hope that we can get some things done before he steps down.

President Xi: [As interpreted.] Thank you, madam reporter, for your interest in China’s economy. China is now committed to improving the marketized renminbi exchange rate formation regime. Since 2005, we adopted the exchange rate reform. By June this year, the renminbi has risen in value by more than 35 percent with the U.S. dollar. Last month -- in fact, we are continuing to make reforms to the renminbi exchange rate central parity quotation regime. That increased the intensity for the markets to determine the exchange rate of renminbi.

Due to the influence of factors, such as the previous strengthening of the U.S. dollar and somewhat turbulence on the financial market, the renminbi exchange rate after reform has experienced a certain degree of fluctuation. However, there is no basis for the renminbi to have a devaluation in the long run. At present, the exchange rate between renminbi and U.S. dollars is moving toward stability. Going forward, China will further improve the marketization and formation regime of renminbi exchange rate, maintain the normal fluctuation of the exchange rate, and maintain the basic stability of renminbi at an adaptive and equilibrium level.

At present, China is also under increasing pressure of economic downturn and some fluctuations on the stock market. Challenges and difficulties have obviously increased. But what we are taking is proactive fiscal policy and prudent monetary policy. And we describe them as measures to stabilize growth, promote reform, restructuring, promote people’s livelihood, and fend off risks.

By comprehensively taking measures, we managed to maintain a 7 percent of growth rate in the first half of this year. Last year, we achieved a 7.3 percent of growth rate. And compared with the aggregate economic strength, the increase -- the absolute increase of the economy is equivalent to the size of a middle-sized economy.

So for the first half of this year, our growth order is 7 percent, and for the whole year, I think it is expected at the same level. The Chinese economy maintaining a mid-to-high growth of rate. This is a fundamental that has not changed, because we are equipped with several conditions.

First of all, our people’s income are still at a middle income period. When countries are developing, this is a period where there will be further development. At present, our per capita GDP only stands at $700-$800 U.S. dollars, and that is very much behind the United States. There is big room for ascendancy and for increase. And we are now doing what we call as the full reforms or the full processes, which is in formatization -- a new type of industrialization, urbanization, and the agricultural modernization.

Take the urbanization as an example. Every year, it will increase by 2 percent. Now our urbanization ratio is 53 percent, and it is expected to grow by 2 percent. And that is equivalent to something like 10 million people moving from rural areas to the urban areas. At the same time, we’re also should not let the rural areas be backward. We need to develop the rural areas. Through the Internet Plus and other policies our industrialization and our urbanization will have a frog-leap development.

Now, the Chinese economy -- turning to a slower growth rate and turning it from a speed-based growth to quality-based growth, and we are moving from an export-driven and investment-driven economy into an economy driven by expanded consumption and domestic demand. We call this as a new normal of the Chinese economy. And I’m confident that going forward, China will surely, for all of us, for everybody, provide a healthy growth that strengthens confidence.

Thank you. And now I would like to remind reporter from the People’s Daily of China to raise questions.

Question: Thank you, President Xi. I have a question -- to seek guidance. Now, some people in America believe that China’s growth might challenge the U.S. leading position in the world. My question for President Xi is, what is your view on the current United States and what is China’s U.S. policy? Thank you.

President Xi: [As interpreted.] Thank you. In my view, the U.S. in economic, in military, has remarkable strength. And other countries in the world are also developing. Still, the U.S. has un-compared advantages and strengths.

The Cold War has long ended. Today’s world has entered into an era of economic globalization where countries are interdependent upon each other. People should move ahead with the times, and give up on the old concepts of “you lose, I win” or “zero-sum game,” and establish a new concept of peaceful development and willing cooperation.

If China develops well, it will benefit the whole world and benefit the United States. If the U.S. develops well, it will also benefit the world and China.

China’s policy towards the U.S. is consistent and transparent. As the world’s biggest developing country and biggest developed countries, and as the world’s two biggest economies, our two sides have broad and common interests on world peace and human progress, and shoulder important and common responsibilities, although our two sides also have certain differences. But the common interests of the two countries far outweigh those differences.

It is also my sincere hope that the two sides of China and the U.S. will proceed from the fundamental interests of the two peoples and world people, make joint efforts to build a new model of major-country relations between two countries, and realize non-conflict, non-confrontation, mutual respect and cooperation.

That should serve as a direction where both sides should strive unswervingly. China is the current international system’s builder, contributor, and developer, and participant, and also beneficiary. We are willing to work with all other countries to firmly defend the fruits of victory of the Second World War, and the existing international system, centered on the -- and at the same time, promote them to developing a more just and equitable direction.

China has raised the One Belt One Road initiative and proposed to establish the AIIB, et cetera. And all of their aims are to expand mutual and beneficial cooperation with other countries and realize common development. These initiatives are open, transparent, inclusive. They are consistent in serving the interests of the U.S. and other countries’ interest. And we will come -- the U.S. and other parties -- to actively participate in them.

Thank you.

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# Address at the Military Retirement Ceremony for Gen. Martin Dempsey

Forty-five years ago -- in June of 1970 -- a telegram arrived in upstate New York at the home of 18-year-old Marty Dempsey. “Congratulations,” it read, “You are appointed to the West Point Class of 1974…” Marty was honored. But he had just finished high school, and he wasn’t entirely sure he wanted to head off to the Academy. His mother, I’m told, thought different. She urged him to “give it a try for the summer” -- which sounds like Beast Barracks meets sleep-away camp. Sound advice, with a little Irish charm, runs in the Dempsey family.

Over the decades that followed, he patrolled the Iron Curtain, commanded divisions on desert battlefields, and led America’s soldiers -- and more than a few times, he burst into song. And over these last four years, Marty’s wisdom, his vision, and his character have helped lead the greatest fighting force the world has ever known.

Secretary Carter, Deputy Secretary Work, members of Congress and the Joint Chiefs, service secretaries, men and women of the Defense Department, our armed forces and our military families -- it is a deep honor to join you as we pay tribute to a singular leader for our military and our nation, and one of the finest men that I know -- General Martin Dempsey.

A little over four years ago, I tapped Marty to serve as Chief of Staff of the Army. We let him enjoy it -- for one day. Then, I asked him to be Chairman. So let me just say, Marty, and more importantly, Deanie, this time I promise, no surprises tomorrow.

I chose Marty for these leadership roles because of his moral fiber and his deep commitment to American strength and values. I chose him because of his vision for our military as a more versatile and responsive force. I chose him because he had the steady hand we needed in this moment of transition -- as we tackle emerging threats and support so many of our troops as they transition to civilian life. And I’ve seen Marty manage each of these challenges with integrity and foresight and care. But perhaps most of all, I chose Marty because he’s a leader you can trust.

Marty, you’ve always given it to me straight. I can't tell you how much I've appreciated your candor and your counsel. And I’ve seen you build that trust not just with me, but across our military, with our troops and their families, with Congress and our allies abroad, and with the American people.

Today, thanks in no small measure to Marty’s leadership, America has reassured allies from Europe to the Asia Pacific. We ended our combat mission in Afghanistan and brought America’s longest war to a responsible end. We’ve forged new partnerships from South Asia to the Sahel to meet terrorist threats. We’ve built a coalition that is combating ISIL in Iraq and Syria. We have bolstered our cyber defenses. We helped halt the spread of Ebola in West Africa.

None of this would have been possible without Marty’s guidance and leadership. And what makes it more remarkable is that he’s guided our forces through a time of reckless budget cuts. With less than a week before Congress needs to pass a budget to keep the government open, let me just say now is not the time for games that lock in sequester. It’s not good for our military readiness. It’s not good for our troops. It's not good for our family. And it's not good for our country. As Commander in Chief, I believe we should invest in America and in our national security, and not shortchange it.

Yet, even in these tough fiscal times, Marty has made sure we maintain our military superiority. And no one can match our services because no one can match our service members -- our sons and daughters who he’s cared for like his own. In them, he sees the West Point classmates of his youth. He sees those he commanded. He sees their families -- and, in them, he sees his own.

There’s Deanie, of course, Marty’s high school sweetheart, lifelong better half, whose grace and resilience and good cheer embodies the military spouses she fights so fiercely for. Chris, Megan, and Caitlin -- who followed in their father’s footsteps to wear our nation’s cloth. Marty’s mother, Sarah, who we thank for making him give the military a try “for the summer.” And there are his nine grandchildren, who we can be confident will mark this nation in so many positive ways in the future. On behalf of the American people, I want to thank the entire Dempsey family for their service to our nation.

Marty will be the first to tell you that he couldn’t have done his job without his outstanding Vice Chair. And I, too, have depended on the advice and experience of Admiral Sandy Winnefeld. Thank you, Sandy, for your outstanding service.

In General Joe Dunford and General Paul Selva -- two of the most respected officers in our military -- we have tested leaders ready to carry on Marty and Sandy’s work. I could not be prouder of them and the service they’ve already rendered this great nation. And I could not be more confident in the advice and counsel that they’ll provide me. Thank you to them. Thank you, Ellyn. Thank you so much for everything that you’ve done.

Now, we're going to have a lot of work to do long after not just Marty is gone, but I'm gone from the stage. There are always new threats, there are always new challenges in this ever-changing world. We have to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL, the remnants of al Qaeda, terror networks around the world. We have to adapt our defenses for the 21st century. We have to give our troops the support they need to meet their missions. We have to make sure that our forces and our families receive the pay and the benefits and the quality of life that they have earned. That is how we maintain a military that is second to none. And I am confident that we are up to the task.

I’m told that on Marty’s desk there’s a box -- it’s a cigar box with 132 cards, each one with the name, picture and story of every one of the 132 soldiers who gave their lives under his command in Iraq. And on top of the box are three words: “Make It Matter.” Make it matter. And every morning, Marty places three of those cards in his pocket, so that every moment as Chairman -- every meeting, every trip, every decision, every troop review -- every moment of every day some of those fallen heroes are with him.

Those cards were with him a few years back when, for the first time as Chairman, Marty spoke to a group of military children who had lost a parent. And that day, as he walked through the crowd -- some 600 Gold Star kids, young, so full of hope -- he began to think about their lives and how each of them would have to make their way without a father or a mother. And Marty had planned to speak -- but he couldn’t. So he did one of the things that he does best. He began to sing.

And in that moment, the highest-ranking military leader in our nation forged a bond with those children -- boys and girls who, at such a tender age, had given up so much -- in a way that perhaps nobody else could. And year after year, they’ve invited him back, because they know Marty Dempsey will always give them everything he has -- his voice, but even more, his full heart and soul.

This is the man we honor today. A friend to so many troops and families across our military. A patriot with a profound love for our country and those who sacrifice for it. A trusted leader who in a time of great change “made it matter” all the time.

I am extraordinarily grateful to have had him by my side through the bulk of my presidency, and I am extraordinarily proud to call him my friend.

Marty, for your lifetime of extraordinary service, you have the deepest thanks of a grateful nation. God bless you. And God bless our men and women in uniform.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# 70th Session of the United Nations General Assembly Address

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary General, fellow delegates, ladies and gentlemen: Seventy years after the founding of the United Nations, it is worth reflecting on what, together, the members of this body have helped to achieve.

Out of the ashes of the Second World War, having witnessed the unthinkable power of the atomic age, the United States has worked with many nations in this Assembly to prevent a third world war -- by forging alliances with old adversaries; by supporting the steady emergence of strong democracies accountable to their people instead of any foreign power; and by building an international system that imposes a cost on those who choose conflict over cooperation, an order that recognizes the dignity and equal worth of all people.

That is the work of seven decades. That is the ideal that this body, at its best, has pursued. Of course, there have been too many times when, collectively, we have fallen short of these ideals. Over seven decades, terrible conflicts have claimed untold victims. But we have pressed forward, slowly, steadily, to make a system of international rules and norms that are better and stronger and more consistent.

It is this international order that has underwritten unparalleled advances in human liberty and prosperity. It is this collective endeavor that’s brought about diplomatic cooperation between the world’s major powers, and buttressed a global economy that has lifted more than a billion people from poverty. It is these international principles that helped constrain bigger countries from imposing our will on smaller ones, and advanced the emergence of democracy and development and individual liberty on every continent.

This progress is real. It can be documented in lives saved, and agreements forged, and diseases conquered, and in mouths fed. And yet, we come together today knowing that the march of human progress never travels in a straight line, that our work is far from complete; that dangerous currents risk pulling us back into a darker, more disordered world.

Today, we see the collapse of strongmen and fragile states breeding conflict, and driving innocent men, women and children across borders on an \*epoch epic scale. Brutal networks of terror have stepped into the vacuum. Technologies that empower individuals are now also exploited by those who spread disinformation, or suppress dissent, or radicalize our youth. Global capital flows have powered growth and investment, but also increased risk of contagion, weakened the bargaining power of workers, and accelerated inequality.

How should we respond to these trends? There are those who argue that the ideals enshrined in the U.N. charter are unachievable or out of date -- a legacy of a postwar era not suited to our own. Effectively, they argue for a return to the rules that applied for most of human history and that pre-date this institution: the belief that power is a zero-sum game; that might makes right; that strong states must impose their will on weaker ones; that the rights of individuals don’t matter; and that in a time of rapid change, order must be imposed by force.

On this basis, we see some major powers assert themselves in ways that contravene international law. We see an erosion of the democratic principles and human rights that are fundamental to this institution’s mission; information is strictly controlled, the space for civil society restricted. We’re told that such retrenchment is required to beat back disorder; that it’s the only way to stamp out terrorism, or prevent foreign meddling. In accordance with this logic, we should support tyrants like Bashar al-Assad, who drops barrel bombs to massacre innocent children, because the alternative is surely worse.

The increasing skepticism of our international order can also be found in the most advanced democracies. We see greater polarization, more frequent gridlock; movements on the far right, and sometimes the left, that insist on stopping the trade that binds our fates to other nations, calling for the building of walls to keep out immigrants. Most ominously, we see the fears of ordinary people being exploited through appeals to sectarianism, or tribalism, or racism, or anti-Semitism; appeals to a glorious past before the body politic was infected by those who look different, or worship God differently; a politics of us versus them.

The United States is not immune from this. Even as our economy is growing and our troops have largely returned from Iraq and Afghanistan, we see in our debates about America’s role in the world a notion of strength that is defined by opposition to old enemies, perceived adversaries, a rising China, or a resurgent Russia; a revolutionary Iran, or an Islam that is incompatible with peace. We see an argument made that the only strength that matters for the United States is bellicose words and shows of military force; that cooperation and diplomacy will not work.

As President of the United States, I am mindful of the dangers that we face; they cross my desk every morning. I lead the strongest military that the world has ever known, and I will never hesitate to protect my country or our allies, unilaterally and by force where necessary.

But I stand before you today believing in my core that we, the nations of the world, cannot return to the old ways of conflict and coercion. We cannot look backwards. We live in an integrated world -- one in which we all have a stake in each other’s success. We cannot turn those forces of integration. No nation in this Assembly can insulate itself from the threat of terrorism, or the risk of financial contagion; the flow of migrants, or the danger of a warming planet. The disorder we see is not driven solely by competition between nations or any single ideology. And if we cannot work together more effectively, we will all suffer the consequences. That is true for the United States, as well.

No matter how powerful our military, how strong our economy, we understand the United States cannot solve the world’s problems alone. In Iraq, the United States learned the hard lesson that even hundreds of thousands of brave, effective troops, trillions of dollars from our Treasury, cannot by itself impose stability on a foreign land. Unless we work with other nations under the mantle of international norms and principles and law that offer legitimacy to our efforts, we will not succeed. And unless we work together to defeat the ideas that drive different communities in a country like Iraq into conflict, any order that our militaries can impose will be temporary.

Just as force alone cannot impose order internationally, I believe in my core that repression cannot forge the social cohesion for nations to succeed. The history of the last two decades proves that in today’s world, dictatorships are unstable. The strongmen of today become the spark of revolution tomorrow. You can jail your opponents, but you can’t imprison ideas. You can try to control access to information, but you cannot turn a lie into truth. It is not a conspiracy of U.S.-backed NGOs that expose corruption and raise the expectations of people around the globe; it’s technology, social media, and the irreducible desire of people everywhere to make their own choices about how they are governed.

Indeed, I believe that in today’s world, the measure of strength is no longer defined by the control of territory. Lasting prosperity does not come solely from the ability to access and extract raw materials. The strength of nations depends on the success of their people -- their knowledge, their innovation, their imagination, their creativity, their drive, their opportunity -- and that, in turn, depends upon individual rights and good governance and personal security. Internal repression and foreign aggression are both symptoms of the failure to provide this foundation.

A politics and solidarity that depend on demonizing others, that draws on religious sectarianism or narrow tribalism or jingoism may at times look like strength in the moment, but over time its weakness will be exposed. And history tells us that the dark forces unleashed by this type of politics surely makes all of us less secure. Our world has been there before. We gain nothing from going back.

Instead, I believe that we must go forward in pursuit of our ideals, not abandon them at this critical time. We must give expression to our best hopes, not our deepest fears. This institution was founded because men and women who came before us had the foresight to know that our nations are more secure when we uphold basic laws and basic norms, and pursue a path of cooperation over conflict. And strong nations, above all, have a responsibility to uphold this international order.

Let me give you a concrete example. After I took office, I made clear that one of the principal achievements of this body -- the nuclear non-proliferation regime -- was endangered by Iran’s violation of the NPT. On that basis, the Security Council tightened sanctions on the Iranian government, and many nations joined us to enforce them. Together, we showed that laws and agreements mean something.

But we also understood that the goal of sanctions was not simply to punish Iran. Our objective was to test whether Iran could change course, accept constraints, and allow the world to verify that its nuclear program will be peaceful. For two years, the United States and our partners -- including Russia, including China -- stuck together in complex negotiations. The result is a lasting, comprehensive deal that prevents Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, while allowing it to access peaceful energy. And if this deal is fully implemented, the prohibition on nuclear weapons is strengthened, a potential war is averted, our world is safer. That is the strength of the international system when it works the way it should.

That same fidelity to international order guides our responses to other challenges around the world. Consider Russia’s annexation of Crimea and further aggression in eastern Ukraine. America has few economic interests in Ukraine. We recognize the deep and complex history between Russia and Ukraine. But we cannot stand by when the sovereignty and territorial integrity of a nation is flagrantly violated. If that happens without consequence in Ukraine, it could happen to any nation gathered here today. That’s the basis of the sanctions that the United States and our partners impose on Russia. It's not a desire to return to a Cold War.

Now, within Russia, state-controlled media may describe these events as an example of a resurgent Russia -- a view shared, by the way, by a number of U.S. politicians and commentators who have always been deeply skeptical of Russia, and seem to be convinced a new Cold War is, in fact, upon us. And yet, look at the results. The Ukrainian people are more interested than ever in aligning with Europe instead of Russia. Sanctions have led to capital flight, a contracting economy, a fallen ruble, and the emigration of more educated Russians.

Imagine if, instead, Russia had engaged in true diplomacy, and worked with Ukraine and the international community to ensure its interests were protected. That would be better for Ukraine, but also better for Russia, and better for the world -- which is why we continue to press for this crisis to be resolved in a way that allows a sovereign and democratic Ukraine to determine its future and control its territory. Not because we want to isolate Russia -- we don't -- but because we want a strong Russia that’s invested in working with us to strengthen the international system as a whole.

Similarly, in the South China Sea, the United States makes no claim on territory there. We don't adjudicate claims. But like every nation gathered here, we have an interest in upholding the basic principles of freedom of navigation and the free flow of commerce, and in resolving disputes through international law, not the law of force. So we will defend these principles, while encouraging China and other claimants to resolve their differences peacefully.

I say this, recognizing that diplomacy is hard; that the outcomes are sometimes unsatisfying; that it's rarely politically popular. But I believe that leaders of large nations, in particular, have an obligation to take these risks -- precisely because we are strong enough to protect our interests if, and when, diplomacy fails.

I also believe that to move forward in this new era, we have to be strong enough to acknowledge when what you’re doing is not working. For 50 years, the United States pursued a Cuba policy that failed to improve the lives of the Cuban people. We changed that. We continue to have differences with the Cuban government. We will continue to stand up for human rights. But we address these issues through diplomatic relations, and increased commerce, and people-to-people ties. As these contacts yield progress, I’m confident that our Congress will inevitably lift an embargo that should not be in place anymore. Change won’t come overnight to Cuba, but I’m confident that openness, not coercion, will support the reforms and better the life the Cuban people deserve, just as I believe that Cuba will find its success if it pursues cooperation with other nations.

Now, if it’s in the interest of major powers to uphold international standards, it is even more true for the rest of the community of nations. Look around the world. From Singapore to Colombia to Senegal, the facts shows that nations succeed when they pursue an inclusive peace and prosperity within their borders, and work cooperatively with countries beyond their borders.

That path is now available to a nation like Iran, which, as of this moment, continues to deploy violent proxies to advance its interests. These efforts may appear to give Iran leverage in disputes with neighbors, but they fuel sectarian conflict that endangers the entire region, and isolates Iran from the promise of trade and commerce. The Iranian people have a proud history, and are filled with extraordinary potential. But chanting “Death to America” does not create jobs, or make Iran more secure. If Iran chose a different path, that would be good for the security of the region, good for the Iranian people, and good for the world.

Of course, around the globe, we will continue to be confronted with nations who reject these lessons of history, places where civil strife, border disputes, and sectarian wars bring about terrorist enclaves and humanitarian disasters. Where order has completely broken down, we must act, but we will be stronger when we act together.

In such efforts, the United States will always do our part. We will do so mindful of the lessons of the past -- not just the lessons of Iraq, but also the example of Libya, where we joined an international coalition under a U.N. mandate to prevent a slaughter. Even as we helped the Libyan people bring an end to the reign of a tyrant, our coalition could have and should have done more to fill a vacuum left behind. We’re grateful to the United Nations for its efforts to forge a unity government. We will help any legitimate Libyan government as it works to bring the country together. But we also have to recognize that we must work more effectively in the future, as an international community, to build capacity for states that are in distress, before they collapse.

And that’s why we should celebrate the fact that later today the United States will join with more than 50 countries to enlist new capabilities -- infantry, intelligence, helicopters, hospitals, and tens of thousands of troops -- to strengthen United Nations peacekeeping. These new capabilities can prevent mass killing, and ensure that peace agreements are more than words on paper. But we have to do it together. Together, we must strengthen our collective capacity to establish security where order has broken down, and to support those who seek a just and lasting peace.

Nowhere is our commitment to international order more tested than in Syria. When a dictator slaughters tens of thousands of his own people, that is not just a matter of one nation’s internal affairs -- it breeds human suffering on an order of magnitude that affects us all. Likewise, when a terrorist group beheads captives, slaughters the innocent and enslaves women, that’s not a single nation’s national security problem -- that is an assault on all humanity.

I’ve said before and I will repeat: There is no room for accommodating an apocalyptic cult like ISIL, and the United States makes no apologies for using our military, as part of a broad coalition, to go after them. We do so with a determination to ensure that there will never be a safe haven for terrorists who carry out these crimes. And we have demonstrated over more than a decade of relentless pursuit of al Qaeda, we will not be outlasted by extremists.

But while military power is necessary, it is not sufficient to resolve the situation in Syria. Lasting stability can only take hold when the people of Syria forge an agreement to live together peacefully. The United States is prepared to work with any nation, including Russia and Iran, to resolve the conflict. But we must recognize that there cannot be, after so much bloodshed, so much carnage, a return to the pre-war status quo.

Let’s remember how this started. Assad reacted to peaceful protests by escalating repression and killing that, in turn, created the environment for the current strife. And so Assad and his allies cannot simply pacify the broad majority of a population who have been brutalized by chemical weapons and indiscriminate bombing. Yes, realism dictates that compromise will be required to end the fighting and ultimately stamp out ISIL. But realism also requires a managed transition away from Assad and to a new leader, and an inclusive government that recognizes there must be an end to this chaos so that the Syrian people can begin to rebuild.

We know that ISIL -- which emerged out of the chaos of Iraq and Syria -- depends on perpetual war to survive. But we also know that they gain adherents because of a poisonous ideology. So part of our job, together, is to work to reject such extremism that infects too many of our young people. Part of that effort must be a continued rejection by Muslims of those who distort Islam to preach intolerance and promote violence, and it must also a rejection by non-Muslims of the ignorance that equates Islam with terror.

This work will take time. There are no easy answers to Syria. And there are no simple answers to the changes that are taking place in much of the Middle East and North Africa. But so many families need help right now; they don’t have time. And that’s why the United States is increasing the number of refugees who we welcome within our borders. That’s why we will continue to be the largest donor of assistance to support those refugees. And today we are launching new efforts to ensure that our people and our businesses, our universities and our NGOs can help as well -- because in the faces of suffering families, our nation of immigrants sees ourselves.

Of course, in the old ways of thinking, the plight of the powerless, the plight of refugees, the plight of the marginalized did not matter. They were on the periphery of the world’s concerns. Today, our concern for them is driven not just by conscience, but should also be drive by self-interest. For helping people who have been pushed to the margins of our world is not mere charity, it is a matter of collective security. And the purpose of this institution is not merely to avoid conflict, it is to galvanize the collective action that makes life better on this planet.

The commitments we’ve made to the Sustainable Development Goals speak to this truth. I believe that capitalism has been the greatest creator of wealth and opportunity that the world has ever known. But from big cities to rural villages around the world, we also know that prosperity is still cruelly out of reach for too many. As His Holiness Pope Francis reminds us, we are stronger when we value the least among these, and see them as equal in dignity to ourselves and our sons and our daughters.

We can roll back preventable disease and end the scourge of HIV/AIDS. We can stamp out pandemics that recognize no borders. That work may not be on television right now, but as we demonstrated in reversing the spread of Ebola, it can save more lives than anything else we can do.

Together, we can eradicate extreme poverty and erase barriers to opportunity. But this requires a sustained commitment to our people -- so farmers can feed more people; so entrepreneurs can start a business without paying a bribe; so young people have the skills they need to succeed in this modern, knowledge-based economy.

We can promote growth through trade that meets a higher standard. And that’s what we’re doing through the Trans-Pacific Partnership -- a trade agreement that encompasses nearly 40 percent of the global economy; an agreement that will open markets, while protecting the rights of workers and protecting the environment that enables development to be sustained.

We can roll back the pollution that we put in our skies, and help economies lift people out of poverty without condemning our children to the ravages of an ever-warming climate. The same ingenuity that produced the Industrial Age and the Computer Age allows us to harness the potential of clean energy. No country can escape the ravages of climate change. And there is no stronger sign of leadership than putting future generations first. The United States will work with every nation that is willing to do its part so that we can come together in Paris to decisively confront this challenge.

And finally, our vision for the future of this Assembly, my belief in moving forward rather than backwards, requires us to defend the democratic principles that allow societies to succeed. Let me start from a simple premise: Catastrophes, like what we are seeing in Syria, do not take place in countries where there is genuine democracy and respect for the universal values this institution is supposed to defend.

I recognize that democracy is going to take different forms in different parts of the world. The very idea of a people governing themselves depends upon government giving expression to their unique culture, their unique history, their unique experiences. But some universal truths are self-evident. No person wants to be imprisoned for peaceful worship. No woman should ever be abused with impunity, or a girl barred from going to school. The freedom to peacefully petition those in power without fear of arbitrary laws -- these are not ideas of one country or one culture. They are fundamental to human progress. They are a cornerstone of this institution.

I realize that in many parts of the world there is a different view -- a belief that strong leadership must tolerate no dissent. I hear it not only from America’s adversaries, but privately at least I also hear it from some of our friends. I disagree. I believe a government that suppresses peaceful dissent is not showing strength; it is showing weakness and it is showing fear. History shows that regimes who fear their own people will eventually crumble, but strong institutions built on the consent of the governed endure long after any one individual is gone.

That's why our strongest leaders -- from George Washington to Nelson Mandela -- have elevated the importance of building strong, democratic institutions over a thirst for perpetual power. Leaders who amend constitutions to stay in office only acknowledge that they failed to build a successful country for their people -- because none of us last forever. It tells us that power is something they cling to for its own sake, rather than for the betterment of those they purport to serve.

I understand democracy is frustrating. Democracy in the United States is certainly imperfect. At times, it can even be dysfunctional. But democracy -- the constant struggle to extend rights to more of our people, to give more people a voice -- is what allowed us to become the most powerful nation in the world.

It's not simply a matter of principle; it's not an abstraction. Democracy -- inclusive democracy -- makes countries stronger. When opposition parties can seek power peacefully through the ballot, a country draws upon new ideas. When a free media can inform the public, corruption and abuse are exposed and can be rooted out. When civil society thrives, communities can solve problems that governments cannot necessarily solve alone. When immigrants are welcomed, countries are more productive and more vibrant. When girls can go to school, and get a job, and pursue unlimited opportunity, that’s when a country realizes its full potential.

That is what I believe is America’s greatest strength. Not everybody in America agrees with me. That's part of democracy. I believe that the fact that you can walk the streets of this city right now and pass churches and synagogues and temples and mosques, where people worship freely; the fact that our nation of immigrants mirrors the diversity of the world -- you can find everybody from everywhere here in New York City -- the fact that, in this country, everybody can contribute, everybody can participate no matter who they are, or what they look like, or who they love -- that's what makes us strong.

And I believe that what is true for America is true for virtually all mature democracies. And that is no accident. We can be proud of our nations without defining ourselves in opposition to some other group. We can be patriotic without demonizing someone else. We can cherish our own identities -- our religion, our ethnicity, our traditions -- without putting others down. Our systems are premised on the notion that absolute power will corrupt, but that people -- ordinary people -- are fundamentally good; that they value family and friendship, faith and the dignity of hard work; and that with appropriate checks and balances, governments can reflect this goodness.

I believe that’s the future we must seek together. To believe in the dignity of every individual, to believe we can bridge our differences, and choose cooperation over conflict -- that is not weakness, that is strength. It is a practical necessity in this interconnected world.

And our people understand this. Think of the Liberian doctor who went door-to-door to search for Ebola cases, and to tell families what to do if they show symptoms. Think of the Iranian shopkeeper who said, after the nuclear deal, “God willing, now we’ll be able to offer many more goods at better prices.” Think of the Americans who lowered the flag over our embassy in Havana in 1961 -- the year I was born -- and returned this summer to raise that flag back up. One of these men said of the Cuban people, “We could do things for them, and they could do things for us. We loved them.” For 50 years, we ignored that fact.

Think of the families leaving everything they’ve known behind, risking barren deserts and stormy waters just to find shelter; just to save their children. One Syrian refugee who was greeted in Hamburg with warm greetings and shelter, said, “We feel there are still some people who love other people.”

The people of our United Nations are not as different as they are told. They can be made to fear; they can be taught to hate -- but they can also respond to hope. History is littered with the failure of false prophets and fallen empires who believed that might always makes right, and that will continue to be the case. You can count on that. But we are called upon to offer a different type of leadership -- leadership strong enough to recognize that nations share common interests and people share a common humanity, and, yes, there are certain ideas and principles that are universal.

That's what those who shaped the United Nations 70 years ago understood. Let us carry forward that faith into the future -- for it is the only way we can assure that future will be brighter for my children, and for yours.

Thank you very much.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Statement on Umpqua Community College Mass Shooting

There’s been another mass shooting in America -- this time, in a community college in Oregon.

That means there are more American families -- moms, dads, children -- whose lives have been changed forever. That means there’s another community stunned with grief, and communities across the country forced to relieve their own anguish, and parents across the country who are scared because they know it might have been their families or their children.

I’ve been to Roseburg, Oregon. There are really good people there. I want to thank all the first responders whose bravery likely saved some lives today. Federal law enforcement has been on the scene in a supporting role, and we’ve offered to stay and help as much as Roseburg needs, for as long as they need.

In the coming days, we’ll learn about the victims -- young men and women who were studying and learning and working hard, their eyes set on the future, their dreams on what they could make of their lives. And America will wrap everyone who’s grieving with our prayers and our love.

But as I said just a few months ago,

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and I said a few months before that,

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and I said each time we see one of these mass shootings, our thoughts and prayers are not enough. It’s not enough. It does not capture the heartache and grief and anger that we should feel. And it does nothing to prevent this carnage from being inflicted someplace else in America -- next week, or a couple of months from now.

We don't yet know why this individual did what he did. And it's fair to say that anybody who does this has a sickness in their minds, regardless of what they think their motivations may be. But we are not the only country on Earth that has people with mental illnesses or want to do harm to other people. We are the only advanced country on Earth that sees these kinds of mass shootings every few months.

Earlier this year, I answered a question in an interview by saying, “The United States of America is the one advanced nation on Earth in which we do not have sufficient common-sense gun-safety laws -- even in the face of repeated mass killings.”

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And later that day, there was a mass shooting at a movie theater in Lafayette, Louisiana. That day! Somehow this has become routine. The reporting is routine. My response here at this podium ends up being routine. The conversation in the aftermath of it. We've become numb to this.

We talked about this after Columbine and Blacksburg, after Tucson, after Newtown, after Aurora, after Charleston. It cannot be this easy for somebody who wants to inflict harm on other people to get his or her hands on a gun.

And what’s become routine, of course, is the response of those who oppose any kind of common-sense gun legislation. Right now, I can imagine the press releases being cranked out: We need more guns, they’ll argue. Fewer gun safety laws.

Does anybody really believe that? There are scores of responsible gun owners in this country -- they know that's not true. We know because of the polling that says the majority of Americans understand we should be changing these laws -- including the majority of responsible, law-abiding gun owners.

There is a gun for roughly every man, woman, and child in America. So how can you, with a straight face, make the argument that more guns will make us safer? We know that states with the most gun laws tend to have the fewest gun deaths. So the notion that gun laws don't work, or just will make it harder for law-abiding citizens and criminals will still get their guns is not borne out by the evidence.

We know that other countries, in response to one mass shooting, have been able to craft laws that almost eliminate mass shootings. Friends of ours, allies of ours -- Great Britain, Australia, countries like ours. So we know there are ways to prevent it.

And, of course, what’s also routine is that somebody, somewhere will comment and say, Obama politicized this issue. Well, this is something we should politicize. It is relevant to our common life together, to the body politic. I would ask news organizations -- because I won't put these facts forward -- have news organizations tally up the number of Americans who’ve been killed through terrorist attacks over the last decade and the number of Americans who’ve been killed by gun violence, and post those side-by-side on your news reports. This won't be information coming from me; it will be coming from you. We spend over a trillion dollars, and pass countless laws, and devote entire agencies to preventing terrorist attacks on our soil, and rightfully so. And yet, we have a Congress that explicitly blocks us from even collecting data on how we could potentially reduce gun deaths. How can that be?

This is a political choice that we make to allow this to happen every few months in America. We collectively are answerable to those families who lose their loved ones because of our inaction. When Americans are killed in mine disasters, we work to make mines safer. When Americans are killed in floods and hurricanes, we make communities safer. When roads are unsafe, we fix them to reduce auto fatalities. We have seatbelt laws because we know it saves lives. So the notion that gun violence is somehow different, that our freedom and our Constitution prohibits any modest regulation of how we use a deadly weapon, when there are law-abiding gun owners all across the country who could hunt and protect their families and do everything they do under such regulations doesn’t make sense.

So, tonight, as those of us who are lucky enough to hug our kids a little closer are thinking about the families who aren't so fortunate, I’d ask the American people to think about how they can get our government to change these laws, and to save lives, and to let young people grow up. And that will require a change of politics on this issue. And it will require that the American people, individually, whether you are a Democrat or a Republican or an independent, when you decide to vote for somebody, are making a determination as to whether this cause of continuing death for innocent people should be a relevant factor in your decision. If you think this is a problem, then you should expect your elected officials to reflect your views.

And I would particularly ask America’s gun owners -- who are using those guns properly, safely, to hunt, for sport, for protecting their families -- to think about whether your views are properly being represented by the organization that suggests it's speaking for you.

And each time this happens I'm going to bring this up. Each time this happens I am going to say that we can actually do something about it, but we're going to have to change our laws. And this is not something I can do by myself. I've got to have a Congress and I've got to have state legislatures and governors who are willing to work with me on this.

I hope and pray that I don't have to come out again during my tenure as President to offer my condolences to families in these circumstances. But based on my experience as President, I can't guarantee that. And that's terrible to say.

And it can change.

May God bless the memories of those who were killed today. May He bring comfort to their families, and courage to the injured as they fight their way back. And may He give us the strength to come together and find the courage to change.

Thank you.

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# Press Conference on Outgoing and Incoming Education Secretary, The Economy, Congress, Syria, Putin, Gun Control, and Pope Francis

President Obama: Please be seated, everybody. Good afternoon.

Arne Duncan is one of my longest-serving Cabinet Secretaries, and he’s been a friend for a lot longer than that. So it’s with some regret and sorrow that I’ve accepted his decision to return to our hometown of Chicago. After more than six years of living in Washington, Arne’s wonderful wife, Karen, and their excellent kids, Claire and Ryan -- who are also buddies of mine -- wanted to move back home. And that’s meant in the interim a lot of time apart.

So I’ll be honest -- I pushed Arne to stay. Sorry, guys. But I also know from personal experience how hard it is to be away from your family on a sustained basis. So while I will miss Arne deeply, he’s more than earned the right to return home.

Take a look at what Arne has accomplished over the last six and a half years. He’s one of the longest-serving Secretaries of Education in our history -- and one of the more consequential. In just a few years, Arne and his team have delivered some incredible results at every stage of the educational experience. More than 30 states have upped their investment in early childhood education. Nearly every state in America has raised standards for teaching and learning, and expectations for what our kids can learn, and our high school graduation rate is at an all-time high. We’ve helped millions more families afford college, and more Americans are graduating from college than ever before. And that’s just scratching the surface.

Arne has done more to bring our educational system -- sometimes kicking and screaming -- into the 21st century than anybody else. America is going to be better off for what he has done. It's going to be more competitive and more prosperous. It is going to be more equal and more upwardly mobile. It’s a record that I truly believe no other Education Secretary can match. Arne bleeds this stuff. He cares so much about our kids. And he's been so passionate about this work. And everybody who interacts with him, including people who disagree with him on some issues, never questions the genuineness and heart that he has brought to this job.

So I couldn't be prouder of him. And, for good measure, Arne also holds the record for most points scored in an NBA All-Star game. And he is my favorite partner in pickup basketball -- the smartest player I know -- even though he’s very slow -- and has no hops. He knows it's true. I will say, watching Ryan, by the way, that the son will soon be surpassing the father because this young man has got game.

Now, keep in mind, none of this change has been easy, and we still have a long way to go. One of the things about education is that it doesn’t deliver results tomorrow or the next day; this is a decade-long or longer proposition. We plant seeds now; we make changes now; and we watch each successive class benefit from these reforms. And it goes in fits and starts, and we have a decentralized system -- that's how our education tradition evolved. So it's not easy and it's not quick, but we are making progress. And we're not going to stop in these last 15 months.

And that's why it's so important and why I think we're very lucky that, even as Arne steps down, we've got an exceptionally talented educator to step in -- and that is Dr. John King.

John is already on Arne’s leadership team. He’s been an educator all his life -- a teacher, a principal, a leader of schools, the New York State’s education chief. He’s the right man to lead the department. He shares our commitment to preparing every child for success in a more innovative and competitive world. He’s got a great team already at the Department of Education of which I am very, very proud. His family is equally cool and good-looking. (Laughter.) And he has equally exceptional children. And I know that, together, we're going to continue to be able to do great things on behalf of all our kids.

So, Arne and John, I want to wish both of you a hardy congratulations and good luck.

Now I'm going to let them say a few words, and then I'm just going to make a few remarks before I take some questions from the press.

We'll start with Arne.

Secretary Duncan: I've cried more today than I have in a while, so I'll try not to get up here and cry.

I’ll start with the President. And when he asked us to come to D.C. and work with him, that was about a one-minute conversation with my wife. And it wasn’t that we wanted to leave Chicago; it wasn’t that I necessarily wanted to be the Education Secretary -- I just wanted to be on his team and believed so much in what he was about and what he stood for.

And I have to say, seven and a half years later, my admiration is only greater. And it’s pretty remarkable -- it’s important for the folks to know, that every hard decision, his only question was, what’s the right thing to do for kids, and challenging us and our team to fight for kids every single day. And often, that was a hard political decision, and that was never a factor. His passion and his commitment has been absolutely extraordinary. For me, it’s not the political leadership; it’s not the educational leadership; it’s the moral leadership.

And I just can’t tell you, Mr. President, personally, what an unbelievable honor it was just to spend some time.

And for those -- every day you see -- for folks who watched him last night talking about the horrendous massacre, gun massacre in Oregon, and how preventable these things are, we need that moral leadership. And please keep that fight

To our team, the team you have at the White House -- Cecilia and Denis and Valerie and others -- it’s been extraordinary to work with DPC. I don’t say this lightly -- I think our team at the Department of Education is stronger than it’s ever been. You never know over seven, eight years, how those teams go, and do you have the B team towards the end -- well, I think we have the A team and a combination of being able to work with the White House -- Shaun and Sylvia and so many folks are here -- Anthony. We have the team in place. I’m just extraordinarily hopeful and confident about what they can do together.

Emma and Ted, and the rest of the crew -- you said a little bit about John -- and folks know, for all of us, this work is very, very personal. For the President, it’s very personal. For me it’s very personal. John was one of those kids that probably shouldn’t be in a room like this, if you sort of look at the stereotypes. And not the easiest time growing up -- he’ll tell you more about it -- he lost both his parents at a pretty early age; went to live with his brother. That wasn’t very easy either. But he had an amazing teacher who saw something in him, who kept him going. And today, he gets to stand here with the President.

And so many times, I think we, as a society, write off kids that look like John and come from places like John. And to see what he can accomplish -- I think that’s what drives all of us. We know there are so many other kids out there we can reach.

And while I’m deeply, deeply sad to be leaving, I’m extraordinarily happy and thankful and proud that John is going to carry on this work with the team. So I want to thank everybody for their hard work.

I quickly want to -- try not to get emotional here -- but thank my parents, as well. My dad was a lifelong educator at the University of Chicago, taught throughout his life. My mother started an inner-city tutoring program before we were born, and raised all of us as a part of that program. And that changed our lives. And all our life, we saw what kids could do when they were given a chance. And that’s why we do this work today. And to be able to see what she did at one little corner at 46th and Greenwood, and to now have a chance over the past six and a half years to try and have an impact around the nation, because this man gave us a chance -- for my family, I can’t tell you how much it means to us.

And then, finally, just to my family. I love this work. I love this team. I love the President. I love the chance to serve. The only thing I love more is you guys. And I can’t wait to come home and see a couple more track meets and maybe get to coach Ryan a little bit, and maybe have a few more dinners, and maybe go to a movie someday -- that would be pretty amazing.

President Obama: Wow! All right!

Secretary Duncan: It’s been too long. And so it’s been an amazing, amazing journey and I feel so proud and so lucky to have been a part of this team. And, Mr. President, thanks for creating the climate in which all of us here -- all of us here --could have the impact we did. And we can never repay the debt of gratitude we owe you for your leadership and your courage. So thank you so much.

And I want to turn it over to John.

Secretary King: Thank you, Arne, for very kind words. Thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to serve and for the faith that you've placed in me and the team that we have at the department.

I’m deeply honored by the chance to serve and also deeply humbled by following in Arne’s footsteps. Arne is an extraordinary leader who I have watched demonstrate tremendous courage in fighting for kids and fighting for what’s best for kids; but also he’s been willing to listen -- to listen to folks and to make adjustments, and to make sure that everything we do every day is towards the goal of greater equity.

Mr. President, you and Arne and our team at the department have laid out an ambitious agenda -- from strengthening early childhood education and expanding access to early childhood, to raising standards for teaching and learning in K through 12, to ensuring that more Americans have access to high-quality higher education, to ensuring that we support our teachers and that we invest in our teachers and provide the best preparation and support and leadership opportunities for them. It’s an incredible agenda, and I’m proud to be able to carry it forward with the amazing team that we have at the department.

Earlier this week, Arne gave a speech at the National Press Club, and in that speech, Arne said education can be the difference between life and death. And I know that's true because it was for me. I grew up in Brooklyn. I lost my mom when I was eight; my dad when I was 12. My dad was very sick before he passed. I moved around between family members and schools. But teachers, New York City public school teachers, are the reason that I am alive. They are the reason that I became a teacher. They are the reason I am standing here today. Those teachers created amazing educational experiences, but also gave me hope -- hope about what is possible, what could be possible for me in life.

I know schools can't do it alone. There’s work we have to do on economic development and housing and health care. But I know that my parents -- who spent their lives as New York City public school educators -- believed that school was at the heart of our promise of equality of opportunity for all Americans. That's what they believed. That's what the President believes. That's what Arne believes. And that's what I feel very privileged to be able to work on with this amazing team we have at the department.

Every child in the United States, every college student, every disconnected youth, every working parent who just wants a few more credits in order to improve their salary and position at their job -- everyone deserves the kind of opportunity that I had to have a great education. Every child deserves the kind of opportunity that my beautiful daughters, Amina and Mireya, have to have a great education, the kind of education their grandparents worked to provide.

I’m so grateful to my very supportive wife, Melissa. So grateful to the Secretary for the opportunity he gave me to join his team, and incredibly grateful to the President for the opportunity to work with a wonderful group of people at the Education Department to try to expand opportunity.

Thank you.

President Obama: Thank you.

Two good men, doing really important work. So I'm lucky to have them, both as colleagues and as friends, and I'm looking forward to seeing even more work done in the next few months.

We've got some other business to attend to. So all of you who are here to celebrate Arne and John, you're lucky enough now to have to sit through -- a little bit of a press conference with me. So make yourselves comfortable. I warned the kids ahead of time. I said, try not to look completely bored.

I'm going to take a couple of questions from the press. But first, a few additional pieces of business.

First of all, we learned today that our businesses created another 118,000 new jobs in September, which means that we now have had 67 straight months of job creation; 13.2 million new jobs in all -- and an unemployment rate that has fallen from a high of 10 percent down to 5.1 percent. These long-term trends are obviously good news, particularly for every American waking up each morning and heading off to a new job.

But we would be doing even better if we didn’t have to keep on dealing with unnecessary crises in Congress every few months. And this is especially important right now, because although the American economy has been chugging along at a steady pace, much of the global economy is softening. We’ve seen an impact on our exports, which was a major driver of growth for us particularly at the beginning of the recovery. And so our own growth could slow if Congress does not do away with some of the counterproductive austerity measures that they have put in place, and if Congress does not avoid the kind of manufactured crises that shatter consumer confidence and could disrupt an already skittish global economy.

On Wednesday, more than half of Republicans voted to shut down the government for the second time in two years. The good news is that there were enough votes in both parties to pass a last-minute bill to keep the government open and operating for another 10 weeks before we can get a more long-term solution. But keep in mind that gimmick only sets up another potential manufactured crisis just two weeks before Christmas.

And I’ve said this before, I want to repeat it -- this is not the way the United States should be operating.

Oftentimes I hear from folks up on Capitol Hill, “the need for American leadership,” “the need for America to be number one.” Well, you know what, around the globe, part of what makes us a leader is when we govern effectively and we keep our own house in order, and we pass budgets, and we can engage in long-term planning, and we can invest in the things that are important for the future. That’s U.S. leadership.

When we fail to do that, we diminish U.S. leadership. It’s not how we are supposed to operate. And we can’t just keep on kicking down the road without solving any problems or doing any long-term planning for the future. That’s true for our military; that’s true for our domestic programs. The American people, American families deserve better. And we can grow faster and the economy can improve if Congress acts with dispatch. It will get worse if they don't.

That’s why I want to be very clear: I will not sign another shortsighted spending bill like the one Congress sent me this week. We purchased ourselves 10 additional weeks; we need to use them effectively.

Keep in mind that a few years ago, both parties put in place harmful automatic cuts that make no distinction between spending we don’t need and spending we do. We can revisit the history of how that happened -- I have some rather grim memories of it. But the notion was that even as we were bringing down the deficit, we would come up with a sustainable, smart, long-term approach to investing in the things that we need. That didn't happen. And so now these cuts that have been maintained have been keeping our economy from growing faster. It’s time to undo them. If we don’t, then we will have to fund our economic and national security priorities in 2016 at the same levels that we did in 2006.

Now, understand, during that decade, between 2006 and 2016, our economy has grown by 12 percent. Our population has grown by 8 percent. New threats have emerged; new opportunities have appeared. We can’t fund our country the way we did 10 years ago because we have greater demands -- with an aging population, with kids who need schools, with roads that need to be fixed, with a military on which we are placing extraordinary demands.

And we can’t cut our way to prosperity. Other countries have tried it and it has not worked. We’ve grown faster than they have because we did not pursue these blind, unthinking cuts to necessary investments for our growth. And by the way, because we’ve grown faster than them, we’ve brought our deficits down faster than they have.

I want to repeat this because the public apparently never believes it. Since I took office, we’ve cut our deficits by two-thirds. The deficit has not been going up; it has been coming down -- precipitously. We’ve cut our deficits by two-thirds. They’re below the average deficits over the past 40 years.

So the bottom line is, Congress has to do its job. It can't flirt with another shutdown. It should pass a serious budget. And if they do, and get rid of some of these mindless cuts, even as we're still prudent about maintaining the spending that we need but not spending we don't need and is not working, their own non-partisan budget office estimates we’re going to add an extra half-million jobs to our economy next year alone. We can immediately put half a million more people back to work if we just have a more sensible budget.

And in these negotiations, nobody is going to get everything they want. We have to work together, though, even if we disagree, in order to do the people’s business. At some point we have to want to govern, and not just play politics or play to various political bases. At some point, we need to pass bills so that we can rebuild our roads, and keep our kids learning, and our military strong, and help people prepare for and recover from disasters. That is Congress’s most basic job. That’s what our government is supposed to do -- serve the American people.

So with that, let me take some questions. And I’ll start with Julie Pace of AP.

Hang in there, kids.

Question: It will be over soon. Thank you, Mr. President. There have been several developments in Syria that I wanted to ask you about, starting with Russia’s involvement. You met with President Putin earlier this week, and I wonder if you think he was honest with you about his intentions in Syria. If Russia is targeting groups beyond the Islamic State, including U.S.-aligned groups, does the U.S. military have an obligation to protect them? And on the situation in Syria more broadly, there have obviously been failures in the U.S. train-and-equip program. Do you believe that that program can be fixed or do you have to look at other options? Would you, in particular, be willing to reconsider a no-fly zone, which several presidential candidates, including your former Secretary of State, are now calling for?

President Obama: Well, first and foremost, let’s understand what’s happening in Syria and how we got here. What started off as peaceful protests against Assad, the president, evolved into a civil war because Assad met those protests with unimaginable brutality. And so this is not a conflict between the United States and any party in Syria; this is a conflict between the Syrian people and a brutal, ruthless dictator.

Point number two is that the reason Assad is still in power is because Russia and Iran have supported him throughout this process. And in that sense, what Russia is doing now is not particularly different from what they had been doing in the past -- they’re just more overt about it. They’ve been propping up a regime that is rejected by an overwhelming majority of the Syrian population because they’ve seen that he has been willing to drop barrel bombs on children and on villages indiscriminately, and has been more concerned about clinging to power than the state of his country.

So in my discussions with President Putin, I was very clear that the only way to solve the problem in Syria is to have a political transition that is inclusive -- that keeps the state intact, that keeps the military intact, that maintains cohesion, but that is inclusive -- and the only way to accomplish that is for Mr. Assad to transition, because you cannot rehabilitate him in the eyes of Syrians. This is not a judgment I’m making; it is a judgment that the overwhelming majority of Syrians make.

And I said to Mr. Putin that I’d be prepared to work with him if he is willing to broker with his partners, Mr. Assad and Iran, a political transition -- we can bring the rest of the world community to a brokered solution -- but that a military solution alone, an attempt by Russia and Iran to prop up Assad and try to pacify the population is just going to get them stuck in a quagmire. And it won’t work. And they will be there for a while if they don’t take a different course.

I also said to him that it is true that the United States and Russia and the entire world have a common interest in destroying ISIL. But what was very clear -- and regardless of what Mr. Putin said -- was that he doesn’t distinguish between ISIL and a moderate Sunni opposition that wants to see Mr. Assad go. From their perspective, they’re all terrorists. And that’s a recipe for disaster, and it’s one that I reject.

So where we are now is that we are having technical conversations about de-confliction so that we’re not seeing U.S. and American firefights in the air. But beyond that, we’re very clear in sticking to our belief and our policy that the problem here is Assad and the brutality that he has inflicted on the Syrian people, and that it has to stop. And in order for it to stop, we’re prepared to work with all the parties concerned. But we are not going to cooperate with a Russian campaign to simply try to destroy anybody who is disgusted and fed up with Mr. Assad’s behavior.

Keep in mind also, from a practical perspective, the moderate opposition in Syria is one that if we’re ever going to have to have a political transition, we need. And the Russian policy is driving those folks underground or creating a situation in which they are de-capacitated, and it’s only strengthening ISIL. And that’s not good for anybody.

In terms of our support of opposition groups inside of Syria, I made very clear early on that the United States couldn’t impose a military solution on Syria either, but that it was in our interest to make sure that we were engaged with moderate opposition inside of Syria because eventually Syria will fall, the Assad regime will fall, and we have to have somebody who we’re working with that we can help pick up the pieces and stitch back together a cohesive, coherent country. And so we will continue to support them.

The training-and-equip program was a specific initiative by the Defense Department to see if we could get some of that moderate opposition to focus attention on ISIL in the eastern portion of the country. And I’m the first one to acknowledge it has not worked the way it was supposed to, Julie. And I think that the Department of Defense would say the same thing. And part of the reason, frankly, is because when we tried to get them to just focus on ISIL, the response we’d get back is, how can we focus on ISIL when every single day we’re having barrel bombs and attacks from the regime? And so it’s been hard to get them to reprioritize, looking east, when they’ve got bombs coming at them from the west.

So what we’re doing with the train-and-equip is looking at where we have had success -- for example, working with some of the Kurdish community in the east that pushed ISIL out -- seeing if we can build on that. But what we're also going to continue to do is to have contacts with and work with opposition that, rightly, believes that in the absence of some change of government inside of Syria we're going to continue to see civil war, and that is going to turbocharge ISIL recruitment and jihadist recruitment, and we're going to continue to have problems.

Now, last point I just want to make about this -- because sometimes the conversation here in the Beltway differs from the conversation internationally. Mr. Putin had to go into Syria not out of strength but out of weakness, because his client, Mr. Assad, was crumbling. And it was insufficient for him simply to send them arms and money; now he’s got to put in his own planes and his own pilots. And the notion that he put forward a plan and that somehow the international community sees that as viable because there is a vacuum there -- I didn't see, after he made that speech in the United Nations, suddenly the 60-nation coalition that we have start lining up behind him.

Iran and Assad make up Mr. Putin’s coalition at the moment. The rest of the world makes up ours. So I don't think people are fooled by the current strategy. It does not mean that we could not see Mr. Putin begin to recognize that it is in their interest to broker a political settlement. And as I said in New York, we're prepared to work with the Russians and the Iranians, as well as our partners who are part of the anti-ISIL coalition to come up with that political transition. And nobody pretends that it’s going to be easy, but I think it is still possible. And so we will maintain lines of communication.

But we are not going to be able to get those negotiations going if there is not a recognition that there’s got to be a change in government. We're not going to go back to the status quo ante. And the kinds of airstrikes against moderate opposition that Russia is engaging in is going to be counterproductive. It’s going to move us farther away rather than towards the ultimate solution that we're all -- that we all should be looking for.

Question: [Inaudible]

President Obama: Julie, throughout this process, I think people have constantly looked for an easy, low-cost answer -- whether it’s we should have sent more rifles in early and somehow then everything would have been okay; or if I had taken that shot even after Assad offered to give up his chemical weapons, then immediately things would have folded, or the Assad regime would have folded, and we would have suddenly seen a peaceful Syria.

This is a hugely, difficult, complex problem. And I would have hoped that we would have learned that from Afghanistan and Iraq, where we have devoted enormous time and effort and resources with the very best people and have given the Afghan people and the Iraqi people an opportunity for democracy. But it’s still hard, as we saw this week in Afghanistan. That's not by virtue of a lack of effort on our part, or a lack of commitment. We’ve still got 10,000 folks in Afghanistan. We're still spending billions of dollar supporting that government, and it’s still tough.

So when I make a decision about the level of military involvement that we're prepared to engage in, in Syria, I have to make a judgment based on, once we start something we’ve got to finish it, and we’ve got to do it well. And do we, in fact, have the resources and the capacity to make a serious impact -- understanding that we’ve still got to go after ISIL in Iraq; we still have to support the training of an Iraqi military that is weaker than any of us perceived; that we still have business to do in Afghanistan. And so I push -- and have consistently over the last four, five years sought out a wide range of opinions about steps that we can take potentially to move Syria in a better direction.

I am under no illusions about what an incredible humanitarian catastrophe this is, and the hardships that we're seeing, and the refugees that are traveling in very dangerous circumstances and now creating real political problems among our allies in Europe, and the heartbreaking images of children drowned trying to escape war, and the potential impact of such a destabilized country on our allies in the region. But what we have learned over the last 10, 12, 13 years is that unless we can get the parties on the ground to agree to live together in some fashion, then no amount of U.S. military engagement will solve the problem. And we will find ourselves either doing just a little bit and not making a difference, and losing credibility that way, or finding ourselves drawn in deeper and deeper into a situation that we can't sustain.

And when I hear people offering up half-baked ideas as if they are solutions, or trying to downplay the challenges involved in this situation -- what I’d like to see people ask is, specifically, precisely, what exactly would you do, and how would you fund it, and how would you sustain it? And typically, what you get is a bunch of mumbo jumbo.

So these are hard challenges. They are ones that we are going to continue to pursue. The topline message that I want everybody to understand is we are going to continue to go after ISIL. We are going to continue to reach out to a moderate opposition. We reject Russia’s theory that everybody opposed to Assad is a terrorist. We think that is self-defeating. It will get them into a quagmire. It will be used as a further recruitment tool for foreign fighters.

We will work with the international community and our coalition to relieve the humanitarian pressure. On refugees, we are working with the Turks and others to see what we can do along the border to make things safer for people. But ultimately, we're going to have to find a way for a political transition if we're going to solve Syria.

Jon Karl.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President.

President Obama: Yes.

Question: Back in July you said that the gun issue has been the most frustrating of your presidency, and we certainly heard that frustration from you last night.

President Obama: Yes.

Question: So in the last 15 months of your presidency, do you intend to do anything differently to get Congress to act or to do something about this gun violence problem?

And I have to get you to respond to something that Jeb Bush just said, and to be fair to Governor Bush I want to read it directly. Asked about the drive to take action in light of what happened in Oregon, he said, “Look, stuff happens. There’s always a crisis. And the impulse is always to do something, and it’s not always the right thing to do.” How would you react to Governor Bush?

President Obama: I don't even think I have to react to that one. I think the American people should hear that and make their own judgments, based on the fact that every couple of months, we have a mass shooting, and in terms of -- and they can decide whether they consider that “stuff happening”.

In terms of what I can do, I’ve asked my team -- as I have in the past -- to scrub what kinds of authorities do we have to enforce the laws that we have in place more effectively to keep guns out of the hands of criminals. Are there additional actions that we can take that might prevent even a handful of these tragic deaths from taking place? But as I said last night, this will not change until the politics change and the behavior of elected officials changes.

And so the main thing I’m going to do is I’m going to talk about this on a regular basis, and I will politicize it because our inaction is a political decision that we are making.

The reason that Congress does not support even the modest gun safety laws that we proposed after Sandy Hook is not because the majority of the American people don’t support it. I mean, normally, politicians are responsive to the views of the electorate. Here you’ve got the majority of the American people think it’s the right thing to do. Background checks, other common-sense steps that would maybe save some lives couldn’t even get a full vote. And why is that? It’s because of politics. It’s because interest groups fund campaigns, feed people fear. And in fairness, it’s not just in the Republican Party -- although the Republican Party is just uniformly opposed to all gun safety laws. And unless we change that political dynamic, we’re not going to be able to make a big dent in this problem.

For example, you’ll hear people talk about the problem is not guns, it’s mental illness. Well, if you talk to people who study this problem, it is true that the majority of these mass shooters are angry young men, but there are hundreds of millions of angry young men around the world -- tens of millions of angry young men. Most of them don’t shoot. It doesn’t help us just to identify -- and the majority of people who have mental illnesses are not shooters. So we can’t sort through and identify ahead of time who might take actions like this. The only thing we can do is make sure that they can’t have an entire arsenal when something snaps in them.

And if we’re going to do something about that, the politics has to change. The politics has to change. And the people who are troubled by this have to be as intense and as organized and as adamant about this issue as folks on the other side who are absolutists and think that any gun safety measures are somehow an assault on freedom, or communistic -- or a plot by me to takeover and stay in power forever or something. I mean, there are all kinds of crackpot conspiracy theories that float around there -- some of which, by the way, are ratified by elected officials in the other party on occasion.

So we’ve got to change the politics of this. And that requires people to feel -- not just feel deeply -- because I get a lot of letters after this happens -- “do something!” Well, okay, here’s what you need to do. You have to make sure that anybody who you are voting for is on the right side of this issue. And if they’re not, even if they’re great on other stuff, for a couple of election cycles you’ve got to vote against them, and let them know precisely why you’re voting against them. And you just have to, for a while, be a single-issue voter because that’s what is happening on the other side.

And that’s going to take some time. I mean, the NRA has had a good start. They’ve been at this a long time, they’ve perfected what they do. You’ve got to give them credit -- they’re very effective, because they don’t represent the majority of the American people but they know how to stir up fear; they know how to stir up their base; they know how to raise money; they know how to scare politicians; they know how to organize campaigns. And the American people are going to have to match them in their sense of urgency if we’re actually going to stop this.

Which isn’t to say stopping all violence. We’re not going to stop all violence. Violence exists around the world, sadly. Part of original sin. But our homicide rates are just a lot higher than other places -- that, by the way, have the same levels of violence. It’s just you can’t kill as many people when you don’t have easy access to these kinds of weapons.

And I’m deeply saddened about what happened yesterday. But Arne is going back to Chicago -- let’s not forget, this is happening every single day in forgotten neighborhoods around the country. Every single day. Kids are just running for their lives, trying to get to school. Broderick, when we were down in New Orleans, sitting down with a group of young men, when we were talking about Katrina, and I’ve got two young men next to me, both of them had been shot multiple times. They were barely 20.

So we got to make a decision. If we think that’s normal, then we have to own it. I don’t think it’s normal. I think it’s abnormal. I think we should change it. But I can’t do it by myself.

So the main thing I’m going to do, Jon, is talk about it. And hope that over time I’m changing enough minds -- along with other leaders around the country -- that we start finally seeing some action. I don’t think it’s going to happen overnight.

Cheryl Bolen.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. To go back to your opening remarks, you said that you won’t sign another short-term CR. But as you know, yesterday Secretary Lew announced that the government’s borrowing authority would run out around November 5th. Would you recommend negotiating an increase in the debt ceiling as part of these budget negotiations on spending caps? And also does the Speaker’s race complicate these negotiations?

President Obama: I’m sure the Speaker’s race complicates these negotiations. That was a rhetorical question. It will complicate the negotiations. But when it comes to the debt ceiling, we're not going back there.

Maybe it’s been a while, so let me just refresh everybody’s memory. Raising the debt ceiling does not authorize us to spend more, it simply authorizes us to pay the bills that we have already incurred. It is the way for the United States to maintain its good credit rating -- the full faith and credit of the United States.

Historically, we do not mess with it. If it gets messed with, it would have profound implications for the global economy and could put our financial system in the kind of tailspin that we saw back in 2007-2008. It’s just a bad thing to do. So we're not going to negotiate on that. It has to get done in the next five weeks. So even though the continuing resolution to keep the government open lasts for 10 weeks, we have to get the debt ceiling raised in five. You've got a shorter timetable to get that done.

But here’s the bottom line: Mitch McConnell, John Boehner, myself, Nancy Pelosi, Harry Reid -- we’ve all spoken and talked about trying to negotiate a budget agreement. And, yes, Speaker Boehner’s decision to step down complicates it. But I do think that there is still a path for us to come up with a reasonable agreement that raises the spending caps above sequester to make sure that we can properly finance both our defense and nondefense needs, that maintains a prudent control of our deficits, and that we can do that in short order. It’s not that complicated. The math is the math.

And what I’ve encouraged is that we get started on that work immediately, and we push through over the next several weeks -- and try to leave out extraneous issues that may prevent us from getting a budget agreement.

I know, for example, that there are many Republicans who are exercised about Planned Parenthood. And I deeply disagree with them on that issue, and I think that it’s mischaracterized what Planned Parenthood does. But I understand that they feel strongly about it, and I respect that. But you can't have an issue like that potentially wreck the entire U.S. economy -- any more than I should hold the entire budget hostage to my desire to do something about gun violence. I feel just as strongly about that and I think I’ve got better evidence for it. But the notion that I would threaten the Republicans that unless they passed gun safety measures that would stop mass shootings I’m going to shut down the government and not sign an increase in the debt ceiling would be irresponsible of me. And the American people, rightly, would reject that.

Well, same is true for them. There are some fights that we fight individually. They want to defund Planned Parenthood, there’s a way to do it. Pass a law, override my veto. That's true across a whole bunch of issues that they disagree with me on, and that's how democracy works. I got no problem with that.

But you have to govern. And I’m hoping that the next Speaker understands that the problem Speaker Boehner had or Mitch McConnell had in not dismantling Obamacare, or not eliminating the Department of Education, or not deporting every immigrant in this country was not because Speaker Boehner or Mitch McConnell didn't care about conservative principles. It had to do with the fact that they can't do it in our system of government, which requires compromise. Just like I can't do everything I want in passing an immigration bill, or passing a gun safety bill. And that doesn't mean, then, I throw a tantrum and try to wreck the economy, and put hardworking Americans who are just now able to dig themselves out of a massive recession, put them in harm’s way. Wrong thing to do.

Peter Alexander.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. You addressed -- I want to follow up on Jon’s questions about the issue that’s obviously deeply personal and moving to you -- that is the gun issue. Apart from Congress’s inaction, apart from the desire for new laws and, beyond that, apart from the gun lobby, as you noted, the pattern is that these perpetrators are angry, aggrieved, oftentimes mentally ill young men. Is there something that you can do with the bully pulpit, with your moral authority, with your remaining time in office to help reach these individuals who believe that gun violence is the way out?

President Obama: No. I think I can continue to speak to the American people as a whole and hopefully model for them basic social norms about rejecting violence, and cooperation and caring for other people. But there are a lot of young men out there. And having been one myself once, I can tell you that us being able to identify or pinpoint who might have problems is extraordinarily difficult.

So I think we, as a culture, should continuously think about how we can nurture our kids, protect our kids, talk to them about conflict resolution, discourage violence. And I think there are poor communities where, rather than mass shootings, you're seeing just normal interactions that used to be settled by a fistfight settled with guns where maybe intervention programs and mentorship and things like that can work. That's the kind of thing that we're trying to encourage through My Brother’s Keeper.

But when it comes to reaching every disaffected young man, 99 percent of -- or 99.9 percent of whom will hopefully grow out of it -- I don't think that there’s a silver bullet there. The way we are going to solve this problem is that when they act out, when they are disturbed, when that particular individual has a problem, that they can't easily access weapons that can perpetrate mass violence on a lot of people.

Because that's what other countries do. Again, I want to emphasize this. There’s no showing that somehow we are inherently more violent than any other advanced nation, or that young men are inherently more violent in our nation than they are in other nations. I will say young men inherently are more violent than the rest of the population, but there’s no sense that somehow this is -- it’s something in the American character that is creating this. Levels of violence are on par between the United States and other advanced countries. What is different is homicide rates and gun violence rates and mass shooting rates. So it’s not that the behavior or the impulses are necessarily different as much as it is that they have access to more powerful weapons.

Julia Edwards.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. You just said that you reject President Putin’s approach to Syria and his attacks on moderate opposition forces. You said it was a recipe for disaster. But what are you willing to do to stop President Putin and protect moderate opposition fighters? Would you consider imposing sanctions against Russia? Would you go so far as to equip moderate rebels with anti-aircraft weapons to protect them from Russian air attacks? And how do you respond to critics who say Putin is outsmarting you, that he took a measure of you in Ukraine and he felt he could get away with it?

President Obama: Yes, I’ve heard it all before. I’ve got to say I’m always struck by the degree to which not just critics but I think people buy this narrative.

Let’s think about this. So when I came into office seven and a half years ago, America had precipitated the worst financial crisis in history, dragged the entire world into a massive recession. We were involved in two wars with almost no coalition support. U.S. -- world opinion about the United States was at a nadir -- we were just barely above Russia at that time, and I think potentially slightly below China’s. And we were shedding 800,000 jobs a month, and so on and so forth.

And today, we're the strongest large advanced economy in the world -- probably one of the few bright spots in the world economy. Our approval ratings have gone up. We are more active on more international issues and forge international responses to everything from Ebola to countering ISIL.

Meanwhile, Mr. Putin comes into office at a time when the economy had been growing and they were trying to pivot to a more diversified economy, and as a consequence of these brilliant moves, their economy is contracting 4 percent this year. They are isolated in the world community, subject to sanctions that are not just applied by us but by what used to be some of their closest trading partners. Their main allies in the Middle East were Libya and Syria -- Mr. Gaddafi and Mr. Assad -- and those countries are falling apart. And he’s now just had to send in troops and aircraft in order to prop up this regime, at the risk of alienating the entire Sunni world.

So what was the question again?

No, but I think it’s really interesting to understand. Russia is not stronger as a consequence of what they’ve been doing. They get attention. The sanctions against Ukraine are still in place. And what I’ve consistently offered -- from a position of strength, because the United States is not subject to sanctions and we’re not contracting 4 percent a year -- what I’ve offered is a pathway whereby they can get back onto a path of growth and do right by their people.

So Mr. Putin’s actions have been successful only insofar as it’s boosted his poll ratings inside of Russia -- which may be why the beltway is so impressed, because that tends to be the measure of success. Of course, it’s easier to do when you’ve got a state-controlled media.

But this is not a smart, strategic move on Russia’s part. And what Russia has now done is not only committed its own troops into a situation in which the overwhelming majority of the Syrian population sees it now as an enemy, but the Sunni population throughout the Middle East is going to see it as a supporter, an endorser, of those barrel bombs landing on kids -- at a time when Russia has a significant Muslim population inside of its own borders that it needs to worry about.

So I want Russia to be successful. This is not a contest between the United States and Russia. It is in our interest for Russia to be a responsible, effective actor on the international stage that can share burdens with us, along with China, along with Europe, along with Japan, along with other countries -- because the problems we have are big. So I’m hopeful that Mr. Putin, having made this doubling-down of the support he has provided to Mr. Assad, recognizes that this is not going to be a good long-term strategy and that he works instead to bring about a political settlement.

Just as I hope that they can resolve the issues with Ukraine in a way that recognizes Russian equities but upholds the basic principle of sovereignty and independence that the Ukrainian people should enjoy like everybody else. But until that time, we’re going to continue to have tensions and we’re going to continue to have differences.

But we’re not going to make Syria into a proxy war between the United States and Russia. That would be bad strategy on our part. This is a battle between Russia, Iran, and Assad against the overwhelming majority of the Syrian people. Our battle is with ISIL, and our battle is with the entire international community to resolve the conflict in a way that can end the bloodshed and end the refugee crisis, and allow people to be at home, work, grow food, shelter their children, send those kids to school. That’s the side we’re on.

This is not some superpower chessboard contest. And anybody who frames it in that way isn’t paying very close attention to what’s been happening on the chessboard.

All right, last question. Major Garrett.

Question: Mr. President, good to see you.

President Obama: Good to see you.

Question: And for the children there, I promise I won’t take too long. So you’ve been very patient.

President Obama: I’ve been boring them to death, I guarantee it. But there have been times where I’ve snagged rebounds for Ryan when he is shooting three-pointers so he has got to put up with this.

Question: Understood. Mr. President, I wonder if you could tell the country to what degree you were changed or moved by what you discussed in private with Pope Francis? What do you think his visit might have meant for the country long term? And for Democrats who might already be wondering, is it too late for Joe Biden to decide whether or not to run for President? And lastly, just to clarify, to what degree did Hillary Clinton’s endorsement just yesterday of a no-fly zone put her in a category of embracing a half-baked answer on Syria that borders on mumbo jumbo?

President Obama: On the latter issue, on the last question that you asked, Hillary Clinton is not half-baked in terms of her approach to these problems. She was obviously my Secretary of State. But I also think that there’s a difference between running for President and being President, and the decisions that are being made and the discussions that I’m having with the Joint Chiefs become much more specific and require, I think, a different kind of judgment. And that’s what I’ll continue to apply as long as I’m here. And if and when she’s President, then she’ll make those judgments. And she’s been there enough that she knows that these are tough calls but that --

Question: -- that she should know better?

President Obama: No, that’s not what I said. That’s perhaps what you said. What I’m saying is, is that we all want to try to relieve the suffering in Syria, but my job is to make sure that whatever we do we are doing in a way that serves the national security interests of the American people; that doesn’t lead to us getting into things that we can’t get out of or that we cannot do effectively; and as much as possible, that we’re working with international partners.

And we’re going to continue to explore things that we can do to protect people and to deal with the humanitarian situation there, and to provide a space in which we can bring about the kind of political transition that’s going to be required to solve the problem. And I think Hillary Clinton would be the first to say that when you’re sitting in the seat that I’m sitting in, in the Situation Room, things look a little bit different -- because she’s been right there next to me.

I love Joe Biden, and he’s got his own decisions to make, and I’ll leave it at that. And in the meantime, he’s doing a great job as Vice President and has been really helpful on a whole bunch of issues.

Pope Francis I love. He is a good man with a warm heart and a big moral imagination. And I think he had such an impact in his visit here -- as he has had around the world -- because he cares so deeply about the least of these, and in that sense expresses what I consider to be, as a Christian, the essence of Christianity. And he’s got a good sense of humor. Well, I can’t share all his jokes. They were all clean.

And as I said in the introduction in the South Lawn when he appeared here at the White House, I think it’s really useful that he makes us uncomfortable in his gentle way; that he’s constantly prodding people’s consciences and asking everybody all across the political spectrum what more you can do to be kind, and to be helpful, and to love, and to sacrifice, and to serve. And in that sense, I don’t think he’s somebody where we should be applying the typical American political measures -- liberal and conservative, and left and right -- I think he is speaking to all of our consciences, and we all have to then search ourselves to see if there are ways that we can do better.

Question: [Inaudible]

President Obama: It did. I think that when I spend time with somebody like the Pontiff -- and there are other individuals, some of whom are famous, some of whom are not, but who are good people and deeply moral -- then it makes me want to be better, makes me want to do better. And those people are great gifts to the world. And sometimes they’re just a teacher in a classroom. And sometimes they’re your neighbor. And sometimes they’re your mom, or your wife. Sometimes they’re your kids. But they can encourage you to be better. That’s what we’re all trying to do.

And that’s part of the wonderful thing about Pope Francis, is the humility that he brings to do this. His rejection of the absolutism that says I’m 100 percent right and you’re 100 percent wrong; but rather, we are all sinners and we are all children of God. That’s a pretty good starting point for being better.

All right. Thank you, guys, for your patience. You can now go home.

Thanks.

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# Statement on Afghanistan

Good morning. Last December -- more than 13 years after our nation was attacked by al Qaeda on 9/11 -- America’s combat mission in Afghanistan came to a responsible end. That milestone was achieved thanks to the courage and the skill of our military, our intelligence, and civilian personnel. They served there with extraordinary skill and valor, and it’s worth remembering especially the more than 2,200 American patriots who made the ultimate sacrifice in Afghanistan.

I visited our troops in Afghanistan last year to thank them on behalf of a grateful nation. I told them they could take great pride in the progress that they helped achieve. They struck devastating blows against the al Qaeda leadership in the tribal regions, delivered justice to Osama bin Laden, prevented terrorist attacks, and saved American lives. They pushed the Taliban back so the Afghan people could reclaim their communities, send their daughters to school, and improve their lives. Our troops trained Afghan forces so they could take the lead for their own security and protect Afghans as they voted in historic elections, leading to the first democratic transfer of power in their country’s history.

Today, American forces no longer patrol Afghan villages or valleys. Our troops are not engaged in major ground combat against the Taliban. Those missions now belong to Afghans, who are fully responsible for securing their country.

But as I’ve said before, while America’s combat mission in Afghanistan may be over, our commitment to Afghanistan and its people endures. As Commander-in-Chief, I will not allow Afghanistan to be used as safe haven for terrorists to attack our nation again. Our forces therefore remain engaged in two narrow but critical missions -- training Afghan forces, and supporting counterterrorism operations against the remnants of al Qaeda. Of course, compared to the 100,000 troops we once had in Afghanistan, today fewer than 10,000 remain, in support of these very focused missions.

I meet regularly with my national security team, including commanders in Afghanistan, to continually assess, honestly, the situation on the ground -- to determine where our strategy is working and where we may need greater flexibility. I have insisted, consistently, that our strategy focus on the development of a sustainable Afghan capacity and self-sufficiency. And when we’ve needed additional forces to advance that goal, or we’ve needed to make adjustments in terms of our timetables, then we’ve made those adjustments. Today, I want to update the American people on our efforts.

Since taking the lead for security earlier this year, Afghan forces have continued to step up. This has been the first fighting season where Afghans have largely been on their own. And they are fighting for their country bravely and tenaciously. Afghan forces continue to hold most urban areas. And when the Taliban has made gains, as in Kunduz, Afghan forces backed by coalition support have been able to push them back. This has come at a very heavy price. This year alone, thousands of Afghan troops and police have lost their lives, as have many Afghan civilians.

At the same time, Afghan forces are still not as strong as they need to be. They’re developing critical capabilities -- intelligence, logistics, aviation, command and control. And meanwhile, the Taliban has made gains, particularly in rural areas, and can still launch deadly attacks in cities, including Kabul. Much of this was predictable. We understood that as we transitioned, that the Taliban would try to exploit some of our movements out of particular areas, and that it would take time for Afghan security forces to strengthen. Pressure from Pakistan has resulted in more al Qaeda coming into Afghanistan, and we’ve seen the emergence of an ISIL presence. The bottom line is, in key areas of the country, the security situation is still very fragile, and in some places there is risk of deterioration.

Fortunately, in President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah there is a national unity government that supports a strong partnership with the United States. During their visit earlier this year, President Ghani and I agreed to continue our counterterrorism cooperation, and he has asked for continued support as Afghan forces grow stronger.

Following consultations with my entire national security team, as well as our international partners and members of Congress, President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah, I’m therefore announcing the following steps, which I am convinced offer the best possibility for lasting progress in Afghanistan.

First, I’ve decided to maintain our current posture of 9,800 troops in Afghanistan through most of next year, 2016. Their mission will not change. Our troops will continue to pursue those two narrow tasks that I outlined earlier -- training Afghan forces and going after al Qaeda. But maintaining our current posture through most of next year, rather than a more rapid drawdown, will allow us to sustain our efforts to train and assist Afghan forces as they grow stronger -- not only during this fighting season, but into the next one.

Second, I have decided that instead of going down to a normal embassy presence in Kabul by the end of 2016, we will maintain 5,500 troops at a small number of bases, including at Bagram, Jalalabad in the east, and Kandahar in the south.

Again, the mission will not change. Our troops will focus on training Afghans and counterterrorism operations. But these bases will give us the presence and the reach our forces require to achieve their mission. In this sense, Afghanistan is a key piece of the network of counterterrorism partnerships that we need, from South Asia to Africa, to deal more broadly with terrorist threats quickly and prevent attacks against our homeland.

Third, we will work with allies and partners to align the steps I am announcing today with their own presence in Afghanistan after 2016. In Afghanistan, we are part of a 42-nation coalition, and our NATO allies and partners can continue to play an indispensable role in helping Afghanistan strengthen its security forces, including respect for human rights.

And finally, because governance and development remain the foundation for stability and progress in Afghanistan, we will continue to support President Ghani and the national unity government as they pursue critical reforms. New provincial governors have been appointed, and President Ghani is working to combat corruption, strengthen institutions, and uphold rule of law. As I told President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah yesterday, efforts that deliver progress and justice for the Afghan people will continue to have the strong support of the United States. And we cannot separate the importance of governance with the issues of security. The more effective these reforms happen, the better off the security situation is going to be.

We also discussed American support of an Afghan-led reconciliation process. By now it should be clear to the Taliban and all who oppose Afghanistan’s progress the only real way to achieve the full drawdown of U.S. and foreign troops from Afghanistan is through a lasting political settlement with the Afghan government. Likewise, sanctuaries for the Taliban and other terrorists must end. Next week, I’ll host Prime Minister Sharif of Pakistan, and I will continue to urge all parties in the region to press the Taliban to return to peace talks and to do their part in pursuit of the peace that Afghans deserve.

In closing, I want to speak directly to those whose lives are most directly affected most by the decisions I’m announcing today. To the Afghan people, who have suffered so much -- Americans’ commitment to you and to a secure, stable and unified Afghanistan, that remains firm. Our two nations have forged a strategic partnership for the long term. And as you defend and build your country, today is a reminder that the United States keeps our commitments.

And to our men and women in uniform -- I know this means that some of you will rotate back into Afghanistan. With the end of our combat mission, this is not like 2010, when nearly 500 Americans were killed and many more were injured. But still, Afghanistan remains dangerous; 25 brave Americans have given their lives there this year.

I do not send you into harm’s way lightly. It’s the most solemn decision I make. I know the wages of war in the wounded warriors I visit in the hospital and in the grief of Gold Star families. But as your Commander-in-Chief, I believe this mission is vital to our national security interests in preventing terrorist attacks against our citizens and our nation.

And to the American people -- I know that many of you have grown weary of this conflict. As you are well aware, I do not support the idea of endless war, and I have repeatedly argued against marching into open-ended military conflicts that do not serve our core security interests.

Yet given what’s at stake in Afghanistan, and the opportunity for a stable and committed ally that can partner with us in preventing the emergence of future threats, and the fact that we have an international coalition, I am firmly convinced that we should make this extra effort. In the Afghan government, we have a serious partner who wants our help. And the majority of the Afghan people share our goals. We have a bilateral security agreement to guide our cooperation. And every single day, Afghan forces are out there fighting and dying to protect their country. They’re not looking for us to do it for them.

I’m speaking of the Afghan army cadet who grew up seeing bombings and attacks on innocent civilians who said, “because of this, I took the decision to join the army, to try and save innocent people’s lives.” Or the police officer training to defuse explosives. “I know it’s dangerous work,” he says, but “I have always had a dream of wearing the uniform of Afghanistan, serving my people and defending my country.”

Or the Afghan commando, a hardened veteran of many missions, who said, “If I start telling you the stories of my life, I might start crying.” He serves, he said, because, “the faster we bring peace, the faster we can bring education, and the stronger our unity will grow. Only if these things happen will Afghanistan be able to stand up for itself.”

My fellow Americans, after so many years of war, Afghanistan will not be a perfect place. It’s a poor country that will have to work hard on its development. There will continue to be contested areas. But Afghans like these are standing up for their country. If they were to fail, it would endanger the security of us all. And we’ve made an enormous investment in a stable Afghanistan. Afghans are making difficult but genuine progress. This modest but meaningful extension of our presence -- while sticking to our current, narrow missions -- can make a real difference. It’s the right thing to do.

May God bless our troops and all who keep us safe. And may God continue to bless the United States of America.

Question: Mr. President, can you tell us how disappointing this decision is for you? Is this -- can you tell us how disappointing this decision is for you?

President Obama: This decision is not disappointing. Continually, my goal has been to make sure that we give every opportunity for Afghanistan to succeed while we’re still making sure that we’re meeting our core missions.

And as I’ve continually said, my approach is to assess the situation on the ground, figure out what’s working, figure out what’s not working, make adjustments where necessary. This isn’t the first time those adjustments have been made; this won’t probably be the last.

What I’m encouraged by is the fact that we have a government that is serious about trying to deliver security and the prospects of a better life for the Afghan people. We have a clear majority of the Afghans who want to partner with us and the international community to achieve those goals. We have a bilateral security arrangement that ensures that our troops can operate in ways that protect them while still achieving their mission. And we’ve always known that we had to maintain a counterterrorism operation in that region in order to tamp down any reemergence of active al Qaeda networks, or other networks that might do us harm.

So this is consistent with the overall vision that we’ve had. And, frankly, we anticipated, as we were drawing down troops, that there would be times where we might need to slow things down or fill gaps in Afghan capacity. And this is a reflection of that. And it’s a dangerous area.

So part of what we’re constantly trying to balance is making sure that Afghans are out there, they’re doing what they need to do, but that we are giving them a chance to succeed and that we’re making sure that our force posture in the area for conducting those narrow missions that we need to conduct, we can do so relatively safely. There are still risks involved, but force protection, the ability of our embassies to operate effectively -- those things all factor in.

And so we’ve got to constantly review these approaches. The important thing I want to emphasize, though, is, is that the nature of the mission has not changed. And the cessation of our combat role has not changed.

Now, the 25 military and civilians who were killed last year, that always weighs on my mind. And 25 deaths are 25 too many, particularly for the families of the fallen. But understand, relative to what was involved when we were in an active combat role and actively engaged in war in Afghanistan was a very different scenario.

So here, you have a situation where we have clarity about what our mission is. We’ve got a partner who wants to work with us. We’re going to continually make adjustments to ensure that we give the best possibilities for success. And I suspect that we will continue to evaluate this going forward, as will the next President. And as conditions improve, we’ll be in a position to make further adjustments.

But I’m absolutely confident this is the right thing to do. And I’m not disappointed because my view has always been how do we achieve our goals while minimizing the strain and exposure on our men and women in uniform, and make sure that we are constantly encouraging and sending a message to the Afghan people, this is their country and they’ve got to defend it, but we’re going to be a steady partner for them.

Thank you, everybody.

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# Community Forum Address on Prescription Drug Abuse

Thank you, everybody. Thank you! Everybody, please have a seat. Have a seat. Thank you so much. Well, hello, West Virginia! Go, Mountaineers! It is great to be back in what is clearly one of the most beautiful states in the United States of America. One of these days, I’m going to finally try a Tudor’s Biscuit.

I want to begin by thanking Jordan for sharing his extraordinary story with us. Jordan is living proof that, when it comes to substance abuse, treatment and recovery, those things are possible if we work together and if we care about each other. And that’s what we’re here to talk about today.

We've got some outstanding leaders who care deeply about this issue. I want to thank your Governor, Earl Ray Tomblin, for being here. Your two fine senators -- Joe Manchin and Shelley Moore Capito. And Charleston Mayor Danny Jones. We’ve also got some outstanding members of my administration who are here -- first and foremost, our proud daughter of West Virginia, HHS Secretary Sylvia Burwell. We have the Director of National Drug Control Policy, Michael Botticelli. And we have the head of the Drug Enforcement Administration, Chuck Rosenberg. Where’s Chuck? He’s around here somewhere.

And what I want to do is to have a conversation with the panelists here today, take some questions -- because this is something that is not a top-down solution type of problem alone. This is going to have to be everybody working together. And we've got to understand what families are going through, what law enforcement is going through, what our health systems are going through in order for us to wrap our arms around this problem. So instead of giving a long speech, I just want to offer some initial thoughts to frame our discussion.

When I came into office, I started studying this issue -- what’s called opioids. And I was stunned by the statistics. More Americans now die every year from drug overdoses than they do from motor vehicle crashes. More than they do from car accidents. The majority of those overdoses involve legal prescription drugs. In 2013 alone, overdoses from prescription pain medications killed more than 16,000 Americans. One year. I don't have to tell you, this is a terrible toll. The numbers are big, but behind those numbers are incredible pain for families. And West this state is home to the highest rate of overdose deaths in the nation.

Now, addiction is not new. But since 1999, sales of powerful prescription pain medications have skyrocketed by 300 percent. In 2012, 259 million prescriptions were written for these drugs, which is more than enough to give every American adult their own bottle of pills.

And as their use has increased, so has the misuse. Some folks are prescribed these medications for good reason but they become addicted because they’re so powerful. At the same time, we’ve seen a dramatic rise in the use of heroin, which belongs to the same class of drugs as painkillers -- this class of drugs known as “opioids.” In fact, four in five heroin users -- new heroin users -- started out by misusing prescription drugs; then they switched to heroin. So this really is a gateway drug -- that prescription drugs become a gateway to heroin. As a consequence, between 2002 and 2013, the number of heroin-related deaths in America nearly quadrupled, although the number of heroin-related overdoses is still far exceeded by the number of legal prescription drug overdoses.

So this crisis is taking lives. It’s destroying families. It’s shattering communities all across the country. And that’s the thing about substance abuse -- it doesn’t discriminate. It touches everybody -- from celebrities to college students, to soccer moms, to inner city kids. White, black, Hispanic, young, old, rich, poor, urban, suburban, men and women. It can happen to a coal miner; it can happen to a construction worker; a cop who is taking a painkiller for a work-related injury. It could happen to the doctor who writes him the prescription.

Now, one of the problems we have is too many families suffer in silence, feeling like they were the only ones struggling to help a loved one. And let’s face it, there’s still fear and shame and stigma that too often surrounds substance abuse -- and often prevents people from seeking the help that they deserve. Because when people loosely throw around words like “junkie,” nobody wants to be labeled in that way.

And part of our goal here I think today is to replace those words with words like father, or daughter, or son, or friend, or sister. Because then you understand there is a human element behind this. This could happen to any of us in any of our families. What if we replaced a word like “junkie” with recovery coaches and specialists like Jordan?

We can’t fight this epidemic without eliminating stigma. That's one of the reasons why I’m so proud of Michael, who’s the first person in the job of dealing with drugs in America who actually knows what it’s like to recover from an addiction. He shares his own story as a way to encourage others to get the help that they need before it’s too late. And I’m proud that there’s some elected officials in this state who’ve told their stories about what happened in their family and to themselves in order for us to start lowering those attitudes that keep people from getting help.

So I’ve made this a priority for my administration. And we're not new to this. In 2010, we released our first National Drug Control Strategy. We followed that up in 2011 with a Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention Plan. We’re implementing those plans. We're partnering with communities to prevent drug use, reduce overdose deaths, help people get treatment. And under the Affordable Care Act, more health plans have to cover substance abuse disorders. The budget that I sent Congress would invest in things like state overdose prevention programs, preparing more first responders to save more lives, and expanding medication assisted treatment programs.

So we have to make those investments. Rather than spending billions of dollars -- taxpayer dollars -- on long prison sentences for nonviolent drug offenders, we could save money and get better outcomes by getting treatment to those who need it.

And we could use some of the savings to make sure that law enforcement has the resources to go after the hardened criminals who are bringing hard drugs like heroin into our country. So with no other disease do we expect people to wait until they're a danger to themselves or others to self-diagnose and seek treatment. Every other disease -- you got a broken leg, you got diabetes, you got some sort of sickness, we understand that we got to get you help. And we also understand when it comes to other diseases that if we don't give you help, and let you suffer by yourself, then other people could get sick. Well, this is an illness. And we got to treat it, as such. We have to change our mindset.

And this is one of the reasons that the DEA declared a “National Prescription Drug Take-Back Day” -- a day when Americans can safely and conveniently dispose of expired and unwanted prescription drugs in their communities. Because most young people who begin misusing prescription drugs don’t buy them in some dark alley -- they get them from Mom or Dad’s medicine cabinet.

And today, we’re also announcing some new actions. First, we’re ensuring that federal agencies train federal health care providers who prescribe opioids. This is a common-sense idea that you’re already implementing here in West Virginia. Congress should follow that lead and make this a national priority. And we look forward to working with governors and the medical community as well.

Second -- and we were talking -- Joe and I were talking on the flight over here -- there is evidence that shows that medication assisted treatment, if done properly, in combination with behavioral therapy and other support and counseling and 12-step programs and things like that, can work. It can be an effective strategy to support recovery. But it can't just be replacing one drug with another. It’s got to be part of a package. So we’re going to identify any barriers that still exist that are keeping us from creating more of these treatment facilities, and incorporating them into our federal programs.

Private sector partners are helping out to help fight this epidemic, as well. And I want to give them some credit. More than 40 medical groups, from the American Medical Association to the American Dental Association are committing to concrete actions. And we need to, obviously, work with the medical community -- because they're the front lines on prescribing this stuff and so there’s got to be a sense of responsibility and ownership and accountability there. We’ve got to expand prescriber training. Increasing the use of naloxone -- I wanted to make sure I was pronouncing that right, so I talked to the expert -- naloxone -- this is something that if first responders have it can often save quickly the lives of somebody who is having an overdose. So we want to make sure that first responders have a supply of this.

We want to make sure that we're getting more physicians certified to provide medication assisted treatment. We then have broadcasters like CBS that are providing airtime for education and awareness. And groups like the NBA have committed to running public service announcements about drug abuse. So that's just an example of some of the private sector partnerships that we're forging here.

The point is -- and I’m going to end with this -- we’ve all got a role to play. Because young people like Jordan, they remind us these are our kids. It’s not somebody else’s kids; it’s our kids. It’s not somebody else’s neighborhood; it’s our neighborhood. And they deserve every chance. We’ve got to make sure that we're doing right by them, we're taking this seriously. And the goal today is to shine a spotlight on this, and then make sure that we walk away out of here, all of us committed to doing something about it. Whether we are a faith leader, whether we are an elected official, whether we're in law enforcement, whether we're a private citizen, a business, we’ve all got a role to play. You understand that here in West Virginia, and we want to make sure the whole country understands how urgent this problem is.

So with that, I’m going to turn it over to our moderator, Michael Botticelli.

Director Botticelli: Well, good afternoon, everybody. Thank you for being here today. I, too, want to thank Jordan for his really stirring comments. I think it really exemplifies for us the challenges that we have, but also the success and hope that comes with recovery. It's really astounding.

We're here in West Virginia today to highlight the issue not just because of the impact that it's had on West Virginia, but the impact that it’s had across the country. But also, West Virginia is working together to implement strategies to really deal with this addiction, and we're proud to be here to help support that.

The President always gives me a lot of credit for talking openly and honestly about my recovery, but, candidly, I'm one of millions of Americans who are in recovery today and my story is not unique. Maybe this part is a little bit unique, sir. But I'm one of millions of Americans who have been restored by getting good care and treatment. And I know the President wants what Jordan and I got, and that is a second chance to be restored to productive members of our communities and to give back what we've so freely been given.

So, thank you, sir.

So with that today, we have a great panel of people who are really going to help provide us with information and their insights about what more we can do on the federal level. I'm really proud to be a colleague of Secretary Silvia Burwell.

And, Secretary, I'm going to start -- you can feel free to say anything you would like, however. I know we're here in your home state of West Virginia. I know -- we have talked -- you have been personally impacted by this. But you’ve also made this a key priority for all of your HHS agencies. So may you could talk a little bit about your experience and what HHS is doing to deal with this issue.

Secretary Burwell: Absolutely. And first, I'll just say I love coming home. It's great to be home. And it's great to welcome the President to the great state of West Virginia.

And when I became Secretary, this was a priority because it is something that I have personally experienced. Everybody, I'm sure, in this room knows people personally -- friends that lost to the addiction and what happens in terms of their children, in terms of their family, in terms of the community. And what your experience is, personally, I think that is what energizes you to act.

And at the department, what we focused on over the last year, figuring out an evidence-based strategy -- because we want to get results, we want to change the kinds of things that people have experienced personally -- and three things. Number one is changing prescribing practices. When the President said the 259 million -- that can't be right. And so how do we work on that.

Second is working on medication assisted treatment, getting people the access we've talked about today being so important to people. And third is that access to naloxone. And I look at our colleagues in law enforcement because they’re usually the front line -- and making sure that when something does go wrong, in terms of that overdose, that we can prevent those deaths, those deaths that are so dramatically impacting the state.

So those are the three things. I'm going to stop because we're here to listen today.

Thank you, Michael.

Director Botticelli: Cary Dixon, you're a mom of a son who is struggling with -- in treatment now, unfortunately in prison. But you’ve turned your struggles into advocacy and action, and you provide support for many, many parents here and around the country for loved ones who are dealing with this. So what has your experience been? What advice do you give parents? What advice do you give us as federal folks about how we can support parents in this battle?

Ms. Dixon: Well, I think initially I want to thank President Obama for coming here today to support this cause for our community that has -- substance abuse, it's become an epidemic in our community. And I thank you for coming today, first and foremost.

And I want to share just briefly -- I've been charged with being a representative for families around our area and actually around the nation who struggle with this. So if I could just share some comments that we families have in common.

President Obama: You take your time. We want to hear from you.

Ms. Dixon: Thank you. I spoke this morning to a good friend of mine who was just calling me to wish me well today and to encourage me in this endeavor. And this friend of mine lost her daughter two and a half years ago to drugs. And so I don't take this charge of being here lightly. I realize that I'm here to represent families, and I am grateful for that opportunity. I do want to say that as I'm speaking to you I'm sharing my story, but I'm sharing the stories of so many other family members that are in this community and in the nation that have this issue. And also it's important to know -- for the sake of time, I've really tried to make this concise, but this is the tip of the iceberg of what families experience and endure when they love someone and care so much about someone with an addiction.

We raise our children in loving homes. We teach them morals and values. We teach them the difference between right and wrong. We wonder what is happening when the grade starts slipping, when things that used to be enjoyable for our loved ones no longer interest them.

We're confused as to the cause of the personality changes that we see in our loved ones. We're shocked when we hear of that first DUI. And we're fearful when our loved ones are taken to jail for the first time. We're embarrassed when holidays approach and family members are coming in from out of town, and our loved ones can't interact because they’re under the influence of drugs. We dread the next phone call. We can't sleep because we haven't received a phone call. We don't take vacations for fear of the next crisis. We come back from vacations because there’s a crisis. We're sad and angry when valuable, but most importantly, sentimental items are missing from our homes, only to find out that they’re at a pawn shop, or that they’re in the hands of drug dealers.

We're relieved when our loved ones acknowledge that they have a serious problem and understand that they need help. And then we're devastated when we help them seek treatment only to find out that there is a month-long waiting list, or that there’s no insurance coverage, or that there’s a big requirement for money up front for treatment.

We are sad and uncomfortable when acquaintances ask us about our loved ones. And we're even more sad when they ask us about every other member of our family and don't mention our loved ones. We neglect our marriages. We neglect other children in our home who are thriving because all of our attention is focused on addiction and substance abuse.

We disagree endlessly about the right way to handle this problem. And after experiencing years of turmoil, we rest better at night when our loved ones are incarcerated, because the place that you never dreamed that your loved one would ever even see, a jail or a prison, is safer than them being on the street, interacting with drug dealers, or pushing a needle into their arm.

The ones of us who are fortunate, we lay awake at night and we plan our loved ones’ funerals in our mind. The ones of us who aren't fortunate actually do plan the funerals, in reality, of our loved ones. And this is where addiction has taken us. This is where substance abuse has taken us.

Now, all that being said, there is hope. And that's probably the most important thing to remember here. We're so grateful to Recovery Point and Matt Ball [ph] and people in recovery that are helping others. We're grateful to our mayor, the mayor of Huntington, Steve Williams, who has so tirelessly and endlessly spearheaded programs to help our community recover. Don Purdue [ph] who has made it possible for people to receive treatment in our communities.

I think education is important. And I was fortunate to find a group called The Loved Ones Group, developed by a man named Ed Hughes. It's a series that helps provide education and information and support for family members or those who care about someone with an addiction. The final week of this program we get to speak to people in recovery. They come and speak to our group of people there. And it inspires us because we know that recovery is possible and that it can happen.

For too long, we've been silent. And I think is going to answer your question as parents and family members, because of the stigma of this disease and the shame that we feel, we've been silent. And I think that is holding us back. We need to open our voices so that people don't feel ashamed. This is a disease. It is a sickness. But education, educating ourselves as much as we can as family members, and speaking out to raise awareness is, I think, critical in helping the situation.

I'm almost finished. People in 12-step recovery groups and different groups rely on a higher power. I'm a person of faith, and my faith has helped me navigate this journey that we've been on. And I just want to share with you a verse that I hold dear for my own family member who is sick, but also offer it to others. Jeremiah 29:11 -- For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

And I believe that every person in the throes of addiction and the disease of substance abuse needs hope in a future. And I believe this for their families as well.

Thank you so much.

Director Botticelli: Cary, thank you so much for sharing your story. It obviously touched everybody here in terms of not only your struggles, but articulating the hope that's on the other side. And we will continue to work with parents as we deal together with this epidemic. I go to Dr. Michael Brumage. You have been involved in this work for many years. You're here at the local level, so love to hear your experience and share what you think are both some successes and challenges in dealing with this issue.

Dr. Brumage: Certainly. And thank you very much. Welcome to West Virginia, Mr. President and Mr. Botticelli. Welcome home, Secretary Burwell.

I've been on the job actually only 79 days here in Charleston. I came back home after being 29 years away. And I knew what I was coming into when I came home. I knew there was a heroin and opioid abuse epidemic in the state. I knew we had the highest rates of Hepatitis B and the second highest rates of Hepatitis C in the nation, largely due to needle sharing among addicts. But I also knew that coming home that Mountaineers would take this kind of challenge head on. That's the kind of people that there are in the state of West Virginia. And so I wanted to be part of the solution here in the state. And I knew it would require patience, persistence, and people -- lots of good people here.

With the help of so many community partners, and my good friend and colleague over at Cabell-Huntington Health Department, Dr. Mike Kilkenney, we've been able to get some programs off the ground, working together. And I think we're moving in the right direction. In about six weeks, we're going to begin our own harm reduction program here in Charleston. We're going to have syringe exchange as part of that. We'll be testing for Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, HIV. We don't want to become another Scott County, Indiana, where they had an outbreak of HIV -- almost 200 cases in a small rural community there.

We’d also like to offer contraceptive services to women of the reproductive age who are addicted to drugs to prevent neonatal abstinence syndrome as well.

And more than anything else, what I think we’d like to do is to treat the people who come through our doors for this program with dignity and respect and the kind of love that they deserve, because the ultimate disease underlying every addiction, from my perspective, is disconnection and alienation from themselves and from everybody else around them.

Two weekends ago, I began working with West Virginia University researchers on a program of mindfulness-based relapse prevention with opioid addicts in recovery. This is based off of the pioneering work done at the University of Washington. And one of the more pleasant surprises that I've seen since I've been here on the job is the close connection between public health and public safety. Our law enforcement community has just been outstanding and we've been really privileged to work with them.

Finally, I was able to also sit together with delegate, Dr. Chris Stansbury from Kanawha County to sponsor legislation -- he’s going to sponsor legislation to make naloxone an over-the-counter medication, the way it is in 14 other states.

And then, as you’ve said, Mr. President, this is a multifaceted issue. It requires a lot of different people to come together to fix this. It's not a quick fix; it requires a collaborative, multiagency approach with public health, mental health, primary care, schools and school nurses, law enforcement. our own judiciary community. And finally, I'd be remiss if I left out our business and industry, because jobs provide not only an income, they provide a sense of purpose and meaning in the lives of people.

And so I'm hoping that by the end of your visit today, Mr. President, that you’ll be impressed with some of the things that are going on and how much West Virginians are really digging in to try to address this issue. Thank you.

Director Botticelli: Thank you, Doctor.

Chief Webster, Dr. Brumage gave you the perfect lead-in and segue to talk about the importance of public health and public safety collaboration. So love to hear your thoughts and what you're doing here.

Chief Webster: Sure. First of all, I'd like to, again, thank the President of the United States for making this a focus, coming to Charleston, West Virginia, and also providing me an opportunity to represent Charleston and all law enforcement, effectively.

I think this is where most people probably look at the person in uniform and they probably say, okay, this is the guy who is now going to tell us we need to build more jails and make tougher laws. And that's not me. This is such an epidemic and we cannot arrest our way out of this mess.

And I think the President touched on it briefly. What the President said earlier is true, because we want to arrest the violent drug dealers that are creating havoc in our communities. We have our share of violent crime. And we are very fortunate -- our drug task force, we have a great partnership with [inaudible.] They fund so many of our efforts. So, on a daily basis, the bad guy get arrested. We made a significant seizure yesterday.

So we feel in law enforcement, as I'm sure our counterparts do, we really attack the supply side of this issue very well. And so we're not going to back down from that and we're going to keep trying to remove people that are dangerous from society. But what’s nice about this, and what I want to talk about, though, is attacking as a strategy the demand side. And that's what I think is very nice about this panel and this gathering, because we've got a lot of things we can really talk about.

We basically have a community of zombies, for lack of a better word, walking around. They need treatment very badly. And they’re coming up to our officers -- they actually are -- some don't want help yet, but at some point they do want help. And we want to get them help. And a couple of the strategies that we've worked on that we want to attack the demand side, not so much the supply in this conversation, is that we have trained our officers in naloxone. And that's been traditionally, up until very recently, just something that our fire department-- and they do more of the -- they can do the nasal and the IV.

We trained all of our officers, regardless of their assignment, to be able to save somebody’s life -- administer the nasal and the rescue breathing mask that's accompanied. And again, that's paid for with Appalachian -- and such great partnership. They recognize that it's supply and demand.

Interestingly, though, when I went to the roll call to start talking about this to the officers, first, they’re kind of like, that might be more of a fire department role. That might be more -- but as we talked more and I went down the line and said, well, has anybody have anybody affected by an addiction, and I've yet to go to one roll call -- I've been to numerous, but I've yet to one where someone said no. Someone has said, yes, my sister, my aunt.

And we've just got them mounted to our cars in the last week, so we don't have any success stories -- and we don't want to have any stories, really, unless they’re -- we want them all to be positive. But we know the fire department will continue to administer most of them in our camp. But we want to be in a position to save a life -- much like a child drowning and we can administer CPR.

Another thing that we're doing that we're real proud of and it's working with the United States Attorney, which is the LEAD program, the Law enforcement assisted diversion program. And basically, since 2014, we've had 39 I'd call them low-level users that were selling drugs to support their habits. And basically they’re hit with a stark decision right at the arrest gate: You have an opportunity to go to jail, or you can seek immediate treatment. And of the 39 people that have taken us up on that, since 2014, just one has been rearrested. I think that's pretty impressive. And that's a partnership with the U.S. Attorney’s Office and something that our officers are coming around to understanding what kind of problem we have.

And I would just say, finally, because we do support everything Dr. Brumage and the Kanawha County Health Department is doing with his harm reduction plan, and how we factor into that with the needle exchange program -- finally, we have a Handle With Care program that we piloted in 2013 in one school on the West Side, then a second school, and now we do it for the whole city. I see some smiles in the crowd because there are teachers in here.

But what we realized had been lost is when police officers go to crime scenes, what are they there for? They’re there to take witness statements. They’re there to arrest the so-called bad guy. And then they leave. But who is looking out for the children, the collateral damage? Who’s looking out for the child that maybe is just trying to do his homework, mom and dad are fighting. We come in, arrest dad. Mom cries. She’s got to go to the hospital. And so that child gets left behind many, many times. And so we started a notification system to where the next day, our officers that are on the scene will send a notification to the principal or to the counselor basically to say, handle that child with care today. Maybe that child needs an extra day before --

Those are ways that we realize that we're not going to arrest our way out of this. We have our place and we can always use additional law enforcement resources. I'm not going to lie to you. But we're all in this together and it's affecting all of us.

Director Botticelli: Thank you, Chief. I think that's an extraordinary example of your willingness and your partnership.

I'm now going to turn to Susan Shumate from the Charleston Gazette, who I believe is going to ask questions of the panel that come from the community.

Ms. Shumate: Thank you for coming to West Virginia, Mr. President, Secretary Burwell and Secretary Botticelli and the rest of the panel to address the chronic issue of opioid addiction. The Charleston Gazette now has done numerous stories over lots of years about this issue facing West Virginia, and we were able to solicit hundreds of questions from our readers over the last five days for the President and the panel.

And with us here is David and Kate Grubb with their question for the President.

Question: First of all, mom -- Cary -- there isn't a parent here who had a dry eye when you spoke. From your heart, you expressed exactly what we feel. And Danny knows this, too. Mr. President, I want to say that it is -- and I'm going to take this opportunity -- it is wonderful to have an intelligent, caring, thoughtful person in your position.

President Obama: Thank you.

Question: Thank you so much for coming. This issue -- my wife and I, we have five daughters. Mr. President, you might relate a little bit to that.

President Obama: I can relate to that. I don't know how you did five. Two keeps me busy.

Question: And we live here in the East End. My second oldest daughter, Jessica, has been battling heroin addiction for seven years. Ironically, the last time we were in this room was when our daughter was in the 8th grade here at Roosevelt and was a cheerleader. She made good grades. She was socially involved. Her future was bright. But as Jordan mentioned, her life got put on hold for a long time.

Last month, the middle of August, our daughter overdosed. We found her in her bedroom, tourniquet on her arm, syringe next to her. She was already turning blue.

My wife administered CPR. We called 911. While we were waiting I held her and said, don't leave us yet. Fortunately -- I want to say this to the Chief -- the response was amazing. Less than five minutes, the EMTs and the police officers were there. The police officers were sympathetic. They were helpful. The EMTs administering Narcan, coupled with the CPR, saved our daughter’s life. And she’s now in recovery.

This is her fourth time. It usually takes more than one time. And we think this one will be the one. We are full of hope. But we understand the pain -- the pain in this room, the pain the families feel. The concern we have is access -- where do you get the treatment? How do you get the treatment?

And, Cary, you mentioned it. As soon as this overdose happened, we called hotlines and we got numbers to call and we called those numbers, and they said, well, there’s a three-month wait -- or, well, we don't take Medicaid cards -- or, this wasn’t really the facility that could handle your type of problem.

The other problem with Medicaid cards and things of that nature is you can't always go out of state. What if the facility is across the river? We're a border state -- we need to be able to have that ability to go to the facility that may be best for our children.

The bottom line is we need resources and we need to find a way to put those resources into effect so that we have the facilities. Because there’s so many people that want help, like our daughter, but it took forever to find a place for her. Right now she’s in Michigan. That was the best we could do. Why can't we have lots of these types of facilities with trained staff here in West Virginia, close to home?

And lastly, I want to say one of the best provisions of the Affordable Care Act is that it does require coverage for drug treatment. And thank you for that. But one of the concerns is that if there aren’t facilities available, then the treatment coverage can be illusory. So we have to close that gap.

And I think the biggest issue there is are you concerned, as sometimes we get concerned given the current political climate that the Affordable Care Act will be weakened or repealed either before the end of your term or in the next term? What are your feelings about our commitment to that program and to the drug rehabilitation part of that program?

President Obama: Well, first of all, as with Cary, I just want to thank you and your wife for sharing your story. And you're right, if you are a parent, then listening to Cary or listening to you, you can relate.

I told somebody one of my favorite sayings I ever heard about having children is it’s like having your heart walking around outside your body. All you care about is making sure they're okay. But they're so vulnerable. And you're just, as a parent always navigating, just trying to figure out how do I make sure they're going to be okay. And when something like this happens -- and I think it’s something that you sharing your story, Cary, and your sharing your story, sir, really emphasizes this is happening in families everywhere with great parents who love their kids.

Obviously there are a lot of kids who are in less stable homes and are more vulnerable. But the way this kind of phenomenon is penetrating all communities means that we have to understand that there is no “us” and “they” here. There is no “us” and “them.” This is all of us in every school, in every community, in every neighborhood. And it could be your child.

So I think the first thing to do -- and this conversation has been so helpful -- is to understand that this is an American problem that cuts across groups and political affiliations. Because once we understand that, then I think we're in a position to deal with it together as opposed to turning it into another political football. That's point number one.

Point number two: One of my goals when I came into office was for us to restore a sense of balance when it came to dealing with drugs. And this was true for illegal drugs, but it was true for legal but over-prescribed drugs. For a long time our goal has been to deal with the supply side. And as the Chief said, we're very aggressive. I promise you, there’s no backing off us trying to make sure that some Mexican heroin cartel is not getting heroin into West Virginia or anyplace else in this country. And we’ve got a lot of terrific agents and border patrols and officials. We have ramped up aggressively, under my administration and under previous administrations, interdiction efforts. So we don't stop that, and we don't make apologies for that. And if there is somebody who is out there systematically making millions or hundreds of millions of dollars off the destruction of our kids, we're going to go after them. We don't apologize for that.

But we were under-investing and -- even with the changes we’ve made -- continue to under-invest in the demand side, in the prevention and the treatment that is so necessary.

And this is a real opportunity. It’s an important moment for us because if we can start thinking intelligently about treatment on the opioids and prescription drug side, then people start making the connection, well, we should have treatment when it comes to heroin -- and then maybe they start thinking, well, we should have treatment when it comes to other narcotics and drugs that are affecting and devastating families potentially in different ways.

But for a long time I think treatment was seen as a second-class citizen to interdiction and arrest and incarceration. And that mindset needs to change. The good news is we're seeing that mindset changing, and it is on a bipartisan basis -- which I think is really interesting. To go back because I want to make sure that people understand we're putting an end to the old politics on this. Democrats and Republicans were both responsible for wanting to look tough on the War on Drugs and ramping up incarceration. It wasn’t just one side or another. And now both at the same time are realizing, you know what, what are we doing here? Why is it that we're willing to invest $20,000 a year in incarcerating a young person when we might have spent a few thousand dollars on the front end to avoid them going to prison in the first place?

And that mindset means that resources hopefully will start channeling in a new direction. But we’ve got to make sure that the money is following the insight. I think we're at the stage now where people are starting to realize that we need more treatment. But the budgets are not yet reflective of that awareness. And that's going to require Congress.

So in our budget, for example, we're proposing an additional $133 million for enhanced treatment and prevention programs. But it’s also going to involve states, state legislatures, counties, local governments, all also recognizing this is something that every community needs. And we can't be stigmatizing this.

Having a treatment facility is just like having a health clinic for any other illness because it’s affecting people just as much. And we know how to do this when we do it smartly. Think about smoking -- and I can say this as an ex-smoker who still chews on Nicorette -- which is okay, it’s expensive, but I can afford it. Better not starting, though, young people. If you look at how drastically we’ve been able to reduce the smoking rates, despite the fact that we never outlawed smoking -- but what we did was we just enhanced education, made it more difficult for kids to access it, stopped peddling it, stopped advertising it, took some of the money out of it. And over time, a public health model had a drastic impact on smoking.

And Nicorette is -- or nicotine is as addictive as any of the drugs we're talking about. So if we could do on that with the public health model, there’s no reason we can't do it here, as well. But it does require a change in mindset. And as you pointed out, it requires additional money.

Last point I’ll make -- on the insurance side. You are absolutely right that insurance coverage is not enough if there is no treatment center for you to apply that insurance. So we're going to have to build and fund and support more treatment centers locally.

On the other hand, if there is a treatment center and you don't have any insurance, then you might have to mortgage your house. And I am very proud of the fact that the Affordable Care Act -- also known as Obamacare -- which I -- I mean I won’t get on a soapbox here, but there’s 17 million people who have health insurance who didn't have it. And by the way, our overall costs for health care have been going up at the slowest rate in my lifetime after we passed the law. So it’s not bankrupting the government, not bankrupting states.

But one of the things that it does is it requires that insurance -- private insurance that's sold on the marketplaces that are subsidized by the federal government have to provide coverage for substance abuse programs. And given the prevalence of what’s happening to our children and our schools, the notion that we would not have our insurance policies cover this -- they're going to cover a broken leg, but they're not going to cover a situation where your child might die? That doesn't make any sense.

And so I think that we're trying to nudge that along through the marketplaces. But I think one of the things that we need to do is to have consumer groups and our medical associations and others really push a little bit more on the insurance companies to say that this is something that is vital, and that everybody should have coverage. Because you don't know if it’s going to be your child. And that's the most important point here.

Cary, is carrying a particular burden. And I was most touched when Cary talked about her other children. But I thought about Malia and Sasha. They're wonderful girls, but they're teenagers. They do some things. And I remember me being a teenager -- and I’ve written about this, I did some stuff. And I’ve been very honest about it. So what I think about is there but for the grace of God, and that's what we all have to remember. And when we do, then I think we’ve got a chance to make a real change.

But thank you for sharing your story.

Ms. Shumate: This was from Natalie Laliberty, who is a principal at Ruthlawn Elementary School. And she says, as the principal of an elementary school, I see the harm being done to kids who are born addicted or live in traumatic and chaotic drug environment. Many of the kids have any number of learning and behavioral problems upon entering preschool and kindergarten. How can the community at large and schools work together to intervene in these children’s lives during their early years when brain growth stimuli is most critical? Thank you.

President Obama: Well, I’ll make sure to get the doctor involved in this one, as well. And I know that Sylvia and others through HHS were working on this a lot.

I’ll just make two quick comments. Number one, we know that you learn more between the time you're born and three years old than you will ever learn the reset of your life. You are a sponge at that age. And so the more we can invest in early childhood education, prenatal education for parents, home visitation with at-risk moms. And we know who they are. If you're a poor teenage single mom who maybe doesn't have a lot of support, then you are just much more likely to not know how to express the love you have for your child effectively, even if you love them just as much as we love our kids. But you just don't have the tools. So that has got to be an emphasis at the state and local levels. That's where we can really make a difference. But us being able to target at-risk parents, new parents, young parents, that can be extraordinarily helpful.

The second thing that I’ll just say -- and then maybe, Doctor, you might want to chime in on this -- and here I’m going to be a little controversial, but I’m in my last term, I only got a year left. And it’s not like my poll numbers are that high. I figure I can go ahead and say it. I think one of the benefits of conversation like this is to highlight the fact that income and race make a difference here. The truth of the matter is, is that poor communities are more vulnerable.

One of the useful things about this forum is we're all vulnerable, but it’s almost like if you're healthy and you get sick, you have more antibodies and resistance. And if you're poor -- or if you’re already weakened and you get sick, then you're more vulnerable, right?

There are some communities we know that are more vulnerable, and the kids there are more vulnerable. And part of what I hope this discussion does is to remind us that just as it could be Malia or Sasha, or Cary’s kids, or any of our kids, those kids who don't always look like us and don't live in the same neighborhood as us, they're just as precious. And their parents are much less equipped than you, sir, or I would be in terms of dealing with this stuff. And we got to get them help, too.

So I think the doctor earlier talked about the importance of jobs and economic development and broad-based approaches so that growth helps everybody. There is some connection to substance abuse and the vulnerabilities that communities have. And we’ve got -- and let’s face it, part of the reason West Virginia probably has more cases partly has to do with the economics that have been taking place in some of these communities, which is why it’s so important for us to also push on that front, as well.

Doctor, any thoughts on that question about the vulnerability of children and how we can get to them quicker, more effectively?

Dr. Brumage: Yes, Mr. President. One of the things that I’m hoping to kick off here next week is a discussion about probably one of the most important studies that most people have never heard of called the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study. The baseline study was done with 17,000 people at Kaiser Permanente in San Diego, California.

And what they found out was that when people score high on a scale of 10 questions -- everybody has a score from zero to 10, the higher you are on that scale, the more likely you are to have problems with addiction with IV drug use, with smoking, with obesity, with all the public health problems that we're really seeing right now. I think a trauma-informed community and an open discussion about where these problems are going is the first step in addressing why people are using drugs in the first place.

And, Mr. President, you're absolutely right. What happens in those early years and reaching out to those families who we know are at risk and devoting the kind of resources that we would need to is really the first step I think in really truncating this.

Because if we don't, what we're going to be doing 25, 30 years from now is having the same discussion about why these kids are abusing drugs, obese, and so on and so forth. So I think that that's a really important part and to have that sort of open discussion about that. Because it happens in good families, as well as in families who are disadvantaged.

But I agree with you it happens probably more often in families that are disadvantaged. And it perpetuates the cycle of poverty, as well.

President Obama: And for those of us who are more advantaged, the disadvantaged communities create the markets that then seep into the more advantaged communities, right? So the reason we have a fire department is because if your neighbor’s house is burning down, you don't want to just leave it to the neighbor to figure out whether or not he can afford to put out the fire. You have an interest in making sure that fire gets put out before it burns your house.

Well, the same is true with drugs. That child who is poor, you may think, well, I don't have to worry about that kid. That's not my kid. My kid is going to be okay. But if you start seeing more and more kids who are more and more involved in the drug trade, over time that migrates into every community. And that's part of the reason why we got to care about every kid out here and make sure they're vulnerable.

Chief.

Chief Webster: And if I can add also on that issue to the question, that Handle With Care Program -- Ruthlawn Elementary is -- I don't believe -- it’s not in the city of Charleston. But the Handle With Care is about to go statewide if it hasn’t. But the Handle With Care Program will fix some of those issues. I know we're talking about addiction and maybe some others that are born with addiction. Well, the Handle With Care may not fix that, but it will at least alert the proper authorities that child is struggling because of some trauma or substance abuse in the home.

President Obama: I think it’s a really smart program. I got to tell you, before I came down I hadn’t heard about it. And I’d really like to see us advertise this more across the country and adopt this as a best practice.

Director Botticelli: I want to thank everyone for coming today. And I want to particularly thank our incredible panel here -- been sharing their experience, but I think also giving us some ideas. And your innovation I think can really help spur replication around the country. So I really want to thank you for doing that. And just for closing comments, I’ll ask the President to say a few things.

President Obama: Well, I’ve been talking too much. I want to say three things. One is we're just talking about the Handle With Care Program and the gentleman here talked about his daughters’ lives being saved by an EMT and police officers on the spot. Our law enforcement officers sometimes get a lot of attention when something bad happens. They don't get enough attention every single day when they're out there saving lives, doing the right thing, looking out for people.

And when I’ve talked to law enforcement, there is an incredible sense of compassion and empathy. And most folks aren’t in there just to try to be hardnosed. Most of the time, they're just trying to help folks. And so, number one, they deserve our thanks.

But number two, the more we're supporting innovative policing that isn’t just thinking, my job is to clean up a mess after it happens, but rather, I’m part of the community and I need to be part of preventing crime and stuff from happening in the first place -- I think we have to encourage that mindset in a lot of law enforcement. I’m really proud of them, so they deserve some applause for that.

Second thing I want to emphasize, we live in a time when our politics gets so polarized. We got talk radio and we got the Internet. And it seems like every year, sort of the rhetoric ratchets up about how this party is destroying the country, or those folks are unpatriotic, or they're evil, or what have you. And I am deeply encouraged by the fact that on this issue, we're seeing bipartisanship and we haven’t seen some of that rhetoric. And I hope that that continues because that's how we’ll solve this problem. And the elected officials who are here, they represent I think that best tradition. And I just want to commend them for that, because that's how we'll be able to get stuff done -- both at the congressional level and at the state and local levels, as well.

And then, finally, I just want to once again thank Cary, the parents who we heard from here. We are just so grateful that you're willing to share your story. It will save lives. And we want you to know that you're in our thoughts and prayers. And we want to just give you all the encouragement in the world. But just as importantly, or more importantly, we want to give your children encouragement, because they got great parents and these things could happen to any of us, but we want them to know that we love them and are looking out for them, as well.

Thank you, everybody.

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# Address on the Terrorist Attacks in Paris

Good evening, everybody. I just want to make a few brief comments about the attacks across Paris tonight. Once again, we’ve seen an outrageous attempt to terrorize innocent civilians.

This is an attack not just on Paris, it’s an attack not just on the people of France, but this is an attack on all of humanity and the universal values that we share.

We stand prepared and ready to provide whatever assistance that the government and the people of France need to respond. France is our oldest ally. The French people have stood shoulder to shoulder with the United States time and again. And we want to be very clear that we stand together with them in the fight against terrorism and extremism.

Paris itself represents the timeless values of human progress. Those who think that they can terrorize the people of France or the values that they stand for are wrong. The American people draw strength from the French people’s commitment to life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness.

We are reminded in this time of tragedy that the bonds of libertÃ© and Ã©galitÃ© and fraternitÃ© are not only values that the French people care so deeply about, but they are values that we share. And those values are going to endure far beyond any act of terrorism or the hateful vision of those who perpetrated the crimes this evening.

We’re going to do whatever it takes to work with the French people and with nations around the world to bring these terrorists to justice, and to go after any terrorist networks that go after our people.

We don’t yet know all the details of what has happened. We have been in contact with French officials to communicate our deepest condolences to the families of those who have been killed, to offer our prayers and thoughts to those who have been wounded. We have offered our full support to them.

The situation is still unfolding. I’ve chosen not to call President Hollande at this time, because my expectation is that he’s very busy at the moment. I actually, by coincidence, was talking to him earlier today in preparation for the G20 meeting. But I am confident that I’ll be in direct communications with him in the next few days, and we’ll be coordinating in any ways that they think are helpful in the investigation of what’s happened.

This is a heartbreaking situation. And obviously those of us here in the United States know what it’s like. We’ve gone through these kinds of episodes ourselves. And whenever these kinds of attacks happened, we’ve always been able to count on the French people to stand with us. They have been an extraordinary counterterrorism partner, and we intend to be there with them in that same fashion.

I’m sure that in the days ahead we’ll learn more about exactly what happened, and my teams will make sure that we are in communication with the press to provide you accurate information. I don’t want to speculate at this point in terms of who was responsible for this. It appears that there may still be live activity and dangers that are taking place as we speak. And so until we know from French officials that the situation is under control, and we have for more information about it, I don’t want to speculate.

Okay? Thank you very much.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Message to the People of Burundi

Amahoro. [Peace].

Today, I want to speak directly to you: the people of Burundi.

Burundi's a proud and beautiful country. But in recent months, the future of the land you love has been put at risk. Leaders have spewed hateful rhetoric. Terrible acts of violence have taken the lives of innocent men, women, and children. From Burundi's painful past, we know where this kind of violence can lead. Today, you have the chance to choose a different path.

And you're not alone. For many years, your partners in the region, and the United States, have worked to help you build a peaceful and stronger country. I speak to you now as your partner and friend.

To Burundi's leaders: Now is the time to put aside the language of hate and division. Follow through on your commitment to participate in an internationally-mediated dialogue outside of Burundi. After all, real strength is the ability to unify a country, not tear it apart.

To Burundi's military: You represent Burundi's ability to overcome divisions and unite. You are Burundi's sons and daughters. You've helped keep peace across Africa. Now you can help keep peace at home, by staying out of political conflicts and protecting the people of Burundi.

And to all Burundians: Remember what you can achieve when you stand together, how you emerged from colonialism and built a new nation. After civil war and strife, you've worked to rebuild. You've seen the possibility of a better, more peaceful future. Don't let political rivalry, or the voices of hate, take that away from you.

You are one people, and now is the time to stand against violence, and to begin the hard work of uniting. The future of your country, the future you want for your children, is in your hands.

Murakoze cane. [Thank you very much].

# G-20 Press Conference

Good afternoon. Let me begin by thanking President Erdogan and the people of Antalya and Turkey for their outstanding work in hosting this G-20 Summit. Antalya is beautiful. The hospitality of the Turkish people is legendary. To our Turkish friends -- Ã§ok teşekkÃ¼rler [thank you so much]. I've been practicing that.

At the G-20, our focus was on how to get the global economy growing faster and creating more jobs for our people. And I’m pleased that we agreed that growth has to be inclusive to address the rising inequality around the world.

Given growing cyber threats, we committed to a set of norms -- drafted by the United States -- for how governments should conduct themselves in cyberspace, including a commitment not to engage in the cyber theft of intellectual property for commercial gain. And as we head into global climate talks, all G-20 countries have submitted our targets, and we’ve pledged to work together for a successful outcome in Paris.

Of course, much of our attention has focused on the heinous attacks that took place in Paris. Across the world, in the United States, American flags are at half-staff in solidarity with our French allies. We’re working closely with our French partners as they pursue their investigations and track down suspects.

France is already a strong counterterrorism partner, and today we’re announcing a new agreement. We’re streamlining the process by which we share intelligence and operational military information with France. This will allow our personnel to pass threat information, including on ISIL, to our French partners even more quickly and more often -- because we need to be doing everything we can to protect against more attacks and protect our citizens.

Tragically, Paris is not alone. We’ve seen outrageous attacks by ISIL in Beirut, last month in Ankara, routinely in Iraq. Here at the G-20, our nations have sent an unmistakable message that we are united against this threat. ISIL is the face of evil. Our goal, as I’ve said many times, is to degrade and ultimately destroy this barbaric terrorist organization.

As I outlined this fall at the United Nations, we have a comprehensive strategy using all elements of our power -- military, intelligence, economic, development, and the strength of our communities. With have always understood that this would be a long-term campaign. There will be setbacks and there will be successes. The terrible events in Paris were a terrible and sickening setback. Even as we grieve with our French friends, however, we can’t lose sight that there has been progress being made.

On the military front, our coalition is intensifying our airstrikes -- more than 8,000 to date. We’re taking out ISIL leaders, commanders, their killers. We’ve seen that when we have an effective partner on the ground, ISIL can and is pushed back. So local forces in Iraq, backed by coalition airpower, recently liberated Sinjar. Iraqi forces are fighting to take back Ramadi. In Syria, ISIL has been pushed back from much of the border region with Turkey. We’ve stepped up our support of opposition forces who are working to cut off supply lines to ISIL’s strongholds in and around Raqqa. So, in short, both in Iraq and Syria, ISIL controls less territory than it did before.

I made the point to my fellow leaders that if we want this progress to be sustained, more nations need to step up with the resources that this fight demands.

Of course, the attacks in Paris remind us that it will not be enough to defeat ISIL in Syria and Iraq alone. Here in Antalya, our nations, therefore, committed to strengthening border controls, sharing more information, and stepping up our efforts to prevent the flow of foreign fighters in and out of Syria and Iraq. As the United States just showed in Libya, ISIL leaders will have no safe haven anywhere. And we’ll continue to stand with leaders in Muslim communities, including faith leaders, who are the best voices to discredit ISIL’s warped ideology.

On the humanitarian front, our nations agreed that we have to do even more, individually and collectively, to address the agony of the Syrian people. The United States is already the largest donor of humanitarian aid to the Syrian people -- some $4.5 billion in aid so far. As winter approaches, we’re donating additional supplies, including clothing and generators, through the United Nations. But the U.N. appeal for Syria still has less than half the funds needed. Today, I’m again calling on more nations to contribute the resources that this crisis demands.

In terms of refugees, it’s clear that countries like Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan -- which are already bearing an extraordinary burden -- cannot be expected to do so alone. At the same time, all of our countries have to ensure our security. And as President, my first priority is the safety of the American people. And that’s why, even as we accept more refugees -- including Syrians -- we do so only after subjecting them to rigorous screening and security checks.

We also have to remember that many of these refugees are the victims of terrorism themselves -- that’s what they’re fleeing. Slamming the door in their faces would be a betrayal of our values. Our nations can welcome refugees who are desperately seeking safety and ensure our own security. We can and must do both.

Finally, we’ve begun to see some modest progress on the diplomatic front, which is critical because a political solution is the only way to end the war in Syria and unite the Syrian people and the world against ISIL. The Vienna talks mark the first time that all the key countries have come together -- as a result, I would add, of American leadership -- and reached a common understanding. With this weekend’s talks, there’s a path forward -- negotiations between the Syrian opposition and the Syrian regime under the auspices of the United Nations; a transition toward a more inclusive, representative government; a new constitution, followed by free elections; and, alongside this political process, a ceasefire in the civil war, even as we continue to fight against ISIL.

These are obviously ambitious goals. Hopes for diplomacy in Syria have been dashed before. There are any number of ways that this latest diplomatic push could falter. And there are still disagreements between the parties, including, most critically, over the fate of Bashar Assad, who we do not believe has a role in Syria’s future because of his brutal rule. His war against the Syrian people is the primary root cause of this crisis.

What is different this time, and what gives us some degree of hope, is that, as I said, for the first time, all the major countries on all sides of the Syrian conflict agree on a process that is needed to end this war. And so while we are very clear-eyed about the very, very difficult road still head, the United States, in partnership with our coalition, is going to remain relentless on all fronts -- military, humanitarian and diplomatic. We have the right strategy, and we’re going to see it through.

So with that, I'm going to take some questions. And I will begin with Jerome Cartillier of AFP.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. One hundred and twenty-nine people were killed in Paris on Friday night. ISIL claimed responsibility for the massacre, sending the message that they could now target civilians all over the world. The equation has clearly changed. Isn't it time for your strategy to change?

President Obama: Well, keep in mind what we have been doing. We have a military strategy that is putting enormous pressure on ISIL through airstrikes; that has put assistance and training on the ground with Iraqi forces; we're now working with Syrian forces as well to squeeze ISIL, cut off their supply lines. We've been coordinating internationally to reduce their financing capabilities, the oil that they’re trying to ship outside. We are taking strikes against high-value targets -- including, most recently, against the individual who was on the video executing civilians who had already been captured, as well as the head of ISIL in Libya. So it's not just in Iraq and Syria.

And so, on the military front, we are continuing to accelerate what we do. As we find additional partners on the ground that are effective, we work with them more closely. I’ve already authorized additional Special Forces on the ground who are going to be able to improve that coordination.

On the counterterrorism front, keep in mind that since I came into office, we have been worried about these kinds of attacks. The vigilance that the United States government maintains and the cooperation that we’re consistently expanding with our European and other partners in going after every single terrorist network is robust and constant. And every few weeks, I meet with my entire national security team and we go over every single threat stream that is presented, and where we have relevant information, we share it immediately with our counterparts around the world, including our European partners.

On aviation security, we have, over the last several years, been working so that at various airports sites -- not just in the United States, but overseas -- we are strengthening our mechanisms to screen and discover passengers who should not be boarding flights, and improving the matters in which we are screening luggage that is going onboard.

And on the diplomatic front, we’ve been consistently working to try to get all the parties together to recognize that there is a moderate opposition inside of Syria that can form the basis for a transition government, and to reach out not only to our friends but also to the Russians and the Iranians who are on the other side of this equation to explain to them that ultimately an organization like ISIL is the greatest danger to them, as well as to us.

So there will be an intensification of the strategy that we put forward, but the strategy that we are putting forward is the strategy that ultimately is going to work. But as I said from the start, it’s going to take time.

And what’s been interesting is, in the aftermath of Paris, as I listen to those who suggest something else needs to be done, typically the things they suggest need to be done are things we are already doing. The one exception is that there have been a few who suggested that we should put large numbers of U.S. troops on the ground.

And keep in mind that we have the finest military in the world and we have the finest military minds in the world, and I’ve been meeting with them intensively for years now, discussing these various options, and it is not just my view but the view of my closest military and civilian advisors that that would be a mistake -- not because our military could not march into Mosul or Raqqa or Ramadi and temporarily clear out ISIL, but because we would see a repetition of what we’ve seen before, which is, if you do not have local populations that are committed to inclusive governance and who are pushing back against ideological extremes, that they resurface -- unless we’re prepared to have a permanent occupation of these countries.

And let’s assume that we were to send 50,000 troops into Syria. What happens when there’s a terrorist attack generated from Yemen? Do we then send more troops into there? Or Libya, perhaps? Or if there’s a terrorist network that’s operating anywhere else -- in North Africa, or in Southeast Asia?

So a strategy has to be one that can be sustained. And the strategy that we’re pursuing, which focuses on going after targets, limiting wherever possible the capabilities of ISIL on the ground -- systematically going after their leadership, their infrastructure, strengthening Shia -- or strengthening Syrian and Iraqi forces and Kurdish forces that are prepared to fight them, cutting off their borders and squeezing the space in which they can operate until ultimately we’re able to defeat them -- that’s the strategy we’re going to have to pursue.

And we will continue to generate more partners for that strategy. And there are going to be some things that we try that don’t work; there will be some strategies we try that do work. And when we find strategies that work, we will double down on those.

Margaret Brennan, CBS.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. A more than year-long bombing campaign in Iraq and in Syria has failed to contain the ambition and the ability of ISIS to launch attacks in the West. Have you underestimated their abilities? And will you widen the rules of engagement for U.S. forces to take more aggressive action?

President Obama: No, we haven't underestimated our abilities. This is precisely why we’re in Iraq as we speak, and why we’re operating in Syria as we speak. And it’s precisely why we have mobilized 65 countries to go after ISIL, and why I hosted at the United Nations an entire discussion of counterterrorism strategies and curbing the flow of foreign fighters, and why we’ve been putting pressure on those countries that have not been as robust as they need to in tracking the flow of foreign fighters in and out of Syria and Iraq.

And so there has been an acute awareness on the part of my administration from the start that it is possible for an organization like ISIL that has such a twisted ideology, and has shown such extraordinary brutality and complete disregard for innocent lives, that they would have the capabilities to potentially strike in the West. And because thousands of fighters have flowed from the West and are European citizens -- a few hundred from the United States, but far more from Europe -- that when those foreign fighters returned, it posed a significant danger. And we have consistently worked with our European partners, disrupting plots in some cases. Sadly, this one was not disrupted in time.

But understand that one of the challenges we have in this situation is, is that if you have a handful of people who don’t mind dying, they can kill a lot of people. That’s one of the challenges of terrorism. It’s not their sophistication or the particular weapon that they possess, but it is the ideology that they carry with them and their willingness to die. And in those circumstances, tracking each individual, making sure that we are disrupting and preventing these attacks is a constant effort at vigilance, and requires extraordinary coordination.

Now, part of the reason that it is important what we do in Iraq and Syria is that the narrative that ISIL developed of creating this caliphate makes it more attractive to potential recruits. So when I said that we are containing their spread in Iraq and Syria, in fact, they control less territory than they did last year. And the more we shrink that territory, the less they can pretend that they are somehow a functioning state, and the more it becomes apparent that they are simply a network of killers who are brutalizing local populations. That allows us to reduce the flow of foreign fighters, which then, over time, will lessen the numbers of terrorists who can potentially carry out terrible acts like they did in Paris.

And that’s what we did with al Qaeda. That doesn’t mean, by the way, that al Qaeda no longer possess the capabilities of potentially striking the West. Al Qaeda in the Peninsula that operates primarily in Yemen we know has consistently tried to target the West. And we are consistently working to disrupt those acts. But despite the fact that they have not gotten as much attention as ISIL, they still pose a danger, as well.

And so our goals here consistently have to be to be aggressive, and to leave no stone unturned, but also recognize this is not conventional warfare. We play into the ISIL narrative when we act as if they’re a state, and we use routine military tactics that are designed to fight a state that is attacking another state. That’s not what’s going on here.

These are killers with fantasies of glory who are very savvy when it comes to social media, and are able to infiltrate the minds of not just Iraqis or Syrians, but disaffected individuals around the world. And when they activate those individuals, those individuals can do a lot of damage. And so we have to take the approach of being rigorous on our counterterrorism efforts, and consistently improve and figure out how we can get more information, how we can infiltrate these networks, how we can reduce their operational space, even as we also try to shrink the amount of territory they control to defeat their narrative.

Ultimately, to reclaim territory from them is going to require, however, an ending of the Syrian civil war, which is why the diplomatic efforts are so important. And it’s going to require an effective Iraqi effort that bridges Shia and Sunni differences, which is why our diplomatic efforts inside of Iraq are so important, as well.

Jim Avila.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. In the days and weeks before the Paris attacks, did you receive warning in your daily intelligence briefing that an attack was imminent? If not, does that not call into question the current assessment that there is no immediate, specific, credible threat to the United States today?

And secondly, if I could ask you to address your critics who say that your reluctance to enter another Middle East war, and your preference of diplomacy over using the military makes the United States weaker and emboldens our enemies.

President Obama: Jim, every day we have threat streams coming through the intelligence transit. And as I said, every several weeks we sit down with all my national security, intelligence, and military teams to discuss various threat streams that may be generated. And the concerns about potential ISIL attacks in the West have been there for over a year now, and they come through periodically. There were no specific mentions of this particular attack that would give us a sense of something that we need -- that we could provide French authorities, for example, or act on ourselves.

But typically the way the intelligence works is there will be a threat stream that is from one source, how reliable is that source; perhaps some signal intelligence gets picked up, it’s evaluated. Some of it is extraordinarily vague and unspecific, and there’s no clear timetable. Some of it may be more specific, and then folks chase down that threat to see what happens.

I am not aware of anything that was specific in the sense -- that would have given a premonition about a particular action in Paris that would allow for law enforcement or military actions to disrupt it.

With respect to the broader issue of my critics, to some degree I answered the question earlier. I think that when you listen to what they actually have to say, what they’re proposing, most of the time, when pressed, they describe things that we’re already doing. Maybe they’re not aware that we’re already doing them. Some of them seem to think that if I were just more bellicose in expressing what we’re doing, that that would make a difference -- because that seems to be the only thing that they’re doing, is talking as if they’re tough. But I haven't seen particular strategies that they would suggest that would make a real difference.

Now, there are a few exceptions. And as I said, the primary exception is those who would deploy U.S. troops on a large scale to retake territory either in Iraq or now in Syria. And at least they have the honesty to go ahead and say that’s what they would do. I just addressed why I think they’re wrong. There have been some who are well-meaning, and I don’t doubt their sincerity when it comes to the issue of the dire humanitarian situation in Syria, who, for example, call for a no-fly zone or a safe zone of some sort.

And this is an example of the kind of issue where I will sit down with our top military and intelligence advisors, and we will painstakingly go through what does something like that look like. And typically, after we’ve gone through a lot of planning and a lot of discussion, and really working it through, it is determined that it would be counterproductive to take those steps -- in part because ISIL does not have planes, so the attacks are on the ground. A true safe zone requires us to set up ground operations. And the bulk of the deaths that have occurred in Syria, for example, have come about not because of regime bombing, but because of on-the-ground casualties. Who would come in, who could come out of that safe zone; how would it work; would it become a magnet for further terrorist attacks; and how many personnel would be required, and how would it end -- there’s a whole set of questions that have to be answered there.

I guess my point is this, Jim: My only interest is to end suffering and to keep the American people safe. And if there’s a good idea out there, then we’re going to do it. I don’t think I’ve shown hesitation to act -- whether it’s with respect to bin Laden or with respect to sending additional troops in Afghanistan, or keeping them there -- if it is determined that it’s actually going to work.

But what we do not do, what I do not do is to take actions either because it is going to work politically or it is going to somehow, in the abstract, make America look tough, or make me look tough. And maybe part of the reason is because every few months I go to Walter Reed, and I see a 25-year-old kid who’s paralyzed or has lost his limbs, and some of those are people I’ve ordered into battle. And so I can’t afford to play some of the political games that others may.

We'll do what’s required to keep the American people safe. And I think it's entirely appropriate in a democracy to have a serious debate about these issues. If folks want to pop off and have opinions about what they think they would do, present a specific plan. If they think that somehow their advisors are better than the Chairman of my Joint Chiefs of Staff and the folks who are actually on the ground, I want to meet them. And we can have that debate. But what I'm not interested in doing is posing or pursuing some notion of American leadership or America winning, or whatever other slogans they come up with that has no relationship to what is actually going to work to protect the American people, and to protect people in the region who are getting killed, and to protect our allies and people like France. I'm too busy for that.

Jim Acosta.

Question: Thank you very much, Mr. President. I wanted to go back to something that you said to Margaret earlier when you said that you have not underestimated ISIS’s abilities. This is an organization that you once described as a JV team that evolved into a force that has now occupied territory in Iraq and Syria and is now able to use that safe haven to launch attacks in other parts of the world. How is that not underestimating their capabilities? And how is that contained, quite frankly? And I think a lot of Americans have this frustration that they see that the United States has the greatest military in the world, it has the backing of nearly every other country in the world when it comes to taking on ISIS. I guess the question is -- and if you’ll forgive the language -- is why can't we take out these bastards?

President Obama: Well, Jim, I just spent the last three questions answering that very question, so I don't know what more you want me to add. I think I've described very specifically what our strategy is, and I've described very specifically why we do not pursue some of the other strategies that have been suggested.

This is not, as I said, a traditional military opponent. We can retake territory. And as long as we leave our troops there, we can hold it, but that does not solve the underlying problem of eliminating the dynamics that are producing these kinds of violent extremist groups.

And so we are going to continue to pursue the strategy that has the best chance of working, even though it does not offer the satisfaction, I guess, of a neat headline or an immediate resolution. And part of the reason, as I said, Jim, is because there are costs to the other side. I just want to remind people, this is not an abstraction. When we send troops in, those troops get injured, they get killed; they’re away from their families; our country spends hundreds of billions of dollars. And so given the fact that there are enormous sacrifices involved in any military action, it's best that we don't shoot first and aim later. It's important for us to get the strategy right. And the strategy that we are pursuing is the right one.

Ron Allen.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. I think a lot of people around the world and in America are concerned because given the strategy that you’re pursuing -- and it’s been more than a year now -- ISIS’s capabilities seem to be expanding. Were you aware that they had the capability of pulling off the kind of attack that they did in Paris? Are you concerned? And do you think they have that same capability to strike in the United States?

And do you think that given all you’ve learned about ISIS over the past year or so, and given all the criticism about your underestimating them, do you think you really understand this enemy well enough to defeat them and to protect the homeland?

President Obama: All right, so this is another variation on the same question. And I guess -- let me try it one last time.

We have been fully aware of the potential capabilities of them carrying out a terrorist attack. That’s precisely why we have been mounting a very aggressive strategy to go after them. As I said before, when you’re talking about the ability of a handful of people with not wildly sophisticated military equipment, weapons, who are willing to die, they can kill a lot of people. And preventing them from doing so is challenging for every country. And if there was a swift and quick solution to this, I assure you that not just the United States, but France and Turkey, and others who have been subject to these terrorist attacks would have implemented those strategies.

There are certain advantages that the United States has in preventing these kinds of attacks. Obviously, after 9/11, we hardened the homeland, set up a whole series of additional steps to protect aviation, to apply lessons learned. We’ve seen much better cooperation between the FBI, state governments, local governments. There is some advantages to geography with respect to the United States.

But, having said that, we’ve seen the possibility of terrorist attacks on our soil. There was the Boston Marathon bombers. Obviously, it did not result in the scale of death that we saw in Paris, but that was a serious attempt at killing a lot of people by two brothers and a crockpot. And it gives you some sense of, I think, the kinds of challenges that are going to be involved in this going forward.

So again, ISIL has serious capabilities. Its capabilities are not unique. They are capabilities that other terrorist organizations that we track and are paying attention to possess, as well. We are going after all of them.

What is unique about ISIL is the degree to which it has been able to control territory that then allows them to attract additional recruits, and the greater effectiveness that they have on social media and their ability to use that to not only attract recruits to fight in Syria, but also potentially to carry out attacks in the homeland and in Europe and in other parts of the world.

And so our ability to shrink the space in which they can operate, combined with a resolution to the Syria situation -- which will reduce the freedom with which they feel that they can operate, and getting local forces who are able to hold and keep them out over the long term, that ultimately is going to be what’s going to make a difference. And it’s going to take some time, but it’s not something that at any stage in this process have we not been aware needs to be done.

Question: [Off-mic] -- Mr. President?

President Obama: Okay, go ahead.

Question: Should I wait for the microphone?

President Obama: No, I can hear you.

Question: Okay, thank you so much. [Inaudible.] I want to ask a question [inaudible]. These terrorist attacks we’ve seen allegedly have been attacks under the name of Islam. But this really takes -- or upsets the peaceful people like countries like Turkey. So how can we give off that [inaudible] this is not really representative of Muslims?

President Obama: Well, this is something that we spoke a lot about at the G-20. The overwhelming majority of victims of terrorism over the last several years, and certainly the overwhelming majority of victims of ISIL, are themselves Muslims. ISIL does not represent Islam. It is not representative in any way of the attitudes of the overwhelming majority of Muslims. This is something that’s been emphasized by Muslim leaders -- whether it’s President Erdogan or the President of Indonesia or the President of Malaysia -- countries that are majority Muslim, but have shown themselves to be tolerant and to work to be inclusive in their political process.

And so to the degree that anyone would equate the terrible actions that took place in Paris with the views of Islam, those kinds of stereotypes are counterproductive. They’re wrong. They will lead, I think, to greater recruitment into terrorist organizations over time if this becomes somehow defined as a Muslim problem as opposed to a terrorist problem.

Now, what is also true is, is that the most vicious terrorist organizations at the moment are ones that claim to be speaking on behalf of true Muslims. And I do think that Muslims around the world -- religious leaders, political leaders, ordinary people -- have to ask very serious questions about how did these extremist ideologies take root, even if it’s only affecting a very small fraction of the population. It is real and it is dangerous. And it has built up over time, and with social media it has now accelerated.

And so I think, on the one hand, non-Muslims cannot stereotype, but I also think the Muslim community has to think about how we make sure that children are not being infected with this twisted notion that somehow they can kill innocent people and that that is justified by religion. And to some degree, that is something that has to come from within the Muslim community itself. And I think there have been times where there has not been enough pushback against extremism. There’s been pushback -- there are some who say, well, we don’t believe in violence, but are not as willing to challenge some of the extremist thoughts or rationales for why Muslims feel oppressed. And I think those ideas have to be challenged.

Let me make one last point about this, and then unfortunately I have to take a flight to Manila. I’m looking forward to seeing Manila, but I hope I can come back to Turkey when I’m not so busy.

One of the places that you’re seeing this debate play itself out is on the refugee issue both in Europe, and I gather it started popping up while I was gone back in the United States. The people who are fleeing Syria are the most harmed by terrorism, they are the most vulnerable as a consequence of civil war and strife. They are parents, they are children, they are orphans. And it is very important -- and I was glad to see that this was affirmed again and again by the G-20 -- that we do not close our hearts to these victims of such violence and somehow start equating the issue of refugees with the issue of terrorism.

In Europe, I think people like Chancellor Merkel have taken a very courageous stance in saying it is our moral obligation, as fellow human beings, to help people who are in such vulnerable situations. And I know that it is putting enormous strains on the resources of the people of Europe. Nobody has been carrying a bigger burden than the people here in Turkey, with 2.5 million refugees, and the people of Jordan and Lebanon, who are also admitting refugees. The fact that they’ve kept their borders open to these refugees is a signal of their belief in a common humanity.

And so we have to, each of us, do our part. And the United States has to step up and do its part. And when I hear folks say that, well, maybe we should just admit the Christians but not the Muslims; when I hear political leaders suggesting that there would be a religious test for which a person who’s fleeing from a war-torn country is admitted, when some of those folks themselves come from families who benefitted from protection when they were fleeing political persecution -- that’s shameful. That’s not American. That’s not who we are. We don’t have religious tests to our compassion.

When Pope Francis came to visit the United States, and gave a speech before Congress, he didn’t just speak about Christians who were being persecuted. He didn’t call on Catholic parishes just to admit to those who were of the same religious faith. He said, protect people who are vulnerable.

And so I think it is very important for us right now -- particularly those who are in leadership, particularly those who have a platform and can be heard -- not to fall into that trap, not to feed that dark impulse inside of us.

I had a lot of disagreements with George W. Bush on policy, but I was very proud after 9/11 when he was adamant and clear about the fact that this is not a war on Islam. And the notion that some of those who have taken on leadership in his party would ignore all of that, that’s not who we are. On this, they should follow his example. It was the right one. It was the right impulse. It’s our better impulse. And whether you are European or American, the values that we are defending -- the values that we’re fighting against ISIL for are precisely that we don’t discriminate against people because of their faith. We don’t kill people because they’re different than us. That’s what separates us from them. And we don’t feed that kind of notion that somehow Christians and Muslims are at war.

And if we want to be successful at defeating ISIL, that’s a good place to start -- by not promoting that kind of ideology, that kind of attitude. In the same way that the Muslim community has an obligation not to in any way excuse anti-Western or anti-Christian sentiment, we have the same obligation as Christians. And we are -- it is good to remember that the United States does not have a religious test, and we are a nation of many peoples of different faiths, which means that we show compassion to everybody. Those are the universal values we stand for. And that’s what my administration intends to stand for.

Thank you very much, everybody.

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# ASEAN Business and Investment Summit Address

Thank you so much. Please be seated. Well, good morning, and thank you for welcoming me here today.

Before I begin, I want to say a few words about the appalling terrorist attack in Mali. We're still learning the facts, but what we do know is that gunmen stormed a hotel in the capital of Bamako that was filled with citizens from a number of nations -- many of whom were there to help the people of Mali build a lasting peace. The terrorists began ruthlessly killing people and taking hostages.

And so, on behalf of the American people, I want to extend our deepest condolences to the people of Mali and the victims’ families, including at least one American. These were innocent people who had everything to live for, and they will be remembered for the joy and love that they brought to the world.

And we are grateful to all those who responded and risked their own lives to save others. Malian security forces and all our own diplomatic security agents rushed in to pull people to safety. French troops and American forces who were in the country for training missions provided support, as did United Nations forces. And thanks to the swift action and skill of all involved, many people escaped and lives were saved, and the terrorists were prevented from causing even more bloodshed. But I want the American people to know that we're still working to account for Americans who may have been at the hotel and to ensure the safety of all of our citizens in Mali.

Like the heinous attacks we saw in Paris -- and attacks we see all too often elsewhere -- this is another awful reminder that the scourge of terrorism threatens so many of our nations. And once again, this barbarity only stiffens our resolve to meet this challenge. We will stand with the people of Mali as they work to rid their country of terrorists and strengthen their democracy. With allies and partners, the United States will be relentless against those who target our citizens. We’ll continue to root out terrorist networks. We will not allow these killers to have a safe haven.

And as I've seen throughout my trip this week, nations around the world -- including countries represented here today --are united in our determination to protect our people; to push back on the hateful ideologies that fuel this terrorism; and to stand up for the universal values of tolerance and respect for human dignity that unites us and makes us stronger than any terrorist. This is the work we must do together. This is the future that we have to build together. And that's why I’m here today.

I want to thank everyone at the ASEAN Business Advisory Council for welcoming us. Those of you here today represent the strength and diversity of all 10 ASEAN nations. I’m pleased that we’re joined by our friends from the American Malaysian Chamber of Commerce and the U.S.-ASEAN Business Council. And I especially want to thank our outstanding hosts -- the government and people of Malaysia, this year’s ASEAN chair. Terima kasih banyak.

Now, as I mentioned before, Southeast Asia holds a special place in my heart. As a boy, I lived in Indonesia where for many years my mother dedicated herself to empowering rural women. And as President, I’ve worked to deepen America’s engagement in this region. I was proud to be the first U.S. President to meet with the leaders of all 10 ASEAN countries -- the first U.S. President to attend the East Asia Summit, and this visit marks my sixth meeting with ASEAN.

And today, ASEAN is one of the largest markets for U.S. exports, and American businesses invest more in ASEAN than any other of these regions. It’s one of the reasons that, while I’ve been in office, we’ve boosted our exports across Asia by more than 50 percent, to record levels. And I congratulate all the ASEAN nations, after many years of work, on launching the new ASEAN Community. I look forward to becoming the first U.S. President to visit Laos when it hosts ASEAN next year.

America’s closer ties with this region are part of a larger story. When I became President, I made a strategic decision that after a decade in which the United States had focused so heavily elsewhere, especially the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, that we would rebalance our foreign policy and play a larger and long-term role here in the Asia Pacific.

I made this decision with an appreciation of history -- how the United States, as a Pacific power, has been a stabilizing presence here for seven decades. And I made it with an eye on the future -- because as the home of half of humanity and some of the fastest-growing markets in the world, the security and prosperity of the Asia Pacific is vital to the national interests of the United States. And deeper partnerships with our allies and partners in this region can help us meet global challenges, including terrorism.

So I put forward a vision of the future our nations can build together: A future of mutual security and peace where international law and norms are upheld and where disputes are resolved by dialogue and diplomacy. A future of open markets and trade that is free and fair. A future of freedom, where government is based on the will of the people, citizens are empowered by democratic governance and the inherent dignity and human rights of all people are upheld.

In pursuit of this vision, the United States has deepened our engagement with the region across the board. We’ve strengthened our alliances. We’ve modernized our defense posture. More U.S. forces are rotating through more parts of the region for training and exercises. We’ve expanded our cooperation with emerging powers and economies, like Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam and India. We’re working to build a constructive relationship with China, where we cooperate more where our interests align, even as we candidly confront areas of disagreement.

We’ve stood up for democracy, for human rights and for development. We’ve called for a return to civilian rule in Thailand. And we’re forging new partnerships to help educate girls and young women in Cambodia. Just yesterday, I met with some extraordinary young people from our Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative -- more than 55,000 young innovators who are going to shape this region for decades to come. And we’re going to sustain our engagement with the people of Myanmar. The landslide victory of Aung San Suu Kyi’s National League of Democracy gives hope for a Burma that is inclusive and united, peaceful and democratic.

In other words, even as the United States has dealt with pressing challenges in other parts of the world, our rebalance to Asia Pacific has continued full force. And now, we’re ready to take the next step by moving ahead with the highest-standard trade agreement in history -- the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Four of your nations are already part of TPP -- Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam. Along with the United States, it also includes Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Canada, Mexico, Peru and Chile. When implemented, it won’t just boost trade and support jobs in our 12 countries, it will help set stronger rules for trade across the Asia Pacific. And that’s what I want to talk about today.

I know that the politics around trade can be hard -- in all of our countries. Past agreements haven’t always lived up to their promises. In recent decades, with the rise of globalization and technology, some workers, especially in developed countries, have seen their jobs exported abroad or replaced by automation. I’ve seen it in my home state of Illinois, as manufacturing plants shut down and jobs dried up over the last two decades. And all of this has made many people skeptical of trade agreements -- despite the fact that American manufacturing has added some 900,000 new jobs in the past few years, growing for the first time in more than a decade. Meanwhile, some industries that are protected from competition by subsidies or tariffs -- and the political interests that represent those industries -- often resist efforts to change the status quo.

So, for all these reasons, a new trade deal like TPP can be a tough sell. But the answer is not to stop trading -- to try to build barriers that close any individual country off from the global economy. It’s not possible anymore. Our economies are more integrated than ever. Companies like yours rely on global supply chains. The answer is to do trade the right way -- and that’s what TPP does.

I’ve been making the case for TPP to the American people, including our Congress, where I am confident we will get approval and move forward. I know there are similar debates in TPP countries here in Asia. And as business leaders, you can make your voices heard. So I’m not going to recount all the reasons why this is such a good deal. But I would encourage you to remind people back home that this trade pact is a win for all of our countries. It’s a win for our 12 TPP countries. By eliminating tens of thousands of tariffs -- essentially taxes -- on goods, on each other’s products, TPP removes old barriers and opens new markets.

The United States is already one of the most open economies in the world. And when the high tariffs among our TPP partners come down also, it will create new opportunities for everybody. Malaysia will be able to sell more cell phones to Mexico. Singapore can sell more medicine to Peru. Vietnam will be able to sell more leather goods to Japan. The list goes on.

TPP is a win for the United States. I’m not going to be shy about this. As President of the United States, I make no apologies for fighting to open markets to American companies and workers. And we’ve had success. U.S. exports have reached record highs, and we know that companies that export tend to grow faster, hire more employees and pay their workers more than companies that do not export. And so, by eliminating some 18,000 tariffs that other countries put on American exports, TPP levels the playing field for our workers and businesses -- which means American manufacturers will be able to sell more cars and trucks, equipment and machinery. American farmers and ranchers will be able to sell more dairy, fruits, poultry and beef -- and there’s no steak like an American steak. You agree.

The bottom line is, Americans are ready to compete. With TPP, you’ll be seeing more products with that label we’re so proud of -- “Made in America.”

And TPP is a win for the kind of trade that companies and workers in our countries need to compete in the 21st century. It makes sure that globalization is working for us, and not against us.

For example, TPP strengthens protections for intellectual property so innovations are less likely to be stolen or pirated. It encourages more trade in services, which is a larger and larger proportion of our economies and our workforces. As the first trade agreement to truly embrace the digital economy, it encourages e-commerce. It simplifies customs, which makes it easier for all companies to export, especially small and medium-sized businesses that create many of the jobs in our countries and have more difficulty navigating through a lot of bureaucracy in trying to export to other countries.

But the message I really want to deliver today is this -- TPP is more than just a trade pact; it also has important strategic and geopolitical benefits. TPP is a long-term investment in our shared security and in universal human rights. I want to be very clear -- trade is not a panacea. It’s not a cure-all for the range of challenges our nations face. But we know from experience that when trade is done right it can help fuel progress in other areas.

Let me be specific. First, TPP will help build greater trust and cooperation among nations. We’ve long understood that trade can help bring countries and regions closer. Take the example of the post-World War II era, where the free nations of Europe set out to bind themselves together in what would become the European Union. Over many decades, the United States helped fashion the international institutions and global trading system that have stitched our economies together and helped prevent another war between major powers. There is a link between economic security and national security, and that's at the heart of ASEAN. So TPP will help to advance the economic integration that underwrites peace and stability in this region.

Second, TPP will bind the United States even closer to some of our strongest allies in Asia. It’s no coincidence that around the world many of our treaty allies are also some of our strongest trading partners. There’s a virtuous circle -- our alliances are the foundation for our security, which becomes the foundation of our prosperity, which allows us to invest in the sources of our strength, including our alliances. The United States has treaty obligations to the security of our allies, Japan and Australia, a longstanding defense relationships with New Zealand. With greater trade and ties under the TPP, we and our allies will be investing in our mutual security for generations to come.

Third, TPP will allow the United States to forge even deeper partnerships with countries that are playing a rising role in this region. Here in Malaysia, new starts-ups and investments in entrepreneurship have made this country a hub of innovation. Vietnam has one of the region’s fastest-growing economies. With greater prosperity comes greater responsibility, and both Malaysia and Vietnam are, indeed, doing more. So the United States is working with both countries to ensure maritime security, to uphold the freedom of navigation, to ensure that disputes in the region are resolved peacefully. And as they grow their economies under TPP, Malaysia and Vietnam will be able to make even greater contributions to regional security.

Fourth, TPP will allow our countries, together, to write the rules for trade in the Asia Pacific for decades to come. Our nations are more secure and more prosperous when everybody plays by the same rules. And what are those rules? We believe that economic relationships should be based not on one country simply extracting the resources of another country, but rather, as TPP envisions, economic partnerships where we encourage innovation and investment for our mutual benefit.

We believe that economic disagreements should be resolved peacefully through dialogue, not through bullying or coercion. We believe in fair competition -- which is why TPP is the first trade agreement to level the playing field between private firms and state-owned enterprises. And we believe that citizens should be able to explore new ideas and innovate -- which is why TPP protects the free flow of data and information across borders and commits our nations to a free and open Internet.

In this sense, with TPP, we’re not only writing the rules for trade in the Asia Pacific, we also have an historic opportunity to shape the future of the global economy. Our 12 nations comprise nearly 40 percent of global GDP, about a third of global trade. And already, a growing number of nations are expressing interest in joining TPP. If a country

-- including other ASEAN countries -- are prepared to meet its high standards, that’s a conversation worth having. And even countries that may never join TPP will have to compete in a TPP world, giving them an incentive to raise their standards, as well. So countries will have a choice -- reform and modernize, or risk getting left behind. In this way, I believe TPP will help strengthen the hand of reformers far beyond our 12 initial members.

All of which means that, over time, TPP holds the promise of becoming an even more important driver of growth in the global economy. There are people back home in the United States that say America -- at a time when you see more emerging powers, a more multipolar world -- that is worried about American leadership. And sometimes I have to explain that one of the ways we're already leading is in helping to shape something like the Trans-Pacific Partnership. This is a prime example of America and our partners working together to shape the world we want for future generations.

And this is particularly important when it comes to advancing human rights and universal values, which are embedded in TPP. In the past, trade agreements often have done too little in this area. And that’s why we negotiated so hard for so long to get a trade pact that upholds our values. And we succeeded. TPP contains the highest trade standards ever negotiated. And with TPP, countries are already making binding commitments.

Every TPP country has responsibilities -- and I'll give you some specific examples. Around the world -- including in America and here in the Asia Pacific -- it’s still too hard for workers to form a union and protect their rights. In some countries, it’s a crime. But we know from our own history that when workers are able to come together and speak with one voice, it helps to boost wages, which improves working conditions and raises living standards. And all this progress ripples out and benefits all workers.

If workers have basic protections and decent wages, then they’re better customers for your business. I believe every worker should have basic protections and rights. So it’s in the text, in black and white -- TPP countries commit to recognizing freedom of association and the right to collectively bargain -- which means that, for the first time, a government like Vietnam has agreed to let its workers form independent units. And that’s progress.

Around the world, and here in the Asia Pacific, we still see abuses that are abhorrent and unacceptable, where men, women and children are sold to traffickers or tricked into forced labor. They toil, day after day, in dangerous conditions that can turn deadly. And this is not “labor” -- this is akin to modern slavery. It has to stop. TPP helps fight this kind of forced labor with internationally recognized labor rights -- prohibitions against forced labor; against child labor; against employment discrimination, including against women.

TPP requires acceptable work conditions, such as a minimum wage, fair hours of work, and workplace safety. And meanwhile, Malaysia, Vietnam and Brunei have committed to specific, concrete reforms to reach these high standards. Change will not happen overnight. But with TPP, hundreds of millions of workers will now be covered by higher, enforceable labor standards. That is progress.

Around the world, and here in the Asia Pacific, the cancer of corruption is a daily indignity. Having to pay a bribe just to start a business or go to school or get a job steals money from workers and families and businesses -- and it is a violation of human rights, and it is a bad strategy for development. Corruption drains billions of dollars that could be used to improve the lives of citizens. Imagine the schools and hospitals and roads and bridges that could be built with that money -- investments that would make countries more competitive and more prosperous.

And that’s why TPP includes the strongest anti-corruption and transparency standards of any trade agreement in history. It requires countries to have laws against corruption -- including making it a crime to bribe a public official -- and it requires countries to enforce those laws. So TPP encourages rule of law and stronger, more effective and more accountable governance. That is progress.

Around the world, including in the United States, and here in the Asia Pacific, rising economic inequality holds back economies and undermines the cohesiveness of our societies and our political systems. Globally, countless millions barely survive on one U.S. dollar and 25 cents a day. That's an affront to human dignity. I’ve made combating economic inequality and creating more opportunity for my fellow Americans a focus of my presidency. And the world recently committed to new Sustainable Development Goals, so that we can continue to push to eradicate the injustice of extreme poverty.

One of the best ways to do that is with economic growth that is broad-based and inclusive -- that lifts up the many and raises living standards -- and by helping developing nations sell more of their goods to the world. That’s what TPP does. It’s designed to help promote development that is sustainable, that improves food security and that reduces poverty. And that is progress.

And around the world, as well as here in the Asia Pacific, economic progress has too often come at the expense of the environment. For too long, the myth persisted that we had to choose between the two. But facts don’t lie. In the United States, we have cleaner air and cleaner water compared to decades ago, even as our economy has grown several times over. The international community took steps to repair the ozone layer even as global growth lifted millions of people from poverty into the middle class. We have proven that we can grow our economies and protect our planet. And that’s why TPP includes the strongest environmental standards in history -- specific provisions to combat wildlife trafficking, illegal logging that worsens deforestation, illegal fishing that endangers our oceans and our fisheries. That is progress.

The reforms and changes I’ve described won’t happen overnight. TPP has to be adopted; it has to be implemented. Countries and companies will be adapting to these new standards and these new reforms. And it's going to take time. We’re ready to partner with all of them and help them as they up their game. And this brings me to another way that TPP is different and better than many past agreements. The standards we’ve described -- that I've described are actually enforceable. TPP has teeth, strong provisions for monitoring. And we’re going to be vigilant to make sure countries fulfill their commitments. If they don’t, we will take action. If a TPP country violates their responsibilities, there are consequences and real penalties. For the sake of our workers and their families and the hopes they have for the future, we’ve got to make sure that we’re delivering on the promises that we’re making today.

So the bottom line is that, as significant as it is, the Trans-Pacific Partnership represents more than just the additional goods we’ll trade, or even the new economic partnerships that we’ll forge and the jobs it will support. TPP sends a powerful message across this region -- across the Asia Pacific. It says that America’s foreign policy rebalance to the Asia Pacific will continue on every front. It says that the United States will keep its commitments to allies and partners, and that we are here to stay and that you can count on us.

And TPP says, most of all, that Americans and people across this region stand together for a shared vision of a future that is more peaceful and more secure and that upholds the universal rights of every human being.

This is about the father, the mother, the children, crammed onto factory floors who deserve their dignity and humane working conditions. It’s about the farmers who want to sell more of their crops and boost their incomes. It's about the workers on the assembly line who are ready to build more cars because new markets await. And it’s about companies like yours -- but also the small business owner who’s ready to export more products and hire more workers, and the entrepreneur who believes that her new idea could be the spark that ignites a new industry or changes the world.

That’s the progress -- the opportunity, the growth, the innovations -- that we can unleash. That’s why I’m so optimistic about our shared future. That's why I'm grateful for our work together. That’s why the nations and people of this region will always have a friend and partner in the United States of America.

Thank you very much, everybody.

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# Malaysia Press Conference

Good afternoon, everybody. Let me begin by once again thanking the government and the people of Malaysia for hosting us at the U.S.-ASEAN and East Asia Summits. These gatherings are enormous undertakings, but thanks to Malaysia’s leadership and incredible hospitality, they have been a great success.

Earlier this week, as I headed to this region, there was a headline in one of our publications back home that asked -- “Obama’s Asian Distraction?” And the premise seemed to be that this region was somehow disconnected from pressing global events. I could not disagree more. This region is not a distraction from the world’s central challenges, like terrorism. The Asia Pacific is absolutely critical to promoting security, prosperity and human dignity around the world. That’s why I’ve devoted so much of my foreign policy to deepening America’s engagement with this region. And I’m pleased that on this trip we made progress across the board.

With my fellow leaders from Japan, Australia and the Philippines, I reaffirmed that our treaty alliances remain the foundation of regional security. The United States is boosting our support for the Philippines' maritime capabilities and those of our regional partners. At the U.S.-ASEAN and East Asia Summits, a key topic was the South China Sea, and many leaders spoke about the need to uphold international principles, including the freedom of navigation and overflight and the peaceful resolution of disputes. And to make sure we keep deepening our partnership here in Southeast Asia, I invited all 10 ASEAN leaders to the United States next year. I’m pleased they accepted, and I look forward to continuing our work.

On the economic front, we worked with our APEC partners to advance a regional economic order where all nations play by the same set of rules. Based on my meeting with our Trans-Pacific Partnership countries, I am optimistic that our 12 nations will approve this pact and that we can increasingly focus on implementing it.

APEC joined the G20 in sending an unequivocal message that we need to reach an ambitious climate change agreement in Paris. I also want to note the landmark step we took this week with more than 30 other nations at the OECD to dramatically reduce subsidies for coal-fired power plants around the world -- which is an important way to advance the fight against climate change. Of course, given the events of this week, much of my work here in Asia focused on the urgent threat of terrorism. Today, families in too many nations are grieving the senseless loss of their loved ones in the attacks in France and in Mali. As Americans, we remember Nohemi Gonzalez, who was just 23 years old, a design major from California State University. She was in Paris to pursue her dream of designing innovations that would improve the lives of people around the world. And we remember Anita Datar of Maryland. She’s a veteran of the Peace Corps, a mother to her young son, who devoted her life to helping the world’s poor, including women and girls in Mali, lift themselves up with health and education.

Nohemi and Anita embodied the values of service and compassion that no terrorist can extinguish. Their legacy will endure in the family and friends who carry on their work. They remind me of my daughters, or my mother, who, on the one hand, had their whole life ahead of them, and on the other hand, had devoted their lives to helping other people. And it is worth us remembering when we look at the statistics that there are beautiful, wonderful lives behind the terrible death tolls that we see in these places.

Over the years, our friends here in Asia have been victims of terrorism, and many of them are close counterterrorism partners with us. So my time here has also been an opportunity to work with many of our partners in the Asia Pacific that are members of our coalition against ISIL -- Australia, Canada, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan.

Which brings me to the point I want to emphasize today. For more than a year, the United States has built and led a broad coalition against ISIL of some 65 nations. Given the frequent focus on America’s leadership of this campaign, sometimes the contributions of our partners are overlooked. In fact, since the G20, a number of our coalition members have stepped up with new commitments. So today I want to take a moment to recognize how our allies and partners help advance every element of our strategy.

Nearly two dozen nations -- among them Turkey and our Arab partners -- contribute in some way to the military campaign, which has taken more than 8,000 strikes against ISIL so far. And as I’ve said, we’re ready to welcome or cooperate with other countries that are determined to truly fight ISIL as well. Fifteen countries have deployed personnel to train and support local forces in Iraq. The United Arab Emirates and Germany are organizing 25 coalition partners in helping to stabilize areas in Iraq liberated from ISIL. Italy is coordinating the multinational effort to train Iraqi police.

On the political front, U.S. leadership brought all the key countries together in the Vienna to discuss a common understanding on the principles for ending the Syrian civil war. On the humanitarian front, the United States is helping to lead the effort to mobilize more aid for the Syrian people, including refugees.

More than 40 countries have now passed or strengthened laws to prevent the flow of foreign terrorist fighters, and 34 nations, including the United States, have arrested foreign terrorist fighters. Saudi Arabia is helping to coordinate the crackdown on ISIL financing. The United Arab Emirates’ new messaging center is working to discredit ISIL’s propaganda, and Malaysia just announced the creation of its own center to do the same. And by joining our summit at the United Nations that we organized this fall, more than 100 nations, more than 20 multilateral institutions and some 120 civil society groups -- including many leaders from Muslim communities around the world -- have become part of a global movement against ISIL and its twisted ideology.

All of which is to say that our coalition will not relent. We will not accept the idea that terrorist assaults on restaurants and theaters and hotels are the new normal -- or that we are powerless to stop them. After all, that’s precisely what terrorists like ISIL want, because, ultimately, that’s the only way that they can win. That’s the very nature of terrorism --they can’t beat us on the battlefield, so they try to terrorize us into being afraid, into changing our patterns of behavior, into panicking, into abandoning our allies and partners, into retreating from the world. And as President, I will not let that happen.

In our diverse societies, everybody can do their part. And we will not give in to fear, or start turning on each other, or treating some people differently because of religion or race or background. That wouldn’t just be a betrayal of our values, it would also feed ISIL’s propaganda -- there assertion, which is absolutely false, that we must absolutely reject, that we are somehow at war with an entire religion. The United States could never be at war with any religion because America is made up of multiple religions. We're strengthened by people from every religion, including Muslim Americans.

So I want to be as clear as I can on this: Prejudice and discrimination helps ISIL and undermines our national security. And so, even as we destroy ISIL on the battlefield -- and we will destroy them -- we will take back land that they are currently in. We will cut off their financing. We will hunt down their leadership. We will dismantle their networks and their supply lines, and we will ultimately destroy them. Even as we are in the process of doing that, we want to make sure that we don't lose our own values and our own principles. And we can all do our part by upholding the values of tolerance and diversity and equality that help keep America strong.

The United States will continue to lead this global coalition. We are intensifying our strategy on all fronts, with local partners on the ground. We are going to keep on rolling back ISIL in Iraq and in Syria, and take out more of their leaders and commanders so that they do not threaten us. And we will destroy this terrorist organization.

And we’ll keep working with our allies and partners for the opportunity and justice that helps defeat violent extremism. We’ll keep standing up for the human rights and dignity of all people -- because that is contrary to what these terrorists believe. That's part of how we defeat them. And I'm confident we will succeed. The hateful vision of an organization like ISIL is no match for the strength of nations and people around the world who are united to live in security and peace and in harmony.

So with that, I'm going to take a couple of questions. We'll start with Angela Greiling-Keane of Bloomberg.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. You're scheduled to meet this week with President Hollande in Washington to talk about stepping up efforts against ISIL even further. Given that Russia would be part of the coalition that France proposes, have you seen any signs in the past couple days of Russia redirecting its military efforts in Syria to actually focus on ISIL? Are there any circumstances that you could see President Assad remaining in power, even if only temporarily, if that's what it took to effectively have a broad alliance directed at ISIL? And finally, as you've said, the U.S. won’t work with Russia if their goal is to keep Assad in power. If that's the case, is defeating ISIL or destroying ISIL a realistic goal?

President Obama: Well, first of all, destroying ISIL is not only a realistic goal, we're going to get it done, and we're going to pursue it with every aspect of American power and with all the coalition partners that we’ve assembled. It’s going to get done.

It will be helpful if Russia directs its focus on ISIL, and I do think that as a consequence of ISIL claiming responsibility for bringing down their plane, there is an increasing awareness on the part of President Putin that ISIL poses a greater threat to them than anything else in the region. The question at this point is whether they can make the strategic adjustment that allows them to be effective partners with us and the other 65 countries who are already part of the counter-ISIL campaign. And we don't know that yet.

So far, over the last several weeks, when they started taking strikes in Syria, their principal targets have been the moderate opposition that they felt threatened Assad. Their principal goal appeared to be -- if you follow the strikes that they took -- to fortify the position of the Assad regime. And that does not add to our efforts against ISIL. In some ways, it strengthens it because ISIL is also fighting many of those groups that the Russians were hitting.

When we were in Turkey I discussed with President Putin, in a brief pull-aside, his need to recognize that he needs to go after the people who killed Russian citizens. And those aren’t the groups that they were currently hitting with strikes. So they're going to have to make an adjustment in terms of what they're prioritizing.

More broadly -- I’ve said this before; I said it to President Putin five years ago and I repeated it to him just a few days ago -- the issue with Assad is not simply the way that he has treated his people. It’s not just a human rights issues. It’s not just a question of supporting somebody who has been ruthlessly dropping bombs on his own civilian populations. As a practical matter, it is not conceivable that Mr. Assad can regain legitimacy in a country in which a large majority of that country despises Assad and will not stop fighting so long as he’s in power, which means that the civil war perpetuates itself.

And so the goal in Vienna is to see if -- with all the countries around the table, including Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, and Iran, and Russia, as well as the United States and other countries that have concerns about this -- whether we can arrive at a political transition process that recognizes the need for a new government and can quell the fighting and bring about a ceasefire and allows all of us to refocus our attention on this barbaric organization that is killing so many people.

Russia has not officially committed to a transition of Assad moving out, but they did agree to the political transition process. And I think we’ll find out over the next several weeks whether or not we can bring about that change of perspective with the Russians.

Keep in mind that we all have an interest in maintaining a Syrian state because we don’t want complete chaos. I mean, and there are problems that we’ve seen in, for example, Lebanon, when the machinery of state entirely breaks down. So there’s going to be a need for the international community and the United Nations to work in order to maintain -- maintaining a Syrian state and be able to move forward with a political transition that’s orderly. And that’s going to be difficult, but that’s what we have to focus on.

In terms of the position of the United States and the other 65 members of the coalition, my view on Assad is it will not work to keep him in power. We can’t stop the fighting. Even if I were to cynically say that my priority is ISIL and not removing Assad regardless of the terrible things that he’s done to his people, the United States could not stop the fighting in Syria by those who are opposed to Assad’s rule. And so this is a practical issue, not just a matter of conscience. And I think that there are a large number of members of this coalition, including President Hollande, who agree with me on that. Michael Shear.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. On a different topic -- when you go to Paris next week for the climate talks, you do so in the shadow of what happened in that city a week ago. Could you talk a little bit about how you think those terror attacks might affect the talks? And substantively, on the talks, can you talk a little bit about concerns that the United States might not have the ability to convince poor countries that nations will help them pay for what they need to do to achieve the climate talks, given especially the Republican opposition back home? And on one separate matter, could you comment on the investigations that we reported about in our paper this morning into whether or not intelligence officials are altering the assessments of the ISIL campaign to make them seem more rosy?

President Obama: I’ll take the last question first. One of the things I insisted on the day I walked into the Oval Office was that I don’t want intelligence shaded by politics. I don’t want it shaded by the desire to tell a feel-good story. We can’t make good policy unless we’ve got good, accurate, hard-headed, clear-eyed intelligence. I believe that the Department of Defense and all those who head up our intelligence agencies understand that, and that I have made it repeatedly clear to all my top national security advisors that I never want them to hold back, even if the intelligence or their opinions about the intelligence, their analysis or interpretations of the data contradict current policy. So that’s a message that we’ve been adamant about from the start.

I don’t know what we’ll discover with respect to what was going on at CENTCOM. I think that’s something that’s best left to the IG and the processes. I have communicated once again to both the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs as well as Secretary Carter that I expect that we get to the bottom of whether or not what you describe has been happening.

There are always going to be some disputes with respect to how to interpret facts on the ground. I get intelligence briefings every single day, and there are times where they’re making their best judgments -- they’ll say, with moderate confidence, or low confidence, or high confidence, this is what we think is happening. There may be times where there are disputes internally among various intelligence agencies about that. But I don’t know the details of this. What I do know is my expectation, which is the highest fidelity to facts, data -- the truth.

And if there are disagreements in terms of how folks are interpreting the facts, then that should be reflected in the reports that we receive -- that some folks think this is going on; other folks thinks that’s going on. And that’s part of what I weigh in terms of making decisions.

One last thing I’ll say, though -- as a consumer of this intelligence, it’s not as if I’ve been receiving wonderfully rosy, glowing portraits of what’s been happening in Iraq and Syria over the last year and a half. So to the extent that it’s been shaded -- again, I don’t know the details of what the IG may discover -- but it feels to me like, at my level at least, we’ve had a pretty clear-eyed, sober assessment of where we’ve made real progress and where we have not.

On Paris, a lot of the discussion out here both at the G20, APEC, and finally here at ASEAN, has been that we’ve got to get a strong Paris deal. And I’m optimistic that we can -- 160 countries have now put forward their national targets for how they can reduce emissions; that accounts for about 90 percent of the world’s emitters.

And the key to a strong agreement is going to be that, although there’s going to be differentiation between countries -- the United States doesn't expect that our obligations are identical to Laos, for example, given our levels of development, how much carbon we emit compared to theirs -- that everybody does have a plan, that everybody is accountable to a single set of reporting requirements, that there’s transparency about what each country is doing -- that once we’ve set that architecture in place, in five years time, we can review what we’ve done, turn up the dials in light of additional information and additional technology. In some cases, we may make progress faster than we expected, and we can increase our targets. So the key is to make sure that everybody is doing their part.

You raise one important issue, and that is climate finance. There are going to be a number of countries who recognize the threat of climate change, want to do something about it, but they also have large populations suffering from extreme poverty, who don't have electricity, who don't have the ability to feed their families. And any leader of those countries has to ask themselves, am I going to be sacrificing development and poverty alleviation in order to deal with climate change, particularly since a lot of more developed countries are responsible for at least the current carbon emissions that are causing climate change.

And so the answer to that we’ve all agreed is a finance mechanism to help these countries adapt -- in some cases, leapfrog old technologies so that instead of building old, dirty power plants, here are some smart, clean-energy plants. And we’ll help you through technology transfer and financing so that you can achieve your development goals, but not add to the carbon problem.

So far, with a target of $100 billion, we’ve reached between private and public sources $62 billion, and that target did not need to be met until 2020, based on our original commitments. So we're well on our way to meeting these commitments. And it’s a smart investment for us to make.

Sometimes, back home, critics will argue, there’s no point in us doing something about getting our house in order when it comes to climate change because other countries won’t do anything and it will just mean that we're in a less competitive position. Well, when I met with President Xi and China signed on to an aggressive commitment, that took a major argument away from those critics. We now the two largest emitters signed on. And it makes sense for us and the Chinese and the Europeans and others to help these countries, because, ultimately, if a country like India, for example, with over a billion people, is a major polluter, that's going to affect all of us. If, on the other hand, they're developing and growing in a clean way, that's going to be good for all of us.

I guess you want to know how the atmosphere, as a consequence of the attack in Paris would affect it. Look, I think it is absolutely vital for every country, every leader to send a signal that the viciousness of a handful of killers does not stop the world from doing vital business, and that Paris -- one of the most beautiful, enticing cities in the world -- is not going to be cowered by the violent, demented actions of a few.

And that's part of the overall message that I want to very clearly send the American people. We do not succumb to fear. That's the primary power that these terrorists have over us. They cannot strike a mortal blow against the United States, or against France, or against a country like Malaysia. But they can make people fearful. And that's understandable, because that could have been us; that could have been our families; that could have been our children in these places. And our hearts are broken when we see these images.

But in addition to hunting down terrorists, in addition to effective intelligence, and in addition to missile strikes, and in addition to cutting off financing and all the other things that we're doing, the most powerful tool we have to fight ISIL is to say that we’re not afraid; to not elevate them; to somehow buy into their fantasy that they’re doing something important. They’re a bunch of killers. And there have been people throughout human history who can find an excuse to kill people because they don’t think like them or look like them. And we fight them, and we beat them, and we don’t change our institutions and our culture and our values because of them.

I want to be very clear about this. I am not afraid that ISIL will beat us because of their operations. When I see a headline that says this individual who designed this plot in Paris is a mastermind -- he’s not a mastermind. He found a few other vicious people, got hands on some fairly conventional weapons, and, sadly, it turns out that if you’re willing to die, you can kill a lot of people.

And so it is in our capacity to roll up those networks. Now, we got to take precautions, we have to take it seriously, and we have to go at the heart of the problem that exists inside of Syria and Iraq right now. And we have to address the broader issues that exist in a tiny fraction of the Muslim community. But it is a real problem that leaders -- from Prime Minister Najib to the President of Indonesia and others who have large Muslim populations -- acknowledge. A country like Indonesia has 250 million people; if just a tiny fraction of those are in some ways attracted by a vicious ideology like ISIL’s, then that’s a real problem for us. And so tools like countering this narrative, and Muslim clerics and political leaders and community leaders coming forward and making sure that our children are not being fed this kind of bile, that’s critically important as well. But in all of this, we cannot respond from fear. And the American people, in the past, have confronted some very real, enormous threats, and we beat them. We vanquished them. This will be no different.

Kevin Corke.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. I wanted to ask you about what Secretary Carter said about expanding the rules of engagement versus ISIS. What was that conversation like? And what did he mean by that? And I’d like to ask you also about immigration. The high court is looking into executive action on immigration, as you know. And I understand the sensitivity of it, you don’t want to be prejudicial. But I’m curious, are you where you thought you’d be in immigration reform? And what would you say to family members who say, listen, we did it the right way, we’ve waited our turn in line -- how do these other guys get to skip the line, if you will? And lastly, the Attorney General announced eight indictments of individuals in the U.S. and Mexico on sex trafficking and related charges. Where is the fight against sex trafficking among the priorities for your Administration? Are you where you thought you’d be on that? Thank you, sir.

President Obama: Okay. Kevin, you asked all those questions so nicely, but if everybody is asking three questions, we’re not going to get home. So let me see if I can go through these very quickly.

With respect to rules of engagement, we are in a constant conversation inside the Situation Room about how do we apply force most effectively to go after key ISIL targets, key ISIL leaders, strategic positions, their infrastructure, their supply lines, while minimizing civilian casualties. We do so for two reasons: One, because it’s the right thing to do. There are people who are caught up in Mosul right now, for example, who despise ISIL, who are essentially captive to ISIL, are being brutalized by ISIL. And to the extent that we can avoid them being killed by those of us who are trying to defeat ISIL, that’s a legitimate concern in any military campaign. Because if we’re not careful about it -- and this brings us to the practical element of it -- then you can alienate the very populations that you need to win over, because ultimately those are the folks who are going to have to drive ISIL out, stomp it out all the way.

The good news is, is the U.S. military has become very good at this. I think that there have been some circumstances where the military proceeds in steps and are continually reevaluating whether, well, maybe this is a situation where we can, in fact, take the strike without a lot of civilian casualties.

A good example with the recent trucks that were struck. There may be ways in which warnings can be given to the drivers -- many of whom may not work for ISIL, they may just be for hire or being forced into it -- so that they better abandon those trucks before we shoot them down, because we’re shooting them down. So that’s the kind of conversation, and that’s been ongoing throughout the process.

With respect to immigration reform, I can’t comment on the ins and outs of the legal case. I’ve said before and I’ll say again, I am confident that the rules and executive action that I put forward are squarely within the category of prosecutorial discretion that historically has been under a President’s power. And you’ve got lower courts who’ve disagreed, but we think that past precedent is on our side.

Substantively, I’ve got 11 million people in our countries, many of whom are working, paying taxes, our neighbors, coworkers, friends who’ve lived in the United States for a very long time. We’re not going to deport them, despite what some political leaders may say. It would be contrary to who we are, would be too costly, is too impractical. What we want to do is allow them to get out of the shadows and to get right with the law, pay a fine, go to the back of the line, but hopefully, over time, be contributors to society.

Of course, none of this would be necessary if we just passed the legislation that was passed in the Senate with a bipartisan majority. And I continue to believe that the ultimate solution is going to be one that comes from Congress. And although, during this political season, it may be difficult for Republican leaders in either the House or in the Senate to resuscitate that legislation, my hope is, is that after the election, they will. And in the interim, I’m going to do everything I can to sensibly apply our immigration laws in a way that is reflective of the fact that we're a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants.

And just very briefly, with respect to sex trafficking -- this is a critical problem. We take it very seriously. We have entire divisions in our law enforcement agencies that are dedicated to this. I’ve elevated this within the White House so that we have people focusing specifically on ending trafficking. And in our international discussions -- most specifically, out here in Southeast Asia -- we are working very closely to promote mechanisms that will end trafficking.

In fact, TPP, one of the central mechanisms in TPP, to ensure high labor standards and human rights and human dignity, are requirements among the members who are signatories to have in place real, serious, enforceable ways to prevent the kind of human trafficking that causes such hardship and brutality for so many people.

And those of you who were with me when I visited the refugee center yesterday will recall the lovely young 16-year-old who was sitting next to me -- she’s somebody who had been a victim of trafficking. And it reminds you of the terrible toll that is often placed on children, people who are the most vulnerable, people who are least able to protect themselves. And every country has an obligation to put an end to it.

David Nakamura.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. You said moments ago that Americans should not give in to fear when it comes to these terrorist attacks. But you also said that the person who may have been the person behind thinking about the attacks is not a mastermind and that anybody who can get their hands on some conventional weapons can -- and is willing to die can blow themselves up. How should Americans feel that if they shouldn’t be scared? And if I may, The Washington Post and ABC News just this week came out with a poll that said 83 percent of the voting public believes that an attack, a terrorist attack against the U.S. with mass casualties is likely to happen in the near future, and 40 percent say it’s very likely. Does that in your mind -- given the fact that you think the public should not be so fearful -- mean that the terrorists are winning? And do you believe that this is sort of the new normal, and Americans will have to live with this kind of fear?

President Obama: David, I think that the American people are right to be concerned, and to expect that we in the government and in law enforcement are doing everything we can to disrupt terrorist attacks, to intercept intelligence that may lead us to individuals who are willing to carry out these attacks, that we make sure that these terrorists are not gaining the kinds of weaponry that would make it easier for them to cause mass attacks. This is a serious problem. And as somebody who more often than I would like has met with or comforted families of victims of terrorism, the losses are real and they're devastating. So this is a serious problem. And we have to work collectively across the board, as we’ve been doing since I became President and since previous administrations identified the kinds of organized terrorist activity like al Qaeda that we’ve seen -- we’ve got to do everything we can to stop it.

But there is a difference between being vigilant and being concerned and taking this seriously and taking precautions and, in some cases, changing our security arrangements, as we’ve done, for example, in aviation -- there’s a difference between smart applications of law enforcement and military and intelligence, and succumbing to the kind of fear that leads us to abandon our values, to abandon how we live, to abandon -- or change how we treat each other.

And the good news is, there, Americans actually have been resilient. They’ve been tested. We had a mass casualty attack on 9/11. And as I said before, I was very proud of the fact that the fundamental nature of America and how we treated each other did not change.

I think we made some bad decisions subsequent to that attack in part based on fear, and that's why we have to be cautious about it. We have to think things through. But overall, the American people went about their lives. Times Square is filled with people -- rightly so. After the Boston bombing attack, folks went right back to the ballpark and sang, “Take Me Out to the Ballgame.” That's what they needed to do.

And so the message I have is that those of us who are charged with protecting the American people are going to do everything we can to destroy this particular network. Once this network is destroyed -- and it will be -- there may be others that pop up in different parts of the world, and so we're going to have to continue to take seriously how we maintain the infrastructure that we’ve built to prevent this. But it doesn't have to change the fundamental trajectory of the American people. And that we should feel confident about.

And the media needs to help in this. I just want to say -- during the course of this week, a very difficult week, it is understandable that this has been a primary focus. But one of the things that has to happen is how we report on this has to maintain perspective, and not empower in any way these terrorist organizations or elevate them in ways that make it easier for them to recruit or make them stronger.

They're a bunch of killers with good social media. And they are dangerous, and they’ve caused great hardship to people. But the overwhelming majority of people who go about their business every day, the Americans who are building things, and making things, and teaching, and saving lives as firefighters and as police officers -- they're stronger. Our way of life is stronger. We have more to offer -- we represent 99.9 percent of humanity. And that's why we should be confident that we’ll win.

Colleen McCain Nelson.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. You've threatened to veto the bill the House passed that would tighten screening procedures for Syrian refugees, but you've left the door open to legislation that is more constructive in the White House’s view.

President Obama: Yes.

Question: What specific changes to your refugee program would you support? And do you think that Democrats who are calling for a halt to your program are betraying our country’s values, as you've suggested of some Republicans? And one last thing -- I’m sorry -- separately. Not a four-part question.

President Obama: Just a two-parter. Okay, go ahead.

Question: You met Friday with Prime Minister Najib, who is facing allegations of corruption and human rights violations. And you’d said at your town hall event that you would raise those issues with him when you spoke privately. What was your message to Najib about the investments funds scandal and also about the issue of jailing his political opponents?

President Obama: Okay. With respect to the refugee program, Paris just happened a week ago. News moves so fast these days that sometimes we just lose track. It’s been so recent and so pervasive in the news, and people have, understandably, been so concerned given how similar Paris is to many American cities that I get why legislation in the House moved forward quickly.

My hope, though, is, is that now that we’ve got some time to catch our breath and take a look at this carefully, people understand that refugees who end up in the United States are the most vetted, scrutinized, thoroughly investigated individuals that ever arrive on American shores; that the process that's been constructed over the course of several administrations on a bipartisan basis is extraordinarily thorough and currently takes between 18 to 24 months for somebody to be approved.

And so although, on its face, the House legislation simply says, well, we can just certify -- and this is not along the lines of some of the more radical proposals that we were hearing earlier in the week from some presidential candidates -- the fact of the matter is, is that if it gums up the work so much, then effectively you don’t end up seeing any refugees admitted. If you layer it with more and more bureaucracy, that doesn’t actually make us safer because it doesn’t do a better job of screening but simply makes it almost impossible to process individuals who are coming in, then you’re effectively ending the refugee program for people who desperately need it.

And when I referred to a betrayal of our values, I was being very specific about some of the commentary that was made that would suggest, for example, that we might let Christians in but not Muslims; that we -- somehow we’re so fearful that a four-year-old orphan might be let in. And those of you who joined me to the refugee center yesterday and you saw those kids, that’s who we’re talking about. If you are a parent and you saw those kids, and you thought about what they had gone through, the notion that we couldn’t find a home for them anywhere in the United States of America, that is contrary to our values.

And the good news is, is that the overwhelming majority of the people who know that we are screening and all the precautions that are already taken -- if they saw those kids, they’d say, yeah, we need to do right by those children.

So with respect to Prime Minister Najib, I don’t comment on investigations happening back in the United States; I certainly am not going to comment on any investigations or legal proceedings that may be taking place in a foreign country where I’m a visitor. But I did raise with Prime Minister Najib -- as I have with many of the leaders here in Southeast Asia, but also many leaders in Africa and Latin America and everywhere we go -- the importance of transparency, accountability, the importance of rooting out corruption -- all of which are impediments to development; all of which hold countries back; all of which contribute to poverty and stunted growth.

And if countries solve those problems, even if they are resource-poor and landlocked, they will do better. And if they don’t solve those problems, it doesn’t matter how much they’re blessed by natural resources, or size, or geography -- they’re going to fail.

And I also emphasized to Prime Minister Najib the importance of civil society and a free press in countries thriving. And every country here is at different levels and stages of development, both social and economic, and we don’t expect that everybody follows the same path that the United States does. But I do think there are some basic principles that are important for us to uphold as friends and partners to the countries that we’re talking to.

The good news is, is that -- take a country like Myanmar, that just went through a historic election after having been subject for 40 years to military rule. They’re not going to immediately be Sweden in terms of their democratic practices, but there is a sea change taking place there, and we want to encourage that and engage it.

And a lot of the work that we do -- the Open Government Partnership that we set up through United Nations, the bilateral work we do in terms of improving transparency, the principles and rules that we’ve embedded in TPP -- all those things are designed to raise the bar, to have people set sights that are a little bit higher. And some will go forward, some will slip back. Paces will vary, but the trajectory is the same -- and that is a world where ordinary people are treated fairly, there’s rule of law, there’s transparency, governments are accountable, people’s voices are heard, women are treated equally, minorities are not discriminated against.

Those are profoundly American values, but I also think they are universal values.

All right. Thank you, everybody. Let’s go home.

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# Joint Press Conference with Fran

President Obama: President Hollande, it has been an honor to welcome you to the White House before, in happier times than this. But as Americans, we stand by our friends -- in good times and in bad -- no matter what. So on behalf of the American people, I want to once again express our deepest condolences to you and all of the people of France for the heinous attacks that took place in Paris.

We’re here today to declare that the United States and France stand united -- in total solidarity -- to deliver justice to these terrorists and those who sent them, and to defend our nations. In that spirit, with heavy but strong hearts, I welcome you today.

FranÃ§ois, with your understanding, my statement today will be a little longer than usual.

I’ve been traveling, and this is an important moment for our nations and for the world. This barbaric terrorist group -- ISIL, or Daesh -- and its murderous ideology pose a serious threat to all of us. It cannot be tolerated. It must be destroyed. And we must do it together. This is the unity of purpose that brings us here today.

On your visit here last year, you said that the French love America. We love the French. Sometimes we Americans are too shy to say so, but we’re not feeling shy today. We Americans love France because we dedicate ourselves to the same ideals -- that all people deserve life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. France is our oldest ally. You helped us win our independence. We helped liberate France from fascism. We owe our freedom to each other.

We love France for your spirit and your culture, your joie de vivre. Since the attacks, Americans have recalled their own visits to Paris -- visiting the Eiffel Tower, or walking along the Seine. We know these places. They’re part of our memories, woven into the fabric of our lives and our culture. I am very grateful to the French people for the hospitality they’ve always shown me, and when they welcomed Michelle and our daughters on their first visit to the City of Lights. By my bed, in the residence, is a picture of me and Michelle in Luxembourg Gardens, kissing. Those are the memories we have of Paris. As early on, I had no gray hair.

So when tragedy struck that evening, our hearts broke, too. In that stadium and concert hall, in those restaurants and cafÃ©s, we see our own. In the faces of the French people, we see ourselves. And that’s why so many Americans have embraced the blue, white and red. It’s why Americans, at candlelight vigils, have joined together to sing La Marseillaise. We have never forgotten how the French people stood with us after 9/11. And today, we stand with you -- nous sommes tous FranÃ§ais.

It’s been noted that the terrorists did not direct their attacks against the French government or military. Rather, they focused their violence on the very spirit of France -- and by extension, on all liberal democracies. This was an attack on our free and open societies -- where people come together to celebrate and sing and compete. In targeting venues where people come together from around the world -- killing citizens of nearly 20 countries, including America -- this was an attack on the very idea that people of different races and religions and backgrounds can live together in peace.

In short, this was not only a strike against one of the world’s great cities, it was an attack against the world itself. It’s the same madness that has slaughtered the innocent from Nigeria to the Sinai, from Lebanon to Iraq. It is a scourge that threatens all of us. And that’s why, for more than a year, the United States, France, and our coalition of some 65 nations have been united in one mission -- to destroy these ISIL terrorists and defeat their vile ideology.

Today, President Hollande and I reviewed our coalition’s progress. More than 8,000 airstrikes, combined with local partners on the ground, have pushed ISIL back from territory in both Iraq and Syria. Today, President Hollande and I agreed that our nations must do even more together. U.S. assistance has supported recent French strikes in Syria, and we’re going to keep stepping up that coordination. And as we saw with the attack in Mali, the terrorist threat goes beyond ISIL. This week, I’ll sign legislation to sustain our support -- including airlift and intelligence -- to allies like France, as we work together to root out terrorist networks in Africa.

We’ll do even more to prevent attacks at home. Building on our recent intelligence agreement, the United States will continue to quickly share threat information with France. And in the wake of Paris, and with the threats in Belgium, there’s also a growing recognition among European nations that they need to ramp up additional efforts to prevent the flow of foreign terrorist fighters. As part of that, I’m calling on the European Union to finally implement the agreement that’s been long in the works that would require airlines to share passenger information, so we can do more to stop foreign terrorist fighters from entering our countries undetected. And I’m prepared to send teams of our experts to work on this with our European partners to make sure we’re redoubling our efforts together.

Regarding the broader crisis in Syria, President Hollande and I agree that Russia’s strikes against the moderate opposition only bolster the Assad regime, whose brutality has helped to fuel the rise of ISIL. We agree that Russia could play a more constructive role if it were to shift the focus of its strikes to defeating ISIL. And likewise, President Hollande and I agree that the best way to bring peace to Syria is through the principles reaffirmed in Vienna, which require active Russian support for a ceasefire and a political transition away from Assad to a democratically elected government that can unite the Syrian people against terrorism.

Finally, FranÃ§ois and I understand that one of our greatest weapons in the fight against ISIL is the strength and resilience of our people. And, here, I want to speak directly to the American people. What happened in Paris is truly horrific. I understand that people worry that something similar could happen here. I want you to know that we will continue to do everything in our power to defend our nation. Since 9/11, we’ve taken extraordinary measures to strengthen our homeland security. Our counterterrorism, homeland security, and law enforcement professionals -- federal, state and local -- they are tireless. They have prevented attacks and they have saved lives. They are working every hour, every day for our security. They did so before Paris, they do so now, and they will not stop. They’re the best in the world.

But it’s not just our security professionals who will defeat ISIL and other terrorist groups. As Americans, we all have a role to play in how we respond to threats. Groups like ISIL cannot defeat us on the battlefield, so they try to terrorize us at home -- against soft targets, against civilians, against innocent people. Even as we’re vigilant, we cannot, and we will not, succumb to fear. Nor can we allow fear to divide us -- for that’s how terrorists win. We cannot give them the victory of changing how we go about living our lives.

The good news is Americans are resilient. We mourned the lives lost at Fort Hood, the Boston Marathon, at Chattanooga. But we did not waver. Our communities have come together. We’ve gone to ballgames and we've gone to concerts, and we've gone shopping. And men and women who want to serve our country continue to go to military recruiting offices. We're vigilant, we take precautions, but we go about our business. To those who want to harm us, our actions have shown that we have too much resolve and too much character. Americans will not be terrorized.

I say all this because another part of being vigilant, another part of defeating terrorists like ISIL, is upholding the rights and freedoms that define our two great republics. That includes freedom of religion. That includes equality before the law. There have been times in our history, in moments of fear, when we have failed to uphold our highest ideals, and it has been to our lasting regret. We must uphold our ideals now. Each of us, all of us, must show that America is strengthened by people of every faith and every background.

Related to this, I want to note that under President Hollande, France plans to welcome 30,000 additional Syrian refugees over the next two years. Here in the United States, refugees coming to America go through up to two years of intense security checks, including biometric screening. Nobody who sets foot in America goes through more screening than refugees. And we’re prepared to share these tools with France and our European partners. As FranÃ§ois has said, our humanitarian duty to help desperate refugees and our duty to our security -- those duties go hand in hand.

On the Statue of Liberty, a gift from the people of France, there are words we know so well: Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to be free. That’s the spirit that makes us American. That’s the spirit that binds us to France. That's the spirit we need today.

In closing, I want to salute the people of Paris for showing the world how to stay strong in the face of terrorism. Even as they grieve, Parisians have begun returning to their cafÃ©s, riding the metro, and going to stadiums to cheer for their teams. Crowds gather in the Place de la RÃ©publique, including a mother who brought her children -- she said, “to let them see that we should not be afraid.” As one Parisian said, “Paris will always be Paris.”

And next week, I will be joining President Hollande and world leaders in Paris for the global climate conference. What a powerful rebuke to the terrorists it will be when the world stands as one and shows that we will not be deterred from building a better future for our children.

So, President Hollande, my fellow Americans -- let’s remember we’ve faced greater threats to our way of life before. Fascism. Communism. A first world war. A second. A long Cold War. Each and every time, we prevailed. We have prevailed because our way of life is stronger. Because we stay united. Because even as we are relentless in the face of evil, we draw on what’s best in ourselves and in the character of our countries. It will be no different this time. Make no mistake, we will win, and groups like ISIL will lose. And standing with allies like France, we will continue to show the world the best of American leadership.

Vive la France. And God bless the United States of America.

Mr. President.

President Hollande: [As interpreted.] Ladies and gentlemen, please allow me, first and foremost, to thank the President of the United States, Barack Obama, for the solidarity he has shown immediately as we found out about the terror attacks. He was the first one to call me. It was very late in France, 2:00 a.m., when Barack called -- the President of the United States.

I would like to express his solidarity towards France, his emotion, his compassion against the horror. And on that night, he meant to tell me that the United States stood by France, that the help that could be provided to France would have no limits, and that we had a duty, a joint duty, to pull our forces together and fight terrorism.

I do not forget, either, all of the messages that the American people sent to the French people over the past few days -- the French colors, the French flags all around in many gatherings; these candles in places that represent France here in the United States; La Marseillaise, our National Anthem, sung in official ceremonies. It is true that in 9/11, we all felt Americans. But after the 13th of November, Americans felt French. Our two peoples, together, merged as one, sharing the same emotion and also the same willingness to fight for freedom, to stand for our values.

We are not two similar peoples. We each have our own history. We have our own culture, our own background. But we share the same trust, the same faith in freedom. It is France that came under attack on the 13th of November. France, for what it is -- a country which we consider unique in the world because France speaks to the world -- France came under attack for what it represents, for what it stands for, for its culture, our way of living, as well as our values, our principles.

But by targeting France, the terrorists, the cowardly murderers, we're targeting the world in these restaurants, in these cafÃ©s, as well as the Bataclan, that concert venue. They were men and women, most of them young, who came from 20 countries, at least. And they shared the same passion for life. And that's the reason why they were murdered.

My thoughts are with the friends and family of a young American student, Nohemi Gonzalez, who came as well to share a moment of culture and joy. My thoughts also go to this American band that was playing at the Bataclan. Our cultures on that occasion were together to bring the same enthusiasm, and they were hit by terrorists.

We are facing a terror group which organizes itself on territory. They have some substantial resources. They’re thriving on smuggling of oil, drug, human beings. And since the beginning of the year, they hit many countries -- Denmark, Tunisia, Lebanon, Kuwait, Turkey, Egypt, as well as Russia, by taking down a Russian plane.

So, together with President Obama, today we wanted on the occasion of that meeting, first of all, to share our determination -- relentless determination -- to fight terrorism everywhere and anywhere. We also meant to tell the world that we will not allow those who want to destroy what we’ve built, we will not allow them to do it -- to destroy what we’ve built, generation after generation. They will not be able to damage the world. And against Daesh, we need a joint response, an implacable joint response.

France and the United States stand together to bring that joint response. Militarily, it is about destroying Daesh no matter where they are. It is about taking out their financing, hunting down their leaders, dismantling their networks, and taking back the land they currently control. We, therefore, decided, President Obama and myself, to scale up our strikes both in Syria and in Iraq, to broaden our scope, to strengthen our intelligence-sharing regarding the targets we must aim at.

The priority is to take back key locations in the hands of Daesh in Syria. It is also a matter of urgency to close the border between Turkey and Syria, and prevent terrorists from crossing the border and coming to Europe or other places and undertake such terrible attacks. We also took the decision to work together with our partners of the coalition in Iraq, and to support all of those who are fighting Daesh on the ground.

The aim is to make sure that these forces can be supported, helped by all countries that are willing to act militarily to destroy Daesh. The resolution of the Security Council that was voted unanimously Friday, after being introduced by France and supported by the United States, this resolution provides us with the clear basis to act. This is what France is currently doing. Our aircraft carrier, the Charles de Gaulle, is currently in the east of Mediterranean, and allows us to enjoy more capability. Yesterday, for the sixth time after the terror attacks in Paris, we struck Raqqa. In addition, we’ve been providing some assistance to Iraqi fighters in the region of Ramadi and in Mosul, within the framework of the coalition.

Now, diplomatically, both President Obama and myself have strengthened our cooperation as early as the night after the attacks. And I would like to commend everything that is being done so that intelligence and information available can be used to tackle terrorists and to follow their movements, so that we prevent them from doing what they want to. Because beyond Syria and Iraq, what they want is somehow to spread fear everywhere so that we doubt, so that we make decisions which are exactly contrary to what we want in terms of freedom and rights. But we will not give in. That being said, we have to defend ourselves and use intelligence.

Diplomatically, we’re working on a credible political transition in Syria within the framework of the Vienna process. And I commend the work done by ministers Fabius and Kerry to agree a timeline that will enable a ceasefire, of course, as quickly as possible, and to open up to a process that will lead to Bashar al-Assad’s departure. Because we cannot imagine the Syrians getting together, gathering around the leader who is responsible for some -- the most of 300,000 dead in a few years. So a government of unity is required, but that must lead to Assad’s departure.

The Syrian crisis is directly relevant to Europe, first of all, given the terrorist threat, but also because there are millions of refugees fleeing the regime’s bombs and Daesh atrocities. If we were to abandon them, we would betray what we are. This is the reason why I reject identifying migration and terrorism.

At the same time, we must control the borders. Today, people are risking their lives to flee when they travel at sea between Turkey and Greece. Turkey, therefore, plays an important role, and it is together with Turkey that we must find solutions so that the refugees can stay close to their country of origin. And we need to make sure that the required controls, the checks are implemented at the border.

On Thursday, I will be traveling to Moscow to meet with Vladimir Putin. And I will tell him that France can work together with Russia if Russia concentrates its military action on Daesh, against ISIL, and if Russia fully commits to the political solution in Syria. This is what we want to do -- we want to gather all countries, all those who are willing to find and to implement a political solution in Syria. We do not want to exclude anyone, but we want to make sure that this political solution can eradicate terrorism.

Lastly, next week -- that is, on Monday -- we will be hosting, in Paris, the climate conference. I certainly could not imagine that this conference would be taking place against such a background. At the same time, I think there cannot be any better symbol or response but to hold the conference in Paris where the attacks took place, where we took the right measures in terms of security protections as well as in defending our values. There is no greater symbol than holding this conference on climate in Paris with some 150 heads of state and government.

Never before did France host so many leaders of the international community. They’re coming to sort out the climate challenge, and again, to work and to find the right agreement so that we can limit greenhouse gases emissions and make sure that our children and our grandchildren live better, or simply can live. But they are also coming to express their support to freedom, to the fight against extremism, that radical Islam which is becoming dangerous.

Yes, all of them are coming no matter their background, no matter their religion, their convictions, to express the same principle, the same values with the same word -- life. Yes, simply life.

And this is the reason why I am very pleased that President Obama will allow us to succeed. I commend his recent statements over the past few weeks and months, but I also commend the commitments he’s made in the name of the United States, as well as in the name of the world. It was very important that one of the most powerful countries in the world, if not the most powerful, and therefore with the highest level of emissions, could also be there to face the future like we’ve been facing history.

What we will be doing early next week in Paris means that we can continue to live, as well as protect our lives and that of all children. France and the United States, given their history and the values -- the founding values of both our nations, given our spirits, we both have that duty to act as a matter of -- urgently against terrorism and against Daesh, and at the same time, to prepare for the future.

Against that background, even though it is a very dire one, I’m pleased to be with Barack Obama to send across that message to the entire world.

Thank you.

President Obama: We’ve got time for a few questions. I’m going to start with Roberta Rampton of Reuters.

Question: Thank you. This is a question for both of you. First, what is your reaction to Turkey shooting down a Russian plane today? And does this draw NATO into a confrontation with Russia? How do you keep this from spiraling out of control? And, President Obama, what does this incident mean for future prospects of military coordination -- more military coordination with Russia? And, President Hollande, ahead of your trip to Moscow on Thursday, what are the prospects for closer military coordination with Russia, given what happened today?

President Obama: Well, first of all, we’re still getting the details of what happened. And I expect to be in communications, potentially directly, with President Erdogan sometime over the next several days.

Turkey, like every country, has a right to defend its territory and its airspace. I think it’s very important right now for us to make sure that both the Russians and the Turks are talking to each other to find out exactly what happened, and take measures to discourage any kind of escalation.

I do think that this points to a ongoing problem with the Russian operations in the sense that they are operating very close to a Turkish border, and they are going after a moderate opposition that are supported by not only Turkey but a wide range of countries. And if Russia is directing its energies towards Daesh and ISIL, some of those conflicts, or potentials for mistakes or escalation, are less likely to occur.

I also think this underscores the importance of us making sure that we move this political track forward as quickly as possible. Like President Hollande, our view from the start has been that Russia is welcome to be part of this broad-based coalition that we’ve set up. There’s never been a point in time in which we said that we don’t want Russia or other countries that may have differences with us on a whole host of other things to avoid working with us against ISIL.

The challenge has been Russia’s focus on propping up Assad rather than focusing on ISIL. I had a conversation with President Putin in Turkey, and I indicated to him at the time that to the extent that they make that strategic shift -- focus on the Vienna process, where they have been constructive, to try to bring all the parties together; try to execute a political transition that all parties would agree to; and refocus attention on going after ISIL -- then there’s enormous capacity for us to cooperate.

Until that happens, it’s very difficult. It’s difficult because if their priority is attacking the moderate opposition that might be future members of an inclusive Syrian government, Russia is not going to get the support of us or a range of other members of the coalition.

But I do think that there is the possibility of cooperation. The sooner we agree to this political process, the less likely that you have the kinds of events that took place, apparently, today.

President Hollande: [As interpreted.] The event that took place is a serious one, and we can only regret it. Turkey is currently providing all of the information to NATO so that we can find out what truly happened and whether Turkey’s airspace indeed was entered into. But we must prevent an escalation; that would be extremely damageable. The only purpose is to fight against terrorism and Daesh. This is what we must do, all of us -- we, Turkey, Russia.

And what just took place, like Barack said, means that we must find a solution to the Syrian crisis, because we can see what the risks are otherwise -- the risks of escalation. I, therefore, will be traveling to Russia this week because we have this resolution of the Security Council and it does show that we must take action against Daesh, against terrorism. That resolution has been voted unanimously. In a way, that was the broadest possible coalition.

Then, I will ask President Putin, as I’ve done before and what I told the Russians a number of times already, that the strikes must be against Daesh, against terrorism, and those who precisely are threatening us. They are threatening the Russians, like ourselves in Europe, like France that was targeted over the past few days. We must, therefore, coordinate ourselves, cooperate, but on that basis, and make sure that we’re all acting against Daesh. And that will be part of the political process, one that must lead to the solution. And we all know what the parameters of the solution are or are not. We know that there’s a deadlock today.

Lastly, I mentioned the Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier, which is in the east of the Mediterranean now. As a matter of fact, there are also some Russian forces. And I, therefore, agreed with President Putin that we must share our intelligence so that we can act in coordination. We must not contradict ourselves. And it’s already the case, and we’ll continue to do so.

Question: [As interpreted.] Mr. President, the Americans have some Special Forces in Syria. Beyond the words and beyond what is happening, are you going to send some Special Forces as well to Syria? Are you considering some ground intervention there? Mr. President, beyond the emotion that we can feel here, beyond these beautiful statements, for more than a year we heard all of you saying that Assad must go, that a political transition is necessary in Syria. Mr. President, can you today, here, in front of us, tell us a specific date, a deadline for Assad to go?

President Obama: Who is this addressed to? Me or for him?

Question: I can translate in English, if needed.

President Obama: No, no, I had the translation. You said “President,” and we’ve got two Presidents here.

President Hollande: [As interpreted.] I will not provide you with a date because it must be as soon as possible. That is one of the requirements for a solution to be found. But at the same time, allow me to underline something. There is a new mindset now. The crisis in Syria has been ongoing for four years -- four years. There are probably more than 300,000 dead. And this is not just relevant to the countries of the region, which are hosting the refugees. It is relevant to Europe and the entire world now with that issue of refugees. And those who believe that we could wait some more, and that, in any case, it was far away, they now realize that we have an influx of refugees, that the terrorists -- the risk is everywhere due to Daesh. We, therefore, must act.

You also asked me what we were going to do, what more. We will intensify the strikes. We will have some more specific target to make sure that Daesh resources, their means are cut off, including their command centers, the trucks carrying oil, their training centers where they prepare terror attacks. We will continue and we will intensify our strikes at the heart of the cities which are currently in the hands of Daesh.

France will not intervene militarily on the ground. It is for the local forces to do so. We've been supporting them for a number of months. We will continue to do so. And they will do the job on the ground after our strikes that will enable them to do so. But France will take its responsibilities regarding that support, which is absolutely necessary.

President Obama: Let me just make a couple of broader comments about the operations against ISIL. As was already indicated, we've taken thousands of strikes; have taken thousands of ISIL fighters, including top commanders and leaders, off the battlefield. We have squeezed their supply lines. We have empowered and armed local groups that are pushing against them, including, most recently, in Sinjar. We're providing training and assistance to the Iraqi government as they prepare to retake places like Ramadi that had been overrun.

We've seen some success. But the question now is, how can we accelerate it? And in fact, even before the tragedy in Paris, I had gathered together my national security forces -- it had been a year -- to review where we had made progress, what worked, what did not, and had put together a plan to accelerate and advance the pressure that we can place on ISIL. And we intend to execute on those plans, but we also think, as FranÃ§ois said, that there may be new openness on the part of other coalition members to help resource and provide additional assistance both to the coalition as a whole and to local forces on the ground.

With respect to Mr. Assad, I think we've got to let the Vienna process play itself out. It is our best opportunity. And so the notion that there would be an immediate date in advance of us getting a broad agreement on that political process and the details I think doesn’t make sense. As soon as we have a framework for a political transition -- potentially, a new constitution, elections -- I think it's in that context that we can start looking at Mr. Assad choosing not to run and potentially seeing a new Syria emerge.

But it's going to be hard. And we should not be under any illusions. Syria has broken down. It began to break down the moment that Mr. Assad started killing indiscriminately his own people. ISIL was able to move into Raqqa in part because of a thorough rejection on the part of many Syrians of the Assad regime, and a power vacuum emerged.

And it is going to be a difficult, long, methodical process to bring back together various factions within Syria to maintain a Syrian state and institutions, and to create the kind of stability that allows people to start coming back in and rebuilding their lives. But it's possible. And the urgency that we've seen even before Paris out of countries like Russia indicate that they recognize they can't be there too long and ultimately winning military battle successfully.

Olivier Knox, Yahoo News.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. [Speaks French.] Mr. President, could you tell us whether the Russian plane did, in fact, breach Turkish airspace? And given the fury of the Russian response on economic, diplomatic, and rhetorical fronts, how concerned are you that there might also be a military component, if not in Turkey, then perhaps with expanded action against coalition interests inside Syria?

[As interpreted.] And, Mr. President, regarding the measures announced today when it comes to strengthening the cooperation on military intelligence and all this, had they been taken a month or weeks ago, do you think they would have prevented the terror attacks that took place in Paris, or will enable us to prevent some further terror attacks?

President Obama: We don't have all the information yet, so I don't want to comment on the specifics. We will be gathering all that information. We expect the Turks to provide information. I'm sure the Russians will have some information. And we'll be able to confirm what happened in part through our own intelligence and our own tracking of that border area.

As FranÃ§ois indicated, my top priority is going to be to ensure that this does not escalate. And hopefully, this is a moment in which all parties can step back and make a determination as to how their interests are best served.

The Russians had several hundred people of their own killed by ISIL. And the flow of foreign fighters out of Russian areas into Syria poses an enormous, long-term threat to Russian territory. So there is a potential convergence of interests between the various parties. It requires us working with them to make the kind of strategic shift that’s necessary and that, frankly, I’ve talked to Putin about for five years now. It requires a recognition that the existing structure cannot gain the legitimacy to stop the war, and until you stop the war, you’re going to have a vacuum in which these kinds of terrorist organizations can operate more effectively.

Let me say one last thing, because I’ve tracked the question that you posed to President Hollande about what could or could not have been prevented. All of our intelligence personnel here in the United States, across the Atlantic, work tirelessly, as I said earlier, to disrupt plots and prevent terrorists attacks. The vast majority of their successes in disrupting plots are not advertised. You never hear about them. But were it not for the dedication of those intelligence and law enforcement and military professionals, this would be a much more dangerous world.

So you have to be careful about speculating about “what if” and “could have” and “would have” in a situation like this -- because it’s hard. You have eight individuals with light weapons; that’s a hard thing to track. What is true, though, is that we can do a better job of coordinating between countries. And I’ve been talking to our European partners for quite some time now about the need for better intelligence, sharing passenger name records, working to ensure that when people enter into Europe -- particularly now -- that the information across various borders is shared on a timely basis, and you have biometric information and other technologies that can make it more accurate. It doesn’t mean it’s always going to be 100 percent foolproof, but we can do better on those fronts.

And one of the challenges has been, frankly, in the past several years, that you have different legal traditions, concerns about privacy and civil liberties, all of which are entirely legitimate. I don’t think those can be ignored now, because that’s part of the -- those are part of the values that make us who we are and that we have to adhere to.

But I do think that this is a reminder that this is a dangerous world. And rooting out small bands of terrorist groups who maintain good operational security and are using modern technologies in ways that are hard to track, that that’s a tough job. And we’re all going to have to pool our resources much more effectively together than we have in the past. And I think when FranÃ§ois goes back to Europe, his leadership, the leadership of other presidents and prime ministers around this issue is going to be as important as anything that we do.

President Hollande: [As interpreted.] Allow me to go back to what Daesh truly is. It is somehow an organization, a terrorist group occupying a territory in Iraq and Syria, killing. And they want to install rules that dishonor humanity. This is what Daesh is doing there. And this is what they are trying to do in other countries, everywhere [inaudible] stands.

And then we have to deal with the number of networks more or less organized in a number of countries that are being used to lead terror attacks, like was the case precisely in Paris. We know that this dreadful plan was prepared in Syria, and then organized in a number of countries. And there are also some accomplices in France, given that some of the terrorists are French, those who committed these acts of war.

So if we want to tackle terrorism, we must act not only to destroy Daesh where they are -- in Syria, in Iraq -- but we must also dismantle and destroy these networks. How can we proceed? Well, first of all, militarily, by intensifying our strikes, by taking back these territories, thanks to the local forces on the ground, which we can support by finding a political solution in Syria, by making sure that the territorial integrity of Iraq is restored. This is what we can do.

Then, when it comes to protection measures to protect our territory and our people, this is what I announced in France and this is what we have to do to eradicate these networks and all of these accomplices and those who are present. Some of them just arrived; others have been there for a long time, and they are not necessarily identified as a threat. It is, therefore, necessary that we strengthen yet further our cooperation in terms of intelligence.

The Paris attacks generated a lot of emotion. But that’s not enough -- compassion, solidarity. And I take note of it, but we must act. And for a number of days now, I’ve been trying to convince -- convincing all the countries that can act to do so.

I met with David Cameron yesterday. He announced that he would take a number of measures to his parliament. That is important. Today I’m here with Barack so that we can act with greater intensity and coherence, as well. Tomorrow I will be hosting German Chancellor Angela Merkel so that European countries, including Germany, can face up to their responsibilities, including in terms of military intelligence and police cooperation, and maybe more. I will also travel to Moscow, so that Russia acts -- can take action against Daesh, and only against Daesh. And then I will receive Matteo Renzi, the head of the Italian government. I will also have an opportunity to talk to all of the European leaders, given that a European Council, together with Turkey, will be held on Sunday.

So it is all of that that must get together and enable us to implement coordination, cooperation in our actions so that we can act on the source, Daesh, and networks that it can use. It is that strength that will enable us to succeed.

Question: [As interpreted.] A question from BFMTV. Both of you today have talked about coordination, cooperation against Daesh. Does it mean that this single coalition -- which you mentioned last week, President Hollande -- is gone? That it is inconceivable to have the Russians and the Americans to work together under this single command? And then Bashar al-Assad, you said you could not put a date on his departure. Does it mean that his departure is not a preamble or prerequisite for the future of Syria?

President Hollande: [As interpreted.] Regarding the coalition of the international community, I believe that the resolution approved by all at the Security Council enabled us to say that now the entire world is committed to fighting against Daesh. Then -- and this is what I will check when I travel to Moscow -- we need one single goal: that is to tackle terrorism and fight against Daesh militarily. And I believe that we can have some further cooperation and coordination militarily to do more.

At the same time, we have to be clear when it comes to the political solution, the one that will enable us to find an outcome for Syria. And in this respect, like we’ve said, and we can repeat it, Bashar al-Assad cannot be the future of Syria.

In Vienna, we are already working with all of the countries -- even though they do not necessarily, they do not have the same stance -- Turkey, Iran, Gulf countries, the United States, France, and of course all of those who are meant to find a solution. But we must work on that transition, a transition where Bashar al-Assad plays no role. Because he’s been the problem, so he cannot be the solution.

President Obama: We’ve got a coalition of 65 countries who have been active in pushing back against ISIL for quite some time. France has been a central part of that coalition, as have European countries, Arab countries. Countries as far-flung as Australia and countries in Southeast Asia are part of that coalition.

Russia right now is a coalition of two, Iran and Russia, supporting Assad. Given Russia’s military capabilities and given the influence they have on the Assad regime, them cooperating would be enormously helpful in bringing about a resolution of the civil war in Syria, and allow us all to refocus our attention on ISIL.

But I think it’s important to remember that you’ve got a global coalition organized. Russia is the outlier. We hope that they refocus their attention on what is the most substantial threat, and that they serve as a constructive partner. And if and when they do, it will make it easier for us to go after ISIL and Daesh.

Although I think it’s also important to recognize that the kinds of airstrikes that they’re carrying out -- just like the kinds of airstrikes that we’re carrying out -- in and of themselves are not sufficient. And the work that we do to bolster local fighting forces, the cutting off of supply lines, financing, oil, reducing the flow of foreign fighters, the intelligence work that needs to be done -- all of that is something that we are doing now and that they can supplement.

But that’s going to be a process that involves hard, methodical work. It’s not going to be something that happens just because suddenly we take a few more airstrikes. And that’s the kind of hard work that I know France is prepared to do, the United States is prepared to do, and perhaps, in the future, Russia will be, as well.

Thank you very much, everybody.

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# COP21, Session 1 Address

President Hollande, Mr. Secretary General, fellow leaders. We have come to Paris to show our resolve.

We offer our condolences to the people of France for the barbaric attacks on this beautiful city. We stand united in solidarity not only to deliver justice to the terrorist network responsible for those attacks but to protect our people and uphold the enduring values that keep us strong and keep us free. And we salute the people of Paris for insisting this crucial conference go on -- an act of defiance that proves nothing will deter us from building the future we want for our children. What greater rejection of those who would tear down our world than marshaling our best efforts to save it?

Nearly 200 nations have assembled here this week -- a declaration that for all the challenges we face, the growing threat of climate change could define the contours of this century more dramatically than any other. What should give us hope that this is a turning point, that this is the moment we finally determined we would save our planet, is the fact that our nations share a sense of urgency about this challenge and a growing realization that it is within our power to do something about it.

Our understanding of the ways human beings disrupt the climate advances by the day. Fourteen of the fifteen warmest years on record have occurred since the year 2000 -- and 2015 is on pace to be the warmest year of all. No nation -- large or small, wealthy or poor -- is immune to what this means.

This summer, I saw the effects of climate change firsthand in our northernmost state, Alaska, where the sea is already swallowing villages and eroding shorelines; where permafrost thaws and the tundra burns; where glaciers are melting at a pace unprecedented in modern times. And it was a preview of one possible future -- a glimpse of our children’s fate if the climate keeps changing faster than our efforts to address it. Submerged countries. Abandoned cities. Fields that no longer grow. Political disruptions that trigger new conflict, and even more floods of desperate peoples seeking the sanctuary of nations not their own.

That future is not one of strong economies, nor is it one where fragile states can find their footing. That future is one that we have the power to change. Right here. Right now. But only if we rise to this moment. As one of America’s governors has said, “We are the first generation to feel the impact of climate change, and the last generation that can do something about it.”

I’ve come here personally, as the leader of the world’s largest economy and the second-largest emitter, to say that the United States of America not only recognizes our role in creating this problem, we embrace our responsibility to do something about it.

Over the last seven years, we’ve made ambitious investments in clean energy, and ambitious reductions in our carbon emissions. We’ve multiplied wind power threefold, and solar power more than twentyfold, helping create parts of America where these clean power sources are finally cheaper than dirtier, conventional power. We’ve invested in energy efficiency in every way imaginable. We’ve said no to infrastructure that would pull high-carbon fossil fuels from the ground, and we’ve said yes to the first-ever set of national standards limiting the amount of carbon pollution our power plants can release into the sky.

The advances we’ve made have helped drive our economic output to all-time highs, and drive our carbon pollution to its lowest levels in nearly two decades.

But the good news is this is not an American trend alone. Last year, the global economy grew while global carbon emissions from burning fossil fuels stayed flat. And what this means can’t be overstated. We have broken the old arguments for inaction. We have proved that strong economic growth and a safer environment no longer have to conflict with one another; they can work in concert with one another.

And that should give us hope. One of the enemies that we'll be fighting at this conference is cynicism, the notion we can't do anything about climate change. Our progress should give us hope during these two weeks -- hope that is rooted in collective action.

Earlier this month in Dubai, after years of delay, the world agreed to work together to cut the super-pollutants known as HFCs. That's progress. Already, prior to Paris, more than 180 countries representing nearly 95 percent of global emissions have put forward their own climate targets. That is progress. For our part, America is on track to reach the emissions targets that I set six years ago in Copenhagen -- we will reduce our carbon emissions in the range of 17 percent below 2005 levels by 2020. And that's why, last year, I set a new target: America will reduce our emissions 26 to 28 percent below 2005 levels within 10 years from now.

So our task here in Paris is to turn these achievements into an enduring framework for human progress -- not a stopgap solution, but a long-term strategy that gives the world confidence in a low-carbon future.

Here, in Paris, let’s secure an agreement that builds in ambition, where progress paves the way for regularly updated targets -- targets that are not set for each of us but by each of us, taking into account the differences that each nation is facing.

Here in Paris, let’s agree to a strong system of transparency that gives each of us the confidence that all of us are meeting our commitments. And let’s make sure that the countries who don’t yet have the full capacity to report on their targets receive the support that they need.

Here in Paris, let’s reaffirm our commitment that resources will be there for countries willing to do their part to skip the dirty phase of development. And I recognize this will not be easy. It will take a commitment to innovation and the capital to continue driving down the cost of clean energy. And that’s why, this afternoon, I’ll join many of you to announce an historic joint effort to accelerate public and private clean energy innovation on a global scale.

Here in Paris, let’s also make sure that these resources flow to the countries that need help preparing for the impacts of climate change that we can no longer avoid. We know the truth that many nations have contributed little to climate change but will be the first to feel its most destructive effects. For some, particularly island nations -- whose leaders I’ll meet with tomorrow -- climate change is a threat to their very existence. And that’s why today, in concert with other nations, America confirms our strong and ongoing commitment to the Least Developed Countries Fund. And tomorrow, we’ll pledge new contributions to risk insurance initiatives that help vulnerable populations rebuild stronger after climate-related disasters.

And finally, here in Paris, let’s show businesses and investors that the global economy is on a firm path towards a low-carbon future. If we put the right rules and incentives in place, we’ll unleash the creative power of our best scientists and engineers and entrepreneurs to deploy clean energy technologies and the new jobs and new opportunities that they create all around the world. There are hundreds of billions of dollars ready to deploy to countries around the world if they get the signal that we mean business this time. Let’s send that signal.

That’s what we seek in these next two weeks. Not simply an agreement to roll back the pollution we put into our skies, but an agreement that helps us lift people from poverty without condemning the next generation to a planet that’s beyond its capacity to repair. Here, in Paris, we can show the world what is possible when we come together, united in common effort and by a common purpose.

And let there be no doubt, the next generation is watching what we do. Just over a week ago, I was in Malaysia, where I held a town hall with young people, and the first question I received was from a young Indonesian woman. And it wasn’t about terrorism, it wasn’t about the economy, it wasn’t about human rights. It was about climate change. And she asked whether I was optimistic about what we can achieve here in Paris, and what young people like her could do to help.

I want our actions to show her that we’re listening. I want our actions to be big enough to draw on the talents of all our people -- men and women, rich and poor -- I want to show her passionate, idealistic young generation that we care about their future.

For I believe, in the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., that there is such a thing as being too late. And when it comes to climate change, that hour is almost upon us. But if we act here, if we act now, if we place our own short-term interests behind the air that our young people will breathe, and the food that they will eat, and the water that they will drink, and the hopes and dreams that sustain their lives, then we won't be too late for them.

And, my fellow leaders, accepting this challenge will not reward us with moments of victory that are clear or quick. Our progress will be measured differently -- in the suffering that is averted, and a planet that's preserved. And that’s what’s always made this so hard. Our generation may not even live to see the full realization of what we do here. But the knowledge that the next generation will be better off for what we do here -- can we imagine a more worthy reward than that? Passing that on to our children and our grandchildren, so that when they look back and they see what we did here in Paris, they can take pride in our achievement.

Let that be the common purpose here in Paris. A world that is worthy of our children. A world that is marked not by conflict, but by cooperation; and not by human suffering, but by human progress. A world that’s safer, and more prosperous, and more secure, and more free than the one that we inherited.

Let’s get to work.

Thank you very much.

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# Paris Press Conference

Good afternoon. Once again, I want to thank the people of France and President Hollande for their extraordinary hospitality. Hosting nearly 200 nations is an enormous task for anybody, but to do so just two weeks after the terrorist attacks here is a remarkable display of resolve.

And that’s why the first place I visited when I arrived on Sunday night was the Bataclan, so that I could pay my respects on behalf of the American people -- who share the French people’s resolve. It was a powerful reminder of the awful human toll of those attacks. Our hearts continue to go out to the victims’ families.

But here in Paris, we also see the resilience of the universal values that we share -- libertÃ©, Ã©galitÃ©, fraternitÃ©. And based on my discussions with President Hollande and other leaders, I am confident that we can continue building momentum -- and adding resources -- to our effort to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL, to disrupt plots against America and our allies, and to bring about the political resolution necessary to resolve the situation in Syria and relieve the hardships on the Syrian people.

Now, this has been a quick visit. Of course, all visits to Paris seem quick -- you always want to stay a little bit longer. But we have accomplished a lot here. I have high hopes that over the next two weeks, we’ll accomplish even more.

I know some have asked why the world would dedicate some of our focus right now to combating climate change even as we work to protect our people and go after terrorist networks. The reason is because this one trend -- climate change -- affects all trends. If we let the world keep warming as fast as it is, and sea levels rising as fast as they are, and weather patterns keep shifting in more unexpected ways -- then before long, we are going to have to devote more and more and more of our economic and military resources not to growing opportunity for our people, but to adapting to the various consequences of a changing planet. This is an economic and security imperative that we have to tackle now. And great nations can handle a lot at once.

America is already leading on many issues, and climate is no different. We’ve made significant progress at home -- increasing production of clean energy, working to reduce emissions, while our businesses have kept creating jobs for 68 straight months. And we've been able to lower our unemployment rate to 5 percent in the process. And since we worked with China last year to show that the two largest economies and two largest emitters can cooperate on climate, more than 180 countries have followed our lead in announcing their own targets. The task that remains here in Paris is to turn these achievements into an enduring framework for progress that gives the world confidence in a low-carbon future. As I said yesterday, what we seek is an agreement where progress paves the way for countries to update their emissions targets on a regular basis, and each nation has the confidence that other nations are meeting their commitments. We seek an agreement that makes sure developing nations have the resources they need to skip the dirty phase of development if they’re willing to do their part, and that makes sure the nations most vulnerable to climate change have resources to adapt to the impacts we can no longer avoid.

We seek an agreement that gives businesses and investors the certainty that the global economy is on a firm path towards a low-carbon future, because that will spur the kind of investment that will be vital to combine reduced emissions with economic growth.

That’s the goal. Not just an agreement to roll back the pollution that threatens our planet, but an agreement that helps our economies grow and our people to thrive without condemning the next generation to a planet that is beyond its capacity to repair.

Now, all of this will be hard. Getting 200 nations to agree on anything is hard. And I’m sure there will be moments over the next two weeks where progress seems stymied, and everyone rushes to write that we are doomed. But I’m convinced that we’re going to get big things done here. Keep in mind, nobody expected that 180 countries would show up in Paris with serious climate targets in hand. Nobody expected that the price of clean energy would fall as fast as it has, or that back in the United States, the solar industry would be creating jobs 10 times faster than the rest of the economy. Nobody expected that more than 150 of America’s biggest companies would pledge their support to an ambitious Paris outcome -- or that a couple dozen of the world’s wealthiest private citizens would join us here to pledge to invest unprecedented resources to bring clean energy technologies to market faster.

What gives me confidence that progress is possible is somebody like Bill Gates -- who I was with yesterday -- understands that tackling climate change is not just a moral imperative, it's an opportunity. Without batting an eye, he said we’re just going to have to go ahead and invent some new technologies to tackle this challenge. That kind of optimism, that kind of sense that we can do what is necessary is infectious. And you tend to believe somebody like Bill when he says that we’re going to get it done -- since he’s done some pretty remarkable things. And I believe that a successful two weeks here could give the world that same kind of optimism that the future is ours to shape.

So, with that, I'm going to take a few questions. We'll start with Jerome Cartillier of [AFP]. Where’s Jerome?

Question: Good morning, sir, and thank you, Mr. President. For months now, you’ve been asking Mr. Putin to play basically a more constructive role in Syria, basically shifting from defending Assad to attacking ISIL. It appears your calls have not been heard. What’s your strategy going forward?

President Obama: Well, I'm not sure that's true. The fact that the Vienna process is moving forward, steadily -- not conclusively, but steadily -- I think is an indication that Mr. Putin recognizes there is not going to be a military resolution to the situation in Syria.

The Russians now have been there for several weeks, over a month, and I think fair-minded reporters who looked at the situation would say that the situation hasn’t changed significantly. In the interim, Russia has lost a commercial passenger jet. You’ve seen another jet shot down. There have been losses in terms of Russian personnel. And I think Mr. Putin understands that, with Afghanistan fresh in the memory, for him to simply get bogged down in a inconclusive and paralyzing civil conflict is not the outcome that he’s looking for.

Now, where we continue to have an ongoing difference is not on the need for a political settlement; it's the issue of whether Mr. Assad can continue to serve as President while still bringing the civil war to an end. It's been my estimation for five years now that that's not possible. Regardless of how you feel about Mr. Assad -- and I consider somebody who kills hundreds of thousands of his own people illegitimate -- but regardless of the moral equation, as a practical matter, it is impossible for Mr. Assad to bring that country together and to bring all the parties into an inclusive government. It is possible, however, to preserve the Syrian state, to have an inclusive government in which the interests of the various groups inside of Syria are represented.

And so, as part of the Vienna process, you're going to see the opposition groups -- the moderate opposition groups that exist within Syria -- some of which, frankly, we don't have a lot in common with but do represent significant factions inside of Syria -- they’ll be coming together in order for them to form at least a negotiating unit or process that can move Vienna forward.

And we're going to just keep on working at this. And my hope and expectation is, is that political track will move at the same time as we continue to apply greater and greater pressure on ISIL.

And with the contributions that the French have made, the Germans have recently announced additional resources to the fight, the Brits have been steady partners in Iraq and I think are now very interested in how they can expand their efforts to help deal with ISIL inside of Syria -- with not just the cohesion of the coalition the United States put together but also the increasing intensity of our actions in the air and progressively on the ground, I think it is possible over the next several months that we both see a shift in calculation in the Russians and a recognition that it's time to bring the civil war in Syria to a close. It's not going to be easy. Too much blood has been shed, too much infrastructure has been destroyed, too many people have been displaced, for us to anticipate that it will be a smooth transition. And ISIL is going to continue to be a deadly organization -- because of its social media, the resources that it has and the networks of experienced fighters that it possesses -- is going to continue to be a serious threat for some time to come. But I’m confident that we are on the winning side of this and that, ultimately, Russia is going to recognize the threat that ISIL poses to its country, to its people, is the most significant, and that they need to align themselves with those of us who are fighting ISIL. Justin Sink. Question: Thanks, Mr. President. I guess I wanted to follow on that shift in calculation that you discussed in terms of President Putin. Did you receive assurances from either him or President Hollande -- who said earlier this week that President Putin had told him he would only target jihadis and ISIS -- that that will be the focus of Russia’s military campaign going forward?

And then, separately, I just wanted to ask about climate. The outstanding issue seems to be whether Republicans who have kind of voiced opposition to your agenda could somehow submarine funding for the Green Climate Fund. That’s a pretty crucial part here. So I’m wondering both how you prevent that in the upcoming appropriations process, and if you’re at all concerned about what Senator McConnell said earlier today or yesterday that a future Republican President could undo what you’re trying to accomplish here in Paris.

President Obama: First of all, on Mr. Putin, I don’t expect that you’re going to see a 180-turn on their strategy over the next several weeks. They have invested for years now in keeping Assad in power. Their presence there is predicated on propping him up. And so that’s going to take some time for them to change how they think about the issue.

And so long as they are aligned with the regime, a lot of Russian resources are still going to be targeted at opposition groups that ultimately are going to end up being part of an inclusive government that we support or other members of the coalition support, and are fighting the regime and fighting ISIL at the same time. So I don’t think we should be under any illusions that somehow Russia starts hitting only ISIL targets. That’s not happening now. It was never happening. It’s not going to be happening in the next several weeks.

What can happen is if the political process that John Kerry has so meticulously stitched together -- in concert with Foreign Minister Lavrov of Russia -- if that works in Vienna, then it’s possible, given the existing accord that the parties have already agreed to, that we start seeing at least pockets of ceasefires in and around Syria. That may mean then that certain opposition groups no longer find themselves subject to either Syrian or Russian bombing; they are then in a conversation about politics. And slowly, we then are able to get everybody’s attention diverted to where it needs to be, and that is going after ISIL in a systematic way.

With respect to climate and what’s taking place here, I don’t want to get ahead of ourselves -- we still need a Paris agreement. And so my main focus is making sure that the United States is a leader in bringing a successful agreement home here in Paris. And there are a number of components to it. So I just want to repeat so that everybody understands what we will consider success several weeks from now.

Number one, that it is an ambitious target that seeks a low-carbon global economy over the course of this century. That means that countries have put forward specific targets, and although those are self-generating, there is a mechanism in which they are presenting to the world confirmation that they are working on those targets, meeting on those targets. So there’s a single transparency mechanism that all countries are adhering to, and that those are legally binding; that there’s periodic reviews so that as the science changes and as technology changes, five years from now, 10 years from now, 15 years from now -- in each successive cycle, countries can update the pledges that they make; and that we’ve got a climate fund that helps developing countries to not only adapt and mitigate but also leapfrog over dirty-power generation in favor of clean energy.

And if we hit those targets, then we will have been successful. Not because, by the way, the pledges alone will meet the necessary targets for us to prevent catastrophic climate change, but because we will have built the architecture that’s needed. We will have established a global consensus of how we’re going to approach the problem. And then we can successfully turn up the dials as new sources of energy become available, as the unit costs for something like solar or improvements in battery technology make it easier for us to meet even higher targets. And systematically, we can drive down carbon emissions and the pace of climate change over the course of several decades.

So I want to emphasize this because I know that in some of the reporting -- if you add up all the pledges and they were all met right now, we would be at a estimated 2.7 centigrade increase in temperature. That’s too high. We wanted to get 2 centigrade or even lower than that. But if we have these periodic reviews built in, what I believe will happen is that by sending that signal to researchers and scientists and investors and entrepreneurs and venture funds, we’ll actually start hitting these targets faster than we expected, and we can be even more ambitious. And so when you look at the cumulative targets that may exist 10 years from now, we may well be within the 2 percent centigrade increase.

And by the way, that’s not just foolish optimism. When you look at the experience of the United States, for example -- I came into office, I prioritized clean energy, I said we’re going to double our clean energy production. Through the Recovery Act, we recognized that making these big investments were also good for the economy and helping us get out of recession and could create jobs. So we made a big investment, and it turned out that we met our goals a lot quicker than we expected.

If you had asked me when I first came into office my expectations for the price of solar-generated power versus traditional coal or other fossil-fuel-generated power, I would say we would make some progress but that solar would still require substantial subsidies in order to be economical. The cost of solar has gone down much faster than any of us would have predicted even five years ago.

So the key here is to set up the structure so that we’re sending signals all around the world: This is happening. We’re not turning back. And the thing about human ingenuity -- I was going to say American ingenuity, but there are other smart folks around too, don’t want to be too parochial about this -- the thing about human ingenuity is, is that it responds when it gets a strong signal of what needs to be done.

The old expression that necessity is the mother of invention -- well, this is necessary. And us getting a strong, high-ambition agreement in place, even if it doesn’t meet all the goals that we ultimately need to meet, sends a signal that it’s necessary and that will spur on the innovation that’s going to ultimately meet our goals.

Nancy Benac.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. One follow-up on the climate change issue. Are you confident that you can hold the U.S. to its commitments under existing treaties with no new vote needed? And separately, on Planned Parenthood, I wondered if you could share your thoughts on that shooting, and any thoughts in the context of the sharp political rhetoric in the country at this time. President Obama: I apologize, Justin, I didn’t address that but, fortunately, Nancy was batting cleanup after you.

On the issue of the climate fund, we already engage in assistance to countries for adaptation, mitigation, sharing technology that can help them meet their energy needs in a clean way. And so this is not just one slug of funding that happens in one year -- this is multiyear commitments that, in many cases, are already embedded in a whole range of programs that we have around the world. And my expectation is, is that we will absolutely be able to meet our commitments.

This is part of American leadership, by the way. And this is part of the debate that we have to have in the United States more frequently.

For some reason, too often in Washington, American leadership is defined by whether or not we’re sending troops somewhere, and that’s the sole definition of leadership. And part of what I’ve been trying to describe during the course of my presidency is that where we make the most impact -- and where, by the way, we strengthen our relationships and influence the most -- is when we are helping to organize the world around a particular problem.

Now, because we’re the largest country, because we have the most powerful military, we should welcome the fact that we’re going to do more and oftentimes we’re going to do it first. So during the Ebola response, other countries could not respond until we had set up the infrastructure to allow other countries to respond, and until we had made the call and showed that we were going to make that investment.

The same was true with respect to making sure that Iran didn’t get a nuclear weapon. We had to lead the way, but, ultimately, because we reached out and brought our allies and partners together, we were able to achieve goals that we could not have achieved by ourselves.

The same is true with climate. When I made the announcement in Beijing with President Xi, I was able to do so in part because we had led domestically, so I could put my money where my mouth was, and I said, here are the tough political decisions we’re making, now what are you going to do? And once we were able to get China involved that gave confidence to other countries that we were in a position to make a difference as well -- or that they needed to be involved in the process as well.

So whether it’s organizing the coalition that’s fighting ISIL, or dealing with climate change, our role is central, but on large international issues like this, it’s not going to be sufficient -- at least not if we want it to take, if we want it to sustain itself. We’ve got to have partners. And that’s the kind of leadership that we should aspire to.

With respect to Planned Parenthood, obviously my heart goes out to the families of those impacted. I mean, Nancy, I say this every time we’ve got one of these mass shootings -- this just doesn’t happen in other countries.

We are, rightly, determined to prevent terrorist attacks wherever they occur, whether in the United States or with friends and allies like France. And we devote enormous resources -- and properly so -- to rooting out networks and debilitating organizations like ISIL, and maintaining the intelligence and improving the information-sharing that can identify those who would try to kill innocent people. And yet, in the United States, we have the power to do more to prevent what is just a regular process of gun homicides that is unequalled by multiples of 5, 6, 10.

And I think the American people understand that. So my hope is, is that, once again, this spurs a conversation and action. And I will continue to present those things that I can do administratively. But in the end of the day, Congress, states, local governments are going to have to act in order to make sure that we’re preventing people who are deranged or have violent tendencies from getting weapons that can magnify the damage that they do.

And with respect to Planned Parenthood, I think it’s clear -- I’ve said it before -- they provide health services to women all across the country. Have for generations. In many cases, it’s the only organization that provides health services to impoverished women. And I think it’s fair to have a legitimate, honest debate about abortion. I don’t think that’s something that is beyond the pale of our political discussion; I think it’s a serious, legitimate issue. How we talk about it -- making sure that we’re talking about it factually, accurately, and not demonizing organizations like Planned Parenthood -- I think is important.

Jeff Mason. Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Do you believe that Turkey is doing enough to strengthen its northwest border with Syria? How is it that a NATO country with as large a military as Turkey has, has not sealed its border? And is that something that you raised today with President Erdogan? And then, to put a finer point on the climate change question, can leaders gathered here believe that the United States will keep its commitments, even after you’ve left office, if a Republican succeeds you in the White House? President Obama: Just with respect to my successor, let me, first of all, say that I’m anticipating a Democrat succeeding me. I’m confident in the wisdom of the American people on that front.

But even if somebody from a different party succeeded me, one of the things that you find is when you’re in this job, you think about it differently than when you’re just running for the job. And what you realize is what I mentioned earlier, that American leadership involves not just playing to a narrow constituency back home, but you now are, in fact, at the center of what happens around the world, and that your credibility and America’s ability to influence events depends on taking seriously what other countries care about.

Now, the fact of the matter is there’s a reason why you have the largest gathering of world leaders probably in human history here in Paris. Everybody else is taking climate change really seriously. They think it’s a really big problem. It spans political parties. You travel around Europe, and you talk to leaders of governments and the opposition, and they are arguing about a whole bunch of things -- one thing they’re not arguing about is whether the science of climate change is real and whether or not we have to do something about it. So whoever is the next President of the United States, if they come in and they suggest somehow that that global consensus -- not just 99.5 percent of scientists and experts, but 99 percent of world leaders -- think this is really important, I think the President of the United States is going to need to think this is really important. And that’s why it’s important for us to not project what’s being said on a campaign trail, but to do what’s right, and make the case.

And I would note that the American people, I think in the most recent survey, two-thirds of them said America should be a signatory to any agreement that emerges that is actually addressing climate change in a serious way. So the good news is, the politics inside the United States is changing, as well. Sometimes it may be hard for Republicans to support something that I’m doing, but that’s more a matter of the games Washington plays. And that’s why I think people should be confident that we’ll meet our commitments on this.

With respect to Turkey, I have had repeated conversations with President Erdogan about the need to close the border between Turkey and Syria. We’ve seen some serious progress on that front, but there are still some gaps. In particular, there’s about 98 kilometers that are still used as a transit point for foreign fighters, ISIL shipping out fuel for sale that helps finance their terrorist activities.

And so we have been having our militaries work together to determine how a combination of air and Turkish ground forces on the Turkish side of the border can do a much better job of sealing the border than currently is. And I think President Erdogan recognizes that. I’m also encouraged by the fact that President Erdogan and the EU had a series of meetings around -- or Turkey and the EU had a series of meetings around the issue of the Turkish-Greek border.

We have to remind ourselves, Turkey has taken on an enormous humanitarian effort. There are millions of Syrians who are displaced and living inside of Turkey -- not just refugee camps, but they are now moving into major cities throughout Turkey. That puts enormous strains on their infrastructure, on their housing, on employment. And Turkey has continued to keep those borders open for people in real need. So I’m proud that the United States is the single-largest contributor of humanitarian aid for Syrian refugees. I’m glad that the EU is looking to do more to help Turkey manage those refugee flows. But I also think the EU, rightly, wants to see the kind of orderly process along the Turkish-Greek border that’s necessary for Europe to be able to regulate the amount of refugees it’s absorbing, and to save the lives of refugees who are oftentimes taking enormous risks because they’re being ferried back and forth by human traffickers who are now operating in the same ways that you see drug traffickers operating under -- at enormous profit, and without regard for human life. Question: Did you raise the border issue with him today? President Obama: We talked about it today, but I guess what I’m saying, Jeff, is this has been an ongoing conversation. We recognize that this is a central part of our anti-ISIL strategy. We’ve got to choke them off. We have to choke off how they make money. We’ve got to choke off their ability to bring in new fighters. Because we’ve taken tens of thousands of their fighters off the battlefield, but if new ones are still coming in, then they continue to maintain a stranglehold over certain population centers inside of Iraq or Syria. So we’ve got to cut off their source of new fighters.

That’s also part of the great danger for Europe, and ultimately the United States, as well, and countries as far-flung as Australia or Singapore. If you’ve got foreign fighters coming in that are getting not only ideologically hardened but battle-hardened, and then they’re returning to their home countries, they’re likely candidates for engaging in the kind of terrorist attacks that we saw here in Paris.

So this has been ongoing concern and we’re going to continue to push hard among all our allies to cut off the financing, cut off the foreign fighters, improve our intelligence-gathering, which has allowed us to accelerate the strikes that we’re taking against ISIL.

A lot of the discussion over the last couple of weeks was the pace of airstrikes. The pace of airstrikes is not constrained by the amount of planes or missiles that we have; the pace has been dictated by how many effective targets do we have. And our intelligence continues to improve. And the better we get at that, the better we’re going to be at going after them.

Scott Horsley. Question: Thank you, Mr. President. In terms of sending that market signal you talked about today and a couple of times this week, I wonder if you see any political path back home towards putting an explicit price on carbon. President Obama: I have long believed that the most elegant way to drive innovation and to reduce carbon emissions is to put a price on it. This is a classic market failure. If you open up an Econ101 textbook, it will say the market is very good about determining prices and allocating capital towards its most productive use -- except there are certain externalities, there are certain things that the market just doesn’t count, it doesn’t price, at least not on its own. Clean air is an example. Clean water -- or the converse -- dirty water, dirty air.

In this case, the carbons that are being sent up that originally we didn’t have the science to fully understand -- we do now. And if that’s the case, if you put a price on it, then the entire market would respond. And the best investments and the smartest technologies would begin scrubbing effectively our entire economy.

But it’s difficult. And so I think that as the science around climate change is more accepted, as people start realizing that even today you can put a price on the damage that climate change is doing -- you go down to Miami, and when it’s flooding at high tide on a sunny day and fish are swimming through the middle of the streets, there’s a cost to that. Insurance companies already are beginning to realize that in terms of how they price risk. And the more the market on its own starts putting a price on it because of risk, it may be that the politics around setting up a cap-and-trade system, for example, shifts as well.

Obviously, I’m not under any illusion that this Congress will impose something like that. But it is worth remembering that it was conservatives and Republicans and center-right think tanks that originally figured out this was a smarter way to deal with pollution than a command-and-control system. And it was folks like George H.W. Bush and his EPA that effectively marshalled this approach to deal with acid raid. We ended up solving it a lot faster, a lot cheaper than anybody had anticipated.

And I guess, more than anything, that’s the main message I want to send here, is climate change is a massive problem. It is a generational problem. It’s a problem that, by definition, is just about the hardest thing for any political system to absorb, because the effects are gradual, they’re diffuse; people don’t feel it immediately and so there’s not a lot of constituency pressure on politicians to do something about it right away, it kind of creeps up on you. You’ve got the problem of the commons and you’ve got to get everybody doing it -- because if just one nation is helping but the other nations aren’t doing it, then it doesn’t do any good -- so you have this huge coordination problem and the danger of free riders. So on all these dimensions, it’s hard to come up with a tougher problem than climate change -- or a more consequential problem.

And yet, despite all that, the main message I’ve got is, I actually think we’re going to solve this thing. If you had said to people as recently as two years ago that we’d have 180 countries showing up in Paris with pretty ambitious targets for carbon reduction, most people would have said you’re crazy, that’s a pipe dream. And yet, here we are. That’s already happened. Before the agreement is even signed, that’s already happened.

As I said earlier, if you had told folks what the cost of generating solar energy would be today relative to what it was five years ago, people would have said, not a chance. And with relatively modest inputs, that’s already happening. I mean, imagine if we’re starting to put more R&D dollars into it -- which is why the Mission Innovation announcement was so significant -- the biggest countries, the most prosperous countries doubling their R&D, but then you’ve also got Bill Gates and other extraordinarily wealthy individuals saying we’re going to put our money into this.

I’m optimistic. I think we’re going to solve it. I think the issue is just going to be the pace and how much damage is done before we are able to fully apply the brakes.

And in some ways, it’s akin to the problem of terrorism and ISIL. In the immediate aftermath of a terrible attack like happened here in Paris, sometimes it’s natural for people to despair. But look at Paris. You can’t tear down Paris because of the demented actions of a handful individuals. The beauty, the joy, the life, the culture, the people, the diversity -- that’s going to win out every time.

But we have to be steady in applying pressure to the problem. We have to keep on going at it. We have to see what works. When something doesn’t work, we have to change our approach. But most of all, we have to push away fear, and have confidence that human innovation, our values, our judgment, our solidarity -- it will win out.

And I guess I’ve been at this long enough where I have some cause for confidence. We went, what, a month, month and a half, where people were pretty sure that Ebola was going to kill us all? Well, nobody asks me about it anymore. And although we still see flickers of it in West Africa, we set up an entire global health security agenda -- part of American leadership -- to deal not only with Ebola but to deal with the possibility of future pandemics. It’s not easy. It takes time. And when you’re in the midst of it, it’s frightening. But it’s solvable.

All right? With that, I’m going to go home. Vive la France! Thank you very much.

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# Address to the Nation on Foreign and Domestic Counter-Terrorism Strategies

Good evening. On Wednesday, 14 Americans were killed as they came together to celebrate the holidays. They were taken from family and friends who loved them deeply. They were white and black; Latino and Asian; immigrants and American-born; moms and dads; daughters and sons. Each of them served their fellow citizens and all of them were part of our American family.

Tonight, I want to talk with you about this tragedy, the broader threat of terrorism, and how we can keep our country safe.

The FBI is still gathering the facts about what happened in San Bernardino, but here is what we know. The victims were brutally murdered and injured by one of their coworkers and his wife. So far, we have no evidence that the killers were directed by a terrorist organization overseas, or that they were part of a broader conspiracy here at home. But it is clear that the two of them had gone down the dark path of radicalization, embracing a perverted interpretation of Islam that calls for war against America and the West. They had stockpiled assault weapons, ammunition, and pipe bombs. So this was an act of terrorism, designed to kill innocent people.

Our nation has been at war with terrorists since al Qaeda killed nearly 3,000 Americans on 9/11. In the process, we’ve hardened our defenses -- from airports to financial centers, to other critical infrastructure. Intelligence and law enforcement agencies have disrupted countless plots here and overseas, and worked around the clock to keep us safe. Our military and counterterrorism professionals have relentlessly pursued terrorist networks overseas -- disrupting safe havens in several different countries, killing Osama bin Laden, and decimating al Qaeda’s leadership.

Over the last few years, however, the terrorist threat has evolved into a new phase. As we’ve become better at preventing complex, multifaceted attacks like 9/11, terrorists turned to less complicated acts of violence like the mass shootings that are all too common in our society. It is this type of attack that we saw at Fort Hood in 2009; in Chattanooga earlier this year; and now in San Bernardino. And as groups like ISIL grew stronger amidst the chaos of war in Iraq and then Syria, and as the Internet erases the distance between countries, we see growing efforts by terrorists to poison the minds of people like the Boston Marathon bombers and the San Bernardino killers.

For seven years, I’ve confronted this evolving threat each morning in my intelligence briefing. And since the day I took this office, I’ve authorized U.S. forces to take out terrorists abroad precisely because I know how real the danger is. As Commander-in-Chief, I have no greater responsibility than the security of the American people. As a father to two young daughters who are the most precious part of my life, I know that we see ourselves with friends and coworkers at a holiday party like the one in San Bernardino. I know we see our kids in the faces of the young people killed in Paris. And I know that after so much war, many Americans are asking whether we are confronted by a cancer that has no immediate cure.

Well, here’s what I want you to know: The threat from terrorism is real, but we will overcome it. We will destroy ISIL and any other organization that tries to harm us. Our success won’t depend on tough talk, or abandoning our values, or giving into fear. That’s what groups like ISIL are hoping for. Instead, we will prevail by being strong and smart, resilient and relentless, and by drawing upon every aspect of American power.

Here’s how. First, our military will continue to hunt down terrorist plotters in any country where it is necessary. In Iraq and Syria, airstrikes are taking out ISIL leaders, heavy weapons, oil tankers, infrastructure. And since the attacks in Paris, our closest allies -- including France, Germany, and the United Kingdom -- have ramped up their contributions to our military campaign, which will help us accelerate our effort to destroy ISIL.

Second, we will continue to provide training and equipment to tens of thousands of Iraqi and Syrian forces fighting ISIL on the ground so that we take away their safe havens. In both countries, we’re deploying Special Operations Forces who can accelerate that offensive. We’ve stepped up this effort since the attacks in Paris, and we’ll continue to invest more in approaches that are working on the ground.

Third, we’re working with friends and allies to stop ISIL’s operations -- to disrupt plots, cut off their financing, and prevent them from recruiting more fighters. Since the attacks in Paris, we’ve surged intelligence-sharing with our European allies. We’re working with Turkey to seal its border with Syria. And we are cooperating with Muslim-majority countries -- and with our Muslim communities here at home -- to counter the vicious ideology that ISIL promotes online.

Fourth, with American leadership, the international community has begun to establish a process -- and timeline -- to pursue ceasefires and a political resolution to the Syrian war. Doing so will allow the Syrian people and every country, including our allies, but also countries like Russia, to focus on the common goal of destroying ISIL -- a group that threatens us all.

This is our strategy to destroy ISIL. It is designed and supported by our military commanders and counterterrorism experts, together with 65 countries that have joined an American-led coalition. And we constantly examine our strategy to determine when additional steps are needed to get the job done. That’s why I’ve ordered the Departments of State and Homeland Security to review the Visa Waiver Program under which the female terrorist in San Bernardino originally came to this country. And that’s why I will urge high-tech and law enforcement leaders to make it harder for terrorists to use technology to escape from justice.

Now, here at home, we have to work together to address the challenge. There are several steps that Congress should take right away.

To begin with, Congress should act to make sure no one on a no-fly list is able to buy a gun. What could possibly be the argument for allowing a terrorist suspect to buy a semi-automatic weapon? This is a matter of national security.

We also need to make it harder for people to buy powerful assault weapons like the ones that were used in San Bernardino. I know there are some who reject any gun safety measures. But the fact is that our intelligence and law enforcement agencies -- no matter how effective they are -- cannot identify every would-be mass shooter, whether that individual is motivated by ISIL or some other hateful ideology. What we can do -- and must do -- is make it harder for them to kill.

Next, we should put in place stronger screening for those who come to America without a visa so that we can take a hard look at whether they’ve traveled to warzones. And we’re working with members of both parties in Congress to do exactly that.

Finally, if Congress believes, as I do, that we are at war with ISIL, it should go ahead and vote to authorize the continued use of military force against these terrorists. For over a year, I have ordered our military to take thousands of airstrikes against ISIL targets. I think it’s time for Congress to vote to demonstrate that the American people are united, and committed, to this fight.

My fellow Americans, these are the steps that we can take together to defeat the terrorist threat. Let me now say a word about what we should not do.

We should not be drawn once more into a long and costly ground war in Iraq or Syria. That’s what groups like ISIL want. They know they can’t defeat us on the battlefield. ISIL fighters were part of the insurgency that we faced in Iraq. But they also know that if we occupy foreign lands, they can maintain insurgencies for years, killing thousands of our troops, draining our resources, and using our presence to draw new recruits.

The strategy that we are using now -- airstrikes, Special Forces, and working with local forces who are fighting to regain control of their own country -- that is how we’ll achieve a more sustainable victory. And it won’t require us sending a new generation of Americans overseas to fight and die for another decade on foreign soil.

Here’s what else we cannot do. We cannot turn against one another by letting this fight be defined as a war between America and Islam. That, too, is what groups like ISIL want. ISIL does not speak for Islam. They are thugs and killers, part of a cult of death, and they account for a tiny fraction of more than a billion Muslims around the world -- including millions of patriotic Muslim Americans who reject their hateful ideology. Moreover, the vast majority of terrorist victims around the world are Muslim. If we’re to succeed in defeating terrorism we must enlist Muslim communities as some of our strongest allies, rather than push them away through suspicion and hate.

That does not mean denying the fact that an extremist ideology has spread within some Muslim communities. This is a real problem that Muslims must confront, without excuse. Muslim leaders here and around the globe have to continue working with us to decisively and unequivocally reject the hateful ideology that groups like ISIL and al Qaeda promote; to speak out against not just acts of violence, but also those interpretations of Islam that are incompatible with the values of religious tolerance, mutual respect, and human dignity.

But just as it is the responsibility of Muslims around the world to root out misguided ideas that lead to radicalization, it is the responsibility of all Americans -- of every faith -- to reject discrimination. It is our responsibility to reject religious tests on who we admit into this country. It’s our responsibility to reject proposals that Muslim Americans should somehow be treated differently. Because when we travel down that road, we lose. That kind of divisiveness, that betrayal of our values plays into the hands of groups like ISIL. Muslim Americans are our friends and our neighbors, our co-workers, our sports heroes -- and, yes, they are our men and women in uniform who are willing to die in defense of our country. We have to remember that. My fellow Americans, I am confident we will succeed in this mission because we are on the right side of history. We were founded upon a belief in human dignity -- that no matter who you are, or where you come from, or what you look like, or what religion you practice, you are equal in the eyes of God and equal in the eyes of the law. Even in this political season, even as we properly debate what steps I and future Presidents must take to keep our country safe, let’s make sure we never forget what makes us exceptional. Let’s not forget that freedom is more powerful than fear; that we have always met challenges -- whether war or depression, natural disasters or terrorist attacks -- by coming together around our common ideals as one nation, as one people. So long as we stay true to that tradition, I have no doubt America will prevail.

Thank you. God bless you, and may God bless the United States of America.

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# 13th Amendment 150-Year Anniversary Address

“In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free.”

1

That’s what President Lincoln once wrote. “Honorable alike in what we give, and what we preserve. We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best hope of earth.”

2

Mr. Speaker, leaders and members of both parties, distinguished guests: We gather here to commemorate a century and a half of freedom -- not simply for former slaves, but for all of us. Today, the issue of chattel slavery seems so simple, so obvious -- it is wrong in every sense. Stealing men, women, and children from their homelands. Tearing husband from wife, parent from child; stripped and sold to the highest bidder; shackled in chains and bloodied with the whip. It’s antithetical not only to our conception of human rights and dignity, but to our conception of ourselves -- a people founded on the premise that all are created equal. And, to many at the time, that judgment was clear as well. Preachers, black and white, railed against this moral outrage from the pulpit. Former slaves rattled the conscience of Americans in books, in pamphlets, and speeches. Men and women organized anti-slavery conventions and fundraising drives. Farmers and shopkeepers opened their barns, their homes, their cellars as waystations on an Underground Railroad, where African Americans often risked their own freedom to ensure the freedom of others. And enslaved Americans, with no rights of their own, they ran north and kept the flame of freedom burning, passing it from one generation to the next, with their faith, and their dignity, and their song. The reformers’ passion only drove the protectors of the status quo to dig in harder. And for decades, America wrestled with the issue of slavery in a way that we have with no other, before or since. It shaped our politics, and it nearly tore us asunder. Tensions ran so high, so personal, that at one point, a lawmaker was beaten unconscious on the Senate floor. Eventually, war broke out –- brother against brother, North against South. At its heart, the question of slavery was never simply about civil rights. It was about the meaning of America, the kind of country we wanted to be –- whether this nation might fulfill the call of its birth: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights,” that among those are life and liberty and the pursuit of happiness. President Lincoln understood that if we were ever to fully realize that founding promise, it meant not just signing an Emancipation Proclamation, not just winning a war. It meant making the most powerful collective statement we can in our democracy: etching our values into our Constitution. He called it “a King’s cure for all the evils.” A hundred and fifty years proved the cure to be necessary but not sufficient. Progress proved halting, too often deferred. Newly freed slaves may have been liberated by the letter of the law, but their daily lives told another tale. They couldn’t vote. They couldn’t fill most occupations. They couldn’t protect themselves or their families from indignity or from violence. And so abolitionists and freedmen and women and radical Republicans kept cajoling and kept rabble-rousing, and within a few years of the war’s end at Appomattox, we passed two more amendments guaranteeing voting rights, birthright citizenship, equal protection under the law. And still, it wasn’t enough. For another century, we saw segregation and Jim Crow make a mockery of these amendments. And we saw justice turn a blind eye to mobs with nooses slung over trees. We saw bullets and bombs terrorize generations. And yet, through all this, the call to freedom survived. “We hold these truths to be self-evident.” And eventually, a new generation rose up to march and organize, and to stand up and to sit in with the moral force of nonviolence and the sweet sound of those same freedom songs that slaves had sung so long ago -– crying out not for special treatment, but for equal rights; calling out for basic justice promised to them almost a century before. Like their abolitionist predecessors, they were plain, humble, ordinary people, armed with little but faith: Faith in the Almighty. Faith in each other. And faith in America. Hope in the face so often of all evidence to the contrary, that something better lay around the bend. Because of them -- maids and porters and students and farmers and priests and housewives -- because of them, a Civil Rights law was passed, and the Voting Rights law was signed. And doors of opportunity swung open, not just for the black porter, but also for the white chambermaid, and the immigrant dishwasher, so that their daughters and their sons might finally imagine a life for themselves beyond washing somebody else’s laundry or shining somebody else’s shoes. Freedom for you and for me. Freedom for all of us. And that’s what we celebrate today. The long arc of progress. Progress that is never assured, never guaranteed, but always possible, always there to be earned -– no matter how stuck we might seem sometimes. No matter how divided or despairing we may appear. No matter what ugliness may bubble up. Progress, so long as we’re willing to push for it; so long as we’re willing to reach for each other. We would do a disservice to those warriors of justice -- Tubman, and Douglass, and Lincoln, and King -- were we to deny that the scars of our nation’s original sin are still with us today. We condemn ourselves to shackles once more if we fail to answer those who wonder if they’re truly equals in their communities, or in their justice systems, or in a job interview. We betray the efforts of the past if we fail to push back against bigotry in all its forms.

But we betray our most noble past as well if we were to deny the possibility of movement, the possibility of progress; if we were to let cynicism consume us and fear overwhelm us. If we lost hope. For however slow, however incomplete, however harshly, loudly, rudely challenged at each point along our journey, in America, we can create the change that we seek.

All it requires is that our generation be willing to do what those who came before us have done: To rise above the cynicism and rise above the fear, to hold fast to our values, to see ourselves in each other, to cherish dignity and opportunity not just for our own children but for somebody else’s child. To remember that our freedom is bound up with the freedom of others -– regardless of what they look like or where they come from or what their last name is or what faith they practice. To be honorable alike in what we give, and what we preserve. To nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best hope of Earth. To nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best hope of Earth.

That is our choice. Today, we affirm hope. Thank you. God bless you.

May God bless the United States of America.

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# Speech on Signing the 'Every Student Succeeds Act'

Welcome to the White House. First of all, I want to thank Antonio for being such an outstanding role model. Back in 2011 -- when he was much shorter -- I visited Kenmore Middle School and saw firsthand their great work helping students like Antonio achieve their potential. And that’s why we’re here today.

This is an early Christmas present. After more than 10 years, members of Congress from both parties have come together to revise our national education law. A Christmas miracle: A bipartisan bill signing right here. So I was telling Lamar we should do this more often. I love it when we’re signing bipartisan bills. Today, I’m proud to sign a law that’s going to make sure that every student is prepared to succeed in the 21st century.

The goals of No Child Left Behind, the predecessor of this law, were the right ones: High standards. Accountability. Closing the achievement gap. Making sure that every child was learning, not just some. But in practice, it often fell short. It didn’t always consider the specific needs of each community. It led to too much testing during classroom time. It often forced schools and school districts into cookie-cutter reforms that didn’t always produce the kinds of results that we wanted to see. And that’s okay -- sometimes reform efforts require you try something, it doesn’t work, you learn some lessons, and you make modifications.

So my Administration, when we came into office, tried some different things. We tried to lead a Race to the Top. That’s why we acted to give states that were willing to embrace reforms -- that they helped to formulate -- more flexibility in how to improve student achievement. They were receiving waivers from some of the requirements of No Child Left Behind. But the truth is that could only do so much. And that’s why, for years, I have called on Congress to come together and get a bipartisan effort to fix No Child Left Behind.

It took a lot of time; it required a lot of work. But thanks to the tireless efforts of many of the people on this stage and some people who are in attendance here today, we finally reached that deal.

There are some people that I especially want to thank. First of all, Senators Lamar Alexander and Patty Murray on the Senate side, and Representatives John Kline and Bobby Scott on the House side, as well as their dedicated staffs. This would not have happened without them.

And I just want to point out that it’s not as if there weren’t some significant ideological differences on some of these issues. No, there were, but I think this is really a good example of how bipartisanship can work. People did not agree on everything at the outset, but they were willing to listen to each other in a civil, constructive way, and to work through these issues, compromise where necessary, while still keeping their eye on the ball. And I think it’s really a testament of the four leaders of the respective committees that they set that kind of tone. And that’s something that we don’t always see here in Washington. There wasn’t a lot of grandstanding, not a lot of posturing -- just a lot of really good, hard work. So I just want to, again, thank them for the outstanding work that they did.

I also want to thank my outgoing Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. Arne has dedicated his life to the cause of education -- and sometimes in the nicest possible way, he has gotten on people’s nerves because he has pushed them and prodded them and tried to make sure that we set high expectations and that we are holding ourselves accountable for children’s performance -- or the school’s performance and how they were delivering for our kids. And had he not been, I believe, as tenacious as he was, I think that we would not have as good of a product as we do here today. And so I could not be prouder of Arne Duncan. And I want acknowledge him.

We are going to miss Arne Duncan a lot. Fortunately, in addition to some great staff that he assembled that is going to be staying on, we also have a great replacement for Arne in Dr. John King, who is going to be doing outstanding work helping to implement this.

In addition, obviously we’ve had some outstanding advocates. We’ve got our teachers unions, we’ve got our civil rights organizations, we’ve got philanthropies -- all of who -- community groups -- who have been active and involved, and the governors organizations and school districts have also been involved, the superintendants. So we want to thank all them for their contributions. All the stakeholders have really buckled down to make this day possible.

And the law comes at an important moment. Over the past seven years, the good news is that our students have made real strides. We’ve seen states raise academic expectations for all students. That means that we’re in a better position to out-teach and out-compete other nations at a time when knowledge is really the single-biggest determinant of economic performance. High school graduation rates have reached an all-time high; dropout rates have hit historic lows. The number of high schools so bad they’re called “dropout factories” has been cut almost in half. We’re training tens of thousands of outstanding math and science teachers. More students are graduating from college than ever before, and more than a million additional black and Hispanic students are now going to college.

So there is some real good work that’s been done, a foundation to build from. But we’re here because we all know that there’s a lot more work to be done. As wonderful as Antonio’s school is, as wonderful as a learning experience is as a lot of our young people are receiving, we know that there are other schools that just aren’t hitting the mark yet. And in today’s economy, a high-quality education is a prerequisite for success.

We’re going to have to have our young people master not just the basics but also become critical thinkers and creative problem solvers. And our competitive advantage depends on whether our kids are prepared to seize the opportunities for tomorrow. So we need to build on the momentum that has already been established. We’ve got to learn what works and do more of that, and we’ve got to get rid of the stuff that doesn’t work. And that’s exactly what the Every Student Succeeds Act does.

First, this law focuses on a national goal of ensuring that all of our students graduate prepared for college and future careers. It builds on the reforms that have helped us make so much progress already, holding everybody to high standards for teaching and learning, empowering states and school districts to develop their own strategies for improvement, dedicating resources to our most vulnerable children. And this law requires states to invest in helping students and schools improve, and focusing on the lowest-performing schools and closing those big achievement gaps.

Second, this bill makes long-overdue fixes to the last education law, replacing the one-size-fits-all approach to reform with a commitment to provide every student with a well-rounded education. It creates real partnerships between the states, which will have new flexibility to tailor their improvement plans, and the federal government, which will have the oversight to make sure that the plans are sound.

It helps states and districts reduce unnecessary standardized tests -- something we talked about a couple of months ago, because what we want to do is to get rid of unnecessary standardized tests so that more teachers can spend time engaging in student learning while, at the same time, making sure that parents and teachers have clear information on their children’s academic performance.

Number three, we know that the early years can make a huge difference in a child’s life, so this law lays the foundation to expand access to high-quality preschools, and it creates incentives for innovative approaches to learning and for supporting great teachers.

And finally, this bill upholds the core value that animated the original Elementary and Secondary Education Act signed by President Lyndon Johnson -- the value that says education, the key to economic opportunity, is a civil right. With this bill, we reaffirm that fundamental American ideal that every child, regardless of race, income, background, the zip code where they live, deserves the chance to make out of their lives what they will.

So this is a big step in the right direction, a true bipartisan effort, a reminder of what can be done when people enter into these issues in a spirit of listening and compromise. But, of course, now the hard work begins. Laws are only as good as the implementation. And that means that we’re going to have to be engaging with the schools and communities all across the country, educators, school leaders, families, students, elected officials, community leaders, philanthropies -- all to make the promise of this law reality.

And, by the way, it’s going to take students like Antonio. He’s doing his part. He’s taking advanced classes to get a head start on high school credits. He plays the violin. He plays sports. He volunteers. He owns one share of stock in Tesla. So he’s clearly going places. I’d invest in him if I could. But one of the reasons Antonio is thriving is he’s got great teachers and a great principal at Kenmore. They saw that spark in him, and, like all great educators, they’re helping him to harness his energy and his curiosity and his talents.

And that’s what we want every single child in America to have. We just want to give them a chance. And so many of them are full of that same talent and drive, but we let them slip through the cracks, or we’re not creative enough in thinking about how they can be engaged, or they just don’t have the resources that they need in the classroom, or they fell behind early because they didn’t get the support that they needed given the tough circumstances they were born into.

And we want to make sure that through this piece of legislation, with our hard work, with our focus, with our discipline, with our passion, with our commitment, that every kid is given the same opportunities that Antonio is getting. I want this not just because it’s good for the students themselves, not just because it’s good for the communities involved, not only because it’s good for our economy, but because it really goes to the essence of what we are about as Americans.

There was a time I think when upward mobility was the hallmark of America. We’ve slipped on that front compared to other countries. And some of it is because where we used to be so far ahead of other countries in investing in education for every child, now on some indicators, we’ve been lagging behind. Hopefully, this is going to get us back out front.

There’s nothing more essential to living up to the ideals of this nation than making sure every child is able to achieve their God-given potential. And I could not be prouder of the people on this stage and those of you in the audience who helped us take just one step closer to that reality.

So with that, let me sign this bill.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Paris Climate Agreement Address

Good evening. In my first Inaugural Address, I committed this country to the tireless task of combating climate change and protecting this planet for future generations.

Two weeks ago, in Paris, I said before the world that we needed a strong global agreement to accomplish this goal -- an enduring agreement that reduces global carbon pollution and sets the world on a course to a low-carbon future.

A few hours ago, we succeeded. We came together around the strong agreement the world needed. We met the moment.

I want to commend President Hollande and Secretary General Ban for their leadership and for hosting such a successful summit, and French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius for presiding with patience and resolve. And I want to give a special thanks to Secretary John Kerry, my Senior Advisor Brian Deese, our chief negotiator Todd Stern, and everyone on their teams for their outstanding work and for making America proud.

I also want to thank the people of nearly 200 nations -- large and small, developed and developing -- for working together to confront a threat to the people of all nations. Together, we’ve shown what’s possible when the world stands as one.

Today, the American people can be proud -- because this historic agreement is a tribute to American leadership. Over the past seven years, we’ve transformed the United States into the global leader in fighting climate change. In 2009, we helped salvage a chaotic Copenhagen Summit and established the principle that all countries had a role to play in combating climate change. We then led by example, with historic investments in growing industries like wind and solar, creating a new and steady stream of middle-class jobs. We’ve set the first-ever nationwide standards to limit the amount of carbon pollution power plants can dump into the air our children breathe. From Alaska to the Gulf Coast to the Great Plains, we’ve partnered with local leaders who are working to help their communities protect themselves from some of the most immediate impacts of a changing climate.

Now, skeptics said these actions would kill jobs. Instead, we’ve seen the longest streak of private-sector job creation in our history. We’ve driven our economic output to all-time highs while driving our carbon pollution down to its lowest level in nearly two decades. And then, with our historic joint announcement with China last year, we showed it was possible to bridge the old divides between developed and developing nations that had stymied global progress for so long. That accomplishment encouraged dozens and dozens of other nations to set their own ambitious climate targets. And that was the foundation for success in Paris. Because no nation, not even one as powerful as ours, can solve this challenge alone. And no country, no matter how small, can sit on the sidelines. All of us had to solve it together.

Now, no agreement is perfect, including this one. Negotiations that involve nearly 200 nations are always challenging. Even if all the initial targets set in Paris are met, we’ll only be part of the way there when it comes to reducing carbon from the atmosphere. So we cannot be complacent because of today’s agreement. The problem is not solved because of this accord. But make no mistake, the Paris agreement establishes the enduring framework the world needs to solve the climate crisis. It creates the mechanism, the architecture, for us to continually tackle this problem in an effective way.

This agreement is ambitious, with every nation setting and committing to their own specific targets, even as we take into account differences among nations. We’ll have a strong system of transparency, including periodic reviews and independent assessments, to help hold every country accountable for meeting its commitments. As technology advances, this agreement allows progress to pave the way for even more ambitious targets over time. And we have secured a broader commitment to support the most vulnerable countries as they pursue cleaner economic growth.

In short, this agreement will mean less of the carbon pollution that threatens our planet, and more of the jobs and economic growth driven by low-carbon investment. Full implementation of this agreement will help delay or avoid some of the worst consequences of climate change, and will pave the way for even more progress, in successive stages, over the coming years.

Moreover, this agreement sends a powerful signal that the world is firmly committed to a low-carbon future. And that has the potential to unleash investment and innovation in clean energy at a scale we have never seen before. The targets we’ve set are bold. And by empowering businesses, scientists, engineers, workers, and the private sector -- investors -- to work together, this agreement represents the best chance we’ve had to save the one planet that we’ve got.

So I believe this moment can be a turning point for the world. We’ve shown that the world has both the will and the ability to take on this challenge. It won’t be easy. Progress won’t always come quick. We cannot be complacent. While our generation will see some of the benefits of building a clean energy economy -- jobs created and money saved -- we may not live to see the full realization of our achievement. But that’s okay. What matters is that today we can be more confident that this planet is going to be in better shape for the next generation. And that’s what I care about. I imagine taking my grandkids, if I’m lucky enough to have some, to the park someday, and holding their hands, and hearing their laughter, and watching a quiet sunset, all the while knowing that our work today prevented an alternate future that could have been grim; that our work, here and now, gave future generations cleaner air, and cleaner water, and a more sustainable planet. And what could be more important than that?

Today, thanks to strong, principled, American leadership, that’s the world that we’ll leave to our children -- a world that is safer and more secure, more prosperous, and more free. And that is our most important mission in our short time here on this Earth.

Thanks.

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# Update on Military Campaign Against ISIL

Today, the United States and our Armed Forces continue to lead the global coalition in our mission to destroy the terrorist group ISIL. As I outlined in my speech to the nation last weekend, our strategy is moving forward with a great sense of urgency on four fronts -- hunting down and taking out these terrorists; training and equipping Iraqi and Syrian forces to fight ISIL on the ground; stopping ISIL’s operations by disrupting their recruiting, financing and propaganda; and, finally, persistent diplomacy to end the Syrian civil war so that everyone can focus on destroying ISIL.

I just had a chance to meet with my National Security Council as part of our regular effort to review and constantly strengthen our efforts. And I want to thank Secretary Carter, Chairman Dunford, and Vice Chairman Selva for hosting us and for their leadership of our men and women in uniform. We heard from General Austin, who is leading the military campaign in the region, as well as General Votel, whose Special Operations forces are playing a vital role in this fight.

I want to provide all of you a brief update on our progress against the ISIL core in Syria and Iraq, because as we squeeze its heart, we’ll make it harder for ISIL to pump its terror and propaganda to the rest of the world.

This fall, even before the revolting attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, I ordered new actions to intensify our war against ISIL. These actions, including more firepower and Special Operations forces, are well underway. This continues to be a difficult fight. As I said before, ISIL is dug in, including in urban areas, and they hide behind civilians, using defenseless men, women and children as human shields.

So even as we’re relentless, we have to be smart, targeting ISIL surgically, with precision. At the same time, our partners on the ground are rooting ISIL out, town by town, neighborhood by neighborhood, block by block. That is what this campaign is doing.

We are hitting ISIL harder than ever. Coalition aircraft -- our fighters, bombers and drones -- have been increasing the pace of airstrikes -- nearly 9,000 as of today. Last month, in November, we dropped more bombs on ISIL targets than any other month since this campaign started.

We’re also taking out ISIL leaders, commanders and killers, one by one. Since this spring, we’ve removed Abu Sayyaf, one of their top leaders; Haji Mutazz, ISIL’s second-in command; Junaid Hussain, a top online recruiter; Mohamed Emwazi, who brutally murdered Americans and others; and in recent weeks, finance chief Abu Saleh; senior extortionist Abu Maryam; and weapons trafficker Abu Rahman al-Tunisi. The list goes on.

We’re going after ISIL from their stronghold right down -- right in downtown Raqqa, to Libya, where we took out Abu Nabil, the ISIL leader there. The point is, ISIL leaders cannot hide. And our next message to them is simple: You are next.

Every day, we destroy as well more of ISIL’s forces -- their fighting positions, bunkers and staging areas; their heavy weapons, bomb-making factories, compounds and training camps. In many places, ISIL has lost its freedom of maneuver, because they know if they mass their forces, we will wipe them out. In fact, since the summer, ISIL has not had a single successful major offensive operation on the ground in either Syria or Iraq. In recent weeks, we’ve unleashed a new wave of strikes on their lifeline, their oil infrastructure, destroying hundreds of their tanker trucks, wells and refineries. And we’re going to keep on hammering those.

ISIL also continues to lose territory in Iraq. ISIL had already lost across Kirkuk province and at Tikrit. More recently, ISIL lost at Sinjar, losing a strategic highway. ISIL lost at Baiji, with its oil refinery. We saw the daring raid supported by our Special Forces, which rescued dozens of prisoners from ISIL, and in which Master Sergeant Joshua Wheeler made the ultimate sacrifice.

So far, ISIL has lost about 40 percent of the populated areas it once controlled in Iraq. And it will lose more. Iraqi forces are now fighting their way deeper into Ramadi. They’re working to encircle Fallujah and cut off ISIL supply routes into Mosul. Again, these are urban areas where ISIL is entrenched. Our partners on the ground face a very tough fight ahead, and we’re going to continue to back them up with the support that they need to ultimately clear ISIL from Iraq.

ISIL also continues to lose territory in Syria. We continue to step up our air support and supplies to local forces -- Syrian Kurds, Arabs, Christians, Turkmen -- and they’re having success. After routing ISIL at Kobani and Tal Abyad, they’ve pushed ISIL back from almost across the entire border region with Turkey, and we’re working with Turkey to seal the rest. ISIL has lost thousands of square miles of territory it once controlled in Syria -- and it will lose more. The Special Forces that I ordered to Syria have begun supporting local forces as they push south, cut off supply lines and tighten the squeeze on Raqqa.

Meanwhile, more people are seeing ISIL for the thugs and the thieves and the killers that they are. We’ve seen instances of ISIL fighters defecting. Others who’ve tried to escape have been executed. And ISIL’s reign of brutality and extortion continues to repel local populations and help fuel the refugee crisis. “So many people are migrating,” said one Syrian refugee. ISIL, she said, will “end up all alone.”

All this said, we recognize that progress needs to keep coming faster. No one knows that more than the countless Syrians and Iraqis living every day under ISIL’s terror, as well as the families in San Bernardino and Paris and elsewhere who are grieving the loss of their loved ones. Just as the United States is doing more in this fight -- just as our allies France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, Australia and Italy are doing more -- so must others.

And that’s why I’ve asked Secretary Carter to go to the Middle East -- he’ll depart right after this press briefing -- to work with our coalition partners on securing more military contributions to this fight. On the diplomatic front, Secretary Kerry will be in Russia tomorrow as we continue to work, as part of the Vienna process, to end the Syrian civil war. Meanwhile, here at home, the Department of Homeland Security is updating its alert system to help the American people stay vigilant and safe.

And as always, our extraordinary men and women in uniform continue to put their lives on the line -- in this campaign and around the world -- to keep the rest of us safe. This holiday season, many of our troops are once again far from their families. And as your Commander-in-Chief, on behalf of the American people, we want to say thank you. We are grateful, and we are proud for everything that you do. Because of you, the America that we know and love and cherish is leading the world in this fight.

Because of you, I am confident that we are going to prevail.

Thank you very much, everybody.

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# Naturalization Ceremony Speech at the National Archives

Well, good morning, everybody. Thank you Deputy Secretary Mayorkas, Judge Roberts, and Director Rodriguez. Thank you to our Archivist, David Ferriero, and everyone at the National Archives for hosting us here today in this spectacular setting.

And to my fellow Americans, our newest citizens -- I’m so excited. You are men and women from more than 25 countries, from Brazil to Uganda, from Iraq to the Philippines. You may come from teeming cities or rural villages. You don’t look alike. You don’t worship the same way. But here, surrounded by the very documents whose values bind us together as one people, you’ve raised your hand and sworn a sacred oath. I’m proud to be among the first to greet you as “my fellow Americans.”

What a remarkable journey all of you have made. And as of today, your story is forever woven into the larger story of this nation. In the brief time that we have together, I want to share that story with you. Because even as you’ve put in the work required to become a citizen, you still have a demanding and rewarding task ahead of you -- and that is the hard work of active citizenship. You have rights and you have responsibilities. And now you have to help us write the next great chapter in America’s story.

Just about every nation in the world, to some extent, admits immigrants. But there’s something unique about America. We don’t simply welcome new immigrants, we don’t simply welcome new arrivals -- we are born of immigrants. That is who we are. Immigration is our origin story. And for more than two centuries, it’s remained at the core of our national character; it’s our oldest tradition. It’s who we are. It’s part of what makes us exceptional.

After all, unless your family is Native American, one of the first Americans, our families -- all of our families -- come from someplace else. The first refugees were the Pilgrims themselves -- fleeing religious persecution, crossing the stormy Atlantic to reach a new world where they might live and pray freely. Eight signers of the Declaration of Independence were immigrants. And in those first decades after independence, English, German, and Scottish immigrants came over, huddled on creaky ships, seeking what Thomas Paine called “asylum for the persecuted lovers of civil and religious liberty…”

Down through the decades, Irish Catholics fleeing hunger, Italians fleeing poverty filled up our cities, rolled up their sleeves, built America. Chinese laborers jammed in steerage under the decks of steamships, making their way to California to build the Central Pacific Railroad that would transform the West -- and our nation. Wave after wave of men, women, and children -- from the Middle East and the Mediterranean, from Asia and Africa -- poured into Ellis Island, or Angel Island, their trunks bursting with their most cherished possessions -- maybe a photograph of the family they left behind, a family Bible, or a Torah, or a Koran. A bag in one hand, maybe a child in the other, standing for hours in long lines. New York and cities across America were transformed into a sort of global fashion show. You had Dutch lace caps and the North African fezzes, stodgy tweed suits and colorful Caribbean dresses.

And perhaps, like some of you, these new arrivals might have had some moments of doubt, wondering if they had made a mistake in leaving everything and everyone they ever knew behind. So life in America was not always easy. It wasn’t always easy for new immigrants. Certainly it wasn’t easy for those of African heritage who had not come here voluntarily, and yet in their own way were immigrants themselves. There was discrimination and hardship and poverty. But, like you, they no doubt found inspiration in all those who had come before them. And they were able to muster faith that, here in America, they might build a better life and give their children something more.

Just as so many have come here in search of a dream, others sought shelter from nightmares. Survivors of the Holocaust. Soviet Refuseniks. Refugees from Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia. Iraqis and Afghans fleeing war. Mexicans, Cubans, Iranians leaving behind deadly revolutions. Central American teenagers running from gang violence. The Lost Boys of Sudan escaping civil war. They’re people like Fulbert Florent Akoula from the Republic of Congo, who was granted asylum when his family was threatened by political violence. And today, Fulbert is here, a proud American.

We can never say it often or loudly enough: Immigrants and refugees revitalize and renew America. Immigrants like you are more likely to start your own business. Many of the Fortune 500 companies in this country were founded by immigrants or their children. Many of the tech startups in Silicon Valley have at least one immigrant founder.

Immigrants are the teachers who inspire our children, and they’re the doctors who keep us healthy. They’re the engineers who design our skylines, and the artists and the entertainers who touch our hearts. Immigrants are soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen who protect us, often risking their lives for an America that isn’t even their own yet. As an Iraqi, Muhanned Ibrahim Al Naib was the target of death threats for working with American forces. He stood by his American comrades, and came to the U.S. as a refugee. And today, we stand by him. And we are proud to welcome Muhanned as a citizen of the country that he already helped to defend.

We celebrate this history, this heritage, as an immigrant nation. And we are strong enough to acknowledge, as painful as it may be, that we haven’t always lived up to our own ideals. We haven’t always lived up to these documents.

From the start, Africans were brought here in chains against their will, and then toiled under the whip. They also built America. A century ago, New York City shops displayed those signs, “No Irish Need Apply.” Catholics were targeted, their loyalty questioned -- so much so that as recently as the 1950s and ‘60s, when JFK had to run, he had to convince people that his allegiance wasn’t primarily to the Pope.

Chinese immigrants faced persecution and vicious stereotypes, and were, for a time, even banned from entering America. During World War II, German and Italian residents were detained, and in one of the darkest chapters in our history, Japanese immigrants and even Japanese American citizens were forced from their homes and imprisoned in camps. We succumbed to fear. We betrayed not only our fellow Americans, but our deepest values. We betrayed these documents. It’s happened before.

And the biggest irony of course was -- is that those who betrayed these values were themselves the children of immigrants. How quickly we forget. One generation passes, two generation passes, and suddenly we don’t remember where we came from. And we suggest that somehow there is “us” and there is “them,” not remembering we used to be “them.”

On days like today, we need to resolve never to repeat mistakes like that again. We must resolve to always speak out against hatred and bigotry in all of its forms -- whether taunts against the child of an immigrant farmworker or threats against a Muslim shopkeeper. We are Americans. Standing up for each other is what the values enshrined in the documents in this room compels us to do -– especially when it’s hard. Especially when it’s not convenient. That’s when it counts. That’s when it matters -- not when things are easy, but when things are hard.

The truth is, being an American is hard. Being part of a democratic government is hard. Being a citizen is hard. It is a challenge. It’s supposed to be. There’s no respite from our ideals. All of us are called to live up to our expectations for ourselves -- not just when it’s convenient, but when it’s inconvenient. When it’s tough. When we’re afraid. The tension throughout our history between welcoming or rejecting the stranger, it’s about more than just immigration. It’s about the meaning of America, what kind of country do we want to be. It’s about the capacity of each generation to honor the creed as old as our founding: “E Pluribus Unum” -- that out of many, we are one.

Scripture tells us, “For we are strangers before you, and sojourners, as were all our fathers.” “We are strangers before you.” In the Mexican immigrant today, we see the Catholic immigrant of a century ago. In the Syrian seeking refuge today, we should see the Jewish refugee of World War II. In these new Americans, we see our own American stories -- our parents, our grandparents, our aunts, our uncles, our cousins who packed up what they could and scraped together what they had. And their paperwork wasn’t always in order. And they set out for a place that was more than just a piece of land, but an idea.

America: A place where we can be a part of something bigger. A place where we can contribute our talents and fulfill our ambitions and secure new opportunity for ourselves and for others. A place where we can retain pride in our heritage, but where we recognize that we have a common creed, a loyalty to these documents, a loyalty to our democracy; where we can criticize our government, but understand that we love it; where we agree to live together even when we don’t agree with each other; where we work through the democratic process, and not through violence or sectarianism to resolve disputes; where we live side by side as neighbors; and where our children know themselves to be a part of this nation, no longer strangers, but the bedrock of this nation, the essence of this nation.

And that’s why today is not the final step in your journey. More than 60 years ago, at a ceremony like this one, Senator John F. Kennedy said, “No form of government requires more of its citizens than does the American democracy.” Our system of self-government depends on ordinary citizens doing the hard, frustrating but always essential work of citizenship -- of being informed. Of understanding that the government isn’t some distant thing, but is you. Of speaking out when something is not right. Of helping fellow citizens when they need a hand. Of coming together to shape our country’s course.

And that work gives purpose to every generation. It belongs to me. It belongs to the judge. It belongs to you. It belongs to you, all of us, as citizens. To follow our laws, yes, but also to engage with your communities and to speak up for what you believe in. And to vote -- to not only exercise the rights that are now yours, but to stand up for the rights of others.

Birtukan Gudeya is here from Ethiopia. She said, “The joy of being an American is the joy of freedom and opportunity. We have been handed a work in progress, one that can evolve for the good of all Americans.” I couldn’t have said it better.

That is what makes America great -- not just the words on these founding documents, as precious and valuable as they are, but the progress that they’ve inspired. If you ever wonder whether America is big enough to hold multitudes, strong enough to withstand the forces of change, brave enough to live up to our ideals even in times of trial, then look to the generations of ordinary citizens who have proven again and again that we are worthy of that.

That’s our great inheritance -- what ordinary people have done to build this country and make these words live. And it’s our generation’s task to follow their example in this journey -- to keep building an America where no matter who we are or what we look like, or who we love or what we believe, we can make of our lives what we will.

You will not and should not forget your history and your past. That adds to the richness of American life. But you are now American. You’ve got obligations as citizens. And I’m absolutely confident you will meet them. You’ll set a good example for all of us, because you know how precious this thing is. It’s not something to take for granted. It’s something to cherish and to fight for.

Thank you. May god bless you. May god bless the United States of America.

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# Post Briefing Address at the National Counterterrorism Center

As President and Commander in Chief, my highest priority is the security of the American people. And on a regular basis, I convene members of my national security team for an in-depth review of our efforts to prevent terrorist attacks against our citizens -- around the world and here at home. We examine any known and emerging threats. We review our security posture and we make sure that we’re taking every necessary measure to protect our people.

Today, I wanted to hold our meeting here -- rather than in the Situation Room at the White House, I wanted to hold it at the National Counterterrorism Center because this is the hub of where so many of our experts and efforts come together. And I want to thank our Director of National Intelligence Clapper, Jim Clapper, as well as NCTC Director Nick Rasmussen, and everybody at NCTC -- all of you -- for welcoming us here today.

Now, Nick, along with CIA Director Brennan and FBI Director Comey, provided a threat briefing. And Director Comey and Attorney General Lynch updated us on the investigation into the San Bernardino attacks. I reiterated that the investigation will continue to have the full support of the federal government and that we should leave no stone unturned in determining why and how these terrorists carried out that tragedy. Secretary of Homeland Security Johnson updated us on the measures we’re taking here at home to increase awareness, stay vigilant, and enhance the safety of the traveling public, especially with so many Americans traveling during the holidays.

After the terrorist attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, I know that a lot of Americans were anxious. And that’s understandable. It’s natural. What matters most to all of us are our friends and our families and our communities and their safety. That's true of folks inside of government as well as outside of government. But here’s what I want every American to know. Since 9/11, we’ve taken extraordinary steps to strengthen our homeland security -- our borders, our ports, our airports, our aviation security, including enhanced watch lists and screening. And we’ve gotten much better -- thanks in part to the people in this room -- of preventing large, complex attacks like 9/11.

Moreover -- and I think everybody here will agree -- we have the very best intelligence, counterterrorism, homeland security and law enforcement professionals in the world. Our folks are the best. Across our government, these dedicated professionals, including here at NCTC, are relentless, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. At the operations center here, people from across our government work, literally shoulder-to-shoulder, pouring over the latest information, analyzing it, integrating it, connecting the dots. They’re sharing information -- pushing it out across the federal government and, just as importantly, to our state and local partners. In other words, what you see here today is one, strong, united team.

So our professionals have a remarkable record of success. Of course, when terrorists pull off a despicable act like what happened in San Bernardino it tears at our hearts. But it also stiffens our resolve to learn whatever lessons we can and to make any improvements that are needed. In the meantime, what the world doesn’t always see are the successes -- those terrorist plots that have been prevented. And that’s how it should be. This work oftentimes demands secrecy. But as Americans, we should not forget how good these patriots are. Over the years, they have taken countless terrorists off the battlefield. They have disrupted plots. They’ve thwarted attacks. They have saved American lives.

And so, for everybody who is involved in our counterterrorism efforts, I want to say thank you, and the American people thank you.

I want to repeat what my team just told me. At this moment, our intelligence and counterterrorism professionals do not have any specific and credible information about an attack on the homeland. That said, we have to be vigilant. As I indicated in my address to the nation last week, we are in a new phase of terrorism, including lone actors and small groups of terrorists, like those in San Bernardino. Because they are smaller, often self-initiating, self-motivating, they’re harder to detect, and that makes it harder to prevent.

But just as the threat evolves, so do we. We’re constantly adapting, constantly improving, upping our game, getting better. And today, the mission to protect our homeland goes on, on three main fronts.

First, we’re going after terrorists over there, where they plot and plan and spew their propaganda. As I described at the Pentagon, we’re hitting ISIL harder than ever in Syria and Iraq. We are taking out their leaders. Our partners on the ground are fighting to push ISIL back, and ISIL has been losing territory.

Our Special Operations Forces are hard at work. We took out the ISIL leader in Libya. We’ve taken out terrorists in Yemen and Somalia. So we're sending a message: If you target Americans, you will have no safe haven. We will find you, and we will defend our nation.

Meanwhile, as always, we're working to protect Americans overseas -- including our military bases and servicemembers. And Secretary John Kerry updated us on security at our embassies and our diplomatic posts.

Second, we continue to do everything in our power to prevent terrorists from getting into the United States. We're doing more with countries around the world, including our European partners, to prevent the flow of foreign terrorist fighters -- both to places like Syria and Iraq, and back into our countries.

We're implementing additional layers of security for visitors who come here under the Visa Waiver Program and we're working with Congress to make further improvements. Any refugee coming to the United States -- some of them victims of terrorism themselves -- will continue to get the most intensive scrutiny of any arrival. They go through up to two years of vetting, including biometric screening. And the review that I ordered into the fiancÃ© visa program, under which the female terrorist in San Bernardino came here, is ongoing.

Third, we're stepping up our efforts to prevent attacks here at home. As I said, the NCTC is constantly sharing information with our state and local partners. Across the country more than 100 joint terrorism task forces are the action arm of this fight -- federal, state, and local experts all working together to disrupt threats. At the state level, fusion cells are receiving tips and pushing information out to local law enforcement. Just yesterday the Department of Homeland Security updated its alert system to make sure Americans are getting the most timely and useful information.

And with groups like ISIL trying to radicalize people to violence, especially online, part of our meeting today focused on how we can continue to strengthen our partnership between law enforcement, high-tech leaders, communities, faith leaders, and citizens. We’ve got to keep on building up trust and cooperation that helps communities inoculate themselves from the kind of propaganda that ISIL is spewing out, preventing their loved ones -- especially young people -- from succumbing to terrorist ideologies in the first place.

And finally, one of our greatest weapons against terrorism is our own strength and resilience as a people. That means staying vigilant -- if you see something suspicious, say something to law enforcement. It also means staying united as one American family -- remembering that our greatest allies in this fight are each other, Americans of all faiths and all backgrounds. And when Americans stand together, nothing can beat us.

Most of all, we cannot give in to fear, or change how we live our lives, because that's what terrorists want. That's the only leverage that they have. They can't defeat us on a battlefield, but they can lead us to change in ways that would undermine what this country is all about. And that's what we have to guard against. We have to remind ourselves that when we stay true to our values, nothing can beat us.

So anyone trying to harm Americans need to know -- they need to know that we're strong and that we're resilient, that we will not be terrorized. We’ve prevailed over much greater threats than this. We will prevail again.

So I want to once again thank all of you at NCTC and every one of your home agencies across our entire government for your extraordinary service. I want every American to know -- as you go about the holidays, as you travel and gather with family, and the kids open their presents, and as you ring in the New Year -- that you've got dedicated patriots working around the clock all across the country to protect us all. Oftentimes they're doing so by sacrificing their own holidays and their own time with families. But they care about this deeply. And they're the best in the world. And for that, we're very grateful.

Thank you, everybody.

Happy holidays.

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# End of Year Press Conference

Good afternoon, everybody. Clearly, this is not the most important event that's taking place in the White House today. There is a screening of Star Wars for Gold Star families and children coming up. So I'll try to be relatively succinct. Let me say a few words about the year behind us and the year ahead, and then I’ll take a few questions.

As I look back on this year, one thing I see is that so much of our steady, persistent work over the years is paying off for the American people in big, tangible ways. Our early actions to rescue the economy set the stage for the longest streak of private sector job growth on record, with 13.7 million new jobs in that time. The unemployment rate has been cut in half -- down to 5 percent. And most importantly, wages grew faster than at any time since the recovery began. So, over the course of this year, a lot of the decisions that we made early on have paid off. Years of steady implementation of the Affordable Care Act helped to drive the rate of the uninsured in America below 10 percent for the first time since records were kept on that. Health care prices have grown at their lowest levels in five decades; 17 million more Americans have gained coverage, and we now know that six million people have signed up through HealthCare.gov for coverage beginning on January 1st -- 600,000 on Tuesday alone. New customers are up one-third over last year. And the more who sign up, the stronger the system becomes. And that's good news for every American who no longer has to worry about being just one illness or accident away from financial hardship.

On climate, our early investment in clean energy ignited a clean energy industry boom. Our actions to help reduce our carbon emissions brought China to the table. And last week, in Paris, nearly 200 nations forged an historic agreement that was only possible because of American leadership.

Around the world -- from reaching the deal to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon, to reestablishing diplomatic relations with Cuba, to concluding a landmark trade agreement that will make sure that American workers and American businesses are operating on a level playing field and that we, rather than China or other countries, are setting the rules for global trade -- we have shown what is possible when America leads.

And, after decades of dedicated advocacy, marriage equality became a reality in all 50 states.

So, I just want to point out -- I said at the beginning of this year that interesting stuff happens in the fourth quarter -- and we are only halfway through.

I do want to thank Congress for ending the year on a high note. I got to sign an education bill that is going to fix some of the challenges that we had with No Child Left Behind, and promises to invest more in high-quality early childhood education. We signed a transportation bill that, although not as robust as I think we need, still allows states and local governments to plan and actually get moving, putting people back to work rebuilding our roads and our bridges. We got Ex-Im Bank back to work supporting American exports.

And today they passed a bipartisan budget deal. I’m not wild about everything in it -- I’m sure that’s true for everybody -- but it is a budget that, as I insisted, invests in our military and our middle class, without ideological provisions that would have weakened Wall Street reform or rules on big polluters.

It’s part of an agreement that will permanently extend tax credits to 24 million working families. It includes some long-sought wins like strengthening America’s leadership at the IMF. And because it eliminates the possibility of a shutdown for the first time -- or for the first nine months of next year, Congress and I have a long runway to get some important things done on behalf of the American people.

Now, there’s still a lot of work to do. For example, there’s still a lot more that Congress can do to promote job growth and increase wages in this country. I still want to work with Congress -- both Democrats and Republicans -- to reform our criminal justice system. And earlier today I commuted the sentences of 95 men and women who had served their debt to society, another step forward in upholding our fundamental ideals of justice and fairness.

And, of course, our most important job is to keep Americans safe. I've had a lot to say about that this week, but let me reiterate, the United States continues to lead a global coalition in our mission to destroy ISIL. ISIL has already lost about 40 percent of the populated areas it once controlled in Iraq, and it’s losing territory in Syria. As we keep up the pressure, our air campaign will continue to hit ISIL harder than ever -- taking out their leaders, their commanders and their forces. We’re stepping up our support for partners on the ground as they push ISIL back. Our men and women in uniform are carrying out their mission with trademark professionalism and courage. And this holiday season, all of us are united in our gratitude for their service, and we are thankful to their families, as well, because they serve alongside those who are actually deployed.

Squeezing ISIL’s heart -- its core in Syria and Iraq -- will make it harder for them to pump their terror and propaganda to the rest of the world. At the same time, as we know from San Bernardino, where I’ll visit with families later today, we have to remain vigilant here at home. Our counterterrorism, intelligence, homeland security, and law enforcement communities are working 24/7 to protect our homeland. And all of us can do our part by staying vigilant, by saying something if we see something that is suspicious, by refusing to be terrorized, and by staying united as one American family.

In short, for all the very real progress America has made over the past seven years, we still have some unfinished business. And I plan on doing everything I can with every minute of every day that I have left as President to deliver on behalf of the American people. Since taking this office, I’ve never been more optimistic about a year ahead than I am right now. And in 2016, I’m going to leave it out all on the field.

So with that, let me take some questions. I'll start with Roberta Rampton of Reuters.

Question: Mr. President, you're going to California today. And as you said earlier this week, you told the nation that there’s no specific or credible threat of a similar attack. But how is it really possible to know? I mean, aren’t similar plots going to be just as hard to detect beforehand? And some lawmakers are saying that your government should review the social media of all people applying for visas to come to this country. What do you think of that idea? Should that be mandatory?

President Obama: Well, Roberta, you’re absolutely right that it is very difficult for us to detect lone wolf plots -- or plots involving a husband and wife, in this case -- because despite the incredible vigilance and professionalism of all our law enforcement, homeland security, et cetera, it’s not that different from us trying to detect the next mass shooter. You don’t always see it. They’re not always communicating publicly, and if you’re not catching what they say publicly, then it becomes a challenge.

We are continuing to work at every level to make sure that there’s no slip between information-sharing among agencies. We’re continuing to strengthen our information-sharing with foreign countries. And because, in part, of the tragedy in Paris, I think you’re seeing much greater cooperation from our European partners on these issues.

But this is a different kind of challenge than the sort that we had with an organization like al Qaeda that involved highly trained operatives who are working as cells or as a network. Here, essentially, you have ISIL trying to encourage or induce somebody who may be prey to this kind of propaganda. And it becomes more difficult to see. It does mean that they’re less likely to be able to carry out large, complex attacks. But as we saw in San Bernardino, obviously, you can still do enormous damage.

The issue of reviewing social media for those who are obtaining visas I think may have gotten garbled a little bit, because there may be -- it’s important to distinguish between posts that are public -- social media on a Facebook page -- versus private communications through various social media or apps. And our law enforcement and intelligence professionals are constantly monitoring public posts, and that is part of the visa review process, that people are investigating what individuals have said publicly and questioned about any statements that they maybe made.

But if you have a private communication between two individuals, that’s harder to discern, by definition. And one of the things we’ll be doing is engaging with the high-tech community to find out how we can, in an appropriate way, do a better job if we have a lead to be able to track a suspected terrorist. But we’re going to have to recognize that no government is going to have the capacity to read every single person’s text or emails or social media. If it’s not posted publicly, then there are going to be feasibility issues that are probably insurmountable at some level, and it raises questions about our values.

I mean, keep in mind it was only a couple of years ago where we were having a major debate about whether the government was becoming too much like Big Brother. And overall, I think we’ve struck the right balance in protecting civil liberties and making sure that U.S. citizens’ privacy is preserved, that we are making sure that there’s oversight to what our intelligence agencies do. But we’re going to have to continue to balance our needs for security with people’s legitimate concerns about privacy.

And because the Internet is global and communication systems are global, the values that we apply here oftentimes are ones that folks who are trying to come into the country are also benefitting from because they’re using the same technologies. But this is precisely why we’re working very hard to bring law enforcement, intelligence, and high-tech companies together. Because we’re going to have to really review what we can do both technically as well as consistent with our laws and our values in order to try to discern more rapidly some of the potential threats that may be out there.

David Jackson.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. A Gitmo question. Congress has made it pretty clear that they’re just not going to let you transfer prisoners to the United States for trial. But some people think you already have the executive authority to transfer those prisoners and close Gitmo itself next year. My question is, do you believe you have that authority and are you willing to exercise it to close that place?

President Obama: Well, first of all, we’ve been working systematically -- another example of persistence -- in reducing the population. We have a review process. Those who are eligible for transfer we locate in countries that have accepted some of these detainees. They monitor them, and it’s been determined that they can be transferred. And my expectation is by early next year, we should have reduced that population below 100. And we will continue to steadily chip away at the numbers in Guantanamo.

There’s going to come to a point where we have an irreducible population -- people who pose a significant threat, but for various reasons, it’s difficult for us to try them in an Article III court. Some of those folks are going through a military commission process. But there’s going to be a challenge there.

Now, at that stage, I’m presenting a plan to Congress about how we can close Guantanamo. I’m not going to automatically assume that Congress says no. I’m not being coy, David. I think it’s fair to say that there’s going to be significant resistance from some quarters to that. But I think we can make a very strong argument that it doesn’t make sense for us to be spending an extra $100 million, $200 million, $300 million, $500 million, a billion dollars, to have a secure setting for 50, 60, 70 people. And we will wait until Congress has definitively said no to a well-thought-out plan with numbers attached to it before we say anything definitive about my executive authority here. I think it’s far preferable if I can get stuff done with Congress.

Question: So actually you could -- right -- on your own?

President Obama: David, as I said -- and I think you’ve seen me on a whole bunch of issues like immigration -- I’m not going to be forward-leaning on what I can do without Congress before I’ve tested what I can do with Congress. And every once in a while, they’ll surprise you, and this may be one of those places -- because I think we can make a really strong argument. Guantanamo continues to be one of the key magnets for jihadi recruitment.

To Roberta’s question earlier about how do they propagandize and convince somebody here in the United States who may not have a criminal record or a history of terrorist activity to start shooting -- this is part of what they feed, this notion of a gross injustice, that America is not living up to its professed ideals. We know that. We see the Internet traffic. We see how Guantanamo has been used to create this mythology that America is at war with Islam. And for us to close it is part of our counterterrorism strategy that is supported by our military, our diplomatic, and our intelligence teams.

So when you combine that with the fact that it’s really expensive that we are essentially at this point detaining a handful of people and each person is costing several million dollars to detain, when there are more efficient ways of doing it, I think we can make a strong argument.

But I’ll take your point that it will be an uphill battle. Now, every battle I’ve had with Congress over the last five years has been uphill. But we keep on surprising you by actually getting some stuff done. Sometimes that may prove necessary, but we try not to get out ahead of ourselves on that.

Julie Pace.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. I wanted to ask you about some of the broader challenges in the Middle East. Some of the Republicans who are running for President have argued that the Mideast and the United States would be safer if we hadn’t had regime change in places like Iraq, Libya, and Egypt. And having gone through the experience of the Arab Spring and the aftermath, I wonder what you now see the U.S. role in the Middle East in terms of trying to push dictators out of power. Would you advise future presidents to call for authoritarian leaders to step down as you did? And just specifically on Syria, at this point, is it your expectation that Bashar Assad’s presidency will outlast yours?

President Obama: There’s been a lot of revisionist history, sometimes by the same people making different arguments depending on the situation. So maybe it’s useful just for us to go back over some of these issues.

We did not depose Hosni Mubarak. Millions of Egyptians did, because of their dissatisfaction with the corruption and authoritarianism of the regime. We had a working relationship with Mubarak. We didn't trigger the Arab Spring. And the notion that somehow the U.S. was in a position to pull the strings on a country that is the largest in the Arab world I think is mistaken.

What is true is that at the point at which the choice becomes mowing down millions of people, or trying to find some transition -- we believed, and I would still argue that it was more sensible for us to find a peaceful transition to the Egyptian situation.

With respect to Libya, Libya is sort of a alternative version of Syria in some ways, because by the time the international coalition interceded in Syria, chaos had already broken out. You already had the makings of a civil war. You had a dictator who was threatening and was in a position to carry out the wholesale slaughter of large numbers of people. And we worked under U.N. mandate with a coalition of folks in order to try to avert a big humanitarian catastrophe that would not have been good for us.

Those who now argue, in retrospect, we should have left Qaddafi in there seem to forget that he had already lost legitimacy and control of his country, and we could have -- instead of what we have in Libya now, we could have had another Syria in Libya now. The problem with Libya was the fact that there was a failure on the part of the entire international community -- and I think that the United States has some accountability for not moving swiftly enough and underestimating the need to rebuild government there quickly -- and as a consequence, you now have a very bad situation.

And as far as Syria goes, I think it is entirely right and proper for the United States of America to speak out on behalf of its values. And when you have an authoritarian leader that is killing hundreds of thousands of his own people, the notion that we would just stand by and say nothing is contrary to who we are. And that does not serve our interests -- because, at that point, us being in collusion with that kind of governance would make us even more of a target for terrorist activity, would --

Question: Do you think that government can cope -- try to stop extremists from --

President Obama: The reason that Assad has been a problem in Syria is because that is a majority-Sunni country and he had lost the space that he had early on to execute an inclusive transition -- peaceful transition. He chose instead to slaughter people. And once that happened, the idea that a minority population there could somehow crush tens of millions of people who oppose him is not feasible. It’s not plausible. Even if you were being cold-eyed and hard-hearted about the human toll there, it just wouldn’t happen. And as a consequence, our view has been that you cannot bring peace to Syria, you cannot get an end to the civil war unless you have a government that is recognized as legitimate by a majority of that country. It will not happen.

And this is the argument that I’ve had repeatedly with Mr. Putin, dating five years ago, at which time his suggestion -- as I gather some Republicans are now suggesting -- was Assad is not so bad, let him just be as brutal and repressive as he can, but at least he’ll keep order. I said, look, the problem is that the history of trying to keep order when a large majority of the country has turned against you is not good. And five years later, I was right.

So we now have an opportunity -- and John Kerry is meeting as we speak with Syria and Turkey and Iran and the Gulf countries and other parties who are interested -- we now have an opportunity not to turn back the clock -- it’s going to be very difficult to completely overcome the devastation that’s happened in Syria already -- but to find a political transition that maintains the Syrian state, that recognizes there are a bunch of a stakeholders inside of Syria, and hopefully, to initiate a ceasefire that won’t be perfect but allows all the parties to turn on what should be our number-one focus, and that is destroying Daesh and its allies in the region.

And that is going to be a difficult process. It’s going to be a painstaking process. But there is no shortcut to that. And that’s not based on some idealism on my part; that’s a hard-headed calculation about what’s going to be required to get the job done.

Question: Do you think that Assad, though, potentially could remain in power a year from now?

President Obama: I think that Assad is going to have to leave in order for the country to stop the bloodletting and for all the parties involved to be able to move forward in a non-sectarian way. He has lost legitimacy in the eyes of a large majority of the country.

Now, is there a way of us constructing a bridge creating a political transition that allows those who are allied with Assad right now -- allows the Russians, allows the Iranians to ensure that their equities are respected, that minorities like the Alawites are not crushed or retribution is not the order of the day -- I think that’s going to be very important as well.

And that’s what makes this so difficult. Sadly, had Assad made a decision earlier that he was not more important personally than his entire country, that kind of political transition would have been much easier. It’s a lot harder now. But John Kerry has been doing some excellent work in moving that process forward. And I do think that you’ve seen from the Russians a recognition that, after a couple of months, they’re not really moving the needle that much, despite a sizeable deployment inside of Syria. And of course, that’s what I suggested would happen -- because there’s only so much bombing you can do when an entire country is outraged and believes that its ruler doesn’t represent them.

Cheryl Bolen.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. I’d like to ask you about the surprising Congress. Specifically, what are your top legislative priorities for next year? And how has the new Speaker, Paul Ryan, changed the dynamic with you and Capitol Hill? And can you be more ambitious next year, doing things like maybe completing the Transatlantic Trade Partnership, or even getting tax reform?

President Obama: Well, first of all, it’s important to give some credit where credit is due. John Boehner did a favor to all of us, including now Speaker Ryan, by working with us to agree on a topline budget framework. That was the basis for subsequent negotiations. He was able to do that because he was going out the door, and was then given, I think, a little more room to maneuver than he previously had.

Having said that, I also want to give Speaker Ryan credit. I called both him and Mitch McConnell, as well as Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid, for the orderly way in which they actually negotiated a budget -- the way Congress is historically and typically supposed to work. I mean, we’ve gotten kind of used to last-minute crises and shutdown threats, and so forth. And this is a messy process that doesn’t satisfy everybody completely, but it’s more typical of American democracy. And I think that Speaker Ryan deserves a role in that.

I will say that in his interactions with me, he has been professional, he has reached out to tell me what he can do and what he cannot do. I think it’s a good working relationship. We recognize that we disagree on a whole bunch of other stuff and have fundamentally different visions for where we want to move the country. But perhaps because even before he was elected he had worked on Capitol Hill, I think he is respectful of the process and respectful of how legislation works. So kudos to him, as well as all the leaders and appropriators who were involved in this process.

Now, I just want to repeat -- because sometimes we take for granted what’s happened -- I said early on in this process that I wasn’t going to sign a budget that did not relieve sequester, this artificial austerity that was making it difficult for us to invest in things like education and our military. And I said I would not accept a lot of ideological riders that were attached to a big budget deal. And we met our goals.

And because of some terrific negotiations by the Democrats up on Capitol Hill and I think some pretty good work by our legislative staff here, we’re going to be able to fund environmental protection. We’re going to be able to make sure that we’re investing in things like early childhood education and making college more affordable. We’re going to be able to implement the Clean Power Plan rule. We’re going to be able to continue to invest in clean energy that spurs on innovation. We’re going to be able to make sure that our military gets the equipment and the training that it needs in order to be effective in fighting ISIL and other threats around the world.

So it was a good win. And there are some things in there that I don't like, but that's the nature of legislation and compromise. And I think the system worked.

That gives me some optimism that next year, on a narrow set of issues, we can get some more work done. Now, as David said, it’s an election year. And obviously a lot of the legislative process is going to be skewed by people looking over their shoulders, worrying about primaries, trying to position themselves relative to the presidential candidates. So that makes it harder. But I think there are going to be a handful of areas where we can make real progress.

One of them you already mentioned -- Trans-Pacific Partnership, which now has been out, Congress has had a chance to review. And it meets the bar that I set. It is consistent with what I promised, which is the most pro-labor, pro-environment, progressive trade deal in history, that eliminates just about every tariff on American manufacturing goods in countries that up until this point have charged a tax, essentially, on anything that American workers and American businesses sell in these areas. It brings those taxes down to zero on basically all American-manufactured products -- a huge win for agriculture, because now the people of Japan are going to be in a better position to enjoy American beef and American pork, which up until this point, even though we're much more efficient producers, has been tagged with a tax that makes our products uncompetitive in Japanese markets.

So this is a big deal. And I think Speaker Ryan would like to try to get it done. And there are both proponents and opponents of this in both Democratic and Republican parties, and so it’s going to be an interesting situation where we're going to have to stitch together the same kind of bipartisan effort in order for us to get it done.

A second area that I think is possible is criminal justice reform. There has been sincere, serious negotiations and efforts by Democrats and Republicans to create a criminal justice system that is more fair, more evenhanded, more proportionate, and is smarter about how we reduce crime. And I’ve really been impressed by the dedication of a core group of Democrats and Republicans -- some of them, the most liberal Democrats and the most conservative Republicans -- coming together saying this is the right thing to do.

We’ve got a good bill in the Senate that passed with bipartisan support out of committee. My hope is, is that gets to the floor, and that we can pair it up with a good bill out of the House. And this is an area where you potentially can see us save money, reduce recidivism, make sure that people who make a mistake on nonviolent crimes have to pay the price, have to serve time, but are released in a reasonable fashion, that they have more support so that they're less likely to go back into the criminal system subsequently. And that's an area where I think we may be able to make a big difference.

So those are just two examples. We’ll keep on looking for a number of examples like that. And wherever there’s an opportunity, I’m going to take it.

Philip Crowther.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. You mentioned climate change already. And at the time of the signing of the deal in Paris, you said it was potentially a turning point for the world. But this was a deal that is not a legally binding document. And you bypassed Congress pretty much completely. Are you worried at this point that a Republican president who might take over from you in the White House could stop the deal in its tracks entirely? And considering that possibility, are you more interested in campaigning for a Democratic nominee, considering that danger?

President Obama: I think it’s fair to say I was going to be campaigning for a Democratic nominee even without that danger. And I am very confident that we're going to have a terrific Democratic nominee and -- [cellphone rings] -- whose phone is that, guys? Come on, now. Somebody -- you recognize your ring. Don’t be embarrassed. Just turn it off. There you go. Okay. Can I still hear it? I think it’s off now.

I think we will have a strong Democratic nominee. I think that Democratic nominee will win. I think I will have a Democratic successor. And I will campaign very hard to make that happen -- for a whole variety of reasons -- because they're far more likely to share my fundamental vision about where America should go.

But having said that, what I think people should also feel good about is that the agreement struck in Paris, although not legally binding when it comes to the targets that had been set, does create this architecture in which all around the world, countries are saying, this is where we’re going. We’re going to be chasing after this clean energy future. This is how we’re going to meet our goals. We’re going to double down on solar power. We’re going to double down on wind power. We’re going to invest more heavily in biofuels. We’re going to figure out battery technologies.

And what you saw in this budget, which I think was really significant, was an extension of the solar tax credits and wind tax credits that we had helped to really boost early on in my administration and that resulted in wind power increasing threefold, solar power increasing by twentyfold.

Those tax credits are now going to be extended for five to seven years. And as a consequence, that combination of market signals means that the private sector is going to start investing much more heavily. They know this is coming. And it’s not just coming here -- it’s coming around the world. So you now have a global marketplace for clean energy that is stable and accelerating over the course of the next decade.

That then creates a different dynamic that is independent of what Congress does, but also helps to shape what Congress does. Because the more people that are now getting jobs in solar installation and production, the more that you have companies who are seeing how American innovation can sell products in clean energy all across the Asia Pacific and in Europe and in Africa, suddenly there’s a big monetary incentive to getting this right.

And that’s been the history of environmental progress in this country, and now we’ve exported it around the world. Every time we’ve made a decision, “you know what, we’re going to have clean air,” the predictions were everything would fall apart. And lo and behold, it turns out that American innovation makes getting clean air a lot less expensive than people expected and it happens a lot faster than expected.

When we made a decision that we were going to double fuel-efficiency standards on cars, everybody said, oh, this is going to ruin the American auto industry. The American auto industry has been booming over the last couple years. Acid rain -- when George H.W. Bush instituted a system to charge for the emissions that were causing acid rain, everybody said, well, you can’t do that, that’s going to ruin business. And it turned out it was smoother, faster, quicker, better. And acid rain folks who were born -- I don’t know -- some of you reporters are getting younger, or I’m getting older -- may not remember it, but that was a big deal. Now most folks don’t even remember it anymore, because it got solved. And there’s no reason why the same won’t happen here.

Now, do I think that there’s going to be a lot of noise and campaigning next year about how we’re going to stop Paris in its tracks? There will probably be a lot of noise like that. Do I actually think that, two years from now, three years from now, even Republican members of Congress are going to look at it and say, that’s a smart thing to do? I don’t think they will.

Keep in mind that, right now, the American Republican Party is the only major party that I can think of in the advanced world that effectively denies climate change. I mean, it’s an outlier. Many of the key signatories to this deal, the architects of this deal come from center-right governments. Even the far-right parties in many of these countries -- they may not like immigrants, for example, but they admit, yes, the science tells us we’ve got to do something about climate change.

So my sense is, is that this is something that may be an advantage in terms of short-term politics and a Republican primary. It’s not something that is going to be a winner for Republicans long term.

Question: You mentioned American leadership. Is it embarrassing to you that the other party denies climate change?

President Obama: No -- because, first of all, I’m not a member of that party. Second of all, it didn’t stop us from being the key leader in getting this done.

I mean, this is something I’ve been working on now for five, six years. When I went to Copenhagen, I essentially engaged in 24 hours of diplomacy to salvage from a pretty chaotic process the basic principle that all countries had to participate, that we couldn’t have a rigid division between developed countries and developing countries when it came to solving this problem. That was the initial foundation for us then working with other countries, culminating in the joint announcement with China, bringing in India, bringing in Brazil and the other big, emerging countries, working with the Europeans and getting this done.

This would not have happened without American leadership. And, by the way, the same is true for the Iran nuclear deal. The same is true for the Trans-Pacific Partnership. The same is true for stamping out Ebola -- something, you guys may recall from last year, which was the potential end of the world.

At each juncture, what we’ve said is, is that American strength and American exceptionalism is not just a matter of us bombing somebody. More often, it’s a matter of us convening, setting the agenda, pointing other nations in a direction that’s good for everybody and good for U.S. interests, engaging in painstaking diplomacy, leading by example. And sometimes the results don’t come overnight, they don’t come the following day, but they come.

And this year, what you really saw was that steady, persistent leadership on many initiatives that I began when I first came into office.

All right. I’ve got April Ryan.

Question: Mr. President, I want to ask you something on criminal justice, or that something you said also -- something from Julie Pace. Your administration contends the United States is 5 percent of the world population, but 25 percent of the global jailed population. What legislation are you supporting that significantly cuts mass incarceration in this country? And going back to the Assad issue, does Assad have to go to defeat ISIS?

President Obama: Well, we’re going to defeat ISIS, and we’re going to do so by systematically squeezing them, cutting off their supply lines, cutting off their financing, taking out their leadership, taking out their forces, taking out their infrastructure. We’re going to do so in partnership with forces on the ground -- that sometimes are spotty, sometimes need capacity-building, need our assistance, need our training -- but we’re seeing, steadily, progress in many of these areas. And so they’re going to be on the run.

Now, they are going to continue to be dangerous. So let me just be very clear -- because whenever I say that we have made progress in squeezing the territory that they control, or made real inroads against them, what people will say is, well, if something happens around the world, then obviously that must not be true. But in any battle, in any fight, even as you make progress, there are still dangers involved. And ISIL’s capacity both to infiltrate Western countries with people who’ve traveled to Syria or traveled to Iraq, and the savviness of their social media, their ability to recruit disaffected individuals who may be French or British or even U.S. citizens, will continue to make them dangerous for quite some time. But we will systematically go after them.

Now, in order for us to stamp them out thoroughly, we have to eliminate lawless areas in which they cannot still roam. So we can disable them, we can dismantle much of their infrastructure, greatly reduce the threat that they pose to the United States, our allies and our neighbors. But, in the same way that al Qaeda is pinned down and has much more difficulty carrying out any significant attacks because of how we’ve systematically dismantled them, they still pose a threat. There are still operatives who are interested in carrying out terrorist attacks because they still operate in areas between Pakistan and Afghanistan, or more prominently right now, in Yemen, that are hard to reach.

Our long-term goal has to be able to stabilize these areas so that they don’t have any safe haven. And in order for us to do that in Syria, there has to be an end to the civil war, and there has to be an actual government that has a police capacity and a structure in these areas that currently aren’t governed. And it is my firm belief and the belief of the experts in this administration, that so long as Assad is there, we cannot achieve that kind of stability inside of Syria. And I think the history over the last several years indicates as much.

So that’s going to continue to be a top priority for us, moving aggressively on the military track and not letting ISIL take a breath, and pounding away at them with our Special Forces and our airstrikes, and the training and advising of partners who can go after them. But we also have to keep very aggressive on this diplomatic track in order for us to bring countries together.

All right? Everybody --

Question: On criminal justice --

President Obama: Oh, on criminal justice reform, I answered the question. I’m hopeful --

Question: On the legislation -- are you supporting the -- mass incarceration?

President Obama: And, April, what I said was, is that I strongly support the Senate legislation that’s already been put forward. I’m hopeful that the House can come up with legislation that follows the same principles, which is to make sure that we’re doing sentencing reform, but we’re also doing a better job in terms of reducing recidivism and providing support for ex-offenders. And if we can get those two bills together in a conference, then I’m somewhat optimistic that we’re going to be able to make a difference.

Now, keep in mind, April, when you use the term “mass incarceration,” statistically, the overwhelming majority of people who are incarcerated are in state prisons and state facilities for state crimes. We can only focus on federal law and federal crimes. And so there’s still going to be a large population of individuals who are incarcerated even for non-violent drug crimes, because this is a trend that started in the late ‘80s and ‘90s, and accelerated at the state levels.

But if we can show at the federal level that we can be smart on crime, more cost-effective, more just, more proportionate, then we can set a trend for other states to follow, as well. And that’s our hope. This is not going to be something that’s reversed overnight.

So just to go back to my general principle, April, it took 20 years for us to get to the point we are now. And it will be 20 years, probably, before we reverse some of these major trends.

Okay, everybody, I got to get to Star Wars. Thank you. Thank you guys. Appreciate you. Merry Christmas, everybody.

Question: Happy New Year, Mr. President.

President Obama: Happy New Year to you!

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Weekly Address: Making America Safer for Our Children

Happy New Year, everybody. I am fired up for the year that stretches out before us. That’s because of what we’ve accomplished together over the past seven.

Seven years ago, our businesses were losing 800,000 jobs a month. They’ve now created jobs for 69 straight months, driving the unemployment rate from a high of 10% down to 5%.

Seven years ago, too many Americans went without health insurance. We’ve now covered more than 17 million people, dropping the rate of the uninsured below 10% for the very first time.

Seven years ago, we were addicted to foreign oil. Now our oil imports have plummeted, our clean energy industry is booming, and America is a global leader in the fight against climate change.

Seven years ago, there were only two states in America with marriage equality. And now there are 50.

All of this progress is because of you. And we’ve got so much more to do. So my New Year’s resolution is to move forward on our unfinished business as much as I can. And I’ll be more frequently asking for your help. That’s what this American project is all about.

That's especially true for one piece of unfinished business, that’s our epidemic of gun violence.

Last month, we remembered the third anniversary Newtown. This Friday, I’ll be thinking about my friend Gabby Giffords, five years into her recovery from the shooting in Tucson. And all across America, survivors of gun violence and those who lost a child, a parent, a spouse to gun violence are forced to mark such awful anniversaries every single day.

And yet Congress still hasn’t done anything to prevent what happened to them from happening to other families. Three years ago, a bipartisan, commonsense bill would have required background checks for virtually everyone who buys a gun. Keep in mind, this policy was supported by some 90% of the American people. It was supported by a majority of NRA households. But the gun lobby mobilized against it. And the Senate blocked it.

Since then, tens of thousands of our fellow Americans have been mowed down by gun violence. Tens of thousands. Each time, we’re told that commonsense reforms like background checks might not have stopped the last massacre, or the one before that, so we shouldn’t do anything.

We know that we can’t stop every act of violence. But what if we tried to stop even one? What if Congress did something -- anything -- to protect our kids from gun violence?

A few months ago, I directed my team at the White House to look into any new actions I can take to help reduce gun violence. And on Monday, I’ll meet with our Attorney General, Loretta Lynch, to discuss our options. Because I get too many letters from parents, and teachers, and kids, to sit around and do nothing. I get letters from responsible gun owners who grieve with us every time these tragedies happen; who share my belief that the Second Amendment guarantees a right to bear arms; and who share my belief we can protect that right while keeping an irresponsible, dangerous few from inflicting harm on a massive scale.

So I know there are a bunch of us who care about this. If you are one of them, I need your help.

Change, as always, is going to take all of us.

The gun lobby is loud and well organized in its defense of effortlessly available guns for anyone. The rest of us are going to have to be just as passionate and well organized in our defense of our kids. That’s the work of citizenship -- to stand up and fight for the change that we seek.

I hope you’ll join me in making America safer for all of our children.

Thanks, everybody.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address Detailing Steps to Reduce Gun Violence

Mark, I want to thank you for your introduction. I still remember the first time we met, the time we spent together, and the conversation we had about Daniel. And that changed me that day. And my hope, earnestly, has been that it would change the country.

Five years ago this week, a sitting member of Congress and 18 others were shot at, at a supermarket in Tucson, Arizona. It wasn’t the first time I had to talk to the nation in response to a mass shooting, nor would it be the last. Fort Hood. Binghamton. Aurora. Oak Creek. Newtown. The Navy Yard. Santa Barbara. Charleston. San Bernardino. Too many.

Audience Member: Too many.

Audience Member: Too many.

Audience Member: Too many.

President Obama: Thanks to a great medical team and the love of her husband, Mark, my dear friend and colleague, Gabby Giffords, survived. She’s here with us today, with her wonderful mom. Thanks to a great medical team, her wonderful husband, Mark -- who, by the way, the last time I met with Mark -- this is just a small aside -- you may know Mark’s twin brother is in outer space. He came to the office, and I said, how often are you talking to him? And he says, well, I usually talk to him every day, but the call was coming in right before the meeting so I think I may have not answered his call -- which made me feel kind of bad. That’s a long-distance call. So I told him if his brother, Scott, is calling today, that he should take it. Turn the ringer on.

I was there with Gabby when she was still in the hospital, and we didn’t think necessarily at that point that she was going to survive. And that visit right before a memorial -- about an hour later Gabby first opened her eyes. And I remember talking to mom about that. But I know the pain that she and her family have endured these past five years, and the rehabilitation and the work and the effort to recover from shattering injuries.

And then I think of all the Americans who aren’t as fortunate. Every single year, more than 30,000 Americans have their lives cut short by guns -- 30,000. Suicides. Domestic violence. Gang shootouts. Accidents. Hundreds of thousands of Americans have lost brothers and sisters, or buried their own children. Many have had to learn to live with a disability, or learned to live without the love of their life.

A number of those people are here today. They can tell you some stories. In this room right here, there are a lot of stories. There’s a lot of heartache. There’s a lot of resilience, there’s a lot of strength, but there’s also a lot of pain. And this is just a small sample.

The United States of America is not the only country on Earth with violent or dangerous people. We are not inherently more prone to violence. But we are the only advanced country on Earth that sees this kind of mass violence erupt with this kind of frequency. It doesn’t happen in other advanced countries. It’s not even close. And as I’ve said before, somehow we’ve become numb to it and we start thinking that this is normal.

And instead of thinking about how to solve the problem, this has become one of our most polarized, partisan debates -- despite the fact that there’s a general consensus in America about what needs to be done. That’s part of the reason why, on Thursday, I’m going to hold a town hall meeting in Virginia on gun violence. Because my goal here is to bring good people on both sides of this issue together for an open discussion.

I’m not on the ballot again. I’m not looking to score some points. I think we can disagree without impugning other people’s motives or without being disagreeable. We don’t need to be talking past one another. But we do have to feel a sense of urgency about it. In Dr. King’s words

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, we need to feel the “fierce urgency of now.” Because people are dying. And the constant excuses for inaction no longer do, no longer suffice.

That’s why we’re here today. Not to debate the last mass shooting, but to do something to try to prevent the next one. To prove that the vast majority of Americans, even if our voices aren’t always the loudest or most extreme, care enough about a little boy like Daniel to come together and take common-sense steps to save lives and protect more of our children.

Now, I want to be absolutely clear at the start -- and I’ve said this over and over again, this also becomes routine, there is a ritual about this whole thing that I have to do -- I believe in the Second Amendment. It’s there written on the paper. It guarantees a right to bear arms. No matter how many times people try to twist my words around -- I taught constitutional law, I know a little about this -- I get it. But I also believe that we can find ways to reduce gun violence consistent with the Second Amendment.

I mean, think about it. We all believe in the First Amendment, the guarantee of free speech, but we accept that you can’t yell “fire” in a theater. We understand there are some constraints on our freedom in order to protect innocent people. We cherish our right to privacy, but we accept that you have to go through metal detectors before being allowed to board a plane. It’s not because people like doing that, but we understand that that’s part of the price of living in a civilized society.

And what’s often ignored in this debate is that a majority of gun owners actually agree. A majority of gun owners agree that we can respect the Second Amendment while keeping an irresponsible, law-breaking feud from inflicting harm on a massive scale.

Today, background checks are required at gun stores. If a father wants to teach his daughter how to hunt, he can walk into a gun store, get a background check, purchase his weapon safely and responsibly. This is not seen as an infringement on the Second Amendment. Contrary to the claims of what some gun rights proponents have suggested, this hasn’t been the first step in some slippery slope to mass confiscation. Contrary to claims of some presidential candidates, apparently, before this meeting, this is not a plot to take away everybody’s guns. You pass a background check; you purchase a firearm.

The problem is some gun sellers have been operating under a different set of rules. A violent felon can buy the exact same weapon over the Internet with no background check, no questions asked. A recent study found that about one in 30 people looking to buy guns on one website had criminal records -- one out of 30 had a criminal record. We’re talking about individuals convicted of serious crimes -- aggravated assault, domestic violence, robbery, illegal gun possession. People with lengthy criminal histories buying deadly weapons all too easily. And this was just one website within the span of a few months.

So we’ve created a system in which dangerous people are allowed to play by a different set of rules than a responsible gun owner who buys his or her gun the right way and subjects themselves to a background check. That doesn’t make sense. Everybody should have to abide by the same rules. Most Americans and gun owners agree. And that’s what we tried to change three years ago, after 26 Americans -– including 20 children -– were murdered at Sandy Hook Elementary.

Two United States Senators -– Joe Manchin, a Democrat from West Virginia, and Pat Toomey, a Republican from Pennsylvania, both gun owners, both strong defenders of our Second Amendment rights, both with “A” grades from the NRA –- that’s hard to get -- worked together in good faith, consulting with folks like our Vice President, who has been a champion on this for a long time, to write a common-sense compromise bill that would have required virtually everyone who buys a gun to get a background check. That was it. Pretty common-sense stuff. Ninety percent of Americans supported that idea. Ninety percent of Democrats in the Senate voted for that idea. But it failed because 90 percent of Republicans in the Senate voted against that idea.

How did this become such a partisan issue? Republican President George W. Bush once said, “I believe in background checks at gun shows or anywhere to make sure that guns don’t get into the hands of people that shouldn’t have them.” Senator John McCain introduced a bipartisan measure to address the gun show loophole, saying, “We need this amendment because criminals and terrorists have exploited and are exploiting this very obvious loophole in our gun safety laws.” Even the NRA used to support expanded background checks. And by the way, most of its members still do. Most Republican voters still do.

How did we get here? How did we get to the place where people think requiring a comprehensive background check means taking away people’s guns?

Each time this comes up, we are fed the excuse that common-sense reforms like background checks might not have stopped the last massacre, or the one before that, or the one before that, so why bother trying. I reject that thinking. We know we can’t stop every act of violence, every act of evil in the world. But maybe we could try to stop one act of evil, one act of violence.

Some of you may recall, at the same time that Sandy Hook happened, a disturbed person in China took a knife and tried to kill -- with a knife -- a bunch of children in China. But most of them survived because he didn’t have access to a powerful weapon. We maybe can’t save everybody, but we could save some. Just as we don’t prevent all traffic accidents but we take steps to try to reduce traffic accidents.

As Ronald Reagan once said, if mandatory background checks could save more lives, “it would be well worth making it the law of the land.” The bill before Congress three years ago met that test. Unfortunately, too many senators failed theirs.

In fact, we know that background checks make a difference. After Connecticut passed a law requiring background checks and gun safety courses, gun deaths decreased by 40 percent -- 40 percent. Meanwhile, since Missouri repealed a law requiring comprehensive background checks and purchase permits, gun deaths have increased to almost 50 percent higher than the national average. One study found, unsurprisingly, that criminals in Missouri now have easier access to guns.

And the evidence tells us that in states that require background checks, law-abiding Americans don’t find it any harder to purchase guns whatsoever. Their guns have not been confiscated. Their rights have not been infringed.

And that’s just the information we have access to. With more research, we could further improve gun safety. Just as with more research, we’ve reduced traffic fatalities enormously over the last 30 years. We do research when cars, food, medicine, even toys harm people so that we make them safer. And you know what -- research, science -- those are good things. They work. They do.

But think about this. When it comes to an inherently deadly weapon -- nobody argues that guns are potentially deadly -- weapons that kill tens of thousands of Americans every year, Congress actually voted to make it harder for public health experts to conduct research into gun violence; made it harder to collect data and facts and develop strategies to reduce gun violence. Even after San Bernardino, they’ve refused to make it harder for terror suspects who can’t get on a plane to buy semi-automatic weapons. That’s not right. That can’t be right.

So the gun lobby may be holding Congress hostage right now, but they cannot hold America hostage. We do not have to accept this carnage as the price of freedom.

Now, I want to be clear. Congress still needs to act. The folks in this room will not rest until Congress does. Because once Congress gets on board with common-sense gun safety measures we can reduce gun violence a whole lot more. But we also can’t wait. Until we have a Congress that’s in line with the majority of Americans, there are actions within my legal authority that we can take to help reduce gun violence and save more lives -– actions that protect our rights and our kids.

After Sandy Hook, Joe and I worked together with our teams and we put forward a whole series of executive actions to try to tighten up the existing rules and systems that we had in place. But today, we want to take it a step further. So let me outline what we’re going to be doing.

Number one, anybody in the business of selling firearms must get a license and conduct background checks, or be subject to criminal prosecutions. It doesn’t matter whether you’re doing it over the Internet or at a gun show. It’s not where you do it, but what you do.

We’re also expanding background checks to cover violent criminals who try to buy some of the most dangerous firearms by hiding behind trusts and corporations and various cutouts.

We’re also taking steps to make the background check system more efficient. Under the guidance of Jim Comey and the FBI, our Deputy Director Tom Brandon at ATF, we’re going to hire more folks to process applications faster, and we’re going to bring an outdated background check system into the 21st century.

And these steps will actually lead to a smoother process for law-abiding gun owners, a smoother process for responsible gun dealers, a stronger process for protecting the people from -- the public from dangerous people. So that’s number one.

Number two, we’re going to do everything we can to ensure the smart and effective enforcement of gun safety laws that are already on the books, which means we’re going to add 200 more ATF agents and investigators. We’re going to require firearms dealers to report more lost or stolen guns on a timely basis. We’re working with advocates to protect victims of domestic abuse from gun violence, where too often -- where too often, people are not getting the protection that they need.

Number three, we’re going to do more to help those suffering from mental illness get the help that they need. High-profile mass shootings tend to shine a light on those few mentally unstable people who inflict harm on others. But the truth is, is that nearly two in three gun deaths are from suicides. So a lot of our work is to prevent people from hurting themselves.

That’s why we made sure that the Affordable Care Act -- also known as Obamacare -- that law made sure that treatment for mental health was covered the same as treatment for any other illness. And that’s why we’re going to invest $500 million to expand access to treatment across the country.

It’s also why we’re going to ensure that federal mental health records are submitted to the background check system, and remove barriers that prevent states from reporting relevant information. If we can continue to de-stigmatize mental health issues, get folks proper care, and fill gaps in the background check system, then we can spare more families the pain of losing a loved one to suicide.

And for those in Congress who so often rush to blame mental illness for mass shootings as a way of avoiding action on guns, here’s your chance to support these efforts. Put your money where your mouth is.

Number four, we’re going to boost gun safety technology. Today, many gun injuries and deaths are the result of legal guns that were stolen or misused or discharged accidentally. In 2013 alone, more than 500 people lost their lives to gun accidents –- and that includes 30 children younger than five years old. In the greatest, most technologically advanced nation on Earth, there is no reason for this. We need to develop new technologies that make guns safer. If we can set it up so you can’t unlock your phone unless you’ve got the right fingerprint, why can’t we do the same thing for our guns? If there’s an app that can help us find a missing tablet -- which happens to me often the older I get -- if we can do it for your iPad, there’s no reason we can’t do it with a stolen gun. If a child can’t open a bottle of aspirin, we should make sure that they can’t pull a trigger on a gun. Right?

So we’re going to advance research. We’re going to work with the private sector to update firearms technology.

And some gun retailers are already stepping up by refusing to finalize a purchase without a complete background check, or by refraining from selling semi-automatic weapons or high-capacity magazines. And I hope that more retailers and more manufacturers join them -- because they should care as much as anybody about a product that now kills almost as many Americans as car accidents.

I make this point because none of us can do this alone. I think Mark made that point earlier. All of us should be able to work together to find a balance that declares the rest of our rights are also important -- Second Amendment rights are important, but there are other rights that we care about as well. And we have to be able to balance them. Because our right to worship freely and safely –- that right was denied to Christians in Charleston, South Carolina. And that was denied Jews in Kansas City. And that was denied Muslims in Chapel Hill, and Sikhs in Oak Creek. They had rights, too.

Our right to peaceful assembly -– that right was robbed from moviegoers in Aurora and Lafayette. Our unalienable right to life, and liberty, and the pursuit of happiness -– those rights were stripped from college students in Blacksburg and Santa Barbara, and from high schoolers at Columbine, and from first-graders in Newtown. First-graders. And from every family who never imagined that their loved one would be taken from our lives by a bullet from a gun.

Every time I think about those kids it gets me mad. And by the way, it happens on the streets of Chicago every day.

So all of us need to demand a Congress brave enough to stand up to the gun lobby’s lies. All of us need to stand up and protect its citizens. All of us need to demand governors and legislatures and businesses do their part to make our communities safer. We need the wide majority of responsible gun owners who grieve with us every time this happens and feel like your views are not being properly represented to join with us to demand something better.

And we need voters who want safer gun laws, and who are disappointed in leaders who stand in their way, to remember come election time.

I mean, some of this is just simple math. Yes, the gun lobby is loud and it is organized in defense of making it effortless for guns to be available for anybody, any time. Well, you know what, the rest of us, we all have to be just as passionate. We have to be just as organized in defense of our kids. This is not that complicated. The reason Congress blocks laws is because they want to win elections. And if you make it hard for them to win an election if they block those laws, they’ll change course, I promise you.

And, yes, it will be hard, and it won’t happen overnight. It won’t happen during this Congress. It won’t happen during my presidency. But a lot of things don’t happen overnight. A woman’s right to vote didn’t happen overnight. The liberation of African Americans didn’t happen overnight. LGBT rights -- that was decades’ worth of work. So just because it’s hard, that’s no excuse not to try.

And if you have any doubt as to why you should feel that “fierce urgency of now,” think about what happened three weeks ago. Zaevion Dobson was a sophomore at Fulton High School in Knoxville, Tennessee. He played football; beloved by his classmates and his teachers. His own mayor called him one of their city’s success stories. The week before Christmas, he headed to a friend’s house to play video games. He wasn’t in the wrong place at the wrong time. He hadn’t made a bad decision. He was exactly where any other kid would be. Your kid. My kids. And then gunmen started firing. And Zaevion -- who was in high school, hadn’t even gotten started in life -- dove on top of three girls to shield them from the bullets. And he was shot in the head. And the girls were spared. He gave his life to save theirs –- an act of heroism a lot bigger than anything we should ever expect from a 15-year-old. “Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends.”

We are not asked to do what Zaevion Dobson did. We’re not asked to have shoulders that big; a heart that strong; reactions that quick. I’m not asking people to have that same level of courage, or sacrifice, or love. But if we love our kids and care about their prospects, and if we love this country and care about its future, then we can find the courage to vote. We can find the courage to get mobilized and organized. We can find the courage to cut through all the noise and do what a sensible country would do.

That’s what we’re doing today. And tomorrow, we should do more. And we should do more the day after that. And if we do, we’ll leave behind a nation that’s stronger than the one we inherited and worthy of the sacrifice of a young man like Zaevion.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you. Thank you. God bless America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Remarks at a CNN 'Guns in America' Town Hall

Anderson Cooper: Good evening from George Mason University here in Fairfax, Virginia. We are here tonight to talk about one of the most divisive issues in America today -- guns. Their protection is enshrined in the Constitution, in the Second Amendment, and gun ownership is an integral part of American history and culture.

There are some 30,000 gun deaths in America each year. Two-thirds of them are suicides; one-third of them are homicides. So the question we want to confront tonight is how you find a balance between protecting the rights of American citizens who want to own guns, but preventing guns from getting into the hands of people who shouldn’t have them.

We brought together people here tonight who represent really all sides of the issue -- gun owners, gun sellers, people who have survived shootings or lost loved ones. Some here believe that having more guns makes us all safer, and believe the right to bear arms defines us, preserves us from tyranny and cannot be compromised in any way. Others here tonight believe just as passionately that more needs to be done to limit the sale of firearms. And we respect all of their views, and we want to hear from as many as we can tonight in the hour ahead.

One voice you will not hear from tonight is the National Rifle Association. They’re the nation’s largest, most influential and powerful gun rights group. We invited them to be here -- I think their office is just a couple miles away. They declined to take part. Some of their members are here tonight, though. We're very thankful for that. And so are representatives from the National Firearms Retailers Association.

This town hall is not something the White House dreamed up or that the White House organized. CNN approached the White House shortly after the San Bernardino terror attack with this idea. And we're pleased that they agreed to participate and pleased to welcome tonight the President of the United States, Barack Obama.

President Obama: Thank you, everybody. Thank you.

Anderson Cooper: Hello, Mr. President. Welcome.

President Obama: Great to see you.

Anderson Cooper: Good to see you. Let me start. Have you ever owned a gun?

President Obama: I have never owned a gun. Now, up at Camp David, we've got some skeet shooting, so on a fairly regular basis, we get a 12-gauge and -- I'm not making any claims about my marksmanship.

Anderson Cooper: Before you were President, did you ever feel a desire to get a gun, feel the need to get a gun?

President Obama: I grew up mostly in Hawaii, and other than hunting for wild pig -- which they do once in a while -- there’s not the popularity of hunting and sportsmanship with guns as much as there are in other parts of the country.

Anderson Cooper: I mean, I ask the question because there’s a lot of people out there who don't trust you, obviously, on the issue of guns. You keep saying you don't want to take away everybody’s guns. But there’s a lot of people out there tonight watching who don't believe you. There are a lot of people in this room who, frankly, don't believe you. And it's not just that you don't really have personal experience having owned a gun, but that things you’ve said: Support for Australia’s tough anti-gun policies. They banned semi-automatic assault rifles. They banned even shotguns in Australia. You’ve praised their policies over and over.

Back in 2008, you said -- you talked about “bitter Americans clinging to their guns.” Even now, these executive actions have caused a lot of concern among a lot of people. What can you say to somebody tonight to convince them that you don't want to take away everybody’s guns and you're not coming for their guns?

President Obama: Well, first of all, Anderson, I think it's useful to keep in mind I've been now President for over seven years and gun sales don't seem to have suffered during that time.

Anderson Cooper: If anything, actually --

President Obama: They’ve gone up. I've been very good for gun manufacturers. More importantly -- I'll tell you a story that I think indicates how I see the issue. Back in 2007-2008, when I was campaigning, I’d leave Chicago, a city which is wonderful, I couldn't be prouder of my city, but where every week there’s a story about a young person getting shot. Some are gang members and it's turf battles. Sometimes it's innocent victims.

Anderson Cooper: Fifty-five people have been shot in Chicago in the last seven days.

President Obama: Sometimes it's happened just a few blocks from my house, and I live in a reasonably good neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago. So that's one image -- talking to families who’ve gone through the pain of losing somebody because of violence in Chicago -- gun violence.

Michelle and I are then campaigning out in Iowa, and we're going to farms and we're going to counties. And at one point, Michelle turned to me and she said, you know, if I was living in a farmhouse, where the sheriff’s department is pretty far away, and somebody can just turn off the highway and come up to the farm, I'd want to have a shotgun or a rifle to make sure that I was protected and my family was protected. And she was absolutely right.

And so part of the reason I think that this ends up being such a difficult issue is because people occupy different realities. There are a whole bunch of law-abiding citizens who have grown up hunting with their dad, or going to the shooting range, and are responsible gun owners. And then there’s the reality that there are neighborhoods around the country where it is easier for a 12 or 13-year-old to purchase a gun -- and cheaper -- than it is for them to get a book.

Anderson Cooper: But what you're proposing, what you proposed this week, the executive actions, the other things, are they really going to be effective? And I ask this because the vast majority of felons out there -- I mean, we can all agree criminals should not get guns; we want to keep guns out of the hands of criminals. The vast majority of criminals get their guns from -- either illegally or from family or friends. So background checks is not something that's going to affect them, is it?

President Obama: Well, but that's not exactly accurate. Look, first of all, it's important for everybody to understand what I've proposed and what I haven't proposed. What I've said consistently throughout my presidency is I respect the Second Amendment; I respect the right to bear arms; I respect people who want a gun for self-protection, for hunting, for sportsmanship. But all of us can agree that it makes sense to do everything we can to keep guns out of the hands of people who would try to do others harm, or to do themselves harm.

Because every year we're losing 30,000 people to gun violence. Two-thirds of those are actually suicides. Hundreds of kids under the age of 18 are being shot or shooting themselves, often by accident -- many of them under the age of five. And so if we can combine gun safety with sensible background checks and some other steps, we're not going to eliminate gun violence, but we will lessen it. And if we take that number from 30,000 down to, let’s say, 28,000, that's 2,000 families who don't have to go through what the families at Newtown or San Bernardino or Charleston went through.

And so what we've proposed is that if you have a background check system that has a bunch of big loopholes, which is why a lot of criminals and people who shouldn’t have guns are able to get guns --

Question: But they’re not buying them at gun shows -- only 1 percent of criminals are buying them at gun shows.

President Obama: No, but this is what happens. Let’s go back to the city of Chicago that has strong gun control laws. And oftentimes the NRA will point to that as an example and say, see, these things don’t work. Well, the problem is, is that about 30, 40 percent of those guns are coming from Indiana, across the border, where there are much laxer laws. And so folks will go to a gun show and purchase a whole bunch of firearms, put them in a van, drive up into Mike Pfleger’s neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago, where his parish is, open up the trunk, and those things are for sale.

Now, technically, you could say those folks bought them illegally, but it was facilitated by the fact that what used to be a small exception that said collectors and hobbyists don’t need to go through a background check has become this massive industry where people who are doing business are, in fact, saying that they’re not in the business of selling guns, but are.

And all we’re saying here is, is that we want to put everybody on notice that the definition of doing business -- which means you have to register, and it means you have to run a background check -- is if you are making a profit and repeatedly selling guns, then you should have to follow the same rules as every other gun dealer. And what that means --

Anderson Cooper: There are a lot of people who believe that’s not specific enough because there’s a lot of fathers and sons who sell guns every now and then and at gun shows. Are they going to have to now start doing background checks? Are they going to start to have to register?

President Obama: Look, what the Justice Department has done is provided a whole range of very specific examples. And what we ultimately need I believe is for Congress to set up a system that is efficient, that doesn’t inconvenience the lawful gun seller or purchaser, but that makes sure that we’re doing the best background check possible.

And the fact, Anderson, that the system may not catch every single person, or there may be a circumstance where somebody doesn’t think that they have to register and do, and that may cause some red tape and bureaucracy for them, which -- or inconvenience -- has to be weighed against the fact that we may be able to save a whole bunch of families from the grief that some of the people in this audience have had to go through.

And keep in mind, for the gun owners who are in attendance here, my suspicion is, is that you all had to go through a background check and it didn’t prevent you from getting a weapon. And the notion that you should have to do that but there are a whole bunch of folks who are less responsible than you who don’t have to do it doesn’t make much sense.

So why we should resist this -- keep in mind that, historically, the NRA was in favor of background checks. Historically, many in the Republican Party were in favor of background checks. And what’s changed is not that my proposals are particularly radical. What’s changed is we’ve suddenly created an atmosphere in which I put out a proposal like background checks or, after Sandy Hook, was calling on Congress, along with people like Gabby Giffords, who herself was a victim of gun violence -- we put out a proposal that is common sense, modest, does not claim to solve every problem, is respectful of the Second Amendment, and the way it is described is that we’re trying to take away everybody’s guns.

And part of the reason I welcomed this opportunity by CNN to have a good discussion and debate about it is because our position is consistently mischaracterized. And, by the way, there’s a reason why the NRA is not here. They’re just down the street, and since this is the main reason they exist, you’d think that they’d be prepared to have a debate with the President.

Anderson Cooper: They haven't been to the White House for years.

President Obama: Oh, no, no -- we’ve invited them. We've invited them.

Anderson Cooper: So, right now, tonight, you’re saying you would be --

President Obama: We have invited them repeatedly. But if you listen to the rhetoric, it is so over the top and so over-heated, and, most importantly, is not acknowledging the fact that there’s no other consumer item that we purchase --

Question: So is that an open invitation that --

President Obama: Hold on a second. Let me finish this point, Cooper. There’s nothing else in our lives that we purchase where we don’t try to make it a little safer if we can. Traffic fatalities have gone down drastically during my lifetime. And part of it is technology, and part of it is the National Highway Safety Administration does research and they figure out, you know what, seatbelts really work. And then we passed some laws to make sure seatbelts are fastened. Airbags make a lot of sense; let’s try those out. Toys -- we say, you know what, we find out that kids are swallowing toys all the time, let’s make sure that the toys aren’t so small that they swallow them if they’re for toddlers or infants. Medicine -- kids can’t open aspirin caps.

Now, the notion that we would not apply the same basic principles to gun ownership as we do to everything else that we own just to try to make them safer, or the notion that anything we do to try to make them safer is somehow a plot to take away guns, that contradicts what we do to try to create a better life for Americans in every other area of our lives.

Anderson Cooper: And just so I’m clear, tonight you’re saying you would welcome to meet with the NRA?

President Obama: Anderson, I’ve said this repeatedly -- I’m happy to meet with them. I’m happy to talk to them. But the conversation has to be based on facts and truth and what we’re actually proposing, not some imaginary fiction in which Obama is trying to take away your guns. The reason, by the way, that gun sales spike not just before I propose something -- every time there is a mass shooting, gun sales spike. And part of the reason is, is that the NRA has convinced many of its members that somebody is going come grab your guns -- which is, by the way, really profitable for the gun manufacturers. It’s a great advertising mechanism, but it’s not necessary. There’s enough of a market out there for people who want protection, who are sportsmen, who wants to go hunting with their kids. And we can make it safer.

Anderson Cooper: I want to open this up to people in our audience.

President Obama: Absolutely.

Anderson Cooper: People have traveled far. I want you to meet Taya Kyle. She’s the widow of Chris Kyle, former Navy SEAL, author of “American Sniper.” Taya wrote a book, “American Life: A Memoir of Love, War, Faith, and Renewal.” Taya, we’re happy you’re here. What do you want to ask the President?

Question: I appreciate you taking the time to come here. And I think that your message of hope is something I agree with, and I think it’s great. And I think that by creating new laws you do give people hope. The thing is that the laws that we create don’t stop these horrific things from happening, right? And that’s a very tough pill to swallow.

President Obama: Right.

Question: We want to think that we can make a law and people will follow it. But by the very nature of their crime, they’re not following it. By the very nature of looking at the people who hurt our loved ones here, I don’t know that any of them would have been stopped by the background check. And yet -- I crave that desire for hope, too. And so I think, part of it, we have to recognize that we cannot outlaw murder, because the people who are murdering are -- they’re breaking the law, but they also don’t have a moral code that we have. And so they could do the same amount of damage with a pipe bomb. The problem is that they want to murder.

And I’m wondering why it wouldn’t be a better use of our time to give people hope in a different way, to say, you know what, we -- well, first of all, actually, let me back up to that. Because with the laws, I know that at least the last I heard, the federal prosecution of gun crimes was like 40 percent. And what I mean by that is that there are people lying on these forms already, and we’re not prosecuting them. So there’s an issue there, right? But instead, if we can give people hope and say that also during this time, while you’ve been President, we are at the lowest murder rate in our country -- all-time low of murders. We’re at an all-time high of gun ownership, right? I’m not necessarily saying that the two are correlated, but what I’m saying is that we’re at an all-time low for a murder rate. That’s a big deal.

And yet, I think most of us in this country feel like it could happen at any moment. It could happen to any of us at any time, at a moment’s notice. When you talk about the NRA, and after a mass shooting that gun sales go up, I would argue that it’s not necessarily that I think somebody is going to come take my gun from me, but I want the hope, and the hope that I have the right to protect myself, that I don’t end up to be one of these families; that I have the freedom to carry whatever weapon I feel I need, just like your wife said on that farm. The sheriff is not going to get to my house, either. And I understand that background checks aren’t necessarily going to stop me from getting a gun, but I also know that they wouldn’t have stopped any of the people here in this room from killing. And so it seems like almost a false sense of hope. So why not celebrate where we are? I guess that’s my real question -- is celebrate that we’re good people, and 99.9 percent of us are never going to kill anyone.

President Obama: Well, let me make a couple of points. First of all, thanks to your husband for his service, and thank you for your service, because of extraordinary heroism that he and your family have shown in protecting all of us. And I’m very grateful for that.

Number two, what you said about murder rates and violent crime generally is something that we don’t celebrate enough. The fact of the matter is, is that violent crime has been steadily declining across America for a pretty long time. And you wouldn’t always know it by watching television, but overall, most cities are much safer than they were 10 years ago or 20 years ago.

Now, I’d challenge the notion that the reason for that is because there’s more gun ownership, because if you look at where are the areas with the highest gun ownership, those are the places, in some cases, where the crime rate hasn’t dropped down that much. And the places where there’s pretty stiff restrictions on gun ownership, in some of those places the crime has dropped really quickly. So I’m not sure that there’s a one-to-one correlation there.

But I think the most important point I want to make is that you will be able to purchase a firearm. Some criminals will get their hands on firearms even if there’s a background check. Somebody may lie on a form. Somebody will intend to commit a crime but they don’t have a record that shows up on the background check system.

But in the same way that we don’t eliminate all traffic accidents, but over the course of 20 years, traffic accidents get lower -- there’s still tragedies, there’s still drunk drivers, there’s still people who don’t wear their seatbelts -- but over time, that violence was reduced, and so families are spared. That’s the same thing that we can do with gun ownership.

There is a way for us to set up a system where you, a responsible gun owner, who I’m assuming, given your husband and your family, is a much better marksman than I am, can have a firearm to protect yourself, but where it is much harder for somebody to fill up a car with guns and sell them to 13-year-old kids on the streets. And that is I think what we’re trying to do.

What we’re also trying to do is make the database more effective -- so that’s part of the proposal -- which, by the way, will convenience you when you go to the store, because if we can set up a 24/7 background check system, then that means that it’s less likely that things slip through the cracks or it’s more difficult for you to get your background check completed.

And we’re also trying to close a loophole that has been developing over the last decade where now people are using cut-out trusts and shell corporations to purchase the most dangerous weapons -- sawed-off shotguns, automatic weapons, silencers -- and don’t have to go through background checks at all. And we don’t know whether -- are these sales going to drug traffickers? We don’t know who’s purchasing them right now. And so what we’re saying is, you know what, that is something that we’ve got to do something about.

The same thing is true with Internet sales, where one study has shown that one out of 30 persons who are purchasing weapons over the Internet turn out to have a felony record. And that’s not something you want to see.

Anderson Cooper: I think one question a lot of people have about you is do you believe the fundamental notion that a good guy with a gun or a good woman with a gun is an important bulwark against a bad person with a gun? And before you answer, I want you to meet Kimberly Corban. Kimberly was a college student in Colorado in 2006 -- Kimberly is right over there. She was raped by a man who broke into her apartment. She testified for three hours in the trial against him. Her attacker was sentenced to 24-years-to-life in prison. And I know that attack, Kimberly, changed your view of handguns. What’s your question for the President?

Question: Absolutely. As a survivor of rape and now a mother to two small children, it seems like being able to purchase a firearm of my choosing, and being able to carry that wherever me and my family are, it seems like my basic responsibility as a parent at this point. I have been unspeakably victimized once already, and I refuse to let that happen again to myself or my kids. So why can’t your Administration see that these restrictions that you’re putting to make it harder for me to own a gun, or harder for me to take that where I need to be is actually just making my kids and I less safe?

President Obama: Well, Kimberly, first of all, obviously, your story is horrific. The strength you’ve shown in telling your story and being here tonight is remarkable. And so I’m really proud of you for that.

I just want to repeat that there’s nothing that we’ve proposed that would make it harder for you to purchase a firearm. And now, you may be referring to issues like concealed carry, but those tend to be state-by-state decisions, and we’re not making any proposals with respect to what states are doing. They can make their own decisions there. So there really is no -- nothing that we’re proposing that prevents you or makes it harder for you to purchase a firearm if you need one.

There are always questions as to whether or not having a firearm in the home protects you from that kind of violence. And I’m not sure we can resolve that. People argue it both sides. What is true is, is that you have to be pretty well trained in order to fire a weapon against somebody who is assaulting you and catches you by surprise. And what is also true is there’s always the possibility that that firearm in a home leads to a tragic accident. We can debate that, round or flat.

But for now, what I just want to focus on is that you certainly would like to make it a little harder for that assailant to have also had a gun. You certainly would want to make sure that if he gets released, that he now can’t do what he did to you to somebody else. And it’s going to be easier for us to prevent him from getting a gun if there’s a strong background system in place -- background check system in place.

And so if you look at the statistics, there’s no doubt that there are times where somebody who has a weapon has been able to protect themselves and scare off an intruder or an assailant. But what is more often the case is that they may not have been able to protect themselves but they end up the victim of the weapon that they purchased themselves. And that’s something that can be debated. In the meantime, all I’m focused on is making sure that a terrible crime like yours that was committed is not made easier because somebody can go on the Internet and just buy whatever weapon they want without us finding out whether they’re a criminal or not.

Anderson Cooper: Kimberly, thank you for being here. I appreciate it.

You talked about Chicago, and there’s a lot of folks from Chicago here tonight. I want you to meet -- or I want everybody to meet, because I know you’ve met her before, Cleo Pendleton. She’s sitting over there. And I should point out -- I think I said it earlier -- 55 shootings in Chicago in just the past seven days. Cleo Pendleton, her daughter, Hadiya, performed at your second inauguration. She was shot to death a little more than a week later. She was 15 years old. She was an honor student, a majorette. And you being here tonight honors her, so thank you very much for being here. What’s your question to the President?

Question: Well, I want to say thank you, first of all, for making it more difficult for guns to get in the hands of those that shouldn’t have them. Thank you for the action you took on Tuesday. But I want to ask a question -- how can we stop the trafficking of guns from states with looser gun laws into states with tougher gun laws? Because I believe that’s the case often in Chicago, and possibly the source of the gun that shot and murdered my daughter.

President Obama: Well, first of all, it’s great to see you again. And part of the reason that we do this is because when you meet parents of wonderful young people and they tell their stories, at least for me, I think of Malia and I think of Sasha and I think of my nieces and I think of my nephews. And the pain that any of us go through with a loss like that is extraordinary. And I couldn’t be prouder of the families who are here representing both sides but who’ve been affected in those ways.

If we are able to set up a strong background check system -- and my proposal, by the way, includes hiring -- having the FBI hire a couple hundred more people to help process background checks, because they’re big numbers, you’re talking about 20 million checks that are getting done every year -- hiring 200,000 -- or 200 more ATF agents to be able to go after unscrupulous gun dealers, then that will apply across the country.

And so, some states may have laws that allow for conceal-and -carry; some states may not. There’s still going to be differences. But what will at least be consistent across the country is that it’s a little bit harder to get a gun.

Now, we can’t guarantee that criminals are not going to have ways of getting guns. But, for example, it may be a little more difficult and a little more expensive, and the laws of supply and demand mean that if something is harder to get and it’s a little more expensive to get, then fewer people get them. And that, in and of itself, could make a difference.

So if somebody is a straw purchaser -- and what that means is they don’t intend the guns for themselves, they intend to resell them to somebody else -- they go to a gun show in Indiana, where right now they don’t have to do a background check, load up a van, and open up that van and sell them to kids in gangs in Chicago -- if now that person has to go through a background check, they’ve got to register, ATF has the capacity then to find out if and when a gun is used in a crime in Chicago where that gun had come from. And now you know here’s somebody who seems to be willing to sell a gun to a 15-year-old who had a known record.

Anderson Cooper: But you’re only going to be asking people to get a license and do background checks if they give out business cards, if they’re selling weapons that are in the original packaging. Somebody just walking around a gun show selling a weapon is not necessarily going to have to register.

President Obama: No -- look, there’s going to be a case-by-case evaluation: Are they on an ongoing basis making a profit and are they repeatedly selling firearms.

Anderson Cooper: I want you to meet Sheriff Paul Babeu of Pinal County, Arizona. He’s a Republican running for Congress. After the recent terror attacks, Sheriff, I know you’ve been telling citizens to arm themselves to protect their families. What’s your question to the President?

Question: Well, first, deputies’ slow response time has been mentioned a couple times. I want to be clear that my deputies have a very fast emergency response --

President Obama: I’m sure that’s true.

Question: Yes. Mr. President, you’ve said you’ve been thwarted by -- frustrated by Congress. As a sheriff, I oftentimes get frustrated. But I don’t make the laws and I’ve sworn an oath to enforce the law, to uphold the Constitution, the same oath you’ve taken. And the talk and why we’re here is all these mass shootings, and yet you’ve said in your executive action it wouldn’t have solved even one of these or the terrorist attack --

President Obama: No, I didn’t say that. I didn’t say that it wouldn’t solve one.

Question: Well, looking at the information, what would it have solved? Now, knowing --

Anderson Cooper: None of the recent mass shootings, I should point out, none of the guns were purchased from an unlicensed dealer.

Question: Correct. And that’s what I’m speaking to -- the executive action that you mentioned earlier. Aspirin, toys, or cars, they’re not written about in the Constitution. I want to know -- and I think all of us really want to get to the solution, and you said don’t talk past each other -- what would you have done to prevent these mass shootings and the terrorist attack? And how do we get those with mental illness and criminals -- that’s the real problem here -- how are we going to get them to follow the laws?

President Obama: Well, first of all, appreciate your service. Good luck on your race. You sure you want to go to Congress?

Question: I don’t want to [inaudible] --

President Obama: I’m sure that’s true. That will hurt you. And I’m sure it’s a Republican district. Look, crime is always going to be with us. So I think it’s really important for us not to suggest that if we can’t solve every crime, we shouldn’t try to solve any crimes.

And the problem when we talk about that guns don’t kill people; people kill people, or it’s primarily a mental health problem, or it’s a criminal and evil problem and that’s what we have to get at -- all of us are interested in fighting crime. I’m very proud of the fact that violent crime rates have continued to go down during the course of my presidency. I’ve got an Attorney General, an FBI that works very closely with local law enforcement in busting up crime rings all the time. That’s a huge priority to us. And we’re probably providing grants to your department to help go after criminals.

The challenge we have is that in many instances, you don’t know ahead of time who’s going to be the criminal. It’s not as if criminals walk around with a label saying, “I’m a criminal.” And, by the way, the young man who killed those kids in Newtown, he didn’t have a criminal record, and so we didn’t know ahead of time, necessarily, that he was going to do something like that. But he was able to have access to an arsenal that allowed him in very short order to kill an entire classroom of small children. And so the question then becomes, are there ways for us -- since we can’t identify that person all the time, are there ways for us to make it less lethal when something like that happens?

And I mentioned this during my speech at the White House a couple of days ago. Right around the time of Newtown, in China, a guy who was obviously similarly deranged had a knife and started attacking a bunch of schoolchildren. About the same number were cut or stabbed by this guy. But most of them survived. And the reason was because he wasn’t yielding a semi-automatic.

So the main point I think that I want to make here is that everybody here is in favor of going after criminals, locking them up, making sure that we’re creating an environment where kids don’t turn into criminals and providing the support that they need. Those are all important things. Nobody is saying we need to be going soft on criminals.

What we do have to make sure of is that we don’t make it so easy for them to have access to deadly weapons. In neighborhoods like Chicago -- I keep on using Chicago -- this is all across the country. You go into any neighborhood, it used to be that parents would see some kids messing around on the corner and they’d say, “Yo” -- even if they weren’t the parent of those children -- “go back inside, stop doing that.” And over time, it was a lot harder to discipline somebody else’s kid and have the community maintain order, or talk to police officers if somebody is doing something wrong, because now somebody is worried about getting shot.

And if we can create an environment that’s just a little bit safer in those communities, that will help. And if it doesn’t infringe on your Second Amendment rights, and it doesn’t infringe on your Second Amendment rights, and you’re still able to get a firearm for your protection, why wouldn’t we want to do that?

Anderson Cooper: We’ve got to take a break. We’re going to take a quick break. Our live town hall conversation, “Guns in America,” with President Barack Obama continues right after this.

[commercial break]

Anderson Cooper: And welcome back. We’re live at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, continuing our live town hall conversation with President Barack Obama, “Guns In America,” talking to voices from all sides of the issue, including the President.

You made your announcement just the other day in a very obviously emotional ceremony at the White House. And I want to play just a moment from it for those who haven’t seen it.

[Video is shown.]

I think a lot of people were surprised by that moment.

President Obama: I was, too, actually. I visited Newtown two days after what happened, so it was still very raw. It’s the only time I’ve ever seen Secret Service cry on duty. And it wasn’t just the parents. You had siblings -- 10-year-olds, 8-year-olds, 3-year-olds, who, in some cases, didn’t even understand that their brother or sister weren’t going to be coming home. And I’ve said this before -- it continues to haunt me. It was one of the worst days of my presidency.

But, look, I want to emphasize that there are a lot of tragedies that happen out there as a consequence of the victims of crime. There are police officers who are out there laying down their lives to protect us every single day. And tears are appropriate for them, as well, and I visit with those families, as well -- victims of terrorism, soldiers coming home.

There’s a lot of heartache out there. And I don’t suggest that this is the only kind of heartache we should be working on. I spent a lot of time and a lot of hours -- in fact, a lot more hours than I spend on this -- trying to prevent terrorist attacks. I spend a lot of time and a lot of hours trying to make sure that we’re continuing to reduce our crime rate.

There are a whole bunch of other answers that are just as important when it comes to making sure that the streets of places like Chicago and Baltimore are safer. Making sure kids get a good early childhood education. Making sure that we’re teaching conflict resolution that doesn’t involve violence. Making sure that faith communities are able to reach out to young people and intervene in timely ways.

So this is not a recipe for solving every problem. Again, I just want to emphasize that the goal here is just to make progress. And it’s interesting, as I enter into my last year as President, I could not be prouder of the work that we’ve done. But it also makes you really humble, because you realize that change takes a long time and a lot of the work you do is just to incrementally make things better so that, 10 years from now, 20 years from now, the crime rate has gone down.

That’s not just because of my Administration. That’s the groundwork that was laid by a bunch of good work by law enforcement and others for years, across Administrations, on a bipartisan basis.

The same is true with traffic safety. The same is true with advances in medicine. The same can be true with this if we stop exaggerating or mischaracterizing the positions of either side and we just come up with some sensible areas that people agree with. Background checks are an example: The majority of gun owners agree with this.

Anderson Cooper: You talk about faith communities. Father Michael Pfleger is here. I know you know him well. He’s a Roman Catholic priest in Chicago. For those who don’t know, his church is St. Sabina on the South Side of Chicago. I was there about a month ago. It was a great honor to be there. Father, you’ve given a lot of eulogies for a lot of kids in your community. Far too many over the 40 years that you have been there. What your question for the President?

Question: Mr. President, first of all, thank you for your courage and your passion, and keep pushing. I happen to be from one of those cities where violence is not going down. Not only, as Anderson mentioned, the 55 shot, there’s been 11 killed in seven days in Chicago. And one of the main reasons for that is the easy access to guns. It’s easier to get a gun in my neighborhood than it is a computer. And the reality is, is because many of those guns have been bought legally. And I understand why people are pushing against you, because I understand it’s a business and it’s about a business, and so if we cut back the easy access to guns, less money for gun manufacturers, less money for the gun lobby. I understand the business of it. But that business is causing blood and the kids that are dying in Chicago. And for many years, nobody even cared about Chicago because the violence is primarily black and brown.

The reality is that I don’t understand why we can’t title guns just like cars. If I have a car and I give it to you, Mr. President, and I don’t transfer a title and you’re in an accident, it’s on me. We don’t take cars away by putting titles on them. Why can’t we do that with guns and every gun in America? So if somebody who’s buying 200 guns, selling them on the streets, if they can’t transfer those titles, then they’re going to be held responsible for the guns that they sell.

President Obama: Well, Father Mike, first of all, for those of you who don’t know him, has been working since before I moved to Chicago, and I was a 23-year-old when I first met him. And somehow I aged and he didn’t.

Anderson Cooper: Your gray hair is not going back, I can tell you from experience.

President Obama: He was always the best-looking priest in Chicago. But Father Pfleger has done heroic work at St. Sabina Parish.

Issues like licensing, registration, that’s an area where there’s just not enough national consensus at this stage to even consider it. And part of it is, is people’s concern that that becomes a prelude to taking people’s guns away. I mean, part of the challenge in this is that the gun debate gets wrapped up in broader debates about whether the federal government is oppressive. And there are conspiracy theories floating around the Internet these days all the time. We did a military exercise in Texas, and a whole bunch of folks were sure that this was the start of martial law, and were suggesting maybe don’t cooperate with the United States Army in an effort to prepare so that if they get deployed overseas, they can handle it. But that’s how difficult sometimes these debates are.

But I want to pick up on some things where I think there should be consensus. One of those areas that I talked about at the speech, part of the proposal is developing smart gun technology. Now, this is an interesting example. I don’t exactly understand this, and maybe there will be somebody in the audience who explains it to me. Back in 1997, the CEO of Colt said we can design, or are starting to develop guns where you can only use it if you’ve got a chip, where you wear a band or a bracelet, and that then protects your 2-year-old or 3-year-old from picking up the gun and using it. And a boycott was called against him, and they had to back off of developing that technology. The same with Smith & Wesson. They were in the process of developing similar technology, and they were attacked by the NRA as “surrendering.”

Now, to me, this does not make sense. If you are a gun owner, I would think that you would at least want a choice so that if you wanted to purchase a firearm that could only be used by you -- in part to avoid accidents in your home, in part to make sure that if it’s stolen, it’s not used by a criminal, in part, if there’s an intruder, you pull the gun but somehow it gets wrested away from you, that gun can’t be turned on you and used on you -- I would think there might be a market for that. You could sell that gun.

Now, I’m not saying that necessarily would be the only gun that’s available, but it seems to me that that would be something that in any other area, in any other product, any other commercial venture, there would be some research and development on that because that’s a promising technology.

It has not been developed primarily because it’s been blocked by either the NRA, which is funded by gun manufacturers, or other reasons. In part, what we proposed was, you know what, we’re going to do some of the research. We’ll work with the private sector. We’ll figure out whether or not this technology can be developed -- and then give everybody a choice in terms of the kind of firearm that they want to purchase -- because I think that there will, in fact, be a market for that. And over time, that’s an example of how we could reduce some of the preventable gun deaths that are out there.

Anderson Cooper: I want to bring in somebody who actually knows a lot about selling guns. I want you to meet Kris Jacob. He’s vice president of the American Firearms Retailers Association. He’s the owner of the Bullseye Indoor Shooting Range and gun store in San Rafael, California. Kris, it’s great to have you here. First of all, how is business under President Obama? Because everything I read says gun sales have been going up. Every time he talks about guns, gun sales go up.

Question: It’s been busy. And certainly I think that shows, as Taya said earlier, that there’s a very serious concern in this country about personal security. And the sheriff is right -- they do everything they possibly can to make sure they get there as quickly as they possibly can. And my question is actually focused around law enforcement, as well. There’s 53,000 licensed gun dealers in the United States who stand behind the counter and say no to people all day.

President Obama: Yes.

Question: We feel it’s our responsibility to make sure that people who have a criminal past, people who are mentally ill or are having a bad day don’t get possession of firearms. So we assist law enforcement all the time in the process of making sure that those things don’t change hands inside our commercial market if they shouldn’t. It’s a very serious responsibility for us, and as a group, we take it very seriously.

My question is around the executive order related to the investigators, the inspectors, the adding of 200 inspectors who are more on the auditing and record-keeping side. Why not add 200 ATF agents on the law enforcement side to keep the criminals and the bad guys out of the stores in the first place? I mean, the problem seems to me to be -- you mentioned dealers who are less responsible than others, and certainly it’s possible that those folks are out there, but if we can enforce the laws that already exist, the tens of thousands of gun laws that are on the books right now, it might create a very significant deterrent in just getting those people in the stores.

Anderson Cooper: Let me also point out the number of ATF agents during your Administration has actually declined. So even if you hired 200 more --

President Obama: Yes, but not because of my budget.

Anderson Cooper: But even if you hired 200 more, it will get it to what it was right before you took office.

President Obama: Absolutely. Well, look, first of all, there are a whole bunch of responsible gun dealers out there. And my hope would be that those gun dealers would support making sure that everybody is following the same rules that they are. That’s number one.

Number two is we’re not writing a new law. Only Congress can do that. This is about enforcing existing laws, and closing what has grown into a massive loophole where a huge percentage of guns -- many of whom end up being traced to crime -- are not going through the responsible gun dealers, but are going through irresponsible folks who are not registered as doing business. And the whole goal here is to clarify and to put on notice that if you’re a business, even if you don’t have bricks and mortar, then you’re supposed to register, you’re supposed to conduct background checks. So the issue is not where you do it, it’s what you’re doing. And that should not be something that threatens responsible gun dealers across the country.

In terms of the ATF, it is absolutely true that the ATF budget has been shrank because -- has been shrunk -- it’s a little late -- you knew what I meant -- and part of it is because the politicizing of this issue. So many in the Republican Congress feel as if the ATF is not their friend, but their enemy. Part of the story I was telling --

Anderson Cooper: You said this issue should be politicized, though.

President Obama: Well, but what I mean by that, Anderson, is, is that they have been portrayed as trying to take people’s guns away as opposed to trying to make sure that the laws are enforced. And one of the most frustrating things that I hear is when people say -- who are opposed to any further laws -- why don’t you just enforce the laws that are on the books, and those very same members of Congress then cut ATF budgets to make it impossible to enforce the law.

And by the way, the ATF is a law enforcement agency working under the FBI that is doing enormous work in going after criminals and drug cartels, and have a pretty dangerous job. So it’s not as if doing background checks or auditing gun sales is all that they’re doing.

Part of my proposal is also developing better technologies so that we can do tracing of shells when a crime is committed in order to figure out who exactly are the perpetrators of the crime and where did they obtain the weapon. So there’s a whole bunch of other elements to this that are going to be important. But my hope is, is that responsible gun dealers like yourself and your organization are going to be supportive of this proposal, because it should actually help push away unscrupulous dealers and that means more customers for you guys.

Anderson Cooper: I want to bring in Mark Kelly. As you know, a former astronaut, husband of former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, who we’re proud to say is here tonight. Five years ago this week in Tucson, Arizona, Congresswoman Giffords was shot. Six others were killed. Captain, your question?

Question: Well, thank you for being here, Mr. President. As you know, Gabby and I are both gun owners. We take gun ownership very seriously and really think about the voices of responsible gun owners in this debate. But I want to follow up to something Father Pfleger said and your answer to his question, and it’s about expanded background checks. Often, what you hear in the debate of expanding background checks to more gun sales -- and, as you know, Gabby and I are 100 percent behind the concept of somebody getting a background check before buying a gun -- but when we testified in front of the Senate Judiciary Committee, we heard not only from the gun lobby but from United States senators that expanding background checks will -- not may -- will lead to a registry, which will lead to confiscation, which will lead to a tyrannical government.

So I would like you to explain, with 350 million guns in 65 million places, households, from Key West to Alaska -- 350 million objects in 65 million places -- if the federal government wanted to confiscate those objects, how would they do that?

President Obama: Well, look, first of all, every time I see Gabby, I’m just so thrilled because I visited her in the hospital, and, as I mentioned I think in the speech in the White House, as we left the hospital then to go to a memorial service, we got word that Gabby had opened her eyes for the first time. And we did not think that she was going to be here, and she is. And Mark has just been extraordinary. And, by the way, Mark’s twin brother is up in space right now and is breaking the record for the longest continuous orbiting of the planet, which is pretty impressive stuff.

What I think Mark is alluding to is what I said earlier -- this notion of a conspiracy out there, and it gets wrapped up in concerns about the federal government. Now, there’s a long history of that. That’s in our DNA. The United States was born suspicious of some distant authority.

Anderson Cooper: But let me just jump in -- is it fair to call it a conspiracy? I mean, there’s a lot of people who really believe this deeply -- that they just don’t trust you.

President Obama: I’m sorry, Cooper, yes it is fair to call it a conspiracy. What are you saying? Are you suggesting that the notion that we are creating a plot to take everybody’s guns away so that we can impose martial law --

Anderson Cooper: Not everybody, but there is certainly a lot of people --

President Obama: -- is a conspiracy? Yes, that is a conspiracy. I would hope that you would agree with that. Is that controversial except on some websites around the country?

Anderson Cooper: There are certainly a lot of people who just have a fundamental distrust that you do not want to get -- go further and further and further down this road.

President Obama: Look, I mean, I’m only going to be here for another year. I don’t know -- when would I have started on this enterprise, right?

I come from the state of Illinois, which -- we’ve been talking about Chicago, but downstate Illinois is closer to Kentucky than it is to Chicago. And everybody hunts down there and a lot of folks own guns. And so this is not, like, alien territory to me. I’ve got a lot of friends like Mark who are hunters. I just came back from Alaska, where I ate a moose that had just been shot -- and it was pretty good.

So, yes, it is a false notion that I believe is circulated for either political reasons or commercial reasons in order to prevent a coming together among people of goodwill to develop common-sense rules that will make us safer while preserving the Second Amendment.

And the notion that we can’t agree on some things while not agreeing on others and the reason for that is because, well, the President secretly wants to X would mean that we’d be paralyzed about doing everything. I mean, maybe when I proposed to make sure that unsafe drugs are taken off the market that, secretly, I’m trying to control the entire drug industry, or take people’s drugs away. But probably not. What’s more likely is I just want to make sure that people are not dying by taking bad drugs.

Anderson Cooper: You wrote an op-ed that just got published. A lot of people probably have not read it yet. One of the things you say in it is that you are not going to campaign for, vote for any candidate, regardless of what party they’re in, if they do not support common-sense gun reform.

President Obama: Yes. I meant what I said. And the reason I said that is this. The majority of people in this country are a lot more sensible than what you see in Washington, and the reason that Washington doesn’t work well in part is because the loudest, shrillest voices, the least compromising, the most powerful or those with the most money have the most influence.

And the way Washington changes is when people vote. And the way we break the deadlock on this issue is when Congress does not have just a stranglehold on this debate -- or, excuse me -- the NRA does not have a stranglehold on Congress in this debate -- but it is balanced by a whole bunch of folks -- gun owners, law enforcement, the majority of the American people -- when their voices are heard, then things get done.

The proposals that we’ve put forward are a version -- a lawful, more narrow version -- of what was proposed by Joe Manchin and Senator Toomey of Pennsylvania, a Republican and a Democrat, both of whom get straight-A scores from the NRA. And somehow, after Newtown, that did not pass the Senate. The majority of senators wanted it, but 90 percent of Republicans voted against it. And I’ll be honest with you, 90 percent of those senators didn’t disagree with the proposal, but they were fearful that it was going to affect them during the election.

So all I’m saying is, is that this debate will not change and get balanced out so that lawful gun owners and their Second Amendment rights are protected, but we’re also creating a pathway towards a safer set of communities -- it’s not going to change until those who are concerned about violence are not as focused and disciplined during election time as those who are. And I’m going to throw my shoulders behind folks who want to actually solve problems instead of just getting a high score from an interest group.

Anderson Cooper: We have time for one more question. And we talked about Chicago a little bit. We haven't really heard from young people tonight -- no offense to those who have spoken. I’m in the same category as you all. Sorry, Father.

President Obama: You’re a kid.

Anderson Cooper: There’s a lot of kids, as you know, growing up in Chicago, fearful of walking to school, fearful of coming home from school. A lot of kids have been killed on buses. There’s a lot of moms of kids who have been killed in the streets of Chicago. And I want you to meet Trey Bosley. He’s 18 years old. He’s a high school student. And his brother Terrell was shot and killed nearly 10 years ago while he was helping a friend in a church parking lot. Terrell would have turned 28 years old on this Tuesday. What’s your question, Trey?

Question: As you said, I lost my brother a few years ago -- well, 10 years ago. And I’ve also lost a countless amount of family members and friends to gun violence, as well. And just growing up as a young black teen in Chicago, where you’re surrounded by not only just gun violence but police brutality, as well, most of aren’t thinking of our life on a long-term scale. Most of us are either thinking day to day, hour to hour -- for some, even minute to minute. I want to thank you for your stand against gun violence for not only the victims of gun violence, but those on the verge of being victims of gun violence. And my question to you is, what is your advice to those youth growing up surrounded by poverty and gun violence?

President Obama: Well, first of all, Trey, I couldn’t be prouder of you. And I know -- is that your momma next to you? I know she’s proud of you right now. So good job, Mom. When I see you, Terrell, I think I about my own --

Anderson Cooper: Trey.

President Obama: Excuse me -- Trey. When I see you, I think about my own youth, because I wasn’t that different from you. Probably not as articulate and maybe more of a goof-off. But the main difference was I lived in a more forgiving environment. If I screwed up, I wasn’t at risk of getting shot. I’d get a second chance. There were a bunch of folks who were looking out for me, and there weren’t a lot of guns on the streets. And that’s how all kids should be growing up, wherever they live.

My advice to you is to continue to be an outstanding role model for the young ones who are coming up behind you. Keep listening to your mom. Work hard and get an education. Understand that high school and whatever peer pressure or restrictions you’re under right now won’t matter by the time you’re a full adult, and what matters is your future. But what I also want to say to you is, is that you’re really important to the future of this country.

And I think it is critical in this debate to understand that it’s not just inner-city kids who are at risk in these situations. Out of the 30,000 deaths due to gun violence, about two-thirds of them are actually suicides. That’s part of the reason why we are investing more heavily also in mental health under my proposal.

But while the majority of victims of gun homicide are black or Hispanic, the overwhelming majority of suicides by young people are white. And those, too, are tragedies. Those, too, are preventable. I’m the father of two outstanding young women, but being a teenager is tough. And we all remember the times where you get confused, you’re angry, and then the next thing you know, if you have access to a firearm what kind of bad decisions you might make. So those are deaths we also want to prevent.

Accidental shootings are also deaths we want to prevent. And we’re not going to prevent all of them. But we can do better. We’re not going to, through this initiative alone, solve all the problems of inner-city crime. Some of that, as I said, has to do with investing in these communities and making sure there’s good education and jobs and opportunity -- and great parents, and moral responsibility, and ethical behavior, and instilling that in our kids -- that’s going to be important.

So this is not a proposal to solve every problem. It’s a modest way of us getting started on improving the prospects of young men and young women like you, the same way we try to improve every other aspect of our lives. That’s all it is.

And if we get started -- as I said before, it used to be people didn’t wear seatbelts, didn’t have airbags. It takes 20, 30 years, but you look and then you realize all these amazing lives of young people like this who are contributing to our society because we came together in a practical way, looking at evidence, looking at data, and figured out how can we make that work better.

Right now, Congress prohibits us even studying through the Center for Disease Control ways in which we could reduce gun violence. That’s how crazy this thing has become. Let’s at least figure out what works. And some of the proposals that I’m making may turn out are not as effective as others. But at least let’s figure it out, let’s try some things. Let’s not just assume that -- every few weeks there’s a mass shooting that gets publicity, every few months there’s one that gets national publicity, every day there are a whole bunch of folks shot on streets around the country that we don’t even hear about. That is not something that we can be satisfied with.

And part of my faith and hope in America is just that -- not that we achieve a perfect union, but that we get better. And we can do better than we’re doing right now if we come together.

Thank you.

Anderson Cooper: Mr. President, thank you very much for your time.

President Obama: Appreciate it very much.

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# Final Presidential State of the Union Address

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, Members of Congress, my fellow Americans:

Tonight marks the eighth year that I’ve come here to report on the State of the Union. And for this final one, I’m going to try to make it shorter. I know some of you are antsy to get back to Iowa.

(I've been there. I'll be shaking hands afterwards if you want some tips.)

Now, I understand that because it’s an election season, expectations for what we will achieve this year are low. But Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the constructive approach that you and other leaders took at the end of last year to pass a budget and make tax cuts permanent for working families. So I hope we can work together this year on some bipartisan priorities -- like criminal justice reform, and helping -- and helping people who are battling prescription drug abuse and heroin abuse. So, who knows, we might just surprise the cynics again.

But tonight, I want to go easy on the traditional list of proposals for the year ahead. Don’t worry, I’ve got plenty -- from helping students learn to write computer code to personalizing medical treatments for patients. And I will keep pushing for progress on the work that I believe still needs to be done: fixing a broken immigration system; protecting our kids from gun violence; equal pay for equal work; paid leave; raising the minimum wage. All these things -- All these things still matter to hardworking families. They’re still the right thing to do, and I won’t let up until they get done.

But for my final address to this chamber, I don’t want to just talk about next year. I want to focus on the next five years, the next ten years, and beyond. I want to focus on our future. We live in a time of extraordinary change -- change that’s reshaping the way we live, the way we work, our planet, our place in the world. It’s change that promises amazing medical breakthroughs, but also economic disruptions that strain working families. It promises education for girls in the most remote villages but also connects terrorists plotting an ocean away. It’s change that can broaden opportunity or widen inequality. And whether we like it or not, the pace of this change will only accelerate.

America's been through big changes before -- wars and depression, the influx of new immigrants, workers fighting for a fair deal, movements to expand civil rights. Each time, there have been those who told us to fear the future, who claimed we could slam the brakes on change, who promised to restore past glory if we just got some group or idea that was threatening America under control. And each time we overcame those fears. We did not, in the words of Lincoln, adhere to "the dogmas of the quiet past."

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Instead we thought anew and acted anew. We made change work for us, always extending America’s promise outward -- to the next frontier, to more people. And because we did, because we saw opportunity where there -- where others others saw peril, we emerged stronger and better than before. What was true then can be true now. Our unique strengths as a nation, our optimism and work ethic, our spirit of discovery, our diversity, our commitment to rule of law -- these things give us everything we need to ensure prosperity and security for generations to come.

In fact, it’s in that spirit that we have made the progress these past seven years. That’s how we recovered from the worst economic crisis in generations. That’s how we reformed our health care system and reinvented our energy sector. That’s how -- That’s how we -- That’s how we delivered more care and benefits to our troops coming home and our veterans. That’s how we -- That’s -- That’s how we secured the freedom in every state to marry the person we love.

But -- But such progress is not inevitable. It’s the result of choices we make together. And we face such choices right now. Will we respond to the changes of our time with fear -- turning inward as a nation, turning against each other as a people? Or will we face the future with confidence in who we are, in what we stand for, and the incredible things that we can do together?

So let’s talk about the future, and four big questions that I believe we as a country have to answer, regardless of who the next President is, or who controls the next Congress. First, how do we give everyone a fair shot at opportunity and security in this new economy? Second, how do we make technology work for us and not against us, especially when it comes to solving urgent challenges like climate change? Third, how do we keep America safe and lead the world without becoming its policeman? And finally, how can we make our politics reflect what’s best in us, and not what’s worst?

Let me start with the economy and a basic fact: The United States of America, right now, has the strongest, most durable economy in the world. We’re in the middle of the longest streak of private-sector job creation in history -- more than 14 million new jobs, the strongest two years of job growth since the 1990s, an unemployment rate cut in half. Our auto industry just had its best year ever. That’s just part of a manufacturing surge that’s created nearly 900,000 new jobs in the past six years. And we’ve done all this while cutting our deficits by almost three-quarters.

Anyone claiming that America’s economy is in decline is peddling fiction.

Now -- What is true, and the reason that a lot of Americans feel anxious, is that the economy has been changing in profound ways -- changes that started long before the Great Recession hit, changes that have not let up. Today, technology doesn’t just replace jobs on the assembly line, but any job where work can be automated. Companies in a global economy can locate anywhere and they face tougher competition. As a result, workers have less leverage for a raise. Companies have less loyalty to their communities. And more and more wealth and income is concentrated at the very top.

All these trends have squeezed workers -- even when they have jobs, even when the economy is growing. It’s made it harder for a hardworking family to pull itself out of poverty, harder for young people to start their careers, tougher for workers to retire when they want to. And although none of these trends are [sic] unique to America, they do offend our uniquely American belief that everybody who works hard should get a fair shot.

For the past seven years, our goal has been a growing economy that also works better for everybody. We’ve made progress, but we need to make more. And despite all the political arguments that we’ve had these past few years, there are actually some areas where Americans broadly agree. We agree that real opportunity requires every American to get the education and training they need to land a good-paying job. The bipartisan reform of No Child Left Behind was an important start. And together we’ve increased early childhood education, lifted high school graduation rates to new highs, boosted graduates in fields like engineering.

In the coming years, we should build on that progress, by providing Pre-K for all and offering every student -- offering every student the hands-on computer science and math classes that make them job-ready on day one. We should recruit and support more great teachers for our kids.

And -- And we have to make college affordable for every American. No hardworking student should be stuck in the red. We’ve already reduced student loan payments by -- to 10 percent of a borrower’s income, and that’s good. But now we’ve actually got to cut the cost of college. Providing two years of community college at no cost for every responsible student is one of the best ways to do that, and I’m going to keep fighting to get that started this year. It’s the right thing to do.

But a great education isn’t all we need in this new economy. We also need benefits and protections that provide a basic measure of security. It’s not too much of a stretch to say that some of the only people in America who are going to work the same job in the same place with a health and a retirement package for 30 years are sitting in this chamber. For everyone else, especially folks in their 40s and 50s, saving for retirement or bouncing back from job loss has gotten a lot tougher. Americans understand that at some point in their careers, in this new economy, they may have to retool; they may have to retrain; but they shouldn’t loose what they’ve already worked so hard to build in the process.

That’s why Social Security and Medicare are more important than ever. We shouldn’t weaken them, we should strengthen them. And for Americans short of retirement, basic benefits should be just as mobile as everything else is today. That, by the way, is what the Affordable Care Act is all about. It’s about filling the gaps in employer-based care so that when you lose a job, or you go back to school, or you strike out and launch that new business you’ll still have coverage. Nearly 18 million people have gained coverage so far, and in the process -- in the process health care inflation has slowed, our businesses have created jobs every single month since it became law.

Now, I’m guessing we won’t agree on health care anytime soon. But -- (a little applause right there; just a guess) -- But there should be other ways parties can work together improve economic security. Say a hardworking American loses his job, we shouldn’t just make sure that he can get unemployment insurance. We should make sure that program encourages him to retrain for a business that’s ready to hire him. If that new job doesn’t pay as much, there should be a system of wage insurance in place so that he can still pay his bills. And even if he’s going from job to job, he should still be able to save for retirement and take his savings with him. That’s the way we make the new economy work better for everybody.

I also know Speaker Ryan has talked about his interest in tackling poverty. America is about giving everybody willing to work a chance, a hand up, and I’d welcome a serious discussion about strategies we can all support -- like expanding tax cuts for low-income workers who don’t have children.

But there are some areas where we just have to be honest: It has been more difficult to find agreement over the last seven years, and a lot of them fall under the category of what role the government should play in making sure the system’s not rigged in favor of the wealthiest and biggest corporations. And it’s an honest disagreement. And the American people have a choice to make. I believe a thriving private sector is the lifeblood of our economy. I think there are outdated regulations that need to be changed. There is red tape that needs to be cut.

(There you go. Yeah. See?)

But after years now of record corporate profits, working families won’t get more opportunity or bigger paychecks just by letting big banks or big oil or hedge funds make their own rules at everybody else’s expense. The middle -- Middle-class families are not going to feel more secure because we allowed attacks on collect -- collective bargaining to go unanswered. Food Stamp recipients did not cause the financial crisis -- recklessness on Wall Street did. Immigrants aren’t the principal reason wages haven’t gone up. Those decisions are made in the boardrooms that all too often put quarterly earnings over long-term returns. It’s sure not the average family watching tonight that avoids paying taxes through offshore accounts.

The point is, I believe, that in this new economy, workers and start-ups and small businesses need more of a voice, not less. The rules should work for them. And I’m not alone in this. This year, I plan to lift up the many businesses who’ve figured out that doing right by their workers or their customers or their communities ends up being good for their shareholders. And I want to spread those best practices across America. That’s part of a brighter future. In fact, it turns out many of our best corporate citizens are also our most creative.

And this brings me to the second big question we as a country have to answer: How do we reignite that spirit of innovation to meet our biggest challenges?

Sixty years ago, when the Russians beat us into space, we didn’t deny Sputnik was up there. We didn’t argue about the science or shrink our research and development budget. We built a space program almost overnight, and twelve years later we were walking on the moon. Now, that spirit of discovery is in our DNA. America is Thomas Edison and the Wright Brothers and George Washington Carver. America is Grace Hopper and Katherine Johnson and Sally Ride. America is every immigrant and entrepreneur from Boston to Austin to Silicon Valley racing to shape a better future.

That’s who we are. And over the past seven years, we’ve nurtured that spirit. We’ve protected an open Internet, and taken bold new steps to get more students and low-income Americans online. We’ve launched next-generation manufacturing hubs and online tools that give an entrepreneur everything he or she needs to start a business in a single day. But we can do so much more.

You know, last year Vice President Biden said that, with a new moonshot, America can cure cancer. Last month, he worked with this Congress to give scientists at the National Institutes of Health the strongest resources that they’ve had in over a decade. Well, so -- so tonight, I’m announcing a new national effort to get it done. And because he’s gone to the mat for all of us on so many issues over the past 40 years, I’m putting Joe in charge of mission control. For the loved ones we’ve all lost, for the families that we can still save, let’s make America the country that cures cancer once and for all.

(What do you think, Joe? Let’s make it happen.)

And medical research is critical. We need the same level of commitment when it comes to developing clean energy sources. Look, if anybody still wants to dispute the science around climate change, have at it. You will be pretty lonely because you’ll be debating our military2, most of America’s business leaders, the majority of the American people, almost the entire scientific community,

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and 200 nations around the world who agree it’s a problem and intend to solve it.

But -- But even if -- even if the planet wasn’t at stake, even if 2014 wasn’t the warmest year on record until 2015 turned out to be even hotter -- why would we want to pass up the chance for American businesses to produce and sell the energy of the future?

Listen, seven years ago, we made the single biggest investment in clean energy in our history. Here are the results: In fields from Iowa to Texas wind power is now cheaper than dirtier, conventional power. On rooftops from Arizona to New York solar is saving Americans tens of millions of dollars a year on their energy bills and employs more Americans than coal, in jobs that pay better than average.

We’re taking steps to give homeowners the freedom to generate and store their own energy -- something, by the way, that environmentalists and Tea Partiers have teamed up to support. And meanwhile, we’ve cut our imports of foreign oil by nearly 60 percent and cut carbon pollution more than any other country on Earth. Gas under two bucks a gallon ain’t bad either.

Now we’ve got to accelerate the transition away from old, dirtier energy sources. Rather than subsidize the past, we should invest in the future, especially in communities that rely on fossil fuels. We do them no favor when we don’t show them where the trends are going. And that’s why I’m going to push to change the way we manage our oil and coal resources so that they better reflect the costs they impose on taxpayers and our planet. And that way we put money back into those communities and put tens of thousands of Americans to work building a 21st century transportation system.

Now, none of this is going to happen overnight. And yes, there are plenty of entrenched interests who want to protect the status quo. But the jobs we’ll create, the money we’ll save, the planet we’ll preserve -- that is the kind of future our kids and our grandkids deserve; and it’s within our grasp.

Now, climate change is just one of many issues where our security is linked to the rest of the world, and that’s why the third big question that we have to answer together is how to keep America safe and strong without either isolating ourselves or trying to nation-build everywhere there’s a problem.

I told you earlier all the talk of America’s economic decline is political hot air. Well so is all the rhetoric you hear about our enemies getting stronger and America getting weaker. Let me -- Let me tell you something: The United States of America is the most powerful nation on Earth -- period. Period. It’s not even close. It’s not even close. It’s not even close. We spend more on our military than the next eight nations combined. Our troops are the finest fighting force in the history of the world. No nation attacks us directly or our allies because they know that’s the path to ruin. Surveys show our standing around the world is higher than when I was elected to this office. And when it comes to every important international issue, people of the world do not look to Beijing or Moscow to lead. They call us.

So it’s useful to level set here because when we don’t we don’t make good decisions. Now, as someone who begins every day with an intelligence briefing, I know this is a dangerous time. But that’s not primarily because of some looming superpower out there, and it’s certainly not because of diminished American strength.

In today’s world, we’re threatened less by evil empires and more by failing states. The Middle East is going through a transformation that will play out for a generation, rooted in conflicts that date back millennia. Economic headwinds are blowing in from a Chinese economy that is in significant transition. Even as their economy severely contracts, Russia is pouring resources in to prop up Ukraine and Syria -- client states that they saw slipping away from their orbit. And the international system we built after World War II is now struggling to keep pace with this new reality.

It’s up to us, the United States of America, to help remake that system; and to do that well it means that we’ve got to set priorities. Priority number one is protecting the American people and going after terrorist networks. Both Al Qaida and now ISIL pose a direct threat to our people, because in today’s world even a handful of terrorists who place no value on human life, including their own, can do a lot of damage. They use the Internet to poison the minds of individuals inside our country. Their actions undermine and destabilize our allies. We have to take them out.

But as we focus on destroying ISIL, over-the-top claims that this is World War III just play into their hands. Masses of fighters on the back of pickup trucks, twisted souls plotting in apartments or garages -- they pose an enormous danger to civilians. They have to be stopped. But they do not threaten our national existence. That -- That is the story ISIL wants to tell. That’s the kind of propaganda they use to recruit. We don’t need to build them up to show that we’re serious; and we sure don’t need to push away vital allies in this fight by echoing the lie that ISIL is somehow representative of one of the world’s largest religions. We just need to call them what they are: killers and fanatics who have to be rooted out, hunted down, and destroyed.

And that’s exactly what we’re doing. For more than a year, America has led a coalition of more than 60 countries to cut off ISIL’s financing, disrupt their plots, stop the flow of terrorist fighters, and stamp out their vicious ideology. With nearly 10,000 air strikes, we're taking out their leadership, their oil, their training camps, their vicious ideology. With nearly 10,000 air strikes, we’re taking out their leadership, their oil, their training camps, their weapons. We’re training, arming and supporting forces who are steadily reclaiming territory in Iraq and Syria.

If this Congress is serious about winning this war and wants to send a message to our troops and the world, authorize the use of military force against ISIL. Take a vote. Take a vote. But the American people should know that, with or without Congressional action, ISIL will learn the same lessons as terrorists before them. If you doubt America’s commitment -- or mine -- to see that justice is done, just ask Osama bin Laden. Ask -- Ask the leader of Al Qaida in Yemen, who was taken out last year, or the perpetrator of the Benghazi attacks, who sits in a prison cell. When you come after Americans, we go after you. And it may take time, but we have long memories, and our reach has no limits.

Our foreign policy has to be focused on the threat from ISIL and Al Qaida, but it can’t stop there. For even without ISIL, even without Al Qaida, instability will continue for decades in many parts of the world -- in the Middle East, in Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan, in parts of Central America and Africa and Asia. Some of these places may become safe havens for new terrorist networks. Others will just fall victim to ethnic conflict or famine, feeding the next wave of refugees. The world will look to us to help solve these problems and our answer needs to be more than tough talk or calls to carpet-bomb civilians. That may work as a TV sound bite but it doesn’t pass muster on the world stage.

We also can’t try to take over and rebuild every country that falls into crisis -- even if it’s done with the best of intentions. That’s not leadership; that’s a recipe for quagmire, spilling American blood and treasure that ultimately will weaken us. It’s the lesson of Vietnam. It’s the lesson of Iraq -- and we should have learned it by now.

Now, fortunately there is a smarter approach -- a patient and disciplined strategy that uses every element of our national power. It says America will always act, alone if necessary, to protect our people and our allies; but on issues of global concern, we will mobilize the world to work with us -- and make sure other countries pull their own weight. That’s our approach to conflicts like Syria, where we’re partnering with local forces and leading international efforts to help that broken society pursue a lasting peace.

That’s why we built a global coalition, with sanctions and principled diplomacy, to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran; and as we speak, Iran has rolled back its nuclear program, shipped out its uranium stockpile, and the world has avoided another war.

That’s how -- That’s how we stopped the spread of Ebola in West Africa. Our military, our doctors, our development workers -- they were heroic. They set up the platform that then allowed other countries to join in behind us and stamp out that epidemic. Hundreds of thousands -- maybe [a] couple million -- lives were saved.

That’s how we forged a Trans-Pacific Partnership to open markets, and protect workers and the environment, and advance American leadership in Asia. It cuts 18,000 taxes on products made in America, which will then support more good jobs here in America. With TPP, China does not set the rules in that region -- we do. You want to show our strength in this new century? Approve this agreement. Give us the tools to enforce it. It’s the right thing to do.

Let me give you another example: Fifty years of isolating Cuba had failed to promote democracy. It set us back in Latin America. That’s why we restored diplomatic relations, opened the door to travel and commerce, positioned ourselves to improve the lives of the Cuban people. So if you want to consolidate our leadership and credibility in the hemisphere, recognize that the Cold War is over. Lift the embargo.

The -- The point is American leadership in the 21st century is not a choice between ignoring the rest of the world, except when we kill terrorists, or, occupying and rebuilding whatever society is unraveling. Leadership means a wise application of military power and rallying the world behind causes that are right. It means seeing our foreign assistance as a part of our national security -- not something separate, not charity. When we lead nearly 200 nations to the most ambitious agreement in history to fight climate change, yes, that helps vulnerable countries, but it also protects our kids. When we help Ukraine defend its democracy, or Colombia resolve a decades-long war, that strengthens the international order we depend on. When we help African countries feed their people and care for the sick, it’s the right thing to do, and it prevents the next pandemic from reaching our shores.

You know, right now we're on track to end the scourge of HIV/AIDS -- that’s within our grasp. And we have the chance to accomplish the same thing with malaria -- something I’ll be pushing this Congress to fund this year. That’s American strength. That’s American leadership. And that kind of leadership depends on the power of our example. That's why I will keep working to shut down the prison at Guantanamo. It it expensive; it is unnecessary; and it only serves as a recruitment brochure for our enemies. There’s a better way.

And that’s why we need to reject any politics, any politics that targets people because of race or religion. Alright, let me just say this: This is not a matter of political correctness. This is a matter of understanding just what it is that makes us strong. The world respects us not just for our arsenal; it respects us for our diversity and our openness and the way we respect every faith.

His Holiness, Pope Francis, told this body from the very spot that I’m standing on tonight -- that "to imitate the hatred and violence of tyrants and murderers is the best way to take their place." When politicians insult Muslims, whether abroad, or fellow citizens; when a mosque is vandalized, or a kid is called names, that doesn’t make us safer. That’s not telling it what -- telling it like it is: It’s just wrong. It diminishes us in the eyes of the world. It makes it harder to achieve our goals. It betrays who we are as a country.

"We the People": Our Constitution begins with those three simple words -- words we’ve come to recognize mean all the people, not just some; words that insist we rise and fall together; that that’s how we might perfect our union.

And that brings me to the fourth, and maybe most important thing, that I want to say tonight. The future we want, all of us want -- opportunity and security for our families, a rising standard of living, a sustainable, peaceful planet for our kids -- all that is within our reach. But it will only happen if we work together. It will only happen if we can have rational, constructive debates. It will only happen if we fix our politics.

A better politics doesn’t mean we have to agree on everything. This is a big country -- different regions, different attitudes, different interests. That’s one of our strengths, too. Our Founders distributed power between states and branches of government, and expected us to argue, just as they did, fiercely, over the size and shape of government, over commerce and foreign relations, over the meaning of liberty and the imperatives of security.

But democracy does require basic bonds of trust between its citizens. It doesn’t -- It doesn’t work if we think the people who disagree with us are all motivated by malice. It doesn’t work if we think that our political opponents are unpatriotic or trying to weaken America. Democracy grinds to a halt without a willingness to compromise, or when even basic facts are contested, or when we listen only to those who agree with us. Our public life withers when only the most extreme voices get all the attention. And most of all, democracy breaks down when the average person feels their voice doesn’t matter -- that the system is rigged in favor of the rich or the powerful or some special interest.

Too many Americans feel that way right now. It’s one of the few regrets of my presidency -- that the rancor and suspicion between the parties has gotten worse instead of better. I have no doubt a -- a President with the gifts of Lincoln or Roosevelt might have better bridged the divide. And I guarantee I’ll keep trying to be better so long as I hold this office.

But my fellow Americans, this cannot be my task -- or any President’s -- alone. There are a whole lot of folks in this chamber -- good people -- who -- who would like to see more cooperation, would like to see a more elevated debate in Washington but feel trapped by the imperatives of getting elected, by the noise coming out of your base. I know -- you’ve told me. It’s the worst-kept secret in Washington. And a lot of you aren’t enjoying being trapped in that kind of rancor.

But that means if we want a better politics -- and I’m addressing the American people now -- if we want a better politics, it’s not enough just to change a congressman or change a senator or even change a President. We have to change the system to reflect our better selves.

I think we’ve got to end the practice of drawing our congressional districts so that politicians can pick their voters and not the other way around.

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Let a bipartisan group do it. I believe we’ve got to reduce the influence of money in our politics, so that a handful of families or hidden interests can’t bankroll our elections. And if our existing approach to campaign finance reform can’t pass muster in the courts, we need to work together to find a real solution, because it’s a problem. And most of you don’t like raising money. I know. I’ve done it. We’ve got to make it easier to vote, not harder. We need to modernize it for the way we live now.

This is America! We want to make it easier for people to participate. And over the course of this year, I intend to travel the country to push for reforms that do just that. But I can’t do these things on my own. Changes in our political process -- in not just who gets elected, but how they get elected -- that will only happen when the American people demand it. It depends on you. That’s what’s meant by a government of, by, and for the people.

What I’m suggesting is hard. It’s a -- a lot easier to be cynical, to accept that change is not possible, and politics is hopeless, and the problem is, all the folks who are elected don’t care, and to believe that our voices and our actions don’t matter. But if we give up now, then we forsake a better future. Those with money and power will gain greater control over the decisions that could send a young soldier to war, or allow another economic disaster, or roll back the equal rights and voting rights that generations of Americans have fought, even died, to secure.

And then, as frustration grows, there will be voices urging us to fall back into our respective tribes, to scapegoat fellow citizens who don’t look like us, or pray like us, or vote like we do, or share the same background. We can’t afford to go down that path. It won’t deliver the economy we want. It will not produce the security we want. But most of all, it contradicts everything that makes us the envy of the world.

So my fellow Americans, whatever you may believe, whether you prefer one party or no party, whether you supported my agenda or fought as hard as you could against it, our collective futures depends on your willingness to uphold your duties as a citizen -- to vote, to speak out, to stand up for others, especially the weak, especially the vulnerable, knowing that each of us is only here because somebody somewhere stood up for us.

We need every American to stay active in our public life, and not just during election time, so that our public life reflects the goodness and the decency that I see in the American people every single day. It is not easy. Our brand of democracy is hard.

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But I can promise that, a little over a year from now, when I no longer hold this office, I will be right there with you as a citizen -- inspired by those voices of fairness and vision, of grit and good humor and kindness, that have helped America travel so far; voices that help us see ourselves not first and foremost as black or white or Asian or Latino; not as gay or straight, immigrant or native born; not Democrat or Republican; but as Americans first, bound by a common creed; voices Dr. King believed would have the final word -- voices of unarmed truth and unconditional love.

And they’re out there, those voices. They don’t get a lot of attention. They don’t seek a lot of fanfare. But they’re busy doing the work this country needs doing. I see them everywhere I travel in this incredible country of ours. I see you, the American people. And in your daily acts of citizenship, I see our future unfolding.

I see it in the worker on the assembly line who clocked extra shifts to keep his company open, and the boss who pays him higher wages instead of laying him off.

I see it in the Dreamer who stays up late at night to finish her science project, and the teacher who comes in early, maybe with some extra supplies that she bought, because she knows that that young girl might someday cure a disease.

I see it in the American who’s served his time, made bad mistakes as a child, but now is dreaming of starting over. And I see it in the business owner who gives him that second chance; the protester determined to prove that justice matters; and the young cop walking the beat, treating everybody with respect, doing the brave, quiet work of keeping us safe.

I see it in the soldier who gives almost everything to save his brothers, the nurse who tends to him until he can run a marathon, the community that lines up to cheer him on.

It’s the son who finds the courage to come out as who he is, and the father whose love for that son overrides everything he’s been taught.

I see it in the elderly woman who will wait in line to cast her vote as long as she has to; the new citizen who casts his vote for the first time; the volunteers at the polls who believe every vote should count, because each of them, in different ways, know how much that precious right is worth.

That’s the America I know. That’s the country we love -- clear-eyed, big-hearted, undaunted by challenge, optimistic that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word.

That’s what makes me so hopeful about our future.

I believe in change because I believe in you, the American people.

And that’s why I stand here, as confident as I have ever been, that the state of our Union is strong.

Thank you. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# On Smart Diplomacy with Iran and Release of U.S. Detainees

Good morning. This is a good day, because, once again, we’re seeing what’s possible with strong American diplomacy.

As I said in my State of the Union address, ensuring the security of the United States and the safety of our people demands a smart, patient and disciplined approach to the world. That includes our diplomacy with the Islamic Republic of Iran. For decades, our differences with Iran meant that our governments almost never spoke to each other. Ultimately, that did not advance America’s interests. Over the years, Iran moved closer and closer to having the ability to build a nuclear weapon. But from Presidents Franklin Roosevelt to John F. Kennedy to Ronald Reagan, the United States has never been afraid to pursue diplomacy with our adversaries. And as President, I decided that a strong, confident America could advance our national security by engaging directly with the Iranian government.

We’ve seen the results. Under the nuclear deal that we, our allies and partners reached with Iran last year, Iran will not get its hands on a nuclear bomb. The region, the United States, and the world will be more secure. As I’ve said many times, the nuclear deal was never intended to resolve all of our differences with Iran. But still, engaging directly with the Iranian government on a sustained basis, for the first time in decades, has created a unique opportunity -- a window -- to try to resolve important issues. And today, I can report progress on a number of fronts.

First, yesterday marked a milestone in preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. Iran has now fulfilled key commitments under the nuclear deal. And I want to take a moment to explain why this is so important.

Over more than a decade, Iran had moved ahead with its nuclear program, and, before the deal, it had installed nearly 20,000 centrifuges that can enrich uranium for a nuclear bomb. Today, Iran has removed two-thirds of those machines. Before the deal, Iran was steadily increasing its stockpile of enriched uranium -- enough for up to 10 nuclear bombs. Today, more than 98 percent of that stockpile has been shipped out of Iran -- meaning Iran now doesn’t have enough material for even one bomb. Before, Iran was nearing completion of a new reactor capable of producing plutonium for a bomb. Today, the core of that reactor has been pulled out and filled with concrete so it cannot be used again.

Before the deal, the world had relatively little visibility into Iran’s nuclear program. Today, international inspectors are on the ground, and Iran is being subjected to the most comprehensive, intrusive inspection regime ever negotiated to monitor a nuclear program. Inspectors will monitor Iran’s key nuclear facilities 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. For decades to come, inspectors will have access to Iran’s entire nuclear supply chain. In other words, if Iran tries to cheat -- if they try to build a bomb covertly -- we will catch them.

So the bottom line is this. Whereas Iran was steadily expanding its nuclear program, we have now cut off every single path that Iran could have used to build a bomb. Whereas it would have taken Iran two to three months to break out with enough material to rush to a bomb, we’ve now extended that breakout time to a year -- and with the world’s unprecedented inspections and access to Iran’s program, we’ll know if Iran ever tries to break out.

Now that Iran’s actions have been verified, it can begin to receive relief from certain nuclear sanctions and gain access to its own money that had been frozen. And perhaps most important of all, we’ve achieved this historic progress through diplomacy, without resorting to another war in the Middle East.

I want to also point out that by working with Iran on this nuclear deal, we were better able to address other issues. When our sailors in the Persian Gulf accidentally strayed into Iranian waters that could have sparked a major international incident. Some folks here in Washington rushed to declare that it was the start of another hostage crisis. Instead, we worked directly with the Iranian government and secured the release of our sailors in less than 24 hours.

This brings me to a second major development -- several Americans unjustly detained by Iran are finally coming home. In some cases, these Americans faced years of continued detention. And I’ve met with some of their families. I’ve seen their anguish, how they ache for their sons and husbands. I gave these families my word -- I made a vow -- that we would do everything in our power to win the release of their loved ones. And we have been tireless. On the sidelines of the nuclear negotiations, our diplomats at the highest level, including Secretary Kerry, used every meeting to push Iran to release our Americans. I did so myself, in my conversation with President Rouhani. After the nuclear deal was completed, the discussions between our governments accelerated. Yesterday, these families finally got the news that they have been waiting for.

Jason Rezaian is coming home. A courageous journalist for The Washington Post, who wrote about the daily lives and hopes of the Iranian people, he’s been held for a year and a half. He embodies the brave spirit that gives life to the freedom of the press. Jason has already been reunited with his wife and mom.

Pastor Saeed Abedini is coming home. Held for three and half years, his unyielding faith has inspired people around the world in the global fight to uphold freedom of religion. Now, Pastor Abedini will return to his church and community in Idaho.

Amir Hekmati is coming home. A former sergeant in the Marine Corps, he’s been held for four and a half years. Today, his parents and sisters are giving thanks in Michigan.

Two other Americans unjustly detained by Iran have also been released -- Nosratollah Khosravi-Roodsari and Matthew Trevithick, an Iranian -- who was in Iran as a student. Their cases were largely unknown to the world. But when Americans are freed and reunited with their families, that’s something that we can all celebrate.

So I want to thank my national security team -- especially Secretary Kerry; Susan Rice, my National Security Advisor; Brett McGurk; Avril Haines; Ben Rhodes -- our whole team worked tirelessly to bring our Americans home, to get this work done. And I want to thank the Swiss government, which represents our interests in Iran, for their critical assistance.

And meanwhile, Iran has agreed to deepen our coordination as we work to locate Robert Levinson -- missing from Iran for more than eight years. Even as we rejoice in the safe return of others, we will never forget about Bob. Each and every day, but especially today, our hearts are with the Levinson family, and we will not rest until their family is whole again.

In a reciprocal humanitarian gesture, six Iranian–Americans and one Iranian serving sentences or awaiting trial in the United States are being granted clemency. These individuals were not charged with terrorism or any violent offenses. They’re civilians, and their release is a one-time gesture to Iran given the unique opportunity offered by this moment and the larger circumstances at play. And it reflects our willingness to engage with Iran to advance our mutual interests, even as we ensure the national security of the United States.

So, nuclear deal implemented. American families reunited. The third piece of this work that we got done this weekend involved the United States and Iran resolving a financial dispute that dated back more than three decades. Since 1981, after our nations severed diplomatic relations, we’ve worked through a international tribunal to resolve various claims between our countries. The United States and Iran are now settling a longstanding Iranian government claim against the United States government. Iran will be returned its own funds, including appropriate interest, but much less than the amount Iran sought.

For the United States, this settlement could save us billions of dollars that could have been pursued by Iran. So there was no benefit to the United States in dragging this out. With the nuclear deal done, prisoners released, the time was right to resolve this dispute as well.

Of course, even as we implement the nuclear deal and welcome our Americans home, we recognize that there remain profound differences between the United States and Iran. We remain steadfast in opposing Iran’s destabilizing behavior elsewhere, including its threats against Israel and our Gulf partners, and its support for violent proxies in places like Syria and Yemen. We still have sanctions on Iran for its violations of human rights, for its support of terrorism, and for its ballistic missile program. And we will continue to enforce these sanctions, vigorously. Iran’s recent missile test, for example, was a violation of its international obligations. And as a result, the United States is imposing sanctions on individuals and companies working to advance Iran’s ballistic missile program. And we are going to remain vigilant about it. We're not going to waver in the defense of our security or that of our allies and partners.

But I do want to once again speak directly to the Iranian people. Yours is a great civilization, with a vibrant culture that has so much to contribute to the world -- in commerce, and in science and the arts. For decades, your government’s threats and actions to destabilize your region have isolated Iran from much of the world. And now our governments are talking with one another. Following the nuclear deal, you -- especially young Iranians -- have the opportunity to begin building new ties with the world. We have a rare chance to pursue a new path -- a different, better future that delivers progress for both our peoples and the wider world. That’s the opportunity before the Iranian people. We need to take advantage of that.

And to my fellow Americans, today, we’re united in welcoming home sons and husbands and brothers who, in lonely prison cells, have endured an absolute nightmare. But they never gave in and they never gave up. At long last, they can stand tall and breathe deep the fresh air of freedom.

As a nation, we face real challenges, around the world and here at home. Many of them will not be resolved quickly or easily. But today’s progress -- Americans coming home, an Iran that has rolled back its nuclear program and accepted unprecedented monitoring of that program -- these things are a reminder of what we can achieve when we lead with strength and with wisdom; with courage and resolve and patience. America can do -- and has done -- big things when we work together. We can leave this world and make it safer and more secure for our children and our grandchildren for generations to come.

I want to thank once again Secretary Kerry; our entire national security team, led by Susan Rice. I'm grateful for all the assistance that we received from our allies and partners. And I am hopeful that this signals the opportunity at least for Iran to work more cooperatively with nations around the world to advance their interests and the interests of people who are looking for peace and security for their families.

Thank you so much.

God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Righteous Among the Nations Award Ceremony Address

Good evening. Erev Tov.

The Talmud teaches that if a person destroys one life, it is as if they’ve destroyed an entire world, and if a person saves one life, it is as if they’ve saved an entire world.

What an extraordinary honor to be with you as we honor four Righteous individuals whose courage is measured in the lives they saved -- one child, one refugee, one comrade at a time -- and who, in so doing, helped save our world.

I deliver a lot of speeches. Very rarely am I so humbled by the eloquence that has preceded me -- not just in words, but in the acts that we commemorate today.

To my dear friend, Steven Spielberg, thanks for your moving and generous words. You spoke of the importance of finding your voice and using it for good, and I know that your work -- whether a masterpiece like Schindler’s List or the stories that you have so persistently preserved through the Shoah Foundation -- is deeply personal. Steven once said that the story of the Shoah is the story that he was born to tell, rooted in those childhood memories that he just gave you a taste of -- the relatives lost, the stories you heard from your family. And, Steven, the whole world is grateful that you found your voice, and for the good that you’ve done with that voice. It will endure for generations. And so, on behalf of all of us, we are grateful.

To Ambassador and Mrs. Dermer, to Nina Totenberg, our friends from the Israeli Embassy and Yad Vashem -- thank you so much for hosting us today.

Let me just add tonight that our thoughts are also with former Israeli President Shimon Peres. I had the opportunity to speak with Shimon earlier this week. I thanked him for his friendship, which has always meant so much to me, personally. And I thanked him, once again, for the shining example of his leadership. With his extraordinary life -- in the Haganah, and as a founding father of the State of Israel, a statesman who has never given up on peace, an embodiment of the great alliance between our two nations -- Shimon inspires us all. And this evening we speak for all of us -- Israelis, Americans, people around the world -- in wishing him a full and speedy recovery.

I also want to just note the presence of two of our outstanding senators from the great state of Tennessee. I know that it’s rare where you have such a extraordinary native of the state being honored in this way, but I think it’s also worth noting that this represents the bipartisan and steadfast support of members of Congress for the security and prosperity of the state of Israel. And they act on that every single day.

To the survivors, families of the Righteous and those they saved, to all the distinguished guests: We gather to honor the newest of the Righteous Among the Nations and make real the call to “never forget,” not just on this day of remembrance, but for all days and for all time.

And at moments like this, as I listened to the extraordinary stories of the four that we honor, memories come rushing back of the times that I’ve encountered the history and the horror of the Shoah -- growing up, hearing the stories of my great uncle who helped liberate Ohrdruf, part of Buchenwald, and who returned home so shaken by the suffering that he had seen that my grandmother would tell me he did not speak to anyone for six months, just went up in his attic, couldn’t fully absorb the horror that he had witnessed.

Then having the opportunity to go to Buchenwald myself with my dear friend, Elie Wiesel, and seeing the ovens, the Little Camp where he was held as a boy. Standing with survivors in the Old Warsaw Ghetto. And then the extraordinary honor of walking through Yad Vashem with Rabbi Lau and seeing the faces and hearing the voices of the lost, of blessed memory.

And then taking my own daughters to visit the Holocaust Museum -- because our children must know this chapter of our history, and that we must never repeat it.

The four lives we honor tonight make a claim on our conscience, as well as our moral imagination. We hear their stories, and we are forced to ask ourselves, under the same circumstances, how would we act? How would we answer God’s question, where are you? Would we show the love of Walery and Maryla Zbijewski? There, in Warsaw, they could have been shot for opening their home to a five-year-old girl. Yet they cared for her like one of their own, gave her safety and shelter and moments of warmth, of family and music -- a shield from the madness outside until her mother could return.

Would we have the extraordinary compassion of Lois Gunden? She wrote that she simply hoped to “add just another ray of love to the lives of these youngsters” who had already endured so much. And by housing and feeding as many Jewish children as she could, her ray of love always shone through, and still burns within the families of those she saved.

Would we have the courage of Master Sergeant Roddie Edmonds? I know your dad said he was just doing his job, but he went above and beyond the call of duty, and so did all those who joined in that line. Faced with a choice of giving up his fellow soldiers or saving his own life, Roddie looked evil in the eye and dared a Nazi to shoot. His moral compass never wavered. He was true to his faith, and he saved some 200 Jewish American soldiers as a consequence. It’s an instructive lesson, by the way, for those of us Christians. I cannot imagine a greater expression of Christianity than to say, I, too, am a Jew.

And I ask these questions because, even as the Holocaust is unique, a crime without parallel in history, the seeds of hate that gave rise to the Shoah -- the ignorance that conspires with arrogance, the indifference that betrays compassion -- those seeds have always been with us. They have found root across cultures, and across faiths, and across generations. The Ambassador mentioned the story of Cain and Abel. It's deep within us. Too often, especially in times of change, especially in times of anxiety and uncertainty, we are too willing to give into a base desire to find someone else -- someone different -- to blame for our struggles.

Here, tonight, we must confront the reality that around the world, anti-Semitism is on the rise. We cannot deny it. When we see some Jews leaving major European cities -- where their families have lived for generations -- because they no longer feel safe; when Jewish centers are targeted from Mumbai to Overland Park, Kansas; when swastikas appear on college campuses -- when we see all that and more, we must not be silent.

An attack on any faith is an attack on all of our faiths. It is an attack on that Golden Rule at the heart of so many faiths -- that we ought to do unto others as we would have done to us. For Americans, in particular, we should understand that it’s an attack on our diversity, on the very idea that people of different backgrounds can live together and thrive together. Which is why -- your father was right -- we are all Jews. Because anti-Semitism is a distillation, an expression of an evil that runs through so much of human history, and if we do not answer that, we do not answer any other form of evil. When any Jew anywhere is targeted just for being Jewish, we all have to respond as Roddie Edmonds did -- “We are all Jews.”

We know that we’ll never be able to wipe out hatred from every single mind. We won't entirely erase the scourge of anti-Semitism. But like the Righteous, we must do everything we can. All of us have a responsibility.

Certainly government has a responsibility. As President, I’ve made sure that the United States is leading the global fight against anti-Semitism. And it’s why, with Israel and countries around the world, we organized the first United Nations General Assembly meeting on anti-Semitism. It’s why we’ve urged other nations to dedicate a special envoy to this threat, as we have.

It’s why, when a statue of an anti-Semitic leader from World War II was planned in Hungary, we led the charge to convince their government to reverse course. This was not a side note to our relations with Hungary, this was central to maintaining a good relationship with the United States, and we let them know.

It’s why, when voices around the world veer from criticism of a particular Israeli policy to an unjust denial of Israel’s right to exist, when Israel faces terrorism, we stand up forcefully and proudly in defense of our ally, in defense of our friend, in defense of the Jewish State of Israel. America’s commitment to Israel’s security remains, now and forever, unshakeable. And I've said this before -- it would be a fundamental moral failing if America broke that bond.

All nations that prize diversity and tolerance and pluralism must speak out whenever and wherever Jews and other religious minorities are attacked. In recent years, we’ve seen leaders in France, Germany, and Great Britain stand strongly against anti-Semitism. In Israel, President Rivlin has spoken eloquently about the need for tolerance and acceptance among all Israelis -- Jewish and Arab.

Meanwhile, governments have an obligation to care for the survivors of the Shoah -- because no one who endured that horror should have to scrape by in their golden years. So, with our White House initiative, we’re working to improve care for Holocaust survivors in need here in the United States. And with the compensation fund we helped create, claims are finally being paid that even more Jews deported from France during the Holocaust, including survivors here in America, can benefit from.

But the task before us does not fall on government alone. Every faith community has a responsibility. Just as all religions speak out against those who try to twist their faith to justify terrorism and violence, just as all faiths need to speak out when interpretations of their religion veer in an ugly direction, so, too, must they speak out against those who use their faith to justify bias against Jews, or people of any faith.

We know that there were Muslims -- from Albanians to Arabs -- who protected Jews from Nazis. In Morocco, leaders from Muslim-majority countries around the world just held a summit on protecting religious minorities, including Jews and Christians. His Holiness Pope Francis has spoken forcefully against anti-Semitism, saying, “Every human being, as a creature of God, is our brother, regardless of his origins or religious beliefs.” These are the voices we must heed. And anyone who claims to be a religious leader must project that vision, that truth.

And finally, all of us have a responsibility to speak out, and to teach what’s right to our children, and to examine our own hearts. That’s the lesson of the Righteous we honor today -- the lesson of the Holocaust itself: Where are you? Who are you? That's the question that the Holocaust poses to us. We have to consider even in moments of peril, even when we might fear for our own lives, the fact that none of us are powerless. We always have a choice. And today, for most of us, standing up against intolerance doesn’t require the same risks that those we honor today took. It doesn’t require imprisonment or that we face down the barrel of a gun. It does require us to speak out. It does require us to stand firm. We know that evil can flourish if we stand idly by.

And so we’re called to live in a way that shows that we’ve actually learned from our past. And that means rejecting indifference. It means cultivating a habit of empathy, and recognizing ourselves in one another; to make common cause with the outsider, the minority, whether that minority is Christian or Jew, whether it is Hindu or Muslim, or a nonbeliever; whether that minority is native born or immigrant; whether they’re Israeli or Palestinian.

It means taking a stand against bigotry in all its forms, and rejecting our darkest impulses and guarding against tribalism as the only value in our communities and in our politics. It means heeding the lesson repeated so often in the Torah: To welcome the stranger, for we were once strangers, too. That’s how we never forget -- not simply by keeping the lessons of the Shoah in our memories, but by living them in our actions. As the book of Deuteronomy teaches us, “Tzedek, Tzedek tirdof” -- “Justice, Justice you shall pursue.”

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I want to close with what I’m told is a Jewish legend. It’s said that within every generation there are 36 virtuous individuals -- individuals so honorable, so filled with compassion, that their good works sustain the very existence of the world. They are called Lamed Vovniks, and without them, society crumbles, according to the legend. We don’t know who they are. They’re entirely indistinguishable, ordinary people -- like Walery and Maryla and Lois and Roddie. You wouldn’t necessarily recognize them in a crowd. But I believe that their generation -- the generation of Schindler and Wallenberg and Karski -- demanded a lot more than 36. It called for more than 26,000 Righteous Among the Nations. It called for the millions of heroes who did not go quietly and who stood up and fought back.

And may we all strive to live up to their noble example, to be the Lamed Vovniks of our generation, to do our part to sustain each other and to embrace the humanity that we share, and in so doing, save our world. May the memory of the lost be a blessing. And as nations and individuals, may we always strive be among the Righteous.

God bless you.

God bless the United States of America.

And God bless the State of Israel.

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# Islamic Society of Baltimore Address

Well, good afternoon. And, Sabah, thank you for the wonderful introduction and for your example -- your devotion to your faith and your education, and your service to others. You’re an inspiration. You’re going to be a fantastic doctor. And I suspect, Sabah, your parents are here because they wanted to see you so -- where are Sabah’s parents? There you go. Good job, Mom. She did great, didn’t she? She was terrific.

To everyone here at the Islamic Society of Baltimore, thank you for welcoming me here today. I want to thank Muslim Americans leaders from across this city and this state, and some who traveled even from out of state to be here. I want to recognize Congressman John Sarbanes, who is here. As well as two other great leaders in Congress -- and proud Muslim Americans -- Congressman Keith Ellison from the great state of Minnesota -- and Congressman Andre Carson from the great state of Indiana.

This mosque, like so many in our country, is an all-American story. You’ve been part of this city for nearly half a century. You serve thousands of families -- some who’ve lived here for decades as well as immigrants from many countries who’ve worked to become proud American citizens.

Now, a lot of Americans have never visited a mosque. To the folks watching this today who haven’t -- think of your own church, or synagogue, or temple, and a mosque like this will be very familiar. This is where families come to worship and express their love for God and each other. There’s a school where teachers open young minds. Kids play baseball and football and basketball -- boys and girls -- I hear they’re pretty good. Cub Scouts, Girl Scouts meet, recite the Pledge of Allegiance here.

With interfaith dialogue, you build bridges of understanding with other faith communities -- Christians and Jews. There’s a health clinic that serves the needy, regardless of their faith. And members of this community are out in the broader community, working for social justice and urban development. As voters, you come here to meet candidates. As one of your members said, “just look at the way we live...we are true Americans."

So the first thing I want to say is two words that Muslim Americans don’t hear often enough -- and that is, thank you. Thank you for serving your community. Thank you for lifting up the lives of your neighbors, and for helping keep us strong and united as one American family. We are grateful for that.

Now, this brings me to the other reason I wanted to come here today. I know that in Muslim communities across our country, this is a time of concern and, frankly, a time of some fear. Like all Americans, you’re worried about the threat of terrorism. But on top of that, as Muslim Americans, you also have another concern -- and that is your entire community so often is targeted or blamed for the violent acts of the very few.

The Muslim American community remains relatively small --several million people in this country. And as a result, most Americans don’t necessarily know -- or at least don't know that they know -- a Muslim personally. And as a result, many only hear about Muslims and Islam from the news after an act of terrorism, or in distorted media portrayals in TV or film, all of which gives this hugely distorted impression.

And since 9/11, but more recently, since the attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, you’ve seen too often people conflating the horrific acts of terrorism with the beliefs of an entire faith. And of course, recently, we’ve heard inexcusable political rhetoric against Muslim Americans that has no place in our country.

No surprise, then, that threats and harassment of Muslim Americans have surged. Here at this mosque, twice last year, threats were made against your children. Around the country, women wearing the hijab -- just like Sabah -- have been targeted. We’ve seen children bullied. We’ve seen mosques vandalized. Sikh Americans and others who are perceived to be Muslims have been targeted, as well.

I just had a chance to meet with some extraordinary Muslim Americans from across the country who are doing all sorts of work. Some of them are doctors; some of them are community leaders; religious leaders. All of them were doing extraordinary work not just in the Muslim community but in the American community. And they’re proud of their work in business and education, and on behalf of social justice and the environment and education. I should point out they were all much younger than me -- which is happening more frequently these days. And you couldn’t help but be inspired, hearing about the extraordinary work that they’re doing. But you also could not help but be heartbroken to hear their worries and their anxieties.

Some of them are parents, and they talked about how their children were asking, are we going to be forced out of the country, or, are we going to be rounded up? Why do people treat us like that? Conversations that you shouldn’t have to have with children -- not in this country. Not at this moment.

And that’s an anxiety echoed in letters I get from Muslim Americans around the country. I’ve had people write to me and say, I feel like I’m a second-class citizen. I’ve had mothers write and say, “my heart cries every night," thinking about how her daughter might be treated at school. A girl from Ohio, 13 years old, told me, “I’m scared." A girl from Texas signed her letter “a confused 14-year-old trying to find her place in the world."

These are children just like mine. And the notion that they would be filled with doubt and questioning their places in this great country of ours at a time when they’ve got enough to worry about -- it’s hard being a teenager already -- that’s not who we are.

We’re one American family. And when any part of our family starts to feel separate or second-class or targeted, it tears at the very fabric of our nation.

It’s a challenge to our values -- and that means we have much work to do. We’ve got to tackle this head on. We have to be honest and clear about it. And we have to speak out. This is a moment when, as Americans, we have to truly listen to each other and learn from each other. And I believe it has to begin with a common understanding of some basic facts. And I express these facts, although they’d be obvious to many of the people in this place, because, unfortunately, it’s not facts that are communicated on a regular basis through our media.

So let’s start with this fact: For more than a thousand years, people have been drawn to Islam’s message of peace. And the very word itself, Islam, comes from salam -- peace. The standard greeting is as-salamu alaykum -- peace be upon you. And like so many faiths, Islam is rooted in a commitment to compassion and mercy and justice and charity. Whoever wants to enter paradise, the Prophet Muhammad taught, “let him treat people the way he would love to be treated." For Christians like myself, I’m assuming that sounds familiar.

The world’s 1.6 billion Muslims are as diverse as humanity itself. They are Arabs and Africans. They're from Latin America to Southeast Asia; Brazilians, Nigerians, Bangladeshis, Indonesians. They are white and brown and black. There’s a large African American Muslim community. That diversity is represented here today. A 14-year-old boy in Texas who’s Muslim spoke for many when he wrote to me and said, “We just want to live in peace."

Here’s another fact: Islam has always been part of America. Starting in colonial times, many of the slaves brought here from Africa were Muslim. And even in their bondage, some kept their faith alive. A few even won their freedom and became known to many Americans. And when enshrining the freedom of religion in our Constitution and our Bill of Rights, our Founders meant what they said when they said it applied to all religions.

Back then, Muslims were often called Mahometans. And Thomas Jefferson explained that the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom he wrote was designed to protect all faiths -- and I’m quoting Thomas Jefferson now -- “the Jew and the Gentile, the Christian and the Mahometan."

Jefferson and John Adams had their own copies of the Quran. Benjamin Franklin wrote that “even if the Mufti of Constantinople were to send a missionary to preach to us, he would find a pulpit at his service." So this is not a new thing.

Generations of Muslim Americans helped to build our nation. They were part of the flow of immigrants who became farmers and merchants. They built America’s first mosque, surprisingly enough, in North Dakota. America’s oldest surviving mosque is in Iowa. The first Islamic center in New York City was built in the 1890s. Muslim Americans worked on Henry Ford’s assembly line, cranking out cars. A Muslim American designed the skyscrapers of Chicago.

In 1957, when dedicating the Islamic center in Washington, D.C., President Eisenhower said, “I should like to assure you, my Islamic friends, that under the American Constitution...and in American hearts...this place of worship, is just as welcome...as any other religion."

And perhaps the most pertinent fact, Muslim Americans enrich our lives today in every way. They’re our neighbors, the teachers who inspire our children, the doctors who trust us with our health -- future doctors like Sabah. They’re scientists who win Nobel Prizes, young entrepreneurs who are creating new technologies that we use all the time. They’re the sports heroes we cheer for -— like Muhammad Ali and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Hakeem Olajuwon. And by the way, when Team USA marches into the next Olympics, one of the Americans waving the red, white and blue -- will a fencing champion, wearing her hijab, Ibtihaj Muhammad, who is here today. Stand up. I told her to bring home the gold. Not to put any pressure on you.

Muslim Americans keep us safe. They’re our police and our firefighters. They're in homeland security, in our intelligence community. They serve honorably in our armed forces -- meaning they fight and bleed and die for our freedom. Some rest in Arlington National Cemetery.

So Muslim Americans are some of the most resilient and patriotic Americans you’ll ever meet. We’re honored to have some of our proud Muslim American servicemembers here today. Please stand if you're here, so we can thank you for your service.

So part of the reason I want to lay out these facts is because, in the discussions that I was having with these incredibly accomplished young people, they were pointing that so often they felt invisible. And part of what we have to do is to lift up the contributions of the Muslim American community not when there’s a problem, but all the time.

Our television shows should have some Muslim characters that are unrelated to national security -- because -- it’s not that hard to do. There was a time when there were no black people on television. And you can tell good stories while still representing the reality of our communities.

Now, we do have another fact that we have to acknowledge. Even as the overwhelming majority -- and I repeat, the overwhelming majority -- of the world’s Muslims embrace Islam as a source of peace, it is undeniable that a small fraction of Muslims propagate a perverted interpretation of Islam. This is the truth.

Groups like al Qaeda and ISIL, they’re not the first extremists in history to misuse God’s name. We’ve seen it before, across faiths. But right now, there is a organized extremist element that draws selectively from Islamic texts, twists them in an attempt to justify their killing and their terror. They combine it with false claims that America and the West are at war with Islam. And this warped thinking that has found adherents around the world -- including, as we saw, tragically, in Boston and Chattanooga and San Bernardino -- is real. It’s there. And it creates tensions and pressure that disproportionately burden the overwhelming majority of law-abiding Muslim citizens.

And the question then is, how do we move forward together? How do we keep our country strong and united? How do we defend ourselves against organizations that are bent on killing innocents? And it can’t be the work of any one faith alone. It can’t be just a burden on the Muslim community -- although the Muslim community has to play a role. We all have responsibilities. So with the time I have left, I just want to suggest a few principles that I believe can guide us.

First, at a time when others are trying to divide us along lines of religion or sect, we have to reaffirm that most fundamental of truths: We are all God’s children. We’re all born equal, with inherent dignity.

And so often, we focus on our outward differences and we forget how much we share. Christians, Jews, Muslims -- we’re all, under our faiths, descendants of Abraham. So mere tolerance of different religions is not enough. Our faiths summon us to embrace our common humanity. “O mankind," the Quran teaches, we have “made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another." So all of us have the task of expressing our religious faith in a way that seeks to build bridges rather than to divide.

Second, as Americans, we have to stay true to our core values, and that includes freedom of religion for all faiths. I already mentioned our Founders, like Jefferson, knew that religious liberty is essential not only to protect religion but because religion helps strengthen our nation -- if it is free, if it is not an extension of the state. Part of what’s happened in the Middle East and North Africa and other places where we see sectarian violence is religion being a tool for another agenda -- for power, for control. Freedom of religion helps prevent that, both ways -- protects religious faiths, protects the state from -- or those who want to take over the state from using religious animosity as a tool for their own ends.

That doesn’t mean that those of us with religious faith should not be involved. We have to be active citizenry. But we have to respect the fact that we have freedom of religion.

Remember, many preachers and pastors fought to abolish the evil of slavery. People of faith advocated to improve conditions for workers and ban child labor. Dr. King was joined by people of many faiths, challenging us to live up to our ideals. And that civil activism, that civic participation that’s the essence of our democracy, it is enhanced by freedom of religion.

Now, we have to acknowledge that there have been times where we have fallen short of our ideals. By the way, Thomas Jefferson’s opponents tried to stir things up by suggesting he was a Muslim -- so I was not the first -- No, it’s true, it’s true. Look it up. I’m in good company.

But it hasn’t just been attacks of that sort that have been used. Mormon communities have been attacked throughout our history. Catholics, including, most prominently, JFK -- John F. Kennedy -- when he ran for President, was accused of being disloyal. There was a suggestion that he would be taking orders from the Pope as opposed to upholding his constitutional duties. Anti-Semitism in this country has a sad and long history, and Jews were exclude routinely from colleges and professions and from public office.

And so if we’re serious about freedom of religion -- and I’m speaking now to my fellow Christians who remain the majority in this country -- we have to understand an attack on one faith is an attack on all our faiths. And when any religious group is targeted, we all have a responsibility to speak up. And we have to reject a politics that seeks to manipulate prejudice or bias, and targets people because of religion.

We’ve got to make sure that hate crimes are punished, and that the civil rights of all Americans are upheld. And just as faith leaders, including Muslims, must speak out when Christians are persecuted around the world -- or when anti-Semitism is on the rise -- because the fact is, is that there are Christians who are targeted now in the Middle East, despite having been there for centuries, and there are Jews who’ve lived in places like France for centuries who now feel obliged to leave because they feel themselves under assault --sometimes by Muslims. We have to be consistent in condemning hateful rhetoric and violence against everyone. And that includes against Muslims here in the United States of America.

So none of us can be silent. We can’t be bystanders to bigotry. And together, we’ve got to show that America truly protects all faiths.

Which brings me to my next point: As we protect our country from terrorism, we should not reinforce the ideas and the rhetoric of the terrorists themselves. I often hear it said that we need moral clarity in this fight. And the suggestion is somehow that if I would simply say, these are all Islamic terrorists, then we would actually have solved the problem by now, apparently. Well, I agree, we actually do need moral clarity. Let’s have some moral clarity.

Groups like ISIL are desperate for legitimacy. They try to portray themselves as religious leaders and holy warriors who speak for Islam. I refuse to give them legitimacy. We must never give them that legitimacy. They’re not defending Islam. They’re not defending Muslims. The vast majority of the people they kill are innocent Muslim men, women and children.

And, by the way, the notion that America is at war with Islam ignores the fact that the world’s religions are a part of who we are. We can’t be at war with any other religion because the world’s religions are a part of the very fabric of the United States, our national character.

So the best way for us to fight terrorism is to deny these organizations legitimacy and to show that here in the United States of America, we do not suppress Islam; we celebrate and lift up the success of Muslim Americans. That’s how we show the lie that they’re trying to propagate. We shouldn’t play into terrorist propaganda. And we can’t suggest that Islam itself is at the root of the problem. That betrays our values. It alienates Muslim Americans. It’s hurtful to those kids who are trying to go to school and are members of the Boy Scouts, and are thinking about joining our military.

That kind of mindset helps our enemies. It helps our enemies recruit. It makes us all less safe. So let’s be clear about that.

Now, finally, just as all Americans have a responsibility to reject discrimination -- I’ve said this before -- Muslims around the world have a responsibility to reject extremist ideologies that are trying to penetrate within Muslim communities.

Here at this mosque, and across our country and around the world, Muslim leaders are roundly and repeatedly and consistently condemning terrorism. And around the globe, Muslims who’ve dared to speak out have often been targeted and even killed. So those voices are there; we just have to amplify them more.

And it was interesting, in the discussion I had before I came out, some people said, why is there always a burden on us? When a young man in Charleston shoots African Americans in a church, there’s not an expectation that every white person in America suddenly is explaining that they’re not racist. They can Everybody is assumed to be horrified by that act. And I recognize that sometimes that doesn't feel fair.

But part of the answer is to make sure that the Muslim community in all of its variety, in all the good works that it’s doing, in all the talent that's on display, that it’s out there visible on a consistent basis -- not just at a certain moment.

But what is also true is, is that there is a battle of hearts and minds that takes place -- that is taking place right now, and American Muslims are better positioned than anybody to show that it is possible to be faithful to Islam and to be part of a pluralistic society, and to be on the cutting-edge of science, and to believe in democracy.

And so I would urge all of you not to see this as a burden, but as a great opportunity and a great privilege to show who you are. To use a little Christian expression -- let your light shine. Because when you do you’ll make clear that this is not a clash of civilizations between the West and Islam. This is a struggle between the peace-loving, overwhelming majority of Muslims around the world and a radical, tiny minority. And ultimately, I’m confident that the overwhelming majority will win that battle. Muslims will decide the future of your faith. And I’m confident in the direction that it will go.

But across the Islamic world, influential voices should consistently speak out with an affirmative vision of their faith. And it’s happening. These are the voices of Muslim clerics who teach that Islam prohibits terrorism, for the Quran says whoever kills an innocent, it is as if he has killed all mankind. These are the voices of Muslim scholars, some of whom join us today, who know Islam has a tradition of respect for other faiths; and Muslim teachers who point out that the first word revealed in the Quran -- igra -- means “read" -- to seek knowledge, to question assumptions.

Muslim political leaders have to push back on the lie that the West oppresses Muslims, and against conspiracy theories that says America is the cause of every ill in the Middle East. Now, that doesn't mean that Muslim Americans aren’t free to criticize American -- U.S. foreign policy. That's part of being an American. I promise you, as the President of the United States, I’m mindful that that is a healthy tradition that is alive and well in America. But like leaders everywhere, these leaders have been offering, and need to continue to offer, a positive vision for progress, and that includes political and economic progress.

And we have to acknowledge that much of the violence in places like the Middle East is now turning into fights between sects -- Shia, Sunni and others -- where differences are often exploited to serve political agendas, as I said earlier. And this bloodshed is destroying Muslim families and communities, and there has to be global pressure to have the vision and the courage to end this kind of thinking and this approach to organizing political power.

It’s not historically unique. It’s happened in every part of the world -- from Northern Ireland to Africa, to Asia, to right here in the United States -- in the past. But it is something that we have to fight against.

And we know it’s possible. Across the history of Islam, different sects traditionally have lived and thrived together peacefully. And in many parts of the world they do today, including here in the United States.

Like people of all religions, Muslims living their faith in a modern, pluralistic world are called upon to uphold human rights, to make sure that everyone has opportunity. That includes the aspirations of women and youth and all people. If we expect our own dignity to be respected, so must we respect the dignity of others.

So let me conclude by saying that as Muslim communities stand up for the future that you believe in, that you exhibit in your daily lives, as you teach your children, America will be your partner. We will -- I will -- do everything I can to lift up the multiplicity of Muslim voices that promote pluralism and peace. We will continue to reach out to young Muslims around the world, empowering them with science and technology and entrepreneurship, so they can pursue their God-given potential, and help build up their communities and provide opportunity. It’s why we will continue to partner with Muslim American communities -- not just to help you protect against extremist threats, but to expand health care and education and opportunity -- because that’s the best way to build strong, resilient communities.

Our values must guide us in this work. Engagement with Muslim American communities must never be a cover for surveillance. We can’t give in to profiling entire groups of people. There’s no one single profile of terrorists. We can’t securitize our entire relationship with Muslim Americans. We can’t deal with you solely through the prism of law enforcement. We’ve got to build trust and mutual respect. That’s how we’ll keep our communities strong and our communities united.

As I was in discussion with the young people before I came in here, I said this will be a process. Law enforcement has a tough job. Some of these groups are specifically trying to target Muslim youth. We’re going to have to be partners in this process. There will be times where the relationship is clumsy or mishandled. But I want you to know that from the President to the FBI Director, to everybody in law enforcement, my directive and their understanding is, is that this is something we have to do together. And if we don’t do it well, then we’re actually not making ourselves safer; we’re making ourselves less safe.

And here, I want to speak directly to the young people who may be listening. In our lives, we all have many identities. We are sons and daughters, and brothers and sisters. We’re classmates; Cub Scout troop members. We’re followers of our faith. We’re citizens of our country. And today, there are voices in this world, particularly over the Internet, who are constantly claiming that you have to choose between your identities -- as a Muslim, for example, or an American. Do not believe them. If you’re ever wondering whether you fit in here, let me say it as clearly as I can, as President of the United States: You fit in here -- right here. You’re right where you belong. You’re part of America, too. You’re not Muslim or American. You’re Muslim and American.

Don’t grow cynical. Don’t respond to ignorance by embracing a world view that suggests you must choose between your faith and your patriotism. Don’t believe that you have to choose between your best impulses and somehow embrace a world view that pits us against each other -- or, even worse, glorifies violence. Understand your power to bring about change. Stay engaged in your community. Help move our country forward -- your country forward.

We are blessed to live in a nation where even if we sometimes stumble, even if we sometimes fall short, we never stop striving for our ideals. We keep moving closer to that more perfect union. We’re a country where, if you work hard and if you play by the rules, you can ultimately make it, no matter who you are or how you pray. It may not always start off even in the race, but here, more than any place else, there’s the opportunity to run that race.

And as we go forward, I want every Muslim American to remember you are not alone. Your fellow Americans stand with you -- just as Sabah described her friends after she decided that she was going to start wearing a hijab. That’s not unusual. Because just as so often we only hear about Muslims after a terrorist attack, so often we only hear about Americans’ response to Muslims after a hate crime has happened, we don’t always hear about the extraordinary respect and love and community that so many Americans feel.

I’m thinking about the seven-year-old boy in Texas who emptied his piggy bank to help a mosque that had been vandalized. Or all the faith communities that rallied around Muslim Americans after the tragedy in Chapel Hill. The churches and the synagogues standing shoulder-to-shoulder with their local mosques, including the woman carrying a sign saying “We love our Muslim neighbors." Think of our men and women in uniform who, when they heard that a little girl was afraid because she’s a Muslim, sent her a message -- “I Will Protect You."

I want every American to remember how Muslim communities are standing up for others, as well. Because right now, as we speak, there are Muslims in Kenya who saved Christians from terrorists, and Muslims who just met in Morocco to protect religious minorities, including Christians and Jews. The good people of this mosque helped this city move forward after the turmoil of last year. Muslim Americans across the country helped African American churches rebuild after arson.

Remember the Muslim Americans in Boston who reached out to victims of the Marathon bombing; the Muslim Americans across the country who raised money for the families of San Bernardino; the Muslim Americans in Chattanooga who honored our fallen servicemembers, one of them saying, “in the name of God, the God of Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, God bless our fallen heroes."

We are one American family. We will rise and fall together. It won’t always be easy. There will be times where our worst impulses are given voice. But I believe that ultimately, our best voices will win out. And that gives me confidence and faith in the future.

After more than 200 years, our blended heritage, the patchwork quilt which is America, that is not a weakness, that is one of our greatest strengths. It’s what makes us a beacon to the world. It’s what led that mother who wrote to me -- the one who worries about her young daughter -- it led her to end her letter with hope, despite her fears. She said, “I still believe in one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

May God's peace be upon you.

May God bless the United States of America.

Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you.

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# Address at the 64th National Prayer Breakfast

Well, good morning.

Giving all praise and honor to God for bringing us together here this morning.

I want to thank everyone who helped organize this breakfast, especially our co-chairs, Robert and Juan, who embody the tradition of friendship, fellowship, and prayer. I will begin with a confession: I have always felt a tinge of guilt motorcading up here at the heart of D.C.’s rush hour. I suspect that not all the commuters were blessing me as they waited to get to work. But it’s for a good cause. A National Prayer Brunch doesn’t have the same ring to it.

And Michelle and I are extremely honored, as always, to be with so many friends, with members of Congress, with faith leaders from across the country and around the world, to be with the Speaker, Leader. I want thank Mark and Roma for their friendship and their extraordinary story, and sharing those inspiring words. Andre, for sharing his remarkable gifts.

And on this occasion, I always enjoy reflecting on a piece of scripture that’s been meaningful to me or otherwise sustained me throughout the year. And lately, I’ve been thinking and praying on a verse from Second Timothy: “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. We live in extraordinary times. Times of extraordinary change. We’re surrounded by tectonic shifts in technology and in our economy; by destructive conflict, disruptions to our climate. And it all reshapes the way we work and the way we live. It’s all amplified by a media that is unceasing, and that feeds 24/7 on our ever-shrinking attention spans. And as a student of history, I often remind people that the challenges that we face are not unique; that in fact, the threats of previous eras -- civil war or world war or cold war, depressions or famines -- those challenges put our own in perspective. Moreover, I believe that our unique strengths as a nation make us better equipped than others to harness this change to work for us, rather than against us.

And yet, the sheer rapidity of change, and the uncertainty that it brings, is real. The hardship of a family trying to make ends meet. Refugees fleeing from a war-torn home. Those things are real. Terrorism, eroding shorelines -- those things are real. Even the very progress that humanity has made, the affluence, the stability that so many of us enjoy, far greater prosperity than any previous generation of humanity has experienced, shines a brighter light on those who still struggle, reveal the gap in prospects that exist for the children of the world.

And that gap between want and plenty, it gives us vertigo. It can make us afraid, not only of the possibility that progress will stall, but that maybe we have more to lose. And fear does funny things. Fear can lead us to lash out against those who are different, or lead us to try to get some sinister “other” under control. Alternatively, fear can lead us to succumb to despair, or paralysis, or cynicism. Fear can feed our most selfish impulses, and erode the bonds of community.

It is a primal emotion -- fear -- one that we all experience. And it can be contagious, spreading through societies, and through nations. And if we let it consume us, the consequences of that fear can be worse than any outward threat.

For me, and I know for so many of you, faith is the great cure for fear. Jesus is a good cure for fear. God gives believers the power, the love, the sound mind required to conquer any fear. And what more important moment for that faith than right now? What better time than these changing, tumultuous times to have Jesus standing beside us, steadying our minds, cleansing our hearts, pointing us towards what matters.

His love gives us the power to resist fear’s temptations. He gives us the courage to reach out to others across that divide, rather than push people away. He gives us the courage to go against the conventional wisdom and stand up for what’s right, even when it’s not popular. To stand up not just to our enemies but, sometimes, to stand up to our friends. He gives us the fortitude to sacrifice ourselves for a larger cause. Or to make tough decisions knowing that we can only do our best. Less of me, more of God. And then, to have the courage to admit our failings and our sins while pledging to learn from our mistakes and to try to do better.

Certainly, during the course of this enormous privilege to have served as the President of the United States, that’s what faith has done for me. It helps me deal with the common, everyday fears that we all share. The main one I’m feeling right now is that our children grow up too fast. They’re leaving. That’s a tough deal. And so, as a parent, you’re worrying about will some harm befall them, how are they going to manage without you, did you miss some central moment in their lives. Will they call? Or text? Each day, we’re fearful that God’s purpose becomes elusive, cloudy. We try to figure out how we fit into his broader plan. They’re universal fears that we have, and my faith helps me to manage those.

And then my faiths helps me to deal with some of the unique elements of my job. As one of the great departed heroes of our age, Nelson Mandela, once said, “I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it… The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.”

And certainly, there are times where I’ve had to repeat that to myself while holding this office. When you hear from a parade of experts, just days after you’re elected, that another Great Depression is a very real possibility -- that will get your attention. When you tell a room full of young cadets that you’ve made a decision to send them into harm’s way, knowing that some of them might not return safely -- that’s sobering. When you hold in your arms the mothers and fathers of innocent children gunned down in their classroom -- that reminds you there’s evil in the world. And so you come to understand what President Lincoln meant when he said that he’d been driven to his knees by the overwhelming conviction that he had no place else to go.

And so like every President, like every leader, like every person, I’ve known fear. But my faith tells me that I need not fear death; that the acceptance of Christ promises everlasting life and the washing away of sins. If Scripture instructs me to “put on the full armor of God” so that when trouble comes, I’m able to stand, then surely I can face down these temporal setbacks, surely I can battle back doubts, surely I can rouse myself to action.

And should that faith waver, should I lose my way, I have drawn strength not only from a remarkable wife, not only from incredible colleagues and friends, but I have drawn strength from witnessing all across this country and all around this world, good people, of all faiths, who do the Lord’s work each and every day, Who wield that power and love, and sound mind to feed the hungry and heal the sick, to teach our children and welcome the stranger.

Think about the extraordinary work of the congregations and faith communities represented here today. Whether fighting global poverty or working to end the scourge of human trafficking, you are the leaders of what Pope Francis calls “this march of living hope.”

When the Earth cleaves in Haiti, Christians, Sikhs, and other faith groups sent volunteers to distribute aid, tend to the wounded, rebuild homes for the homeless.

When Ebola ravaged West Africa, Jewish, Christian, Muslim groups responded to the outbreak to save lives. And as the news fanned the flames of fear, churches and mosques responded with a powerful rebuke, welcoming survivors into their pews.

When nine worshippers were murdered in a Charleston church basement, it was people of all faiths who came together to wrap a shattered community in love and understanding.

When Syrian refugees seek the sanctuary of our shores, it’s the faithful from synagogues, mosques, temples, and churches who welcome them, the first to offer blankets and food and open their homes. Even now, people of different faiths and beliefs are coming together to help people suffering in Flint.

And then there’s the most -- less spectacular, more quiet efforts of congregations all across this country just helping people. Seeing God in others. And we’re driven to do this because we’re driven by the value that so many of our faiths teach us -– I am my brother’s keeper, I am my sister’s keeper. As Christians, we do this compelled by the Gospel of Jesus -- the command to love God, and love one another.

And so, yes, like every person, there are times where I’m fearful. But my faith and, more importantly, the faith that I’ve seen in so many of you, the God I see in you, that makes me inevitably hopeful about our future. I have seen so many who know that God has not given us a spirit of fear. He has given us power, and love, and a sound mind.

We see that spirit in people like Pastor Saeed Abedini, imprisoned for no crime other than holding God in his heart. And last year, we prayed that he might be freed. And this year, we give thanks that he is home safe.

We pray for God’s protection for all around the world who are not free to practice their faith, including Christians who are persecuted, or who have been driven from their ancient homelands by unspeakable violence. And just as we call on other countries to respect the rights of religious minorities, we, too, respect the right of every single American to practice their faith freely. For this is what each of us is called on to do: To seek our common humanity in each other. To make sure our politics and our public discourse reflect that same spirit of love and sound mind. To assume the best in each other and not just the worst -- and not just at the National Prayer Breakfast. To begin each of our works from the shared belief that all of us want what’s good and right for our country and our future.

We can draw such strength from the quiet moments of heroism around us every single day. And so let me close with two such stories that I’ve come to know just over the past week.

A week ago, I spoke at a ceremony held at the Israeli Embassy for the first time, honoring the courage of people who saved Jews during the Holocaust. And one of the recipients was the grandson -- or the son of an American soldier who had been captured by the Nazis. So a group of American soldiers are captured, and their captors ordered Jewish POWs to identify themselves. And one sergeant, a Christian named Roddie Edmonds, from Tennessee, ordered all American troops to report alongside them. They lined up in formation, approximately 200 of them, and the Nazi colonel said, “I asked only for the Jewish POWs,” and said, “These can’t all be Jewish.” And Master Sergeant Edmonds stood there and said, “We are all Jews.” And the colonel took out his pistol and held it to the Master Sergeant’s head and said, “Tell me who the Jews are.” And he repeated, “We are all Jews.” And faced with the choice of shooting all those soldiers, the Nazis relented. And so, through his moral clarity, through an act of faith, Sergeant Edmonds saved the lives of his Jewish brothers-in-arms.

A second story. Just yesterday, some of you may be aware I visited a mosque in Baltimore to let our Muslim-American brothers and sisters know that they, too, are Americans and welcome here. And there I met a Muslim-American named Rami Nashashibi, who runs a nonprofit working for social change in Chicago. And he forms coalitions with churches and Latino groups and African Americans in this poor neighborhood in Chicago. And he told me how the day after the tragedy in San Bernardino happened, he took his three young children to a playground in the Marquette Park neighborhood, and while they were out, the time came for one of the five daily prayers that are essential to the Muslim tradition. And on any other day, he told me, he would have immediately put his rug out on the grass right there and prayed.

But that day, he paused. He feared any unwelcome attention he might attract to himself and his children. And his seven year-old daughter asked him, “What are you doing, Dad? Isn't it time to pray?” And he thought of all the times he had told her the story of the day that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Rabbi Robert Marx, and 700 other people marched to that very same park, enduring hatred and bigotry, dodging rocks and bottles, and hateful words, in order to challenge Chicago housing segregation, and to ask America to live up to our highest ideals.

And so, at that moment, drawing from the courage of men of different religions, of a different time, Rami refused to teach his children to be afraid. Instead, he taught them to be a part of that legacy of faith and good conscience. “I want them to understand that sometimes faith will be tested,” he told me, “and that we will be asked to show immense courage, like others have before us, to make our city, our country, and our world a better reflection of all our ideals.” And he put down his rug and he prayed.

Now, those two stories, they give me courage and they give me hope. And they instruct me in my own Christian faith. I can’t imagine a moment in which that young American sergeant expressed his Christianity more profoundly than when, confronted by his own death, he said “We are all Jews.” I can’t imagine a clearer expression of Jesus’s teachings. I can’t imagine a better expression of the peaceful spirit of Islam than when a Muslim father, filled with fear, drew from the example of a Baptist preacher and a Jewish rabbi to teach his children what God demands.

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. I pray that by His grace, we all find the courage to set such examples in our own lives -- not just during this wonderful gathering and fellowship, not just in the public piety that we profess, but in those smaller moments when it’s difficult, when we’re challenged, when we’re angry, when we’re confronted with someone who doesn’t agree with us, when no one is watching. I pray, as Roma so beautifully said, that our differences ultimately are bridged; that the God that is in each of us comes together, and we don’t divide.

I pray that our leaders will always act with humility and generosity. I pray that my failings are forgiven. I pray that we will uphold our obligation to be good stewards of God’s creation -- this beautiful planet. I pray that we will see every single child as our own, each worthy of our love and of our compassion. And I pray we answer Scripture’s call to lift up the vulnerable, and to stand up for justice, and ensure that every human being lives in dignity. That’s my prayer for this breakfast, and for this country, in the years to come. May God bless you, and may He continue to bless this country that we love.

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# Address Honoring the Golden State Warriors 2015 NBA Championship

Well, welcome to the White House, everybody. Give it up for the NBA Champion Golden State Warriors! Everybody please have a seat. Now, let me begin by saying I was hoping that Riley Curry would be here today -- to share the podium with me, but I guess I’m going to have to get media training some other day.

The East Room is not as loud as the “Roaracle,” but Dub Nation is well represented. We’ve got some members of my Cabinet and Congress in the house who are big fans, and I don’t just mean Harrison Barnes, who apparently they call “The Senator.” He’s from Iowa, so maybe he’s got some politics in his blood. But we’ve got one of the biggest Golden State Warrior fans around, our Leader in the House of Representatives, Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi. We’ve got Republican Leader Kevin McCarthy is here, so this is bipartisan. We have Mayor Schaaf is here. So we’re glad you’re here to celebrate the best in the Bay.

I also want to recognize Warriors Executive Board member and NBA legend, one of the greatest of all time, the logo, Jerry West. As well as owner Joe Lacob, and General Manager Bob Myers. Give them a big round of applause.

Now, it is rare to be in the presence of guys from the greatest team in NBA history. So we’re pretty lucky today, because we’ve got one of those players in the house -- Steve Kerr from the 1995-‘96 Chicago Bulls! It’s good to see you back.

Now, for those of you who don’t know, the Warriors started this season without Coach Kerr, who was recovering from back surgery. So Luke Walton stepped up and led the team to a ridiculous 39-4 record. Unfortunately, the NBA won’t let Luke count those wins as his own -- which, man, that doesn’t seem fair. You defied the cynics. You accomplished big things. You racked up a great record, and you don’t get enough credit. I can’t imagine how that feels.

Now, let’s face it, the Warriors are in the midst of a pretty special two-year run. Folks are saying that they are “revolutionizing” basketball. They are so good that they seem to be just breaking the game itself. And I don’t play anymore, but I still know a little bit about basketball, and this really is one of the best that we’ve ever seen. Great shooting, great passing, a small-ball “nuclear lineup” -- it’s almost not fair. And they play not just well, but they play well together. They play as a team the way basketball is supposed to be played. And it’s beautiful to watch when they’re working on all cylinders.

Now, let’s face it, “beautiful” was not how folks described the Warriors for many years. I may be one of the few who are old enough to remember the last time they were good, back in the middle of the ‘70s, I was -- the last time they won a championship -- I was 10 years old. So the franchise, it had some good teams and some great players, but it had been struggling. One college player forgot that there was even a team in Oakland -- that was Klay Thompson, by the way.

But a few years ago, Joe Lacob took over, pointed to that 1975 championship banner and said, “That’s a very lonely flag. We need another one.” And last year they got it -- 67 wins, 16 straight at one point. That used to seem like a lot until this year -- where they started off 24-0. Ended last season with their first title in 40 years.

And obviously, a big part of that was league MVP, Steph Curry. Steph is a pretty good shooter.

For those of you who watched the game against the Wizards last night, he was -- to use slang -- he was “clowning.” He was all jumping up and down. Just settle down. By the way, for the record, I heard during this summer, after our golf game, that Steph was using the excuse of Secret Service being intimidating for why he lost the match. That is not the case. But he will have another opportunity. Obviously, watching Steph play is incredible. And for anybody who enjoys basketball, it is just a lot of fun.

But it’s not just Steph. There’s the other “Splash Brother,” Klay, who dropped 37 points in a quarter, and whose jump shot is actually a little prettier. I’m just saying. There were Barnes dunks, Bogut blocks, Draymond Green showing us “heart over height” every single night. Draymond is also known to add a few more words that I cannot repeat. Then you’ve got a couple of unselfish All-Stars in their own right that were coming off the bench -- Andre Iguodala and David Lee. And a bench that was so good that an opposing coach complained, “they’ve got two starting lineups.”

In the Finals, Golden State faced Cleveland and a guy named LeBron. Down two games to one, Coach Kerr had the guts to shake up the lineup -- and it worked. Andre came off the bench, played great D, took home the Finals MVP. And it was a perfect example of the kind of team this is -- everybody doing their part, everybody ready to step up at any moment. Unselfish play. Folks looking out for each other.

And it’s the same kind of selflessness that the Warriors show in their community, as well. They’ve led the way for the NBA’s commitment to our My Brother’s Keeper initiative, promoting mentoring in the Bay Area and nationwide. I know they met with some students in the White House mentor program earlier today. This team is also supporting the city’s Oakland Promise effort to help more kids make it through college. You’ve had players take a stand against gun violence. They’ve worked with Michelle’s Let’s Move initiative. They’ve dressed up as Santa to deliver Christmas presents to those in need. And the first time I met Steph was because he had partnered with the U.N. Foundation to donate three anti-malarial mosquito nets for every three-pointer he makes. So last night, that’s 33 nets. So keep shooting, Steph. Not that he needs any encouragement, obviously.

The point is, this is a great basketball team, but it’s a great organization, it’s a great culture. And these are outstanding young men. And some of them I’ve met before. Steph I’ve gotten to know a little better. They’re just -- they’re the kind of people you want representing a city, representing the NBA, and the kind of people that you want our kids to be rooting for.

So they have a lot to be proud of. Good luck for the rest of this season. Maybe you’ll break that Bulls record. But as Coach Kerr pointed out, he wins either way. Either way, he’s got the record.

So thanks, everybody. Congratulations.

Do you want to say something?

Coach Steve Kerr: Thank you. I’m actually -- I’m a little thirsty. Is that my water or yours?

President Obama: It is. Go for it.

Coach Steve Kerr: I thought maybe it was yours. I’m guessing it’s yours.

I want to say thank you. I also want to say congratulations for becoming the first President in our nation’s great history to use the term “clowning.” So, although maybe Teddy Roosevelt used it somewhere in there, I don’t know. But we want to thank you. Our organization is so honored to be here, to meet you, to tour the White House, and to celebrate our championship with you here.

Our general manager, Bob Myers, who you met earlier, also mentioned to me that you’re going to be a free agent at the end of this year. So we don’t know if you have anything lined up yet, but --

President Obama: I’m ready to go.

Coach Steve Kerr: You can consider this a symbol of an offer that’s coming. We -- We want you -- as soon as your duties are done here in the White House, we’d like you to be the leader of Dub Nation.

President Obama: 44. [Jersey number]

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# Illinois General Assembly Address

Mr. Speaker, Mr. President, members of the General Assembly, my fellow Illinoisans: It’s actually kind of fun to start a speech like that twice in one month.

What an incredible privilege it is to address this chamber. And to Governor Rauner, Senator Durbin, members of Congress, Speaker Madigan, Former Governor Pat Quinn, Mayor Langfelder and the people of Springfield -- thank you for such a warm welcome as I come back home. Thank you. Thank you so much. Thank you. It's good to be home. Thank you, guys. Thank you. Thank you. It is great to see so many old friends like John Cullerton and Emil Jones. I miss you guys.

It's great to be in the State Capitol. Being here today calls to mind the first time I spoke on the Senate floor, almost 20 years ago. And I was passionate, idealistic, ready to make a difference. Just to stand in that magnificent chamber was enough to fill me up with a heightened sense of purpose.

And I probably needed a little dose of reality when I first arrived. So one day, I rose to speak about a bill. And I thought I’d made some compelling points, with irrefutable logic. And I was about to sit down, feeling pretty good about myself, when Pate Philip sauntered over to my desk. Now, there are some young people here, so for those of you who don't remember, Pate Philip was the Senate Majority Leader at the time. He was a Marine, and big shock of white hair, chomped on a cigar; was so politically incorrect that you don't even know how to describe it. But he always treated me well. And he came by and he slapped me on the back, he said, "Kid, that was a pretty good speech. In fact, I think you changed a lot of minds. But you didn’t change any votes." Then he singled, and they gaveled, and we got blown out.

So that was my first lesson in humility. The next came when I presented my own first bill. It was a simple piece of legislation that would make it a lot easier for Illinois manufacturers to hire graduating community college students. I didn’t know any serious opposition, so I asked for a vote. And what I got was a good hazing. I assume that this custom still exists.

So a senior colleague put the vote on hold to ask, "Could you correctly pronounce your name for me? I’m having a little trouble with it." "Obama," I said. "Is that Irish?" he asked. And being in my early 30s at the time, I was a little cocky -- I said, "It will be when I run countywide." "That was a good joke," he said, but he wasn’t amused. "This bill is still going to die."

And he went on to complain that my predecessor’s name was easier to pronounce than mine, that I didn’t have cookies at my desk like she did, how would I ever expect to get any votes without having cookies on my desk. "I definitely urge a no vote," he said, "whatever your name is."

And for the next several minutes, the Senate debated on whether I should add an apostrophe to my name for the Irish, or whether the fact that "Obama" ends in a vowel meant I actually belonged to the Italians -- and just how many trees had had to die to print this terrible, miserable bill, anyway.

And I was chastened. And I said, "If I survive this event, I will be eternally grateful and consider this a highlight of my legal and legislative career." And I asked for a vote. And initially the tote board showed that it was going down, but at the last minute it flipped and my bill passed. But I was duly reminded that I was a freshman in the minority. And I want to thank all my former colleagues in both chambers for not letting me forget it.

To be a rookie in the minority party, as I was, is not much fun in any legislature. We were called "mushrooms" -- because we were kept in the dark and fed a lot of manure. But one benefit of being in such a position -- not being invited into the meetings where the big deals were being made -- is that I had a lot of time to get to know my colleagues. And many of us were away from our families, and so we became friends.

We went to fish fries together. We’d go to union halls. We’d play in golf scrambles. We had a great bipartisan poker game at the Illinois Manufacturer’s Association. Boro Relijie would host, and folks like Dave Luechtefeld and Terry Link, others would join in. We’d eat downstairs -- and I can’t say I miss the horseshoes. But away from the glare of TV, or the tweets, or the GIFs of today’s media, what we discovered was that despite our surface differences -- Democrats and Republicans, downstate hog farmers, inner-city African Americans, suburban businesspeople, Latinos from Pilsen or Little Village -- despite those differences, we actually had a lot in common. We cared about our communities. We cared about our families. We cared about America.

We fought hard for our positions. I don’t want to be nostalgic here -- we voted against each other all the time. And party lines held most of the time. But those relationships, that trust we’d built meant that we came at each debate assuming the best in one another and not the worst.

I was reminiscing with Christine Radogno -- we came in in the same class. And we were on opposite sides of most issues, but I always trusted her and believed that she was a good person. And if we had a bill that we might be able to work together on, it was a pleasure to work with her on. Or Dave Syverson, who -- we worked together on the Public Health and Welfare Committee, and we got some important work done that made a difference in people’s lives.

And we didn’t call each other idiots or fascists who were trying to destroy America. Because then we’d have to explain why we were playing poker or having a drink with an idiot or a fascist who was trying to destroy America.

And that respect gave us room for progress. And after I’d served here for six years, my party finally gained the majority. Emil Jones became the President of the Senate. And by then, I had made some friends across the aisle -- like Kirk Dillard, who I believe is here today, and we were able to pass the first serious ethics reform in 25 years. And working closely with law enforcement, who knew by then that we cared about cops and sheriffs and prosecutors. And working with folks like John Cullerton, we passed Illinois’ first racial profiling law, which was good for police officers and minority communities.

And because someone like my friend, John Bouman, who worked at the Shriver Center on Poverty Law, helped us build coalitions across the state, including with business, and was able to then reach out to Republicans, we were able to increase tax credits for the working poor and expand health insurance to children in need.

And we wouldn’t bend on our most deeply held principles, but we were willing to forge compromises in pursuit of a larger goal. We were practical when we needed to be. We could fight like heck on one issue and then shake hands on the next. Somebody like Jesse White was able to travel around the state and people didn’t even know what party he was necessarily from because he brought so much joy with the tumblers and the work that they were doing.

So I want you to know that this is why I’ve always believed so deeply in a better kind of politics, in part because of what I learned here in this legislature. Because of what I learned traveling across the state, visiting some of your districts, before I was running statewide, before I was a U.S. senator; learning all the corners of this state -- this most-representative of states. A state of small towns and rich farmland, and the world’s greatest city. A microcosm of America, where Democrats and Republicans and independents, and good people of every ethnicity and every faith shared certain bedrock values.

I just saw a story the other day showing that if you rank all 50 states across categories like education levels and household incomes, and race and religion, the one state that most closely mirrors America as a whole is Illinois, this state.

And I learned by talking to your constituents that if you were willing to listen, it was possible to bridge a lot of differences. I learned that most Americans aren’t following the ins and outs of the legislature carefully, but they instinctively know that issues are more complicated than rehearsed sound bites; that they play differently in different parts of the state and in the country. They understand the difference between realism and idealism; the difference between responsibility and recklessness. They had the maturity to know what can and cannot be compromised, and to admit the possibility that the other side just might have a point.

And it convinced me that if we just approached our national politics the same way the American people approach their daily lives –- at the workplace, at the Little League game; at church or the synagogue -- with common sense, and a commitment to fair play and basic courtesy, that there is no problem that we couldn’t solve together.

And that was the vision that guided me when I first ran for the United States Senate. That’s the vision I shared when I said we are more than just a collection of red states and blue states, but we are the United States of America. And that vision is why, nine years ago today, on the steps of the Old State Capitol just a few blocks from here, I announced my candidacy for President.

Now, over these nine years, I want you to know my faith in the generosity and the fundamental goodness of the American people has been rewarded and affirmed over and over and over again. I’ve seen it in the determination of autoworkers who had been laid off but were sure that they could once again be part of a great, iconic Americans industry. I’ve seen it in the single mom who goes back to school even as she’s working and looking after her kids because she wants a better life for that next generation. I’ve seen it the vision and risk-taking of small businessmen. I’ve seen it time and time again in the courage of our troops.

But it’s been noted often by pundits that the tone of our politics hasn’t gotten better since I was inaugurated, in fact it’s gotten worse; that there’s still this yawning gap between the magnitude of our challenges and the smallness of our politics. Which is why, in my final State of the Union address, and in the one before that, I had to acknowledge that one of my few regrets is my inability to reduce the polarization and meanness in our politics. I was able to be part of that here and yet couldn’t translate it the way I wanted to into our politics in Washington.

And people ask me why I’ve devoted so much time to this topic. And I tell them it’s not just because I’m President, and the polarization and the gridlock are frustrating to me. The fact is we’ve gotten a heck of a lot done these past seven years, despite the gridlock. We saved the economy from a depression. We brought back an auto industry from the brink of collapse. We helped our businesses create 14 million new jobs over the past six years. We cut the unemployment rate from 10 percent to 4.9 percent. We covered nearly 18 million more Americans with health insurance. We ignited a clean energy revolution. We got bin Laden. We brought the vast majority of our troops home to their families. We got a lot done. We're still getting a lot done.

And our political system helped make these things possible, and the list could go on. There’s no doubt America is better off today than when I took office. I didn't want this to be a State of Union speech where we have the standing up and the sitting down. Come on, guys, you know better than that. No, no, no, I’ve got a serious point to make here. I’ve got a serious point to make here because this is part of the issue, right? We have an importation of our politics nationally, and on cable and talk radio, and it seeps into everything.

The point I’m trying to make is I care about fixing our politics not only because I’m the President today, or because some of my initiatives have been blocked by Congress -- that happens to every President, happens to every governor, happens to everybody who participates -- anybody who participates in a democracy. You're not going to get 100 percent of what you want all the time.

The reason this is important to me is, next year I’ll still hold the most important title of all, and that's the title of citizen. And as an American citizen, I understand that our progress is not inevitable -- our progress has never been inevitable. It must be fought for, and won by all of us, with the kind of patriotism that our fellow Illinoisan, Adlai Stevenson, once described not as a "short, frenzied outburst of emotion, but the tranquil and steady dedication of a lifetime." It requires citizenship and a sense that we are one.

And today that kind of citizenship is threatened by a poisonous political climate that pushes people away from participating in our public life. It turns folks off. It discourages them, makes them cynical. And when that happens, more powerful and extreme voices fill the void. When that happens, progress stalls. And that’s how we end up with only a handful of lobbyists setting the agenda. That’s how we end up with policies that are detached from what working families face every day. That’s how we end up with the well-connected who publicly demand that government stay out of their business but then whisper in its ear for special treatment.

That’s how our political system gets consumed by small things when we are a people that are called to do great things -- to give everybody a shot in a changing economy; to keep America safe and strong in an uncertain world; to repair our climate before it threatens everything we leave for our kids.

So that’s what’s on my mind as I come back to Illinois today. This is what will be a focus of mine over the course of this year and beyond: What can we do, all of us, together, to try to make our politics better? And I speak to both sides on this. As all of you know, it could be better, and all of you would feel prouder of the work you do if it was better.

So, first, let’s put to rest a couple of myths about our politics. One is the myth that the problems with our politics are new. They are not. American politics has never been particularly gentle or high-minded -- especially not during times of great change.

As I mentioned when I visited a mosque in Maryland last week, Thomas Jefferson’s opponent tried to stir things up by suggesting he was a Muslim. So I’m in good company. But that’s nothing compared to the newspaper which warned that if Jefferson were elected, "murder, robbery, rape, adultery, and incest will be openly taught and practiced." His Vice President, Aaron Burr, literally killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel. I don’t even want to tell you what Andrew Jackson’s opponents said about his mamma. Lincoln, himself, was routinely called "weak, wishy-washy," a "yahoo," "an unshapely man," "the obscene ape of Illinois," and, my favorite -- a "facetious pettifogger." I don’t know what that means -- but it sounds insulting.

So, comparatively speaking, today is not that bad -- as long as you’ve got a thick skin. As Harold Washington once said: "Politics ain't beanbag." It’s tough. And that’s okay.

There’s also the notion sometimes that our politics are broken because politicians are significantly more corrupt or beholden to big money than they used to be. There’s no doubt that lobbyists still have easier access to the halls of power than the average American. There’s a lot of work that we need to do to make sure that the system works for ordinary people and not just the well-connected. That’s true at the federal level; that’s true at the state level. Folks aren’t entirely wrong when they feel as if the system too often is rigged and does not address their interests.

But, relative to the past, listen, I’m confident we’ve got enough rules and checks to prevent anyone in my Cabinet from siphoning whiskey tax revenue into their own pockets like President Grant’s administration did. Until FDR went after the ward bosses of Tammany Hall, they controlled judges and politicians as they pleased -- patronage, bribery, and money laundering. It’s not as easy as it was to whip up tens of thousands of phantom votes, whether in Chicago or South Texas.

From the Teapot Dome to Watergate, history tells us we should always be vigilant and demand that our public servants follow the highest ethical standards. But the truth is that the kind of corruption that is blatant, of the sort that we saw in the past, is much less likely in today’s politics. And the Justice Department and the media work hard to keep it that way. And that’s a very good thing. So we don’t want to romanticize the past and think somehow it’s a difference in the people being elected.

And it also isn’t true that today’s issues are inherently more polarizing than the past. I remember, we endured four years of Civil War that resulted in hundreds of thousands of dead Americans. This country was divided on a fundamental question. Before Pearl Harbor, entering into World War II was a highly charged debate. The fault lines of Vietnam, the culture wars of the ‘60s -- they still echo into our politics a half-century later.

We’ve been arguing since our founding over the proper size and role of government; the meaning of individual freedom and equality; over war and peace, and the best way to give all of our citizens opportunity. And these are important debates that everybody should join, with all the rigor that a free people require.

My point is, the problem is not that politicians are worse, the problem is not that the issues are tougher. And so it’s important for us to understand that the situation we find ourselves in today is not somehow unique or hopeless. We’ve always gone through periods when our democracy seems stuck. And when that happens, we have to find a new way of doing business.

We’re in one of those moments. We’ve got to build a better politics -- one that’s less of a spectacle and more of a battle of ideas; one that’s less of a business and more of a mission; one that understands the success of the American experiment rests on our willingness to engage all our citizens in this work.

And that starts by acknowledging that we do have a problem. And we all know it. What’s different today is the nature and the extent of the polarization. How ideologically divided the parties are is brought about by some of the same long-term trends in our politics and our culture. The parties themselves have become more homogenous than ever. A great sorting has taken place that drove Southern conservatives out of the Democratic Party, Northern moderates out of the Republican Party, so you don’t have within each party as much diversity of views.

And you’ve got a fractured media. Some folks watch FOX News; some folks read the Huffington Post. And very often, what’s profitable is the most sensational conflict and the most incendiary sound bites. And we can choose our own facts. We don’t have a common basis for what’s true and what’s not. I mean, if I listened to some of these conservative pundits, I wouldn’t vote for me either. I sound like a scary guy.

You’ve got advocacy groups that, frankly, sometimes benefit from keeping their members agitated as much as possible, assured of the righteousness of their cause. Unlimited dark money -- money that nobody knows where it’s coming from, who’s paying -- drowns out ordinary voices. And far too many of us surrender our voices entirely by choosing not to vote. And this polarization is pervasive and it seeps into our society to the point where surveys even suggest that many Americans wouldn’t want their kids to date someone from another political party. Now, some of us don’t want our kids dating, period. But that’s a losing battle.

But this isn’t just an abstract problem for political scientists. This has real impact on whether or not we can get things done together. This has a real impact on whether families are able to support themselves, or whether the homeless are getting shelter on a cold day. It makes a difference as to the quality of the education that kids are getting. This is not an abstraction.

But so often, these debates, particularly in Washington but increasingly in state legislatures, become abstractions. It’s as if there are no people involved, it’s just cardboard cutouts and caricatures of positions. It encourages the kind of ideological fealty that rejects any compromise as a form of weakness. And in a big, complicated democracy like ours, if we can’t compromise, by definition, we can’t govern ourselves.

Look, I am a progressive Democrat. I am proud of that. I make no bones about it. I’m going to make another point here. I believe that people should have access to health care. I believe they should have access to a good public education. I believe that workers deserve a higher minimum wage. I believe that collective bargaining is critical to the prospects of the middle class, and that pensions are vital to retirement, as long as they’re funded responsibly.

Hold on a second. Hold on a second. Sit down, Democrats. Sit down. Sit down -- just for a second. I appreciate that, but I want to make this larger point.

I believe we’re judged by how we care for the poor and the vulnerable. I believe that in order to live up to our ideals, we have to continually fight discrimination in all its forms. I believe in science, and the science behind things like climate change, and that a transition to cleaner sources of energy will help preserve the planet for future generations.

I believe in a tough, smart foreign policy that says America will never hesitate to protect our people and our allies, but that we should use every element of our power and never rush to war.

Those are the things I believe. But here’s the point I want to make. I believe that there are a lot of Republicans who share many of these same values, even though they may disagree with me on the means to achieve them. I think sometimes my Republican colleagues make constructive points about outdated regulations that may need to be changed, or programs that even though well-intended, didn't always work the way they were supposed to.

And where I’ve got an opportunity to find some common ground, that doesn’t make me a sellout to my own party. That applies -- well, we’ll talk later, Duncan. This is what happens, everybody starts cherry-picking. One thing I’ve learned is folks don't change.

So trying to find common ground doesn't make me less of a Democrat or less of a progressive. It means I’m trying to get stuff done.

And the same applies to a Republican who, heaven forbid, might agree with me on a particular issue -- or if I said America is great, decided to stand during a State of Union. It’s not a controversial proposition. You're not going to get in trouble.

But the fact that that's hard to do is a testament to how difficult our politics has become. Because folks are worried, well, I’m going to get yelled at by you, or this blogger is going to write that, or this talk show host is going to talk about me, and suddenly I’ve got to challenger, and calling me a RINO or a not a real progressive.

So when I hear voices in either party boast of their refusal to compromise as an accomplishment in and of itself, I’m not impressed. All that does is prevent what most Americans would consider actual accomplishments -- like fixing roads, educating kids, passing budgets, cleaning our environment, making our streets safe.

It cuts both ways, guys. See, suddenly everybody is standing. This is fascinating to watch. The point is, it cuts both ways.

Our Founders trusted us with the keys to this system of self-government. Our politics is the place where we try to make this incredible machinery work; where we come together to settle our differences and solve big problems, do big things together that we could not possibly do alone. And our Founders anchored all this in a visionary Constitution that separates power and demands compromise, precisely to prevent one party, or one wing of a party, or one faction, or some powerful interests from getting 100 percent of its way.

So when either side makes blanket promises to their base that it can’t possibly meet -- tax cuts without cuts to services -- "everything will be fine, but we won’t spend any money" -- war without shared sacrifice -- "we’re going to be tough, but don’t worry, it will be fine" -- union bashing or corporate bashing without acknowledging that both workers and businesses make our economy run -- that kind of politics means that the supporters will be perennially disappointed. It only adds to folks’ sense that the system is rigged. It’s one of the reasons why we see these big electoral swings every few years. It’s why people are so cynical.

Now, I don’t pretend to have all the answers to this. These trends will not change overnight. If I did, I would have already done them through an executive action. That was just a joke, guys. Relax. A sense of humor is also helpful.

But I do want to offer some steps that we can take that I believe would help reform our institutions and move our system in a way that helps reflect our better selves. And these aren’t particularly original, but I just want to go ahead and mention them.

First is to take, or at least reduce, some of the corrosive influence of money in our politics.

Now, this year, just over 150 families -- 150 families -- have spent as much on the presidential race as the rest of America combined. Today, a couple of billionaires in one state can push their agenda, dump dark money into every state -- nobody knows where it’s coming from -- mostly used on these dark ads, everybody is kind of dark and the worst picture possible. And there’s some ominous voice talking about how they’re destroying the country.

And they spend this money based on some ideological preference that really is disconnected to the realities of how people live. They’re not that concerned about the particulars of what’s happening in a union hall in Galesburg, and what folks are going through trying to find a job. They’re not particularly familiar with what’s happening at a VFW post. [Phone rings.] Somebody’s phone is on. In Carbondale. They haven’t heard personally from farmers outside of the Quads and what they’re going through. Those are the voices that should be outweighing a handful of folks with a lot of money. I’m not saying the folks with a lot of money should have no voice; I’m saying they shouldn’t be able to drown out everybody else’s.

And that’s why I disagree with the Supreme Court’s Citizens United decision. I don’t believe that money is speech, or that political spending should have no limits, or that it shouldn’t be disclosed. I still support a constitutional amendment to set reasonable limits on financial influence in America’s elections.

But amending the Constitution is an extremely challenging and time-consuming process -- as it should be. So we’re going to have to come up with more immediate ways to reduce the influence of money in politics. There are a lot of good proposals out there, and we have to work to find ones that can gain some bipartisan support -- because a handful of families and hidden interests shouldn’t be able to bankroll elections in the greatest democracy on Earth.

The second step towards a better politics is rethinking the way that we draw our congressional districts. Now, let me point this out -- I want to point this out, because this is another case of cherry-picking here. This tends to be popular in states where Democrats have been drawing the lines among Republicans, and less popular among Republicans where they control drawing the lines. So let’s be very clear here -- nobody has got clean hands on this thing. Nobody has got clean hands on this thing.

The fact is, today technology allows parties in power to precision-draw constituencies so that the opposition’s supporters are packed into as few districts as possible. That’s why our districts are shaped like earmuffs or spaghetti. It’s also how one party can get more seats even when it gets fewer votes.

And while this gerrymandering may insulate some incumbents from a serious challenge from the other party, it also means that the main thing those incumbents are worried about are challengers from the most extreme voices in their own party. That’s what’s happened in Congress. You wonder why Congress doesn’t work? The House of Representatives there, there may be a handful -- less than 10 percent -- of districts that are even competitive at this point. So if you’re a Republican, all you’re worried about is what somebody to your right is saying about you, because you know you’re not going to lose a general election. Same is true for a lot of Democrats. So our debates move away from the middle, where most Americans are, towards the far ends of the spectrum. And that polarizes us further.

Now, this is something we have the power to fix. And once the next census rolls around and we have the most up-to-date picture of America’s population, we should change the way our districts are drawn. In America, politicians should not pick their voters; voters should pick their politicians. And this needs to be done across the nation, not just in a select few states. It should be done everywhere.

Now, the more Americans use their voice and participate, the less captive our politics will be to narrow constituencies. No matter how much undisclosed money is spent, no matter how many negative ads are run, no matter how unrepresentative a district is drawn, if everybody voted, if a far larger number of people voted, that would overcome in many ways some of these other institutional barriers. It would make our politics better.

And that’s why a third step towards a better politics is making voting easier, not harder; and modernizing it for the way that we live now.

Now, this shouldn’t be controversial, guys. You liked the redistricting thing, but not letting people vote. I should get some applause on that, too.

Listen, three years ago, I set up a bipartisan commission to improve the voting experience in America. It had the election lawyers from my campaign and from Mitt Romney’s campaign. They got together outside of the context of immediate politics. And I actually want to thank this assembly for moving to adopt some of its recommendations. Thanks to the good work of my dear friend, Senator Don Harmon, and many of you, there’s a new law going into effect this year that will allow Illinoisans to register and vote at the polls on Election Day. It expands early voting -- something that makes it a lot easier for working folks and busy parents to go vote.

Think about it. If you’re a single mom, and you’ve got to take public transportation to punch a clock, work round the clock, get home, cook dinner on a Tuesday in bad weather -- that’s tough. Why would we want to make it so that she couldn’t do it on a Saturday or a Sunday? How is that advancing our democracy?

So this law will make a difference. I’m proud of my home state for helping to lead the way.

And we know this works. In 2012 and 2014, the states with the highest voter turnout all had same-day registration. So today, I ask every state in America to join us -- reduce these barriers to voting. Make it easier for your constituents to get out and vote.

And I’d encourage this assembly to take the next step. Senator Manar and Representative Gabel have bills that would automatically register every eligible citizen to vote when they apply for a driver’s license. That will protect the fundamental right of everybody. Democrats, Republicans, independents, seniors, folks with disabilities, the men and women of our military -- it would make sure that it was easier for them to vote and have their vote counted.

And as one of your constituents, I think you should pass that legislation right away. I think the Governor should sign it without delay. Let’s make the Land of Lincoln a leader in voter participation. That's something we should be proud to do. Let’s set the pace -- encourage other states across the country to follow our lead, making automatic voter registration the new norm across America.

Now, just during the course of this talk, it’s been interesting to watch the dynamics, obviously. In part because so much of our politics now is just designed for short-term, tactical gain. If you think that having more voters will hurt you on Election Day, then suddenly you're not interested in participation. And if you think that the gerrymandering is helping you instead of hurting you, then you're not for those proposals.

We get trapped in these things. We know better. If we were setting up a set of rules ahead of time, and you didn't know where you stood, which party you were going to be in, if you didn't have all the data and the poll numbers to tell you what’s going to give you an edge or not, you’d set up a system that was fair. You’d encourage everybody to be part of it. That's what we learned in our civics books. That's how it should work.

The fact that we can't do that, that brings me to my last point, which is, even as we change the way system works, we also have a responsibility to change the way that we, as elected officials and as citizens, work together. Because this democracy only works when we get both right -- when the system is fair, but also when we build a culture that is trying to make it work.

Recently, I’ve been thinking a lot about something a friend of mine, Deval Patrick, once said to his constituents when he was governor of Massachusetts. He said, "Insist from us and from each other a modicum of civility as the condition for serving you." This is what he told voters. "Insist on us having a modicum of civility."

I think that’s something that all of us, as Americans, have to insist from each other. Our children are watching what we do. They don’t just learn it in school, they learn it by watching us -- the way we conduct ourselves, the way we treat each other. If we lie about each other, they learn it’s okay to lie. If we make up facts and ignore science, then they just think it’s just their opinion that matters. If they see us insulting each other like school kids, then they think, well, I guess that's how people are supposed to behave. The way we respect -- or don’t -- each other as citizens will determine whether or not the hard, frustrating, but absolutely necessary work of self-government continues.

I’ve got daughters that are getting older now, and one of the most important things about being a parent I think is them just seeing what you do not when you're out in public, not when you're dealing with somebody important, but just how do you do -- how do you treat people generally. And it makes me much more mindful. I want to live up to their expectations.

And in that same way, I want this democracy to live up to the people’s expectations. We can't move forward if all we do is tear each other down. And the political incentives, as they are today, too often rewards that kind of behavior. That's what gets attention. So it will require some courage just to act the way our parents taught us to act. It shouldn’t, but in this political environment apparently it does. We’ve got to insist to do better from each other, for each other.

Rather than reward those who’d disenfranchise any segment of America, we’ve got to insist that everybody arm themselves with information, and facts, and that they vote. If 99 percent of us voted, it wouldn’t matter how much the 1 percent spends on our elections.

Rather than reward the most extreme voices, or the most divisive language, or who is best at launching schoolyard taunts, we should insist on a higher form of discourse in our common life, one based on empathy and respect, -- which does not mean you abandon principle. It doesn't mean you're not tough.

Rather than paint those who disagree with us as motivated by malice, to suggest that any of us lack patriotism -- we can insist, as Lincoln did, that we are not enemies, but friends; that our fellow Americans are not only entitled to a different point of view, but that they love this country as much as we do.

Rather than reward a 24/7 media that so often thrives on sensationalism and conflict, we have to stand up and insist, no, reason matters, facts matter; issues are complicated. When folks just make stuff up, they can’t go unchallenged. And that’s true for Democrats if you hear a Democratic make something up, and that’s true for a Republican if you see a Republican cross that line.

Rather than accept the notion that compromise is a sellout to one side, we’ve got to insist on the opposite -- that it can be a genuine victory that means progress for all sides. And rather than preventing our kids from dating people in other parties -- well, I may have issues about dating, generally -- but we can trust that we’ve raised our kids to do the right thing, and to look at the qualities of people’s character, not some label attached to them.

And maybe, most of all, whenever someone begins to grow cynical about our politics, or believes that their actions can’t make a difference or it’s not worth participating in, we’ve got to insist, even against all evidence to the contrary, that in fact they can make a difference. And in this job of being a citizen of the United States of America, that’s a big deal. It's something we should revere and take seriously.

Abraham Lincoln wasn’t always the giant that we think of today. He lacked formal schooling. His businesses and his law practices often struggled. After just one term in Congress, his opposition to the Mexican-American War damaged his reputation so badly he did not run for reelection. He was denounced as a traitor, a demagogue, an enemy sympathizer. He returned to his law practice and admitted he was losing interest in politics entirely.

And then something happened that shook his conscience. Congress effectively overturned the Missouri Compromise, that flawed and fragile law that had prohibited slavery in the North and legalized it in the South, but left the question ultimately unsettled. And stunned by this news, Lincoln said he’d been roused "as he had never been before" over what it meant for America’s future.

And so, here in Springfield, at the state fair, he got back in the game and he delivered the first of his great anti-slavery speeches to a crowd of thousands. And over the next six years, even as he lost two more political races, his arguments with Douglas and others shaped the national debate. That’s when he uttered those brilliant words on the steps of the Old State Capitol that "A house divided against itself cannot stand;" that "this government cannot endure, permanently, half slave and half free."

He became the first Republican President, and I believe our greatest President. And through his will and his words and, most of all, his character, he held a nation together and he helped free a people.

And those victories did not solve all of our problems. He would be attacked at times for the compromises he was prepared to make by abolitionists and folks from his own side. It would be 100 years more until the law guaranteed African Americans the equal rights that they had been promised. Even 50 years after that, our march is not yet finished. But because Lincoln made that decision not to give up, and not to let other voices speak for him, and because he held in his mind the strength of principle but the vision, the ability to understand those who disagreed with him, and showed them respect even as he fought them -- because of what he set in motion, generations of free men and women of all races and walks of life have had the chance to choose this country’s course. What a great gift. What a great legacy he has bestowed up.

And that’s the thing about America. We are a constant work of progress. And our success has never been certain, none of our journey has been preordained. And there’s always been a gap between our highest ideals and the reality that we witness every single day. But what makes us exceptional -- what makes us Americans -- is that we have fought wars, and passed laws, and reformed systems, and organized unions, and staged protests, and launched mighty movements to close that gap, and to bring the promise and the practice of America into closer alignment. We’ve made the effort to form that "more perfect union."

Nine years to the day that I first announced for this office, I still believe in that politics of hope. And for all the challenges of a rapidly changing world, and for all the imperfections of our democracy, the capacity to reach across our differences and choose that kind of politics -- not a cynical politics, not a politics of fear, but that kind of politics -- sustained over the tranquil and steady dedication of a lifetime, that’s something that remains entirely up to us.

Thank you, Illinois. God bless you. God bless America. It’s good to see all you. I miss you guys. Thank you.

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# On the Passing of USSC Justice Antonin Scalia

Good evening, everybody.

For almost 30 years, Justice Antonin "Nino" Scalia was a larger-than-life pre[sence] on the bench: a brilliant legal mind with an energetic style, incisive wit, and colorful opinions.

He influenced a generation of judges, lawyers, and students -- and profoundly shaped the legal landscape. He will no doubt be remembered as one of the most consequential judges and thinkers to serve on the Supreme Court. Justice Scalia dedicated his life to the cornerstone of our democracy: the rule of law. Tonight, we honor his extraordinary service to our nation and remember one of the towering legal figures of our time.

Antonin Scalia was born in Trenton, New Jersey to an Italian immigrant family. After graduating from Georgetown University and Harvard Law School, he worked at a law firm and taught law before entering a life of public service. He rose from Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Legal Counsel to the Judge on the D.C. Circuit Court, to Associate Justice of the Supreme Court.

A devout Catholic, he was the proud father of nine children and grandfather to many [28] loving grandchildren. Justice Scalia was both an avid hunter and an opera lover -- a passion for music that he shared with his dear colleague and friend, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg. Michelle and I were proud to welcome him to the White House, including in 2012 for a State Dinner for Prime Minister David Cameron. And tonight, we join his fellow justices in mourning this remarkable man.

Obviously today is a time to remember Justice Scalia’s legacy. I plan to fulfill my constitutional responsibilities to nominate a successor in due time. And there will be plenty of time for me to do so, and for the Senate to fulfill its responsibility to give that person a fair hearing and a timely vote. These are responsibilities that I take seriously, as should everyone. They’re bigger than any one party. They are about our democracy. They’re about the institution to which Justice Scalia dedicated his professional life, and making sure it continues to function as the beacon of justice that our Founders envisioned.

But at this moment, we most of all want to think about his family; and Michelle and I join the nation in sending our deepest sympathies to Justice Scalia’s wife, Maureen, and their loving family -- a beautiful symbol of a life well lived. We thank them for sharing Justice Scalia with our country.

God bless them all, and God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# U.S.-ASEAN Press Conference

Let me begin by thanking the Annenberg Foundation Trust, and everyone here at beauty -- beautiful Sunnylands and the people of Rancho Mirage for their incredible hospitality these past two days. I have hosted foreign leaders here before. It’s quite another to host leaders from 10 nations at the same time. And I want to thank everybody who helped make the summit such a success.

For 50 years, leaders and people across Southeast Asia have worked together through ASEAN to advance their mutual security, prosperity and dignity. For decades, the United States has been a proud partner with ASEAN. And this summit has built on the unprecedented cooperation we’ve forged over the past seven years, as I described yesterday. This spirit -- working together on behalf of mutual interests, in mutual respect -- guided our work over the past two days. And so I especially want to thank my fellow leaders from the ASEAN countries for being here, for their commitment and for the progress that we’ve made together.

One of my main messages over the past two days has been the commitment of the United States to ASEAN and its people. That commitment is and will remain strong and enduring. With our Strategic Partnership, we have a framework to guide our ties for decades to come.

Here at Sunnylands, we agreed to a number of key principles, including the principle that ASEAN will continue to be central -- in fact, indispensable -- to peace, prosperity and progress in the Asia Pacific. When ASEAN speaks with a clear, unified voice, it can help advance security, opportunity and human dignity not only for the more than 600 million people across ASEAN, but for people across the Asia Pacific and around the world. And I’m pleased that, here at this summit, ASEAN’s strong voice allowed us to make progress on multiple fronts.

First, we agreed to do more together to encourage the entrepreneurship and innovation that are at the heart of modern, competitive economies. We had an excellent discussion with a number of pioneering business leaders who reiterated the recipe for attracting trade and investment -- rule of law, transparency, protection of intellectual property, efficient customs, modern infrastructure, e-commerce and the free flow of information, support for small and medium-sized businesses, and perhaps most importantly, investment in people -- investment in strong schools to educate and train the next generation.

Around the table, there was widespread recognition that this is the path ASEAN countries need to continue on. As they do, it will create even more opportunities for trade and investment between the U.S. and ASEAN countries.

I affirmed our strong support for the ASEAN Community and pledged that the United States will continue to be a partner in ASEAN’s efforts to integrate economies and reduce barriers to trade and investment. I’m also announcing a new initiative -- U.S.-ASEAN Connect -- a network of hubs across the region to better coordinate our economic engagement and connect more of our entrepreneurs, investors and businesses with each other.

We’re also doing more to help aspiring innovators in the region learn English, the international language of business. And I reiterated that the Trans-Pacific Partnership -- which includes four ASEAN members -- can advance economic integration across ASEAN and set stronger rules for trade throughout the Asia Pacific. To that end, we’ve launched a new effort to help all ASEAN countries understand the key elements of TPP, as well as the reforms that could eventually lead to them joining.

Second, with regard to security, the United States and ASEAN are reaffirming our strong commitment to a regional order where international rules and norms -- and the rights of all nations, large and small -- are upheld. We discussed the need for tangible steps in the South China Sea to lower tensions, including a halt to further reclamation, new construction and militarization of disputed areas. Freedom of navigation must be upheld and lawful commerce should not be impeded.

I reiterated that the United States will continue to fly, sail, and operate wherever international law allows, and we will support the right of all countries to do the same. We will continue to help our allies and partners strengthen their maritime capabilities. And we discussed how any disputes between claimants in the region must be resolved peacefully, through legal means, such as the upcoming arbitration ruling under the U.N. Convention of the Law of the Seas, which the parties are obligated to respect and abide by.

Third, I made it clear that the United States will continue to stand with those across Southeast Asia who are working to advance rule of law, good governance, accountable institutions and the universal human rights of all people. We continue to encourage a return to civilian rule in Thailand. We will sustain our engagement with the people of Myanmar as a new president is selected, and as they work to implement the ceasefire agreement and move forward with national reconciliation.

Across the region, we’ll continue to stand with citizens and civil society and defend their freedom of speech, of assembly and of the press. No one, including those in political opposition, should ever be detained or imprisoned simply for speaking their mind. That only stymies progress, only makes it harder for countries to truly thrive and prosper.

And finally, the United States and ASEAN are doing more to deal with transnational challenges together. I offered our assistance to help ASEAN counties better leverage Interpol data to prevent the flow of foreign terrorist fighters. We agree that implementing the Paris climate change agreement, including helping developing countries adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change, will be critical and it will enable them to leap ahead to new and affordable clean energy.

As we pursue our sustainable development goals, we’re launching a new competition -- an innovation challenge to encourage students across ASEAN to develop new solutions to boost agriculture. We’re moving ahead with our Global Health Security Agenda to prevent future epidemics, and I pledged additional U.S. assistance to help ASEAN combat the horror of human trafficking.

So, to sum up, I believe this summit has put the U.S.-ASEAN partnership on a new trajectory that will carry us to even greater heights in the decades ahead. America’s foreign policy rebalance to the Asia Pacific, including Southeast Asia, will continue to be a foreign policy priority of my presidency. I look forward to visiting Vietnam for the first time in May and to becoming the first U.S. President to visit Laos when it hosts the East Asia Summit in September.

And I’m confident that whoever the next President may be will build on the foundation that we’ve laid, because there’s strong, sustained, bipartisan support for American engagement in the Asia Pacific region. And through our Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative, our investment in young people, in their business success, and civil society and grassroots leaders across the region I believe will further bind us together in a spirit of partnership and friendship for many years to come.

So, with that, let me take a few questions. And I'm going to start with Darlene Superville of the Associated Press. Where is Darlene? There she is.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. My question is about the Supreme Court.

President Obama: I'm shocked.

Question: What recourse do you have if Leader McConnell blocks a vote on your Supreme Court nominee? And do you think that if you choose someone moderate enough that Republicans might change course and schedule a vote? And as you consider that choice and who to nominate, what qualities are important to you, and is diversity among them? Thank you.

President Obama: First of all, I want to reiterate heartfelt condolences to the Scalia family. Obviously, Justice Scalia and I had different political orientations and probably would have disagreed on the outcome of certain cases. But there’s no doubt that he was a giant on the Supreme Court, helped to shape the legal landscape. He was, by all accounts, a good friend and loved his family deeply. And so it’s important, before we rush into the all the politics of this, to take stock of somebody who made enormous contributions to the United States. And we are grateful not only for his service but for his family’s service.

The Constitution is pretty clear about what is supposed to happen now. When there is a vacancy on the Supreme Court, the President of the United States is to nominate someone. The Senate is to consider that nomination, and either they disapprove of that nominee or that nominee is elevated to the Supreme Court.

Historically, this has not been viewed as a question. There’s no unwritten law that says that it can only be done on off years -- that’s not in the constitutional text. I’m amused when I hear people who claim to be strict interpreters of the Constitution suddenly reading into it a whole series of provisions that are not there. There is more than enough time for the Senate to consider in a thoughtful way the record of a nominee that I present and to make a decision.

And with respect to our process, we’re going to do the same thing that we did with respect to Justice Kagan’s nomination and Justice Sotomayor’s nomination. We’re going to find somebody who is has an outstanding legal mind, somebody who cares deeply about our democracy and cares about rule of law. There’s not going to be any particular position on a particular issue that determines whether or not I nominate them, but I’m going to present somebody who indisputably is qualified for the seat and any fair-minded person -- even somebody who disagreed with my politics -- would say would serve with honor and integrity on the Court.

Now, part of the problem that we have here is, is we’ve almost gotten accustomed to how obstructionist the Senate has become when it comes to nominations. I’ve got 14 nominations that have been pending that were unanimously approved by the Judiciary Committee -- so Republicans and Democrats on the Judiciary Committee all agreed that they were well-qualified for the position. And yet we can’t get a vote on those individuals.

So in some ways, this argument is just an extension of what we’ve seen in the Senate, generally -- and not just on judicial nominees.

The basic function of government requires that the President of the United States, in his or her duties, has a team of people -- Cabinet secretaries, assistant secretaries -- that can carry out the basic functions of government. It requires -- the Constitution requires that we appoint judges so that they can carry out their functions as a separate branch of government.

And the fact that we’ve almost grown accustomed to a situation that is almost unprecedented, where every nomination is contested, everything is blocked regardless of how qualified the person is, even when there’s no ideological objection to them, certainly where there’s no disqualifying actions by the nominee that have surfaced -- the fact that it’s that hard, that we’re even discussing this, is I think a measure of how, unfortunately, the venom and rancor in Washington has prevented us from getting basic work done. This would be a good moment for us to rise above that.

I understand the stakes. I understand the pressure that Republican senators are, undoubtedly, under. I mean, the fact of the matter is, is that what the issue here is, is that the Court is now divided on many issues; this would be a deciding vote. And there are a lot of Republican senators who are going to be under a lot of pressure from various special interests and various constituencies and many of their voters to not let any nominee go through, no matter who I nominate. But that’s not how the system is supposed to work. That’s not how our democracy is supposed to work.

And I intend to nominate in due time a very well-qualified candidate. If we are following basic precedent, then that nominee will be presented before the committees; the vote will be taken; and ultimately, they’ll be confirmed. Justice Kennedy, when he was nominated by Ronald Reagan -- in Ronald Reagan’s last year in office, a vote was taken, and there were a whole lot of Democrats who I’m sure did not agree with Justice Kennedy on his position on a variety of issues -- but they did the right thing; they confirmed him. And if they voted against him, they certainly didn’t mount a filibuster to block a vote from even coming up.

This is the Supreme Court. The highest court in the land. It’s the one court where we would expect elected officials to rise above day-to-day politics. And this will be the opportunity for senators to do their job. Your job doesn’t stop until you’re voted out or until your term expires. I intend to do my job between now and January 20th of 2017. I expect them to do their job as well.

All right. Let’s see who we’ve got here. Jeff Mason.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Following up on that, should we interpret your comments just now that you are likely to choose a moderate nominee? Would you --

President Obama: No.

Question: Okay.

President Obama: I don’t know where you found that. You shouldn’t assume anything about the qualifications of the nominee other than they’re going to be well-qualified.

Question: All right.

President Obama: Okay.

Question: Following up, would you consider a recess appointment if your nominee is not granted a hearing?

President Obama: I think that we have more than enough time to go through regular order, regular processes. I intend to nominate somebody, to present them to the American people, to present them to the Senate. I expect them to hold hearings. I expect there to be a vote.

Question: That means no recess appointment?

President Obama: Full stop.

Question: And lastly, as long as we’re doing this in a row, how do you respond to Republican criticism that your position is undercut by the fact that you and other members of your administration who were in the Senate at the time tried to filibuster Judge Alito in 2006?

President Obama: Look, I think what’s fair to say is that how judicial nominations have evolved over time is not historically the fault of any single party. This has become just one more extension of politics. And there are times where folks are in the Senate and they’re thinking, as I just described, primarily about, is this going to cause me problems in a primary? Is this going to cause me problems with supporters of mine? And so people take strategic decisions. I understand that.

But what is also true is Justice Alito is on the bench right now. I think that, historically, if you look at it, regardless of what votes particular senators have taken, there’s been a basic consensus, a basic understanding, that the Supreme Court is different. And each caucus may decide who’s going to vote where and what but that basically you let the vote come up, and you make sure that a well-qualified candidate is able to join the bench, even if you don’t particularly agree with them. And my expectation is, is that the same should happen here.

Now, this will be a test -- one more test -- of whether or not norms, rules, basic fair play can function at all in Washington these days. But I do want to point out, this is not just the Supreme Court. We have consistently seen just a breakdown in the basic functions of government because the Senate will not confirm well-qualified nominees even when they’re voted out of committee, which means that they’re voted by both parties without objection.

And we still have problems, because there’s a certain mindset that says we’re just going to grind the system down to a halt, and if we don’t like the President then we’re just not going to let him make any appointments. We’re going to make it tougher for the administration to do their basic job. We’re going to make sure that ambassadors aren’t seated, even though these are critical countries and it may have an effect on our international relations. We’re going to make sure that judges aren’t confirmed, despite the fact that Justice Roberts, himself, has pointed out there’s emergencies in courts around the country because there are just not enough judges and there are too many cases, and the system is breaking down.

So this has become a habit. And it gets worse and worse each year. And it’s not something that I have spent a huge amount of time talking about, because, frankly, the American people, on average, they’re more interested in gas prices and wages and issues that touch on their day-to-day lives in a more direct way, so it doesn’t get a lot of political attention.

But this is the Supreme Court. And it’s going to get some attention. And we have to ask ourselves as a society a fundamental question: Are we able to still make this democracy work the way it’s supposed to, the way our Founders envisioned it? And I would challenge anyone who purports to be adhering to the original intent of the Founders, anybody who believes in the Constitution, coming up with a plausible rationale as to why they would not even have a hearing for a nominee made in accordance with the Constitution by the President of the United States --with a year left, practically, in office. It’s pretty hard to find that in the Constitution.

All right. You’ve gotten at least -- you’ve gotten four now, Jeff.

Toluse.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Two different topics -- first on Syria. Last year, when President Putin was about to enter into Syria, you said that he was doing so from a position of weakness and that he would only get himself involved in a quagmire there. Now, with Aleppo about to fall, it seems like President Putin is basically getting one of his goals, which is to bolster Assad and to take out the rebels, which the U.S. is backing. How do you respond to critics who say that you have been outfoxed by Putin? And what is your plan if Aleppo does fall? Do you plan to step up military action to help the rebels in Syria, who you have said are key to taking on ISIS?

And then secondly, I wanted to ask you about 2016 as well.

President Obama: Okay, this is getting to be a lot of questions here. How about -- you asked me a big question right there. How about I just answer that one?

Question: Okay, sure.

President Obama: All right.

First of all, if you look back at the transcripts, what I said was that Russia has been propping up Assad this entire time. The fact that Putin finally had to send his own troops and his own aircraft and invest this massive military operation was not a testament to a great strength; it was a testament to the weakness of Assad’s position. That if somebody is strong, then you don’t have to send in your army to prop up your ally. They have legitimacy in their country and they are able to manage it their self, and then you have good relations with them. You send in your army when the horse you’re backing isn’t effective. And that’s exactly what’s happened.

Now, what I said was, is that Russia would involve itself in a quagmire. Absolutely, it will. If there’s anybody who thinks that somehow the fighting ends because Russia and the regime has made some initial advances -- about three-quarters of the country is still under control of folks other than Assad. That’s not stopping anytime soon.

I say that, by the way, with no pleasure. This is not a contest between me and Putin. The question is, how can we stop the suffering, stabilize the region, stop this massive out-migration of refugees who are having such a terrible time, end the violence, stop the bombing of schools and hospitals and innocent civilians, stop creating a safe haven for ISIS. And there’s nothing that’s happened over the last several weeks that points to those issues being solved. And that is what I mean by a quagmire.

Now, Putin may think that he’s prepared to invest in a permanent occupation of Syria with Russian military. That’s going to be pretty costly. That’s going to be a big piece of business. And if you look at the state of the Russian economy, that’s probably not the best thing for Russia.

What would be smarter would be for Russia to work with the United States and other parties in the international community to try to broker some sort of political transition. Now, John Kerry, working with his Russian counterpart, has, on paper, said that there’s going to be a cessation of hostilities in a few days. This will test whether or not that’s possible. It’s hard to do because there’s been a lot of bloodshed. And if Russia continues indiscriminate bombing of the sort that we’ve been seeing, I think it’s fair to say that you’re not going to see any take-up by the opposition.

And, yes, Russia has a major military. Obviously, a bunch of rebels are not going to be able to compete with the hardware of the second-most powerful military in the world. But that doesn’t solve the problem of actually stabilizing Syria. And the only way to do that is to bring about some sort of political transition.

We will see what happens over the next several days. And we will continue to work with our partners who are focused on defeating ISIS to also see how we can work together to try to bring about a more lasting political solution than aerial bombardment of schools and hospitals are going to achieve.

But it’s hard. I’m under no illusions here that this is going to be easy. A country has been shattered because Assad was willing to shatter it, and has repeatedly missed opportunities to try to arrive at a political transition. And Russia has been party to that entire process. And the real question we should be asking is what is it that Russia thinks it gains if it gets a country that’s been completely destroyed as an ally that it now has to perpetually spend billions of dollars to prop up? That’s not that great a prize. Unfortunately, the problem is, is that it has spillover effects that are impacting everybody, and that’s what we have to focus on.

One thing that I do want to add, though -- this has not distracted us from continuing to focus on ISIL. And we continue to press them hard both in Iraq and Syria. That will not stop. And if we can get a political transition in Syria, that allows us to coordinate more effectively with not just Russia, but other countries in the region to focus on the folks who pose the greatest direct threat to the United States.

All right. Andrew Beatty.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. I wanted to ask you, first of all, whether you think that military intervention will be necessary in Libya to dislodge the Islamic State from Sirte? And as an extension of that, do you think that by the end of your presidency the Islamic State will still have geographical strongholds throughout the Middle East? And, I'm sorry, I can't resist asking a third -- how was the stadium course? What did you shoot?

President Obama: The last, for non-golfers, is a reference to PGA West. Very nice course; very difficult. My score is classified.

With respect to Libya, I have been clear from the outset that we will go after ISIS wherever it appears, the same way that we went after al Qaeda wherever they appeared. And the testament to the fact that we are doing that already is that we took out ISIS -- one of ISIS’s most prominent leaders in Libya.

We will continue to take actions where we've got a clear operation and a clear target in mind. And we are working with our other coalition partners to make sure that as we see opportunities to prevent ISIS from digging in, in Libya, we take them. At the same time, we're working diligently with the United Nations to try to get a government in place in Libya. And that's been a problem.

The tragedy of Libya over the last several years is Libya has a relatively small population and a lot of oil wealth and could be really successful. They are divided by tribal lines and ethnic lines, power plays. There is now, I think, a recognition on the part of a broad middle among their political leadership that it makes sense to unify so that there is just some semblance of a state there, but extremes on either side are still making it difficult for that state to cohere.

If we can get that done, that will be enormously helpful, because our strong preference, as has always been the case, is to train Libyans to fight. And the good news in Libya is, is that they don't like outsiders coming in, telling them what to do. There’s a whole bunch of constituencies who are hardened fighters and don't ascribe to ISIS or their perverted ideology. But they have to be organized and can't be fighting each other. And so that's probably as important as anything that we're going to be doing in Libya over the coming months.

Carol Lee.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. The Democratic race to replace you has gotten pretty heated lately, and you have Hillary Clinton saying that -- or at least casting herself as the rightful heir to your legacy and the one, the candidate who will be the keeper of your legacy, while also saying the Bernie Sanders has been disloyal to you. Is she right?

President Obama: Well, that's the great thing about primaries, is everybody is trying to differentiate themselves, when, in fact, Bernie and Hillary agree on a lot of stuff and disagree pretty much across the board with everything the Republicans stand for. So my hope is, is that we can let the primary voters and caucus-goers have their say for a while, and let’s see how this thing plays itself out.

I know Hillary better than I know Bernie because she served in my administration and she was an outstanding Secretary of State. And I suspect that on certain issues she agrees with me more than Bernie does. On the other hand, there may be a couple issues where Bernie agrees with me more. I don't know. I haven’t studied their positions that closely.

Here’s what I have confidence in -- that Democratic voters believe in certain principles. They believe in equal opportunity. They believe in making sure that every kid in this country gets a fair shot. They believe in making sure that economic growth is broad-based and everybody benefits from it, and if you work hard you're not in poverty. They believe in preserving a strong safety net through programs like Social Security and Medicare. They believe in a foreign policy that is not reckless, that is tough and protects the American people but doesn’t shoot before it aims. They believe in climate change. They think science matters. They think that it's important for us to have some basic regulations to keep our air clean and our water clean, and to make sure that banks aren't engaging in excesses that can result in the kind of thing that we saw in 2007 and 2008. So there’s a broad convergence of interests around those issues.

I think what you're seeing among Democrats right now is a difference in tactics, trying to figure out how do you actually get things done; how do you actually operate in a political environment that's become so polarized; how do you deal with the power of special interests, and frankly, how do you deal with a Republican Party right now that has moved so far to the right that it's often hard to find common ground.

And so that's, I think, the debate that's taking place right now. It's a healthy debate. Ultimately, I will probably have an opinion on it, based on both being a candidate of hope and change and a President who’s got some nicks and cuts and bruises from getting stuff done over the last seven years. But for now, I think it's important for Democratic voters to express themselves and for the candidates to be run through the paces.

The thing I can say unequivocally, Carol is I'm not unhappy that I am not on the ballot.

Ron Allen, NBC.

Question: Let me continue the 2016 questions. On the Republican side -- and a lot of your guests were probably very intrigued by the fact that there’s a candidate who’s still winning who’s called for a ban on Muslims, and significant segments of the population in America agree --

President Obama: “Intrigued” is an interesting way of putting it.

Question: Struck -- well, what was their reaction? That's one of my five questions. But the point is --

President Obama: Ron, let’s stick to two.

Question: The point is, in the past you've explained that as anger, resentment, insecurity -- economic insecurity. The question is how much responsibility do you accept for that reservoir of feeling in the country that's propelling that sort of candidate? And a couple weeks ago, you told Matt Lauer that Donald Trump would not win the presidency. Do you now think that he will not win the nomination, as well? And what about Rubio, and what about Cruz?

President Obama: I think foreign observers are troubled by some of the rhetoric that's been taking place in these Republican primaries and Republican debates. I don't think it’s restricted, by the way, to Mr. Trump. I find it interesting that everybody is focused on Trump, primarily just because he says in more interesting ways what the other candidates are saying, as well.

So he may up the ante in anti-Muslim sentiment, but if you look at what the other Republican candidates have said, that's pretty troubling, too. He may express strong, anti-immigration sentiment, but you've heard that from the other candidates, as well. You've got a candidate who sponsored a bill -- that I supported -- to finally solve the immigration problem, and he’s running away from it as fast as he can.

They're all denying climate change. I think that's troubling to the international community, since the science is unequivocal. And the other countries around the world, they kind of count on the United States being on the side of science and reason and common sense, because they know that if the United States does not act on big problems in smart ways, nobody will.

But this is not just Mr. Trump. Look at the statements that are being made by the other candidates. There is not a single candidate in the Republican primary that thinks we should do anything about climate change; that thinks it’s serious. Well, that's a problem. The rest of the world looks at that and says, how can that be?

I’ll leave it to you to speculate on how this whole race is going to go. I continue to believe Mr. Trump will not be President. And the reason is because I have a lot of faith in the American people, and I think they recognize that being President is a serious job. It’s not hosting a talk show or a reality show. It’s not promotion. It’s not marketing.

It’s hard. And a lot of people count on us getting it right. And it’s not a matter of pandering and doing whatever will get you in the news on a given day. And sometimes it requires you making hard decisions even when people don't like it, and doing things that are unpopular, and standing up for people who are vulnerable but don't have some powerful political constituency. And it requires being able to work with leaders around the world in a way that reflects the importance of the office; and gives people confidence that you know the facts, and you know their names, and you know where they are on a map, and you know something about their history. And you're not just going to play to the crowd back home -- because they have their own crowds back home -- and you're trying to solve problems.

And so, yes, during primaries, people vent and they express themselves. And it seems like entertainment, and oftentimes it’s reported just like entertainment. But as you get closer, reality has a way of intruding.

And these are the folks who I have faith in, because they ultimately are going to say whoever is standing where I’m standing right now has the nuclear codes with them, and can order 21-year-olds into a firefight, and have to make sure that the banking system doesn't collapse, and is often responsible for not just the United States of America but 20 other countries that are having big problems or falling apart and are going to be looking for us to do something. And the American people are pretty sensible and I think they’ll make a sensible choice in the end.

All right? Thanks, everybody. Thank you.

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# Weekly Address: A New Chapter with Cuba

Hi, everybody. This week, we made it official -- I’m going to Cuba.

When Michelle and I go to Havana next month, it will be the first visit of a U.S. President to Cuba in nearly 90 years. And it builds on the decision I made more than a year ago to begin a new chapter in our relationship with the people of Cuba.

You see, I believe that the best way to advance American interests and values, and the best way to help the Cuban people improve their lives, is through engagement -- by normalizing relations between our governments and increasing the contacts between our peoples. I’ve always said that change won’t come to Cuba overnight. But as Cuba opens up, it will mean more opportunity and resources for ordinary Cubans. And we’re starting to see some progress.

Today, the American flag flies over our embassy in Havana, and our diplomats are interacting more broadly with the Cuban people. More Americans are visiting Cuba than at any time in the last 50 years -- Cuban-American families; American students, teachers, humanitarian volunteers, faith communities -- all forging new ties and friendships that are bringing our countries closer. And when direct flights and ferries resume, even more of our citizens will have the chance to travel and work together and know each other.

American companies are starting to do business in Cuba, helping to nurture private enterprise and giving Cuban entrepreneurs new opportunities. With new Wi-Fi hotspots, more Cubans are starting to go online and get information from the outside world. In both our countries, there’s overwhelming support for this new relationship. And in Cuba today, for the first time in a half century, there is hope for a different future, especially among Cuba’s young people who have such extraordinary talent and potential just waiting to be unleashed.

My visit will be an opportunity to keep moving forward. I’ll meet with President Castro to discuss how we can continue normalizing relations, including making it easier to trade and easier for Cubans to access the Internet and start their own businesses. As I did when I met President Castro last year, I’ll speak candidly about our serious differences with the Cuban government, including on democracy and human rights. I’ll reaffirm that the United States will continue to stand up for universal values like freedom of speech and assembly and religion.

I’ll meet with members of Cuba’s civil society -- courageous men and women who give voice to the aspirations of the Cuban people. I’ll meet with Cuban entrepreneurs to learn how we can help them start new ventures. And I’ll speak directly to the Cuban people about the values we share and how I believe we can be partners as they work for the future they want.

We’re still in the early days of our new relationship with the Cuban people. This transformation will take time. But I’m focused on the future, and I’m confident that my visit will advance the goals that guide us -- promoting American interests and values and a better future for the Cuban people, a future of more freedom and more opportunity.

Thanks everybody.

And to the people of Cuba; Nos vemos en La Habana.

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# Address on Closing Guantanamo Bay Detention Facility

Good morning, everybody.

In our fight against terrorists like al Qaeda and ISIL, we are using every element of our national power -- our military; intelligence; diplomacy; homeland security; law enforcement, federal, state and local; as well as the example of our ideals as a country that’s committed to universal values, including rule of law and human rights. In this fight, we learn and we work to constantly improve. When we find something that works, we keep on doing it. When it becomes clear that something is not working as intended -- when it does not advance our security -- we have to change course.

For many years, it’s been clear that the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay does not advance our national security -- it undermines it. This is not just my opinion. This is the opinion of experts, this is the opinion of many in our military. It’s counterproductive to our fight against terrorists, because they use it as propaganda in their efforts to recruit. It drains military resources, with nearly 450 million dollars spent last year alone to keep it running, and more than 200 million dollars in additional costs needed to keep it open going forward for less than 100 detainees. Guantanamo harms our partnerships with allies and other countries whose cooperation we need against terrorism. When I talk to other world leaders, they bring up the fact that Guantanamo is not resolved.

Moreover, keeping this facility open is contrary to our values. It undermines our standing in the world. It is viewed as a stain on our broader record of upholding the highest standards of rule of law. As Americans, we pride ourselves on being a beacon to other nations, a model of the rule of law. But 15 years after 9/11 -- 15 years after the worst terrorist attack in American history -- we’re still having to defend the existence of a facility and a process where not a single verdict has been reached in those attacks -- not a single one.

When I first ran for President, it was widely recognized that this facility needed to close. This was not just my opinion. This was not some radical, far-left view. There was bipartisan support to close it. My predecessor, President Bush, to his credit, said he wanted to close it. It was one of the few things that I and my Republican opponent, Senator John McCain, agreed on.

And so, in one of my first acts as President, I took action to begin closing it. And because we had bipartisan support, I wanted to make sure that we did it right. I indicated that we would need to take our time to do it in a systematic way, and that we had examined all the options.

And unfortunately, during that period where we were putting the pieces in place to close it, what had previously been bipartisan support suddenly became a partisan issue. Suddenly, many you previously had said it should be closed backed off because they were worried about the politics. The public was scared into thinking that, well, if we close it, somehow we’ll be less safe. And since that time, Congress has repeatedly imposed restrictions aimed at preventing us from closing this facility.

Now, despite the politics, we’ve made progress. Of the nearly 800 detainees once held at Guantanamo, more than 85 percent have already been transferred to other countries. More than 500 of these transfers, by the way, occurred under President Bush. Since I took office, we’ve so far transferred 147 more, each under new, significant restrictions to keep them from returning to the battlefield. And as a result of these actions, today, just 91 detainees remain -- less than 100. Today, the Defense Department, thanks to very hard work by Secretary of Defense Ash Carter, as well as his team, working in concert with the Office of Management and Budget, today, the Department is submitting to Congress our plan for finally closing the facility at Guantanamo once and for all. It’s a plan that reflects the hard work of my entire national security team, so I especially want to thank Ash and his team at DOD. This plan has my full support. It reflects our best thinking on how to best go after terrorists and deal with those who we may capture, and it is a strategy with four main elements.

First, we’ll continue to securely and responsibly transfer to other countries the 35 detainees -- out of the 91 -- that have already been approved for transfer. Keep in mind, this process involves extensive and careful coordination across our federal government to ensure that our national security interests are met when an individual is transferred to another country. So, for example, we insist that foreign countries institute strong security measures. And as we move forward, that means that we will have around 60 -- and potentially even fewer -- detainees remaining.

Second, we’ll accelerate the periodic reviews of remaining detainees to determine whether their continued detention is necessary. Our review board, which includes representatives from across government, will continue to look at all relevant information, including current intelligence. And if certain detainees no longer pose a continuing significant threat, they may be eligible for transfer to another country as well.

Number three, we’ll continue to use all legal tools to deal with the remaining detainees still held under law of war detention. Currently, 10 detainees are in some stage of the military commissions process -- a process that we worked hard to reform in my first year in office with bipartisan support from Congress. But I have to say, with respect to these commissions, they are very costly, they have resulted in years of litigation without a resolution. We’re therefore outlining additional changes to improve these commissions, which would require congressional action, and we will be consulting with them in the near future on that issue.

I also want to point out that, in contrast to the commission process, our Article 3 federal courts have proven to have an outstanding record of convicting some of the most hardened terrorists. These prosecutions allow for the gathering of intelligence against terrorist groups. It proves that we can both prosecute terrorists and protect the American people. So think about it -- terrorists like Richard Reid, the shoe bomber; Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, who tried to blow up an airplane over Detroit; Faisal Shahzad, who put a car bomb in Times Square; and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, who bombed the Boston Marathon -- they were all convicted in our Article III courts and are now behind bars, here in the United States.

So we can capture terrorists, protect the American people, and when done right, we can try them and put them in our maximum security prisons, and it works just fine. And in this sense, the plan we’re putting forward today isn’t just about closing the facility at Guantanamo. It’s not just about dealing with the current group of detainees, which is a complex piece of business because of the manner in which they were originally apprehended and what happened. This is about closing a chapter in our history. It reflects the lessons that we’ve learned since 9/11 --lessons that need to guide our nation going forward.

So even as we use military commissions to close out the cases of some current detainees -- which, given the unique circumstances of their cases make it difficult for them to be tried in Article III courts -- this type of use of military commissions should not set a precedent for the future. As they have been in past wars, military commissions will continue to be an option when individuals are detained during battle. But our preferred option, the most effective option for dealing with individuals detained outside military theaters, must be our strong, proven federal courts.

Fourth, and finally, we’re going to work with Congress to find a secure location in the United States to hold remaining detainees. These are detainees who are subject to military commissions, but it also includes those who cannot yet be transferred to other countries or who we’ve determined must continue to be detained because they pose a continuing significant threat to the United States.

We are not identifying a specific facility today in this plan. We are outlining what options look like. As Congress has imposed restrictions that currently prevent the transfer of detainees to the United States, we recognize that this is going to be a challenge. And we’re going to keep making the case to Congress that we can do this is a responsible and secure way, taking into account the lessons and great record of our maximum-security prisons.

And let me point out, the plan we’re submitting today is not only the right thing to do for our security, it will also save money. The Defense Department estimates that this plan, compared to keeping Guantanamo open, would lower costs by up to 85 million dollars a year. Over 10 years, it would generate savings of more than 300 million dollars. Over 20 years, the savings would be up to 1.7 billion dollars. In other words, we can ensure our security, uphold our highest values around the world, and save American taxpayers a lot of money in the process.

So in closing, I want to say I am very clear-eyed about the hurdles to finally closing Guantanamo. The politics of this are tough. I think a lot of the American public are worried about terrorism, and in their mind the notion of having terrorists held in the United States rather than in some distant place can be scary. But part of my message to the American people here is we’re already holding a bunch of really dangerous terrorists here in the United States because we threw the book at them. And there have been no incidents. We’ve managed it just fine.

And in Congress, I recognize, in part because of some of the fears of the public that have been fanned oftentimes by misinformation, there continues to be a fair amount of opposition to doing closing Guantanamo. If it were easy, it would have happened years ago -- as I wanted, as I have been working to try to get done. But there remains bipartisan support for closing it. And given the stakes involved for our security, this plan deserves a fair hearing. Even in an election year, we should be able to have an open, honest, good-faith dialogue about how to best ensure our national security. And the fact that I’m no longer running, Joe is no longer running, we’re not on the ballot -- it gives us the capacity to not have to worry about the politics.

Let us do what is right for America. Let us go ahead and close this chapter, and do it right, do it carefully, do it in a way that makes sure we’re safe, but gives the next President and, more importantly, future generations, the ability to apply the lessons we’ve learned in the fight against terrorism and doing it in a way that doesn’t raise some of the problems that Guantanamo has raised.

I really think there’s an opportunity here for progress. I believe we’ve got an obligation to try. President Bush said he wanted to close Guantanamo despite everything that he had invested in it. I give him credit for that. There was an honest assessment on his part about what needed to happen. But he didn’t get it done and it was passed to me. I’ve been working for seven years now to get this thing closed. As President, I have spent countless hours dealing with this -- I do not exaggerate about that. Our closest allies have raised it with me continually. They often raise specific cases of detainees repeatedly.

I don’t want to pass this problem on to the next President, whoever it is. And if, as a nation, we don’t deal with this now, when will we deal with it? Are we going to let this linger on for another 15 years, another 20 years, another 30 years? If we don’t do what’s required now, I think future generations are going to look back and ask why we failed to act when the right course, the right side of history, and of justice, and our best American traditions was clear.

So, again, I want to thank Secretary Carter. You and your team did an outstanding job, and you’ve shown great leadership on this issue. With this plan, we have the opportunity, finally, to eliminate a terrorist propaganda tool, strengthen relationships with allies and partners, enhance our national security, and, most importantly, uphold the values that define us as Americans. I’m absolutely committed to closing the detention facility at Guantanamo. I’m going to continue to make the case for doing so for as long as I hold this office. But this is a good moment for everybody to step back, take a look at the facts, take a look at the views of those who have been most committed to fighting terrorism and understand this stuff -- our operatives, our intelligence officials, our military. Let’s go ahead and get this thing done.

Thanks very much, everybody.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Update on Campaign to Degrade and Destroy ISIL

Good evening, everybody. I just met with my National Security Council as part of our regular effort to review and intensify our campaign to destroy ISIL. I want to thank Secretary Kerry for hosting us and for his leadership of American diplomacy, not only in the Middle East but around the world. Secretary Carter and Chairman Dunford updated us on our military campaign, and Brett McGurk, my special envoy to our coalition, helped lead a review of our overall strategy.

At the outset, I want to say, again, that this remains a difficult fight. The situation in Syria and Iraq is one of the most complex the world has seen in recent times. ISIL is entrenched, including in urban areas, using innocent civilians as human shields. Even in places where ISIL has been driven out, it leaves behind utter devastation -- communities in ruin that need to be stabilized and rebuilt, which will take years and tremendous international resources, because, certainly in Iraq, they’re hard-pressed to come up with everything that they need to rebuild, and in Syria, the regime there still is not constituted in such a way that it is investing in civilian populations.

Countries, communities and groups that agree on fighting ISIL in the short term often don’t agree on broader, long-term goals. Indeed, the fight in Syria is not only a civil war, but it’s also a proxy war between regional powers, reflecting deep sectarian and political rivalries. Russia’s intervention and airstrikes have reinforced the Assad regime and made a humanitarian catastrophe even worse. And the entire world has been horrified by images of starving Syrians -- including children -- reduced to near skeletons.

So this is a tough situation with a lot of moving parts. And as a consequence, I want to thank John for his tireless efforts, along with his team, to reach a cessation of hostilities in the civil war. None of us are under any illusions. We’re all aware of the many potential pitfalls, and there are plenty of reasons for skepticism. But history would judge us harshly if we did not do our part in at least trying to end this terrible conflict with diplomacy.

If implemented -- and that’s a significant “if” -- this cessation could reduce the violence and get more food and aid to Syrians who are suffering and desperately need it. It could save lives. Potentially, it could also lead to negotiations on a political settlement to end the civil war so that everybody can focus their attention on destroying ISIL. And that’s why the United States will do everything we can to maximize the chances of success in this cessation of hostilities. At the same time, I want to make totally clear that there will be absolutely no cease-fire with respect to ISIL. We remain relentless in going after them.

About two months ago, at the Pentagon, I said that we had to squeeze ISIL’s core in Syria and Iraq -- its heart -- to make it harder for these killers to pump their terror and their propaganda to the rest of the world. And over the last two months, the good news is we’ve done exactly that. We’ve continued to intensify our efforts, and we’re seeing results.

Today, I directed my team to continue accelerating this campaign on all fronts. Our 66-member coalition, including Arab partners, continues to grow stronger. Over the past two months, thanks to Secretary Carter’s good work, just about all of our military partners have agreed to increase their contributions, buying into our conception of how we ramp us the pressure on ISIL. Dutch aircraft are now striking ISIL targets in Syria. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are expanding their role in the air campaign. Canada is tripling its personnel to help train and advise forces in Iraq.

Every day, our air campaign -- more than 10,000 strikes so far -- continues to destroy ISIL forces, infrastructure and heavy weapons. ISIL fighters are learning that they’ve got no safe haven. We can hit them anywhere, anytime -- and we do. In fact, ISIL still has not had a single successful major offensive operation in Syria or Iraq since last summer. And we continue to go after ISIL leaders and commanders -- taking them out, day in, day out, one after another after another.

With coalition training, equipment and support -- including our Special Forces -- local forces continue to push ISIL back out of territory that they had previously held. After intense block-by-block fighting, Iraqi forces recently succeeded in pushing ISIL out of Ramadi. ISIL has now lost a series of key Iraqi towns and cities -- more than 40 percent of the areas it once controlled in Iraq. And today, we discussed the next phases of this fight, including moving against ISIL in the city of Hīt, and the resources needed to retake Anbar Province and Mosul. And as we approach the G7 this spring, I’ll continue to work with the international community so Iraq gets the financial support it needs to sustain this campaign, rebuild communities that have been devastated by ISIL presence, and pursue critical economic reforms.

Meanwhile, in Syria, a coalition of local forces continues to push ISIL back, including out of the strategic Tishrin Dam area. Now they’re battling ISIL at al-Shaddadi. And they’re continuing to squeeze ISIL’s stronghold of Raqqa, cutting off highways and supply lines. Raqqa is not the capital of a growing caliphate; it’s increasingly under stress as ISIL territory shrinks.

Thanks to our wave of strikes against its oil infrastructure, tanker trucks, wells and refineries, ISIL’s oil production and revenues are significantly reduced. We’re destroying the storage sites where ISIL holds its cash -- its money is literally going up in smoke. As a result, ISIL has been forced to slash the salaries of its fighters, which, increasingly, diminishes their morale. We continue to hear reports of defections, and executions of those who try to defect.

At the same time, thanks to the coordination of many nations -- including Turkey’s continuing work to tighten its border -- the flow of foreign terrorist fighters into Syria finally appears to be slowing. The bottom line is there are fewer ISIL fighters on the battlefield in Syria and Iraq, and for those who are there, it’s harder for them to recruit and replenish their ranks.

As its finances shrink, ISIL is also imposing more taxes and fines on those under its brutal rule. That, in turn, stokes even more resentment among local populations. More people are realizing that ISIL is not a caliphate, it’s a crime ring. “It’s a criminal gang pretending to be a state,” said one Syrian refugee. “They turned out to be thieves,” said another. ISIL, said one Syrian, “has made an enemy of almost everyone.”

So they’re not winning over hearts and minds, and they’re under severe pressure. But as we’ve said all along, the only way to deal with ISIL in a way that defeats them in a lasting way is to end the chaos and the civil war that has engulfed Syria. That’s how ISIL was able to thrive in the first place. The cessation of hostilities that’s scheduled to take effect at midnight tomorrow is a potential step in bringing about an end to the chaos.

Even under the best of circumstances, we don’t expect the violence to end immediately. In fact, I think we are certain that there will continue to be fighting, in part because not only ISIL, but organizations like Al Nusra that is not part of any negotiations and is hostile to the United States, is going to continue to fight.

But everybody knows what needs to happen, and that is all parties that are part of the cessation of activities need to end attacks, including aerial bombardment. Humanitarian aid must be allowed to reach areas under siege. And a lot of that is going to depend on whether the Syrian regime, Russia, and their allies live up to their commitments. The coming days will be critical, and the world will be watching.

More broadly, this is going to be a test of whether the parties are truly committed to negotiations. The process agreed to in Vienna is clear -- a transition toward a more inclusive representative government, a new constitution, followed by free elections.

I will say it again: Such a future, I am convinced, cannot include Bashar al-Assad. It’s clear that after years of his barbaric war against his own people -- including torture, and barrel bombs, and sieges, and starvation -- many Syrians will never stop fighting until Assad is out of power. There’s no alternative to a managed transition away from Assad. It’s the only way to end the civil war and unite the Syrian people against terrorists.

This is an area where there’s still significant dispute between us and the Russians, between us and the Iranians, between us and some of the other players on the ground. And the question is going to be whether the cessation of hostilities gives all the parties concerned an opportunity to reflect and assess what, in fact, will be required in order for us to see an end to the fighting in Syria.

Beyond Syria and Iraq, I want to point out that we continue to go after ISIL wherever it tries to take root, working with partners from Nigeria to Afghanistan. As we showed last week with our strike on an ISIL training camp in Libya, which targeted a senior ISIL operative, we will continue to use the full range of tools to eliminate ISIL threats wherever they are. Meanwhile, the United States will continue to support the Libyan people as they work to form a new government and regain control of their country, as we’ve seen in recent days with Libyans celebrating in the streets as ISIL was driven from parts of Benghazi.

Even as we continue our military and counterterrorism efforts, we also recognize that it’s not enough to defeat ISIL on the battlefield. We’re going to have to defeat its ideology, which radicalizes, recruits, and inspires people to violence. The United Arab Emirates, Malaysia and Saudi Arabia are stepping up their efforts to discredit ISIL propaganda.

Here at the State Department, our new Global Engagement Center will do more to lift up voices that expose ISIL as the murderers that they are -- killers of innocent Muslim men, women and children. And my administration is working with high-tech leaders in Silicon Valley, including Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter to help counter ISIL online and to empower more people, especially young people, to use their talents and technology to push back on ISIL’s propaganda.

Finally, we had an opportunity to discuss the importance of us staying vigilant here at home. Lone actors or small groups of terrorists like those in San Bernardino are very hard to detect. And they continue to pose a serious threat. So at every level -- federal, state and local -- law enforcement needs to be working together, 24/7, sharing information and connecting the dots to prevent attacks.

As we do, we’ll continue to partner with communities to help them stay strong and resilient. That includes upholding our values, including freedom of religion, so that we stay united as one American family.

So to summarize, the fight against ISIL will remain difficult but we will continue to draw on all elements of our national power -- military, intelligence, diplomacy, homeland security, law enforcement, and the strength of our communities. And I am confident that we will prevail. We are in a better position now than we were last month, and a better position last month than we were three months ago.

In the end, brutality of ISIL is no match for the yearning of millions who want to live in security and dignity. I think of the Syrian who returned to his home in Kobani, a city that was in ruins but liberated from ISIL. “Despite knowing life would be tougher here,” he said, “I chose to come back.” And I think of the tens of thousands of people of Tikrit in Iraq, who have returned home, including students back at their university, focusing on a better future.

So the road ahead will not be easy, but our coalition continues to grow stronger. The ISIL core in Syria and Iraq continues to shrink. With allies and partners and the service of our dedicated personnel, our diplomats, our civilians, and our military, we will destroy this barbaric terrorist organization and continue to stand with people across the region who seek a better and a safer future.

Thanks very much, everybody.

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# Address On the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act Seventh Anniversary

Please, everybody please have a seat. It is great to be back in Jacksonville. As President, I've been to all 50 states. I have seen some pretty incredible things, but I've also got a bucket list of things I still need to get done. Apparently, I have not yet made it to the world’s largest outdoor cocktail party. So there’s some local things I've got to check out at some point. That's the kind of thing you do once you are not President anymore. So, hopefully, I'll see you back, but it is great to be in Florida on a Friday afternoon.

I want to thank Jaime not only for the introduction, but more importantly, for your service to our nation. Thank you so much.

I also want to recognize two outstanding members of Congress w Yay, Corrine! And Representative Patrick Murphy. And I also want to thank everybody at Saft America for hosting us today, especially Tom Alcide and Chris Kaniut. You can’t miss him.

We’re here to talk about the great things you guys are doing at this facility. But before I begin, I do want to say a few words about yet another mass shooting that we’ve had to endure. Some of you may have heard, yesterday a gunman murdered three people and injured 14 others in Hesston, Kansas. And this morning, I spoke with Mayor Kauffman and expressed our deepest condolences for the victims, their families, and the community as a whole.

This comes after last weekend's rampage in Kalamazoo, Michigan, where six more innocent Americans were gunned down. And these acts may not dominate the news today, but these are two more communities in America that are torn apart by grief. And I felt it was important for me to say something today because somehow, as I’ve said before, this becomes routine -- these sort of mass shootings that are taking place.

We cannot become numb to this. Anybody who says they want to keep the American people safe has to care about this, because it’s happening in far too many towns and affecting far too many innocent Americans. And there are some things we can do about it. And right now, this Congress may not have any appetite to do something about it, but we need one that does. As long as I hold this office, I’m going to keep on bringing this up, even if it’s not getting the same attention that it should. And I wish I didn’t have to keep on talking about it. Lord knows I wish I didn’t have to make these phone calls and comfort families. The real tragedy is the degree to which this has become routine.

So I hope all of you pay attention to this. I hope the media pays attention to this. Once a week, we have these shootings. And it doesn’t dominate the news, and that’s got to change.

So thank you for allowing me to talk about that for a moment.

The truth is, though, that even when we’ve got some real challenges out there, the reason I’m here today is because Saft is telling a story about the amazing work that people all across this country have done to bring America back from one of the worst financial crises in our history.

So think about it. Sometimes people also forget where we’ve been, and if you forget where you’ve been, sometimes you don’t know where you need to go. Seven years ago, the ground we were standing on was an empty plot of swampland. I don’t know if gators make it up this far -- (laughter) -- but it was not some place you’d want to be wondering around. It had been ignored for more than a decade since the Navy base here closed.

Back then, all around us, the economy was in a free fall -- 800,000 Americans were losing their jobs every single month. That’s almost the entire population of Jacksonville joining the unemployment line every few weeks. Families lost their homes, families lost their savings. And people here in Florida were especially hard hit -- the unemployment rate here in Florida hit 11.2 percent, which was even higher than the national average.

Fast-forward today. Businesses like yours have created jobs for 71 straight months -- 14 million new jobs overall. We’ve cut the unemployment rate by more than half. Nationally, the high was 10 percent -- it’s now down to 4.9 percent. And here in Jacksonville, it is even lower. Our auto industry just had its best year ever. We’ve created more than 900,000 new manufacturing jobs in the past six years.

Meanwhile, our high school graduation rate is at an all-time high. Nearly 18 million Americans have gained health care coverage -- although here in Florida, there are a whole bunch of folks who haven’t because the state hasn’t expanded Medicaid, but that’s another topic. Businesses like Saft are leading a clean energy revolution that’s creating jobs and making our planet safer and more secure at the same time.

Now, you don’t hear a lot about this from the folks who are on the campaign trail. They’re spending all their time talking down America. I don’t know when it became fashionable to do that. But I sure am proud of what I’ve seen Americans do over the course of these last seven years since the crisis hit. And anybody who says we are not absolutely better off today than we were just seven years ago -- they’re not leveling with you. They’re not telling the truth. By almost every economic measure, we are significantly better off, and Florida is significantly better off. Jacksonville is a whole lot better off.

And the reason I make this point is none of this was an accident. It happened because of your hard work. It happened because of your resilience. It happened because Americans looked out for one another, and families scrimped and saved, and workers re-trained, and businesses hired and expanded, and students hit the books. And it happened because, early on, my administration put in place some pretty smart policies to rebuild our economy on a new foundation for growth and prosperity.

And thanks to America’s steady, persistent work, those policies are paying off in big, tangible ways -- and we’re not talking about it enough. And if we don’t talk about why it is that things got better, then we may end up pursuing policies that will make things worse. It’s not to argue that everything is perfect. There are still folks who are looking for work. There are still problems in terms of people getting higher wages. Being able to save for college, being able to retire. But if we don’t recognize the progress we’ve made and how that came about, then we may chase some snake oil and end up having policies that get us back in the swamp.

So part of what made us able to recover was something called the Recovery Act -- which I fought for from my first days in office. We just marked the seventh anniversary. And that recovery plan was a success. At the time, there were a bunch of folks who said, what, it’s not working, it’s not happening -- because it didn’t happen overnight. But you ask any credible economist, and they will tell you that if we had not acted, if we had not passed the Recovery Act, if we hadn’t saved the auto industry, if we hadn’t taken the steps we did, we could have fallen into another Great Depression.

And if you doubt that, you look around the world. Because in places like Europe, where they took a path of cutting and cutting, and not investing in clean energy, and not investing in transportation, and not investing in working retraining -- some of the same strategies that some politicians were arguing for right here in the United States, and are still arguing for -- those countries still have double-digit unemployment today. Some of these countries still face double-digit unemployment. We’re doing better than them on almost every measure.

Here’s what the Recovery Act did. It cut taxes for businesses investing in the future. It cut taxes for 95 percent of working families –- more than 100 million families in all. The extensions of some of these measures are still in effect, and they’re helping more than a million families here in Florida making ends meet.

We extended aid to help working people put food on the table, kept millions of people from falling into poverty. And that, in turn, meant that they could be customers at local businesses, and that helped support local businesses in the area.

We helped states and communities keep hundreds of thousands of teachers and first responders on the job, which meant they could afford to pay their mortgage. and they could afford to go to a restaurant once in a while, and they could afford to buy the computer that their child needed for school -- all of which kept the economy going.

We put people back to work repairing our roads and our bridges and our ports –- even sprucing up the National Mall, and Ellis Island, and the Grand Canyon. And we did this all while making this one of the most transparent, aboveboard pieces of legislation in our history; almost zero waste or fraud. I put Joe Biden in charge, and we call him the sheriff -- he wasn’t putting up with any nonsense.

We also aimed higher than just preventing another Great Depression. We wanted to build a new foundation for a stronger, smarter economy. We wanted to build a future where prosperity wasn’t fueled by reckless speculation on Wall Street, and excessive consumer debt, pursuing paper profits. We wanted a future that was solid, where prosperity is built and shared by a skilled, productive workforce. A prosperity that rests on sound investments that spread opportunity at home, and help America lead the world in technology and innovation and the discoveries that will help shape the 21st century.

And so I came here to Saft to show what it means to invest in the future. The future is built by the workers here at Saft and in companies like it all across the country. Because there are few areas where our efforts to build a new economy have paid off in a bigger way than in how we manage energy -- make it cleaner, make it more efficient -- help consumers, help businesses, and create jobs.

When I took office, we were hopelessly addicted to foreign oil. The future of our renewable energy industry was pretty cloudy and it looked like it might start collapsing. But we knew that there were technologies out there that existed -- the problem was they were too expensive. And because credit had frozen during the recession, it meant that a lot of entrepreneurs, a lot of businesses -- they couldn’t scale up to start taking advantage of these new technologies.

Meanwhile countries like Germany and China were racing ahead towards clean energy, creating the jobs that come with it, and we were falling behind. And I knew that the nation that won the race to drive the global economy and new energy, that was going to be the nation that won the 21st century, and I wanted America to win that race.

So here’s what we did. As part of the Recovery Act, we made the largest single investment in clean energy in our history. We invested in solar power. We invested in wind power. We invested in geothermal power. We gave seed money to entrepreneurs and businesses to get them to work with these promising new technologies and get them out of the door faster. Almost 98 percent of those investments that we made under one of our loan programs are paying off. Taxpayers are getting their money back, and some, and these businesses are thriving.

And overall, the clean energy investments we made in the Recovery Act have combined to support hundreds of thousands of jobs -- including nearly 300 right here at Saft. This was an example of the fruits of those investments that we made -- jobs that America needs done, getting done right here in Florida.

Just look around -- you see what a different hardworking Americans, with some smart help from the government, have been able to accomplish. Seven years ago, electricity from solar was just getting off the ground; today, we’ve multiplied the amount of solar power America produces 30 times over. Seven years ago, there were just a handful of large-scale utility solar plants in America; today, there are more than 30. Solar jobs are growing 12 times faster than other jobs; they’re paying better than average. Meanwhile, we’ve tripled the power we harness from the wind. We’ve cut our net imports of foreign oil by nearly 60 percent.

And all of you have helped us do this. Thanks to the investments we made in the Recovery Act, we’ve seen huge gains in our advanced battery industry. Because solar and wind don’t work unless we’ve got good ways to store power when the sun is out or the wind is blowing, so that it can be used in a regular, reliable way.

And the good news is, America now has more than two dozen factories manufacturing batteries and components for electric cars. And these batteries are nearly 70 percent cheaper and 60 percent more powerful than just five years ago. That’s how fast we’ve been making progress in this area. And we’re not just making advanced batteries for cars, we’re putting them together so they’re making batteries the size of cars. We just saw some -- looked like trailer parks. And these batteries help stabilize our energy grid, which is allowing us to transition faster to renewable energy.

That’s what you’re doing here at Saft. On my tour, I stepped inside -- I took a look at a shipping container filled with cutting-edge lithium-ion batteries. It stores energy for times when the wind’s not blowing or the sun’s not shining. These batteries are the kinds of things folks don’t always think about when it comes to renewable energy, but it couldn’t be more important. So the good news is that over the final three months of last year, we deployed more advanced energy storage capacity than over the previous two years combined.

And that’s what we should be investing in. Clean energy is about owning the kind of innovation where America has always been the leader. Clean energy is about unleashing the potential of all these new technologies -- because we can figure some stuff out just about better than anybody else. And just think about what we can do with something like solar in a place like the Sunshine State.

Clean energy is about cutting carbon emissions and fighting climate change, so that we can help our kids breathe cleaner, and protect the planet for future generations -- and make sure that Florida doesn’t get flooded. Clean energy is about making our economy less dependent on foreign oil from some of the most unstable parts of the world. And clean energy is about a steady stream of good jobs that give families a chance to reach for something higher and leave something better behind for their kids.

And here’s one other great fact about clean energy. It’s providing thousands of jobs for veterans, including vets that we brought home from Iraq and Afghanistan.

I’ve often said to CEOs across the country, if you want a job done right, hire a vet. And that’s why, working with them, we’ve been able to see the solar industry commit to hiring 50,000 more vets in the coming years -- this has been part of Michelle’s and Jill Biden’s Joining Forces program. So here at Saft, more than one-third of your employees are veterans. In fact, if you’re a veteran, please stand up so we can thank you for your service.

So companies like this are powered by veterans like Jaime. Jaime’s got five kids. He grew up in Puerto Rico, lived in Atlantic City, served in the military for 26 years. For the last four years, he’s been a team leader at the company that’s building our energy future. And he’s seen a lot, but the one thing he’s learned is that -- and I’m quoting him now -- “There’s always so much that changes very fast, but so much possibility.”

And that’s what Saft is about; that’s what this recovery has been about. Things are changing fast, and that’s scary sometimes. It means that you’ve got to constantly retrain for the jobs of the future. It means that the economy is interconnected and what happens on the other side of the world will affect us -- because you may be selling some batteries over there.

Sometimes it’s disorienting. But there’s so much possibility. And that’s the story of these last seven years. So much has changed fast, but there’s one country on Earth that sees possibility where others see peril. There’s on country on Earth that has the power to make change work for us and not against us, and that’s the United States of America -- as long we’re not scared of it. We always adapt to change. We always figure it out. Because we’re a nation of innovators and risk-takers, we make change work for us.

So we turned recession into recovery faster than almost any other country. We took an empty swamp, turned into an engine of innovation. And we knew that it was going to take more than one year, or even one President, to get to where we need to go, but we can see real, tangible evidence of what a new economy looks like. It looks like this facility right here.

It’s an economy that’s brimming with new industry and commerce, and new energy and new technologies, and highly skilled, higher-wage workers. It’s an economy that is producing for the United States and U.S. markets, but is also selling stuff overseas -- because we make it better than anybody else because we’ve got the best workers and the best innovators and the best scientists than anybody else.

The future is ours. But to finish the job requires steady, persistent effort. We can’t grow complacent. We can’t chase false promises. We’ve got to be smart. We’ve got to work together. But I’ve never been more optimistic than I am now that we will get to where we need to go, because I’ve seen what you can do. And if we keep working together, everything is possible and our best days are just ahead.

So, thank you, Jacksonville. Thank you, Saft. Thank you, veterans.

God bless you.

God bless the United States of America.

Thank you.

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# Remarks at South by Southwest Interactive

Moderator Evan Smith:

Hi, Mr. President.

President Obama: Hey! It's good to see you, and hello, Austin! I love Austin, Texas. Audience Member: We love you! President Obama: Thank you. It's just good to be back.

Moderator Smith:

Nice to have you here. Welcome. Welcome to Austin. Welcome to South by Southwest. Let’s make a little news. You stopped at Torchy’s on the way in from the airport. President Obama: I did.

Moderator Smith:

You did. Would you please share with the world what you told me backstage -- your order? Perfectly in keeping with your political views. President Obama: I ordered the Democrat. But then I ordered a Republican and an Independent, because I wanted to give all people a proper hearing. I wanted to be fair.

Moderator Smith:

Bipartisan in tacos as in life. President Obama: That's exactly right.

Moderator Smith:

That's how it goes. Mr. President, you're very nice to be here with us today. And you came for a purpose. You want to accomplish something. You said as much in your weekly radio address last weekend. I got the opportunity to hear it. Some people in the room have not heard it. For their benefit, and people outside the room, would you say why you're here? Make the pitch in miniature, please. President Obama: Well, first of all, I'm here because I like excuses to come to Austin, Texas. And that's a good enough reason. And I want to acknowledge your Mayor, Steve Adler, who bought tacos with me. I normally don't do this, but I'm going to embarrass somebody -- I'm going to also acknowledge the Chancellor of the Texas System because he’s one of my favorite people and a truly great American -- Bill McRaven, who I think is over there. It's pretty rare where a chancellor of a university system can really mess you up. So, in case any of the students are wondering, don't mess with your chancellor. But I knew him as Admiral, and he served America as well as anybody served it. Look, we are at a moment in history where technology, globalization, our economy is changing so fast. And this gathering, South by Southwest, brings together people who are at the cutting-edge of those changes. Those changes offer us enormous opportunities but also are very disruptive and unsettling. They empower individuals to do things that they could have never dreamed of before, but they also empower folks who are very dangerous to spread dangerous messages. And part of my challenge since I've been President is trying to find ways in which our government can be a part of the positive change that's taking place and can help convene and catalyze folks in the private sector and the non-profit sector to be part of the broader civic community in tackling some of our biggest challenges. And just three things that I talked about during my weekly address where this group, I think, is prime to make a difference. Number one, we're spending a lot of time figuring out how can we make government work through technology, digital platforms, and so forth. So, for example, we've reduced the FAFSA form process where you apply for student aid by about two-thirds just by digitalizing it, putting it online, making it a little more common sense. We have made it now possible to apply for Social Security online in ways that couldn't be done before. Across agencies, we're interacting every day with our government, and the question is, how do we make that work better? Because an anti-government mentality grows if people feel frustrated because they’re not getting good service. The second thing that these new technologies allow us to do is to tackle big problems in new ways. We had a conference in Washington a few weeks back on what we're calling precision medicine -- the capacity today to potentially cure diseases because we understand the human genome and we understand that a cure for me may not be the same as a cure for you. And there’s incredible research taking place all around the country, but we haven't gathered all that data together to make sure that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. And number three, we want to make sure that we're using big data, analytics, technology to make civic participation easier. Voters -- increasing voting rights and making sure that people are informed about who they’re voting for and why they’re voting. Making sure that community organizations or activists are able to meet and help to shape our society in new ways. So the reason I'm here really is to recruit all of you. It's to say to you as I'm about to leave office, how can we start coming up with new platforms, new ideas, new approaches across disciplines and across skill sets to solve some of the big problems that we're facing today. Because, I've said this before, I said this at the State of the Union, the most important office in a democracy is the office of citizen. And right now, with all the talent that's out there, our government is not working and our politics isn't working as well as it should -- the only way we're going to solve that is make sure that we're getting citizens involved in ways that we haven't up until now.

Moderator Smith:

Mr. President, the theory of bringing tech more closely aligned with government in solving problems is great, but the reality is that the culture of the tech sector and the culture of government could not be more different. Government is big and bloated and slow and risk-averse, and it's run on outmoded systems and outmoded equipment. Tech is sleek and streamlined, and fail-fast and enamored of the new and the shiny. How do you take these two things that seem culturally to be so unalike and put them together in a way where they can and want to work together? President Obama: Well, let me give you an example of the big and the bloated and the frustrated. You may recall that I passed this law called the Affordable Care Act to sign people up for health care. And then the website didn’t work.

Moderator Smith:

I heard that. President Obama: And this was a little embarrassing for me because I was the cool, early adaptor President.

Moderator Smith:

Right. Not exactly an advertisement for -- President Obama: And my entire campaign had been premised on having really cool technology, and social media and all that. Well, here’s what happened, was that the procurement systems, the specifications, the way that software was built in government was adapted for the age when procurement was for buying boots or buying pencils or buying furniture as opposed to buying software. And so there’s an example of an outdated system -- bloated, risk-averse, not working well. Here’s what happened as a consequence of healthcare.gov breaking down, though -- we had to bring in a SWAT team of all my friends from Silicon Valley and from Austin and some of the best software engineers in the world to come in and fix it -- which we did in about three, four months’ time. And what we realized was that we could potentially build a SWAT team, a world-class technology office inside of the government that was helping across agencies. We've dubbed that the U.S. Digital Services. And we've got some of the top talent from Google, from Facebook, from all the top tech companies. These folks are coming in, in some cases, for six months, in some cases for two years -- and they are making an enormous difference in making sure that veterans are getting services on time, fixing outdated systems, making sure that agencies like the Small Business Administration that has been clunky, is redesigning itself so that if an entrepreneur wants to start up a business here in Texas, that they can go to one spot and within a day they’ve handled all the regulatory red tape that used to require them maybe months to navigate. Now, the folks who are working in this Digital Service, they’re having a great time, and in part because they are harnessing incredible skills to a purpose where they know that millions of people can be helped. And what they’ll tell me is that as long as they feel that they’ve got a President and somebody who’s providing some air cover, there’s no system that they can’t get in there and work and change and make it significantly better. So part of my job is to try to institutionalize that over the next several years. And I want to make sure that the next President and the federal government from here on out is in constant improvement mode and we’re constantly bringing in new talent and new ideas to solve some of these big problems. It can be done. It requires some effort, but everything requires some effort.

Moderator Smith:

Because, Mr. President, you know, I talked to tech people in advance of your coming, and I said, if you were asked by the President or by the administration to come in and work with them, what would the conditions need to be that would make it possible? And they said, well, we would need some kind of a carve-out, some kind of flexibility from rules and regulations. We would be willing to work with the government, and maybe we would then donate back the IP to the public sector. Or if we want to give some of the employees from our payroll the opportunity to work in government, maybe we could get -- as you would with another kind of donation -- some sort of a tax break back. We’d be willing to work, but the government would have to come at least a little bit in our direction. You’re saying you’re willing to do that? President Obama: Well, I’m not saying I’m willing to do it; I’m saying we’re doing it.

Moderator Smith:

You’re doing it now -- yes, sir. President Obama: It is currently happening. And the opportunities are there. But I want to focus on the fact that there are different ways for people here to get engaged. It’s not just you coming in -- although we want to create a pipeline where there’s a continuous flow of talent that is helping to shape the government. The other thing that we’re doing, though, is we’re also convening people to solve problems, and they may in their existing roles be able to work together to make a huge difference.

I’ll give you a specific example. Before I came in here, I met with an incredible group of people -- entrepreneurs, moviemakers, organizations, tech leaders -- to talk about how we make a real difference on countering violent extremism. It's not enough if we're going to defeat ISIL just to take out their leadership or to control certain territories, if, in the virtual world, they are consistently reaching kids here in the United States or elsewhere in the world and recruiting them and twisting their minds to do terrible things. We've got to be able to penetrate that. For good reasons, we don't want the government to be the lead on that. First of all, we're not credible with the people who might be receiving those messages. Second of all, it's dangerous if the government gets in the business of propaganda. So what I said to them was we'll help convene and put you guys in a room together. Where there are resources that are necessary, we can help provide it. But, essentially, you figure out how we can reach young people who might be vulnerable to extremist messages. You tell us, based on the analytics and the data and the algorithms that you're working with on a day-to-day basis to sell products, what is it that's going to really penetrate here. How can we amplify powerful stories that are already taking place so that there are platforms that can reach as many people as possible?

Moderator Smith:

So whether you solve the problem or they solve the problem, it’s all good? President Obama: Exactly. I’ve give you a second example, and that is the issue of voting -- I mentioned this earlier. We’re the only advanced democracy in the world that makes it harder for people to vote. No, I hear laughing, but it’s sad. We take enormous pride in the fact that we are the world’s oldest continuous democracy, and yet we systematically put up barriers and make it as hard as possible for our citizens to vote. And it is much easier to order pizza or a trip than it is for you to exercise the single most important task in a democracy, and that is for you to select who is going to represent you in government. Now, I think it’s important for a group like this, as we come up to an election, regardless of your party affiliation, to think about how do we redesign our systems so that we don’t have 50 percent or 55 percent voter participation on presidential elections, and during off-year congressional elections, you’ve got 39 or 40 percent voting.

Moderator Smith:

Mr. President, you’re in the state with the worst voter turnout in the country over the last few years. President Obama: By coincidence.

Moderator Smith:

We would take 55 percent tomorrow if we could get it. President Obama: There is a reason I’m bringing this up. But it’s not just Texas. And so one of the things that we’re doing is engaging folks who are already doing interesting work in the online space, how can we create safe, secure, smart systems for people to be able to vote much easier online, and what are the technologies to help people get aware of what they’re voting about, who they’re voting for -- that’s, again, an issue where you don’t want the federal government engineering all that. But what we can do is to have the incredible talent that’s represented in this auditorium really spend time thinking about that and getting to work on it.

Moderator Smith:

But governments, Mr. President, governments need to play a role in it. They have to pass legislation that enables some of these things. President Obama: Yes.

Moderator Smith:

So in Texas, again, a state with terrible voter turnout every time, we broke records on primary day but we still had the second worst voting age participation of any state that’s voted so far. We can’t get out of our own way. You need, in Texas, legislation that enables this. We won’t even allow people to register to vote -- register to vote, not vote -- register online in Texas -- register online. We can pay our taxes, we can hold our phone up at the supermarket to pay with our credit card, but somehow online voter registration is perceived to be insecure, or same-day registration. President Obama: It’s not insecure. It’s done because the folks who are currently governing the good state of Texas -- aren’t interested in having more people participate. So obviously you’ve got to make a political argument about why this is important, and not every state is going to move along the same direction. But I will tell you that if we can create more and more models that show that if made easier, more people vote, and that it is seamless and that it is secure, and jurisdictions that are willing to adopt and support these new mechanisms are in place, and if we are building more models of civic engagement and using the tools and technology that we’re using to buy things to participate in self-governance, then over time -- look, Texas is never going to be an early adapter of what I’m talking about here. But over time, pressure builds for us to create systems that make government more responsive and make it work better.

Moderator Smith:

Let me stay with Texas and touch on something you alluded to earlier -- that there are a lot of people in the world today who don’t like government, don’t trust government, don’t think government can do good. You are in Texas, the hating-on-government capital of the Western world, right? We hate government so much we’d rather have no government, except we then wouldn’t have anybody to sue. So we need government for at least one reason. How do you change the perception that government can do good at a moment when people have decided government can’t do good? President Obama: Well, part of it is the fact that when government does great things, we take it for granted and it’s not a story. I mean, every day, government is delivering for everybody in this room, whether you know it or not. I can find the fiercest libertarian in the room who despises every level of government, thinks it’s all corrupt, but they’re checking the weather on their phone, and lo and behold, it turns out that there’s a government satellite out there that is facilitating that.

Moderator Smith:

That’s government. President Obama: And they’d be really irritated if they couldn’t figure out whether it was going to be 70 and sunny or 60 and rainy tomorrow. But that’s not reported as government. We just take for granted, of course, there are roads, and, of course, there’s a geo-satellite system and, of course, we have Special Forces who are making sure that folks aren’t blowing up our buildings. Well, part of our task is to tell a better story about what government does. Now, government is often its own worst enemy in the sense that it has to also be more responsive where people interact in a direct way with government. I’ve said before that I could change the politics of America faster than just about anything if I could just take control of all the DMVs in the country. Because if somebody goes to get their license renewed and it takes them two hours --

Moderator Smith:

And they walk away frustrated. President Obama: -- and everybody is kind of surly --

Moderator Smith:

Right. President Obama: -- that’s their impression of government.

Moderator Smith:

Yeah. President Obama: Or if their primary interaction with government is the IRS, you just don’t have a good association with government when you’re writing that check. But if we make it easier, if it’s being done online, if suddenly, you have the capacity to interact with government in a way that also gives you some feedback about how you’re tax dollars are being spent or why this is important, or what you’re doing, so that it’s a two-way exchange as opposed to something that feels distant and that you have no control over, then people’s attitudes change. Now, here’s the problem, and this is why politics matter. If there are those who despise government -- oftentimes because the absence of government allows them to pollute, or keep as much money as they can, or not have to answer to consumers who are complaining about their practices -- if they are controlling those who are currently in government and government gets starved of resources, then it can be a self-reinforcing notion that, in fact, government doesn’t work because it’s being starved. A great example of this, by the way, I met with financial regulators this week to just get a report back on how we’re doing on Wall Street reform. One of the things that the left and the right agree on is that after the financial crisis, nothing changed, and all those folks on Wall Street who had done these terrible things just got away with it, and we didn’t change the system and it’s just the way it is now. Well, the truth of the matter is, actually, a lot changed. The banks have been forced to capitalize much more. Some of the shoddy practices have been shut down. We set up a Consumer Finance Protection Bureau that prevents some of the mortgage practices -- that had ended up not only hurting individuals but also destabilizing the entire system. Derivatives now have to be set up on a clearinghouse platform that allows oversight in a way that didn’t exist before. The financial system is much more stable than it used to be. And too big to fail actually is much less likely, because if somebody engages in reckless practices we can now unwind them without them bringing down the entire system.

Moderator Smith:

So how come we don’t know it then? President Obama: Well, first of all, that’s not a story that is interesting to people. What’s more interesting is a cynical view that terrible things happened and nothing got changed. And that’s how it gets reported both in popular culture as well as in the media. But the second thing that’s happened is, where it’s not -- where we still have work to do in this space -- the main reason we have work to do in this space is because this Congress has prevented oversight agencies like the FCC and the CFTC from having enough staff and resources to be able to enforce as well as they could some of the laws and the rules that are put in place. And so we go back to the need for civic engagement. We cannot solve the problems in government and we cannot solve the problems that we face collectively as a society unless we, the people, are paying attention. And in an age in which people are getting information through digital platforms, through the Internet, where people’s attention spans have shrunk, it is critical that all of you who are shaping this environment are spending time thinking about how are we getting people -- how are we getting citizens engaged, and you, yourselves have to be engaged and spend some time thinking about it. It doesn’t mean you have to do it full-time. It doesn’t mean that you have to run for office yourself. But it does mean that whatever your field is, there is a way right now for you to engage and participate to take this democracy back in ways that we have not seen in a very long time.

Moderator Smith:

What you’re preaching, Mr. President, again -- nobody will take issue with the idea of more civic engagement in a digital age. But the question is whether everybody, all of us in this country, are in the same digital age, right? You’re in a state that is seeing rapid changes in its population. We’ll soon be Hispanic majority. Well, in this state, as in a lot of other states, the digital divide -- access to Wi-Fi, access to devices continues to be an enormous problem. Fifty percent of adults in Hispanic households have no access to Internet at home. Fifty-four percent of African Americans have access, but 46 percent do not. Many more white households have access to the Internet than do non-white households. We know that we have this massive digital divide in this country, in Texas and elsewhere. Shouldn’t the government, before we start providing all the civic engagement through the digital space, make sure that everybody is in the digital space first? President Obama: Which is, actually, exactly what we’ve been trying to do over the last several years. When we passed the Recovery Act -- the stimulus that was very controversial at the time and that continues to be criticized by the other party, despite the fact that unemployment is now below 5 percent -- and we avoided a Great Depression. Thanks, Obama. But embedded in that was a massive investment in making sure that communities that had been left out of broadband and Wi-Fi were reached. And we have made enormous progress in extending more and more Internet access -- high-speed Internet access to communities all across the country. A second example -- we set up something called ConnectED, where our goal -- and we’re on track to meet this by 2018 -- is that 99 percent of classrooms have access to high-speed wireless. And the way we’ve done that, in part, is through federal spending, but what we’ve also done is we’ve partnered with an array of companies.

Moderator Smith:

Right, private industries. President Obama: Private industry has really stepped up. And so part of the task -- you’re right that we’ve got to make sure that, given the power of this space, everybody is plugged in. But one of the great tricks to all this is making sure that whatever government is doing is then supplemented with and enhanced by a private sector and nonprofit sector that are ready to step up. And it’s not just, by the way, getting a line in or Wi-Fi there. It’s also training teachers. We’ve set up something called -- well, open book? Somebody out here -- Audience Member: Open eBooks. President Obama: There you go, Open eBooks. I knew there was somebody in the audience who’d know about this. To make sure that kids in places that don’t have a lot of books that suddenly they have access to this enormous e-library, and that that becomes folded into the mechanics and the infrastructure that’s been set in place.

Moderator Smith:

Mr. President, very good, it’s important to have wired classrooms, but part of the problem is that 70 percent of homework assignments by one measure, given by teachers, require some Internet access. So it’s one thing to wire classrooms; the problem is homes. There was a story in The New York Times about a month ago that had a couple of kids from McAllen, a brother and sister, standing outside their school building into the wee hours of the night having to do their homework on their phones, using the Wi-Fi from the school after hours because they had no Wi-Fi at home. This is 2016. It just seems crazy. President Obama: Which is why we’ve set up something called Opportunity Networks that is going to go into public housing, rural communities, low-income communities to make sure that access is available precisely so those young people can do the work.

Moderator Smith:

You’re going to try to solve this problem? President Obama: I am trying to solve every problem. But here --

Moderator Smith:

You’ve got to have a goal, I understand. President Obama: But here’s the point that I want to make. These are solvable problems, but it’s not a matter of us passively waiting for somebody else to solve it. And that’s part of the mindset that I’m trying to break. I tried to break it back in 2007, 2008, when I ran for this office. As you will recall, the slogan was not “Yes, I can” -- it was “Yes, We Can.” And we could sit here and you could list out an array of problems, inequities that have to be addressed. What I’m saying is, number one, government actually works better in so many areas than we give it credit for because we tend to focus on those areas where it’s not working as well. Number two, part of the reason that government doesn’t always appear to provide a satisfactory solution is because government has to take on the hardest problems. The private sector doesn’t have to figure out how to educate the poorest kids. The private sector doesn’t have to figure out how to protect us from a terrorist cell. If you have aging, sick veterans, the private sector may not serve them as well, or to figure out how do we get homeless off the streets. So the toughest problems are government problems. And finding solutions to those things can take time. And so you’re never going to get 100 percent satisfaction the way you might get that perfect cup of coffee, the perfect latte, or the perfect -- the lowest price on your ticket to Cancun -- because these are harder problems. But the third point that I’m trying to make here is that if we can reconceive of our government so that the interactions and the interplay between private sector, nonprofits, and government are opened up, and we use technology, data, social media in order to join forces around problems, then there’s no problem that we face in this country that is not soluble. And the key is to have incredible talent, as is gathered here, to focus on it. It’s not enough just to focus on what’s the cool next thing. Part of what we have to do is to figure out how do we use and harness the cool next thing to make sure that everybody in this country has opportunity. And to make sure that we’re dealing with our environment in an effective way.

Moderator Smith:

I want to use and harness the time we have. We’ve got 10 minutes left. We started a little late. President Obama: Nice segue. That was good.

Moderator Smith:

Thank you. I appreciate it. Took the baton here, Mr. President. I took the baton. President Obama: It was good. It was good.

Moderator Smith:

We asked for questions from regular folks through the Texas Tribune website. We’ve got a few of those. And I want to ask you about a couple of those. Some are related to the topics we’ve been talking about, and some are not. I’m going to go quickly so that we use the time we have. A bunch of people wanted me to ask you about Apple and the situation with Apple and the FBI. You’re trying to persuade the tech community that they should work with government. But it looks to the tech community -- at least some in the tech community -- that government is the enemy of the tech community in the way that it’s dealing with Apple. Some in the tech community. The question I want to ask you is, putting aside the specifics of this specific case, the legal fight between the company and the FBI, there are big questions around the idea of how you balance the need for law enforcement to conduct investigations and the needs of citizens to protect their privacy. This is the old privacy versus security debate. Mr. President, where do you come down on the privacy versus security debate? President Obama: Well, first of all, I can’t comment on the specific case. So let’s set that aside. All of us value our privacy, and this is a society that is built on a Constitution and a Bill of Rights and a healthy skepticism about overreaching government power. Before smartphones were invented, and to this day, if there is probable cause to think that you have abducted a child, or that you are engaging in a terrorist plot, or you are guilty of some serious crime, law enforcement can appear before your -- at your doorstep and say, we have a warrant to search your home, and they can go into your bedroom and into your bedroom doors and rifle through your underwear to see if there’s any evidence of wrongdoing. And we agree on that, because we recognize that just like all of our other rights -- freedom of speech, freedom of religion, et cetera -- that there are going to be some constraints that we impose in order to make sure that we are safe, secure and living in a civilized society. Now, technology is evolving so rapidly that new questions are being asked. And I am of the view that there are very real reasons why we want to make sure that government cannot just willy-nilly get into everybody’s iPhones that is full of -- or smartphones that are full of very personal information and very personal data. And let’s face it, the whole Snowden disclosure episode elevated people’s suspicions of this. So does popular culture, by the way, which makes it appear as if I'm in the Sit Room and I'm moving things --

Moderator Smith:

You’ve been watching Homeland. President Obama: There’s like half a fingerprint and half an hour later, I'm tracking the guy in the streets of Istanbul.

Moderator Smith:

It's not really that cool? President Obama: It turns out it doesn’t work that way. Sometimes I'm just trying to get a connection. But, look, that was a real issue. I will say, by the way, that -- and I don't want to go too far afield -- but the Snowden issue vastly overstated the dangers to U.S. citizens in terms of spying, because the fact of the matter is, is that actually our intelligence agencies are pretty scrupulous about U.S. persons, people on U.S. soil. What those disclosures did identify were accesses overseas with respect to people who are not in this country. A lot of those have been fixed. Don't take my word for it. There was a panel that was constituted, an independent panel that just graded all the reforms that we set up to avoid those charges. But I understand that that raised suspicions. All right. So we're concerned about privacy. We don't want government to be looking through everybody’s phones, willy-nilly, without any kind of oversight or probable cause or a clear sense that it's targeted at somebody who might be a wrong-doer. What makes it even more complicated is the fact we also want really strong encryption, because part of us preventing terrorism, or preventing people from disrupting the financial system or our air traffic control system or a whole other set of systems that are increasingly digitalized is that hackers, state or non-state, can just get in there and mess them up. So we've got two values, both of which are important. Right?

Moderator Smith:

Right. President Obama: And the question we now have to ask is, if technologically, it is possible to make an impenetrable device or system where the encryption is so strong that there’s no key, there’s no door at all, then how do we apprehend the child pornographer? How do we solve or disrupt a terrorist plot? What mechanisms do we have available to even do simple things like tax enforcement? Because, if, in fact, you can't crack that at all, government can't get in, then everybody is walking around with a Swiss bank account in their pocket -- right? So there has to be some concession to the need to be able to get into that information somehow. Now, what folks who are on the encryption side will argue is any key whatsoever, even if it starts off as just being directed at one device could end up being used on every device. That's just the nature of these systems. That is a technical question. I'm not a software engineer. It is, I think, technically true, but I think it can be overstated. And so the question now becomes, we as a society -- setting aside the specific case between the FBI and Apple, setting aside the commercial interests, concerns about what could the Chinese government do with this even if we trusted the U.S. government -- setting aside all those questions, we're going to have to make some decisions about how do we balance these respective risks. And I've got a bunch of smart people sitting there, talking about it, thinking about it. We have engaged the tech community aggressively to help solve this problem. My conclusion so far is that you cannot take an absolutist view on this. So if your argument is strong encryption, no matter what, and we can and should, in fact, create black boxes, then that I think does not strike the kind of balance that we have lived with for 200, 300 years. And it's fetishizing our phones above every other value. And that can't be the right answer. I suspect that the answer is going to come down to how do we create a system where the encryption is as strong as possible, the key is as secure as possible, it is accessible by the smallest number of people possible for a subset of issues that we agree are important. How we design that is not something that I have the expertise to do. But I caution -- I am way on the civil liberties side of this thing. Bill McRaven will tell you that I anguish a lot over the decisions we make in terms of how to keep this country safe, and I am not interested in overthrowing the values that have made us an exceptional and great nation simply for expediency. But the dangers are real. Maintaining law and order and a civilized society is important. Protecting our kids is important. And so I would just caution against taking an absolutist perspective on this. Because we make compromises all the time. I haven't flown commercial in a while -- but my understanding is it's not great fun --

Moderator Smith:

It's not great. It's not great. President Obama: -- going through security. But we make the concession because -- it's a big intrusion on our privacy, but we recognize it as important. We have stops for drunk drivers. It's an intrusion, but we think it's the right thing to do. And this notion that somehow our data is different and can be walled off from those other tradeoffs we make I believe is incorrect. We do have to make sure, given the power of the Internet and how much our lives are digitalized, that it is narrow and it is constrained and that there’s oversight. And I'm confident this is something that we can solve. But we're going to need the tech community -- software designers, people who care deeply about this stuff -- to help us solve it. Because what will happen is if everybody goes to their respective corners and the tech community says, you know what, either we have strong, perfect encryption, or else it's Big Brother and an Orwellian world -- what you’ll find is that after something really bad happens, the politics of this will swing and it will become sloppy and rushed, and it will go through Congress in ways that have not been thought through. And then you really will have dangers to our civil liberties because we will have not done -- the people who understand this best and who care most about privacy and civil liberties have sort of disengaged or taken a position that is not sustainable for the general public as a whole over time.

Moderator Smith:

Sadly, Mr. President, the clock is telling me that we're out of time. A lot of things I wanted to ask you. You gave a great answer on that question, and I'm happy to have that be the last bit that we did together. Thank you so much for being here. President Obama: I'm the President, so I'm going to take one more minute.

Moderator Smith:

You will? We'll take it. President Obama: There are a number of different ways in which all of you can plug into what I've been talking about here today. So if you are interested in figuring out ways to make government services work better, you can go to whitehouse.gov or U.S. Digital Services and find out what they’re doing. If you are interested in how we can make sure that classrooms are properly connected, you can plug into what we're doing with ConnectED. One of my favorite projects that’s just gotten started over the last several months is -- diapers are really expensive, and we've actually set up a system whereby through social media and the Internet, non-for-profits are able to make bulk purchases of diapers, save 25 percent on those, so that they can distribute them to low-income moms and families. And it's a convergence of diaper makers and logistics companies and Internet companies. And we sort of convened the thing, but it's not running through a government program. So whatever your interests are, whatever your passions are, whatever your concerns are, we need you. And I want to underscore the fact that in 10 months I will not have this office. It has been the great privilege of my life, but it's not like I stop caring about the things that I care about right now. And it's not like I'm going to stop being involved in promoting the best, most prosperous, most peaceful, most tolerant, most ecologically responsible America that I can. I'll be sitting in an audience with you -- and I expect you to step up and get involved, because the country needs you. And if the brainpower and talent that's on display here today and throughout this conference takes up that baton, then I'm going to be really confident about the future of this country. All right. Thank you, guys.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Merrick Garland USSC Nomination Address

Of the many powers and responsibilities that the Constitution vests in the presidency, few are more consequential than appointing a Supreme Court justice -- particularly one to succeed Justice Scalia, one of the most influential jurists of our time.

The men and women who sit on the Supreme Court are the final arbiters of American law. They safeguard our rights. They ensure that our system is one of laws and not men. They’re charged with the essential task of applying principles put to paper more than two centuries ago to some of the most challenging questions of our time.

So this is not a responsibility that I take lightly. It’s a decision that requires me to set aside short-term expediency and narrow politics, so as to maintain faith with our founders and, perhaps more importantly, with future generations. That’s why, over the past several weeks, I’ve done my best to set up a rigorous and comprehensive process. I’ve sought the advice of Republican and Democratic members of Congress. We’ve reached out to every member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, to constitutional scholars, to advocacy groups, to bar associations, representing an array of interests and opinions from all across the spectrum.

And today, after completing this exhaustive process, I’ve made my decision. I’ve selected a nominee who is widely recognized not only as one of America’s sharpest legal minds, but someone who brings to his work a spirit of decency, modesty, integrity, even-handedness, and excellence. These qualities, and his long commitment to public service, have earned him the respect and admiration of leaders from both sides of the aisle. He will ultimately bring that same character to bear on the Supreme Court, an institution in which he is uniquely prepared to serve immediately.

Today, I am nominating Chief Judge Merrick Brian Garland to join the Supreme Court.

Now, in law enforcement circles, and the in the legal community at large, Judge Garland needs no introduction. But I’d like to take a minute to introduce Merrick to the American people, whom he already so ably serves.

He was born and raised in the Land of Lincoln -- in my hometown of Chicago, in my home state of Illinois. His mother volunteered in the community; his father ran a small business out of their home. Inheriting that work ethic, Merrick became valedictorian of his public high school. He earned a scholarship to Harvard, where he graduated summa cum laude. And he put himself through Harvard Law School by working as a tutor, by stocking shoes in a shoe store, and, in what is always a painful moment for any young man, by selling his comic book collection. It's tough. Been there.

Merrick graduated magna cum laude from Harvard Law, and the early years of his legal career bear all the traditional marks of excellence. He clerked for two of President Eisenhower’s judicial appointees -- first for a legendary judge on the Second Circuit, Judge Henry Friendly, and then for Supreme Court Justice William Brennan. Following his clerkships, Merrick joined a highly regarded law firm, with a practice focused on litigation and pro bono representation of disadvantaged Americans. Within four years, he earned a partnership -- the dream of most lawyers. But in 1989, just months after that achievement, Merrick made a highly unusual career decision. He walked away from a comfortable and lucrative law practice to return to public service.

Merrick accepted a low-level job as a federal prosecutor in President George H.W. Bush’s administration. He took a 50-percent pay cut, traded in his elegant partner’s office for a windowless closet that smelled of stale cigarette smoke. This was a time when crime here in Washington had reached epidemic proportions, and he wanted to help. And he quickly made a name for himself, going after corrupt politicians and violent criminals.

His sterling record as a prosecutor led him to the Justice Department, where he oversaw some of the most significant prosecutions in the 1990s -- including overseeing every aspect of the federal response to the Oklahoma City bombing. In the aftermath of that act of terror, when 168 people, many of them small children, were murdered, Merrick had one evening to say goodbye to his own young daughters before he boarded a plane to Oklahoma City. And he would remain there for weeks. He worked side-by-side with first responders, rescue workers, local and federal law enforcement. He led the investigation and supervised the prosecution that brought Timothy McVeigh to justice.

But perhaps most important is the way he did it. Throughout the process, Merrick took pains to do everything by the book. When people offered to turn over evidence voluntarily, he refused, taking the harder route of obtaining the proper subpoenas instead, because Merrick would take no chances that someone who murdered innocent Americans might go free on a technicality.

Merrick also made a concerted effort to reach out to the victims and their families, updating them frequently on the case’s progress. Everywhere he went, he carried with him in his briefcase the program from the memorial service with each of the victims’ names inside -- a constant, searing reminder of why he had to succeed.

Judge Garland has often referred to his work on the Oklahoma City case as, and I quote, “the most important thing I have ever done in my life.” And through it all, he never lost touch with that community that he served.

It’s no surprise then, that soon after his work in Oklahoma City, Merrick was nominated to what’s often called the second highest court in the land -- the D.C. Circuit Court. During that process, during that confirmation process, he earned overwhelming bipartisan praise from senators and legal experts alike. Republican Senator Orrin Hatch, who was then chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, supported his nomination. Back then, he said, “In all honesty, I would like to see one person come to this floor and say one reason why Merrick Garland does not deserve this position.” He actually accused fellow Senate Republicans trying to obstruct Merrick’s confirmation of “playing politics with judges.” And he has since said that Judge Garland would be a “consensus nominee” for the Supreme Court who “would be very well supported by all sides,” and there would be “no question” Merrick would be confirmed with bipartisan support.

Ultimately, Merrick was confirmed to the D.C. Circuit, the second highest court in the land, with votes from a majority of Democrats and a majority of Republicans. Three years ago, he was elevated to Chief Judge. And in his 19 years on the D.C. Circuit, Judge Garland has brought his trademark diligence, compassion, and unwavering regard for the rule of law to his work.

On a circuit court known for strong-minded judges on both ends of the spectrum, Judge Garland has earned a track record of building consensus as a thoughtful, fair-minded judge who follows the law. He’s shown a rare ability to bring together odd couples, assemble unlikely coalitions, persuade colleagues with wide-ranging judicial philosophies to sign on to his opinions.

And this record on the bench speaks, I believe, to Judge Garland’s fundamental temperament -- his insistence that all views deserve a respectful hearing. His habit, to borrow a phrase from former Justice John Paul Stevens, “of understanding before disagreeing,” and then disagreeing without being disagreeable. It speaks to his ability to persuade, to respond to the concerns of others with sound arguments and airtight logic. As his former colleague on the D.C. Circuit, and our current Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, John Roberts, once said, “Any time Judge Garland disagrees, you know you’re in a difficult area.”

At the same time, Chief Judge Garland is more than just a brilliant legal mind. He’s someone who has a keen understanding that justice is about more than abstract legal theory; more than some footnote in a dusty casebook. His life experience -- his experience in places like Oklahoma City -- informs his view that the law is more than an intellectual exercise. He understands the way law affects the daily reality of people’s lives in a big, complicated democracy, and in rapidly-changing times. And throughout his jurisprudence runs a common thread -- a dedication to protecting the basic rights of every American; a conviction that in a democracy, powerful voices must not be allowed to drown out the voices of everyday Americans.

To find someone with such a long career of public service, marked by complex and sensitive issues; to find someone who just about everyone not only respects, but genuinely likes -- that is rare. And it speaks to who Merrick Garland is -- not just as a lawyer, but as a man.

People respect the way he treats others -- his genuine courtesy and respect for his colleagues and those who come before his court. They admire his civic-mindedness -- mentoring his clerks throughout their careers, urging them to use their legal training to serve their communities, setting his own example by tutoring a young student at a Northeast D.C. elementary school each year for the past 18 years. They’re moved by his deep devotion to his family -- Lynn, his wife of nearly 30 years, and their two daughters, Becky and Jessie. As a family, they indulge their love of hiking and skiing and canoeing, and their love of America by visiting our national parks.

People respect Merrick’s deep and abiding passion for protecting our most basic constitutional rights. It’s a passion, I’m told, that manifested itself at an early age. And one story is indicative of this, is notable. As valedictorian of his high school class, he had to deliver a commencement address. The other student speaker that day spoke first and unleashed a fiery critique of the Vietnam War. Fearing the controversy that might result, several parents decided to unplug the sound system, and the rest of the student’s speech was muffled.

And Merrick didn’t necessarily agree with the tone of his classmate’s remarks, nor his choice of topic for that day. But stirred by the sight of a fellow student’s voice being silenced, he tossed aside his prepared remarks and delivered instead, on the spot, a passionate, impromptu defense of our First Amendment rights.

It was the beginning of a lifelong career -- as a lawyer, and a prosecutor, and as a judge -- devoted to protecting the rights of others. And he has done that work with decency and humanity and common sense, and a common touch. And I’m proud that he’ll continue that work on our nation’s highest court.

I said I would take this process seriously -- and I did. I chose a serious man and an exemplary judge, Merrick Garland. Over my seven years as President, in all my conversations with senators from both parties in which I asked their views on qualified Supreme Court nominees -- this includes the previous two seats that I had to fill -- the one name that has come up repeatedly, from Republicans and Democrats alike, is Merrick Garland.

Now, I recognize that we have entered the political season -- or perhaps, these days it never ends -- a political season that is even noisier and more volatile than usual. I know that Republicans will point to Democrats who’ve made it hard for Republican Presidents to get their nominees confirmed. And they’re not wrong about that. There’s been politics involved in nominations in the past. Although it should be pointed out that, in each of those instances, Democrats ultimately confirmed a nominee put forward by a Republican President.

I also know that because of Justice Scalia’s outsized role on the Court and in American law, and the fact that Americans are closely divided on a number of issues before the Court, it is tempting to make this confirmation process simply an extension of our divided politics -- the squabbling that’s going on in the news every day. But to go down that path would be wrong. It would be a betrayal of our best traditions, and a betrayal of the vision of our founding documents.

At a time when our politics are so polarized, at a time when norms and customs of political rhetoric and courtesy and comity are so often treated like they’re disposable -- this is precisely the time when we should play it straight, and treat the process of appointing a Supreme Court justice with the seriousness and care it deserves. Because our Supreme Court really is unique. It’s supposed to be above politics. It has to be. And it should stay that way.

To suggest that someone as qualified and respected as Merrick Garland doesn’t even deserve a hearing, let alone an up or down vote, to join an institution as important as our Supreme Court, when two-thirds of Americans believe otherwise -- that would be unprecedented.

To suggest that someone who has served his country with honor and dignity, with a distinguished track record of delivering justice for the American people, might be treated, as one Republican leader stated, as a political “piÃ±ata” -- that can’t be right.

Tomorrow, Judge Garland will travel to the Hill to begin meeting with senators, one-on-one. I simply ask Republicans in the Senate to give him a fair hearing, and then an up or down vote. If you don’t, then it will not only be an abdication of the Senate’s constitutional duty, it will indicate a process for nominating and confirming judges that is beyond repair. It will mean everything is subject to the most partisan of politics -- everything. It will provoke an endless cycle of more tit-for-tat, and make it increasingly impossible for any President, Democrat or Republican, to carry out their constitutional function. The reputation of the Supreme Court will inevitably suffer. Faith in our justice system will inevitably suffer. Our democracy will ultimately suffer, as well.

I have fulfilled my constitutional duty. Now it’s time for the Senate to do theirs. Presidents do not stop working in the final year of their term. Neither should a senator.

I know that tomorrow the Senate will take a break and leave town on recess for two weeks. My earnest hope is that senators take that time to reflect on the importance of this process to our democracy -- not what’s expedient, not what’s happening at the moment, what does this mean for our institutions, for our common life -- the stakes, the consequences, the seriousness of the job we all swore an oath to do.

And when they return, I hope that they’ll act in a bipartisan fashion. I hope they’re fair. That’s all. I hope they are fair. As they did when they confirmed Merrick Garland to the D.C. Circuit, I ask that they confirm Merrick Garland now to the Supreme Court, so that he can take his seat in time to fully participate in its work for the American people this fall. He is the right man for the job. He deserves to be confirmed. I could not be prouder of the work that he has already done on behalf of the American people. He deserves our thanks and he deserves a fair hearing.

And with that, I’d like to invite Judge Garland to say a few words.

Judge Garland: Thank you, Mr. President. This is the greatest honor of my life -- other than Lynn agreeing to marry me 28 years ago. It’s also the greatest gift I’ve ever received except -- and there’s another caveat -- the birth of our daughters, Jessie and Becky.

As my parents taught me by both words and deeds, a life of public service is as much a gift to the person who serves as it is to those he is serving. And for me, there could be no higher public service than serving as a member of the United States Supreme Court.

My family deserves much of the credit for the path that led me here. My grandparents left the Pale of Settlement at the border of Western Russian and Eastern Europe in the early 1900s, fleeing anti-Semitism, and hoping to make a better life for their children in America. They settled in the Midwest, eventually making their way to Chicago.

There, my father, who ran the smallest of small businesses from a room in our basement, took me with him as he made the rounds to his customers, always impressing upon me the importance of hard work and fair dealing. There, my mother headed the local PTA and school board and directed a volunteer services agency, all the while instilling in my sister and me the understanding that service to the community is a responsibility above all others. Even now, my sisters honor that example by serving the children of their communities.

I know that my mother is watching this on television and crying her eyes out. So are my sisters, who have supported me in every step I have ever taken. I only wish that my father were here to see this today. I also wish that we hadn’t taught my older daughter to be so adventurous that she would be hiking in the mountains, out of cell service range -- when the President called.

It was the sense of responsibility to serve a community, instilled by my parents, that led me to leave my law firm to become a line prosecutor in 1989. There, one of my first assignments was to assist in the prosecution of a violent gang that had come down to the District from New York, took over a public housing project and terrorized the residents. The hardest job we faced was persuading mothers and grandmothers that if they testified, we would be able to keep them safe and convict the gang members. We succeeded only by convincing witnesses and victims that they could trust that the rule of law would prevail.

Years later, when I went to Oklahoma City to investigate the bombing of the Federal Building, I saw up close the devastation that can happen when someone abandons the justice system as a way of resolving grievances, and instead takes matters into his own hands. Once again, I saw the importance of assuring victims and families that the justice system could work. We promised that we would find the perpetrators, that we would bring them to justice, and that we would do it in a way that honored the Constitution. The people of Oklahoma City gave us their trust, and we did everything we could to live up to it.

Trust that justice will be done in our courts without prejudice or partisanship is what, in a large part, distinguishes this country from others. People must be confident that a judge’s decisions are determined by the law, and only the law. For a judge to be worthy of such trust, he or she must be faithful to the Constitution and to the statutes passed by the Congress. He or she must put aside his personal views or preferences, and follow the law -- not make it. Fidelity to the Constitution and the law has been the cornerstone of my professional life, and it’s the hallmark of the kind of judge I have tried to be for the past 18 years. If the Senate sees fit to confirm me to the position for which I have been nominated today, I promise to continue on that course.

Mr. President, it’s a great privilege to be nominated by a fellow Chicagoan. I am grateful beyond words for the honor you have bestowed upon me.

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# Joint Press Conference with Raul Castro

President Raul Castro: [As interpreted.]

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Mr. President Barack Obama, we are pleased to welcome you on this, the first visit of a President of the United States of America to our country in 88 years.

We have observed that in the 15 months that have passed since the decision was made to establish our diplomatic relations, we have obtained concrete results. We were able to resume direct postal exchanges and we signed an agreement to resume commercial flights.

We have signed two memorandums of understanding on the protection of the environment and maritime areas, and another one to secure the safety of sea navigation. Today, another one will be signed on cooperation of the area of agriculture. At the moment, another set of bilateral instruments are being negotiated to cooperate in such areas as counter narcotics, the safety of commerce, and travelers and health. About this last issue, we have agreed to deepen our cooperation in the prevention and treatment of transmissible diseases, such as Zika, and non-transmissible chronic diseases, cancer included.

This cooperation is beneficial not only for Cuba and the United States, but also for our hemisphere at large. Following the decisions made by President Obama to modify the application of some aspects of the blockade, Cuban enterprises and their American counterparts are working to identify possible commercial operations that could materialize in the still restrictive framework of existing regulations.

The fact is that some have already materialized, especially in the area of telecommunications -- an area in which our country already has a program designed on the basis of its priorities and the necessary technological sovereignty, one that can secure the appropriate (ph) views and the service of national interests.

Progress has also been made toward the acquisition of medicines, medical materiel and equipment for power generation and environmental protection, these among others. Much more could be done if the blockade were lifted.

We recognize the position of President Obama and his Administration against the blockade, and his repeated appeals to Congress to have it removed. The most recent measures adopted by his Administration are positive but insufficient. I had the opportunity to discuss with the President other steps that we think could be taken in order to remove restrictions that remain in force, and make a significant contribution to the debunking of the blockade.

This is essential, because the blockade remains in force and because it contains discouraging elements and intimidating effects and extra- territorial outreach.

I put forward to the President some examples on this, showing their negative consequences for both Cuba and other countries. The blockade stands as the most important obstacle to our economic development and the wellbeing of the Cuba people. That's why its removal will be of the essence to normalize bilateral relations. And actually, it will also bring benefits to the Cuban emigrants who wish the best for their families and their country.

In order to move forward towards normalization, it will also be necessary to return the territory illegally occupied by Guantanamo Naval Base. Since they stand as the two main obstacles, these issues were again dealt with in the editorial ran on March 9 by the official newspaper of the Communist Party of Cuba.

And again, only four days ago, in the press conference offered by our Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez, those pieces extensively reported by the media.

Other policies should also be abolished for normal relations to develop between the United States and Cuba. No one should intend to have the Cuban people renounce the destiny it chose in freedom and sovereignty, the same for which you have made enormous sacrifices.

We also discussed international issues, particularly those that could have an impact on regional peace and stability. We had thought to discuss other issues, but we did not have enough time. I had planned to raise our concern over the destabilization some are trying to promote in Venezuela, something which we consider to be counterproductive to the overall situation in the continent. I did not have the chance to raise with him, I'm raising it here.

Likewise, we talked about the ongoing peace process in Colombia and the effort to put an end to that conflict. There are profound differences between our countries that will not go away. Since we hold different concepts on many subjects such as political systems, democracy, the exercise of human rights, social justice, international relations and world peace and stability.

We defend human rights. In our view, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights are indivisible, interdependent and universal. Actually, we find it inconceivable that a government does not defend and insure the right to health care, education, Social Security with provision and development, equal pay and the rights of children. We oppose political manipulation and double standards in the approach to human rights.

Cuba has much to say and show on this issue. That is why I have reiterated to the President our willingness to continue moving forward with the dialogue on this matter that was already initiated.

On December 17th, 2014, as we announced the decision to re- establish diplomatic relations, I said that we should learn the art of co- existing with our difference in a civilized manner. In my remarks to Parliament on July 15, 2015, I said changing everything that needs to be changed is the sovereign and exclusive concern of Cubans. The revolutionary government is willing to advance to a normalization of relations, for it is convinced that both countries can co-exist and cooperate in a civilized manner and for the mutual benefit regardless of existing and future differences and thus contribute to peace, security, stability, development and equity in our continent and around the world.

Today, I reaffirm that we should exercise the art of civilized co-existence, which involves accepting and respecting differences and preventing these from becoming the center of our relationship.

We should instead promote links that can benefit both our countries and peoples while focusing on those things that bring us closer and not on those that pull us apart. We agree that a long and complex path still lies ahead. But what is most important is that we have started taking the first steps to build a new type of relationship, one that has never existed between Cuba and the United States.

Actually, destroying a bridge can be an easy and quick undertaking. However, its solid reconstruction can prove a lengthy and challenging endeavor. After four failed attempts and giving proof of the will and perseverance, on September 2, 2013, American swimmer Diane Nyad managed to cross the Florida Strait swimming without an anti-shark cage to protect her.

To that exploit of conquering the geographical differences between our two countries. It was for that exploit that on August 30th, 2013, as the national anthems of Cuba and the United States were played she was presented with the Order of Sport Merit, a declaration awarded by the State Counsel. Such feat carries a powerful message.

One that should serve as an example to honor bilateral relations. For it confirms that if she could do it, then we can do it too. President Obama, I reiterate our appreciation for his visit and the willingness of the government of Cuba to continue moving forward in the well being of our countries.

Thank you very much.

President Obama: Buenas tardes. President Castro, to you, the Cuban government and the Cuban people, thank you for the welcome that you have extended to me, to my family, and to my delegation. For more than half a century, the sight of a U.S. President here in Havana would have been unimaginable. But this is a new day -- es un nuevo dÃ­a -- between our two countries.

With your indulgence, Mr. President, I want to go just briefly off topic because during this weekend, I received news that one of our outstanding United States Armed Service members, Marine Staff Sergeant Louis F. Cardin of Temecula, California, was killed in northern Iraq as we assisted the Iraqi government in dealing with ISIL, the terrorist organization there. And I just wanted to give my thoughts and prayers to the family there and those who have been injured. It's a reminder that even as we embark on this historic visit, there are U.S. Armed Service members who are sacrificing each and every day on behalf of our freedom and our safety. So I’m grateful to them.

My wife, Michelle, and I brought our daughters -- and by the way, they don't always want to go with us; they’re teenagers now. They have friends at home and they have things to do -- but they wanted to come to Cuba because they understood, and we wanted to show them, the beauty of Cuba and its people. We were moved by the Cubans who received us yesterday, smiling and waving, as we drove in from the airport. We were grateful for the opportunity to experience Old Havana -- had some excellent Cuban food. Our visit to the Cathedral was a reminder of the values that we share, of the deep faith that sustains so many Cubans and Americans. And it also gave me an opportunity to express my gratitude to Cardinal Ortega, who, along with His Holiness Pope Francis, did so much to support the improved relations between our governments. This morning, I was honored to pay tribute to JosÃ© MartÃ­ -- not only his role in Cuban independence, but the profound words that he wrote and spoke in support of liberty and freedom everywhere.

I bring with me the greetings and the friendship of the American people. In fact, I’m joined on this trip by nearly 40 members of Congress -- Democrats and Republicans. This is the largest such delegation of my presidency, and it indicates the excitement and interest in America about the process that we’ve undertaken. These members of Congress recognize that our new relationship with the Cuban people is in the interest of both nations. I’m also joined by some of America’s top business leaders and entrepreneurs because we’re ready to pursue more commercial ties, which create jobs and opportunity for Cubans and Americans alike.

And I’m especially pleased that I’m joined on this trip by so many Cuban Americans. For them, and for the more than two million proud Cuban Americans across the United States, this is a moment filled with great emotion. Ever since we made it easier to travel between our countries, more Cuban Americans are coming home. For many, this is a time of new hope for the future.

So, President Castro, I want to thank you for the courtesy and the spirit of openness that you’ve shown during our talks. At our meeting in Panama last year, you said that we’re willing to discuss every issue, and everything is on the table. So with your understanding, my statement will be a little longer than usual.

President Castro always jokes with me about how long Castro brothers’ speeches can be. But I’m going to actually go a little longer than you probably today, with your indulgence. We have a half a century of work to catch up on.

Our growing engagement with Cuba is guided by one overarching goal -- advancing the mutual interests of our two countries, including improving the lives of our people, both Cubans and Americans. That’s why I’m here. I’ve said consistently, after more than five very difficult decades, the relationship between our governments will not be transformed overnight. We continue, as President Castro indicated, to have some very serious differences, including on democracy and human rights. And President Castro and I have had very frank and candid conversations on these subjects.

The United States recognizes progress that Cuba has made as a nation, its enormous achievements in education and in health care. And perhaps most importantly, I affirmed that Cuba’s destiny will not be decided by the United States or any other nation. Cuba is sovereign and, rightly, has great pride. And the future of Cuba will be decided by Cubans, not by anybody else.

At the same time, as we do wherever we go around the world, I made it clear that the United States will continue to speak up on behalf of democracy, including the right of the Cuban people to decide their own future. We’ll speak out on behalf of universal human rights, including freedom of speech, and assembly, and religion. Indeed, I look forward to meeting with and hearing from Cuban civil society leaders tomorrow.

But as you heard, President Castro has also addressed what he views as shortcomings in the United States around basic needs for people, and poverty and inequality and race relations. And we welcome that constructive dialogue as well -- because we believe that when we share our deepest beliefs and ideas with an attitude of mutual respect, that we can both learn and make the lives of our people better.

Part of normalizing relations means that we discuss our differences directly. So I’m very pleased that we’ve agreed to hold our next U.S.-Cuba human rights dialogue here in Havana later this year. And both of our countries will welcome visits by independent United Nations experts as we combat human trafficking, which we agree is a profound violation of human rights.

Even as we discuss these differences, we share a belief that we can continue to make progress in those areas that we have in common. President Castro, you said in Panama that “we might disagree on something today on which we would agree tomorrow.” And that’s certainly been the case over the past 15 months and the days leading up to this visit. And today, I can report that we continue to move forward on many fronts when it comes to normalizing relations.

We’re moving ahead with more opportunities for Americans to travel to Cuba and interact with the Cuban people. Over the past year, the number of Americans coming here has surged. Last week, we gave approval for individual Americans to come here for educational travel. U.S. airlines will begin direct commercial flights this year. With last week’s port security announcement, we’ve removed the last major hurdle to resuming cruises and ferry service. All of which will mean even more Americans visiting Cuba in the years ahead and appreciating the incredible history and culture of the Cuban people.

We’re moving ahead with more trade. With only 90 miles between us, we’re natural trading partners. Other steps we took last week -- allowing the U.S. dollar to be used more widely with Cuba, giving Cubans more access to the dollar in international transactions, and allowing Cubans in the U.S. to earn salaries –- these things will do more to create opportunities for trade and joint ventures. We welcome Cuba’s important announcement that it plans to end the 10 percent penalty on dollar conversions here, which will open the door to more travel and more commerce. And these steps show that we’re opening up to one another.

With this visit, we’ve agreed to deepen our cooperation on agriculture to support our farmers and our ranchers. This afternoon, I’ll highlight some of the new commercial deals being announced by major U.S. companies. And just as I continue to call on Congress to lift the trade embargo, I discussed with President Castro the steps we urge Cuba to take to show that it’s ready to do more business, which includes allowing more joint ventures and allowing foreign companies to hire Cubans directly.

We’re moving ahead with our efforts to help connect more Cubans to the Internet and the global economy. Under President Castro, Cuba has set a goal of bringing Cubans online. And we want to help. At this afternoon’s entrepreneurship event, I’ll discuss additional steps we’re taking to help more Cubans learn, innovate, and do business online -- because in the 21st century, countries cannot be successful unless their citizens have access to the Internet.

We’re moving ahead with more educational exchanges. Thanks to the generous support of the Cuban-American community, I can announce that my 100,000 Strong in the Americas initiative will offer new opportunities for university students to study abroad -- more Americans at Cuban schools and more Cubans at U.S. schools. And going forward, educational grants and scholarships will be available to Cuban students. And in partnership with the Cuban government, we’ll offer more English language training for Cuban teachers, both in Cuba and online.

Even as Cubans prepare for the arrival of the Rolling Stones, we’re moving ahead with more events and exchanges that bring Cubans and Americans together as well. We all look forward to tomorrow’s matchup between the Tampa Bay Rays and the Cuban National Team.

More broadly, we’re moving ahead with partnerships in health, science, and the environment. Just as Cubans and American medical teams have worked together in Haiti against cholera, and in West Africa against Ebola -- and I want to give a special commendation to Cuban doctors who volunteered and took on some very tough assignments to save lives in West Africa in partnership with us and other nations. We very much appreciate the work that they did. Our medical professionals will now collaborate in new areas, preventing the spread of viruses like Zika and leading new research into cancer vaccines. Our governments will also work to protect the beautiful waters of this region that we share.

And as two countries threatened by climate change, I believe we can work together to protect communities and our low-lying coasts. And we're inviting Cuba to join us and our Caribbean and Central American partners at this spring’s regional energy summit in Washington.

And finally, we're moving ahead with our closer cooperation on regional security. We're working to deepen our law enforcement coordination, especially against narco-traffickers that threaten both of our peoples. I want to thank President Castro and the Cuban government for hosting peace talks between the Colombian government and the FARC. And we remain optimistic that Colombians can achieve a lasting and just peace. And although we did not have an extensive discussion of Venezuela, we did touch on the subject. And I believe that the whole region has an interest in a country that is addressing its economic challenges, is responsive to the aspirations of its people, and is a source of stability in the region. That is, I believe, an interest that we should all share.

So again, President Castro, I want to thank you for welcoming me. I think it’s fair to say that the United States and Cuba are now engaged across more areas than any time during my lifetime. With every passing day, more Americans are coming to Cuba, more U.S. businesses and schools and faith groups are working to forge new partnerships with the Cuban people. More Cubans are benefitting from the opportunities that this travel and trade bring.

As you indicated, the road ahead will not be easy. Fortunately, we don’t have to swim with sharks in order to achieve the goals that you and I have set forth. As you say here in Cuba, “echar para adelante.” Despite the difficulties, we will continue to move forward. We're focused on the future.

And I’m absolutely confident that if we stay on this course, we can deliver a better and brighter future for both the Cuban people and the American people.

Muchas gracias. Thank you very much.

First question, Jim Acosta.

Question: [As interpreted.] Thank you, President Castro, for your hospitality in Havana. And thank you, Mr. President.

[In English.] In your meeting with President Castro, what words did you use to urge him to pursue democratic reforms and expand human rights here in Cuba? Will you invite President Castro to the White House? We know he’s been to New York. And why did you not meet with Fidel Castro?

And, President Castro, my father is Cuban. He left for the United States when he was young. Do you see a new and democratic direction for your country? And why you have Cuban political prisoners? And why don’t you release them? And one more question, who do you prefer -- Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump? Thank you.

President Obama: Well, as I think we both indicated, we had a very fruitful conversation around issues of democracy and human rights. Our starting point is that we have two different systems -- two different systems of government, two different economies. And we have decades of profound differences, both bilaterally and internationally.

What I have said to President Castro is that we are moving forward and not looking backwards; that we don’t view Cuba as a threat to the United States. I hope that my visit here indicates the degree to which we're setting a new chapter in Cuban-American relations.

But as is true with countries around the world where we have normalized relations, we will continue to stand up for basic principles that we believe in. America believes in democracy. We believe that freedom of speech and freedom of assembly and freedom of religion are not just American values, but are universal values. They may not express themselves exactly in the same way in every country, they may not be enshrined in the founding documents or constitutions of every country the same way, or protected legally in exactly the same ways, but the impulse -- the human impulse towards freedom, the freedom that JosÃ© MartÃ­ talked about, we think is a universal longing.

President Castro I think has pointed out that, in his view, making sure that everybody is getting a decent education or health care, has basic security in old age -- that those things are human rights, as well. I personally would not disagree with him.

But it doesn’t detract from some of these other concerns. And the goal of the human rights dialogue is not for the United States to dictate to Cuba how they should govern themselves, but to make sure that we are having a frank and candid conversation around this issue and hopefully that we can learn from each other.

It does not mean that it has to be the only issue we talk about. Economics, health, scientific exchanges, international cooperation on issues of regional as well as global import are also important. But this is something that we are going to stay on. And I actually welcome President Castro commenting on some of the areas where he feels that we're falling short because I think we should not be immune or afraid of criticism or discussion, as well.

Here’s the one thing I do know is that when I talk to Cuban Americans -- and, Jim, you’re second generation, and so I think I speak not for you directly, but for many that I talk to around the United States -- I think there is enormous hope that there can be reconciliation. And the bridge that President Castro discussed can be built between the Cuban American community and Cubans here. There are family ties and cultural ties that are so strong. And I think everyone would benefit from those ties being reestablished.

One of the impediments to strengthening those ties is these disagreements around human rights and democracy. And to the extent that we can have a good conversation about that and to actually make progress, that, I think, will allow us to see the full flowering of a relationship that is possible. In the absence of that, I think it will continue to be a very powerful irritant. And this is not unique to U.S.-Cuban relations. It’s one that, as you know, I have conversations with when we go to bilateral meetings with some of our very close allies, as well as countries that we don’t have as close of a relationship to. But I think it is something that matters. And I’ve met with people who have been subject to arbitrary detention, and that’s something that I generally have to speak out on because I hear from them directly and I know what it means for them.

Excuse me.

President Raul Castro: [As interpreted.] I was asking if his question was directed to me or to President Obama. You talked about political prisoners.

President Obama: I think the second one was addressed to you. Trump and Hillary.

President Raul Castro: [As interpreted.] For him or for me?

Question: [As interpreted.] For you, Mr. President.

President Raul Castro: What did you say about the political prisoners? Can you repeat that question about political prisoners? Did you ask if we had political prisoners?

Question: I wanted to know if you have Cuban political prisoners and why you don’t release them.

President Raul Castro: Give me the list of political prisoners and I will release them immediately. Just mention a list. What political prisoners? Give me a name or names. After this meeting is over, you can give me a list of political prisoners. And if we have those political prisoners, they will be released before tonight ends.

Question: And Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton, President Castro?

President Raul Castro: [As interpreted.] Well, I cannot vote in the United States.

Question: [As interpreted.] My question is for President Raul Castro. I’m from Cuban TV. President Raul Castro, you have repeatedly stated, and today once again, that we must learn to coexist in a civilized manner with our differences. Could you broaden this concept? This is a historical moment that we are living.

And then I have a brief question for President Obama. President Obama, could U.S. government give more space to eliminate U.S. blockade during your mandate so that another generation of Cubans would not have to suffer this economic and commercial blockade against Cuba?

President Raul Castro: [As interpreted.] The first question was for me. Please repeat your question, because I couldn’t hear well.

Question: [As interpreted.] You have said repeatedly that we must learn to coexist in a civilized manner with our differences.

President Raul Castro: Well, President Obama himself has referred to that. We have given the first steps –- many for being the first steps. And we must continue giving these steps. And I’m sure that we will be able to coexist peacefully in an environment of mutual cooperation as we are doing already in many fields for the benefit of both countries and with the benefit of other countries as we have already done -- in Haiti, with the cholera and in Africa with the Ebola. That is the future of mankind if we want to save the humans species. The level of water grows and the island may become smaller.

You are asking too many questions to me. I think questions should be directed to President Obama.

President Obama: So we have administratively already made a number of modifications on the embargo. I referred to a number of them in my opening statement. And we’ve actually been fairly aggressive in exercising as much flexibility as we can, given that the law putting the embargo in place has not been repealed by Congress. There may be some technical aspects of the embargo that we can still make adjustments on, depending on problems as they arise.

So, for example, the issue around the dollar and the need to make modifications in terms of how the embargo was implemented to encourage, rather than discourage reforms that the Cuban government itself is willing to engage in and to facilitate greater trade and commerce, that is something that grew out of the dialogue between our governments, and we have made appropriate adjustments to it. It will take some time for commercial banks to understand the new rules, but we actually think that this is an area where we can improve current circumstances.

But I’ll be honest with you that the list of things that we can do administratively is growing shorter, and the bulk of changes that have to be made with respect to the embargo are now going to rely on Congress making changes.

I’ve been very clear about the interests in getting that done before I leave. Frankly, Congress is not as productive as I would like during a Presidential election year. But the fact that we have such a large congressional delegation with Democrats and Republicans with us is an indication that there is growing interest inside of Congress for lifting the embargo.

As I just indicated in my earlier answer, how quickly that happens will, in part, depend on whether we can bridge some of our differences around human rights issues. And that's why the dialogue I think is so important. It sends a signal that at least there’s engagement between the two countries on these matters.

Now, I promised the President I would take one more question. Andrea Mitchell of NBC.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Do you feel, after your meeting today, that you have made enough progress to even accelerate the pace and that the Cuban government is able to move quickly enough so that the changes that you have made through these technical adjustments to the embargo will be permanent, cannot be reversed by the next President? And what advice have you given to President Castro about the ability of having the blockade, the embargo lifted? Because he has said again today this is a continuous issue which is blocking progress, from their standpoint.

And you said the conversations about human rights were frank and candid and that you want to move forward. But even as you were arriving, there were dramatic arrests of peaceful protests -- the Ladies in White. What signal does that send? Can you have civilized coexistence at the same time you have such profound disagreements about the very definitions of what human rights means, as President Castro expressed today?

And for President Castro, for many of us, it's remarkable to hear you speak about all these subjects. Can you tell us what you see in the future? President Obama has nine months remaining. You have said you would be stepping down in 2018. What is the future of our two countries, given the different definitions and the different interpretations of profound issues like democracy and human rights?

Thank you.

President Obama: Well, Andrea, the embargo is going to end. When, I can't be entirely sure, but I believe it will end. And the path that we're on will continue beyond my Administration. The reason is logic. The reason is that what we did for 50 years did not serve our interests or the interests of the Cuban people. And as I said when we made the announcement about normalization of relations, if you keep on doing something over and over again for 50 years and it doesn’t work, it might make sense to try something new.

And that's what we've done. And the fact that there has been strong support not just inside of Congress, not just among the American people, but also among the Cuban people indicates that this is a process that should and will continue.

Having said that, lifting the embargo requires the votes of a majority in Congress, and maybe even more than a majority in the Senate. And as I indicated to President Castro, two things I think will help accelerate the pace of bringing the embargo to an end. The first is to the degree that we can take advantage of the existing changes that we’ve already made and we see progress, that will help to validate this change in policy.

So, for example, we have said that it is no longer a restriction on U.S. companies to invest in helping to build Internet and broadband infrastructure inside of Cuba. It is not against U.S. law, as it's been interpreted by the Administration. If we start seeing those kinds of commercial deals taking place and Cubans are benefitting from greater access to the Internet -- and when I go to the entrepreneurship meeting later this afternoon, I understand that we're going to meet some young Cubans who are already getting trained and are facile in using the Internet, they’re interested in startups -- that builds a constituency for ending the embargo. If we build on the work that we're doing in agriculture, and you start seeing more U.S. farmers interacting with Cuban farmers, and there’s more exports and imports -- that builds a constituency and the possibility of ending the embargo increases. So hopefully taking advantage of what we've already done will help.

And the second area, which we've already discussed extensively, is the issue of human rights. People are still concerned about that inside of Cuba.

Now, keep in mind I’ve got fierce disagreements with the Chinese around human rights. I’ll be going to Vietnam later this year -- I have deep disagreements with them as well. When we first visited Burma, people questioned whether we should be traveling there because of longstanding human rights violations in our view. And the approach that I’ve taken has been that if I engage frankly, clearly, stating what our beliefs are but also being clear that we can't force change on any particular country -- ultimately it has to come from within -- then that is going to be a more useful strategy than the same kinds of rigid disengagement that for 50 years did nothing.

I guess ultimately what this comes down to, Andrea, is I have faith in people. I think that if you meet Cubans here and Cubans meet Americans, and they’re meeting and talking and interacting and doing business together, and going to school together and learning from each other, then they’ll recognize people are people. And in that context, I believe that change will occur.

Okay, now I’m done, but SeÃ±or Presidente, I think Andrea had a question for you just about your vision. It's up to you. He did say he was only going to take one question and I was going to take two. But I leave it up to you if you want to address that question.

Question: Por favor.

President Obama: Andrea, she’s one of our most esteemed journalists in America, and I’m sure she’d appreciate just a short, brief answer.

President Raul Castro: Andrea --

Question: Mr. President.

President Raul Castro: [As interpreted.] There is a program here to be fulfilled. I know that if I stay here, you will ask 500 questions. I said that I was going to answer one. Well, I answered one and a half. President Obama has already helped me out with the answer here, Andrea.

I was reading something about human rights, but I’m going to make the question to you now. There are 61 international instruments recognized. How many countries in the world comply with all the human rights and civil rights that have been included in these 61 instruments? What country complies with them all? Do you know how many? I do. None.

None, whatsoever. Some countries comply some rights; others comply others. And we are among these countries. Out of these 61 instruments, Cuba has complied with 47 of these human rights instruments. There are countries that may comply with more, there’s those that comply with less.

I think the human rights issue should not be politicized. That is not correct. That is a purpose that will stay the same way. For example, for Cuba, the desire for all the rights. Do you think there’s any more sacred right than the right to health, so that billions of children don’t die just for the lack of a vaccine or a drug or a medicament? Do you agree with the right to free education for all those born anywhere in the world or in any country? I think many countries don't think this is a human right. In Cuba, all children are born in a hospital and they are registered that same day, because when mothers are in advance pregnancy they go to hospitals days before, many days before delivery, so that all children are born in hospitals. It doesn’t matter if they live in faraway places or in mountains or hills. We have many other rights -- a right to health, the right to education.

And this is my last example that I will mention. Do you think that for equal work, men get better paid than women just for the fact of being women? Well, in Cuba, women get the same pay for same work. I can give you many, many examples. I don't think we can use the argument of human rights for political confrontation. That is not fair. It's not correct.

I’m not saying that it's not honest. It's part of confrontations, of course. But let us work so that we can all comply with all human rights. It's like talking about pride -- I’m going to end here because it's a commitment that we should end in time. It’s not correct to ask me about political prisoners in general. Please give me the name of a political prisoner.

And I think this is enough. We have concluded. Thank you for your participation.

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# Address to Entrepreneurs of Cuba

Thank you. Muchas gracias. Please, everybody have a seat. Buenas tardes.

Let me begin by thanking our hosts. This is my very first visit to a Cuban cervecerÃ­a. I hear they’ve got some great pollo -- Moros y Cristianos. And, of course, cerveza. But today, we’re here to work.

So I want to thank all of you for being part of this unprecedented event -- the Cuban government. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the new U.S.-Cuba Business Council. I’m also want to express my appreciation because we are joined on this trip by nearly 40 members of Congress, as well as some of America’s top business leaders and innovators who are eager to invest in Cuba and its people. And most importantly, I want to welcome all the extraordinary entrepreneurs -- men and women who are here from across Cuba.

Now, I’m not here to give a big speech. I’m going to do that tomorrow. What I really want to do is hear from you and have a conversation about what we can achieve together. But I do want to begin by stepping back and talking about the forces and hopes that bring us together here today.

In many ways, the history of Cuba can be understood through the labor of the Cuban people. For centuries, under colonial rule, and then during decades of American involvement, the toil of the Cuban people was often used to enrich others as opposed to the people who were doing the work. And then, for much of the past half century, it was virtually impossible for Cubans to operate their own businesses. But in recent years, that’s begun to change. To its credit, the Cuban government has adopted some reforms. Cuba is welcoming more foreign investment. Cubans can now buy and sell property, and today many Cubans own their own homes and apartments. It’s easier for Cubans to travel, to buy a cellphone, for farmers to start cooperatives, and for a family to start their own business.

The United States has been proud to help. Shortly after I took office, we said that Cuban Americans could send unlimited remittances to their families here in Cuba. And we allowed Cuban Americans to visit more often. Across this island, Cubans have used those remittances often to start businesses. And when Cuban Americans come visit, they often bring supplies and materials. We also made it easier for Cuban entrepreneurs to import and to export. And since we’ve made it easier to travel to Cuba, a lot more Americans are visiting the island -- you may have noticed.

So the Cuban economy is beginning to change, and just look at the results. Groups like Cuba Emprende are training a new generation of entrepreneurs. Today, about half a million Cubans -- including some of you -- are proud cuentapropistas -- running your own restaurants, cafes, beauty salons, barber shops, or working as artists, seamstresses and taxi drivers. Your businesses now employ about one-third of the Cuban workforce. With help from services like Airbnb, more Americans are staying at your casas particulares and eating at your paladares -- like my family did last night. That food was really good -- even if my Spanish is not that great.

Those of you who run your own business knows what this means. You can earn a little more money for your family. You can provide more for your children. And then there’s the pride that comes from creating something new and improving the lives of those around you. And that’s the power of entrepreneurship. It’s about self-determination -- the opportunity to forge your own future. It’s the belief that even if you don’t have much -- maybe just a kitchen, or a sewing machine, or a car -- if you’re willing to work hard, you can make your own way and improve your situation in life for the next generation. It’s the spirit of youth -- talented and driven, daring young people like so many of you ready to make your mark on the world.

It’s an investment in the future, because as we’ve seen in America, businesses that start small -- even in a garage -- can grow into some of the world’s most successful companies, and change the way we work and the way we live and connect with each other. That’s the spirit of entrepreneurship. And that’s what we’re encouraging here today. Because Cuba’s economic future -- its ability to create more jobs and a growing middle class, and meet the aspirations of the Cuban people -- depends on growth in the private sector, as well as government action.

And it’s not easy. In the United States, we work to help entrepreneurs and small businesses get the resources they need because it can be a struggle to get a new venture off the ground. Around the world, we help young people and entrepreneurs access training and skills to put their ideas into action. Here today, you’re talking about the challenges you face as entrepreneurs in Cuba.

Now, many of the changes that our two countries have already announced, including today, will help you to meet some of those challenges. More Americans coming to Cuba means more customers for your businesses. More Americans using the dollar will mean that they will spend more, as well. There will be more channels for you to import supplies and equipment. More Americans will be able to buy your arts, crafts, food, Cuban-origin software -- as well as, of course, Cuban rum and cigars.

We also know that, around the world, entrepreneurs flourish when there’s an environment that encourages their success. When professionals like architects and engineers and lawyers are allowed to start their own businesses, as well. When entrepreneurs can get loans from banks -- capital to start and expand their businesses. And then we need wholesale markets where you can buy supplies. When there’s a single currency and modern infrastructure so you can get your goods to market and import supplies. And when there’s a single currency and a modern infrastructure so you can get your goods to market and import supplies. And perhaps most importantly, when everybody has a chance to succeed, including women and Afro-Cubans. These are all areas where the United States hopes to be a partner as Cuba moves forward.

And I can tell you one of the reasons I’m so confident in the potential of the Cuban people is because you have some important advantages. Your commitment to education and very high literacy rates -- that gives you an enormous advantage in the 21st century. That's been an investment that has been made here in Cuba. Your ingenuity -- who else could keep almendrons running all these years? You’ve got more than 300 million potential American customers -- and one of the world’s most dynamic cities, Miami, right next door. And you have more than two million talented, successful Cuban Americans -- some of whom joined me on this trip -- ready to invest in you and help pursue your dreams, and have deep family commitments and deep roots in Cuban culture. So I’m absolutely convinced -- if just given a chance, more Cubans can succeed right here at home, in the Cuba that you love.

So I’m here today to say that America wants to be your partner. Around this visit, American companies are moving ahead with new commercial deals. GE is going to sell more products here, from aviation to energy technology. CleBer will be the first U.S. company to build a factory here in more than 50 years -- they’re going to build tractors for Cuban farmers. Starwood will become the first U.S. hotel that operates here in nearly 60 years, and Marriot plans to come, as well -- and they’ll help train Cubans in the hospitality industry. The first Carnival cruise is expected to pull into Havana in May. And I will keep saying it every chance I get -- one of the best ways to help the Cuban people succeed and improve their lives would be for the U.S. Congress to lift the embargo once and for all.

Here today, we’re doing even more to empower Cuban entrepreneurs. I know you’ve been networking with each other and potential American partners. Innovators in business -- like Airbnb’s Brian Chesky -- are sharing the lessons that they’ve learned. We’ve got a shark here named Daymond John -- for those of you who don't know, there’s a show in America called Shark Tank, which is an outstanding show where, on television, young entrepreneurs bring their ideas and present them, and they try to get some financing right there on the air. And it's a fun show to watch. Julie Hanna supports entrepreneurs all over the world with micro-financing. So give them your best pitch. They just might bite and decide to invest.

We’re also announcing some new commitments today. As part of our Young Leaders in the Americas Initiative, we’re going to welcome up to 15 young Cuban entrepreneurs to the United States to help them get the training and skills to grow their own business. For the first time, we’ll welcome Cubans to our annual Global Entrepreneurship Summit, which I’ll host in Silicon Valley later this year. And later this year, our Small Business Administrator, Maria Contreras Sweet -- who is here today. Where’s Maria? There she is. She’s going to lead a delegation of business leaders here to promote more entrepreneurship in Cuba.

And we also want to help connect more Cuban entrepreneurs to the Internet. Some are here today, including Yon GutiÃ©rrez, who designed AlaMesa, an app to connect Cubans to restaurants; and InfoMed, connecting doctors and scientists. More Cubans are going online at Wi-Fi hotspots, but still, very few Cubans have Internet access. Although I just learned that my skit with Panfilo got two million hits here in Cuba, so that -- I think with Internet access paid attention here.

But in terms of Internet access, even those who have it often are using old dial-up connections that can be expensive and slow. I don't even remember the sound of the phone when it went [makes "dial-up" sound] -- so new technology has come and we need to bring it to Cuba. “If we had Internet” one Cuban entrepreneur said, “we could really take off.”

So America wants to help you take off. And Verizon will help deliver direct landline phone connections between Cuba and the United States. Cisco has announced it will help Cuban students develop their IT skills. The American high-tech firm Stripe, is partnering with Merchise Startup Circle here in Havana to help Cubans start ventures and do business online.

The bottom line is this. We believe in the Cuban people. We believe in artists like Idania Del Rio who designs and illustrates her own goods -- “99 percent Cuban design,” she calls it. We believe in merchants like Sandra Lidicie Aldama, who says, “One of the most important things in the Cuban nature is perseverance, optimism, and our capacity to find a solution to any obstacle in the way.” We believe in the entrepreneur who said, “I think with these changes in Cuba there’s no turning back.” And another who said, “This opens us up to the world.” And one who also said, “Just give us the chance.”

Just give us the chance. Well, as your friend and as your partner, the United States of America wants to help you get that chance. And we're so grateful that we're off to this outstanding start at this event here today. Muchas gracias.

Thank you very much. Thank you. Now, as I said, I didn’t want to just talk, I want to also hear from you. So I’ve asked to join me one of our outstanding journalists in the United States, an entrepreneur herself who works to empower girls through education. She is a proud Cuban-American who, on this visit, has brought her children to Cuba to meet their cousins for the first time. Please give her a big round of applause --Soledad O’Brien.

Ms. O'Brien: So welcome, everyone. My name is Soledad O’Brien, and I’m a journalist, as the President said. And I’m also a Cuban-American. My mother grew up not very far from here, Habana Vieja. And so it's not only nice to be back, but it's great to be able to bring my children here for the first time.

I’m also an entrepreneur. I run a small business that employs nine people full-time. So I know very well the joys and the struggles of running your own business. And I'm excited to be here today to moderate a discussion -- to talk to several businesspeople, some people who work in the private sector and others who work in the state sector, to discuss some of the opportunities to improve business and also improve cooperation between Cuba and the United States.

So I'm going to ask the people that I call on to stand and talk for just a couple of moments about your business. And if you have a question for the President, we would love to hear it.

So we'll begin with Gilberto “Papito” Valladares. He’s a small business owner. He is a barber. He’s also a community organizer.

Welcome.

Question: [As interpreted.] Good afternoon. Mr. President, my name is Gilberto Valladares. Everybody calls me by my nickname, "Papito." I'm a bald barber and a dreamer. I’d like to share with you my vision, my personal vision. I am also from Old Havana. I love Old Havana. We have that in common.

In ’99, I made a major decision in my life to become a private self-employed people. At the time, 95 percent of barbers worked for the state. Now, 95 percent of them are private operators, meaning that something is happening in Cuban society. It is a very important moment for me. I know that the historical moment of committing the private sector with society is tomorrow, and that's what's been happening in my community. I live in the callejÃ³n de los peluqueros, or barbers' street. I do like barber work. That's why they talk about that callejÃ³n, or alley.

Three years ago, on that street, we only had one self-employed person, myself. Today we are talking in terms of 97 people who are self-employed, including owners and workers. And this has helped us to promote a dynamic I’d like to share with you as to how my community has been creating a chain of economic benefits and also a chain of social benefits. I am convinced that social benefits make economic benefits even more greater. When you work in a micro-company and you work for the future of society, that’s where the future of society lies.

The person [inaudible] values of economics. That's why we pay so much attention to social values. My economic project is also helping another project for young people who want to learn to become barbers. Today we have 10 deaf girls who are being taught how to be hairdressers so that in the future they can work. I'm so happy because alliances have allowed us to grow. By alliances I mean alliances between the private and state sector, among people, and so on.

I think it is also very important to see how we are creating a synergy, and in the end, we all win. I’ll also say it's so important that in the end I will not be able to fix the world, but I can fix my little piece of land where I live. And I think that a very few littles will make a big thing up.

President Obama: Well, first of all, Papito, I know that my barber is very important to me. And Michelle’s hairdresser -- if she had to choose between me and her hairdresser, I don't know, it would be a close call.

But in the United States, a barbershop, a beauty salon, that's oftentimes the center of the neighborhood and community life, and that's where people meet. And so congratulations on not only starting your business but also seeing it as a social enterprise that can help to contribute to the wellbeing of the community as a whole.

One of the things we’re excited about is the fact that even though it’s starting small, and you’re self-employed, you’re now about to build up a business and people can see you as a role model and as an example. The next step obviously is for you potentially to be able to expand. And in the United States -- I don’t know about barbering here -- but in the United States, oftentimes people start off, they just have one chair in the barbershop, then they get five chairs. Young barbers come in and initially they rent a chair from you, but over time, once they've gotten regular customers, maybe they go off and they branch off, and they start their own barbershop. And in that way, you see a number of businesses start to grow, even though it started just from one.

And one of the issues that hopefully the cuentapropista movement can begin to develop is the capacity to take these small businesses that have just started and begin to expand them. That's not going to happen overnight, but that's part of what we'd like to see encouraged. And I think that that's going to require government feeling comfortable with that process, but it's also going to require entrepreneurs like you, as role models, so that people can see how successful it's been.

I will say, there was an interesting conversation that I had with President Castro around this issue, and I know that U.S. companies will relate to this, because he pointed out that as people start getting more of their own income, owning their own property and starting their own businesses, the question starts coming up about paying taxes. And President Castro pointed out, rightfully, that nobody likes paying taxes, especially if they're not used to paying taxes. And I assured him that was a universal trait. That's true in America, just as much as it is in the United States.

But that gives you a sense of how some of these institutions are going to have to evolve over time because they're still relatively new. But certainly these are the kinds of initiatives that will start building new habits and new possibilities for people throughout your country.

So, congratulations. If I hadn’t just gotten a haircut, I'd stop by your shop.

Ms. O'Brien: The next person I'd like to introduce is Idania del Rio, and she's a graphic designer. And she has been in the past part of an exchange program to the United States.

Question: [As interpreted.] Thank you, very much. Good afternoon. I am a designer, illustrator. And with two women, we funded Clandestina, which is a design brand intending to define work by as done by Cuban young designers, and in general to have a bigger design market in Havana to begin with. So we are trying to establish a chain between creation, production, and sales for the benefit of Cuban designers.

The concept behind Clandestina's work is to change the concept of Cuban souvenir idea. We have products like rum and tobacco and cigars, which are practically commodities, but there is a whole market of new products from new initiatives of creation which are not as well established as those products. And design is a quite interesting field in any modern society where much value can be generated for society itself. Clandestina began a year ago.

What started as a t-shirt shop has become a project with 14 employees, and it is creating over 25 products. So we are very, very happy -- most of all, our girls, which is also very cool. And thanks to some things that have been happening -- we have been invited to participate in WEAmericas, which is a State Department project. And because of those things of life, we entered the Columbia Business School. So we've been having business training, and that's essential for us. That has changed our lives and the way we think of our own project, which began as a project and now is a company. We do have many expectations for the future and for what we can do with young people in our township in Old Havana also.

Thank you very much.

Ms. O'Brien: What would you like to happen between Cuba and the United States that could be helpful to you and the young women that you serve?

Question: Basically, what has been discussed here. Specific regulations, information about those regulations, what will happen with imports and exports, what will happen with Cubans as to whether they might be having companies in the United States or selling their products there. Could they trade online? And that Cuban state information and U.S. government information would be valuable for us. This information is what we need most, I think.

President Obama: Well, I need some information on where I can buy a couple of t-shirts. Did you bring some samples? I'm not going to take yours. But we'll see if we can get a couple. I think Malia and Sasha might want a couple. And I still have some pesos to spend before I leave.

But I tell you, you're absolutely right about the need to make sure that young people who have ideas are not restricted to just the traditional exports where you're not that high up on the value chain. And this is true around the world, including in the United States. You have global markets -- they're competitive. If all you're doing is selling commodities, then it's very hard to spur significant economic growth, and you're also vulnerable in the world marketplace if there's a downturn in the economy and people need less raw materials.

So if China's economy slows and suddenly they're not buying as much oil or as much minerals, or what have you, then suddenly the economy of that country is very vulnerable. And so you want a diversified economy and you want to make sure that skills, design, software, products of intellectual work and not just raw materials and commodities, that that becomes a critical part of the overall economy.

Now, Cuba already has an example of that in its outstanding medical profession. The doctors and the nurses are essential exports for Cuba because they're highly skilled, they're highly trained. They're at a global standard. And as a consequence, they can sell those services essentially when they work elsewhere in the world. But there's no reason to think that the same ingenuity that exists when it comes to medicine shouldn’t be true in fashion as well, or in software, or in engineering, or a whole host of other potential occupations that people provide.

And so you're starting to lead the way. But I'll talk to you afterwards about that t-shirt.

Ms. O'Brien: The next person we'd like to hear from is Brian Chesky. You mentioned him earlier. He is the founder of Airbnb, and they have 2 million listings in 190 countries.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. It's an honor to be here. This is a historic week for diplomacy. And I want to just talk for a moment about maybe another kind of diplomacy, and that is people-to-people diplomacy. We launched, with your help, one year ago. In that period of time, we've had Americans come from all 50 states in the country, and they've stayed with hosts here in Cuba. And we estimate now about 20 percent of all Americans that are staying in Cuba are staying in a home with a Cuba host. What they say is that they come here with 50 years of questions, and they have three days to ask them. But I think it's been an amazing experience and unbelievable story.

We just got the word from the White House that, a day ago, we were going to be allowed to have not just Americans stay with a Cuban host, but guests from all over the world. I mentioned this to a Cuban host, and then she actually started crying. And she explained to me that this would allow her to finally be able to complete paying the bills for their family and fix up her home.

I met another host last night, and she said, "We open our doors, we open our hearts, and what we care most about is not just the money we make, but the friendships we make." And they used to say that they had lots of misconceptions about Americans, and it's hard to have misconceptions about Americans when you actually host them in your homes. And the same thing is true with Americans and I think people all over the world. There's hundreds of thousands of new friendships that are possible if we can bring people together.

President Obama: I just want to brag on Brian just for one second. First of all, for those Cubans who are not familiar with Brian, you can see how young he is. The company that he started, Airbnb, basically started as an idea with his co-founder who is also here. How long ago did you guys start, Brian [Chesky]?

Mr. Chesky: Eight years.

President Obama: Eight years. And what's the valuation now?

Mr. Chesky: Twenty-five --

President Obama: Don't be shy.

Mr. Chesky: $25 billion.

President Obama: $25 billion? With a "B"? Okay. But I use Brian as an example. He's one of our outstanding your entrepreneurs who had an idea and acted on it. And in this global economy, it can take off -- if it's a good idea and it's well executed. But I also think Brian is a good example of the power of the Internet and why having an Internet infrastructure is so important. Because essentially, Airbnb is using social media and the Internet in order to create a buyer and a seller and a market that is safe for those buyers and sellers that didn’t previously exist. I mean, it used to be if an American or a German or anybody wanted to come to Cuba, they could go to a hotel, and that was it. Now, suddenly, there are thousands of potential sellers of a great experience here in Cuba, and they themselves become small business people.

But it's only possible because somebody in Germany can look up online and see, okay, that's a house, that looks nice, there's a nice picture. There's been a good rating of the host. They found out that when you get there, the room actually looks like the room on the Internet. The person who's inviting somebody into their home, they can check and they've seen that, okay, the person who's using this has a good credit rating. And if they've stayed at Airbnb before, they haven’t completely torn up the house.

And so it's a tool to build trust and allow this transaction to take place. But if you imagine what could be done with broader Internet access and service here, Brian, I think, gives you a good example of the potential that could be unleashed. But it requires an infrastructure and an investment in order to make it work.

Thank you for sharing your story, Brian.

Ms. O'Brien: Up next is Abelardo Alvarez Silva. Mr. Silva, I should say, is the president of the Cooperative of Credits and Services, an association of small farmers.

Question: Good afternoon, Mr. President. I'm a farmer, president of a credit and service cooperative, a social and economic unit which has autonomy in its management. I cover expenses with the income. There are 192 associates. There's a general assembly, the top organ of the cooperative. It has an area of 638 hectares -- 500 are arable land with fruits, grains, et cetera; 28 owners and 25 [inaudible]. We produce all of our production, around 9,000 tons. For social consumption, we sell to the population directly. With the industry, we sell seeds to hotels.

One of the positive impacts of our cooperative at the social level, our cooperative takes care of women homes, children with oncological problems. That is the positive impact of the cooperative. We supply them. We are located in Artemisa, Havana Matanzas area. It's a productive area under irrigation, with a system created by farmers with an advanced experience in all the crops. However, we have not been able to find all the potential because of the absence of new technology. Our machinery are very backward -- irrigation system that prevents us from finding the development and the top productivity of our work.

What is our message? To give us an opportunity to meet two objectives. One, to produce food for the people more efficiently. And second, in the immediate future, to contribute to the world. And we continue with our land growing it and harvesting it.

President Obama: Let me just ask you a quick question -- pregunta. What's your -- you said you grow grain and fruit. Let's get a translation. I'm just curious, first of all, what are the products that you've been most successful in growing? What's your major seller? And also, when it comes to equipment, what are the specific things that you're looking for at this point? Is it basics, like tractors, or is it more sophisticated irrigation systems? What are the main needs of the cooperative at this point?

Question: [As interpreted.] We have several crops. We produce potatoes, plantains, and sweet potatoes. Those are the most productive items. And in vegetables, we're high producers in carrots, tomato, beet root. They're the main ones -- although we grow them all. And fruits -- guava, papaya. Those are our main crops. Fifty percent are vegetables, thirty-five in fruits, fifteen in grains, and five percent in foods.

When I spoke about the obtainment of the equipment, we need machinery -- irrigation machinery. Our machinery is very old, and no spare parts do we have. Those parts that we need today, it's hard to buy them. So the irrigation system are actual furrows, and that's not used anymore. It brings about erosion. And we have substituted with organic maneuver. But still, we're under the productivity.

When we have all that machinery, things will be done in less time, less expensive. Not so much use of water. Better protection of the soil -- to find the top productivity of the land. Also, the resources which we need are indispensable, and sometimes they don’t come.

Because of the main costs, as you know, we don’t receive those inputs at the time required and when we don’t really need it. Thank you.

President Obama: My Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack, joined me in this delegation. I don’t know if he's here today. But I know that he's been meeting with Cuban government officials about how we can accelerate cooperation between U.S. farmers and Cuban farmers. We have programs all around the world that are designed to advance technologies, specifically for small farmers, not just for big farmers -- because the truth of the matter is, the U.S. agricultural industry, which is the largest in the world, oftentimes may have systems that are not perfectly adapted to smaller-scale cooperative farming. On the other hand, what you're seeing in terms of agriculture in the United States is a greater and greater interest in what's called organic farming -- less inputs, less chemicals, fewer mono-crops, and more vegetables and fruits that can go directly to the table. And this is part of the First Lady's emphasis on healthier eating.

And the fact that Cuba is so close to the United States means that if you develop fruits and vegetables here, the ability to ship them and immediately get to markets where they can be purchased would be something that could make a big difference in terms of farm incomes here in Cuba.

So this is an area where, again, it's not going to happen overnight, but our hope is that as relationships between the two countries advance and develop, hopefully we'll be getting you some new equipment sometime in the future.

Question: Muchas gracias.

President Obama: Muchas gracias.

Ms. O'Brien: Dr. Miriam Portuondo Sao is with the health system. She's a specialist in the genetics clinic. Welcome.

Question: [As interpreted.] Welcome. For us, it's a pleasure to share with you a little bit on the experience in the field of medical collaboration. I am doctor -- a doctor in medical science, especially in clinical genetics, and professor of the university. And we have had the opportunity to share the medical collaboration, the international one. As you know, it reaches 138 other countries. Over 3,700 health professionals have participated.

And this field of medical collaboration, there are several fields. And you know the recent experience we had and the struggle against the Ebola experience in the countries of Western Africa. From there on, we have had other working lines in which we have cooperated, like the miracle operation that has returned vision to over 2 million people in the rest of the world. We have a special program -- research and action of disability. We have already one experience of handicap people, which we had in our country. We want to collaborate with the ALBA countries, and this research we want it to be conveyed. Once we research each person with all the disabilities that show up, then we know the true reality of that person. And in those sectors that should be taken care of in a personalized manner, we provide them with a medical special program. And other programs have been developed, like the development of genetics. And community genetics, rehabilitation, those are programs which go from the research and action.

We also have the possibility to establish collaboration lines, joint ones. And we have possibilities that the health medical services have 17 programs. They are world-class in the country. And we can received patients if they are sent. And we have lines, like attention and the certification of addiction -- lines which are already dealing with very specific matters for certain regions, and where we could establish other fields of cooperation -- research, academic services, development, clinical trials, especially on cancer, for instance, that could contribute in this link with the pharmaceutical industry. Vaccines, which have already been tried, that shall improve the quality and prolong the life of patients that are limited at this moment. We're willing to cooperate in all these spheres. Thank you.

Ms. O'Brien: You mentioned collaboration. And I'd love to know what could the United States and doctors and the medical profession here in Cuba be working on together.

President Obama: Well, as I said, Cuba has world-class doctors and nurses. And the field that the doctor mentioned, the transformation that's taking place as we started understanding genetics, mapping the human genome, understanding at a cellular level, the nature of diseases, means that we're in a position in the very near future to start personalizing treatments, because a cancer cell that develops in me may not be the same as one that develops in you, and may require different treatments. But that's just one example of a wide range of areas where collaboration could be very fruitful.

So with the Cuban government, we have agreed to establish and develop over time more and more scientific and research collaborations in the medical area. And one of the things that I've always believed is that knowledge should be disseminated everywhere. And the basis for scientific advancement is the sharing of information and data sets, and our ability to test hypotheses and discoveries and treatments and diagnoses across borders -- because ultimately, regardless of our political and economic systems and our differences, the diseases are the same because we're the same creatures. And we want to make sure that if there's a cure or a potential line of research here in Cuba, that that can go global, in the same way that if in the United States, we find a potential ability to diagnose or treat, that we can spread that around the world.

One specific example that I mentioned to President Castro today is the work we're doing on Zika. It's just not Zika; it's also dengue and some other mosquito-borne diseases that are becoming more common because people are traveling more. Many of these are actually fairly simple viruses. But it's just because they used to be very isolated, the major drug companies and scientific research didn’t devote a lot of attention to them, and now suddenly they're spreading very quickly. The faster we can get diagnoses and potential vaccines, the more we can help guard against what appear to be some correlations between this disease and abnormalities in newborns.

But you’re seeing this spread so fast across the Americas, this is a natural place where the U.S. and Cuba should be working together. Because it really doesn’t matter whether it's and ALBA country or a U.S. ally, the mosquitos don't care about borders. They’re biting everybody. And the women who are fearful because it may affect their pregnancy, they’re not concerned with ideology, they’re interested in making sure that their children are protected.

So that's a good, specific, concrete example of how our collaboration can advance.

Ms. O'Brien: Our last speaker is Indhira Sotillo Fernandez. She is the founder of IslaDentro, which is sort of the Yelp of Cuban. Business, artist, cultural guide of the Internet. Certainly has been challenging here. So why don't you tell us a little bit about your business and how you’d like to see it develop.

Question: Good afternoon. My name is Indhira. I represent IslaDentro. It's a guide of vistas for the state and private sector. I am from the private sector and I think I am an entrepreneur. This was a project that came to my hands almost from the air. It just came to me. And in time, I have been transforming it. We have modified until we have reached to this state. If you want to walk around Havana, you should install it in your phone. It includes everything you need, you require. We have restaurants, cafeterias, beauty parlors, and mechanics of almandrones, the old cars. All sorts of services are in that type of guide.

My experience in that work, when I began I knew nothing about programming. All I do is empiric. I began to design in an empiric way. I have a very good team that backs me and perfectly understands this, and they put it into practice.

One, I want to be the guide of Cuba. I want to be the one representing Cuba abroad -- the guide for all those who come here and move around inside the whole island with the application. To become the guide that represents Cuba, abroad especially. And of course, to have thousands and thousands -- right now, I have hundreds of active profiles in the application, and thousands would be much better.

President Obama: What’s going to be the one or two things that are going to be most important to you as you develop your business over the next several years, and how can the dialogue between the United States and Cuba be most helpful? Is it capital? Is it having access to international markets? Is it making sure that the Internet is widespread? Is it having trained personnel? Is it your knowledge of how to expand your business and make sure that it actually is generating revenue? What are the things that you think are going to be most important to you?

Question: A little bit of all you have mentioned. A little bit of all we're going to need. Of course, to open up -- if the Internet is opened up, it will be faster so that abroad they will know what we're doing inside, and it will be easier for anyone arriving, any foreigner, coming with information. That is one of the things. Also, to train ourselves better, it would be another of the urgencies to take into account. A little bit of everything you said.

President Obama: Well, here is the thing I will say, that Malia and Sasha -- Malia is soon 18, Sasha will soon be 15 -- if they go anywhere, they don't have a book. They don't have maps. Everything is on their phone. And that's true of young people internationally. And so as more and more visitors come to Cuba, I think that the potential for this app is going to be enormous. And so I know that you have the right idea. It's just going to be a matter of execution. And hopefully, with some of the changes that are taking place in terms of government policy, and your own drive, and some of the work that we're doing, for example, where Cisco is training more people in terms of online skills, and maybe some entrepreneurial advice that we're able to obtain through the exchanges that have taken place between our two countries -- when they come here five years from now without me, they’ll know how to find the best restaurant and the best music. They’ll be going to your app.

So, good luck.

Question: Gracias.

Ms. O'Brien: I’ll just throw out some questions, as well. Where do you think -- I mean, clearly she talked about wanting to learn about entrepreneurship, in addition to capital and all these other things. What do you think is going to be the thing that changes Cuba over the next two, three years that will really help entrepreneurs in this country?

President Obama: Well, ultimately, it's going to be young people like some of the ones that we've heard who are going to use their own imaginations and ideas to help develop and expand the Cuban economy.

Obviously, the United States has a long history -- we were built on entrepreneurship and on market-based principles. And it has produced wealth that's unmatched in the history of the world. I think Cuba, in part because of its history and seeing some of the inequalities that emerged in the old system, have been concerned about what a market-based economy does to the social fabric and to equality and to making sure that the progress that's been made in health care and education, that that's not eroded, and you don't start seeing some of the patterns of inequality that existed before coming back.

And I understand those concerns. I will say this, though, that in the 21st century, in a knowledge-based economy, in a global economy, for Cuba to grow it's going to have to find ways to link itself with that global economy. And that's going to require some reforms internally here in Cuba. And what I said to President Castro was, given some of the history of mistrust between the United States and Cuba, given the fact that our embargo at the moment is still in place, it may be that it's not the United States that is giving them the technical advice they need in terms of how to make some of the changes and reforms in a way that is not overly disruptive. But there are other countries that have done this and made these transitions. There are countries that have a more mixed economy but that have been able to develop strong entrepreneurs and a business class.

And so Cuba should take ideas, steal ideas from wherever you see something working. Now, my advice would be don't steal ideas from places where it's not working. And there are some economic models that just don't work. And that's not an ideological opinion on my part. That's just the objective reality that there’s some economies that have had great difficulty in how they operate, and it gets harder and harder as time goes by.

So I think that some of what’s going to have to happen will be internal to Cuba. And that's not going to be determined by the United States, that's going to be determined by the Cuban government and the Cuban people. What I can say is that the business leaders -- the U.S. business leaders who are here and the American people are not interested in Cuba failing. We're interested in Cuba succeeding. We're interested in Cuba being a partner with us.

We're interested in a situation in which businesspeople who are in Miami right now are taking a half hour, 45-minute flight, or however long it takes, and suddenly they’re in a thriving Cuba where they’re partnering with Cuban businesses. Young people like the ones we've met today, they’re developing their own business on their own terms. They may have international partners, but they’re not being dictated to. They’re, in fact, the ones who are guiding their own models and their own prosperity. That more and more Cubans are seeing the concrete benefits of economic growth, and that that economic leadership, which I believe can be compatible with good education and good health care and equal pay for equal work, and all the principles that President Castro talked about at his press conference -- that's our hope. That's our desire.

When I initiated the change in policy, one of my arguments was that if something is not working for 50 years you stop doing it and try something new. And that applies to what the United States is doing. That also applies to what Cuba is doing.

And so we both I think are in a time when we should be examining new ideas. But the one thing that this gathering and hopefully my visit should have communicated is the Cuban people have nothing to fear from the United States. And I’ve said to the American people, we have nothing to fear from Cuba. And if we can build that trust, and let these young people develop their talents without fear, then I'm confident that the future of both countries and the cooperation between the two countries is going to be very promising.

So, thank you very much, everybody.

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# Address to the People of Cuba

Thank you. Muchas gracias. Thank you so much. Please. Thank you very much.

President Castro, the people of Cuba, thank you so much for the warm welcome that I have received, that my family have received, and that our delegation has received. It is an extraordinary honor to be here today.

Before I begin, please indulge me. I want to comment on the terrorist attacks that have taken place in Brussels. The thoughts and the prayers of the American people are with the people of Belgium. We stand in solidarity with them in condemning these outrageous attacks against innocent people. We will do whatever is necessary to support our friend and ally, Belgium, in bringing to justice those who are responsible. And this is yet another reminder that the world must unite, we must be together, regardless of nationality, or race, or faith, in fighting against the scourge of terrorism. We can -- and will -- defeat those who threaten the safety and security of people all around the world.

To the government and the people of Cuba, I want to thank you for the kindness that you’ve shown to me and Michelle, Malia, Sasha, my mother-in-law, Marian.

Cultivo una rosa blanca.

1

In his most famous poem, Jose Mart

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made this offering of friendship and peace to both his friend and his enemy. Today, as the President of the United States of America, I offer the Cuban people el saludo de paz.

2

Havana is only 90 miles from Florida, but to get here we had to travel a great distance -- over barriers of history and ideology; barriers of pain and separation. The blue waters beneath Air Force One once carried American battleships to this island -- to liberate, but also to exert control over Cuba. Those waters also carried generations of Cuban revolutionaries to the United States, where they built support for their cause. And that short distance has been crossed by hundreds of thousands of Cuban exiles -- on planes and makeshift rafts -- who came to America in pursuit of freedom and opportunity, sometimes leaving behind everything they owned and every person that they loved.

Like so many people in both of our countries, my lifetime has spanned a time of isolation between us. The Cuban Revolution took place the same year that my father came to the United States from Kenya. The Bay of Pigs took place the year that I was born. The next year, the entire world held its breath, watching our two countries, as humanity came as close as we ever have to the horror of nuclear war. As the decades rolled by, our governments settled into a seemingly endless confrontation, fighting battles through proxies. In a world that remade itself time and again, one constant was the conflict between the United States and Cuba.

I have come here to bury the last remnant of the Cold War in the Americas. I have come here to extend the hand of friendship to the Cuban people.

I want to be clear: The differences between our governments over these many years are real and they are important. I’m sure President Castro would say the same thing -- I know, because I’ve heard him address those differences at length. But before I discuss those issues, we also need to recognize how much we share. Because in many ways, the United States and Cuba are like two brothers who’ve been estranged for many years, even as we share the same blood.

We both live in a new world, colonized by Europeans. Cuba, like the United States, was built in part by slaves brought here from Africa. Like the United States, the Cuban people can trace their heritage to both slaves and slave-owners. We’ve welcomed both immigrants who came a great distance to start new lives in the Americas.

Over the years, our cultures have blended together. Dr. Carlos Finlay’s work in Cuba paved the way for generations of doctors, including Walter Reed, who drew on Dr. Finlay’s work to help combat Yellow Fever. Just as Mart

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wrote some of his most famous words in New York, Ernest Hemingway made a home in Cuba, and found inspiration in the waters of these shores. We share a national past-time -- La Pelota -- and later today our players will compete on the same Havana field that Jackie Robinson played on before he made his Major League debut. And it's said that our greatest boxer, Muhammad Ali, once paid tribute to a Cuban that he could never fight -- saying that he would only be able to reach a draw with the great Cuban, Teofilo Stevenson.

So even as our governments became adversaries, our people continued to share these common passions, particularly as so many Cubans came to America. In Miami or Havana, you can find places to dance the Cha-Cha-Cha or the Salsa, and eat ropa vieja. People in both of our countries have sung along with Celia Cruz or Gloria Estefan, and now listen to reggaeton or Pitbull. Millions of our people share a common religion -- a faith that I paid tribute to at the Shrine of our Lady of Charity in Miami, a peace that Cubans find in La Cachita.

For all of our differences, the Cuban and American people share common values in their own lives. A sense of patriotism and a sense of pride -- a lot of pride. A profound love of family. A passion for our children, a commitment to their education. And that's why I believe our grandchildren will look back on this period of isolation as an aberration, as just one chapter in a longer story of family and of friendship.

But we cannot, and should not, ignore the very real differences that we have -- about how we organize our governments, our economies, and our societies. Cuba has a one-party system; the United States is a multi-party democracy. Cuba has a socialist economic model; the United States is an open market. Cuba has emphasized the role and rights of the state; the United States is founded upon the rights of the individual.

Despite these differences, on December 17th 2014, President Castro and I announced that the United States and Cuba would begin a process to normalize relations between our countries. Since then, we have established diplomatic relations and opened embassies. We've begun initiatives to cooperate on health and agriculture, education and law enforcement. We've reached agreements to restore direct flights and mail service. We've expanded commercial ties, and increased the capacity of Americans to travel and do business in Cuba.

And these changes have been welcomed, even though there are still opponents to these policies. But still, many people on both sides of this debate have asked: Why now? Why now?

There is one simple answer: What the United States was doing was not working. We have to have the courage to acknowledge that truth. A policy of isolation designed for the Cold War made little sense in the 21st century. The embargo was only hurting the Cuban people instead of helping them. And I've always believed in what Martin Luther King, Jr. called “the fierce urgency of now”

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-- we should not fear change, we should embrace it.

That leads me to a bigger and more important reason for these changes: Creo en el pueblo Cubano. I believe in the Cuban people. This is not just a policy of normalizing relations with the Cuban government. The United States of America is normalizing relations with the Cuban people.

And today, I want to share with you my vision of what our future can be. I want the Cuban people -- especially the young people -- to understand why I believe that you should look to the future with hope; not the false promise which insists that things are better than they really are, or the blind optimism that says all your problems can go away tomorrow. Hope that is rooted in the future that you can choose and that you can shape, and that you can build for your country.

I'm hopeful because I believe that the Cuban people are as innovative as any people in the world.

In a global economy, powered by ideas and information, a country’s greatest asset is its people. In the United States, we have a clear monument to what the Cuban people can build: it’s called Miami. Here in Havana, we see that same talent in cuentapropistas, cooperatives and old cars that still run. El Cubano inventa del aire.

Cuba has an extraordinary resource -- a system of education which values every boy and every girl. And in recent years, the Cuban government has begun to open up to the world, and to open up more space for that talent to thrive. In just a few years, we've seen how cuentapropistas can succeed while sustaining a distinctly Cuban spirit. Being self-employed is not about becoming more like America, it’s about being yourself.

Look at Sandra Lidice Aldama, who chose to start a small business. Cubans, she said, can “innovate and adapt without losing our identity…our secret is in not copying or imitating but simply being ourselves.”

Look at Papito Valladeres, a barber, whose success allowed him to improve conditions in his neighborhood. “I realize I’m not going to solve all of the world’s problems,” he said. “But if I can solve problems in the little piece of the world where I live, it can ripple across Havana.”

That’s where hope begins -- with the ability to earn your own living, and to build something you can be proud of. That’s why our policies focus on supporting Cubans, instead of hurting them. That’s why we got rid of limits on remittances -- so ordinary Cubans have more resources. That’s why we’re encouraging travel -- which will build bridges between our people, and bring more revenue to those Cuban small businesses. That’s why we’ve opened up space for commerce and exchanges -- so that Americans and Cubans can work together to find cures for diseases, and create jobs, and open the door to more opportunity for the Cuban people.

As President of the United States, I’ve called on our Congress to lift the embargo. It is an outdated burden on the Cuban people. It's a burden on the Americans who want to work and do business or invest here in Cuba. It's time to lift the embargo. But even if we lifted the embargo tomorrow, Cubans would not realize their potential without continued change here in Cuba. It should be easier to open a business here in Cuba. A worker should be able to get a job directly with companies who invest here in Cuba. Two currencies shouldn’t separate the type of salaries that Cubans can earn.

The Internet should be available across the island, so that Cubans can connect to the wider world -- and to one of the greatest engines of growth in human history.

There’s no limitation from the United States on the ability of Cuba to take these steps. It’s up to you. And I can tell you as a friend that sustainable prosperity in the 21st century depends upon education, health care, and environmental protection. But it also depends on the free and open exchange of ideas. If you can’t access information online, if you cannot be exposed to different points of view, you will not reach your full potential. And over time, the youth will lose hope.

I know these issues are sensitive, especially coming from an American President. Before 1959, some Americans saw Cuba as something to exploit, ignored poverty, enabled corruption. And since 1959, we’ve been shadow-boxers in this battle of geopolitics and personalities. I know the history, but I refuse to be trapped by it.

I’ve made it clear that the United States has neither the capacity, nor the intention to impose change on Cuba. What changes come will depend upon the Cuban people. We will not impose our political or economic system on you. We recognize that every country, every people, must chart its own course and shape its own model. But having removed the shadow of history from our relationship, I must speak honestly about the things that I believe -- the things that we, as Americans, believe. As MartÃ­ said, “Liberty is the right of every man to be honest, to think and to speak without hypocrisy.”

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So let me tell you what I believe. I can't force you to agree, but you should know what I think. I believe that every person should be equal under the law. Every child deserves the dignity that comes with education, and health care and food on the table and a roof over their heads. I believe citizens should be free to speak their mind without fear -- to organize, and to criticize their government, and to protest peacefully, and that the rule of law should not include arbitrary detentions of people who exercise those rights. I believe that every person should have the freedom to practice their faith peacefully and publicly. And, yes, I believe voters should be able to choose their governments in free and democratic elections.

Not everybody agrees with me on this. Not everybody agrees with the American people on this. But I believe those human rights are universal. I believe they are the rights of the American people, the Cuban people, and people around the world.

Now, there’s no secret that our governments disagree on many of these issues. I’ve had frank conversations with President Castro. For many years, he has pointed out the flaws in the American system -- economic inequality; the death penalty; racial discrimination; wars abroad. That’s just a sample. He has a much longer list. But here’s what the Cuban people need to understand: I welcome this open debate and dialogue. It’s good. It’s healthy. I’m not afraid of it.

We do have too much money in American politics. But, in America, it's still possible for somebody like me -- a child who was raised by a single mom, a child of mixed race who did not have a lot of money -- to pursue and achieve the highest office in the land. That's what’s possible in America.

We do have challenges with racial bias -- in our communities, in our criminal justice system, in our society -- the legacy of slavery and segregation. But the fact that we have open debates within America’s own democracy is what allows us to get better. In 1959, the year that my father moved to America, it was illegal for him to marry my mother, who was white, in many American states. When I first started school, we were still struggling to desegregate schools across the American South. But people organized; they protested; they debated these issues; they challenged government officials. And because of those protests, and because of those debates, and because of popular mobilization, I’m able to stand here today as an African-American and as President of the United States. That was because of the freedoms that were afforded in the United States that we were able to bring about change.

I’m not saying this is easy. There’s still enormous problems in our society. But democracy is the way that we solve them. That's how we got health care for more of our people. That's how we made enormous gains in women’s rights and gay rights. That's how we address the inequality that concentrates so much wealth at the top of our society. Because workers can organize and ordinary people have a voice, American democracy has given our people the opportunity to pursue their dreams and enjoy a high standard of living.

Now, there are still some tough fights. It isn’t always pretty, the process of democracy. It's often frustrating. You can see that in the election going on back home. But just stop and consider this fact about the American campaign that's taking place right now. You had two Cuban Americans in the Republican Party

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, running against the legacy of a black man who is President, while arguing that they’re the best person to beat the Democratic nominee who will either be a woman or a Democratic Socialist. Who would have believed that back in 1959? That's a measure of our progress as a democracy.

So here’s my message to the Cuban government and the Cuban people: The ideals that are the starting point for every revolution -- America’s revolution, Cuba’s revolution, the liberation movements around the world -- those ideals find their truest expression, I believe, in democracy. Not because American democracy is perfect, but precisely because we’re not. And we -- like every country -- need the space that democracy gives us to change. It gives individuals the capacity to be catalysts to think in new ways, and to re-imagine how our society should be, and to make them better.

There’s already an evolution taking place inside of Cuba, a generational change. Many suggested that I come here and ask the people of Cuba to tear something down -- but I’m appealing to the young people of Cuba who will lift something up, build something new. El futuro de Cuba tiene que estar en las manos del pueblo Cubano.

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And to President Castro -- who I appreciate being here today -- I want you to know, I believe my visit here demonstrates you do not need to fear a threat from the United States. And given your commitment to Cuba’s sovereignty and self-determination, I am also confident that you need not fear the different voices of the Cuban people -- and their capacity to speak, and assemble, and vote for their leaders. In fact, I’m hopeful for the future because I trust that the Cuban people will make the right decisions.

And as you do, I’m also confident that Cuba can continue to play an important role in the hemisphere and around the globe -- and my hope is, is that you can do so as a partner with the United States.

We’ve played very different roles in the world. But no one should deny the service that thousands of Cuban doctors have delivered for the poor and suffering. Last year, American health care workers -- and the U.S. military -- worked side-by-side with Cubans to save lives and stamp out Ebola in West Africa. I believe that we should continue that kind of cooperation in other countries.

We’ve been on the different side of so many conflicts in the Americas. But today, Americans and Cubans are sitting together at the negotiating table, and we are helping the Colombian people resolve a civil war that’s dragged on for decades. That kind of cooperation is good for everybody. It gives everyone in this hemisphere hope.

We took different journeys to our support for the people of South Africa in ending apartheid.

But President Castro and I could both be there in Johannesburg to pay tribute to the legacy of the great Nelson Mandela. And in examining his life and his words, I'm sure we both realize we have more work to do to promote equality in our own countries -- to reduce discrimination based on race in our own countries. And in Cuba, we want our engagement to help lift up the Cubans who are of African descent -- who’ve proven that there’s nothing they cannot achieve when given the chance.

We’ve been a part of different blocs of nations in the hemisphere, and we will continue to have profound differences about how to promote peace, security, opportunity, and human rights. But as we normalize our relations, I believe it can help foster a greater sense of unity in the Americas -- todos somos Americanos.

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From the beginning of my time in office, I’ve urged the people of the Americas to leave behind the ideological battles of the past. We are in a new era. I know that many of the issues that I’ve talked about lack the drama of the past. And I know that part of Cuba’s identity is its pride in being a small island nation that could stand up for its rights, and shake the world. But I also know that Cuba will always stand out because of the talent, hard work, and pride of the Cuban people. That's your strength. Cuba doesn’t have to be defined by being against the United States, any more than the United States should be defined by being against Cuba. I'm hopeful for the future because of the reconciliation that’s taking place among the Cuban people.

I know that for some Cubans on the island, there may be a sense that those who left somehow supported the old order in Cuba. I'm sure there’s a narrative that lingers here which suggests that Cuban exiles ignored the problems of pre-Revolutionary Cuba, and rejected the struggle to build a new future. But I can tell you today that so many Cuban exiles carry a memory of painful -- and sometimes violent -- separation. They love Cuba. A part of them still considers this their true home. That’s why their passion is so strong. That's why their heartache is so great. And for the Cuban American community that I’ve come to know and respect, this is not just about politics. This is about family -- the memory of a home that was lost; the desire to rebuild a broken bond; the hope for a better future the hope for return and reconciliation.

For all of the politics, people are people, and Cubans are Cubans. And I’ve come here -- I’ve traveled this distance -- on a bridge that was built by Cubans on both sides of the Florida Straits. I first got to know the talent and passion of the Cuban people in America. And I know how they have suffered more than the pain of exile -- they also know what it’s like to be an outsider, and to struggle, and to work harder to make sure their children can reach higher in America.

So the reconciliation of the Cuban people -- the children and grandchildren of revolution, and the children and grandchildren of exile -- that is fundamental to Cuba’s future.

You see it in Gloria Gonzalez, who traveled here in 2013 for the first time after 61 years of separation, and was met by her sister, Llorca. “You recognized me, but I didn’t recognize you,” Gloria said after she embraced her sibling. Imagine that, after 61 years.

You see it in Melinda Lopez, who came to her family’s old home. And as she was walking the streets, an elderly woman recognized her as her mother’s daughter, and began to cry. She took her into her home and showed her a pile of photos that included Melinda’s baby picture, which her mother had sent 50 years ago. Melinda later said, “So many of us are now getting so much back.”

You see it in Cristian Miguel Soler, a young man who became the first of his family to travel here after 50 years. And meeting relatives for the first time, he said, “I realized that family is family no matter the distance between us.”

Sometimes the most important changes start in small places. The tides of history can leave people in conflict and exile and poverty. It takes time for those circumstances to change. But the recognition of a common humanity, the reconciliation of people bound by blood and a belief in one another -- that’s where progress begins. Understanding, and listening, and forgiveness. And if the Cuban people face the future together, it will be more likely that the young people of today will be able to live with dignity and achieve their dreams right here in Cuba.

The history of the United States and Cuba encompass revolution and conflict; struggle and sacrifice; retribution and, now, reconciliation. It is time, now, for us to leave the past behind. It is time for us to look forward to the future together -- un future de esperanza.

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And it won’t be easy, and there will be setbacks. It will take time. But my time here in Cuba renews my hope and my confidence in what the Cuban people will do. We can make this journey as friends, and as neighbors, and as family -- together.

Si se puede. Muchas gracias.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Young Leaders of the Americas Initiative Town Hall Argentina

Hola! Thank you. Thank you so much. Muchas gracias. Thank you so much. Buenos dias, Buenos Aires! Please have a seat. Well, thank you so much for the warm welcome that you’ve offered me, and Michelle, and Malia and Sasha and my mother-in-law -- a very important person. And on behalf of the people of the United States, I want to thank you for your friendship and the strong bonds between our two peoples.

Celeste, thank you for the wonderful introduction. Please give Celeste a big round of applause. That's not easy to do. The work that she’s doing to prepare more of our young people -- and especially young women -- for the jobs of tomorrow is inspiring. I’m glad to hear that when Celeste visited the United States as part of the Young Leaders Initiative, she got to go to her first National Basketball Association game in Denver. I don't think Ginobili was playing, but I can confirm that he is not only a nice guy but also one of the best players in the world -- and a proud Argentinian. So he is a great champion. My Chicago Bulls have been losing and the Spurs have been winning, so I'm not that happy about that.

I want to thank everybody at the Usina del Arte for hosting us today. And I want you to know that the reason I came here is, in part, because I wanted to come to Buenos Aires ever since I was a young person like you. I very much enjoyed Argentinian literature -- authors like Borges and CortÃ¡zar. And so I would read them and became fascinated with Buenos Aires. I said at my press conference today, the only problem was when I was reading, people were always drinking mate, and I didn’t know what that was.

So I just had my first mate today. It was good. It was good. And my team, my staff thought I was very clear-headed at the press conference, and they said it must be the mate. So I'm going to try to take some back.

But I also wanted to bring my daughters here, so they could see the beauty and the vibrancy of this city. They’ve already met one famous Argentinean -- His Holiness Pope Francis. Now they want to meet Messi, but I could not arrange that. They will not get a chance to experience the Palermo at night. They will have to come back on their own to do that -- not with their father. And we're looking forward to visiting Bariloche tomorrow.

But also, whenever I travel, I always want to spend time with young people. Your generation has grown up in times of breathtaking change. In your lives, you’ve seen massive global declines in poverty and disease -- so there’s a lot of good news out there -- you’ve seen incredible strides for women’s rights and LGBT rights. You’ve mastered technology -- the world is connected now in ways that we couldn't imagine even 10, 20 years ago. But you’ve also seen unthinkable violence from terrorists who try to tear us apart -- whether at an airport in Brussels, as we just saw, or a Jewish center in Buenos Aires. And all of us -- Americans and Argentinians alike -- stand against the scourge of terrorism, and we stand with the people of Belgium during this time of enormous sorrow.

And yet, even though you’ve come of an age where change is happening so rapidly, your generation I think believes deeply that you can change this world for the better. You’re more interested in hard work -- the hard work of waging peace than the easy impulse towards conflict. You’re more interested in the hard work of building prosperity through entrepreneurship, instead of cronyism and corruption. You’re more eager for the progress that comes not from holding down people who are not like you, but lifting everybody up so that everybody has an opportunity, regardless of what they look like or how they pray or who they love. And that makes me hopeful. I'm always inspired by young people.

So I’m going to be speaking very briefly, because I want to mostly hear from you. I am here because these past several years mark a new era of U.S. engagement in the region, in the Americas. We’re not just nations, but we’re also neighbors. Millions of people in the United States are bound to the Americas through ties of commerce and family. Thousands of Argentinians study in the United States every year. Hundreds of U.S. companies employ thousands of people here in Argentina. And we’re committed to expanding those ties of leadership and scholarship and trade. And I’m here in Argentina because I’m impressed with many of the reforms that have been initiated by President Macri in recent weeks -- his effort to reconnect Argentina to the world community, and to lay the groundwork for a more sustainable and inclusive economy. He inherited a tough economic situation, just as I did when I first came into office. He’s working to make it better. And in fact, to show their confidence in this new direction, U.S. companies are announcing tens of millions of dollars in new investment in Argentina. And I’m launching a new dialogue to strengthen business ties between our countries. So the United States welcomes Argentina’s leadership role not just in the region, but in the world. Because to solve today’s challenges, we have to be partners. Somos un equipo. I got to practice my Spanish.

But it’s critical that we work together. And that's one of the reasons why the U.S. has started a new chapter with our relationship with Cuba. I was honored to be the first U.S. President to visit Cuba in almost 90 years. And we still have differences with the Cuban government, but what I said to President Castro is we can't be imprisoned by the past. When something doesn't work for 50 years, we have to try something new. And I believe that engagement and dialogue is more powerful than isolation, and that the changes that we're making can improve the lives of the Cuban people.

And all of the people of the Americas deserve the right to speak and gather freely, and access the world’s information, and participate in forums like this. And so we hope that that will happen in Cuba. We hope that will happen everywhere in the world. But ultimately, it’s going to be up to the Cuban people, just like it’s up to sovereign peoples everywhere to be able to find their own voice and create democracy and freedom. We can be partners in that, and we can help.

And this new beginning is going to be good, I think, for the entire hemisphere. Part of my goal is to move past the old debates that have defined this region, move forward in a way that benefits your generation. And unlike any other time in history, the technology at your disposal means that you don't have to settle for the world as it is; you can create the world as you want it to be. You already have the freedom to build a world in powerful and disruptive ways.

That's why we're going to spend a lot of time in the coming months in building more vibrant connections between young people. Five years ago I started an initiative called 100,000 Strong in the Americas. And by the end of this decade, we want 100,000 U.S. students studying in the Americas, and we want 100,000 students from the Americas studying in the United States.

And today I’m proud to announce that that effort is growing here in Argentina. Partners like INET and CAF Development Bank in Latin America have committed to increase student exchanges between our technical colleges. And I want to thank President Macri for committing to a thousand new exchanges.

And finally, last year I launched what we call the Young Leaders of the America Initiative. And we're seeking out the most innovative young entrepreneurs and civil society leaders, and giving them a chance to earn the training and the connections and the capital that you need to make a difference. So this year I’ll welcome the first full class of fellows to Washington. We're going to help them expand their commercial and social ventures by embedding them in U.S. businesses and incubators and nonprofits and universities. We're going to give U.S. participants the chance to continue their collaboration with you back in your home countries.

And that's how we want to empower all young people. That's how we want to empower young women like Celeste. It’s how we create a future where climate researchers in the Amazon collaborate with scientists in Alaska; where an idea in Buenos Aires can develop with an incubator in Boston. It’s how we can make sure that we create a future where any young person can choose a path that opens his or her opportunities beyond their neighborhood into the wider world.

It’s where a young person can learn skills in the state of West Virginia in the United States, and put them to work right here in Argentina. So, Gino Tubaro, who’s here today -- where’s Gino? Somewhere. There we go. All right, Gino.

So Gino is a great example. He was tinkering with 3D printing as a teenager when, through the U.S. Embassy, he participated in a National Youth Science Camp in West Virginia. Then he learned about the latest 3D printing technology. When he came home to Argentina, he co-founded a company that used these new skills to work. He received a request from a woman looking for a prosthetic hand for her young son, Felipe. And typically, those hands can costs tens of thousands of American dollars. Gino “printed” a new hand for Felipe for far less. Just a few weeks later, for the first time, Felipe could ride a bike, go fishing, do many of the things that normal children do. And since then, more than 1,000 Argentinians have signed up for Gino’s help.

So that’s what’s possible when we work together. That’s what’s possible when we invest in young people like all of you. So I am very proud to be here. I’m excited for your questions. I’m excited for our conversation. As you heard, my Spanish is not as good as it should be. But we have a translator here so you can ask questions in English or in Spanish, and I will answer them as best I can. And we have about an hour. Preguntenme. Let’s go. All right?

Who wants to go first? This young man right here. You. Introduce yourself, please.

Question: Mr. President, I wanted to ask you the following question. We live in a world where cultures often clash instead of coexisting peacefully; where some believe their very survival depends on the eradication of others; where intolerance and violence have become a currency; and people are forced to abandon everything and flee their homes, a drama which I believe will characterize much of this century’s history.

My question is this: Do you think all of the different human cultures will eventually unify or converge on a unique and universal culture, something like -- perhaps something akin to the United Federation of Planets in TV series “Star Trek”? I do not seek a scientific answer, just the honest opinion of a man who, as President of one of the world’s leading countries, has been given a privileged point of view on that matter.

Thank you.

President Obama: That's an interesting question. Thank you.

I believe that under the surface all people are the same. Now part of that is my own heritage and my own background. My father was a black man from Africa. My mother was a white woman in the United States, whose ancestors had come from England and Scotland. My mother remarried, and then we moved to Indonesia. So I have a half-sister who is Asian. I have nieces who are half Chinese. And so in my own family, I’ve got the genetic strains of everybody. And it gives me confidence -- confidence that's been reinforced as President -- that people are all essentially the same. Similar hopes, similar dreams, similar strengths, similar weaknesses. But we're also all bound by history and culture and habits. And so conflicts arise, in part, because of some weaknesses in human nature. When we feel threatened, then we like to strike out against people who are not like us. When change is happening too quickly, and we try to hang on to those things that we think could give us a solid foundation. And sometimes the organizing principles are around issues like race, or religion. When there are times of scarcity, then people can turn on each other.

And so I don't underestimate the very real challenges that we continue to face, and I don't think it is inevitable that the world comes together in a common culture and common understanding. But overall, I am hopeful. And the reason I'm hopeful is, if you look at the trajectory of history, humanity has slowly improved. Not in a straight line -- sometimes you take two steps forward and then you take one step back.

But if anybody here was asked the question, what moment in human history would you want to be born, and you didn’t know ahead of time whether you were going to be born in the United States or in Namibia, you didn’t know ahead of time whether you were going to be male or female, born into a wealthy family or a poor family, so all you knew was what moment in history would give you the best chance for the best life, you would choose today. Because the world is wealthier than it's ever been. It is better educated than it's ever been. It is more tolerant of differences than it's ever been. It's more connected than it's ever been. It's healthier than it's ever been. We live longer than we ever have. We have better dental care than we ever have.

It used to be if you had a bad tooth, that was bad. You had a problem. Now you go see the dentist most of the time -- in many countries around the world. It's a small thing, but it's important. Penicillin. Books. Women are treated with more respect, on average, today -- even though we have a long way to go. People with sexual differences are treated with more respect.

And even violence -- because today we see terrorism and it's painful, and we're shocked and horrified by what happens -- and yet, if you look even in the 20th century, much less if you go back to the days of the conquistadores or Genghis Khan or slavery -- but even just in the 20th century, the world is far less violent today, on average, than it was 25, 50, 100 years ago.

So all of that makes me hopeful. But as I said, it's not inevitable. And I think one of the things that's important for bringing about further progress is that we listen to each other and we understand our differences. I don't think it's necessary for us to all speak one language, or all have the same foods, or all have the same customs. But I do believe that there are some universal principles that are important.

I believe that the most important principle is a very simple one that is at the heart of most of the world’s great religions, which is treat somebody the same way you’d want to be treated. And if you start with that basic premise, then we will continue to make progress.

But I also think that in order for us to make progress, we have to have that fellow feeling and we have to combine that with the use of our brains and reason, and our intellect. And what’s interesting now, everybody here has a phone -- everybody is looking all the time. And in some ways, that's actually isolating people sometimes more than it's bringing people together. And what I also notice is, because there’s so much information coming in, that sometimes people just surf the surface of information as opposed to analysis and understanding and study.

In America, sometimes in our politics you see sound bites -- what we call sound bites. I don't know the translation. But it's just the Twitter line without trying to figure out, okay, is this true or not? What are the facts? And when it comes to an issue like climate change, we have to have a maturity to say, okay, here’s what the science tells us -- the planet is getting warmer -- and even though it's not happening right now, and it's a beautiful day outside in Buenos Aires, we have to start working now, so that 20, 30, 50, 100 years from now we still have a beautiful planet to live on.

That requires not just a strong heart, but also using our heads. And if we do those two things, then I feel confident that we'll make progress. We'll still have problems, but that's what makes life interesting, is having a few problems.

I'm going to alternate between men and women, so that we make it fair. This young lady right there, since she’s standing right in the front.

Question: I'm going to have a heart attack, Mr. President.

President Obama: Oh, don't have a heart attack! That would be bad!

Question: I'm a university professor. I teach American political communications. I have no answers, but I don't want to feel worse for my students. And I want to say that you are my hero, yes.

President Obama: Well, thank you so much. I appreciate that. Thank you. Since you didn’t have a question, I'll call on that young lady in the front, as well, just so that she -- that way I get a question. But that was very nice. Thank you.

Question: Thank you. Mr. President, I'm a research scientist. I'm very proud to have you here in my country, really. And I’m thankful, too, because I was educated in your country during my postdoc in teaching research. So my question is related with that, with science, principally, because I feel like always art and science was like the fields where the human being have not limits. And I was wondering if you are not fine, if you are not really just doing more than collaboration between our countries -- and this is the most important thing in this area -- why not to do a stronger collaboration between your country and mine, like this idea between others that perhaps other people have? But I was organizing with a Professor David Kaplan in the United States, who was my mentor there, to have a representation here in Argentina from their laboratory of research.

I know that there are a lot of programs of collaboration, like Georgetown, to be done like I did. But I feel like stronger collaboration in this field must be another kind of thing -- not only to have knowledge, but to put in real -- like, for example, technologic transfer. But I feel like science, basic science is very, very important. When I've been there like a researcher, I feel like we can do more. So I want to know about that.

President Obama: Good. Well, President Macri and I spoke about this in our meeting. I think the possibilities of collaboration between Argentina and the United States in scientific fields as well as the cultural fields -- there’s a huge opportunity there. We can do much more than we've done so far. And you're right that it's not enough just to have student exchanges. There’s work that also has to be done together. And the more minds we have that work on it, the sooner we'll be able to solve problems.

I'll give you one specific example, and that is when it comes to diseases and medicine. Everybody here is familiar with the emerging problem of Zika throughout the Americas. It turns out the Zika is not a complicated virus. And I'm actually quite optimistic that we'll be able to find a diagnostic tool and a vaccine for Zika. But the reason in the past that it hasn’t been developed was because it was predominantly in small, poorer countries in isolated areas. There wasn’t a lot of money to be made selling drugs to solve this small problem. And so it didn’t get any attention.

Except now we live in this world where everybody travels, where everybody is mobile, and so there’s no such thing as a disease that's just isolated in one place, because if we don't cure that disease, if we don't identify it early enough, it will sweep the world. And oftentimes it will sweep very rapidly because there’s no immunity and people aren't accustomed to it.

And that's true -- we saw what happened with Ebola. Now were seeing it with Zika. And obviously the thing I'm most concerned about is if we end up seeing a flu, an airborne disease -- because we know that in the past, in 1918, with the Spanish Flu, millions of people around the world died -- it can go very fast.

So this is an example where our goal is to work with the Brazilians, with the Cubans, with the Argentinians, with everyone so that we are pooling our resources, solving the problem quickly, getting clinical trials done quickly, finding ways that are culturally appropriate to make sure that people get the medicines they need quickly. And if we use the old model where each country is doing its own thing and working with its own companies, and not worrying about what’s happening elsewhere, we're not going to solve it.

So I think the opportunities for collaboration are there. They are strong. We're going to be developing over the next several months, I hope, a plan for the kind of collaboration that you described. Now, it won't all change overnight, but we do think that we can make progress in this area. And this is the kind of thing that not only solves problems but it also breeds understanding. It creates -- it makes people simpatico -- right -- in a way that reduces the possibilities of conflict over time.

So it's an excellent question. Thank you.

All right. It's a gentleman’s turn. Let’s see, this gentleman right here in the sweater.

Question: Hi. And welcome to Argentina, Mr. President. And first of all, I would like to say thank you for having us here. It's a pleasure and an honor. And thank you, and thanks, Argentina -- as a truly proud member of the gay community -- for fighting for our rights as humans, as we all are.

My question is, given the fact that, right in the world, most of the main causes of death -- such as heart disease or chronic lower respiratory disease, diabetes, or even clandestine abortion in Argentina -- can be prevented with proper health education, climate change policies, and of course medical research. So which ones do you think are, in these seven years now as President of the United States, your greatest achievements in terms of those issues?

President Obama: Well, first of all, I had to start in the United States, because we were the only advanced nation on Earth that didn’t have a universal health care program, and so we had millions of people who did not have health care. So I had, as some of you know, a very big fight to establish a system -- that's not ideal because we had to modify it and adapt it to the existing system that we already had, but that has now provided 20 million people with health care that didn’t have it before.

So part of the answer is to make sure that people have access to basic care, particularly preventive care. Because so many of the diseases that occur around the world, we can prevent fairly cheaply, and once people are sick, then it's very expensive. So, in Africa, if we can get mosquito nets -- we know that a lot of disease and death is caused by mosquito-borne diseases. And we've pushed very hard, and we are now in a position where we could potentially, if not completely, eliminate and then shrink drastically the incidents of malaria around the world.

It's not that complicated. It's just a matter of organizing how we do it. And we know we've done it before because polio, for example, is an area where there's been enormous progress, and there's just a few pockets of polio left in the world. Small pox, same thing. So we know how to do this. It's a matter of global organization that's very important. So that's point number one.

Point number two. People's incomes have to be increased. Nothing kills you like poverty. And so you can't separate trying to make people healthier from giving them the ability to make enough money and have enough resources to support themselves and their families. One of the things that we've done, in addition to the global health initiatives that we've worked on, is programs like Feed the Future. And what we do is not give food -- although we obviously are the biggest contributor of food around the world -- but what we do is we take small farmers and we say, what is it that you need to increase yields?

And in some cases, it may be something as simple as new seeds. In some cases, it may be something as simple as a small mechanized system so that they can process the seeds on sites. And just that small amount of processing allows them to sell it on the market more expensive because they don’t have to send it to a big grainery, and that person takes a cut of their income. And by getting a little bit more money, now maybe they can buy a small tractor in a cooperative.

And what we've been able to do is to see small landholders increase their incomes by five, seven, ten times. And suddenly, they become not just farmers but small business people, and they start hiring people. And it creates a new economy in those communities. And that's not just an economic program, it's also a health program -- because if they've got more money and now they've got a roof over their heads, and they can afford a mosquito net, and they're eating better so their body has greater immunity to diseases, there's enormous improvement generally.

Now, the good news -- remember I said this is why I'm optimistic -- if you look at the U.N. Millennium goals that were set 20 years ago, we did not achieve all the goals. But infant mortality has dropped dramatically during that period of time. The number of people who live in extreme poverty has dropped dramatically during this time. And so I was very glad that the U.N. came together this year around a new set of sustainable development goals. If we can do that, and we continue with the kinds of joint health care programs that I discussed, then I'm optimistic that we'll continue to see progress. Because most of the deaths that happen, they happen to infants with preventable diseases; they happen to mothers when they're giving birth; they occur because of diseases that could have been prevented with very little money and people having slightly higher incomes.

And so it's going to be up to young people like you, though, to continue to find new areas where we can make progress and make improvements. Good luck.

The young woman right there. Yes, right there.

Question: Good afternoon.

President Obama: Good afternoon.

Question: First of all, I want to thank your country and your administration for investing in women like me and others from around the world that use sports as a way of developing other women through the Global Sports Mentoring Program.

President Obama: Excellent.

Question: And then you mentioned two things during your speech before. One was that this is the generation that needs to make a change in the world -- and I honestly believe that. And then you also mentioned that we cannot expect to create those changes if we keep on doing the same things over and over for this amount of years. And in my opinion, when it comes to businesses, that's kind of the way things are working right now. And when it comes to social entrepreneurs like myself or social businesses, there are very few countries that have a framework to empower people and social entrepreneurs to create those kinds of businesses. So my question is, what would be your advice for social entrepreneurs to keep on doing this hard work? And what do you think is the responsibilities of government to change those rules so that social businesses can be the new kind of businesses in this world?

President Obama: Before I answer your question, tell me a little bit -- tell me about your business. What is it -- tell me about the programs that you're doing.

Question: Okay, so I run a nonprofit organization in Rosario, and we focus on creating social change by empowering youth living in poverty and by generating civic participation. By that, we also use innovative tools such as coding for kids, new type of businesses we develop -- we help them achieve and develop life skills. That's what we are doing right now.

President Obama: And how long has the program been going on?

Question: Almost 10 years now.

President Obama: Okay. Excellent. Well, I started in the nonprofit sector in community work, and so it's something that I care deeply about. Each country is different. In the United States, most social entrepreneurs are typically financed through the private sector. Essentially philanthropies, rich people, or businesses, they finance it. Other countries -- it will come through the government and the taxes that people pay.

But what we've learned is that for many of the social problems that we face, it has to be a combination of the private sector and the nonprofit sector and government working together to really make a difference. And what do I mean by that? So I'm sure if you go into a poor neighborhood in Argentina, just like a poor neighborhood in the United States, there are a lot of different kinds of problems. You have, first of all, economic issues because these communities don't have jobs, businesses have not invested in them; in some cases, it may be factories that used to be there moved away, and so the jobs that people used to have there no longer exist.

So part of the effort has to be how do we bring private-sector businesses and attract investment into those communities to create jobs. That's point number one. But the businesses may not come unless the government has built the infrastructure -- the roads or the Wi-Fi connections or what have you. So the government has to make an investment. And even if the businesses and the government are prepared to do what they need to do, the human capital -- the people -- they have to make sure that they're getting the education that they need, the training that they need.

In some cases, in the United States at least, if they're very poor communities, you have young people who have been in poor families for generations. So they may not even know what the inside of an office building looks like. They may never have experienced what it means to go to a job at a certain time and structure their day in an organized way. And that's where a nonprofit, a social entrepreneur, can come and say, we'll partner with young people and have a professional or an adult who is working with that person and showing them, this is what's possible for you. Opening their eyes to telling some young girl in a poor neighborhood, you can be a computer scientist and why don't you come with me, and this is what computers are, they're not that complicated, this is what coding means, and if you can do math, then you can start coding. And suddenly, just by them seeing the possibilities, that inspires their effort.

The point is, is that each of those pieces are important. I don't know enough about how social entrepreneurs and community organizations and nonprofits are financed here in Argentina to give you a good opinion. I could give you an opinion -- politicians always can give you opinions, but I can't give you a good opinion because I don't have enough information about what changes might be made to give an organization like yours more support.

But one of the things that's interesting that's happening in the United States is that you're starting to see organizations that are kind of a blend of for-profit and non-for-profit. So they might have a business component that, let's say, sells handcrafts and artwork that's made by a community for profit, but then the money goes into financing the social programs that help give people these opportunities. And how they're treated in terms of taxes and the corporate organization -- that's going to change by country. Each country is going to have a different model. But more and more, I believe that that's going to be the wave of the future if we want to make progress on these problems.

I guess to make a broader point, so often in the past there's been a sharp division between left and right, between capitalist and communist or socialist. And especially in the Americas, that's been a big debate, right? Oh, you know, you're a capitalist Yankee dog, and oh, you know, you're some crazy communist that's going to take away everybody's property. And I mean, those are interesting intellectual arguments, but I think for your generation, you should be practical and just choose from what works. You don't have to worry about whether it neatly fits into socialist theory or capitalist theory -- you should just decide what works.

And I said this to President Castro in Cuba. I said, look, you've made great progress in educating young people. Every child in Cuba gets a basic education -- that's a huge improvement from where it was. Medical care -- the life expectancy of Cubans is equivalent to the United States, despite it being a very poor country, because they have access to health care. That's a huge achievement. They should be congratulated. But you drive around Havana and you say this economy is not working. It looks like it did in the 1950s. And so you have to be practical in asking yourself how can you achieve the goals of equality and inclusion, but also recognize that the market system produces a lot of wealth and goods and services. And it also gives individuals freedom because they have initiative.

And so you don't have to be rigid in saying it’s either this or that, you can say -- depending on the problem you're trying to solve, depending on the social issues that you're trying to address what works. And I think that what you’ll find is that the most successful societies, the most successful economies are ones that are rooted in a market-based system, but also recognize that a market does not work by itself. It has to have a social and moral and ethical and community basis, and there has to be inclusion. Otherwise it’s not stable.

And it’s up to you -- whether you're in business or in academia or the nonprofit sector, whatever you're doing -- to create new forms that are adapted to the new conditions that we live in today.

Okay, let’s see. It’s a guy’s turn, a gentleman’s turn. Hold on a second. That guy right there, in the dark shirt. Yes, you. No, right there. Go ahead. You. Yes, I can hear you. Go ahead. Speak right into the microphone. You don't have a microphone. Where is the microphone? Here, it’s coming. But be careful. Don't fall over. It’s a little tight over there.

Question: Hello?

President Obama: Yes, I can hear you now.

Question: Hello, Mr. President. I am a senior in high school. This fall I will be -- I will start studying international relations in American University at the School of International Service.

President Obama: Excellent. We look forward to seeing you.

Question: Thank you. My question --

President Obama: Make sure to bring a coat, though. It’s going to be cool during the winter.

Question: My question to you is regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. I am an Arab Israeli myself. And the reality is that with an increase of illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank, this is leading to more and more -- to having a binational state. Do you think that a binational state where there is an Israeli Prime Minister and a Palestinian President, or a Palestinian Prime Minister and an Israeli President is a possibility?

President Obama: No, it’s an interesting question. I was asked at the press conference to reflect on the seven and a half years where I’ve been President -- where I’ve been happy and feel that I’ve accomplished my goals, where I think I’ve been frustrated. And obviously the situation with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been an area where despite enormous efforts on my part -- and a lot of people’s parts -- we haven’t made the kind of progress that I wanted to see.

I continue to believe that the only way to resolve this issue is to have an Israeli predominantly Jewish state that is secure and safe, side by side with a sovereign and contiguous Palestinian state.

And the reason I say that is because I think the aspirations of the Palestinian people for a state of their own and self-determination is too strong to be denied. And I also think that the Jewish people, given their history, have to feel that they have a state that they are secure with, and that they can preserve from aggression.

And so there has been talk about a one-state solution, or sort of divided government. It’s hard for me to envision that being stable. There’s such deep distrust between the two peoples right now. And the neighborhood is in such a mess that I continue to believe that a two-state solution is the best way.

Now, over time that could evolve. But initially, at least, I think the Palestinians have to feel like they have something of their own that they can say, this is ours and it expresses our deepest aspirations. And I think that the Jewish people have to feel safe.

Now, the problem is, is that history casts a heavy cloud on this. Each side only remembers its grief, and has a very difficult time -- has a very difficult time seeing the other side, the situation. And both of them have legitimate fears. And I will also say, though, that in some ways because Israeli society has been so successful economically, it has I think from a position of strength been less willing to make concessions. On the other hand, the Palestinians because of weakness have not had the political cohesion and organization to enter into negotiations and feel like they can get what they need. And so both side just go to separate corners. And we have worked and worked and worked.

And last year and the year before that, John Kerry -- that poor man, he was flying back and forth, and taking messages back and forth, and I was making phone calls. But ultimately we can't do it for them. And so the tragedy of the situation there is that until the populations of both peoples recognize the truth, which is they're going to be living together one way or another. And the question is: Are you going to be living together with checkpoints and people being stabbed and hatred? Or are you going to be living together in a way that creates opportunity and hope for children? Until they make that decision and that is reflected in the political leaders they elected, and the politics that they promote, there’s very little that we can do to force it to happen.

That doesn't mean we don't keep trying and trying to persuade and provide incentives. But ultimately, this is going to be something that those people have to decide on.

And here’s the last thing I will say, though, and I’ve said this to Prime Minister Netanyahu, and I’ve said this publicly. If you look at the demographics of the region and the West Bank and Gaza, and the Arab-Israeli population, it’s growing much faster than the Jewish population. If you don't find a way to resolve the conflict, then over time you're going to have to make a choice: Do we preserve this as a Jewish state, but it is now no longer a democracy? Because if it was, then the Jewish people would be a small minority. Or do you preserve its Jewish character, but now it is -- or do you preserve the democracy, but now it’s no longer a predominantly Jewish state? You're going to have to make a choice.

The only way to avoid that choice -- if you want to preserve it as a predominantly Jewish state and a democracy, then you have to give the Palestinian people and Arab people who are living in that community their own state in order to have self-determination. And I hope that that happens.

And even once I’m no longer President, I will continue to try to promote that peaceful dialogue. But I will be the first one to confess this is not something I was able to get done. And I’m not that hopeful that it’s going to happen in the next nine months. It’s been 60 years; it’s not going to happen in the next nine months.

All right, so I’m going to go back here in the shadows here. I didn't even see these folks back here. Yes, this gentleman in the t-shirt and the sunglasses. This side hasn’t gotten attention? Okay, you'll be nice.

Question: [As interpreted.] The question is, taking into account that Donald Trump is one of the candidates in the Republican Party, why do you think that the people is supporting the policies that he supports? And do you think that he will reach the presidency?

President Obama: So the question was about the elections, the elections in the United States. Look, politics in the United States is complicated, just like every other country. You know something about this here in Argentina. Politics is complicated. But that's part of the problem with and the benefit of a democracy, which is, it's loud and it's noisy and complicated.

What you're seeing right now is, in part, that the Republican Party has moved to the right very strongly during the course of my presidency. Now, there are a lot of reasons for that. But that's just a fact. And I think that the Republican Party, because of their efforts to oppose me, found themselves taking positions that were further and further away from the mainstream. It was successful in some ways in getting congressional candidates elected, because during the elections the turnout is typically very low, and so the most passionate people vote. And in this new media age where people are getting their info, as I said before, in sound bites, and where they don’t necessarily get the same information, depending on whether they're on the left or on the right, they can decide, I'm only going to read the things I agree with already, as opposed to getting a broader opinion.

What happened was, is that it reinforced a politics that was based on what they oppose as opposed to what they were for. And primarily, they opposed me. And so that's what's happening inside of the Republican Party. Within the Democratic Party, which I think is not going through as big of a change, I do think that Mr. Sanders and Secretary Clinton are responding to a continued concern, which is the economy has recovered, it is much better than it was when I came into office, but the crisis that we went through in 2008-2009 has left a lot of people feeling more insecure. And so even though their lives are better now, they're worried how is it going to be in the future.

And they see some of the global trends that you probably see here in Argentina, which is globalization is disrupted, and the days are over where you get a job and you stay in it for 30 years or 40 years, and then you retire and you have a pension, and it's all simple. Now you might have a job for five years, and then the company closes and you've got to retrain, and you've got to go to another job, and you're trying to figure out how to save to pay for your child's education, while you're also trying to save for retirement.

So you're starting to see, I think, a more vocal discussion of changing some of the economic arrangements and institutional arrangements in the United States. And in that sense, this is the same debate that's taking place everywhere in the advanced economies. What you're seeing is more and more growth is going to just a few, and the poor may have improved a little bit, but the middle class starts to feel more insecure. And that creates a willingness to question some of the existing institutional arrangements.

So both on the left and the right, there are disruptions and people are asking more serious questions about the economy. It's just that it's a little more extreme in the Republican Party. But look, I am a Democratic President, so you should assume that my answer is a little biased. I will acknowledge that.

The good news is, though, that ultimately I have great trust and great faith in the American people. I think, ultimately, they will make a good decision in terms of the next President and the next administration. I also think that one of the great advantages of the United States system, even though it's very frustrating sometimes for the President, is that power is distributed across a lot of institutions. It's what we call separation of powers and decentralization. So it's not just that the President and Congress are separate centers of power; it's also true that you have state governments that are powerful. The private sector is powerful. And this makes it hard sometimes for America to change as rapidly as we need to, to respond to changed circumstances or problems because it's sort of like herding cats -- you're constantly trying to get everybody to work together and move in the same direction at the same time. And that's difficult.

The advantage is that even if we end up with somebody who I might not consider a great President, there is a limit to some of the damage that they can do because -- and I'm sure Republicans feel that about me -- they're glad that there's distribution of power because they imagine that I would have turned the United States into Cuba, I suppose. They tend to exaggerate little bit how I see the world.

But that's why I think that the United States has been stable as a democracy for a very long time. And that's why I think not only do I have confidence the American people will make a good choice, but we usually can recover from mistakes and typically we find leadership, and because it's a democracy, there are enough voices that lift up to correct those mistakes over time.

Last question? Okay. This young lady right here.

Question: Good afternoon.

President Obama: Good afternoon.

Question: I'm 16 years old. I was part of the Young Ambassadors Program 2015, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. Thanks to that program, I had a chance to see the world from a different point of view by living with a host community in Missouri.

President Obama: In Missouri?

Question: Yes, in Kansas City --

President Obama: What city -- what town were you in? Question: In April, in late summer.

President Obama: Okay, where were you in Missouri?

Question: Kansas City.

President Obama: Yes, in Kansas City.

Question: So that made me realize how different and similar are the cultures between Argentina and America. But at the same time, this program was given to us to make an impact in our community when we came back. And I was thinking, why sometimes it's so hard for nations to work together to invent a better world? Why sometimes it's hard for political leaders to get along if, after all, we are all humans, and we all have blood in our veins, and we all want the world to be a better place? But sometimes you see news, terrorific things, and you just think, why can't I be President to change that? So you are a President, and maybe you can answer me?

President Obama: Well, first of all -- so I'm just curious -- what was the thing that you thought was most different about the United States? What was the thing that surprised you or you said, well this is -- I did not expect this?

Question: I'm real sorry the question -- the answer is not going to be a serious one, but toilets.

President Obama: Were they better or worse? Question: They were better, but they were automatic, so it's, like, kind of scary to get in there. President Obama: Oh, that's a good point. If you don't know what's happening, you jump up.

Question: Exactly. President Obama: Well, not everybody has automatic toilets, so this must have been a very nice --

Question: If I'm serious, I think it's the way students, I had an opportunity to have some classes at the high school -- it was a public high school -- and how students see the world from a different perspective. Some didn't know what Argentina was, where it was; they would ask if we had Coca-Cola, if we had iPhones, if we had phones. And some others knew so much about Latin America. So it's like the U.S. is a big diverse country and it was so awesome, and it was different from here.

President Obama: That's interesting. Well, every country has strengths and weaknesses. I will say that an area where the United States -- I'd like us to do better is greater awareness of the world outside of the United States. And part of this is just history. America was so big and relatively protected from threats from other countries. And it was able to develop its own internal market, and so for a long time, in some ways, America didn't feel as if it needed to know what was really going on outside. It's part of the reason why we don't do as well on foreign languages compared to a lot of other countries with the kind of educational levels.

And this is something that I've said to the American people and through our Education Department -- we have to change how we approach the world, because the world has shrunk. And if we want to train young Americans to be able to compete, they have to know where Argentina is. They have to know how to speak Spanish or Chinese -- Mandarin. Or understand the cultures and customs of other peoples. Every young person does in order to live in this now global community.

A reason that Presidents can't just solve things right away is because every leader in every country is gathering and expressing a very particular set of interests and history and institutional arrangements. And those interests oftentimes constrain what a leader can do, even if he or she wants to do it.

So I was just mentioning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. If a Palestinian leader like Abu Mazen, President Abbas, wants to make peace with the Israelis, he has to convince Palestinians that they should give up certain claims that they may have in a negotiation. But if he makes that commitment, then there may be a younger Palestinian politician who sees that as a weakness, and it will turn around and say, look, Abbas is selling us out, he's not looking out for the interests of the Palestinian people, he is being manipulated or taken by the Israelis.

And then if Netanyahu wants peace, he's got to make concessions to create a Palestinian state. But he has to get elected, and he's thinking to himself, if I make this concession, then somebody in my party, the Likud, may challenge me. And so what happens is, is that most politicians are constantly making decisions based on what they're hearing from their various constituencies. And their constituencies -- they want what they want. They don't want to compromise sometimes. They don't want to understand the nuances of things.

And then it turns out that in politics, sometimes making somebody afraid of somebody else or creating an enemy is more successful in stirring up passion than trying to say let's understand this other person or these other people. So there are leaders who I think do a better job of focusing on the common good, and there are other leaders who are very narrowly focused on just how do I stay in power. And ultimately, if you're lucky enough to live in a democracy, then part of making sure that your leaders can act well is the citizens, the constituency, have to also be well-informed and be willing to give him or her the room to do things that may not be convenient for you right now, but may actually be the right thing to do.

And one thing that Argentina and America share is we are democratic. And I always say to the people of the United States, the most important position in a democracy is not the office of the President. The most important office is the office of citizen, because if you have citizens who are informed and know about other countries, and recognize that if we provide foreign aid to some distant country in Africa, that ultimately may make us healthier. And if you have a citizenry that recognizes that even if I have to pay slightly more in taxes -- which nobody likes paying taxes -- but if I do, maybe I can provide that young child who lives in a poorer neighborhood an opportunity for a better life. And then because she has a job and a better life, she can pay taxes, and then everybody has more, and the society is better off.

If you don't have citizens like that, then you're going to get leaders who think very narrowly and you'll be disappointed. So the job -- one thing I always tell young people, don't just think that you elect somebody and then you expect them to solve all your problems and then you just sit back and complain when it doesn't happen. You have to work as a citizen also to provide the leaders the space and the direction to do the right thing. It's just as important for you to challenge ignorance or discrimination or people who are always thinking in terms of war -- it's just as important for you to do that as the President because I don't care how good the person, the leader you elect is, if the people want something different. In a democracy, at least, that's what's going to happen.

Now, the good news is I think all of you are up to the task, up to the job of being good citizens. And I look forward to the citizens of the United States and the citizens of Argentina continuing to create a better world together.

Thank you very much, everybody.

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# The President Discusses 'The Wire' with David Simon

President Obama: At the front end I've got to tell you, I'm a huge fan of The Wire. I think it's one of the greatest not just television shows, but pieces of art, in the last couple of decades. I was a huge fan of it. What is it that you saw, you learned, you heard, that made you start thinking about the culture of the drug trade and its impact on the inner cities, and that compelled you then to want to tell these stories?

David Simon: Well, I was in Baltimore and it's a very drug saturated city, or it certainly was in the early 1980s when I arrived. And this was a time where people thought they could arrest their way out of a drug problem. And they actually tried to do that. And what became increasingly obvious to me over the years of covering it was that when you devote yourselves to street-level drug enforcement, when you try to win the drug war, you only have a limited number of resources limited amount of resources.

And I watched the police department in Baltimore, and then I noticed it in other cities -- other cities with the same sort of problems of drug use. They stopped doing police work. They were arresting people for drugs, and that was presumptive police work, but actually it wasn't. And at the same time that the numbers of drug arrests, and the incarcerations for drug arrests, went up -- and they were small incarcerations; they were two, three months in jail because you couldn't put them anywhere -- you couldn't build prisons fast enough.

Meanwhile, the arrest rates for rape, robbery, murder, were going down. And the one thing that makes cities safer is competent retroactive investigation of felonies. That actually can make a city safer. But to do that you have to use and not be used by informants. You have to know how to testify in court. You have to write a search warrant that is going to hold up.

President Obama: You know, the good news is that some of the smarter police departments started to figure this out.

David Simon: Right. That's true.

President Obama: And we've seen reductions in violent crime in most big cities in America, in some cases precipitously, partly because I think there was an awareness that we were so invested in street-level drug transactions that we were losing focus on what was really important, which was people wanted to be safe.

On the other hand, what we know is that a consequence of that was this massive trend towards incarceration, even of non-violent drug offenders. And I saw this during the period that you were reporting and then starting to write for television. I saw this from the perspective of a state legislator -- this just explosion of incarcerations, disproportionately African American and Latino. And the challenge which you depict in your show is: folks go in at great expense to the state, many times trained to become more hardened criminals while in prison, come out and are basically unemployable, and end up looping back in.

David Simon: Permanently a part of the "other America."

President Obama: Exactly.

David Simon: They can't be pulled back. Nobody incarcerates their population at this level. And to look at it -- when I came in as a police reporter, the federal prison population was about 34% violent offenders. When I left as a police reporter 13 years later, it was about 7%. So these were less violent people getting longer sentences. Of course there was the elimination of parole and "good time" -- all you had was good time, and so people were staying in. And you're absolutely right: They come back out completely tarred -- they can't vote; they can't participate in their commu[nities]; they've lost track of families; families have been destroyed; communities have been upended. And if it was this draconian and it worked, then maybe we could have a discussion that said what we're doing is working --

President Obama: -- "The tradeoffs were worth it."

David Simon: Yeah: "It's terrible and we're losing a lot of humanity, but hey, it's working." But it doesn't work. It's draconian and it doesn't work.

President Obama: I've been looking at -- because it's part of the fallout of what you described -- as the economy's recovering, unemployment is coming down drastically. But one of the puzzles we have is we still have low participation rates among the population in the aggregate, but when you break down why people are not getting back in the labor force even as jobs are being created, a big chunk of that is the young male population --

David Simon: With a felony history.

President Obama: -- with felony histories. And so now, where we have the opportunity to give them a pathway towards a responsible life, they're foreclosed, and that's counterproductive.

David Simon: The guy who was the model for the character Omar in The Wire was a real guy named Donny Anders. I never thought I'd be saying his name in the White House. He's a guy who lived the life on the street. He spent years robbing drug dealers. He lived hard. And he eventually caught a 17 year bit -- and he deserved it. But he wasn't caught; he actually went in on conscience because it finally got to him. And he did everything that the prosecutors wanted him to do. And he came out 17 years later and all he wanted to do was give back to West Baltimore. He'd taken so much, and he'd been in for 17 years; he just wanted to address himself to the disaster. And on paper that man -- who is an extraordinary man; he's one of the most extraordinary people I've met in my life -- on paper he was a convicted felon and a convicted murderer. And there was no -- there was nothing that could get him from that extremity. Multiply that by hundreds of thousands of lives that have been disconnected and have no way to channel back into.

President Obama: Yeah. Well, and part of what -- Omar's, by the way, my favorite character.

David Simon: That was the part -- I was worried about that when you said it.

President Obama: But part of what your show depicted though is also that there's a generational element to this, right? So you got entire generations of men being locked up, which means entire generations of boys growing up either without a father or, if they see their dad, they're seeing him in prison.

David Simon: Right. I mean this is not happening in a vacuum. These are the places in America where the industrialization has had the most effect, and where the unemployment rates -- the actual unemployment rates -- among young Black males in my city bear no resemblance to the actual unemployment rate nationally. And so that's something that has to be countered, which is that the drug trade itself, it's like a company town. And this is a[n] industry that's so large, and with so much money around it, that it's hard to get around it if you grow up amid it, and certainly without role models that know how to maneuver around it. And to undo that, taking the overlay that is the drug war, and at least rationing it down and making it proportional in some way is essential, because right now, what drugs don't destroy, the war against them is ripping apart.

President Obama: Well, here's the good news. There is a[n] increasing realization on the Left but also on the Right, politically, that what we're doing is counterproductive, either from a Libertarian perspective, the way we treat nonviolent drug crimes is problematic; and from a fiscal perspective it's breaking the bank. You end up spending so much more on prison than you would with these kids being in school or even going to college that it's counterproductive; and it means everyone's taxes are going up, or at least services that everybody uses are being squeezed, or we can't hire cops to deal with violent crime as you talked about. We're all responsible for at least finding a solution to this, and the encouraging thing is, I think awareness is increasing, in part because violent crime has gone down in a lot of big cities -- people are more open to having a discussion about this.

David Simon: Yeah, they're not as frightened.

President Obama: And I think we have to seize that opportunity. But part of the challenge is going to be making sure, number one, that we humanize what so often on the local news is just a bunch of shadowy characters, and tell their stories. And that's where the work you've done is so important.

Then the second thing is enlisting law enforcement as an ally on this. Now, Eric Holder, my Attorney General, we started talking about this several years ago when I first came in to office. And one of the things that we tried to do is change how we talk to U.S. attorneys and their offices about what is a measure of effective prosecution. And when we came into office, I think what was probably true in a lot of State's Attorney's Office[s], the measure was, how much time do you get?

David Simon: Charge the maximum.

President Obama: Charge the max. And our point was, effectiveness as a prosecutor involves thinking about justice, and being proportional in how you think about these issues. And that's something we can do administratively, but ultimately we're going to need legislation, and that's where raising awareness is going to be important. And law enforcement and prosecutors have to be able to talk about this. And we have to let them know -- and you show this in The Wire as well -- in the same way you've got to be able to humanize those involved in the drug trade.

We have to remind ourselves that the police, they've got a scary, tough, difficult job. And if the rest of society is saying, "Just go deal with this" and "We don't want to hear about it" and "You're just on the front lines" and "Just keep it out of our sight lines" and "Its not our problem" -- we're betraying them as well. And ultimately you're going to have to address some of the environmental issues. And I know that's not fashionable because the notion is, "Oh, you don't want to make excuses for criminals." What we understand -- and what perhaps one of the most moving sections of The Wire was that whole depiction of the schools in Baltimore and public schools -- was that if kids are left so far behind that they don't have recourse, they're going to see what else is available to survive.

David Simon: They're going to learn, one way or the other.

President Obama: They're going to learn something. And so we're going to have to think about schools and counselors and mental health and ultimately jobs and re-industrialization -- and I think we understand all that. But if we can start down this path to a more productive way of thinking about drugs and its intersection with law enforcement, 20 years from now we can say to ourselves: "Well, maybe we got a little smarter." And, we didn't get here overnight and we're not going to get out of it overnight, but the fact that we've got people talking about it in a smarter way gets me a little encouraged.

David Simon: From your mouth to God's ear.

President Obama: I enjoyed it.

David Simon: Thank you very much.

President Obama: Thank you.

# Nuclear Security Summit Press Conference

Good evening, everybody. I want to begin by thanking the people of Washington, D.C. for hosting us, especially for putting up with more than 50 motorcades. And I will make one promise to the people of this city -- I will not hold another one of these summits in another six years.

I want to thank everyone who participated in our meetings -- more than 50 leaders from every region of the world and key international organizations. As at our previous summits, we didn’t just come here to talk, but we came here to act. I know that the very technical nature of nuclear security doesn’t always make for flashy headlines. But over the past six years, we have made significant, meaningful progress in securing the world’s nuclear material so that it never falls into the hands of terrorists. And I want to take a few moments to step back and lay out exactly what we have accomplished.

Together, we have removed the world’s most deadly materials from nuclear facilities around the world. With Japan’s announcement today, we’ve now removed or secured all the highly enriched uranium and plutonium from more than 50 facilities in 30 countries -- more than 3.8 tons, which is more than enough to create 150 nuclear weapons. That's material than will never fall into the hands of terrorists.

Fourteen nations and Taiwan -- countries as diverse as Argentina and Chile, to Libya and Turkey, to Serbia and Vietnam -- have now rid themselves entirely of highly enriched uranium and plutonium. In particular, I want to point out again that successfully removing all of Ukraine’s highly enriched uranium four years ago meant that the very difficult situation in Ukraine over the past two years was not made even more dangerous by the presence of these materials.

As of today, South America -- an entire continent -- is completely free of these dangerous materials. When Poland completes its removal this year, central Europe will be free of them as well. When Indonesia completes its work this year, so will all of Southeast Asia. In other words, as terrorists and criminal gangs and arms merchants look around for deadly ingredients for a nuclear device, vast regions of the world are now off-limits. And that is a remarkable achievement.

We’ve made important progress in the United States as well. In addition to the new steps I announced this morning, we’ve improved nuclear security and training. We’ve consolidated nuclear materials at fewer facilities, eliminated some 138 tons of our surplus highly enriched uranium -- which would be enough for 5,500 nuclear weapons. Working with Russia, we’re on track to eliminate enough Russian highly enriched uranium for about 20,000 nuclear weapons, which we are converting to electricity here in the United States.

More specifically, as a result of these summits, every single one of the more than 50 nations represented here have taken concrete steps to enhance security at their nuclear facilities and storage sites. And that includes improved physical security, stronger regulations, abiding by international guidelines, greater transparency, and that includes international peer reviews. Fifteen new centers have been created around the world to promote nuclear security technologies and training, to share best practices. And as part of our work today, we agreed to keep strengthening our nuclear facilities’ defenses against cyber-attacks.

We’ve bolstered international efforts to disrupt nuclear smuggling. The Proliferation Security Initiative has grown to more than 100 nations, including regular exercises to improve our collective ability to interdict shipments. The United States and 36 partner countries have worked to install radiation detection equipment at more than 300 international border crossings, airports and ports. And we are developing new mobile detection systems as well. And finally, as I noted this morning, we’ve strengthened the treaties and international partnerships that are a foundation for so many of our efforts.

So, again, we have made significant progress. And everyone involved in this work -- especially our teams, who have worked tirelessly for years -- can take enormous pride in our achievements. Nevertheless, as I said earlier, our work is by no means finished. There’s still a great deal of nuclear and radioactive material around the world that needs to be secured. Global stocks of plutonium are growing. Nuclear arsenals are expanding in some countries with more small, tactical nuclear weapons, which could be at greater risk of theft. And as a consequence, one of the central goals of this summit was how do we build on the work that has been done so that we have an international architecture that can continue the efforts, even though this is the last formal leaders’ summit.

So even as this is the last of those leader-level summits, today we agreed to maintain a strong architecture, including through the United Nations, the International Atomic Energy Agency, and INTERPOL, to carry on this work and to provide the resources and technical support that is needed to continue this mission. And we are creating a new nuclear security contact group -- senior-level experts from more than 30 of our countries -- who will meet regularly to preserve the networks of cooperation we’ve built, to institutionalize this work, and to keep driving progress for years to come.

At our session on ISIL this afternoon, there was widespread agreement that defeating terrorist groups like ISIL requires more information-sharing. Everybody understands the urgency in the wake of what’s happened in Brussels and Turkey, Pakistan, and so many other countries around the world. As a consequence, our Director of National Intelligence, Jim Clapper, is continuing to engage with intelligence leaders from a number of our European partners on deepening our cooperation. And today, I invited all the nations represented at this summit to join a broader discussion among our intelligence and security services on how we can improve information-sharing within and among our nations to prevent all manner of terrorist attacks, especially those that might involve weapons of mass destruction.

In closing, I just want to say that preventing nuclear terrorism is one part of the broader agenda that I outlined seven years ago in Prague -- stopping the spread of nuclear weapons and seeking a world without them. In recent days, there’s been no shortage of analysis on whether we’ve achieved our vision, and I’m the first to acknowledge the great deal of work that remains -- from negotiating further reductions with Russia to dealing with North Korea’s nuclear program.

As I indicated in Prague, realizing our vision will not happen quickly, and it perhaps will not happen in my lifetime. But we’ve begun. The United States and Russian nuclear arsenals are on track to be the lowest that they have been in six decades. I’ve reduced the number and role of nuclear weapons in our nuclear security strategy. In a historic deal, we’ve prevented the spread of nuclear weapons to Iran. An international fuel bank is being built to promote civil nuclear cooperation.

So I’m extremely proud of our record across the board. And we’re going to keep pushing forward wherever we can, as I hope future administrations do, to bring us closer to the day when these nuclear dangers no longer hang over the heads of our children and our grandchildren.

With that, let me take a few questions. And I’m going to start with Roberta Rampton of Reuters.

Question: Thank you. I want to ask about Iran. And three weeks ago, Iran’s Supreme Leader complained that his country has not been getting actual business deals since the nuclear agreement. And non-U.S. companies are saying that it’s very hard, or sometimes impossible, to do much business with Iran without at some point accessing the U.S. financial system to do U.S.-dollar-denominated transactions. So my question is, are you considering allowing such transactions? And if so, is that not a betrayal of your assurances that most U.S. sanctions would stay in place?

President Obama: That’s not actually the approach that we’re taking. So let me say broadly that so long as Iran is carrying out its end of the bargain, we think it’s important for the world community to carry out our end of the bargain.

They have, in fact, based on the presentations that were made by the IAEA this morning to the P5+1, have, in fact, followed the implementation steps that were laid out. And as a consequence, sanctions related to their nuclear program have been brought down. Part of the challenge that they face is that companies haven’t been doing business there for a long time, and they need to get comfortable with the prospects of this deal holding.

One of the things that Secretary Lew and his counterparts within the P5+1 and elsewhere are going to be doing is providing clarity to businesses about what transactions are, in fact, allowed. And it’s going to take time over the next several months for companies and their legal departments to feel confident that, in fact, there may not be risks of liability if they do business with Iran.

And so some of the concerns that Iran has expressed we are going to work with them to address. It is not necessary that we take the approach of them going through dollar-denominated transactions. It is possible for them to work through European financial institutions, as well. But there is going to need to be continued clarification provided to businesses in order to -- for deal flows to begin.

Now, what I would say is also important is Iran’s own behavior in generating confidence that Iran is a safe place to do business. In a deal like this, my first priority, my first concern was making sure that we got their nuclear program stopped, and material that they already had that would give them a very short breakout capacity, that that was shipped out. That has happened. And I always said that I could not promise that Iran would take advantage of this opportunity and this window to reenter the international community.

Iran, so far, has followed the letter of the agreement. But the spirit of the agreement involves Iran also sending signals to the world community and businesses that it is not going to be engaging in a range of provocative actions that might scare business off. When they launched ballistic missiles with slogans calling for the destruction of Israel that makes businesses nervous. There is some geopolitical risk that is heightened when they see that taking place.

If Iran continues to ship missiles to Hezbollah, that gets businesses nervous. And so part of what I hope happens is we have a responsibility to provide clarity about the rules that govern so that Iran can, in fact, benefit, the Iranian people can benefit from an improved economic situation. But Iran has to understand what every country in the world understands, which is businesses want to go where they feel safe, where they don't see massive controversy, where they can be confident that transactions are going to operate normally. And that's an adjustment that Iran is going to have to make as well.

And, frankly, within Iran, I suspect there are different views. In the same way that there are hardliners here in the United States who, even after we certify that this deal is working, even after our intelligence teams, Israeli intelligence teams say this has been a game-changer, are still opposed to the deal on principle, there are hardliners inside of Iran who don't want to see Iran open itself up to the broader world community and are doing things to potentially undermine the deal.

And so those forces that seek the benefits of the deal not just in narrow terms but more broadly, we want to make sure that, over time, they're in a position to realize those benefits.

David Nakamura.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. As you mentioned at the beginning of your remarks, you just finished a working session with 50 world leaders about combatting terrorism and groups like the Islamic State. And I wanted to ask you specifically about one of the strategies, prime strategies your administration is using in that effort. In the past several weeks, your administration has killed well over 200 people in airstrikes in Somalia, Libya, and Yemen, according to the Department of Defense. How can you be certain that all the people killed posed an imminent threat to the United States? And why is the United States now killing scores of people at a time, rather than eliminating individuals in very targeted strikes? Thank you.

President Obama: We have constructed a fairly rigid and vigorous set of criteria for us evaluating the intelligence that we receive about ISIL, where it might be operating, where al Qaeda is operating. These guidelines involve a whole range of agencies consulting extensively, and are then checked, double-checked, triple-checked before kinetic actions are taken.

And for the most part, our actions are directed at high-value targets in the countries that you just described, outside of the theater of Iraq and Syria. In some cases, what we're seeing are camps that after long periods of monitoring becomes clear are involved in in directing plots that could do the United States harm, or are supporting ISIL activities or al Qaeda activities elsewhere in the world.

So, if after a long period of observation, we are seeing that, in fact, explosive materials are being loaded onto trucks, and individuals are engaging in training in small arms, and there are some of those individuals who are identified as couriers for ISIL or al Qaeda then, based on those evaluations, a strike will be taken. But what we have been very cautious about is making sure that we are not taking strikes in situations where, for example, we think there is the presence of women or children, or if it is in a normally populated area.

And recently we laid out the criteria by which we're making these decisions. We declassified many elements of this. We are going to be putting forward and trying to institutionalize on a regular basis how we make these evaluations and these analyses.

I think, in terms of the broader debate that's taking place, David, I think there’s been in the past legitimate criticism that the architecture, the legal architecture around the use of drone strikes or other kinetic strikes wasn't as precise as it should have been, and there's no doubt that civilians were killed that shouldn't have been. I think that over the last several years, we have worked very hard to avoid and prevent those kinds of tragedies from taking place.

In situations of war, we have to take responsibility when we're not acting appropriately, or where we've just made mistakes even with the best of intentions. And that's what we're going to continue to try to do. And what I can say with great confidence is that our operating procedures are as rigorous as they have ever been and that there is a constant evaluation of precisely what we do.

Carol Lee.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. You've spent seven years now working on nonproliferation issues, and you said in your opening remarks that you hope that future administrations do the same and make it a priority. This week, the Republican frontrunner to replace you said that perhaps South Korea and Japan should have nuclear weapons, and wouldn't rule out using nuclear weapons in Europe. Did that come up at this summit? And just generally, what message does it send when a major-party candidate is articulating such a reversal in U.S. foreign policy? And also, who did you vote for in the Democratic primary?

President Obama: Well, first of all, it's a secret ballot, isn't it, Carol?Okay. No, I'm not going to tell you now.

What do the statements you mentioned tell us? They tell us that the person who made the statements doesn't know much about foreign policy, or nuclear policy, or the Korean Peninsula, or the world generally.

It came up on the sidelines. I’ve said before that people pay attention to American elections. What we do is really important to the rest of the world. And even in those countries that are used to a carnival atmosphere in their own politics want sobriety and clarity when it comes to U.S. elections because they understand the President of the United States needs to know what’s going on around the world and has to put in place the kinds of policies that lead not only to our security and prosperity, but will have an impact on everybody else’s security and prosperity.

Our alliance with Japan and the Republic of Korea is one of the foundations, one of the cornerstones of our presence in the Asia Pacific region. It has underwritten the peace and prosperity of that region. It has been an enormous buoy to American commerce and America influence. And it has prevented the possibilities of a nuclear escalation and conflict between countries that, in the past and throughout history, have been engaged in hugely destructive conflicts and controversies.

So you don't mess with that. It is an investment that rests on the sacrifices that our men and women made back in World War II when they were fighting throughout the Pacific. It is because of their sacrifices and the wisdom that American foreign policymakers showed after World War II that we’ve been able to avoid catastrophe in those regions. And we don't want somebody in the Oval Office who doesn't recognize how important that is.

Andrew Beatty.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Yesterday you met with President Erdogan of Turkey hours after some fairly ugly scenes at the Brookings Institution. I was wondering, do you consider him an authoritarian?

President Obama: Turkey is a NATO ally. It is an extraordinarily important partner in our fight against ISIL. It is a country with whom we have a long and strategic relationship with. And President Erdogan is someone who I’ve dealt with since I came into office, and in a whole range of areas, we’ve had a productive partnership.

What is also true, and I have expressed this to him directly, so it’s no secret that there are some trends within Turkey that I’ve been troubled with. I am a strong believer in freedom of the press. I'm a strong believer in freedom of religion. I'm a strong believer in rule of law and democracy. And there is no doubt that President Erdogan has repeatedly been elected through a democratic process, but I think the approach that they've been taking towards the press is one that could lead Turkey down a path that would be very troubling.

And we are going to continue to advise them -- and I've said to President Erdogan, remind him that he came into office with a promise of democracy. And Turkey has historically been a country in which deep Islamic faith has lived side by side with modernity and an increasing openness. And that's the legacy that he should pursue, rather than a strategy that involves repression of information and shutting down democratic debate.

Having said that, I want to emphasize the degree to which their cooperation has been critical on a whole range of international and regional issues, and will continue to be. And so as is true with a lot of our friends and partners, we work with them, we cooperate with them. We are appreciative of their efforts. And there are going to be some differences. And where there are differences, we will say so. And that's what I've tried to do here.

I'll take one last question. This young lady right there.

Question: Thank you, President. Mr. President, what do you think --

President Obama: Where are you from, by the way?

Question: I am from Azerbaijan. How can Azerbaijan support in nuclear security issue?

President Obama: Well, Azerbaijan, like many countries that participated, have already taken a number of steps. And each country has put forward a national action plan. There are some countries that had stockpiles of highly enriched uranium that they agreed to get rid of. There are other countries that have civilian nuclear facilities but don’t necessarily have the best security practices, and so they have adopted better security practices.

There are countries that could potentially be transit points for the smuggling of nuclear materials, and so they've worked with us on border controls and detection. And because of Azerbaijan's location, it's a critical partner in this process.

I should point out, by the way, that although the focus of these summits has been on securing nuclear materials and making sure they don’t fall into the hands of terrorists, the relationships, the information-sharing, the stitching together of domestic law enforcement, international law enforcement, intelligence, military agencies, both within countries and between countries -- this set of relationships internationally will be useful not just for nuclear material, but it is useful in preventing terrorism generally. It's useful in identifying threats of chemical weapons or biological weapons.

One of the clear messages coming out of this summit and our experiences over the last seven years is an increasing awareness that some of the most important threats that we face are transnational threats. And so we are slowly developing a web of relationships around the world that allow us to match and keep up with the transnational organizations that all too often are involved in terrorist activity, criminal activity, human trafficking, a whole range of issues that can ultimately do our citizens harms. And seeing the strengthening of these institutions I think will be one of the most important legacies of this entire process.

Mark Landler, since you had your hand up, I’ll call on you. One last question.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. I wanted to ask a question about nuclear policy. Through these past seven years when you've pushed to rid the world of nuclear materials and fissile material, the U.S. nuclear industry has actually worked to improve miniaturization of warheads. And while it has not developed new classes of cruise missiles or warheads, it’s worked to improve the technology. And that's prompted some in China and Russia to say, well, gee, we need to keep up. Are you concerned that the technological advances in the United States have had the effect of sort of undermining some of the progress you've made on the prevention side?

President Obama: I think it’s a legitimate question, and I am concerned. Here’s the balance that we’ve had to strike. We have a nuclear stockpile that we have to make sure is safe and make sure is reliable.

And after the START II Treaty that we entered into with Russia, we have brought down significantly the number of weapons that are active. But we also have to make sure that they're up to date; that their command and control systems that might have been developed a while ago are up to snuff, given all the technology that has changed since that time. And we have to make sure that our deterrence continues to work.

And so even as we’ve brought down the number of weapons that we have, I’ve wanted to make sure that what we do retain functions -- that it is not subject to a cyber intrusion; that there’s sufficient confidence in the system that we don't create destabilizing activity.

My preference would be to bring down further our nuclear arsenal. And after we completed START II, I approached the Russians -- our team approached the Russians in terms of looking at a next phase for arms reductions. Because Mr. Putin came into power, or returned to his office as President, and because of the vision that he’s been pursuing of emphasizing military might over development inside of Russia and diversifying the economy, we have not seen the kind of progress that I would have hoped for with Russia.

The good news is that the possibilities of progress remain. We are abiding by START II. We're seeing implementation. And although we are not likely to see further reductions during my presidency, my hope is, is that we have built the mechanisms and systems of verification and so forth that will allow us to continue to reduce them in the future.

We do have to guard against, in the interim, ramping up new and more deadly and more effective systems that end up leading to a whole new escalation of the arms race. And in our modernization plan, I’ve tried to strike the proper balance, making sure that the triad and our systems work properly, that they’re effective, but also to make sure that we are leaving the door open to further reductions in the future.

But one of the challenges that we’re going to have here is that it is very difficult to see huge reductions in our nuclear arsenal unless the United States and Russia, as the two largest possessors of nuclear weapons, are prepared to lead the way. The other area where I think we’d need to see progress is Pakistan and India, that subcontinent, making sure that as they develop military doctrines, that they are not continually moving in the wrong direction.

And we have to take a look at the Korean Peninsula, because the DPRK, North Korea, is in a whole different category and poses the most immediate set of concerns for all of us, one that we are working internationally to focus on. And that’s one of the reasons why we had the trilateral meeting with Japan and Korea, and it was a major topic of discussion with President Xi, as well.

Thank you very much, everybody. Have a good weekend.

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# Conversation on the USSC Nomination Process

Professor Strauss: Well, Mr. President, it's a tremendous honor for the University and the law school. Welcome back.

President Obama: It is good to be back. It is good to be back. As some of you may know, I actually spent 10 years teaching classes and seminars here, and it was really fun. And I missed it. And I thought, well, why don't I come back and say hi to everybody.

So there are a couple of people I want to acknowledge because they helped to facilitate this. First of all, I want to thank Dean Miles for closing down the school, I guess, for a day. Thank you. Special acknowledgements for Geoff Stone and Doug Baird, who were great friends when I was teaching here and were partly responsible for having me actually take on some responsibility straight out of law school to mold the minds of students who were just barely younger than me. I know that because some of them I saw and they all have gray hair now -- which is a little troubling.

We've got a terrific congressional delegation who’s here, and I just want to acknowledge them. First of all, your outstanding senior Senator for the great state of Illinois, Dick Durbin is here. And we've got Congressman Bobby Rush. Congressman Danny Davis. Congressman Bill Foster. And Congressman Mike Quigley. We also have Lisa Madigan, the Attorney General of Illinois. And my former seatmate in Springfield when we were both in the State Senate together, and is doing a terrific job.

And I want to thank David, who I was joking before we came out, is one of the country’s foremost constitutional experts -- and a nice guy. And you guys are lucky to have him. In fact, when I was teaching here I think I stole his Con Law class for a while, and he graciously gave it up because despite the privilege of grading 60 or 70 bluebooks -- he apparently thought it was important for me to have that privilege as well.

The last thing I'll say by way of introduction -- I had a chance to talk to some young people over in the overflow room, mostly students, and I just said to them that having now been in politics for quite some time, seeing what lawyers are capable of doing every single day, working on a whole range of issues that are of huge importance to our democracy and to our society, I hope that all the students here are excited about the incredible changes and good that you are going to be able to do when you get out of here.

I know that sometimes the news feeds cynicism and democracy at this moment seems particularly frustrating. But each and every day, I see lawyers not that much older than you who are helping young people get an education, are making sure that consumers are protected, are helping to keep America safe, are ensuring that our health care system works for everybody, are helping to preserve the planet and fight against climate change. It is remarkable what you can do with your talents. And it doesn’t always get a lot of publicity, but you can make a really meaningful difference.

So one of the reasons I wanted to come back is to recruit you. To stay engaged, get involved, make a difference. It doesn’t mean you have to run for office. It doesn't mean you have to run for office. It doesn't mean you even have to work for government. There are a lot of ways of serving. But I do hope that one of the things that you will take away from our discussion today and your extraordinary education here at the University of Chicago is the incredible high that you can get from serving this country.

So with that, what do you want to talk about, David?

Professor Strauss: Well, let me start back when you were here as a teacher. I know you taught constitutional law, so you were thinking about the Supreme Court and thinking about the justices and what would make someone -- or what make someone a great justice or a successful justice. But you're in a different spot now. Has your thinking changed?

President Obama: Surprisingly, not as much as you would have expected. Obviously, we're having a substantial argument in Washington right now about not just a particular judge, but also about the process of appointing judges to the federal courts and appointing nominees to the Supreme Court.

And to get this out of the way, Merrick Garland is an extraordinary jurist who is indisputably qualified to serve on the highest court in the land. And nobody really argues otherwise. I just want to be clear here. If the question is qualifications and excellence, it is uniformly viewed by not just Democrats but also Republicans, those who have served -- lawyers, judges, legal scholars, members of the current Supreme Court -- that he is as good of a judge as we have in this country right now. That he’s fair, he’s smart, he’s objective. He’s a consensus builder. He shows judicial restraint. He’s appreciative of the unique role of the Court, but also respectful of the role of the other branches of government.

So no one has plausibly made an argument that this is not the kind of person we’d want on the Supreme Court. The question then becomes, why is it so hard for the guy just to get a hearing and a vote?

And this speaks to what’s happened, generally, when it comes to the process of appointing federal judges. It used to be that people read the Constitution and Article II powers fairly straightforwardly. It says the President shall make these nominations with the advice and consent of the Senate. And unless there was some sort of real problem with that judge’s character or qualifications, it was fairly routine at every level -- both at the district court level, the appellate court level, and the Supreme Court -- that the person would be confirmed in short order. There would be a hearing. People would ask the potential judge a question or two or five or 10. There would be questionnaires. And once they had satisfactorily performed that process, then the Senate would vote.

And it was presumed -- it was understood that just as the President had a constitutional duty to make the appointment that the Senate had a constitutional duty to at least make a determination as to whether this person should be on the bench.

What has been unique in this process has been the growing attitude inside of the Senate that every nomination, no matter how well-qualified a judge, is a subject of contention. In some cases, it’s simply because one party or the other wants to gum up the works and so they will drag out confirmation longer and longer. Even if, ultimately, the judge gets confirmed by voice vote, by unanimous consent in the Senate, they’ll drag it out for two or three months, because if you're bogged down with judges, then it means other business can't be done. So sometimes it’s just strategic.

In other cases, the view has been that despite all the talk about people wanting objective judges who are just calling balls and strikes and don't bring any views to bear, that there are litmus tests that are applied that prevent a judge from getting a fair vote, even though they're qualified, because they don't meet the particular views of the party that's objecting.

And this problem got bad enough in previous administrations, but came to a head under my administration, in which we had a situation where we were starting to see six months pass or nine months pass before a judge could get a hearing. This was when Democrats were in charge of the Senate, but because of the particular rules of the filibuster that previously had been used for just a few things but now were routinely deployed on everything, we just couldn’t get judges through. And you started seeing a crisis in vacancies across districts and circuits everywhere.

Finally, the Democrats said, we're ending the ability for Senate members to filibuster when it comes to district court and appellate court justices, but we're going to preserve it for the Supreme Court.

We now have a situation, after Judge Scalia’s passing, in which it’s not just that the Republican majority in the Senate intend to vote against a highly qualified judge, we now have a situation where they're saying, we simply will not consider the nomination itself. We're just going to shut down the process. And as a consequence, we have a 4-4 tie in the Supreme Court and potentially at least two Supreme Court terms in which this vacancy will remain.

That is unprecedented. Not only are they not willing to hold a vote at this point, they have refused to hold hearings on Judge Garland. And in some cases, Mitch McConnell and others have said, we will not even show the courtesy of meeting with the judge to find out what he thinks. And I think what’s important for all of you to understand -- because you're going to be not just lawyers appearing in court, potentially, but custodians of our legal system and our democracy -- is if you start getting into a situation in which the process of appointing judges is so broken, so partisan that an eminently qualified jurist cannot even get a hearing, then we are going to see the kinds of sharp, partisan polarization that has come to characterize our electoral politics seeping entirely into the judicial system. And the courts will be just an extension of our legislatures and our elections and our politics.

And that erodes the institutional integrity of the judicial branch. At that point, people lose confidence in the ability of the courts to fairly adjudicate cases and controversies. And our democracy can't afford that. Our system is designed to make sure that this branch works. And it requires a broad consensus, even if we don't agree on any particular ruling, that the court’s rulings itself are legitimate and consistent with our democratic design. And that's why this is so important. It’s not just a matter of who is occupying that ninth seat in the Supreme Court. It has to do with how we, as a democracy, operate, and the particular authority that a court has to bring in order for our democracy to work.

That was a really long answer. Others will not be as long.

Professor Strauss: Well, let me ask you about that, Mr. President. How did we get to this point? You hear sometimes that the problem is the Supreme Court has injected itself into political issues, and so, of course, it gets enmeshed in politics. But the Supreme Court has been controversial almost from the beginning -- from the Jeffersonians’ attack on the Marshall Court, all the way through the “Impeach Earl Warren” billboards in parts of the country in the ‘50s and ‘60s. And we haven’t had this before. So is there -- do you have an explanation for what it is that brought us to this position?

President Obama: I think there are a variety of explanations. First of all, it’s important to underscore what you just said. And all of you law students, even if you're not critical, legal theorists, or what have you, I think just from reading cases, you will acknowledge that there’s politics in legal rulings. When we make decisions about right, wrong, what are the rules governing our society, et cetera, that that's an extension of our broader political and democratic conversation. Nobody is denying that.

And you're right. There have been controversies in the past about how we should decide the balance between liberty and security, about how do we treat minority groups to assure that they are protected from majority rule. How do we make sure that the political process itself has integrity and that our votes count? Those are all issue where passions are real and people have opinions. And there’s nothing wrong with that.

But I think what changed was when the Congress itself, and the Senate in particular, began to change. I think in some ways the judicial process is a casualty of some broader trends in our democracy. First of all, our politics have become much more polarized. There’s been something called the “great sorting” because of gerrymandering, because of how our media works where folks either watch Fox News or they read The New York Times, but rarely do both. Positions get hardened and reinforced. Partisans carry more weight within each party. The notion of a liberal Republican or a conservative Democrat -- those things broke down. And so politics itself got more polarized.

That, then, fed into a culture in Congress in which basic comity and habits of courtesy and process and institutional respect for people that you can agree with, those things began to break down. The filibuster, as I said, started becoming just standard practice. There’s nothing in the Constitution that says every item that comes before the Senate is supposed to get a super majority. It used to be that the filibuster -- it doesn’t have a very distinguished history -- was used principally for blocking civil rights and anti-lynching and voting rights legislation. That was bad enough. It then suddenly became the norm for everything as minority parties started to decide that they wanted to block what the majority of senators were in favor of. And so all of this I think contributed to a breakdown of the process.

Now, in fairness, Democrats are not blameless on this. If you talk to Republicans, they’ll also often point to the Bork nomination as where this all started. And there have been times where Democrats used the filibuster to block what Republican Presidents or conservative legal theorists viewed as eminently qualified jurists. I will say that there has not been a circumstance in which a Republican President’s appointee did not get a hearing, did not get a vote, and as a general proposition, they have been confirmed even where there have been strong objections.

So what you have here is, I think, a circumstance in which those in the Senate have decided that placating our base is more important than upholding their constitutional and institutional roles in our democracy in a way that is dangerous. And there are other examples of it, but this judicial nomination process I think has become an extreme example.

Professor Strauss: Let me take you back a step to how -- to your thinking about when you're making an appointment. And I'm going to try to put it in an historical context a little bit. You have Presidents who really set out to reshape the Court. And Franklin Roosevelt may be the clearest example. He was determined to find justices who would uphold New Deal legislation. Richard Nixon wanted justices who would limit the rights of people accused of crimes, and that's sort of one model.

And then you have Presidents who did not have any particular agenda. And I think President Eisenhower is an example. He appointed three of the great justices of the 20th century -- Chief Justice Warren, Justice Harlan, Justice Brennan. But his appointees came from different backgrounds, no identifiable tendency in the way they thought about the Constitution.

So do you see yourself as one of those models, or something different from both?

President Obama: There’s no doubt that in making my appointments, the values of the justice matter to me. And what I mean by that is not how they’d rule on a particular issue. In fact, we're very careful when I interview candidates not to ask them about a particular case or controversy that might make it seem as if I want a particular outcome. But what I've been consistently looking for -- and this is what I saw in Justice Sotomayor, what I saw in Justice Kagan -- is people who, number one, have intellectual integrity. And what that means is, is that they look at the facts and the law, and even if it's uncomfortable to them, they don't like the outcome, they follow the law, and they recognize that that's their job.

Number two, that they bring a humanity to the job. And what I mean by that is that, particularly on the Supreme Court, nine out of 10 cases -- well, certainly in the federal courts -- nine out of 10 cases we can probably arrive at an outcome just by applying basic tenets to constitutional interpretation. There’s not going to be a lot of controversy. The cases that really matter are the ones where there’s ambiguity, where there’s a lack of clarity, where it requires constitutional principles being applied in a way that is true to precedent, is true to basic legal tenets, but also that understands the unique role of the Court in making sure that people who are locked out of the political process, for example, are not permanently locked out, that they have some recourse; that we have justices who understand how the world works so that they are not entirely blind to the history of racial discrimination or gender discrimination, or how money operates in our world.

Not because that necessarily leads them to rule on a particular issue, but because it means that when they’re looking at a tough case in which statute or the Constitution does not provide an immediate, ready answer, that they can apply judgment, grounded in how we actually live and the ideals and principles that have made this such an extraordinary country. I want them to have lived a little and be able to see the wide spectrum of people that they’re going to be wielding this enormous power over.

And so, a lot of times when I talk to the candidates for the judiciary, I spend time asking about their families and them growing up, and what were formative experiences in their minds. And in some ways, that reveals more than anything.

And part of the reason that I think Merrick Garland would be such an extraordinary judge is not just because he’s already been an extraordinary judge, but I think about his life story. And I mentioned this in the introduction -- when he was a high school kid, as class valedictorian, he’s got a student speaking ahead of him who lambasts the Vietnam War, and parents are trying to unplug the guy’s mic, and Merrick comes in and -- not because he necessarily agrees with the student, but, impromptu, provides a vigorous defense of free speech. As a 17- or 18-year-old kid -- that tells me something about him. It gives me confidence that this is somebody who’s thought about what our core values and ethics are as a society.

When you hear about the work he did in the Oklahoma City bombing, and he’s presiding over the investigation at the Justice Department, and the fact that he was meticulous in how he conducted that investigation, and didn’t cut corners -- even though, in the wake of those kinds of terrorist attacks, oftentimes it's convenient, because people aren't going to call you on it, to cut corners -- and at the same time, how he kept the program mourning the deceased from the memorial because he knew that each one of those people who had been killed, and each one of those families had been affected in such profound ways -- that tells me something about who he is.

And that, as much as anything, I think is going to give me confidence that that's the kind of person where, if I'm before a judge, I want to make sure that I've got somebody who’s wise and who cares about people and is not arbitrary, and can provide confidence to the justice system. And I also think part of the reason I thought Merrick was ideal now is precisely because of all the polarization we were talking about earlier. What a good moment for us to have somebody who is respected by both sides, and who Chief Justice Roberts served with on the Appellate Court and befriended, and consistently said -- despite being on the opposite ends of a bunch of decisions -- said this is somebody who, if he says you're wrong, you’ve got to think long and hard about it.

He embodies and models what it is that we want to see in our juris prudence.

Professor Strauss: Let me sort of pick up on that. I mean, as you know, some people on the left were disappointed with your choice of Chief Judge Garland. They thought you should have appointed someone who would be more aggressive in moving the Court in a certain direction. And I just -- I guess what I want to say is, those of us who knew you “back then” could have said you shouldn’t be surprised, because if I remember correctly -- and correct me if I don't -- when you were teaching constitutional law, there are people in that line of work who hold up the Warren Court as the model and say the Court’s job is to be really on the front lines of attacking society’s problems. And if I remember correctly, you were skeptical of that when you were a law professor. So am I right in remembering that, and has the skepticism carried over?

President Obama: No, no, I think you're right about this. It's an adage in con law, and you're familiar with this -- probably the students are too -- that the courts are a terrific shield, but they’re not always a very effective sword. And what I mean by that is, is that there have been moments in history -- Brown v. Board of Education being the best example, and on the other end of the spectrum, a decision like Dred Scott, which was antithetical to what we want to see a court do -- there are certain moments where, like in Brown, that democracy has broken down in a fundamental way. The majority has shut down access for the petitions for redress from a minority group. There are times where an individual who is engaging in, let’s say, highly unpopular speech is not going to be able, through the political process, to uphold the values that we, collectively, have decided are pretty important to uphold.

And so, in those circumstances, I have a very progressive view of how the courts should operate. But as I think Judge Garland said, being a federal judge doesn’t mean that you have this broad writ to simply remake society. Ideally, you’ve got a political process that does that; that we argue about issues, and we elect representatives, and we get votes, and we pass bills, and we get a new administration and they overturn stuff that we passed. And it's rough, and it's tumble, and it's not always elegant, but that's the constitutional design. And it has the benefit of making sure that separation of powers and decentralization of power in our society keeps this lumbering ship moving in a pretty good direction.

And so it's been rare -- and this is by design -- that the Court engages in massive social engineering. Now, I care deeply about -- there are a whole range of progressive causes that I will continue to fight for as long as I have a breath. I believe in a society that is doing something about climate change in an aggressive way. I believe in a society in which every child is able to get a decent education and opportunity. I believe that everybody should have health care in a society that's wealthy -- it's not a privilege, it's a right. I believe that our criminal justice system is flawed in a whole range of ways.

A couple of weeks ago, or maybe it was last week, I had lunch with a sampling of the people that I've pardoned for nonviolent drug offenses. And I've got a woman sitting next to me who, at a very young age, in her early 20s, was sentenced to life in prison for a nonviolent drug offense. That's crazy. It makes no sense. It was unjust and counterproductive, and leaves huge scars not just in that woman’s family and her children, but in our society as a whole.

So there are a whole bunch of things I've done as President and I intend to continue to do and to advocate for. Those are not things, though, that typically a Supreme Court justice is in the position to get done. They don't have taxing power. They don't necessarily have the expertise to be designing programs to get at the things that we care about. And so I do have a modesty in terms of my expectations for what the Court should do.

But I want the court to do what it should do really well. I want a court that does believe that equality under the law is equality under the law -- not just the words, but that it is operationalized, that it's real. I want a court that is treating a poor indigent criminal defendant the same as a wealthy criminal defendant, and that justice is blind with respect to -- she agrees with me.

So modesty in the scope and the nature of what the law is, but doing really well what the Court is designed to do -- that's what I'm looking for in a justice.

Professor Strauss: I think we can open it up.

President Obama: Let’s open it up to questions. There you go, a little Socratic method here. State the case! No, I'm teasing. I'm teasing. This young lady right here in the green -- yes. Do we have a mic? Let’s give them mics so everybody can hear you. Introduce yourself, by the way.

Question: Hi.

President Obama: Hi.

Question: My name is Amelia.

President Obama: Hey, Amelia.

Question: I actually had the opportunity to ask you a question when I was 15 years old, in New Hampshire.

President Obama: Wow.

Question: So I'm really happy to --

President Obama: Are you a student here now?

Question: I am.

President Obama: That's very cool. Did I answer your question the last time?

Question: You did, very well.

President Obama: Thank goodness. All right, what do you got?

Question: So I'm really happy to hear that you said you were going to continue to push for the issues that you care about, because I, of course, believe that the push for the Supreme Court nomination is incredibly important. I'm just a little concerned that other issues could get left behind. One such issue, for example, is criminal justice reform -- specifically, the problem of mass incarceration. So I was wondering if you could speak to what more you’ll do in your last 10 months to address this issue.

President Obama: Great. It's a great question. We're in this really interesting moment where generally Congress is thoroughly unproductive -- not, by the way, because of the members of Congress who are here -- who are all doing great work -- but in the aggregate it’s not doing much.

One exception has been this growing interest, this movement in criminal justice reform. And it’s bipartisan and it’s sincere on the part of all sides on this. And it’s an interest convergence. You have fiscal conservatives who have been seeing how expensive it is to incarcerate people year after year after year, and how it’s breaking the bank -- particularly at the state level, where if you track spending on public education and spending on incarceration over the last 25, 30 years, there is almost a direct line between more people in jail and less support for public universities, for example. So there’s a fiscal concern.

You've got a libertarian strand of conservatives who really believe why is it the government’s business if somebody is taking -- smoking pot, let’s say, and why would we want to jail them for 20 years? You've got a very sincere evangelical movement that oftentimes is involved in reentry programs or prison ministries, and so have embraced the idea of a second chance.

And so you combine that with law enforcement that I think has begun to recognize that a lot of how we have prosecuted the war on drugs has been unproductive, and that recidivism is inevitable if people are getting no skills. They're incarcerated for decades, and then we're just releasing them with no possible support. And then the long-standing progressive view that a lot of our criminal justice system has been tainted by racial discrimination and class bias. All those things are converging.

And so now we've got some really interesting coalitions. You’ve got the ACLU and the Koch brothers agreeing on this, which does not happen often. Dick Durbin has been one of the key leaders in the Senate in shaping a criminal justice reform bill that has a real chance of passage. And I think it’s really important to understand the nomination process with Judge Garland is not holding back our ability to move forward.

It would be one thing if Mitch McConnell was saying, man, it’s going to take so long to schedule all the hearings and the votes, and we won’t have time because we're just so busy that we can't then do criminal justice instead. But since there has been a spike in the number of days off in this Congress, and, typically, a judicial confirmation takes less than three months from the time that person is nominated -- Judge Alito, for example, took 82 days -- this is something that shouldn’t prevent us from getting done the criminal justice issues.

I think what’s been tougher is just managing the traditional politics around being soft on crime versus being tough on crime. And right now because crime rates -- sadly except for in certain neighborhoods in Chicago and a few other cities -- have been going down in ways that are remarkable and nobody can fully explain, there is less profit in saying I’m going to be tough on crime.

But there is always a hesitance on the part of legislators because very rarely is a politician punished for having been too tough on crime and sentencing. But occasionally, Ã¡ la Willie Horton, they feel that a vote that can be perceived as lenient might come back to bite them.

The good news is that, so far at least, people have stuck with it. And I’m modestly optimistic that we can get something done this year. It won’t solve the problem of mass incarceration -- because that was a process that took 20, 30 years to get to where we are now, where we account for 5 percent of the world’s population and 25 percent of the world’s prisoners, so it’s going to take some time to reverse. But the legislation that's pending right now provides meaningful reductions in the standards for sentencing around nonviolent drug crimes. It does some very important work in terms of reentry, diversion programs. It breaks this psychology that we just have to lock people up in order to keep ourselves safe.

One last element to this that has been interesting is the opioids crisis that some of you may have read about. Right now painkillers -- overdoses of people taking painkillers kills more people than traffic accidents. It’s a remarkable statistic. There has been this huge spike in painkiller addiction, which is then leading to heroin addiction, because oftentimes heroin is cheaper than painkillers. And four out of five people who get addicted to heroin start their addiction with OxyContin or some other painkiller addiction. And unlike crack, it’s not just affecting inner-city African American or Latino communities. It’s widespread. It’s pervasive. It’s seeping into rural areas. And it’s a tragic issue that we are really spending a lot of time focused on.

But what’s interesting is, is that the politics of this changes a little bit where when elected officials see kids who are like their kids getting hooked and going through these terrible things, there’s been a greater predisposition to think of this as a public health issue rather than a criminal justice and incarceration issue.

And that's -- I’m just being blunt -- that's the truth. But it actually has had an impact in terms of an openness I think to re-examining some of our drug laws.

Good question. I’m sure your question eight years ago was really good, too.

All right, I’m going to go boy-girl-boy-girl just to make sure this is fair. We monitor these things. Yes, gentleman right here, in the tie. You. Yes, you look sharp. Do you wear a tie every day to class? That's good, man.

Question: I’m Jimmy. I’m also a 1L. I’ve never asked you a question before.

President Obama: Okay.

Question: So this might not go very well. But I’ve written it down so hopefully I can read it. Mr. President, we are currently in the midst of a polarizing, political election cycle dividing both major parties along populist and establishment fault lines. Do you anticipate this divergence within the Democratic Party widening to the extent we saw with the tea party’s emergence within the ranks of the Republican Party? And if not, what do you worry about for the future of the Democratic Party?

President Obama: Short answer is, no, I don't. The cleavages inside the Democratic Party are not comparable to what we're seeing in the Republican Party right now. The argument inside the Democratic Party is a little bit more about means, less about ends.

If you look at our two Democratic candidates, they believe that everybody should get health care. They believe that every child should get a good education. They believe that climate change is real and that we should do something about it. They believe in equality for the LGBT community. Right? If you go through the list, there’s not a huge divergence there.

I think that in the Democratic Party, there is a populist impulse that grows out of what I also think has happened for folks who are voting in the Republican primary, this frustration in the wake of the financial crisis and the bottom falling out for people who lost their jobs, or lost their homes, or lost their pensions; that the world is moving fast, the ground is not firm under their feet. And even before that crisis, wages and incomes were not going up at the same pace as productivity, corporate profits, and so forth. And so there is a sense the game is rigged. And we have to more fundamentally change that game, that system -- whether it’s Wall Street, or how Washington operates, or what have you.

Some of that impulse is healthy. I think you want people to be asking hard questions about injustice economically and the way that insiders in the political process may not fully represent the interest of everyone.

The danger, whether for Democrats or Republicans, is in a closed-loop system where everybody is just listening to the people who agree with them, that you start thinking the way to get to where I want to go is to simply be as uncompromising as possible, and hold the line, and not pay attention or listen to what the other side has to say. And that is sort of a tea party mentality. And that anybody who suggests, well, there’s another point of view, or there’s a whole half of the country that completely disagrees with us that we have to work with, well, then you must be a sellout, or you must be corrupted, or you must be on the take, or what have you.

And that is not, I think, useful. It’s not say that there isn’t corruption, that there isn’t compromise -- people compromising principles for less-than-noble means, et cetera. Those things happen and they should be called out.

But a lot of the reason why a lot of Democrats who supported me and still support me got frustrated is because a bunch of the country doesn't agree with me or them, and they have votes, too, and they elect members of Congress. And that's how our democracy works. It’s not a situation, if you don't get everything you want, it’s always because the person you elected sold you out. It may just be because in our system you send up taking half loaves.

I could not be prouder of the Affordable Care Act, but it was a messy process. It doesn't have a public option. It’s not single-payer. If I were designing a system from scratch, I would have designed a more elegant system and a more efficient system. But that's not what was possible in our democracy -- in the same way that Social Security when it first started was a meagerly program providing benefits to just a few people and historically cut out for purely racist reasons domestic servants or sharecroppers or what have you. And then over time you kept on improving it. That's how change generally happens.

And I think the thing that Democrats have to guard against is going in the direction that the Republicans are much further along on, and that is this sense of we are just going to get our way, and if we don't, then we'll cannibalize our own and then kick them out and try again, and we narrow our viewpoints more and more until finally we stake out positions that are so extreme that they alienate the broad public.

I don't see that being where the Democrats go. But it's always something that we have to pay attention to.

Question: Thank you so much for being here. I'd like to know how have your views on the Supreme Court nomination process changed since you taught constitutional law here at the University of Chicago.

President Obama: My views on how it should work hasn’t changed. My views on how it currently works obviously are a source of frustration. Look, just to kind of wrap up this Supreme Court conversation, I think it is perfectly acceptable for Republicans to decide that even though Merrick Garland is highly qualified, even though he’s indisputably a good and fair judge, even though he’s gotten the highest ratings from all the bar organizations and others that have examined his record, that I just don't agree with him on X, Y, Z, and I'm going to vote against him because I believe in something different on important issues.

What’s not acceptable is not giving him a vote, not giving him a hearing, not meeting with him. What’s not acceptable, I believe, is the increasing use of the filibuster for somebody who’s clearly within the mainstream, or to essentially say that we are going to nullify the ability of a President who is from another party from making an appointment. And we're going to wait to see if maybe we can get a guy from our party to make the appointment. That is where you have a process foul that corrodes the ability of the Court to function effectively.

If you play out how much of a problem this could end up being -- if, in fact, Mitch McConnell sticks to not giving a hearing and not giving a vote, and let’s say, from their perspective, everything works out great and their nominee, whoever that might be, wins and takes over the White House, and they, then, make an appointment -- the notion that Democrats would then say, oh, well, we'll just go along with that -- that is inconceivable. Right?

So now the Democrats say, well, what’s good for the goose is good for the gander, we'll wait four more years to see how the next President comes in, at which point what’s most likely then is Mitch McConnell will then eliminate the filibuster possibility for Supreme Court justices, as it was eliminated for the other judicial appointments. And now it's just a majoritarian exercise inside the Senate of who controls the presidency and who controls the Senate. And if different parties control the White House and the Senate during that period of time, you're not going to get any appointments done -- which is a disaster for the courts, generally.

For two reasons. One is, there’s a lot of work that needs to get done and you need judges. And right now, there are emergency situations in districts across the country. But the second thing that happens is people will, at that point, just become more and more cynical about decisions that are coming down from the Court. They’re already cynical because so much of so many opinions just end up being straight 5-4, and it starts feeling like this is just a partisan alignment. But it gets much worse under these circumstances. People then just view the courts as an extension of our political parties -- polarized political parties.

And if confidence in the courts consistently breaks down, then you start seeing our attitudes about democracy generally starting to break down, a legitimacy breaking down in ways that are very dangerous.

It's a gentleman’s turn. Right here in the front. I am impressed by the way you guys did all get dressed up. Was there a memo sent out? Did the Dean say, you guys, we want you to all -- because you aren't going to class like this. I know. I remember.

Question: Hello, Mr. President. Thank you very much for being here with us today. I'm a 2L here at the law school. My question for you is, what sorts of constitutional questions were at the forefront of your mind when deciding who your nominee should be? And what sorts of constitutional questions do you think Americans should be asking themselves when assessing your selection and thinking about the 2016 presidential election?

President Obama: Well, I will tell you, as I said before, I'm very careful not to delve too specifically into a candidate’s position on live issues. You're a well-informed 2L, you know the issues that people debate. There’s a standard set of social issues that have been roiling society and the courts for a long time -- whether it's LGBT rights, or abortion, or civil rights.

What’s interesting is there are a set of new issues that are going to be coming up that, for your generation, I think are going to be increasingly salient. One great example is this whole debate around encryption, which I think is just the tip of the iceberg of what we're going to have to figure out. In a society in which so much of your life is digitized, people have a whole new set of privacy expectations that are understandable. They also expect, though, that since their lives are all digitized, that the digital world is safe, which creates a contradictory demand on government -- protect me from hackers, protect me from terrorists, protect me from et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, but I don't want you to know any of your [sic] business and I don't even want you to have the ability to investigate some of that business when it happens because there’s broader implications and we're worried about Big Brother. And so there’s going to be a whole series of issues around that that I think will be coming up.

I think there are a range of economic issues that date back very far, to the earliest days of the Court and were prominent during the Great Depression and FDR’s era that have gone into abeyance -- people don't pay attention to them as much in terms of monopoly concentration, or antitrust issues, et cetera -- but I think in this current environment are going to be coming more prominent over time.

And then, political participation issues and voting issues I think, and money in politics issues -- that's a whole series of issues that I do believe are an important role for the Court to play. Because if we're not effectively setting the rules of the political process, if that is delegitimized, then whatever outcomes are generated are subject to just endless contention.

And this is separate from the judiciary. This is your President editorializing. We really are the only advanced democracy on Earth that systematically and purposely makes it really hard for people to vote. And we sort of take it for granted. I mean, we sort of just assume, yeah, that's I guess how it is. There’s no other country on Earth that does that. And there’s a legacy to that that grows directly out of a history in which first property men, then white men, then white folks didn’t want women, minorities to participate in the political process and be able to empower themselves in that fashion.

Now, that's the history. We should be a society in which, at this point, we said, yeah, that history wasn’t so good, that's not who we are, and there was a Civil War fought about all this stuff, and we passed a whole series of laws like the Voting Rights Act, and at this point we should be at the point where we say, you know what, we want everybody to vote because that's the essence of our democracy. But we have not just federal laws, but state laws, that unabashedly discourage people from voting -- which is why we have some of the lowest voting rates of any advanced democracy in the world.

And that's a problem. That's not something that -- I'm saying that to Congress, as well as to the presidency, as well as to governors, as well as state legislators, as well as to courts. That can't be right! There’s no justification for that! You can't defend it!

And I've always said -- and this goes back to the young man’s question earlier about political polarization -- maybe the single biggest change that we could make in our political process that would reduce some of the polarization, make people feel more invested, restore integrity to the system, would be just make sure everybody is voting. Australia has got mandatory voting. You start getting 70-80 percent voting rates, that's transformative.

All right. How much time do we have, by the way? How many?

Moderator: Time for one more.

President Obama: We'll take two. The young lady in the green, right there in the sweater. Yes, that's you. Yes. You didn’t remember what you were wearing today, did you?

Question: So I think we can agree that in our nation, we celebrate diversity. Diversity of ethnicity is the basis, the background. And I'm just wondering -- well, of course, U of Chicago is a diversity of ideas. I'm just wondering what diverse characteristics Judge Garland would bring to the Supreme Court.

President Obama: Well, he’s from Skokie -- which is very important. It's a great place. It's a great town. The way I've thought about diversity is not to think about any single seat as, oh, I've got to fill this slot with this demographic, but rather if I've got a broad set of nominees to make -- and this is true across the board -- how do I make sure that I'm intentional throughout that process so that the talent of every American is, and every potential candidate gets a fair look, and I have confidence that if I stick to that, if I do that, if I make sure that I'm broadening the search, broadening the pool, looking at a bunch of folks even if they’re not going through the conventional paths, that I'll end up -- the process will result in diversity.

And that, in fact, is what’s happened. I am -- not to brag, but I have transformed the federal courts from a diversity standpoint with a record that's been unmatched. We've got more African Americans on the circuit courts than we ever has before. We've got -- I've appointed more African American women to the federal courts than any other President before. I've appointed more Latinos than any President before. I've appointed more Native Americans, more Asian Americans, more LGBT judges than ever before.

But at no point did I say, oh, you know what, I need a black lesbian from Skokie -- in that slot. Can you find me one? I mean, that's just not how I've approached it. It turns out that if the process is fair and you are saying that it's important that our courts are reflective of a changing society, you’ll end up with a really good cross-section of people who are excellent. And that's who we've been able to appoint.

And so, when I looked at Merrick Garland, that was the person that -- the difference between the Supreme Court is just a handful of seats come up at any given time now. I appointed a Latino woman and another woman right before that, so, yeah, he’s a white guy, but he’s a really outstanding jurist. Sorry. I think that's important.

But this speaks to the broader debate about diversity that I think is important and obviously churns up in college campuses a lot. The question is, have you set up a process and are you intentional about giving everybody a shot? And are you thinking about roadblocks to why we're not seeing a more diverse population? And when you start asking those questions -- in whatever institution. I mean, I just met with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Combatant Commanders, our key military leaders. And the U.S. military, interestingly, has probably done as good of a job as any institution in our society when it comes to integration and bringing diverse people in, but, as you go up the ranks, you start seeing that it becomes less and less reflective of the broader population and the troops, the men and women in uniform who are coming in.

And so we had a really interesting conversation about what’s happening? How much of this is that the young African American or Latino officer, or woman officer isn't mentored by the person right above them, and steered into particular assignments that are less likely to achieve a promotion? And what can we do about a different set of financial burdens that may exist? And if a lot of those folks are going in as enlisted men and women, because that's the opportunity that was presented to them and nobody told them they could apply to West Point, what are we doing to find outstanding enlisteds, and saying, you’d make a good officer and we're going to groom you?

And all of that -- that's not as satisfying as, when it comes to publicity, as just checking a box and saying, look, I appointed this person or that person in any particular slot. But that's where you start changing systems, and you start changing institutions, and you end up with a really broad-based change in access. And that's something that I really care deeply about because, just as is true in the military, it's true generally. Look, our society is changing. You cannot have a successful America if we are leaving out big chunks of the population from opportunity and leadership. It just doesn’t work.

And it's the same argument I make internationally in countries that are still repressing women -- saying, your society cannot work, it doesn’t work if more than half your population is constrained. If the half of that population that is most likely to be raising your children and teaching the next generation is not getting opportunity, your society will fail over the long term. And that's just true generally.

All right, one last question.

Question: What happens --

President Obama: Excuse me, you were not called on. And you are a journalist. And I'm calling on students. So, thank you very much. This wasn’t a press conference.

So, let’s just see -- it's a gentleman’s turn. This gentleman right there.

Question: Hi, my name is Seth. I'm a 3L. If you don't mind me reading my question --

President Obama: It's okay. This is what I was saying about you guys and your phones. By the way, are you now -- I'm assuming you can't carry your phones into court, can you?

Question: Actually, it depends.

President Obama: I'm going to say, you guys might want to practice --

Question: I'll try to work on that. So one issue that Judge Garland would likely never be able to consider if he were confirmed concerns the President’s authority to conduct drone strikes away from active battlefields. And these are strikes that you have continuously authorized on the basis of vague legal standards that you unilaterally deem to be satisfied in each case without ever appearing before a court, and in the process killing hundreds of innocent civilians as well as, in some cases, American citizens. So my question is, how are these killings morally and legally justified? And what kind of message does this drone program send about America’s values to the world, the American people, and to law students like myself who refuse to put our trust in an opaque process?

President Obama: I think that's a great question -- although I will say that I will dispute some of the underlying premises that you asserted as facts. But I think it's an important topic, and it's a fair one.

When I came into office, we were still in the midst of two wars, in Iraq and Afghanistan. And in the border regions between Afghanistan and Pakistan, al Qaida was still highly active. And drone technologies began to develop in parallel with -- had developed prior to my presidency, but started to really accelerate in terms of the technology and the precision with which strikes could be taken.

And the challenge for me as Commander-in-Chief has consistently been how do you think about this new technology in a way that is consistent with morality, ideals, laws of war, but is also consistent with my first priority as President and Commander-in-Chief, which is to keep all of you safe, including you.

And so I think it’s fair to say that in the first couple of years of my presidency, the architecture -- legal architecture, administrative architecture, command structures -- around how these were utilized was underdeveloped relative to how fast the technology was moving. So another way of saying this is our military or our intelligence teams started seeing this as really effective. And they started just going because the goal was let’s get al Qaeda, let’s get these leaders. There’s a training camp here. There’s a high-value target there. Let’s move. And it was -- the decision-making was not ad hoc, but it was embedded in decisions that are made all the time about a commander leading a military operation, or an intelligence team trying to take out a terrorist. And there wasn’t enough of an overarching structure, right?

So you may recall -- but if not, I’m sure we can send it to you -- I gave a speech at the National Defense University in which I said that we have to create an architecture for this because the potential for abuse -- given the remoteness of these weapons and their lethality, we've got to come up with a structure that governs how we're approaching it. And that's what we've done. So I’ve put forward what’s called a presidential directive. It’s basically a set of administrative guidelines whereby these weapons are being used.

Now, we actually did put forward a non-classified version of what those directives look like. And it says that you can't use these weapons unless you have near certainty that there will not be civilian casualties; that you have near certainty that the targets you are hitting are, in fact, terrorist organizations that are intending to do imminent harm to the United States. And you've got all the agencies who are involved in that process, they have to get together and approve that. And it goes to the highest, most senior levels of our government in order for us to make those decisions.

And what I’ve also said that we need to start creating a process whereby this -- whereby public accountability is introduced so that you or citizens or members of Congress outside of the Intelligence Committee can look at the facts and see whether or not we're abiding by what we say are these norms.

And we're actually -- there’s a lot of legal aspects to this because part of the problem here is, is that this drone program initially came through the intelligence side under classified programs, as opposed to the military. Part of what I’ve also said is I don't want our intelligence agencies being a paramilitary organization. That's not their function. As much as possible this should be done through our Defense Department so that we can report, here’s what we did, here’s why we did it, here’s our assessment of what happened.

And so slowly we are pushing it in that direction. My hope is, is that by the time I leave office there is not only an internal structure in place that governs these standards that we’ve set, but there is also an institutionalized process whereby the actions that the U.S. government takes through drone technology are consistently reported on, on an annualized basis so that people can look.

And the reason this is really important to me -- and this was implied in your question -- is there is a lot of misinformation about this. There is no doubt -- and I said this in an interview I think recently -- there is no doubt that some innocent people have been killed by drone strikes. It is not true that it has been this sort of willy-nilly, let’s bomb a village. That is not how folks have operated. And what I can say with great certainty is that the rate of civilian casualties in any drone operation are far lower than the rate of civilian casualties that occur in conventional war.

So the irony -- let’s take an example like the bin Laden raid. This was as precise, as effective an operation that I don't think anybody would dispute was in the national security interests of the United States. And we put our best people in there who operate as precisely and as effectively as any group of individuals probably ever have in the history of the planet. And they executed their mission flawlessly. But there were a number of people who were killed in that who you might describe as not the targets of the mission -- members of bin Laden’s family, for example. Now, that would be counted as a civilian casualty under the standards from which you drew your information. And if you calculated it as a percent, there was actually a pretty high civilian casualty rate for this extraordinarily precise mission.

Now, imagine during the height of the Iraq war, or when we were still actively fighting in Afghanistan, the number of civilians who were killed in normal military operations. We talk about the number of U.S. troops that were killed in Iraq. The number of Iraqis that were killed -- primarily by AQI and those we were fighting, but also by U.S. military that was trying to be as careful as possible in chaotic situations, like Fallujah or Ramadi -- were in the tens of thousands.

So part of my job as President is to figure out how I can keep America safe doing the least damage possible in really tough, bad situations. And I don't have the luxury of just not doing anything and then being able to stand back and feel as if my conscience is completely clear. I have to make decisions because there are folks out there who are genuinely trying to kill us and would be happy to blow up this entire room without any compunction, and are actively trying to find ways to do it.

And I wish I could just send in Iron Man -- no, no, I don't mean that as a joke. I just mean I wish that the tragedy of war, conflict, terrorism, et cetera, did not end up creating circumstances where we, wielding kinetic power, don't end up hurting anybody who shouldn’t have been hurt.

But what I try to do is to set up the system as best as I can. And I think it is very important for those who are critics of the U.S. government -- and this includes folks on the outside -- to examine the incredible progress that we've made over the course of a couple of decades. Because this conversation didn't even exist, it did not even cross the minds of people in the White House as recently as 30 or 40 years ago. I mean, it wasn’t even a factor. And we anguish over this in a very serious way.

But what I do think is a legitimate concern is, is that the transparency issues. I think that the way that this got built up through our intelligence and what’s called our Title 50 programs meant that it did not -- it wasn’t subject to the same amount of democratic debate as when we are conducting what are called Title 10 Department of Defense conventional operations. And that's done a disservice not only to the public being able to examine where we made mistakes and create corrective action, it’s actually also done a disservice to the incredibly dedicated men and women in intelligence and in operations who perform these operations who are subject to accusations that somehow they're irresponsible and bloodless and going around blowing up children, which is not the case.

And our popular media I think has been able to just project a whole bunch of scenarios that are generally not accurate.

I guess I should stop there. But thank you for the question. It was a legitimate one.

I’ll end where I started. Just based on the quality of the questions and your very sharp appearances -- you guys have an enormous amount to contribute. Don't let the day-to-day noise and news and frustrations with our democracy discourage you from being involved.

I’m phasing out of this particular part of my life. But I’ve said this before -- and I believed it when I was teaching here, I believe it even more now after having been President -- the most important office in a democracy is the office of citizen. I really believe that. Change happens when citizens are informed, are engaged, are paying attention, are asking tough questions -- asking tough questions of themselves, by the way, not just of others -- not too comfortable in whatever dogmas that we all attach ourselves to. And you are learning the kind of critical thinking in this school that will allow you to become really good citizens. Use it.

Thanks.

Professor Strauss: Thank you, Mr. President.

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# Press Conference in Saudi Arabia

President Obama: You already heard my statement, so I’m going to take a couple of question, starting with Kathleen Hennessey of AP. Where’s Kathleen? Where are you? There you are. Question: Thanks for doing this, Mr. President. In the lead-up to this trip, there was a lot of talk about strains in the relationship between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, some of it stemming from your comments about Gulf partners being “free riders,” and specifically that Iran and Saudi Arabia should “share the neighborhood.” I’m wondering if after your meeting you feel like you’ve eased any of those tensions, if that was your goal. And if you can point to any evidence of greater cooperation or engagement in the campaign against ISIL. Do you feel now that the Gulf partners are carrying their weight? President Obama: Well, I think that a lot of the strain was always overblown. The fact of the matter is, is that the friendship and cooperation that exist between the United States and the Gulf countries has been consistent for decades. During the course of our administration, the GCC countries have extensively cooperated with us on counterterrorism, on curbing the financing of terrorist activities. They are part of the counter-ISIL coalition that has made progress both in Syria and in Iraq. If you think about last year, when we had the Camp David meeting, you were already seeing the onset of conflict in Libya as well as in Yemen. And as we come to this meeting in part because of the collective efforts of members of the GCC, we have a new government in Libya that is very nascent, but has the opportunity finally to organize itself in a way that we haven’t seen in a couple of years. That would not have happened had it not been for the effective diplomatic pressure that was applied by all the GCC countries, as well as the United States and the United Nations. In Yemen, we now have a cessation of hostilities that allows us to build a peace process that can relieve the suffering of the people inside of Yemen. That would not have happened had it not been for the GCC-U.S. cooperation. We would not have gotten an Iran deal to get their nuclear weapons had not the GCC been supportive of it. So what is true between the United States and the GCC, as is true with all of our allies and friends, is that at any point in time, there are going to be differences in tactics. And part of the goal here, as well as the meeting at Camp David, is to make sure that not only do we share a broad common vision of how prosperity and stability and peace are achieved in this region and how we counter extremist activity, but that we have knowledge of what each party is doing on an ongoing basis. I think it is no doubt true that when we entered into the negotiations with Iran around the nuclear deal, there was concern that in the interest of getting the deal done, we would somehow look the other way with respect to their other destabilizing activities. And in fact, what we are able to report is not only have we seen Iran do what it was supposed to do under the deal and the threat of an Iranian nuclear weapon is greatly reduced, but what we’ve also seen, what the GCC has seen, is our continued cooperation in, for example, interdicting Iranian efforts to arm the Houthi militias inside of Yemen. That, I think, has created some confidence. But one of the things, at a time when the region is so fraught with so many different problems and challenges, is the need for more consistent institutionalized communication at every level of government. And that’s part of what we’ve been able to achieve through these two summits. And my hope is, is that it will continue into the next administration. I think it has been highly useful, because the possibilities of misunderstanding increase when there’s so much activity taking place. I’ll give you one last example. Inside of Iraq, there are understandable concerns about Iranian influence in the Iraqi government at a time when the Iraqi government is also critical for us fighting ISIL. It was very important I think for us to describe our assessment that Prime Minister Abadi is in fact effectively fighting against ISIL and trying to reach out to Sunnis inside of Iraq, while acknowledging that there are significant problems in terms of government stability inside of Baghdad. And that’s a reason for us not to withdraw, but rather to get more involved in helping to stabilize areas like Anbar, where we’ve not cleared out ISIL but the towns that they were governing have been left devastated. If we want Sunni communities to be able to rebuild themselves and to get back into the lives they were leading before ISIL took over, then we’re going to have to help the Iraqi government respond. The same is true with respect to Syria. Right now, the cessation of hostilities is very fragile and may be breaking down in part because of the Assad regime’s continuing attacks on areas where they perceive they have an advantage. This is part of the reason why I called Mr. Putin on Monday, indicating to him that in the same way that we are continually urging the moderate opposition inside of Syria to abide by the cessation of hostilities, he needs to be holding the regime into account. For us to be able to describe the specifics of that conversation in a setting like this to give the opportunity for the other heads of state to ask questions about Russian intentions I think was extremely useful. Question: Were you able to secure any new commitments on the stabilization effort? I mean, you were asking for aid. Did you get any? President Obama: We’ve been able to secure additional commitments with respect to the counter-ISIL campaign more broadly. With respect to direct help to the Iraqi government, what I recommended was that we wait to assess how the current government turmoil in Iraq plays itself out over the next couple of weeks before we make final decisions about how useful particular offers of assistance will be. Although, already what we’ve seen is, for example, the government of Kuwait over the last year has deferred payments that were required under the U.N. resolution between Iraq and Kuwait. That’s worth a couple of billion dollars to the Iraqi government. And we described our efforts to make sure that in addition to the military assistance that we’re providing Iraq, that we’re also focusing on these stabilization functions. But frankly, right now in Baghdad, there’s some big challenges in terms of Prime Minister Abadi forming a new government -- or a new cabinet. Until that’s settled, I think it’s important for us to make sure that any additional stabilization dollars that are put in are going to be effectively spent. Greg Jaffe. Question: I was going to ask, since you just spoke about Prime Minister Abadi, how concerned are you about his hold on power? Are there things that the GCC partners can do to help solidify his government? And then, did you guys talk about a plan B in Syria if the cessation of hostilities falters? And then lastly, I was just going to ask, have you contemplated adding additional Special Forces in Syria to bolster the counter-ISIL fight? And what might it take for you to make that decision? President Obama: Good. On the first item, I'm concerned. I think Prime Minister Abadi has been a good partner for us. But interestingly enough, right now in Baghdad, the challenges within the government don't fall along the usual lines of Kurdish-Sunni-Shia. There's actually significant dissension and disputes even among the Shia power blocks. Obviously, ultimately it's up to the Iraqis to make these decisions. It's not up to us, it's not up to the Iranians, it's not up to GCC countries. It's up to the Iraqi people to determine the government that they form. We do think, however, that it is vital for the health and stability of Iraq that the cabinet and the makeup of government is finalized and stabilized. And we've been urging them to get the job done. And we have contacts with all the various factions and parties, saying to them they have to take the long view and think about the well-being of the country at a time when they're still fighting Daesh, Mosul is still under ISIL control; at a time when, because of low oil prices, they've got challenges with respect to their budget. There's a dam that needs to be fixed. They've got a lot on their plate. Now is not the time for government gridlock or bickering. With respect to Syria, we had discussions about what options are available to us should the current cessation of hostilities break down. None of the options are good. It has been my view consistently that we have to get a political solution inside of Syria and that all the external actors involved have to be committed to that as well as the actors inside of Syria. Certainly that's what the Syrian people want -- they want an end to the bombing. They want to be able to go back to their homes. They want to be able to farm their lands and run their businesses and send their kids to school. And the problem with any plan B that does not involve a political settlement is that it means more fighting, potentially for years. And whoever comes out on top will be standing on top of a country that's been devastated and that will then take years to rebuild. So the sooner we can end fighting and resolve this in a political fashion, the better. The primary reasons that we have been emphasizing the need for Assad to go is not just because he's killed his people and barrel-bombed women and children; it's that it is hard to conceive of him being at the head of a government that would end the fighting because it was perceived as legitimate. That's what we have to emphasize, that's what we have to work on. I'm going to take one last question. I assume this is Arab press, not just you. Go ahead, but there are other people here. Question: What, Mr. President, do you think the main issue or case that you have a different opinion between GCC and the United States and this -- something you think there is different? President Obama: I think that, overall, there's a broad consensus in assisting each other in our collective security. The GCC hosts the United States, and we could not operate effectively militarily in the region if it weren't for GCC countries. Our intelligence-sharing is vital in fighting against terrorism, and has consistently improved. We're starting to see the need to cooperate on new threats like cyberattacks, for example. Our efforts as a consequence of these summits to form a unified ballistic missile defense is very important. Our belief that the prosperity and stability of the region depends on countries treating all their citizens fairly and that sectarianism is an enemy of peace and prosperity -- that if people are seeing themselves not as a citizen of a country but as a member of a particular branch of Islam, that that is a recipe for countries falling apart. I think there's broad agreement there. Probably the biggest area where there's been tactical differences has been with respect to Iran. And the issue is not the need for shared cooperation to deter against Iranian provocations -- on that, we're all agreed. I think that there has been concern, even when we were working on the Iran nuclear deal, that if we were in discussions with them about these issues, that somehow Iran would feel emboldened to act more provocatively in the region. And what I've said to them is we have to have a dual track. We have to be effective in our defenses and hold Iran to account where it is acting in ways that are contrary to international rules and norms. But we also have to have the capacity to enter into a dialogue to reduce tensions and to identify ways in which the more reasonable forces inside of Iran can negotiate with the countries in the region, with its neighbors, so that we don't see an escalation of proxy fights across the region. And I think that that view is one that is consistent with how many in the GCC view it, but because there's been so much mistrust that's been built up -- in part because of Iranian provocations -- that people are cautious and want to make sure that nobody is naÃ¯ve about what Iran may be doing to stir up problems in other countries. And what we've consistently shown them is we're not naÃ¯ve. But as I pointed out, during the height of the Cold War, both Democratic Presidents like John F. Kennedy and Republican Presidents like Ronald Reagan still negotiated with the Soviet Union. Even when the Soviet Union was threatening the destruction of the United States, there was still dialogue so that we could find ways to reduce tensions and the dangers of war and chaos. And that's the same approach that we have to take. Even as Iran is calling us "The Great Satan," we were able to get a deal done where they got rid of their nuclear stockpiles, and that makes us safer. That's not a sign of weakness, that's a sign of strength. Thank you very much, everybody.

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# Young Leaders of the United Kingdom Town Hall

Hello, everybody! Thank you so much. Thank you, everybody. Have a seat. Have a seat. Well, hello, London. It is good to be back in the UK. Thank you, Khadija, for that wonderful introduction. I was saying backstage I'd vote for her for something.

I want to thank our U.S. Ambassador, Matthew Barzun, for all the great work that he’s doing.

And it is wonderful to see all of you. I guess you all know why I came this week. It’s no secret. Nothing was going to stop me from wishing happy birthday to Her Majesty. And meeting George. Who was adorable. Michelle and I had the privilege to visit with Her Majesty and the Duke of Edinburgh yesterday. I can’t tell you what we talked about. I can tell you that I hope I am such an engaging lunch partner when I am 90. And I’d like to thank Her Majesty for letting us use one of her Horticultural Halls for this town hall.

I also just came from touring Shakespeare’s Globe -- which is a good way to start your Saturday morning. Today is the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare’s death. And as he once wrote, “brevity is the soul of wit,” so I will try to be brief on the front end so we have time for a conversation.

These are some of the favorite things that I do when I travel around the world, is just have a chance to meet with young people and hear from them directly. It's inspiring to me. It gives me new ideas and I think underscores the degree to which young people are rising up in every continent to seize the possibilities of tomorrow.

Now, whenever I get together with leaders of the United States and UK, you hear a lot about the special relationship and the shared values and interests that bind us together, and the ways that our cooperation makes the world safer and more secure, and a more just and prosperous place. And all of that is true. We go back a pretty long way, the UK and the U.S. We’ve had our quarrels. There was that whole tea incident and -- and the British burned my house down. But we made up.

Ultimately, we made up and ended up spilling blood on the battlefield together, side-by-side, against fascism and against tyranny, for freedom and for democracy. And from the ashes of war, we led the charge to create the institutions and initiatives that sustain a prosperous peace -- NATO; Bretton Woods, the Marshall Plan, the EU. The joint efforts and sacrifices of previous generations of Americans and Brits are a big part of why we’ve known decades of relative peace and prosperity in Europe, and that, in turn, has helped to spread peace and prosperity around the world.

And think about how extraordinary that is. For more than 1,000 years, this continent was darkened by war and violence. It was taken for granted. It was assumed that that was the fate of man. Now, that’s not to say that your generation has had it easy. Both here and in the United States, your generation has grown up at a time of breathtaking change. You’ve come of age through 9/11 and 7/7. You’ve had friends go off to war. You’ve seen families endure recession. The challenges of our time -- economic inequality and climate change, terrorism and migration -- all these things are real. And in an age of instant information, where TV and Twitter can feed us a steady stream of bad news, I know that it can sometimes seem like the order that we’ve created is fragile, maybe even crumbling, maybe the center cannot hold.

And we see new calls for isolationism or xenophobia. We see those who would call for rolling back the rights of people; people hunkering down in their own point of view and unwilling to engage in a democratic debate. And those impulses I think we can understand. They are reactions to changing times and uncertainty.

But when I speak to young people, I implore them and I implore you to reject those calls to pull back. I’m here to ask you to reject the notion that we’re gripped by forces that we can’t control. And I want you to take a longer and more optimistic view of history and the part that you can play in it. I ask you to embrace the view of one of my predecessors, President John F. Kennedy, who once said: “Our problems are man-made; therefore, they can be solved by man. And man can be as big as he wants.”

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That’s how, since 1950, the global average life expectancy has grown by 25 years. Since 1990, we’ve cut extreme poverty around the world in half. That’s how, over the past 100 years, we’ve come from a world where only a small fraction of women could vote to one where almost every woman can. That’s how, since just the year 2000, we’ve come from a world without marriage equality to one where it’s a reality in nearly two dozen countries, including here and in the United States.

Every few months, I speak with a new group of White House interns. They’re roughly your age. They come in for six months; they are assigned to various aspects of the White House. And I often talk to them about the fact that if you could choose one moment in history in which to be born, and you didn’t know ahead of time what you were to be -- you didn’t know whether you were a man or a woman, what nationality, what ethnicity, what religion who your parents were, what class status you might have -- if you could choose one time in history where the chances that you led a fulfilling life were most promising, you’d choose right now, this moment. Because the world, for all of its travails, for all of its challenges, has never been healthier, better educated, wealthier, more tolerant, less violent, more attentive to the rights of all people than it is today.

That doesn’t mean we don't have big problems. That's not a cause for complacency, but it is a cause for optimism. You are standing in a moment where your capacity to shape this world is unmatched. What an incredible privilege that is. And you’ve never had better tools to make a difference -- to forge a better UK and a better Europe and a better world.

So my primary message today is going to be to reject pessimism and cynicism; know that progress is possible, that our problems can be solved. Progress requires the harder path of breaking down barriers, and building bridges, and standing up for the values of tolerance and diversity that our nations have worked and sacrificed to secure and defend. Progress is not inevitable, and it requires struggle and perseverance and discipline and faith. But that’s the story of how we won voting rights, and women’s rights, and workers’ rights, and civil rights, and immigration rights, and gay rights. Because those who came before us often risked their lives to give us the chance to know something better.

That's what gives me so much hope about your generation. So many of you are driven by that same impulse. You’re a generation that has seen integration and globalization not as threats but as opportunities -- for education, and exploration, and employment, and exchange. You’re a generation who sees differences of pluralism and diversity not as a curse, but as a great gift.

That’s one of the reasons why the United States has invested in young leader initiatives around the globe -- in Africa and Latin America, Southeast Asia, and right here in the UK.

So last summer, we launched Young Leaders UK. And it’s grown from four students in Plymouth to more than 1,000 nationwide -- a diverse group of Brits aged 18 to 30, from government and NGOs and the private sector, including many of you here today. I know Ambassador Barzun has held town hall workshops at more than 100 high schools, with more than 14,000 “sixth formers.” He’s worked to create more of the U.S. Embassy exchange programs that have graduated alumni like Margaret Thatcher, and Gordon Brown, and Tony Blair. Because we want you to have the tools, connections, and resources that you need to make yourselves change agents, the change that you are looking for in the world.

So you’re young leaders like Michael Sani, who’s here today -- where is Michael? There he is. Michael was inspired by America’s “Rock the Vote” voter registration initiative, so he started his own “Bite the Bullet” -- “Bite the Ballot” -- excuse me -- initiative here in the UK. He spent time in Greensboro, North Carolina, where he learned about our Civil Rights Movement. And he said: “I have a new understanding of the meaning of perseverance, resilience, and delayed gratification -- about fighting for change you may not live to see, but your children will live to see.”

Fighting for change that you may not live to see, but that your children will live to see. That’s what this is all about. That’s what we are all about. Whether in the Cold War or world war, movements for economic or social justice, efforts to combat climate change -- our best impulses has always been to leave a better world for the next generation.

Maryam Ahmed is here today. Where is Maryam? Where are you? Are you also behind me? There’s Maryam up top. It’s that impulse that compels a young leader like Maryam to say, I may have grown up one of eight in a small West London house, but I’m going to use the education I got at Oxford to help any child have the same opportunities that I had.

And Ali Hashem is here. Where is Ali? Right there. It’s the same impulse that’s led Ali to say, I may have fled Syria as a child, but now that I’m in elective office, I’m going to use my power to help other refugees like me.

And Becca Bunce is here today. Where is Becca? There’s Becca. It’s that impulse that compels a young leader like Becca to say that, as a woman with a disability, I may have fallen down at times, but people who believed in me picked me up. And I’m going to pay it forward by fighting for people with disabilities and against violence against women, because I believe the world can be a better place.

You can't help but be inspired by the stories of young people like these, both in the United States and the United Kingdom. And think of all the good that we can do together. Think of all the good that we have yet to accomplish. There is not a challenge on this planet that our two countries don’t take on together. And as long as your generation nurtures that special relationship, and learns from one another, and stands together, I'm confident the future is brighter than the past, and that our best days are still ahead of us.

So, with that, let’s have a conversation. All right -- you guys were ready. Here’s what we're going to do. I am going to go boy, girl, boy, girl, to make sure that it's fair. I’ll try to get in as many questions as I can. Introduce yourself. We have mics. Right there. And tell me who you are and where you're from, and then try to keep your question -- or comment relatively brief so I can get as many as possible. All right?

And we will start right here.

Question: Mr. President, my name is Keona McCarney [ph] from Belfast, Northern Ireland. And this special relationship is felt nowhere stronger than in Northern Ireland, where America has played a really important role in our peace process. How will your predecessor and those to come after you help to foster that?

President Obama: Well, Northern Ireland is a story of perseverance. And the fact that your generation -- how old are you now?

Question: Twenty-one.

President Obama: Twenty-one. Your experience has been entirely different than your parents. There are still huge problems there -- some of them political, some of them economic. But every year we have, on St. Patrick’s Day, folks from Ireland come. And we had both your First Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister come. And folks are working these issue through.

And what’s interesting is the degree to which the example of peacemaking in Northern Ireland is now inspiring others. So in Colombia, Latin America right now, they're trying to undergo a peace process. And they’ve actually brought people from Northern Ireland to come and describe how do you overcome years of enmity and hatred and intolerance, and try to shape a country that is unified.

You know this better than I do, but one of the things that you see in Northern Ireland that's most important is the very simple act of recognizing the humanity of those on the other side of the argument, having empathy and a sense of connection to people who are not like you. That's taken time, but you're now seeing that. And I think among young people who are interacting more, you're seeing that.

It requires also forging a new identity that is about being from Northern Ireland as opposed to being Unionist or Sinn Fein or -- just deciding the country as a whole is more important than any particular faction or any particular flag.

But this is a challenging time to do that. Because there is so much uncertainty in the world right now, because things are changing so fast, there is a temptation to forge identities, tribal identities that give you a sense of certainty, a buffer against change. And that's something that our young people -- we have to fight against. Whether you're talking about Africa, or the Middle East, or Northern Ireland, or Burma, the forces that lead to the most violence and the most injustice typically spring out of people saying, I want to feel important by dividing the world into “us” and “them.” And “them” threatens me, and so I’ve got to make sure that my tribe strikes out first.

And fighting that mentality and that impulse requires us to begin very young, with our kids. One of the most encouraging things I’ve seen in Northern Ireland is children starting to go to school together and having a sense that we're all in this together, as opposed to it’s “us” against “them.”

But it’s going to take some time. It will depend on leaders like you to make it happen, all right? No pressure. You're going to be fine. You're going to do it. All right, good question.

All right, so it’s a gentleman’s turn. That gentleman right there. Yes, you. There’s nobody behind you, right there. No, no, no. You. Hold on a second. I was pointing down here, but go ahead, and I’ll call on him next. Go ahead.

Question: Hi, I’m Peter from London.

President Obama: Hi, Peter.

Question: I always imagine in the future, so if your successor comes to you and she says -- I suppose it could be Bernie. And she says, oh, he’s prioritized education, health care, and defense. These are three issues we've got, we've got in the budget. And what’s your priority and how do you think about ranking those? And what do you think -- what would you like to see as your core priorities there?

President Obama: For the next President?

Question: And for yourself, as well. But, yes.

President Obama: Well, one of the things that I’ve learned as President is I don't always have the luxury of just choosing one or two things. Turns out that how well we do in the United States and how well the globe does depends on a lot of things.

My first priority is to keep the American people safe. Just like I’m sure Prime Minister Cameron, if you asked him, what is your first priority, it’s keeping the United Kingdom safe. So security is always going to be a top-of-the-list item.

And the threats from ISIL and transnational terrorism are absolutely critical to address. But how we address them is important. And recognizing that security is not just a matter of military actions, but is a matter of the messages we send and the institutions that we build, and the diplomacy that we engage in, and the opportunities that we present to people. That is going to be important for the next President of the United States and any global leader to recognize.

I am in awe of our respective militaries, the men and women in uniform who serve their country and make such extraordinary sacrifices. But we do them a disservice if we think that the entire burden of keeping the world safe is just placed on those who are in uniform. That's where diplomacy comes in.

You look at something like Iran where obviously the United States and Iran has had a terrible relationship since 1979; the theocracy there has engaged in all kinds of very dangerous and provocative behaviors, and they were on the path to obtain a nuclear weapon. The hard, diplomatic work that we did, along with the UK and the EU and members of the Security Council, to forge an agreement where they are no longer on the path to get a nuclear weapon -- we never engaged in a military strike to do it, but it resulted in a much safer world.

And the same is true when you think about development in sub-Saharan Africa. An organization like Boko Haram is ideologically driven and we have to help countries like Nigeria fight against the brutality and the rape and the pillage that they engage in. But if there are communities where children can't read or feed themselves, they are much more vulnerable to fostering these kind of demented ideologies.

So I think it's not an either-or question, and it's important for young people who -- very many thoughtful young people I think instinctually are suspicious of military action because too often it's been used as a knee-jerk response to problems as opposed to part of a broader set of solutions. But we have to do both, and we can do both.

In terms of the United States right now, I would love to see a focus on early childhood education as the next step in filling out our social safety net. We don't yet have institutions that are fully adapted to the fact that, guess what, women work and support families, and they need things like paid family leave and high-quality child care. And we know that when we invest in children between the ages of zero and three that the outcomes in terms of them getting effective educations and having thriving lives are enormous. We end up saving huge amounts of money from reduced crime and poverty if we just make that early investment. That's something that some countries do better than others, and we can learn from other countries along those lines.

Across the board, across the developing world right now, I think we have to attend to issues of inequality. And one of the places to start addressing these issues of inequality is making sure that every child is getting a decent education. And a lot of our countries are not doing as well as they should on that front.

All right, who is next? The young lady right there. You, yes, you.

Question: Hi, my name is Fatima, and my question is, do you think signing the T-TIP agreement will have a negative impact on the EU, due to the standards of regulation enforced?

President Obama: For those of you who are not aware, T-TIP, as we call it, is the trade deal that is being negotiated between the United States and the European Union. We haven't gotten it done yet. The truth is, is that the United States and Europe already have enormous amounts of trade, but there are still barriers that exist that prevent businesses and individuals that are providing services to each other to be able to do so seamlessly. And if we are able to get this deal done, it's estimated that it will create millions of jobs and billions of dollars of benefits on both sides of the Atlantic.

But getting trade deals done is tough, because each country has its own parochial interests and factions. And in order to get a trade deal done, each country has to give something up. So it's a time-consuming process. And people, right now, are especially suspicious of trade deals because trade deals feel as if they are accelerating some of these globalizing trends that have weakened labor unions and allow for jobs to be shipped to low-wage countries. And some of the criticism in the past of trade deals are legitimate. Sometimes they have served the interests of large corporations and not necessarily of workers in the countries that participate in them.

But we've just gone through this exercise between the United States and Asia, where we organized a large regional trade deal with 11 countries, and part of the argument that I'm making in the United States is that the answer to globalization and income inequality and lack of wage growth is not to try to pull up the drawbridge and shut off trade. The idea is to make sure that in these trade deals we are embedding standards and values that help lift workers' rights and help lift environmental standards and help fight against things like human trafficking and child labor. And our values should be embedded in how countries trade with each other.

So, for example, Vietnam was one of the countries that is part of this Trans-Pacific Partnership, and we said to Vietnam, if you want access to our markets, we understand you have a different political system than us, but if workers have no rights and there's no possibility of organizing labor unions, we're not going to let you sell a bunch of sneakers and t-shirts into our country because by definition you're going to be undercutting the standards of living of folks in our country. And so for the first time, the government of Vietnam has started to change its laws to recognize labor unions. Now, they're still suppressed. Those standards are not where they are in the United States or the UK. But it gives us a lever by which to begin to raise standards all around the world.

Now, that's less of an issue between the United States and Europe. The main thing between the United States and Europe is trying to just break down some of the regulatory differences that make it difficult to do business back and forth. Plus, making sure those light sockets are all matched up. I mean, those light sockets are really irritating.

Let's see. I promised I was going to call on this gentleman back here. Yes, sir. No, no, right here. You keep passing by this poor guy.

Question: My name is Elijah, I'm from London. After eight years, what would you say you want your legacy to be?

President Obama: Well, I mean, I still have a few more months. Actually, eight months and 52 days -- not that I'm counting. I just made that up, I actually don't know. It's roughly something like that.

It's interesting, when you're in the job, you're not thinking on a day-to-day basis about your legacy -- you're thinking about how do I get done what I'm trying to get done right now. And I don't think that I'll have a good sense of my legacy until 10 years from now, and I can look back with some perspective and get a sense of what worked and what didn't.

There are things I'm proud of. The basic principle that in a country as wealthy as the United States, every person should have access to high-quality health care that they can afford -- that's something I'm proud of, I believe in. Saving the world economy from a Great Depression -- that was pretty good.

The first time I came to London was April of 2009, and the world economy was in a free fall, in part because of the reckless behavior of folks on Wall Street, but in part because of reckless behavior of a lot of financial institutions around the globe. For us to be able to mobilize the world community to take rapid action to stabilize the financial markets, and then in the United States to pass Wall Street reforms that make it much less likely that a crisis like that can happen again, I'm proud of that.

I think on the international stage, the work that we did to get the possible nuclear weapons that Iran was developing out of Iran, and doing so without going to war is something I'm very proud of.

There are things that people don't pay a lot of attention to now, but the response to the Ebola crisis -- for about three weeks, everybody was sure that everybody was going to die -- we're all going to get Ebola, we're all going to die. And there was sort of hysteria about it. And then everybody forgot about it. And the reason everybody forgot about it was because we mounted what was probably one of the most effective, if not the most effective, international public health responses in the history of the world, and saved hundreds of thousands of lives.

So, I'll look at a scorecard at the end. And I'm proud about the fact that I think that I have been true to myself during this process. I don't -- sometimes I look back at what I said when I was running for office and what I'm saying today, and they match up. So there's, I think, a certain core integrity to what I've been trying to do. We've had failures, and occasionally we've been blocked, but this goes back to one of the themes of my opening statement, and it's important for all the young people here to remember. Change takes time. And oftentimes, what you start has to then be picked up by your successors or the next generation.

If you think about the gap between -- well, something I'm most familiar with -- the American Civil Rights Movement. You had abolitionists in the 1700s who were fighting against slavery, and for a hundred years built a movement that eventually led to a civil war, and the amendments to our Constitution that ended slavery and called for equal protection under the law. It then took another hundred years for those rights that had been enshrined in the Constitution to actually be affirmed through the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. And then it's taken another 50 years to try to make sure that those rights are realized. And they're still not fully realized. There's still discrimination in aspects of American life, even with a black President.

And, in fact, one of the dangers has been that by electing a black President, people have then said, well, there must be no problems at all. And obviously you see Ferguson and some of the issues that we've seen in the criminal justice system indicating the degree to which that was always false.

So, does that mean all the work that was done along the way was worthless? No, of course not. But it does mean that if any of you begin to work on an issue that you care deeply about, don't be disappointed if a year out, things haven't been completely solved. Don't give up and succumb to cynicism if, after five years, poverty has not been eradicated, and prejudice is still out there somewhere, and we haven’t resolved all of the steps we need to take to reverse climate change. It’s okay.

Dr. King said, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.” And it doesn't bend on its own. It bends because we pull it in that direction. But it requires a series of generations working and building off of what the previous one has done.

And so, as President, I think about it in those ways. I consider myself a runner, and I run my leg of the race. But then I’ve got a baton and I’m passing it on to the next person. And hopefully they're running in the right direction, as opposed to the wrong direction. And hopefully they don't drop the baton. And then they go and then they pass it on to somebody else. And that's how I think you've got to think about change, generally.

All right. It is a young woman’s turn. Yes, right here, in the red. Yes, you. No, no, that's you. You're wearing red. Yes.

Question: Hi, I’m Louisa. I’m a climate change campaigner, and I want to thank you for your smart and creative way to try and sort of get a grip on the problem.

President Obama: Yes.

Question: And given you've been talking about the value of social movements, I was wondering which campaigns have made you change your mind while you've been in office and inspired you to do things, and where you think we need more external pressure from campaigns to create meaningful change.

President Obama: Well, that's an interesting question. And are you talking about climate change, in particular? Or are you talking about just generally, on a whole spectrum of issues? That's interesting. It’s interesting because I started as a community organizer trying to pressure politicians into getting things done. And then -- now I’m on the other side, and so what has worked and what hasn’t.

Well, in the United States what’s been remarkable is the rapidity with which the marriage equality movement changed the political landscape and hearts and minds, and resulted in actual changes in law. It’s probably been the fastest set of changes in terms of a social movement that I’ve seen.

On issues of LGBT rights generally, I didn't need a lot of pressure. I came in working on ending a policy called “Don’t ask, Don't tell,” that was preventing LGBT citizens from serving in our military openly. We did that very systematically. Policies in terms of those who had HIV-AIDS being able to emigrate to our country, hospital visitations -- there were a whole host of things that we were already doing.

But on marriage equality, I was in favor of what’s called civil unions. My notion was initially that labeling those partnerships as marriage wasn’t necessary as long as people were getting the same rights, and it would disentangle them from some of the religious connotations that marriage had in the minds of a lot of Americans. And that's where I think -- I have to confess my children generally had an impact on me. People I loved who were in monogamous same-sex relationships explained to me what I should have understood earlier, which is it was not simply about legal rights but about a sense of stigma, that if you're calling it something different it means that somehow it means less in the eyes of society.

I believe that the manner in which the LGBT community described marriage equality as not some radical thing, but actually reached out to people who said they care about family values, and said, if you care about everything that families provide -- stability and commitment and partnership -- then this is actually a pretty conservative position to take, that you should be in favor of it. I thought there was a lot of smarts in reaching out and building and framing the issue in a way that could bring in people who initially didn’t agree with them.

As a general rule, I think that what, for example, Black Lives Matter is doing now to bring attention to the problem of a criminal justice system that sometimes is not treating people fairly based on race, or reacting to shootings of individuals by police officers, has been really effective in bringing attention to problems.

One of the things I caution young people about, though, that I don't think is effective is once you’ve highlighted an issue and brought it to people’s attention and shined a spotlight, and elected officials or people who are in a position to start bringing about change are ready to sit down with you, then you can't just keep on yelling at them. And you can't refuse to meet because that might compromise the purity of your position.

The value of social movements and activism is to get you at the table, get you in the room, and then to start trying to figure out how is this problem going to be solved. You, then, have a responsibility to prepare an agenda that is achievable, that can institutionalize the changes you seek, and to engage the other side, and occasionally to take half a loaf that will advance the gains that you seek, understanding that there’s going to be more work to do, but this is what is achievable at this moment.

And too often what I see is wonderful activism that highlights a problem, but then people feel so passionately and are so invested in the purity of their position that they never take that next step and say, okay, well, now I got to sit down and try to actually get something done.

So the Paris agreement that we just negotiated and that a number of countries just signed yesterday on Earth Day -- the agreement we shaped is not going to, by itself, solve climate change. The science argues that the world is going to need to do a lot more in order for us to prevent catastrophic climate change. But my strategy from the start has been, all right, if I can get the Chinese to agree with us, as the two largest emitters, that we have to do something, and lock in China with us for the first time to take some serious steps around reducing carbon emissions, and if by getting the two largest emitters I can now leverage all the other smaller countries to also put in their own targets for emissions, and if we can set up an architecture that recognizes the need for carbon reduction and can allow people to -- allow countries to hold each other accountable, then that's a start. And we can now start turning up the dial as our science and our understanding improves, and as technology improves, so that poor countries don't feel that they have to choose between development and carbon reductions. And there are all kinds of compromises in that. But it's a start.

Now, there are some climate activists who, after the Paris agreement was signed, said, ah, this is not enough! But they’re not in a conversation, apparently, with Prime Minister Modi of India, for example, who’s thinking, I've still got several hundred million people without electricity, and I have some obligation to try to relieve them of their poverty and suffering, so I've got to balance those equities against the imperatives of the planet as a whole.

Now, the good news is, is that most of the groups that have been involved in this process have been pretty sophisticated. But that's a general principle that I think all of you should consider. Make noise and occasionally you can act a little crazy to get attention, to shine a spotlight on the issue, to highlight it. But once people who are in power and in a position to actually do something about it are prepared to meet and listen with you, do your homework; be prepared; present a plausible set of actions; and negotiate and be prepared to move the ball down the field even if it doesn’t get all the way there. All right?

Question: Do I have permission to act a little bit crazy? --

President Obama: No. You do, but it wouldn't be fair if you just start yelling out a question and...because it's a guy’s turn also.

All right, go ahead.

Question: Thank you, President, firstly, for all you did for the world and for mankind. I think you made a great contribution and you inspire a lot of young people across the world. But my question is slightly -- on East Africa -- since you said you can see an equation. Just last week, 400 young boys died in the Mediterranean Sea in trying to seek a better life. Most left in Somalia. And those young boys have lost their livelihoods. Since, there is international ships coming to the Somali territorial water, and those ships have been trying to protect the international ships from the piracy. But at the same time they have been doing it, there has been a lot of proven cases that they have been dumped as waste in the Somali Sea.

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And also there is proven cases within the coast cities that children are dying with very strange diseases that they’ve never seen, that these things are coming to the coast came out from the sea.

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So today I have the opportunity to ask you, while you're here for the next eight or nine months that you have, can you kindly use your leverage within the international arena to galvanize the international community to look at this issue? And can you share some practical steps that you can take to ensure --

President Obama: Well, I'll be honest with you. I'm not fully familiar with some of the issues you referred to. I'm certainly familiar with the challenges that Somalia has been going through. And we've been working aggressively to try to help Mogadishu develop a functioning state that can protect its people and that can get an economy moving that gives young people opportunity.

I'm certainly familiar with the issues of piracy and the international concerns that led to many of these ships patrolling these areas. I'm less familiar with some of the issues that you discussed. So what I'll do is, after this meeting, as we're shaking hands, I'll try to get some additional information from you. One of the things I've learned as President is, although you can always fake your way through an answer, sometimes it's really good just to say, you know what, I don't know all the answers on this one. So I'll find out more about the specifics that you're talking about.

All right. See, now since you’ve raised your hand and you didn’t continue to act crazy, I'm going to go ahead and call on you. Go ahead.

Question: First of all, sincerest apologies. I guess --

President Obama: That's okay --

Question: -- I got overwhelmed.

President Obama: You got -- You got excited.

Question: My name is Maria Munir. And you’ve been speaking a lot about how we have to become the change that we want to see. And you’ve spoken about progress, about human rights, and about how we in the United States and the UK need to lead in terms of civil rights movements and LGBTQ issues. Now I'm about to do something terrifying, which is I'm coming out to you as a non-binary person, which means that I don't fit within -- I'm getting emotional, I'm so sorry.

President Obama: That's okay.

Question: I come from a -- I'm from Pakistani-Muslim background, which inevitably has cultural implications. And I know that in North Carolina, recently, with the bathroom bill, and people are being forced obviously to produce birth certificates to prove their gender in order to go to a toilet. In UK, we don't recognize non-binary people under the Equality Act, so we literally have no rights. So if there was any discrimination, there’s nothing we can do.

I've been working for the last nine months with the UK Civil Service Fast Stream with Julianne Smith in order to do what I can, even though I'm still at university and running for local election at the same time. I managed to get them to respect pronouns. I've managed to get them to commit to gender-neutral toilets. And these are thing I've done as a student. And I really, really wish that yourself and David Cameron would take us seriously as transgender people. And perhaps you could elucidate as to what you can do to go beyond what has been accepted as the LGBTQ rights movement, in including people who fit outside the social norms.

President Obama: First of all, that wasn’t that crazy. I thought you were going to ask to come up here and dance with me or something. But, look, I'm incredibly proud of the steps it sounds like you’ve already taken to speak out about your own experience and then to try to create a social movement and change laws. It sounds to me like you're on the right track.

I can't speak for David Cameron, although I will say that on LGBT issues, I think David has been ahead of the curve relative to a lot of other leaders around the world and even here in the UK. I can say from my perspective that we're taking a lot of serious steps to address these issues within the federal government.

The challenge we've had is North Carolina, the law that comes up, for example, that's a state law. And because of our system of government, I can't overturn on my own state laws unless a federal law is passed that prohibits states from doing these things. And with the Congress I currently have, that's not likely to happen.

But we're doing a lot of work administratively. And as I said, you should feel encouraged just by virtue of the fact that I think social attitudes on this issue have changed faster than I’ve seen on any other issue. It doesn't feel fast enough for you or for those who are impacted. And that's good -- you shouldn’t feel satisfied. You should keep pushing. But I think the trend lines are good on this. We're moving in the right direction -- and in part, because of a courageous act of young people like yourself. So stick with it.

All right. Let’s see. Gentleman in the green here.

Question: Thank you much. I agree with everything you said so far about compromise. But in an age of polarized politics, how do you inspire people to commit to compromise and fighting for the middle ground?

President Obama: I think it’s a great question. It’s something that I wrestle with. I would distinguish between compromising on principles and compromising in getting things done in the here and now. And what I mean by that is I am uncompromising on the notion that every person, regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, has a dignity and worth and have to be treated equally. So I'm uncompromising in that basic principle.

And I’m also of the belief that in order to realize the principle, every child has to have true opportunity; that every child is deserving of a decent education, and decent health care, and the ability to go to college so that they can make of themselves what they will. So that's a powerful principle in me. That drives my politics.

But if I’m sitting with Congress, and I have the opportunity to get half a million more kids into an early childhood education program, even though I know that that will 2 million who need it out of the program, but the alternative is none, I’ll take half a million, right? And I can look at myself in the mirror and feel good about the 500,000 that I'm helping, knowing that the next round of budget negotiations that we have, I'm going to go for another half a million, and I'm going to go for another half a million after that.

So I think it's important for everyone to understand that you'd have to be principled, you have to have a North Star, a moral compass. There should be a reason for you getting involved in social issues other than vanity, or just trying to mix and mingle and meet cute people that you're interested in -- although that's not a bad reason. But you have to recognize that, particularly in pluralistic societies and democratic governments like we have in the United States and the UK, there are people who disagree with us. They have different perspectives. They come from different points of view. And they're not bad people just because they disagree with us. They may, in fact, assert that they've got similar principles to ours, but they just disagree with us on the means to vindicate those principles.

And you are absolutely right that we are in this age now -- partly because of what's happened with our media, in which people from different political parties, different political orientations can spend the bulk of their day only talking to, and listening to, and hearing the perspectives of people who already agree with them.

I know less about the UK media, but in the United States, it used to be we had three television stations. And people might complain about the dominance of these three television stations, but there was one virtue to them, which was everybody was kind of watching the same thing and had the same understanding of what the facts were on any given issue. And today, you have 500 television stations, and the Internet will give you a thousand different sources of information. And so what's increasingly happening in the United States is, is that if you're a conservative, then you're watching Fox News or you're reading a conservative blogpost. If you're a liberal, then you're reading the Huffington Post or reading The New York Times. And there's this massive divergence that's taking place in terms of just what the agreed-upon facts and assumptions are that we're talking about. And that does make it harder to compromise.

And there have been some interesting studies that have been done showing that if you spend time with people who just agree with you on any particular issue, that you become even more extreme in your convictions because you're never contradicted and everybody just mutually reinforces their perspective.

That's why I think it is so important for all the young people here to seek out people who don't agree with you. That will teach you to compromise. It will also help you, by the way, if you decide to get married.

But the most important thing is understanding that compromise does not mean surrendering what you believe, it just means that you are recognizing the truth, the fact that these other people who disagree with you or this other political party, or this other nation -- that they have dignity too, that they have worth as well, and you have to hear them and see them. And sometimes we don't.

All right, how much time do I have, by the way, people? One more question? I'll make it two. I'll make it two. Let's see. The young lady right there. Go ahead.

Question: Good morning, Mr. President.

President Obama: Good morning.

Question: I'm losing my voice, so I apologize.

President Obama: That's okay.

Question: My name is

[inaudible at: 62:33

], and my question for you is, what leadership skills have you found yourself relying on most during your time in office, and why?

President Obama: A thick skin -- is very helpful. I was just talking about this, actually, with the Ambassador last night. Where is Matthew? I think I was just talking about this. Yes, I think we were just talking about this.

Two things I'm pretty good at -- well, let me say this. One of the things that happens as you get older is you are, hopefully, more aware of and honest with yourself about what your strengths are and what your weaknesses are. I could list my weaknesses, but you asked me about the things I've found useful, so I'll skip over that.

Two things I'm pretty good at -- one is attracting talent. And anybody who wants to be a leader, I would advise you to spend a lot of time thinking about how am I helping other people do great things. Because, as President of the United States, I am dealing with so many issues and I can't be expert on everything, and I can't be everywhere. And the one thing I can do is assemble a team of people who are really good and really smart and really committed, and care about their mission, and have integrity, and then give them the tools, or get rid of the barriers, or help coach them so that they can do a great job.

And I think leaders who think that their primary job is to make everybody do exactly what they want, as opposed to helping to organize really talented people to collectively go to where we need to go typically stumble. You should be predisposed to other people's power -- how can I make the people around me do great things. If they do, then, by definition, I'll succeed, because that's my job, is to get this team moving in the right direction.

So that’s one. The second thing, I'm pretty good at setting a course, a general direction, and being able to hopefully unify that team around that general direction. Oftentimes I have to rely on other people to implement and execute to get there, but setting a direction requires also listening to what is it that's important to people.

And the third thing is synthesizing -- I think it's very useful as a leader to be able to -- particularly on complex issues -- to sit around a table and hear a lot of different points of view, and be able to get to what's the nub of the issue, what's the heart of the problem, what's the essential conflict that we're trying to resolve, and get everybody to see the problem the same -- see what the problem is.

Because I see a lot of organizations, they spend a lot of time doing a lot of work, but they're working on the wrong thing or they're distracted from the essential issue. Somebody once said, it's more important to do the right thing than to do things right. And what they meant was you can hack away and build this amazing path through the jungle, but if you're headed in the wrong direction then it's a waste of time. So you've got to make sure that people understand what it is that we're trying to solve.

Yeah, that's enough.

I've got time for one more. All right. The Sikh gentleman. Yes.

Question: Hello. So my issue -- my question is related to an issue which minorities face in the USA. We see many times Sikhs being discriminated against, as Muslims, and even if we were Muslims, that still doesn't give the right for anyone to be Islamophobic to us. So my question is, why isn't a firm stand being taken on issues such as ample security, where there's a lot of issues with TSA? Since your neighbors in Canada -- Justin Trudeau, he recently said that he's going to apologize for an issue which happened 102 years ago, and he has recently become Prime Minister, so why is it that he is taking a firm stand on an issue which happened so long ago, whereas countries such as the USA aren't taking a stand against discrimination when it is 2016?

President Obama: Hold on. Before everybody starts applauding that question -- let's make sure that we're on the same wavelength in terms of facts. I have taken an adamant stand against making sure that we're not racially profiling in airports. And it is explicit TSA policy not to racially profile.

Now, does that mean that out of the hundreds of airports and thousands of TSA officials that there has not been times where a Sikh is going through the airport and somebody targets them for a secondary screening because of what they look like? Of course that's happened. But that's not my administration's policy. And I'm happy to provide you with chapter and verse as to why we have taken an explicit stand against this.

It does raise a broader issue that you're mentioning, which is that in pluralistic societies like the United States, like the UK, in diverse societies, one of our biggest challenges is going to be how do we approach keeping people safe and preventing terrorist acts. There was a time when terrorism here in the UK was largely emanating from the IRA. So this is not a uniquely Muslim problem. What is also true is, today there are a tiny subset of groups that have perverted Islam in justifying killing innocent people. And how we do that in a way that is consistent with our values and consistent with pluralism and respect for religion is vitally important.

And I, about four months ago, visited a mosque in the United States precisely to send a message that our greatest allies in this process are the incredible Muslim Americans who are, historically, fully integrated into our society, that economically, are actually doing better than the average American in many measures, that are fighting in armed forces, that are defending our people in all sorts of ways, and that if we engage in Islamophobia, we are not only betraying what is essential to us, but just as a practical matter, engaging in self-defeating behavior if we're serious about terrorism.

And so the language that we use, the tactics and approaches that we take, the respect that we show all people -- those are security matters. It's not just feel-good, liberal political correctness. It's a matter of what is it that we're fighting for, and how are we going to win this fight against people who are so blocked off from the reality of others who they don't agree with that they'd be willing to blow themselves up and kill hundreds of people. It's the extreme of what I was just talking to this gentleman about, about the inability to compromise and recognize difference, and feel comfortable with that.

So, look, this is going to be a challenging issue for some time to come. But I'm confident that it is an issue that we can succeed at, as long as young people like you are committed to not just believing the right thing and feeling the right ways, but fighting for it; and so long as you're engaged and active, and speaking out, and listening. And if you do that, I feel pretty good about our futures. I feel good about our chances.

You guys inspire me. Thank you very much. Appreciate it.

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# Address to the Peoples of Europe

Guten tag. It is -- It is wonderful to see all of you, and I want to begin by thanking Chancellor Merkel for being here. On behalf of the American people, I want to thank Angela for being a champion of our alliance. And on behalf of all of us, I want to thank you for your commitment to freedom, and equality, and human rights, which is a reflection of your inspiring life. I truly believe you’ve shown us the leadership of steady hands -- how do you call it? The Merkel-Raute. And over the last seven years, I have relied on your friendship and counsel, and your firm moral compass. So we very much appreciate your Chancellor, Angela Merkel.

To the members of the Bundestag, Prime Minister Weil, Mayor Schostock, distinguished guests, people of Germany. And I’m especially pleased to see the young people here -- from Germany and across Europe. We also have some proud Americans here.

I have to admit that I have developed a special place in my heart for the German people. Back when I was a candidate for this office, you welcomed me with a small rally in Berlin, where I spoke of the change that’s possible when the world stands as one. As President, you've treated me and Michelle and our daughters to wonderful hospitality. You've offered me excellent beer -- and weisswurst in Krun. You've now hosted our delegation here in Hannover.

My only regret is that I have never been to Germany for Oktoberfest. So I will have to come back. And I suspect it's more fun when you're not President. So my timing will be good.

And as always, I bring the friendship of the American people. We consider the German people, and all of our European allies, to be among our closest friends in the world -- because we share so much experience and so many of the same values. We believe that nations and peoples should live in security and peace. We believe in creating opportunity that lifts up not just the few but the many. And I’m proud to be the first American President to come to Europe and be able to say that, in the United States, health care is not a privilege, it is now a right for all. We share that as well.

Perhaps most importantly, we believe in the equality and inherent dignity of every human being. Today in America, people have the freedom to marry the person that they love. We believe in justice, that no child in the world should ever die from a mosquito bite; that no one should suffer from the ache of an empty stomach; that, together, we can save our planet and the world’s most vulnerable people from the worst effects of climate change. These are things that we share. It's borne of common experience.

And this is what I want to talk to you about today -- the future that we are building together -- not separately, but together. And that starts right here in Europe.

And I want to begin with an observation that, given the challenges that we face in the world and the headlines we see every day, may seem improbable, but it’s true. We are fortunate to be living in the most peaceful, most prosperous, most progressive era in human history. That may surprise young people who are watching TV or looking at your phones and it seems like only bad news comes through every day. But consider that it’s been decades since the last war between major powers. More people live in democracies. We’re wealthier and healthier and better educated, with a global economy that has lifted up more than a billion people from extreme poverty, and created new middle classes from the Americas to Africa to Asia. Think about the health of the average person in the world -- tens of millions of lives that we now save from disease and infant mortality, and people now living longer lives.

Around the world, we’re more tolerant -- with more opportunity for women, and gays and lesbians, as we push back on bigotry and prejudice. And around the world, there’s a new generation of young people -- like you -- that are connected by technology, and driven by your idealism and your imagination, and you're working together to start new ventures, and to hold governments more accountable, and advance human dignity.

If you had to choose a moment in time to be born, any time in human history, and you didn't know ahead of time what nationality you were or what gender or what your economic status might be, you'd choose today -- which isn't to say that there is not still enormous suffering and enormous tragedy and so much work for us to do. It is to remember that the trajectory of our history over the last 50, 100 years has been remarkable. And we can't take that for granted, and we should take confidence in our ability to be able to shape our own destiny.

Now, that doesn't mean that we can be complacent because today dangerous forces do threaten to pull the world backward, and our progress is not inevitable. These challenges threaten Europe and they threaten our transatlantic community. We're not immune from the forces of change around the world. As they have elsewhere, barbaric terrorists have slaughtered innocent people in Paris and Brussels, and Istanbul and San Bernardino, California. And we see these tragedies in places central to our daily lives -- an airport or cafÃ©, a workplace or a theater -- and it unsettles us. It makes us unsure in our day-to-day lives -- fearful not just for ourselves but those that we love. Conflicts from South Sudan to Syria to Afghanistan have sent millions fleeing, seeking the relative safety of Europe’s shores, but that puts new strains on countries and local communities, and threatens to distort our politics.

Russian aggression has flagrantly violated the sovereignty and territory of an independent European nation, Ukraine, and that unnerves our allies in Eastern Europe, threatening our vision of a Europe that is whole, free and at peace. And it seems to threaten the progress that's been made since the end of the Cold War.

Slow economic growth in Europe, especially in the south, has left millions unemployed, including a generation of young people without jobs and who may look to the future with diminishing hopes. And all these persistent challenges have led some to question whether European integration can long endure; whether you might be better off separating off, redrawing some of the barriers and the laws between nations that existed in the 20th century.

Across our countries, including in the United States, a lot of workers and families are still struggling to recover from the worst economic crisis in generations. And that trauma of millions who lost their jobs and their homes and their savings is still felt. And meanwhile, there are profound trends underway that have been going on for decades -- globalization, automation that -- in some cases, of depressed wages, and made workers in a weaker position to bargain for better working conditions. Wages have stagnated in many advanced countries while other costs have gone up. Inequality has increased. And for many people, it’s harder than ever just to hold on.

This is happening in Europe; we see some of these trends in the United States and across the advanced economies. And these concerns and anxieties are real. They are legitimate. They cannot be ignored, and they deserve solutions from those in power.

Unfortunately, in the vacuum, if we do not solve these problems, you start seeing those who would try to exploit these fears and frustrations and channel them in a destructive way. A creeping emergence of the kind of politics that the European project was founded to reject -- an “us” versus “them” mentality that tries to blame our problems on the other, somebody who doesn’t look like us or doesn’t pray like us -- whether it’s immigrants, or Muslims, or somebody who is deemed different than us.

And you see increasing intolerance in our politics. And loud voices get the most attention. This reminds me of the poem by the great Irish poet W.B. Yeats, where the best lack all conviction, and the worst are full of passionate intensity.

So this is a defining moment. And what happens on this continent has consequences for people around the globe. If a unified, peaceful, liberal, pluralistic, free-market Europe begins to doubt itself, begins to question the progress that’s been made over the last several decades, then we can’t expect the progress that is just now taking hold in many places around the world will continue. Instead, we will be empowering those who argue that democracy can’t work, that intolerance and tribalism and organizing ourselves along ethnic lines, and authoritarianism and restrictions on the press -- that those are the things that the challenges of today demand.

So I’ve come here today, to the heart of Europe, to say that the United States, and the entire world, needs a strong and prosperous and democratic and united Europe.

Perhaps you need an outsider, somebody who is not European, to remind you of the magnitude of what you have achieved. The progress that I described was made possible in large measure by ideals that originated on this continent in a great Enlightenment and the founding of new republics. Of course, that progress didn’t travel a straight line. In the last century -- twice in just 30 years -- the forces of empire and intolerance and extreme nationalism consumed this continent. And cities like this one were largely reduced to rubble. Tens of millions of men and women and children were killed.

But from the ruins of the Second World War, our nations set out to remake the world -- to build a new international order and the institutions to uphold it. A United Nations to prevent another world war and advance a more just and lasting peace. International financial institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund to promote prosperity for all peoples. A Universal Declaration of Human Rights to advance the “inalienable rights of all members of the human family.” And here in Europe, giants like Chancellor Adenauer set out to bind old adversaries through commerce and through trade. As Adenauer said in those early days, “European unity was a dream of a few. It became a hope for [the] many. Today it is a necessity for all of us.”

And it wasn’t easy. Old animosities had to be overcome. National pride had to be joined with a commitment to a common good. Complex questions of sovereignty and burden-sharing had to be answered. Ant at every step, the impulse to pull back -- for each country to go its own way -- had to be resisted. More than once, skeptics predicted the demise of this great project.

But the vision of European unity soldiered on -- and having defended Europe’s freedom in war, America stood with you every step of this journey. A Marshall Plan to rebuild; an airlift to save Berlin; a NATO alliance to defend our way of life. America’s commitment to Europe was captured by a young American President, John F. Kennedy, when he stood in a free West Berlin and declared that “freedom is indivisible, and when one man is enslaved, all are not free.”

With strength and resolve and the power of our ideals, and a belief in a unified Europe, we didn’t simply end the Cold War -- freedom won. Germany was reunited. You welcomed new democracies into an even “ever closer union.” You may argue over whose football clubs are better, vote for different singers on Eurovision. But your accomplishment -- more than 500 million people speaking 24 languages in 28 countries, 19 with a common currency, in one European Union -- remains one of the greatest political and economic achievements of modern times.

Yes, European unity can require frustrating compromise. It adds layers of government that can slow decision-making. I understand. I've been in meetings with the European Commission. And, as an American, we're famously disdainful of government. We understand how easy it must be to vent at Brussels and complain. But remember that every member of your union is a democracy. That's not an accident. Remember that no EU country has raised arms against another. That's not an accident. Remember that NATO is as strong as it’s ever been.

Remember that our market economies -- as Angela and I saw this morning -- are the greatest generators of innovation and wealth and opportunity in history. Our freedom, our quality of life remains the envy of the world, so much so that parents are willing to walk across deserts, and cross the seas on makeshift rafts, and risk everything in the hope of giving their children the blessings that we -- that you -- enjoy -- blessings that you cannot take for granted.

This continent, in the 20th century, was at constant war. People starved on this continent. Families were separated on this continent. And now people desperately want to come here precisely because of what you've created. You can't take that for granted.

And today, more than ever, a strong, united Europe remains, as Adenauer said, a necessity for all of us. It’s a necessity for the United States, because Europe’s security and prosperity is inherently indivisible from our own. We can’t cut ourselves off from you. Our economies are integrated. Our cultures are integrated. Our peoples are integrated. You saw the response of the American people to Paris and Brussels -- it’s because, in our imaginations, this is our cities.

A strong, united Europe is a necessity for the world because an integrated Europe remains vital to our international order. Europe helps to uphold the norms and rules that can maintain peace and promote prosperity around the world.

Consider what we’ve done in recent years: Pulling the global economy back from the brink of depression and putting the world on the path of recovery. A comprehensive deal that's cut off every single one of Iran’s paths to a nuclear bomb -- part of our shared vision of a world without nuclear weapons. In Paris, the most ambitious agreement in history to fight climate change. Stopping Ebola in West Africa and saving countless lives. Rallying the world around new sustainable development, including our goal to end extreme poverty. None of those things could have happened if I -- if the United States did not have a partnership with a strong and united Europe. It wouldn’t have happened.

That’s what’s possible when Europe and America and the world stand as one. And that’s precisely what we're going to need to face down the very real dangers that we face today. So let me just lay out the kind of cooperation that we're going to need. We need a strong Europe to bear its share of the burden, working with us on behalf of our collective security. The United States has an extraordinary military, the best the world has ever known, but the nature of today’s threats means we can’t deal with these challenges by ourselves.

Right now, the most urgent threat to our nations is ISIL, and that’s why we’re united in our determination to destroy it. And all 28 NATO allies are contributing to our coalition -- whether it’s striking ISIL targets in Syria and Iraq, or supporting the air campaign, or training local forces in Iraq, or providing critical humanitarian aid. And we continue to make progress, pushing ISIL back from territory that it controlled.

And just as I’ve approved additional support for Iraqi forces against ISIL, I’ve decided to increase U.S. support for local forces fighting ISIL in Syria. A small number of American Special Operations Forces are already on the ground in Syria and their expertise has been critical as local forces have driven ISIL out of key areas. So given the success, I’ve approved the deployment of up 250 additional U.S. personnel in Syria, including Special Forces, to keep up this momentum. They’re not going to be leading the fight on the ground, but they will be essential in providing the training and assisting local forces that continue to drive ISIL back.

So, make no mistake. These terrorists will learn the same lesson as others before them have, which is, your hatred is no match for our nations united in the defense of our way of life. And just as we remain relentless on the military front, we’re not going to give up on diplomacy to end the civil war in Syria, because the suffering of the Syrian people has to end, and that requires an effective political transition.

But this remains a difficult fight, and none of us can solve this problem by ourselves. Even as European countries make important contributions against ISIL, Europe, including NATO, can still do more. So I’ve spoken to Chancellor Merkel and I’ll be meeting later with the Presidents of France and the Prime Ministers of Great Britain and of Italy. In Syria and Iraq, we need more nations contributing to the air campaign. We need more nations contributing trainers to help build up local forces in Iraq. We need more nations to contribute economic assistance to Iraq so it can stabilize liberated areas and break the cycle of violent extremism so that ISIL cannot come back.

These terrorists are doing everything in their power to strike our cities and kill our citizens, so we need to do everything in our power to stop them. And that includes closing gaps so terrorists can’t pull off attacks like those in Paris and Brussels.

Which brings me to one other point. Europeans, like Americans, cherish your privacy. And many are skeptical about governments collecting and sharing information, for good reason. That skepticism is healthy. Germans remember their history of government surveillance -- so do Americans, by the way, particularly those who were fighting on behalf of civil rights.

So it’s part of our democracies to want to make sure our governments are accountable.

But I want to say this to young people who value their privacy and spend a lot of time on their phones: The threat of terrorism is real. In the United States, I’ve worked to reform our surveillance programs to ensure that they’re consistent with the rule of law and upholding our values, like privacy -- and, by the way, we include the privacy of people outside of the United States. We care about Europeans’ privacy, not just Americans’ privacy.

But I also, in working on these issues, have come to recognize security and privacy don’t have to be a contradiction. We can protect both. And we have to. If we truly value our liberty, then we have to take the steps that are necessary to share information and intelligence within Europe, as well as between the United States and Europe, to stop terrorists from traveling and crossing borders and killing innocent people.

And as today’s diffuse threats evolve, our alliance has to evolve. So we’re going to have a NATO summit this summer in Warsaw, and I will insist that all of us need to meet our responsibilities, united, together. That means standing with the people of Afghanistan as they build their security forces and push back against violent extremism. It means more ships in the Aegean to shut down criminal networks who are profiting by smuggling desperate families and children.

And that said, NATO’s central mission is, and always will be, our solemn duty -- our Article 5 commitment to our common defense. That’s why we’ll continue to bolster the defense of our frontline allies in Poland and Romania and the Baltic states.

So we have to both make sure that NATO carries out its traditional mission, but also to meet the threats of NATO’s southern flank. That’s why we need to stay nimble, and make sure our forces are interoperable, and invest in new capabilities like cyber defense and missile defense. And that’s why every NATO member should be contributing its full share -- 2 percent of GDP -- towards our common security, something that doesn’t always happen. And I’ll be honest, sometimes Europe has been complacent about its own defense.

Just as we stand firm in our own defense, we have to uphold our most basic principles of our international order, and that’s a principle that nations like Ukraine have the right to choose their own destiny. Remember that it was Ukrainians on the Maidan, many of them your age, reaching out for a future with Europe that prompted Russia to send in its military. After all that Europe endured in the 20th century, we must not allow borders to be redrawn by brute force in the 21st century. So we should keep helping Ukraine with its reforms to improve its economy and consolidate its democracy and modernize its forces to protect its independence.

And I want good relations with Russia, and have invested a lot in good relations with Russia. But we need to keep sanctions on Russia in place until Russia fully implements the Minsk agreements that Chancellor Merkel and President Hollande and others have worked so hard to maintain, and provide a path for a political resolution of this issue. And ultimately, it is my fervent hope that Russia recognizes that true greatness comes not from bullying neighbors, but by working with the world, which is the only way to deliver lasting economic growth and progress to the Russian people.

Now, our collective security rests on a foundation of prosperity, so that brings me to my second point. The world needs a prosperous and growing Europe -- not just a strong Europe, but a prosperous and growing Europe that generates good jobs and wages for its people.

As I mentioned before, the economic anxieties many feel today on both sides of the Atlantic are real. The disruptive changes brought about by the global economy, unfortunately, sometimes are hitting certain groups, especially working-class communities, more heavily. And if neither the burdens, nor the benefits of our global economy are being fairy distributed, it’s no wonder that people rise up and reject globalization. If there are too few winners and too many losers as the global economy integrates, people are going to push back.

So all of us in positions of power have a responsibility as leaders of government and business and civil society to help people realize the promise of economic and security in this integrated economy. And the good news is, we know how to do it. Sometimes we just lack the political will to do it.

In the United States, our economy is growing again, but the United States can’t be the sole engine of global growth. And countries should not have to choose between responding to crises and investing in their people. So we need to pursue reforms to position us for long-term prosperity, and support demand and invest in the future. All of our countries, for example, could be investing more in infrastructure. All of our countries need to invest in science and research and development that sparks new innovation and new industries. All of our countries have to invest in our young people, and make sure that they have the skills and the training and the education they need to adapt to this rapidly changing world. All of our countries need to worry about inequality, and make sure that workers are getting a fair share of the incredible productivity that technology and global supply chains are producing.

But if you’re really concerned about inequality, if you’re really concerned about the plight of workers, if you’re a progressive, it’s my firm belief that you can’t turn inward. That’s not the right answer. We have to keep increasing the trade and investment that supports jobs, as we’re working to do between the United States and the EU. We need to keep implementing reforms to our banking and financial systems so that the excesses and abuses that triggered the financial crisis never happen again.

But we can’t do that individually, nation by nation, because finance now is transnational. It moves around too fast. If we’re not coordinating between Europe and the United States and Asia, then it won’t work.

As the world has been reminded in recent weeks, we need to close loopholes that allow corporations and wealthy individuals to avoid paying their fair share of taxes through tax havens and tax avoidance, trillions of dollars that could be going towards pressing needs like education and health care and infrastructure. But to do that, we have to work together.

Here in Europe, as you work to strengthen your union -- including through labor and banking reforms, and by ensuring growth across the Eurozone -- you will have the staunch support of the United States. But you’re going to have to do it together, because your economies are too integrated to try to solve these problems on your own. And I want to repeat: We have to confront the injustice of widening economic inequality. But that is going to require collective work, because capital is mobile, and if only a few countries are worrying about it, then a lot of businesses will head toward places that don’t care about it quite as much.

For a lot of years, it was thought that countries had to choose between economic growth and economic inclusion. Now we know the truth -- when wealth is increasingly concentrated among the few at the top, it’s not only a moral challenge to us but it actually drags down a country’s growth potential. We need growth that is broad and lifts everybody up. We need tax policies that do right by working families.

And those like me who support European unity and free trade also have a profound responsibility to champion strong protections for workers -- a living wage and the right to organize, and a strong safety net, and a commitment to protect consumers and the environment upon which we all depend. If we really want to reduce inequality, we've got to make sure everyone who works hard gets a fair shot -- and that's especially true for young people like you -- with education, and job training, and quality health care and good wages. And that includes, by the way, making sure that there's equal pay for equal work for women.

The point is, we have to reform many of our economies. But the answer to reform is not to start cutting ourselves off from each other. Rather, it's to work together. And this brings me back to where I began. The world depends upon a democratic Europe that upholds the principles of pluralism and diversity and freedom that are our common creed. As free peoples, we cannot allow the forces that I’ve described -- fears about security or economic anxieties -- to undermine our commitment to the universal values that are the source of our strength.

Democracy, I understand, can be messy. It can be slow. It can be frustrating. I know that. I have to deal with a Congress. We have to constantly work to make sure government is not a collection of distant, detached institutions, but is connected and responsive to the everyday concerns of our people. There's no doubt that how a united Europe works together can be improved. But look around the world -- at authoritarian governments and theocracies that rule by fear and oppression -- there is no doubt that democracy is still the most just and effective form of government ever created.

And when I talk about democracy, I don't just mean elections, because there are a number of countries where people get 70, 80 percent of the vote, but they control all the media and the judiciary. And civil society organizations and NGOs can't organize, and have to be registered, and are intimidated. I mean real democracy, the sort that we see here in Europe and in the United States. So we have to be vigilant in defense of these pillars of democracy -- not just elections, but rule of law, as well as fair elections, a free press, vibrant civil societies where citizens can work for change.

And we should be suspicious of those who claim to have the interests of Europe at heart and yet don't practice the very values that are essential to Europe, that have made freedom in Europe so real.

So, yes, these are unsettling times. And when the future is uncertain, there seems to be an instinct in our human nature to withdraw to the perceived comfort and security of our own tribe, our own sect, our own nationality, people who look like us, sound like us. But in today's world, more than any time in human history, that is a false comfort. It pits people against one another because of what they look or how they pray or who they love. And yet, we know where that kind of twisted thinking can lead. It can lead to oppression. It can lead to segregation and internment camps. And to the Shoah and Srebrenica.

In the United States, we’ve long wrestled with questions of race and integration, and we do to this day. And we still have a lot of work to do. But our progress allows somebody like me to now stand here as President of the United States. That's because we committed ourselves to a larger ideal, one based on a creed -- not a race, not a nationality -- a set of principles; truths that we held to be self-evident that all men were created equal. And now, as Europe confronts questions of immigration and religion and assimilation, I want you to remember that our countries are stronger, they are more secure and more successful when we welcome and integrate people of all backgrounds and faith, and make them feel as one. And that includes our fellow citizens who are Muslim.

Look, the sudden arrival of so many people from beyond our borders, especially when their cultures are very different, that can be daunting. We have immigration issues in the United States as well, along our southern border of the United States and from people arriving from all around the world who get a visa and decide they want to stay. And I know the politics of immigration and refugees is hard. It's hard everywhere, in every country. And just as a handful of neighborhoods shouldn't bear all the burden of refugee resettlement, neither should any one nation. All of us have to step up, all of us have to share this responsibility. That includes the United States.

But even as we take steps that are required to ensure our security; even as we help Turkey and Greece cope with this influx in a way that is safe and humane; even as Chancellor Merkel and other European leaders work for an orderly immigration and resettlement process, rather than a disorderly one; even as we all need to collectively do more to invest in the sustainable development and governance in those nations from which people are fleeing so that they can succeed and prosper in their own countries, and so that we can reduce the conflicts that cause so much of the refugee crisis around the world -- Chancellor Merkel and others have eloquently reminded us that we cannot turn our backs on our fellow human beings who are here now, and need our help now. We have to uphold our values, not just when it’s easy, but when it’s hard.

In Germany, more than anywhere else, we learned that what the world needs is not more walls. We can't define ourselves by the barriers we build to keep people out or to keep people in. At every crossroads in our history, we've moved forward when we acted on those timeless ideals that tells us to be open to one another, and to respect the dignity of every human being.

And I think of so many Germans and people across Europe who have welcomed migrants into their homes, because, as one woman in Berlin said, “we needed to do something.” Just that human impulse to help. And I think of the refugee who said, “I want to teach my kids the value of working.” That human impulse to see the next generation have hope. All of us can be guided by the empathy and compassion of His Holiness, Pope Francis, who said “refugees are not numbers, they are people who have faces, names, stories, and [they] need to be treated as such.”

And I know it may seem easy for me to say all this, living on the other side of the ocean. And I know that some will call it blind hope when I say that I am confident that the forces that bind Europe together are ultimately much stronger than those trying to pull you apart. But hope is not blind when it is rooted in the memory of all that you've already overcome -- your parents, your grandparents.

So I say to you, the people of Europe, don't forget who you are. You are the heirs to a struggle for freedom. You're the Germans, the French, the Dutch, the Belgians, the Luxembourgers, the Italians -- and yes, the British -- who rose above old divisions and put Europe on the path to union.

You’re the Poles of Solidarity and the Czechs and Slovaks who waged a Velvet Revolution. You’re the Latvians, and Lithuanians and Estonians who linked hands in a great human chain of freedom. You’re the Hungarians and Austrians who cut through borders of barbed wire. And you’re the Berliners who, on that November night, finally tore down that wall. You’re the people of Madrid and London who faced down bombings and refused to give in to fear.

And you are the Parisians who, later this year, plan to reopen the Bataclan. You’re the people of Brussels, in a square of flowers and flags, including one Belgian who offered a message -- we need “more.” More understanding. More dialogue. More humanity.

That's who you are. United, together. You are Europe -- “United in diversity.” Guided by the ideals that have lit the world, and stronger when you stand as one.

As you go forward, you can be confident that your greatest ally and friend, the United States of America, stands with you, shoulder-to-shoulder, now and forever. Because a united Europe -- once the dream of a few -- remains the hope of the many and a necessity for us all.

Thank you very much. Thank you.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# White House Correspondents' Dinner Address 2016

[Entrance music: "Cups (Pitch Perfect's When I'm Gone)" by Anna Kendrick.]

President Obama: You can't say it, but you know it's true.

Good evening, everybody.

Everybody: Good evening.

It is an honor to be here at my last -- and perhaps the last -- White House Correspondents' Dinner.

You all look great.

The end of the Republic has never looked better!

I do apologize. I know I was a little late tonight. I was running on "CPT" -- which stands for "Jokes That White People Should Not Make

It's a tip for you, Jeff [Mason].

Mason: Got it.

President Obama: Anyway! Here we are. My eighth and final appearance at this unique event. And I am excited. If this material works well, I'm going to use it at Goldman Sachs next year. Earn me some serious Tubmans.

That's right.

My brilliant and beautiful wife, Michelle, is here tonight.

She looks so happy to be here. That's called practice -- it's like learning to do three-minute planks. She makes it look easy now.

Next year at this time, someone else will be standing here in this very spot, and it's anyone's guess who she will be. But standing here, I can't help but be reflective, a little sentimental. Eight years ago, I said it was time to change the tone of our politics. In hindsight, I clearly should have been more specific.

Eight years ago, I was a young man, full of idealism and vigor, and look at me now. I am gray and grizzled, just counting down the days 'til my death panel. Hillary once questioned whether I'd be ready for a 3 a.m. phone call -- now I'm awake anyway because I've got to go to the bathroom. I'm up.

In fact, somebody recently said to me, "Mr. President, you are so yesterday. Justin Trudeau has completely replaced you: He's so handsome; he's so charming; he's the future."

And I said, "Justin, just give it a rest." I resented that.

Meanwhile, Michelle has not aged a day. The only way you can date her in photos is by looking at me.

Take a look.

Here we are in 2008.

Here we are a few years later.

And this one is from two weeks ago.

So time passes. In just six short months, I will be officially a lame duck, which means Congress now will flat-out reject my authority. And Republican leaders won't take my phone calls. And this is going to take some getting used to, it's really going to -- it's a curve ball. I don't know what to do with it.

Of course, in fact, for months now congressional Republicans have been saying there are things I cannot do in my final year. Unfortunately, this dinner was not one of them. But on everything else, it's another story. And you know who you are, Republicans. In fact, I think we've got Republican Senators Tim Scott and Cory Gardner, they're in the house, which reminds me -- Security, bar the doors! Judge Merrick Garland, come on out, we're going to do this right here, right now. It's like "The Red Wedding."

But it's not just Congress. Even some foreign leaders, they've been looking ahead, anticipating my departure. Last week, Prince George showed up to our meeting in his bathrobe.

That was a slap in the face. A clear breach in protocol. Although while in England I did have lunch with Her Majesty, the Queen, took in a performance of Shakespeare, hit the links with David Cameron. (Just in case anybody is still debating whether I'm black enough, I think that settles the debate.)

I won't lie -- look, this is a tough transition. It's hard. Key staff are now starting to leave the White House.

Even reporters have left me:

Savannah Guthrie, she's left the White House Press Corps to host the Today show.

Norah O'Donnell left the briefing room to host CBS This Morning.

Jake Tapper left journalism to join CNN.

But the prospect of leaving the White House is a mixed bag. You might have heard that someone jumped the White House fence last week, but I have to give Secret Service credit -- they found Michelle, brought her back; she's safe back at home now. It's only nine more months, baby. Settle down.

And yet, somehow, despite all this, despite the churn, in my final year, my approval ratings keep going up. The last time I was this high, I was trying to decide on my major.

And here's the thing: I haven't really done anything differently. So it's odd. Even my aides can't explain the rising poll numbers -- what has changed, nobody can figure it out.

Puzzling....

Anyway, in this last year I do have more appreciation for those who have been with me on this amazing ride, like one of our finest public servants, Joe Biden. God bless him. Love that guy. I love Joe Biden -- I really do. And I want to thank him for his friendship, for his counsel, for always giving it to me straight, for not shooting anybody in the face. Thank you, Joe.

Also, I would be remiss -- let's give it up for our host, Larry Wilmore. Also known as one of the two black guys [along with Trevor Noah] who is not Jon Stewart. You're the South African guy, right? I love Larry. And his parents are here, who are from Evanston, which is a great town.

I also would like to acknowledge some of the award-winning reporters that we have with us here tonight. Rachel McAdams. Mark Ruffalo. Liev Schreiber. Thank you all for everything that you've done. I'm just joking. As you know, Spotlight is a film, a movie about investigative journalists with the resources and the autonomy to chase down the truth and hold the powerful accountable. Best fantasy film since Star Wars. Look -- that was maybe a cheap shot.

I understand the news business is tough these days, it keeps changing all the time. Every year at this dinner, somebody makes a joke about BuzzFeed, for example, changing the media landscape. And every year, the Washington Post laughs a little bit less hard. Kind of a silence there. Especially at the Washington Post table.

GOP Chairman Reince Priebus is here as well. Glad to see you that you feel that you've earned a night off. Congratulations on all your success. The Republican Party, the nomination process -– it's all going great. Keep it up.

Kendall Jenner is also here. And we had a chance to meet her backstage -- she seems like a very nice young woman. I'm not exactly sure what she does, but I am told that my Twitter mentions are about to go through the roof.

Helen Mirren is here tonight. I don't even have a joke here. I just think Helen Mirren is awesome. She's awesome.

Sitting at the same table, I see Mike Bloomberg. Mike, a combative, controversial New York billionaire is leading the GOP primary and it is not you. That's has to sting a little bit. Although it's not an entirely fair comparison between you and The Donald. After all, Mike was a big-city mayor. He knows policy in depth. And he's actually worth the amount of money that he says he is.

What an election season. For example, we've got the bright new face of the Democratic Party here tonight –- Mr. Bernie Sanders! There he is -- Bernie! Bernie, you look like a million bucks. Or to put it in terms you'll understand, you look like 37,000 donations of 27 dollars each.

A lot of folks have been surprised by the Bernie phenomenon, especially his appeal to young people. But not me, I get it. Just recently, a young person came up to me and said she was sick of politicians standing in the way of her dreams. As if we were actually going to let Malia go to Burning Man this year. That was not going to happen. Bernie might have let her go. Not us.

I am hurt, though, Bernie, that you've distancing yourself a little from me. I mean, that's just not something that you do to your comrade.

Bernie's slogan has helped his campaign catch fire among young people. "Feel the Bern." Feel the Bern -- it's a good slogan.

Hillary's slogan has not had the same effect. Let's see this.

Look, I've said how much I admire Hillary's toughness, her smarts, her policy chops, her experience. You've got to admit it, though, Hillary trying to appeal to young voters is a little bit like your relative just signed up for Facebook: "Dear America, did you get my poke?" "Is it appearing on your wall?" "I'm not sure I am using this right. Love, Aunt Hillary." It's not entirely persuasive.

Meanwhile, on the Republican side, things are a little more -- How should we say this? -- a little more "loose." Just look at the confusion over the invitations to tonight's dinner. Guests were asked to check whether they wanted steak or fish, but instead, a whole bunch of you wrote in: Paul Ryan. That's not an option, people. Steak or fish. You may not like steak or fish -- but that's your choice.

Meanwhile, some candidates aren't polling high enough to qualify for their own joke tonight.

The rules were well-established ahead of time.

And then there's Ted Cruz. Ted had a tough week. He went to Indiana –- Hoosier country –- stood on a basketball court, and called the hoop a "basketball ring." What else is in his lexicon? Baseball sticks? Football hats? But sure, I'm the foreign one.

Well, let me conclude tonight on a more serious note. I want to thank the Washington press corps, I want to thank Carol for all that you do. The free press is central to our democracy, and -- nah, I'm just kidding! You know I've got to talk about Trump! Come on! We weren't just going to stop there. Come on.

Although I am a little hurt that he's not here tonight. We had so much fun the last time. And it is surprising. You've got a room full of reporters, celebrities, cameras, and he says no? Is this dinner too tacky for The Donald? What could he possibly be doing instead? Is he at home, eating a Trump Steak -- tweeting out insults to Angela Merkel? What's he doing?

The Republican establishment is incredulous that he is their most likely nominee -- incredulous, shocking. They say Donald lacks the foreign policy experience to be President. But, in fairness, he has spent years meeting with leaders from around the world: Miss Sweden, Miss Argentina, Miss Azerbaijan.

And there's one area where Donald's experience could be invaluable -– and that's closing Guantanamo. Because Trump knows a thing or two about running waterfront properties into the ground.

All right, that's probably enough. I mean, I've got more material -- no, no, I don't want to spend too much time on The Donald. Following your lead, I want to show some restraint. Because I think we can all agree that from the start, he's gotten the appropriate amount of coverage, befitting the seriousness of his candidacy.

I hope you all are proud of yourselves. The guy wanted to give his hotel business a boost, and now we're praying that Cleveland makes it through July.

Mm-mm-mm. Hmm.

As for me and Michelle, we've decided to stay in D.C. for a couple more years. Thank you. This way, our youngest daughter can finish up high school, Michelle can stay closer to her plot of carrots. She's already making plans to see them every day. Take a look.

But our decision has actually presented a bit of a dilemma because, traditionally, Presidents don't stick around after they're done. And it's something that I've been brooding about a little bit. Take a look.

I am still waiting for all of you to respond to my invitation to connect on LinkedIn. But I know you have jobs to do, which is what really brings us here tonight.

I know that there are times that we've had differences, and that's inherent in our institutional roles -- it's true of every President and his press corps. But we've always shared the same goal -- to root our public discourse in the truth; to open the doors of this democracy; to do whatever we can to make our country and our world more free and more just. And I've always appreciated the role that you have all played as equal partners in reaching these goals.

And our free press is why we once again recognize the real journalists who uncovered a horrifying scandal and brought about some measure of justice for thousands of victims throughout the world. They are here with us tonight –- Sacha Pfeiffer, Mike Rezendes, Walter Robinson, Matt Carroll, and Ben Bradlee, Jr. Please give them a big round of applause.

Our free press is why, once again, we honor Jason Rezaian. As Carol noted, last time this year, we spoke of Jason's courage as he endured the isolation of an Iranian prison. This year, we see that courage in the flesh and it's a living testament to the very idea of a free press, and a reminder of the rising level of danger, and political intimidation, and physical threats faced by reporters overseas. And I can make this commitment that as long as I hold this office, my Administration will continue to fight for the release of American journalists held against their will -- and we will not stop until they see the same freedom as Jason had.

At home and abroad, journalists like all of you engage in the dogged pursuit of informing citizens, and holding leaders accountable, and making our government of the people possible. And it's an enormous responsibility. And I realize it's an enormous challenge at a time when the economics of the business sometimes incentivize speed over depth; and when controversy and conflict are what most immediately attract readers and viewers.

The good news is there are so many of you that are pushing against those trends. And as a citizen of this great democracy, I am grateful for that. For this is also a time around the world when some of the fundamental ideals of liberal democracies are under attack, and when notions of objectivity, and of a free press, and of facts, and of evidence are trying to be undermined. Or, in some cases, ignored entirely.

And in such a climate, it's not enough just to give people a megaphone. And that's why your power and your responsibility to dig and to question and to counter distortions and untruths is more important than ever. Taking a stand on behalf of what is true does not require you shedding your objectivity. In fact, it is the essence of good journalism. It affirms the idea that the only way we can build consensus, the only way that we can move forward as a country, the only way we can help the world mend itself is by agreeing on a baseline of facts when it comes to the challenges that confront us all.

So this night is a testament to all of you who have devoted your lives to that idea, who push to shine a light on the truth every single day. So I want to close my final White House Correspondents' Dinner by just saying thank you. I'm very proud of what you've done. It has been an honor and a privilege to work side by side with you to strengthen our democracy.

And with that, I just have two more words to say -–

Obama out.

[Mic drop.]

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Speech to Community of Flint, Michigan

All right. Let me do some businessing. Let me begin by recognizing some of the guests who are here. Your mayor, Karen Weaver, is here. I know Governor Rick Snyder is here.

No, no -- because here's here to -- we're doing some business here. Members of Congress are here, including your outstanding senator, Debbie Stabenow. Flint's own Dan Kildee is here. Debbie Dingell is here. Brenda Lawrence is here. John Conyers is here. And Sandy Levin. An outstanding Michigan delegation. We've got Secretary Sylvia Burwell, who is the head of Health and Human Services, works for me. And Administrator Gina McCarthy is here, as well. I want to thank Superintendent Bilal Tawwab -- and Principal Tim Green for their hospitality. And I want to thank all of you for being here.

Now, not too long ago, I received a letter from a young lady, an eight-year-old girl named Mari Copeny. You may know her as "Little Miss Flint."

Those of you who have seats, please feel free to sit down so folks can see behind you. If you don't have a seat, don't sit down.

And like a lot of you, Mari has been worried about what happened here in Flint. She's worried about what it means for children like her. She's worried about the future of this city and this community.

So in the middle of a tragedy that should have never happened here in the United States of America -- the denial of something as basic as clean, safe drinking water -- this eight-year-old girl spoke out and marched and, like many of you, protested. As Mari was getting ready to hop on a bus to Washington, she wrote to ask if she could meet with me while she was in town. There she is.

Now, I would have been happy to see Mari in Washington. But when something like this happens, a young girl shouldn't have to go to Washington to be heard. I thought her President should come to Flint to meet with her. And that's why I'm here -- to tell you directly that I see you and I hear you, and I want to hear directly from you about how this public health crisis has disrupted your lives, how it's made you angry, how it's made you worried.

And I just had a chance to meet with a few of your neighbors in a roundtable discussion, and I heard from them what I know a lot of you are feeling: That a lot of you are scared. That all of you feel let down. And I told them that I understood why you'd be afraid -- not just for yourselves, but for your kids.

I also wanted to come here, though, to tell you that I've got your back -- that we're paying attention. So I met and heard directly from those who are leading the federal response and who are working hard to make sure that Flint is whole again, to make sure that this proud city bounces back not just to where it was, but stronger than ever. And I want all of you to know I am confident that Flint will come back. I will not rest, and I'm going to make sure that the leaders, at every level of government, don't rest until every drop of water that flows to your homes is safe to drink and safe to cook with, and safe to bathe in -- because that's part of the basic responsibilities of a government in the United States of America.

So as President, I've sent Flint the best resources our federal government has to support our state and local partners. The agencies that serve you -- the agencies that specialize in health and housing, and those that support small businesses and our kids' education; those that are responsible for the food that our children eat and, of course, the water we drink. Everybody is on duty. The National Guard is on duty. This is a hands-on-deck situation -- all hands on deck. Because if there's a child who feels neglected on the north side of Flint, or a family on the east side of this city who wonders whether they should give up on their hometown and move away, or an immigrant who wonders whether America means what we say about being a place where we take care of our own. That matters to all of us -- not just in Flint, not just in Michigan, but all across America. Flint's recovery is everybody's responsibility. And I'm going to make sure that responsibility is met.

So I just talked with some of the team of responders that are on the ground to make sure that they're coordinating. And they're doing some incredible things. They've distributed enough water to fill more than three Olympic-sized swimming pools. They've distributed thousands of filters. They're helping students afford nutritious food that work against the contaminants in bad water. They're making sure new moms have access to instant infant formula that doesn't require water. They've expanded health services for children and pregnant women, and education programs for Flint's youngest children. They're out there testing homes for lead and testing children for exposure to lead.

But like all our best responses in tough times, this is not a government effort alone. We need our businesses and nonprofits and philanthropies to step up. And what's incredible about Flint is how many volunteers have already been leading the way. You've got members of one union, UA Local 370, that have donated tens of thousands of dollars and 10,000 hours of their time. They've installed thousands of filters, hundreds of faucets by going door to door, night and day. They're not asking for anything in return, they're just doing the right thing.

So many Americans, here in Flint and around the country, have proven that you don't have be a plumber or a pipefitter to pitch in -- although it's very helpful if you're a plumber or pipefitter. So, in March, dozens of accountants teamed up with the American Red Cross to help residents recycle all the plastic water bottles that have been piling up. Religious and community groups are organizing supply drives, supporting families, offering free medical services.

The director of a local dance studio, I understand, found a creative way to help; she's letting people use her studio as a space to support one another by sharing their stories and realizing they're not alone. Even inmates at an Indiana prison came together to donate more than $2,500 to the people of Flint. And a second-grader from Virginia, a young man named Isiah Britt, set up a website to see if he could raise $500 for hand sanitizers to send to the kids at Eisenhower Elementary here in Flint. So Isiah, it's fair to say, surpassed his goal, because he raised $15,000. And he explained that the experience taught him just because you're small "doesn't mean you can't do big things."

So when you think of all those stories, it should be clear that the American people care about Flint. The American people are paying attention and they care about you. And as is true when disasters strike in other ways, people pitch in, they come together. Because they imagine, "All right, that could have been me." That's the good news.

The bad news is that this should not have happened in the first place. And even though the scope of the response looks sort of like the efforts we're used to seeing after a natural disaster, that's not what this was. This was a manmade disaster. This was avoidable. This was preventable.

Now, I'm not here to go through the full history of what happened. Like a lot of manufacturing towns, Flint's economy has been taking hits for decades now -- plants closing, jobs moving away. Manufacturing has shrunk. And that's made it harder for the city to maintain city services. And let's face it, government officials at every level weren't attentive to potential problems the way they should have been. So they start getting short-staffed, they start getting a shrinking tax base, more demand for services. Things start getting strained, and there's not enough help from the outside. And then when Flint's finances collapsed, an emergency manager was put in place whose mandate was primarily to cut at all costs. And then some very poor decisions were made. All these things contributed to this crisis. Many of you know the story.

Now, I do not believe that anybody consciously wanted to hurt the people in Flint. And this is not the place to sort out every screw-up that resulted in contaminated water. But I do think there is a larger issue that we have to acknowledge, because I do think that part of what contributed to this crisis was a broader mindset, a bigger attitude, a corrosive attitude that exists in our politics and exists in too many levels of our government.

And it's a mindset that believes that less government is the highest good no matter what. It's a mindset that says environmental rules designed to keep your water clean or your air clean are optional, or not that important, or unnecessarily burden businesses or taxpayers. It's an ideology that undervalues the common good, says we're all on our own and what's in it for me, and how do I do well, but I'm not going to invest in what we need as a community. And, as a consequence, you end up seeing an underinvestment in the things that we all share that make us safe, that make us whole, that give us the ability to pursue our own individual dreams. So we underinvest in pipes underground. We underinvest in bridges that we drive on, and the roads that connect us, and the schools that move us forward.

And this is part of the attitude, this is part of the mindset: We especially underinvest when the communities that are put at risk are poor, or don't have a lot of political clout -- and so are not as often heard in the corridors of power.

And this kind of thinking -- this myth that government is always the enemy; that forgets that our government is us -- it's us; that it's an extension of us, ourselves -- that attitude is as corrosive to our democracy as the stuff that resulted in lead in your water. Because what happens is it leads to systematic neglect. It leads to carelessness and callousness. It leads to a lot of hidden disasters that you don't always read about and aren't as flashy, but that over time diminish the life of a community and make it harder for our young people to succeed.

In one of the roundtables, I was listening to somebody -- I think it was a pastor who told me, you know, it made us feel like we didn't count. And you can't have a democracy where people feel like they don't count, where people feel like they're not heard.

And that attitude ignores how this country was built, our entire history -- which is based on the idea that we're all connected and that what happens in a community like Flint matters everybody, and that there are things that we can only do together, as a nation, as a people, as a state, as a city that no man is an island.

We've been debating this since the Republic began: What are our individual responsibilities and what are our collective responsibilities. And that's a good debate. But I've always believed what the first Republican President, a guy named Abraham Lincoln, said. He said we should do individually those things that we do best by ourselves. But through our government, we should do together what we can't do as well for ourselves.

So it doesn't matter how hard you work, how responsible you are, or how well you raise your kids -- you can't set up a whole water system for a city. That's not something you do by yourself. You do it with other people. You can't hire your own fire department, or your own police force, or your own army. There are things we have to do together -- basic things that we all benefit from.

And that's how we invested in a rail system and a highway system. That's how we invested in public schools. That's how we invested in science and research. These how we invested in community colleges and land grant colleges like Michigan State.

Can I get some water? Come on up here. Give me some water. I want a glass of water. I want a glass of water. Sit down. I'm all right. I'm going to get a glass of water right here. Let's make sure we find one. It will be filtered. Hold on, I'm going to talk about that in a second. Settle down, everybody.

Where was I? We invested in our communities and our cities. And by making those investments in the common good, we invested in ourselves. That's the platform we create that allows each of us independently to succeed. That's what made America great.

So the people in Flint, and across Michigan, and around the country -- individuals and church groups and non-for-profits and community organizations -- you've proven that the American people will step up when required. And our volunteers, our non-for-profits, they're the lifeblood of our communities. We so appreciate what you do.

But volunteers don't build county water systems and keep lead from leaching into our drinking glasses. We can't rely on faith groups to reinforce bridges and repave runways at the airport. We can't ask second-graders, even ones as patriotic as Isiah Britt who raised all that money, to raise enough money to keep our kids healthy.

You hear a lot about government overreach, how Obama -- he's for big government. Listen, it's not government overreach to say that our government is responsible for making sure you can wash your hands in your own sink, or shower in your own home, or cook for your family. These are the most basic services. There is no more basic element sustaining human life than water. It's not too much to expect for all Americans that their water is going to be safe.

Now, where do we go from here?

Well, I'm still waiting for my water. Somebody obviously didn't hear me. Usually I get my water pretty quick. Hold on a second.

Now, the reason I know I'm okay is because I already had some Flint water. There we go. I really did need a glass of water. This is not a stunt.

Now, I'm going to talk about this. Everybody settle down. This is a feisty crowd. Hold on a second. All right, everybody settle down. I got some serious points to make here.

So where do we go from here? Now, Mayor Weaver has a plan to fix the pipes in Flint. And unfortunately, because the state initially cut so many corners, it's going to end up being more expensive -- much more expensive now than it would have been to avert the disaster in the first place. But the good news is that Michigan does have funds it can use from the federal government to help Flint. The Governor indicated that in his budget he has put forward additional funds to replace the pipes. In order for it to happen -- and I said this to the Mayor and the Governor; I had them both in my car, the Beast -- I told them I wasn't going to let either of them out until we figured this out. I had Secret Service surrounding everybody.

But what I said was, is that the city and the state and the federal government, everybody is going to have to work together to get this done. So it's not going to happen overnight. But we have to get started. We have to get the money flowing. We've got to work with our plumbers and pipefitters, but also train local residents and start getting apprenticeship programs going -- so that even as we're trying to deal with this disaster, we're also hopefully lifting people up and giving them an opportunity for employment. Congress, led by your congressional delegation, needs to act in a bipartisan fashion, do their job, make sure Flint has the necessary resources.

And so it's long past time that Flint has a well-managed, monitored, modern water system that protects not just against lead, but other contaminants. All right? So that's our goal. That's one goal.

But we've got to do more than just ensure the integrity and safety of your water for the long term. What we also have to do is work as one team -- federal, state, and local leaders, Democrats and Republicans -- to address some of the broader issues that have been raised by this crisis. The federal officials I met with today are committed to staying on the job until we get it done. But that requires the state of Michigan to step up and be fully invested in this process, as well. Today's vote in Lansing to increase funding for health care was a good start.

But part of keeping the faith with the people of Flint means making sure that you're first in line for the jobs this effort will create. It means that since the state voted this afternoon to expand Medicaid, every child who lived in Flint while the water was bad needs to be able to get seen by a doctor, diagnosed, make sure that there's follow-up. We can't just promise it, we've got to deliver it. And that means everybody has got to cooperate. Everybody has got to cooperate.

And keeping the faith with you also means the state has to step up and deliver the resources that will help not only fix the water, but transform Flint so that it is once again a functioning city with the capacity and the democratic structures to work. The city government has to be on a firm foundation. The mayor can't do it by herself. She's got to have a team and a staff, and there's got to be a budget that works, that's sustainable, and a plan for long-term economic development, and a plan to make sure that health care is available to all of our kids, and a plan to make sure that education is top-notch in this city, and that more jobs are being created. And that will require many more of the good work that we've seen from citizens and community groups who care about your families.

But it's not enough just to fix the water. We've got to fix the culture of neglect, the mindset I was talking about -- that has degraded too many schools and too many roads and hurt too many futures. We've got to fix the mindset that only leaves people cynical about our government. Our government is us -- of us, by us, for us -- the people.

So we've got a lot of work to do. But I'm here to tell you I'm prepared to work with you on this. I'm paying attention.

Now, a couple of specific things I want to address. These aren't in my prepared remarks, but this is what I gathered from the conversations that I had.

I'm in Flint right now, not Detroit. But I do love Detroit. And their school needs support, and there is -- some of that same mindset has hurt the schools there.

But listen up, because this is drawn from the conversations I had with many of your neighbors and friends, as well as the federal response teams that I sent out here a while back. We're going to do everything we can to accelerate getting new pipes here in Flint. But even with all the money, even with an efficient, speeded-up process, it's going to take a while for all the pipes to be replaced. It's not going to happen next month. It's not going to happen six months from now, where all the pipes in Flint are going to be replaced. We've got to get started, and you need to see that it's getting started and that progress is being made. But it's not going to happen overnight. Even if we get all the plumbers and pipefitters, and we get some more apprentices trained -- even if we do all that, it's going to take some time.

And so one of the things I heard talking to a lot of your neighbors is, boy, right now it's rough just trying to figure out how to get bottled water on the way home from work, and you're trying to just shower real quick, and people are still concerned about what's safe and what information is correct and what is not. So I do want to just tell you what I know, based on not just what I've been reading in the papers, but what our top scientists have told me.

The first is that while you are waiting to get your pipes replaced, you need to have a filter installed, and use that filter. And if you do use that filter, then the water is safe to consume for children over the age of six and who are not pregnant.

Now, hold on a second. Don't just start shouting, okay? Because this is the problem -- we're going to have to solve this problem. And if people don't listen to each other, then it's not going to get fixed.

So I'm telling you -- and I promise you, I'm really good at stirring folks up. So if I want to just come here and stir folks up, I know how to do that. But that's not actually going to solve the problem, all right? So I'm telling what I know, because I guarantee you that the scientists who work for me, if they tell me something -- which I'm saying in front of all those cameras -- turns out to be wrong, that person will not have a job.

So although I understand the fear and concern that people have, and it is entirely legitimate, what the science tells us at this stage is you should not drink any of the water that is not filtered. But if you get the filter and use it properly, that water can be consumed. That's point number one.

And you can get those filters free, and people will help install them if you need help -- particularly seniors who may have trouble going back and forth and trying to get a whole bunch of bottles of water and so forth. So that's information that I trust and I believe. That's point number one.

Point number two: Every child in Flint who may have consumed water during the course of this tragedy -- and that is the overwhelming majority of children here -- should get checked.

Now, the reason that's important is because lead is a serious issue. And if undiagnosed and not dealt with, it can lead to some long-term problems. But -- and this is really important, so I want everybody to pay attention -- if you know that your child may have been exposed and you go to a health clinic, a doctor, a provider, and are working with them, then your child will be fine. And the reason I can say that with some confidence is not just based on science, but based on the fact that keep in mind that it wasn't until the ‘80s where we started banning lead in paint, lead in toys, lead in gasoline. So if you are my age, or older, or maybe even a little bit younger, you got some lead in your system when you were growing up. You did. I am sure that somewhere, when I was two years old, I was taking a chip of paint, tasting it, and I got some lead. Or sometimes toys were painted with lead, and you were chewing on them.

Now, I say that not to make light of the situation. We know now what we didn't know then, which is it can cause problems if children get exposed to lead at elevated levels. But the point is that as long as kids are getting good health care, and folks are paying attention, and they're getting a good education, and they have community support, and they're getting some good home training, and they are in a community that is loving and nurturing and thriving, these kids will be fine. And I don't want anybody to start thinking that somehow all the kids in Flint are going to have problems for the rest of their lives, because that's not true. That is not true. And I don't want that stigma to be established in the minds of kids.

We've learned a lot of things since I was a kid. I used to have adults blowing smoke in my face all the time. We didn't use seat belts. We wrapped dry-cleaning bags around us and thought that was funny. Folks didn't know. No, no, but the reason I think this is important is because I heard from a lot of folks who were saying how moms and dads were feeling guilty. They're feeling sad. They're feeling depressed. Oh, Lord, what's -- how is this going to affect my child. And it's right to be angry. But you can't get passive. You can't just suddenly sit back and sink into despair. Our kids will be fine, but you have to now take action. Don't wait for somebody else to reach out and ask whether your child has gotten a checkup recently. We just expanded Medicaid. Go take your child to that doctor. Use that health system.

And so community organizations, churches, et cetera, one of the things that we need to do is -- and I've talked to the Governor and the Mayor about this -- is set up a system of outreach so that we're getting everybody as a village looking out for every child, making sure that they're getting checked up, making sure they've got pediatric care, making sure they're being tested effectively, making sure then that they're getting nutritious food.

Just to give you an example, we know that if kids are getting vegetables and eating properly -- that, just by itself, is going to have some impact on any effects of lead. But I know that here in Flint there are whole neighborhoods that don't even have a supermarket. So we're going to have to figure out how to get supermarkets in those communities. And in the meantime, we got to help make sure that those kids are getting the nutrition they need.

So I say all this just to indicate you should be angry, but channel that anger. You should be hurt, but don't sink into despair. And most of all, do not somehow communicate to our children here in this city that they're going to be saddled with problems for the rest of their lives. Because they will not. They'll do just fine, just like I did fine with a single mom, and a lot of you did fine growing up in a tough neighborhood. They'll make it as long as we're there for them and looking after them, and doing the right thing for them and giving them the resources that they need. Don't lose hope. Don't lose hope.

I talked longer than I was going to. But I feel strongly about this whole issue with kids now. Kids rise to the expectations we set for them. A lot of kids in Flint already got some crosses they got to bear. They've already got people telling them, oh, it's too tough for you because you're black or you're poor. They will do fine as long as we do right by them. And that's my intention. And set high expectations for them.

Just a couple more points. What happened here is just an extreme example, an extreme and tragic case of what's happening in a lot of places around the country. We've seen unacceptably high levels of lead in townships along the Jersey Shore and in North Carolina's major cities. We've seen it in the capitals of South Carolina and Mississippi. And even, not long ago, lead-contaminated drinking water was found right down the street from the United States Capitol.

So Flint is just a tip of the iceberg in terms of us reinvesting in our communities. We've seen bridges fall and levies break. So we've got to break that mindset. These things aren't a coincidence. They're the same mindset that left Flint's water unsafe to drink. And it's self-destructive when we don't invest in our communities. Because a lot of times the people who are against government spending, they'll say, well, the private sector is the key. The private sector is the key for our economy. Free markets and free enterprise are great. But companies won't invest in a place where your infrastructure is crumbling and your roads are broke. You're not going to start a business or be able to recruit outstanding staff if there's no safe drinking water in the city.

So my hope is, is that this begins a national conversation about what we need to do to invest in future generations. And it's no secret that, on this pipeline of neglect, a lot of times it's the most poor folks who are left behind. It's working people who are left behind. We see it in communities across the Midwest that haven't recovered since the plants shut down. We see it on inner city corners where they might be able to drink the water, but they can't find a job. We see it in the rural hills of Appalachia.

We've got to break that mindset that says that that neighborhood over there, that's not my problem; those kids over there, they don't look like my kids exactly, so I don't have to worry about them -- out of sight, out of mind. We've got to break that attitude that says somehow there's an "us" in "them," and remind ourselves that there's just one big "we" -- the American family, and everybody has got to look out for each other. Because the kids here in Flint aren't "those" kids, they're "our" kids. That's what Scripture teaches us. But I'm not going to start preaching in front of some pastors.

So let me just close by saying this. Look, I know this has been a scary time. I know this is disappointing. You've been let down. But there is a sermon about a phoenix rising from these ashes. And there is the opportunity out of this complete screw-up, this painful tragedy, this neglect, this disappointment to actually pull together and make for a better future.

Sometimes it takes a crisis for everybody to focus their attention. Because there have been a lot of crises going on in Flint; they just weren't as loud and noisy, and nobody noticed. There are a lot of small, quiet crises going on in the lives of people around this country. And this helps lift it up.

And when we see it, and we understand it, and we feel it, then maybe we start making a connection with each other. And that begins to change our mindset and improve our politics and improve our government to make it more responsive and more accountable. And the good news is, is that that's the natural mindset of our young people. That's why I'm so hopeful about the people of Flint. That's why I'm so hopeful about America generally, is I meet young people all the time, and they've got a mindset just like Little Miss Flint here. She decides, I'm just going right to the President, because I think we can fix this. Or the mindset of Isiah raising $15,000 to help an elementary school where he's never been.

That's America. That's who we are at our best. We are a nation of individuals, and we should be proud of everything that we can accomplish on our own through hard work, and grit, and looking after our own families, and making sure we're raising our children right. But we don't do these things alone. Ultimately, our success is dependent on each other. Our success is dependent on each other.

I have had the privilege of being the President of the United States, a big office -- an office that gives me enormous power and enormous responsibility. But the thing I've learned in that job is that I can't do it by myself. I can't fix every problem on my own. I need a mother-in-law who helps Michelle and me raise Malia and Sasha. I need incredible staff who are carrying out our policies to sign people up for health care. I've got to have our incredible men and women in uniform who are willing to go overseas and fight on behalf of our freedom. I've got to have governors and mayors who are willing to work with me to get things done in their states and in their cities.

And, most of all, I need fellow citizens who share the values that built this great country and are willing to work with me and work together to make it better. I said this before: The most important office in a democracy is the office of citizen. It's more important than the President. More important than any senator or governor or mayor. It is the idea that each of us has something to contribute, each of us has something to give back.

So, Flint, I'm here not just to say I've got your back. I'm here not just to say that you will get help. I'm also here to say you've got power. I'm also here to say you count. I'm also here to say that you can make a difference and rebuild this city better than ever. And you'll have a friend and partner in the President of the United States.

God bless you. God bless Flint. God bless Michigan. God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Howard University Commencement Address

To President Frederick, the Board of Trustees, faculty and staff, fellow recipients of honorary degrees, thank you for the honor of spending this day with you. And congratulations to the Class of 2016! Four years ago, back when you were just freshmen, I understand many of you came by my house the night I was reelected. So I decided to return the favor and come by yours.

To the parents, the grandparents, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, all the family and friends who stood by this class, cheered them on, helped them get here today -- this is your day, as well. Let’s give them a big round of applause, as well.

I’m not trying to stir up any rivalries here; I just want to see who’s in the house. We got Quad? Annex. Drew. Carver. Slow. Towers. And Meridian. Rest in peace, Meridian. Rest in peace.

I know you’re all excited today. You might be a little tired, as well. Some of you were up all night making sure your credits were in order. Some of you stayed up too late, ended up at HoChi at 2:00 a.m. Got some mambo sauce on your fingers.

But you got here. And you've all worked hard to reach this day. You’ve shuttled between challenging classes and Greek life. You've led clubs, played an instrument or a sport. You volunteered, you interned. You held down one, two, maybe three jobs. You've made lifelong friends and discovered exactly what you’re made of. The “Howard Hustle” has strengthened your sense of purpose and ambition.

Which means you're part of a long line of Howard graduates. Some are on this stage today. Some are in the audience. That spirit of achievement and special responsibility has defined this campus ever since the Freedman’s Bureau established Howard just four years after the Emancipation Proclamation; just two years after the Civil War came to an end. They created this university with a vision -- a vision of uplift; a vision for an America where our fates would be determined not by our race, gender, religion or creed, but where we would be free -- in every sense -- to pursue our individual and collective dreams.

It is that spirit that's made Howard a centerpiece of African-American intellectual life and a central part of our larger American story. This institution has been the home of many firsts: The first black Nobel Peace Prize winner. The first black Supreme Court justice. But its mission has been to ensure those firsts were not the last. Countless scholars, professionals, artists, and leaders from every field received their training here. The generations of men and women who walked through this yard helped reform our government, cure disease, grow a black middle class, advance civil rights, shape our culture. The seeds of change -- for all Americans -- were sown here. And that’s what I want to talk about today.

As I was preparing these remarks, I realized that when I was first elected President, most of you -- the Class of 2016 -- were just starting high school. Today, you’re graduating college. I used to joke about being old. Now I realize I'm old. It's not a joke anymore.

But seeing all of you here gives me some perspective. It makes me reflect on the changes that I’ve seen over my own lifetime. So let me begin with what may sound like a controversial statement -- a hot take.

Given the current state of our political rhetoric and debate, let me say something that may be controversial, and that is this: America is a better place today than it was when I graduated from college. Let me repeat: America is by almost every measure better than it was when I graduated from college. It also happens to be better off than when I took office -- but that's a longer story. That's a different discussion for another speech.

But think about it. I graduated in 1983. New York City, America’s largest city, where I lived at the time, had endured a decade marked by crime and deterioration and near bankruptcy. And many cities were in similar shape. Our nation had gone through years of economic stagnation, the stranglehold of foreign oil, a recession where unemployment nearly scraped 11 percent. The auto industry was getting its clock cleaned by foreign competition. And don’t even get me started on the clothes and the hairstyles. I've tried to eliminate all photos of me from this period. I thought I looked good. I was wrong.

Since that year -- since the year I graduated -- the poverty rate is down. Americans with college degrees, that rate is up. Crime rates are down. America’s cities have undergone a renaissance. There are more women in the workforce. They’re earning more money. We’ve cut teen pregnancy in half. We've slashed the African American dropout rate by almost 60 percent, and all of you have a computer in your pocket that gives you the world at the touch of a button. In 1983, I was part of fewer than 10 percent of African Americans who graduated with a bachelor’s degree. Today, you’re part of the more than 20 percent who will. And more than half of blacks say we’re better off than our parents were at our age -- and that our kids will be better off, too.

So America is better. And the world is better, too. A wall came down in Berlin. An Iron Curtain was torn asunder. The obscenity of apartheid came to an end. A young generation in Belfast and London have grown up without ever having to think about IRA bombings. In just the past 16 years, we’ve come from a world without marriage equality to one where it’s a reality in nearly two dozen countries. Around the world, more people live in democracies. We’ve lifted more than 1 billion people from extreme poverty. We’ve cut the child mortality rate worldwide by more than half.

America is better. The world is better. And stay with me now -- race relations are better since I graduated. That’s the truth. No, my election did not create a post-racial society. I don’t know who was propagating that notion. That was not mine. But the election itself -- and the subsequent one -- because the first one, folks might have made a mistake. The second one, they knew what they were getting. The election itself was just one indicator of how attitudes had changed.

In my inaugural address, I remarked that just 60 years earlier, my father might not have been served in a D.C. restaurant -- at least not certain of them. There were no black CEOs of Fortune 500 companies. Very few black judges. Shoot, as Larry Wilmore pointed out last week, a lot of folks didn’t even think blacks had the tools to be a quarterback. Today, former Bull Michael Jordan isn’t just the greatest basketball player of all time -- he owns the team. When I was graduating, the main black hero on TV was Mr. T. Rap and hip hop were counterculture, underground. Now, Shonda Rhimes owns Thursday night, and BeyoncÃ© runs the world. We’re no longer only entertainers, we're producers, studio executives. No longer small business owners -- we're CEOs, we’re mayors, representatives, Presidents of the United States.

I am not saying gaps do not persist. Obviously, they do. Racism persists. Inequality persists. Don’t worry -- I’m going to get to that. But I wanted to start, Class of 2016, by opening your eyes to the moment that you are in. If you had to choose one moment in history in which you could be born, and you didn’t know ahead of time who you were going to be -- what nationality, what gender, what race, whether you’d be rich or poor, gay or straight, what faith you'd be born into -- you wouldn’t choose 100 years ago. You wouldn’t choose the fifties, or the sixties, or the seventies. You’d choose right now. If you had to choose a time to be, in the words of Lorraine Hansberry, “young, gifted, and black” in America, you would choose right now.

I tell you all this because it's important to note progress. Because to deny how far we’ve come would do a disservice to the cause of justice, to the legions of foot soldiers; to not only the incredibly accomplished individuals who have already been mentioned, but your mothers and your dads, and grandparents and great grandparents, who marched and toiled and suffered and overcame to make this day possible. I tell you this not to lull you into complacency, but to spur you into action -- because there’s still so much more work to do, so many more miles to travel. And America needs you to gladly, happily take up that work. You all have some work to do. So enjoy the party, because you're going to be busy.

Yes, our economy has recovered from crisis stronger than almost any other in the world. But there are folks of all races who are still hurting -- who still can’t find work that pays enough to keep the lights on, who still can’t save for retirement. We’ve still got a big racial gap in economic opportunity. The overall unemployment rate is 5 percent, but the black unemployment rate is almost nine. We’ve still got an achievement gap when black boys and girls graduate high school and college at lower rates than white boys and white girls. Harriet Tubman may be going on the twenty, but we’ve still got a gender gap when a black woman working full-time still earns just 66 percent of what a white man gets paid.

We’ve got a justice gap when too many black boys and girls pass through a pipeline from underfunded schools to overcrowded jails. This is one area where things have gotten worse. When I was in college, about half a million people in America were behind bars. Today, there are about 2.2 million. Black men are about six times likelier to be in prison right now than white men.

Around the world, we’ve still got challenges to solve that threaten everybody in the 21st century -- old scourges like disease and conflict, but also new challenges, from terrorism and climate change.

So make no mistake, Class of 2016 -- you’ve got plenty of work to do. But as complicated and sometimes intractable as these challenges may seem, the truth is that your generation is better positioned than any before you to meet those challenges, to flip the script.

Now, how you do that, how you meet these challenges, how you bring about change will ultimately be up to you. My generation, like all generations, is too confined by our own experience, too invested in our own biases, too stuck in our ways to provide much of the new thinking that will be required. But us old-heads have learned a few things that might be useful in your journey. So with the rest of my time, I’d like to offer some suggestions for how young leaders like you can fulfill your destiny and shape our collective future -- bend it in the direction of justice and equality and freedom.

First of all -- and this should not be a problem for this group -- be confident in your heritage. Be confident in your blackness. One of the great changes that’s occurred in our country since I was your age is the realization there's no one way to be black. Take it from somebody who’s seen both sides of debate about whether I'm black enough. In the past couple months, I’ve had lunch with the Queen of England and hosted Kendrick Lamar in the Oval Office. There’s no straitjacket, there's no constraints, there's no litmus test for authenticity.

Look at Howard. One thing most folks don’t know about Howard is how diverse it is. When you arrived here, some of you were like, oh, they've got black people in Iowa? But it’s true -- this class comes from big cities and rural communities, and some of you crossed oceans to study here. You shatter stereotypes. Some of you come from a long line of Bison. Some of you are the first in your family to graduate from college. You all talk different, you all dress different. You’re Lakers fans, Celtics fans, maybe even some hockey fans.

And because of those who've come before you, you have models to follow. You can work for a company, or start your own. You can go into politics, or run an organization that holds politicians accountable. You can write a book that wins the National Book Award, or you can write the new run of “Black Panther.” Or, like one of your alumni, Ta-Nehisi Coates, you can go ahead and just do both. You can create your own style, set your own standard of beauty, embrace your own sexuality. Think about an icon we just lost -- Prince. He blew up categories. People didn’t know what Prince was doing. And folks loved him for it.

You need to have the same confidence. Or as my daughters tell me all the time, “You be you, Daddy.” Sometimes Sasha puts a variation on it -- "You do you, Daddy." And because you’re a black person doing whatever it is that you're doing, that makes it a black thing. Feel confident.

Second, even as we each embrace our own beautiful, unique, and valid versions of our blackness, remember the tie that does bind us as African Americans -- and that is our particular awareness of injustice and unfairness and struggle. That means we cannot sleepwalk through life. We cannot be ignorant of history. We can’t meet the world with a sense of entitlement. We can’t walk by a homeless man without asking why a society as wealthy as ours allows that state of affairs to occur. We can’t just lock up a low-level dealer without asking why this boy, barely out of childhood, felt he had no other options. We have cousins and uncles and brothers and sisters who we remember were just as smart and just as talented as we were, but somehow got ground down by structures that are unfair and unjust.

And that means we have to not only question the world as it is, and stand up for those African Americans who haven’t been so lucky -- because, yes, you've worked hard, but you've also been lucky. That's a pet peeve of mine: People who have been successful and don’t realize they've been lucky. That God may have blessed them; it wasn’t nothing you did. So don’t have an attitude. But we must expand our moral imaginations to understand and empathize with all people who are struggling, not just black folks who are struggling -- the refugee, the immigrant, the rural poor, the transgender person, and yes, the middle-aged white guy who you may think has all the advantages, but over the last several decades has seen his world upended by economic and cultural and technological change, and feels powerless to stop it. You got to get in his head, too.

Number three: You have to go through life with more than just passion for change; you need a strategy. I'll repeat that. I want you to have passion, but you have to have a strategy. Not just awareness, but action. Not just hashtags, but votes.

You see, change requires more than righteous anger. It requires a program, and it requires organizing. At the 1964 Democratic Convention, Fannie Lou Hamer -- all five-feet-four-inches tall -- gave a fiery speech on the national stage. But then she went back home to Mississippi and organized cotton pickers. And she didn't have the tools and technology where you can whip up a movement in minutes. She had to go door to door. And I’m so proud of the new guard of black civil rights leaders who understand this. It’s thanks in large part to the activism of young people like many of you, from Black Twitter to Black Lives Matter, that America’s eyes have been opened -- white, black, Democrat, Republican -- to the real problems, for example, in our criminal justice system.

But to bring about structural change, lasting change, awareness is not enough. It requires changes in law, changes in custom. If you care about mass incarceration, let me ask you: How are you pressuring members of Congress to pass the criminal justice reform bill now pending before them? If you care about better policing, do you know who your district attorney is? Do you know who your state’s attorney general is? Do you know the difference? Do you know who appoints the police chief and who writes the police training manual? Find out who they are, what their responsibilities are. Mobilize the community, present them with a plan, work with them to bring about change, hold them accountable if they do not deliver. Passion is vital, but you've got to have a strategy.

And your plan better include voting -- not just some of the time, but all the time. It is absolutely true that 50 years after the Voting Rights Act, there are still too many barriers in this country to vote. There are too many people trying to erect new barriers to voting. This is the only advanced democracy on Earth that goes out of its way to make it difficult for people to vote. And there's a reason for that. There's a legacy to that.

But let me say this: Even if we dismantled every barrier to voting, that alone would not change the fact that America has some of the lowest voting rates in the free world. In 2014, only 36 percent of Americans turned out to vote in the midterms -- the secondlowest participation rate on record. Youth turnout -- that would be you -- was less than 20 percent. Less than 20 percent. Four out of five did not vote. In 2012, nearly two in three African Americans turned out. And then, in 2014, only two in five turned out. You don’t think that made a difference in terms of the Congress I've got to deal with? And then people are wondering, well, how come Obama hasn’t gotten this done? How come he didn’t get that done? You don’t think that made a difference? What would have happened if you had turned out at 50, 60, 70 percent, all across this country? People try to make this political thing really complicated. Like, what kind of reforms do we need? And how do we need to do that? You know what, just vote. It's math. If you have more votes than the other guy, you get to do what you want. It's not that complicated.

And you don’t have excuses. You don’t have to guess the number of jellybeans in a jar or bubbles on a bar of soap to register to vote. You don’t have to risk your life to cast a ballot. Other people already did that for you. Your grandparents, your great grandparents might be here today if they were working on it. What's your excuse? When we don’t vote, we give away our power, disenfranchise ourselves -- right when we need to use the power that we have; right when we need your power to stop others from taking away the vote and rights of those more vulnerable than you are -- the elderly and the poor, the formerly incarcerated trying to earn their second chance.

So you got to vote all the time, not just when it’s cool, not just when it's time to elect a President, not just when you’re inspired. It's your duty. When it’s time to elect a member of Congress or a city councilman, or a school board member, or a sheriff. That’s how we change our politics -- by electing people at every level who are representative of and accountable to us. It is not that complicated. Don’t make it complicated.

And finally, change requires more than just speaking out -- it requires listening, as well. In particular, it requires listening to those with whom you disagree, and being prepared to compromise. When I was a state senator, I helped pass Illinois’s first racial profiling law, and one of the first laws in the nation requiring the videotaping of confessions in capital cases. And we were successful because, early on, I engaged law enforcement. I didn’t say to them, oh, you guys are so racist, you need to do something. I understood, as many of you do, that the overwhelming majority of police officers are good, and honest, and courageous, and fair, and love the communities they serve.

And we knew there were some bad apples, and that even the good cops with the best of intentions -- including, by the way, African American police officers -- might have unconscious biases, as we all do. So we engaged and we listened, and we kept working until we built consensus. And because we took the time to listen, we crafted legislation that was good for the police -- because it improved the trust and cooperation of the community -- and it was good for the communities, who were less likely to be treated unfairly. And I can say this unequivocally: Without at least the acceptance of the police organizations in Illinois, I could never have gotten those bills passed. Very simple. They would have blocked them.

The point is, you need allies in a democracy. That's just the way it is. It can be frustrating and it can be slow. But history teaches us that the alternative to democracy is always worse. That's not just true in this country. It’s not a black or white thing. Go to any country where the give and take of democracy has been repealed by one-party rule, and I will show you a country that does not work.

And democracy requires compromise, even when you are 100 percent right. This is hard to explain sometimes. You can be completely right, and you still are going to have to engage folks who disagree with you. If you think that the only way forward is to be as uncompromising as possible, you will feel good about yourself, you will enjoy a certain moral purity, but you’re not going to get what you want. And if you don’t get what you want long enough, you will eventually think the whole system is rigged. And that will lead to more cynicism, and less participation, and a downward spiral of more injustice and more anger and more despair. And that's never been the source of our progress. That's how we cheat ourselves of progress.

We remember Dr. King’s soaring oratory, the power of his letter from a Birmingham jail, the marches he led. But he also sat down with President Johnson in the Oval Office to try and get a Civil Rights Act and a Voting Rights Act passed. And those two seminal bills were not perfect -- just like the Emancipation Proclamation was a war document as much as it was some clarion call for freedom. Those mileposts of our progress were not perfect. They did not make up for centuries of slavery or Jim Crow or eliminate racism or provide for 40 acres and a mule. But they made things better. And you know what, I will take better every time. I always tell my staff -- better is good, because you consolidate your gains and then you move on to the next fight from a stronger position.

Brittany Packnett, a member of the Black Lives Matter movement and Campaign Zero, one of the Ferguson protest organizers, she joined our Task Force on 21st Century Policing. Some of her fellow activists questioned whether she should participate. She rolled up her sleeves and sat at the same table with big city police chiefs and prosecutors. And because she did, she ended up shaping many of the recommendations of that task force. And those recommendations are now being adopted across the country -- changes that many of the protesters called for. If young activists like Brittany had refused to participate out of some sense of ideological purity, then those great ideas would have just remained ideas. But she did participate. And that’s how change happens.

America is big and it is boisterous and it is more diverse than ever. The president told me that we've got a significant Nepalese contingent here at Howard. I would not have guessed that. Right on. But it just tells you how interconnected we're becoming. And with so many folks from so many places, converging, we are not always going to agree with each other.

Another Howard alum, Zora Neale Hurston, once said -- this is a good quote here: “Nothing that God ever made is the same thing to more than one person.” Think about that. That’s why our democracy gives us a process designed for us to settle our disputes with argument and ideas and votes instead of violence and simple majority rule.

So don’t try to shut folks out, don’t try to shut them down, no matter how much you might disagree with them. There's been a trend around the country of trying to get colleges to disinvite speakers with a different point of view, or disrupt a politician’s rally. Don’t do that -- no matter how ridiculous or offensive you might find the things that come out of their mouths. Because as my grandmother used to tell me, every time a fool speaks, they are just advertising their own ignorance. Let them talk. Let them talk. If you don’t, you just make them a victim, and then they can avoid accountability.

That doesn’t mean you shouldn’t challenge them. Have the confidence to challenge them, the confidence in the rightness of your position. There will be times when you shouldn’t compromise your core values, your integrity, and you will have the responsibility to speak up in the face of injustice. But listen. Engage. If the other side has a point, learn from them. If they’re wrong, rebut them. Teach them. Beat them on the battlefield of ideas. And you might as well start practicing now, because one thing I can guarantee you -- you will have to deal with ignorance, hatred, racism, foolishness, trifling folks. I promise you, you will have to deal with all that at every stage of your life. That may not seem fair, but life has never been completely fair. Nobody promised you a crystal stair. And if you want to make life fair, then you've got to start with the world as it is.

So that’s my advice. That’s how you change things. Change isn’t something that happens every four years or eight years; change is not placing your faith in any particular politician and then just putting your feet up and saying, okay, go. Change is the effort of committed citizens who hitch their wagons to something bigger than themselves and fight for it every single day.

That’s what Thurgood Marshall understood -- a man who once walked this year, graduated from Howard Law; went home to Baltimore, started his own law practice. He and his mentor, Charles Hamilton Houston, rolled up their sleeves and they set out to overturn segregation. They worked through the NAACP. Filed dozens of lawsuits, fought dozens of cases. And after nearly 20 years of effort -- 20 years -- Thurgood Marshall ultimately succeeded in bringing his righteous cause before the Supreme Court, and securing the ruling in Brown v. Board of Education that separate could never be equal. Twenty years.

Marshall, Houston -- they knew it would not be easy. They knew it would not be quick. They knew all sorts of obstacles would stand in their way. They knew that even if they won, that would just be the beginning of a longer march to equality. But they had discipline. They had persistence. They had faith -- and a sense of humor. And they made life better for all Americans.

And I know you graduates share those qualities. I know it because I've learned about some of the young people graduating here today. There's a young woman named Ciearra Jefferson, who’s graduating with you. And I'm just going to use her as an example. I hope you don’t mind, Ciearra. Ciearra grew up in Detroit and was raised by a poor single mom who worked seven days a week in an auto plant. And for a time, her family found themselves without a place to call home. They bounced around between friends and family who might take them in. By her senior year, Ciearra was up at 5:00 am every day, juggling homework, extracurricular activities, volunteering, all while taking care of her little sister. But she knew that education was her ticket to a better life. So she never gave up. Pushed herself to excel. This daughter of a single mom who works on the assembly line turned down a full scholarship to Harvard to come to Howard.

And today, like many of you, Ciearra is the first in her family to graduate from college. And then, she says, she’s going to go back to her hometown, just like Thurgood Marshall did, to make sure all the working folks she grew up with have access to the health care they need and deserve. As she puts it, she’s going to be a “change agent.” She’s going to reach back and help folks like her succeed.

And people like Ciearra are why I remain optimistic about America. Young people like you are why I never give in to despair.

James Baldwin once wrote, “Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

Graduates, each of us is only here because someone else faced down challenges for us. We are only who we are because someone else struggled and sacrificed for us. That's not just Thurgood Marshall’s story, or Ciearra’s story, or my story, or your story -- that is the story of America. A story whispered by slaves in the cotton fields, the song of marchers in Selma, the dream of a King in the shadow of Lincoln. The prayer of immigrants who set out for a new world. The roar of women demanding the vote. The rallying cry of workers who built America. And the GIs who bled overseas for our freedom.

Now it’s your turn. And the good news is, you’re ready. And when your journey seems too hard, and when you run into a chorus of cynics who tell you that you’re being foolish to keep believing or that you can’t do something, or that you should just give up, or you should just settle -- you might say to yourself a little phrase that I’ve found handy these last eight years: Yes, we can.

Congratulations, Class of 2016! Good luck! God bless you. God bless the United States of America. I'm proud of you.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Weekly Address on Opioid Addiction with Macklemore

President Obama: Hi, everybody. I've got a special guest with me this week: Macklemore. Now, for those of you who don't share the same love for hip-hop that I do, he's a Grammy-winning artist, but he is also an advocate who's giving voice to a disease that we too often just whisper about: the disease of addiction.

Macklemore: Hey, everybody. I'm here with President Obama because I take this personally. I abused prescription drugs and I battled addiction. If I hadn't gotten the help that I needed when I needed it, I definitely would not be here today. And I want to help others facing the same challenges that I did.

President Obama: And drug overdoses now take more lives every year than traffic accidents. Deaths from opioid overdoses have tripled since 2000. A lot of [the] time, they're from legal drugs prescribed by a doctor. So, addiction doesn't always start in some dark alley; it often starts in a medicine cabinet. In fact, a new study released this month found that 44 percent of Americans know someone who has been addicted to prescription pain killers.

Macklemore: I didn't just know someone -- I lost someone. My friend Kevin overdosed on painkillers when he was just 21 years old. Addiction is like any other disease -- it doesn't discriminate. It doesn't care what color you are, whether you're a guy or a girl, rich or poor, whether you live in a[n] inner-city, a suburb, or rural America. This doesn't just happen to other people's kids or in some other neighborhood. It can happen to any of us.

President Obama: That's why just talking about this crisis isn't enough. We need to get treatment to more people who need it. My Administration is working with communities to reduce overdose deaths, including with medication. We're working with law enforcement to help people get into treatment instead of jail. And under Obamacare, health plans in the Marketplace have to include coverage for treatment.

Macklemore: I know recovery isn't easy or quick, but along with the 12-step program, treatment has saved my life. And recovery works. We need our leaders in Washington to fund it, and for people to know how to find it.

President Obama: We all need to do more to make that happen. I've asked Congress to expand access to recovery services, and to give first responders the tools they need to treat overdoses before it's too late. This week, the House passed several bills about opioids -- which is great -- but unless they also make investments in more treatment, it won't get Americans the help that they need. On top of funding, doctors also need more training about the power of pain medication they prescribe, and the risks that those pain medications carry. Another way our country can help those suffering in private is to make this conversation public.

Macklemore: When you're going through it, it's hard to imagine there could be anything worse than addiction. But shame and the stigma associated with the disease keeps too many people from seeking the help that they actually need. Addiction isn't a personal choice or a personal failing, and sometimes it takes more than a strong will to get better. It takes a strong community and accessible resources.

President Obama: The good news is, there's hope. When we talk about opioid abuse as the public health problem that it is, more people will seek the help that they need. More people will find the strength to recover, just like Macklemore and millions of Americans have. We'll see fewer preventable deaths and fewer broken families.

Macklemore: We have to tell people who need help that it's okay to ask for it. We've got to make sure they know where to get it.

President Obama: We all have a role to play. Even if we haven't fought this battle in our own lives, there's a good chance we know someone who has -- or who is.

Macklemore: President Obama and I just had a powerful conversation here at the White House about opioid abuse and what we can do about it. You can catch it this summer on MTV. And to find treatment in your area, call 1-800-662-HELP.

President Obama: Thanks, everybody. Thanks, Macklemore.

Macklemore: Thank you.

President Obama: And have a great weekend.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address to the People of Vietnam

Xin chÃ o! Xin chÃ o Vietnam! Thank you. Thank you so much. To the government and the people of Vietnam, thank you for this very warm welcome and the hospitality that you have shown to me on this visit. And thank all of you for being here today. We have Vietnamese from across this great country, including so many young people who represent the dynamism, and the talent and the hope of Vietnam.

On this visit, my heart has been touched by the kindness for which the Vietnamese people are known. In the many people who have been lining the streets, smiling and waving, I feel the friendship between our peoples. Last night, I visited the Old Quarter here in Hanoi and enjoyed some outstanding Vietnamese food. I tried some BÃºn Chả. Drank some bia Ha Noi. But I have to say, the busy streets of this city, I’ve never seen so many motorbikes in my life. So I haven’t had to try to cross the street so far, but maybe when I come back and visit you can tell me how.

I am not the first American President to come to Vietnam in recent times. But I am the first, like so many of you, who came of age after the war between our countries. When the last U.S. forces left Vietnam, I was just 13 years old. So my first exposure to Vietnam and the Vietnamese people came when I was growing up in Hawaii, with its proud Vietnamese American community there.

At the same time, many people in this country are much younger than me. Like my two daughters, many of you have lived your whole lives knowing only one thing -- and that is peace and normalized relations between Vietnam and the United States. So I come here mindful of the past, mindful of our difficult history, but focused on the future -- the prosperity, security and human dignity that we can advance together.

I also come here with a deep respect for Vietnam’s ancient heritage. For millennia, farmers have tended these lands -- a history revealed in the Dong Son drums. At this bend in the river, Hanoi has endured for more than a thousand years. The world came to treasure Vietnamese silks and paintings, and a great Temple of Literature stands as a testament to your pursuit of knowledge. And yet, over the centuries, your fate was too often dictated by others. Your beloved land was not always your own. But like bamboo, the unbroken spirit of the Vietnamese people was captured by Ly Thuong Kiet -- “the Southern emperor rules the Southern land. Our destiny is writ in Heaven’s Book.”

Today, we also remember the longer history between Vietnamese and Americans that is too often overlooked. More than 200 years ago, when our Founding Father, Thomas Jefferson, sought rice for his farm, he looked to the rice of Vietnam, which he said had “the reputation of being whitest to the eye, best flavored to the taste, and most productive.” Soon after, American trade ships arrived in your ports seeking commerce.

During the Second World War, Americans came here to support your struggle against occupation. When American pilots were shot down, the Vietnamese people helped rescue them. And on the day that Vietnam declared its independence, crowds took to the streets of this city, and Ho Chi Minh evoked the American Declaration of Independence. He said, “All people are created equal. The Creator has endowed them with inviolable rights. Among these rights are the right to life, the right to liberty, and the right to the pursuit of happiness.”

In another time, the profession of these shared ideals and our common story of throwing off colonialism might have brought us closer together sooner. But instead, Cold War rivalries and fears of communism pulled us into conflict. Like other conflicts throughout human history, we learned once more a bitter truth -- that war, no matter what our intentions may be, brings suffering and tragedy.

At your war memorial not far from here, and with family altars across this country, you remember some 3 million Vietnamese, soldiers and civilians, on both sides, who lost their lives. At our memorial wall in Washington, we can touch the names of 58,315 Americans who gave their lives in the conflict. In both our countries, our veterans and families of the fallen still ache for the friends and loved ones that they lost. Just as we learned in America that, even if we disagree about a war, we must always honor those who serve and welcome them home with the respect they deserve, we can join together today, Vietnamese and Americans, and acknowledge the pain and the sacrifices on both sides.

More recently, over the past two decades, Vietnam has achieved enormous progress, and today the world can see the strides that you have made. With economic reforms and trade agreements, including with the United States, you have entered the global economy, selling your goods around the world. More foreign investment is coming in. And with one of the fastest-growing economies in Asia, Vietnam has moved up to become a middle-income nation.

We see Vietnam’s progress in the skyscrapers and high-rises of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, and new shopping malls and urban centers. We see it in the satellites Vietnam puts into space and a new generation that is online, launching startups and running new ventures. We see it in the tens of millions of Vietnamese connected on Facebook and Instagram. And you’re not just posting selfies -- although I hear you do that a lot -- and so far, there have been a number of people who have already asked me for selfies. You’re also raising your voices for causes that you care about, like saving the old trees of Hanoi.

So all this dynamism has delivered real progress in people’s lives. Here in Vietnam, you’ve dramatically reduced extreme poverty, you've boosted family incomes and lifted millions into a fast-growing middle class. Hunger, disease, child and maternal mortality are all down. The number of people with clean drinking water and electricity, the number of boys and girls in school, and your literacy rate -- these are all up. This is extraordinary progress. This is what you have been able to achieve in a very short time.

And as Vietnam has transformed, so has the relationship between our two nations. We learned a lesson taught by the venerable Thich Nhat Hanh, who said, “In true dialogue, both sides are willing to change.” In this way, the very war that had divided us became a source for healing. It allowed us to account for the missing and finally bring them home. It allowed us to help remove landmines and unexploded bombs, because no child should ever lose a leg just playing outside. Even as we continue to assist Vietnamese with disabilities, including children, we are also continuing to help remove Agent Orange -- dioxin -- so that Vietnam can reclaim more of your land. We're proud of our work together in Danang, and we look forward to supporting your efforts in Bien Hoa.

Let’s also not forget that the reconciliation between our countries was led by our veterans who once faced each other in battle. Think of Senator John McCain, who was held for years here as a prisoner of war, meeting General Giap, who said our countries should not be enemies but friends. Think of all the veterans, Vietnamese and American, who have helped us heal and build new ties. Few have done more in this regard over the years than former Navy lieutenant, and now Secretary of State of the United States, John Kerry, who is here today. And on behalf of all of us, John, we thank you for your extraordinary effort.

Because our veterans showed us the way, because warriors had the courage to pursue peace, our peoples are now closer than ever before. Our trade has surged. Our students and scholars learn together. We welcome more Vietnamese students to America than from any other country in Southeast Asia. And every year, you welcome more and more American tourists, including young Americans with their backpacks, to Hanoi’s 36 Streets and the shops of Hoi An, and the imperial city of Hue. As Vietnamese and Americans, we can all relate to those words written by Van Cao -- “From now, we know each other’s homeland; from now, we learn to feel for each other.”

As President, I’ve built on this progress. With our new Comprehensive Partnership, our governments are working more closely together than ever before. And with this visit, we’ve put our relationship on a firmer footing for decades to come. In a sense, the long story between our two nations that began with Thomas Jefferson more than two centuries ago has now come full circle. It has taken many years and required great effort. But now we can say something that was once unimaginable: Today, Vietnam and the United States are partners.

And I believe our experience holds lessons for the world. At a time when many conflicts seem intractable, seem as if they will never end, we have shown that hearts can change and that a different future is possible when we refuse to be prisoners of the past. We've shown how peace can be better than war. We've shown that progress and human dignity is best advanced by cooperation and not conflict. That’s what Vietnam and America can show the world.

Now, America’s new partnership with Vietnam is rooted in some basic truths. Vietnam is an independent, sovereign nation, and no other nation can impose its will on you or decide your destiny. Now, the United States has an interest here. We have an interest in Vietnam’s success. But our Comprehensive Partnership is still in its early stages. And with the time I have left, I want to share with you the vision that I believe can guide us in the decades ahead.

First, let’s work together to create real opportunity and prosperity for all of our people. We know the ingredients for economic success in the 21st century. In our global economy, investment and trade flows to wherever there is rule of law, because no one wants to pay a bribe to start a business. Nobody wants to sell their goods or go to school if they don’t know how they're going to be treated. In knowledge-based economies, jobs go to where people have the freedom to think for themselves and exchange ideas and to innovate. And real economic partnerships are not just about one country extracting resources from another. They’re about investing in our greatest resource, which is our people and their skills and their talents, whether you live in a big city or a rural village. And that’s the kind of partnership that America offers.

As I announced yesterday, the Peace Corps will come to Vietnam for the first time, with a focus on teaching English. A generation after young Americans came here to fight, a new generation of Americans are going to come here to teach and build and deepen the friendship between us. Some of America’s leading technology companies and academic institutions are joining Vietnamese universities to strengthen training in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and medicine. Because even as we keep welcoming more Vietnamese students to America, we also believe that young people deserve a world-class education right here in Vietnam.

It's one of the reasons why we're very excited that this fall, the new Fulbright University Vietnam will open in Ho Chi Minh City -- this nation’s first independent, non-profit university -- where there will be full academic freedom and scholarships for those in need. Students, scholars, researchers will focus on public policy and management and business; on engineering and computer science; and liberal arts -- everything from the poetry of Nguyen Du, to the philosophy of Phan Chu Trinh, to the mathematics of Ngo Bao Chau.

And we're going to keep partnering with young people and entrepreneurs, because we believe that if you can just access the skills and technology and capital you need, then nothing can stand in your way -- and that includes, by the way, the talented women of Vietnam. We think gender equality is an important principle. From the Trung Sisters to today, strong, confident women have always helped move Vietnam forward. The evidence is clear -- I say this wherever I go around the world -- families, communities and countries are more prosperous when girls and women have an equal opportunity to succeed in school and at work and in government. That's true everywhere, and it's true here in Vietnam.

We’ll keep working to unleash the full potential of your economy with the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Here in Vietnam, TPP will let you sell more of your products to the world and it will attract new investment. TPP will require reforms to protect workers and rule of law and intellectual property. And the United States is ready to assist Vietnam as it works to fully implement its commitments. I want you to know that, as President of the United States, I strongly support TPP because you'll also be able to buy more of our goods, “Made in America.”

Moreover, I support TPP because of its important strategic benefits. Vietnam will be less dependent on any one trading partner and enjoy broader ties with more partners, including the United States. And TPP will reinforce regional cooperation. It will help address economic inequality and will advance human rights, with higher wages and safer working conditions. For the first time here in Vietnam, the right to form independent labor unions and prohibitions against forced labor and child labor. And it has the strongest environmental protections and the strongest anti-corruption standards of any trade agreement in history. That’s the future TPP offers for all of us, because all of us -- the United States, Vietnam, and the other signatories -- will have to abide by these rules that we have shaped together. That's the future that is available to all of us. So we now have to get it done -- for the sake of our economic prosperity and our national security.

This brings me to the second area where we can work together, and that is ensuring our mutual security. With this visit, we have agreed to elevate our security cooperation and build more trust between our men and women in uniform. We’ll continue to offer training and equipment to your Coast Guard to enhance Vietnam’s maritime capabilities. We will partner to deliver humanitarian aid in times of disaster. With the announcement I made yesterday to fully lift the ban on defense sales, Vietnam will have greater access to the military equipment you need to ensure your security. And the United States is demonstrating our commitment to fully normalize our relationship with Vietnam.

More broadly, the 20th century has taught all of us -- including the United States and Vietnam -- that the international order upon which our mutual security depends is rooted in certain rules and norms. Nations are sovereign, and no matter how large or small a nation may be, its sovereignty should be respected, and it territory should not be violated. Big nations should not bully smaller ones. Disputes should be resolved peacefully. And regional institutions, like ASEAN and the East Asia Summit, should continue to be strengthened. That’s what I believe. That's what the United States believes. That’s the kind of partnership America offers this region. I look forward to advancing this spirit of respect and reconciliation later this year when I become the first U.S. President to visit Laos.

In the South China Sea, the United States is not a claimant in current disputes. But we will stand with partners in upholding core principles, like freedom of navigation and overflight, and lawful commerce that is not impeded, and the peaceful resolution of disputes, through legal means, in accordance with international law. As we go forward, the United States will continue to fly, sail and operate wherever international law allows, and we will support the right of all countries to do the same.

Even as we cooperate more closely in the areas I’ve described, our partnership includes a third element -- addressing areas where our governments disagree, including on human rights. I say this not to single out Vietnam. No nation is perfect. Two centuries on, the United States is still striving to live up to our founding ideals. We still deal with our shortcomings -- too much money in our politics, and rising economic inequality, racial bias in our criminal justice system, women still not being paid as much as men doing the same job. We still have problems. And we're not immune from criticism, I promise you. I hear it every day. But that scrutiny, that open debate, confronting our imperfections, and allowing everybody to have their say has helped us grow stronger and more prosperous and more just.

I’ve said this before -- the United States does not seek to impose our form of government on Vietnam. The rights I speak of I believe are not American values; I think they're universal values written into the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They're written into the Vietnamese constitution, which states that “citizens have the right to freedom of speech and freedom of the press, and have the right of access to information, the right to assembly, the right to association, and the right to demonstrate.” That’s in the Vietnamese constitution. So really, this is an issue about all of us, each country, trying to consistently apply these principles, making sure that we -- those of us in government -- are being true to these ideals.

In recent years, Vietnam has made some progress. Vietnam has committed to bringing its laws in line with its new constitution and with international norms. Under recently passed laws, the government will disclose more of its budget and the public will have the right to access more information. And, as I said, Vietnam has committed to economic and labor reforms under the TPP. So these are all positive steps. And ultimately, the future of Vietnam will be decided by the people of Vietnam. Every country will chart its own path, and our two nations have different traditions and different political systems and different cultures. But as a friend of Vietnam, allow me to share my view -- why I believe nations are more successful when universal rights are upheld.

When there is freedom of expression and freedom of speech, and when people can share ideas and access the Internet and social media without restriction, that fuels the innovation economies need to thrive. That's where new ideas happen. That's how a Facebook starts. That's how some of our greatest companies began -- because somebody had a new idea. It was different. And they were able to share it. When there’s freedom of the press -- when journalists and bloggers are able to shine a light on injustice or abuse -- that holds officials accountable and builds public confidence that the system works. When candidates can run for office and campaign freely, and voters can choose their own leaders in free and fair elections, it makes the countries more stable, because citizens know that their voices count and that peaceful change is possible. And it brings new people into the system.

When there is freedom of religion, it not only allows people to fully express the love and compassion that are at the heart of all great religions, but it allows faith groups to serve their communities through schools and hospitals, and care for the poor and the vulnerable. And when there is freedom of assembly -- when citizens are free to organize in civil society -- then countries can better address challenges that government sometimes cannot solve by itself. So it is my view that upholding these rights is not a threat to stability, but actually reinforces stability and is the foundation of progress.

After all, it was a yearning for these rights that inspired people around the world, including Vietnam, to throw off colonialism. And I believe that upholding these rights is the fullest expression of the independence that so many cherish, including here, in a nation that proclaims itself to be “of the People, by the People and for the People.”

Vietnam will do it differently than the United States does. And each of us will do it differently from many other countries around the world. But there are these basic principles that I think we all have to try to work on and improve. And I said this as somebody who's about to leave office, so I have the benefit of almost eight years now of reflecting on how our system has worked and interacting with countries around the world who are constantly trying to improve their systems, as well.

Finally, our partnership I think can meet global challenges that no nation can solve by itself. If we’re going to ensure the health of our people and the beauty of our planet, then development has to be sustainable. Natural wonders like Ha Long Bay and Son Doong Cave have to be preserved for our children and our grandchildren. Rising seas threaten the coasts and waterways on which so many Vietnamese depend. And so as partners in the fight against climate change, we need to fulfill the commitments we made in Paris, we need to help farmers and villages and people who depend on fishing to adapt and to bring more clean energy to places like the Mekong Delta -- a rice bowl of the world that we need to feed future generations.

And we can save lives beyond our borders. By helping other countries strengthen, for example, their health systems, we can prevent outbreaks of disease from becoming epidemics that threaten all of us. And as Vietnam deepens its commitment to U.N. peacekeeping, the United States is proud to help train your peacekeepers. And what a truly remarkable thing that is -- our two nations that once fought each other now standing together and helping others achieve peace, as well. So in addition to our bilateral relationship, our partnership also allows us to help shape the international environment in ways that are positive.

Now, fully realizing the vision that I’ve described today is not going to happen overnight, and it is not inevitable. There may be stumbles and setbacks along the way. There are going to be times where there are misunderstandings. It will take sustained effort and true dialogue where both sides continue to change. But considering all the history and hurdles that we've already overcome, I stand before you today very optimistic about our future together. And my confidence is rooted, as always, in the friendship and shared aspirations of our peoples.

I think of all the Americans and Vietnamese who have crossed a wide ocean -- some reuniting with families for the first time in decades -- and who, like Trinh Cong Son said in his song, have joined hands, and opening their hearts and seeing our common humanity in each other.

I think of all the Vietnamese Americans who have succeeded in every walk of life -- doctors, journalists, judges, public servants. One of them, who was born here, wrote me a letter and said, by “God’s grace, I have been able to live the American Dream…I'm very proud to be an American but also very proud to be Vietnamese.” And today he’s here, back in the country of his birth, because, he said, his “personal passion” is “improving the life of every Vietnamese person.”

I think of a new generation of Vietnamese -- so many of you, so many of the young people who are here -- who are ready to make your mark on the world. And I want to say to all the young people listening: Your talent, your drive, your dreams -- in those things, Vietnam has everything it needs to thrive. Your destiny is in your hands. This is your moment. And as you pursue the future that you want, I want you to know that the United States of America will be right there with you as your partner and as your friend.

And many years from now, when even more Vietnamese and Americans are studying with each other; innovating and doing business with each other; standing up for our security, and promoting human rights and protecting our planet with each other -- I hope you think back to this moment and draw hope from the vision that I’ve offered today. Or, if I can say it another way -- in words that you know well from the Tale of Kieu -- “Please take from me this token of trust, so we can embark upon our 100-year journey together.”

Cam on cac ban.

Thank you very much. Thank you, Vietnam. Thank you.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address in Vietnam on Entrepreneurship and Business Development

Thank you. Zin chÃ o. Thank you very much. Thank you. Well, it’s wonderful to be here in Ho Chi Minh City. Please have a seat.

I just had the opportunity to visit the Jade Emperor Pagoda. And I think going from a 100-year-old sacred temple to this 21st century Dreamplex is I think a wonderful expression of the evolution that's taken place here in Vietnam -- a country that honors its history, but is also boldly racing towards the future.

And that’s also the story of this city. This is a city on the move. And we could see as we were traveling in from the airport all the activity that's currently taking place. And I’m not just talking about the traffic -- although I do think it might be easier to be on a motorbike than a motorcade.

But this city, like this country, is full of energy. You can see it in the skyscrapers shooting above the horizon and the shops that are springing up at every corner. You can spot it online, where tens of millions of Vietnamese are connecting with each other and with the world. And you can feel it here at Dreamplex, where ideas are becoming a reality. I just had the chance to see some of those ideas in action -- young people who are making things happen. I saw a virtual game that can help people recover from nerve injuries, to a machine that lets your smartphone control a laser-cutter -- although you have to be careful with the laser-cutter where you point it.

But some of this energy may be due to your famous cÃ phÃª trÃºng. That stuff is strong, I understand. But the real driver of Vietnam’s growth, and the engine of Ho Chi Minh City, is the spirit of entrepreneurship -- the spirit that brings us here today.

And I see it everywhere I travel all around the world. I meet people -- and especially young people, like the three that we're about to meet -- who are eager to strike out on their own, start something new, and shape their own destinies. Many want to do more than just create a great new appropriate for a phone. They want to contribute to their communities and help people live better lives.

And that’s what entrepreneurship is all about. It's building businesses -- making a profit, hopefully. But it's also about creating good jobs, and developing new products, and devising ways to serve others. Entrepreneurship is also the fuel for prosperity that puts rising economies on the path to success. It’s what gives young people like so many of you the chance to channel your energy and your passion into something that is bigger than yourselves. And it allows us to come together across countries and cultures to solve some of the world’s greatest challenges.

Of course, being an entrepreneur is not easy. It’s not easy in the United States; it's not easy here in Vietnam; it's not easy anyplace in the world. It can be tough to get started. It’s hard to access capital. It's hard to get the skills that you need to run a business. You might not always have the mentors and the networks that can help guide you along the way. And it can be especially difficult for women, for others who traditionally are not viewed as being at the center of business life in a country, haven't had all the access to the same opportunities.

So we’ve got to tap all the talent that's out there. Just because you are born poor does not mean you should not be able to start a business. Just because you don't look like the traditional businessman doesn’t mean you can't make a great product or deliver a great service.

And that’s why Dreamplex is so important. It’s not only a home for digital entrepreneurs like you. It’s also a place where you can share ideas and work together and build a community that supports each other.

And incubators like this allow Vietnam, alongside its emphasis on entrepreneurship, to see more startups happening in this country than ever before. Recently, in one year alone, the funding for startups doubled in this country. And we’re seeing major acquisitions, like Fossil Group’s takeover Misfit Wearables, a Vietnamese company that makes devices like fitness trackers. We’re seeing Vietnamese-Americans who are coming here to start new ventures -- and that shows a strong bond between the United States and Vietnam.

And the world is taking notice. A leading global venture capital firm called 500 Startups just launched a 10 million dollar fund here in Ho Chi Minh City. Next month at our Global Entrepreneurship Summit -- something that I've been hosting now for several years -- I’ll welcome eight Vietnamese entrepreneurs to Silicon Valley, so that they can learn from some of the best entrepreneurs and startups and venture capitalists in the world. And your success sends a message to global investors about this country’s incredible potential for innovation. Hopefully it also encourages other Vietnamese entrepreneurs to chase that new great idea and start that new company, which will continue to fuel an ever-expanding Vietnam economy.

I’m here today because the United States is committed to being a partner as you grow. With the Peace Corps coming to Vietnam for the first time, our volunteers are going to help more Vietnamese learn English -- the language that so often is used in the global economy. With programs like our Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative, we’re helping give thousands of young people across Vietnam the skills and networks they need to turn their ideas into action. With our U.S.-ASEAN Connect Initiative, we’re matching American investors with Vietnamese entrepreneurs in areas like clean energy. With the women’s entrepreneurship center we’re going to open here in Vietnam -- WECREATE is what we're going to call it -- we’ll help empower the next generation of women business owners.

And if we really want to encourage entrepreneurship and innovation, I should mention that we need to move ahead with the Trans-Pacific Partnership, because TPP will not only let us sell more of our goods to each other and bring our economies closer together, it will accelerate economic reforms here in Vietnam, boost your economic competitiveness, open up new markets not only for large companies but also for small and medium-sized businesses. It will raise labor and environmental standards, and it will improve business conditions so that entrepreneurs like you can thrive.

So my message to all the entrepreneurs here today is that I believe in you, America believes in you, and we’re going to keep investing in your success. Ultimately, it’s the inventors and dreamers, people like those that I just met, those that we'll hear from soon, and all of you in the audience who are going to shape Vietnam’s future for decades to come.

So I'm looking forward to hearing from these outstanding young leaders. Thank you very much. Cam on.

So I'm just going to introduce very quickly these outstanding young businesspeople who are leading the way here in Vietnam. We invited them here to give us some of their thoughts about what would make it easier for them to start their businesses and to continue to nurture the startups that they’re involved with.

The first is Khoa Pham, who is the director of Legal and Corporate at Microsoft Vietnam. We have Le Hoang Uyen Vy, who is the founder of Adayroi, which is aiming to become the Amazon of Vietnam. And we have Do Thi Thuy Hang, who’s the vice president of Seedcom, which invests in Vietnamese companies. So please give them a big round of applause, and we'll start our conversation.

So, Vy, let's start with you. And tell us -- it sounds like you started being interested in business at a very young age.

Vy: Good evening, Mr. President. And good evening, everyone. First of all, I'd like to say thank you to the Vietnamese and U.S. governments for organizing such a wonderful event. My name is Vy, and I graduated from Georgetown University in 2009, majoring in finance. Actually, I have a passion for technology when I was in school. When I was 13, I decided to start my own web design company. And I love the idea of connecting buyers and sellers to an online platform, just like eBay or Amazon.

But at the moment, I was so young and I couldn't start a formal business. And therefore, after my college graduation, I decided to come back to Vietnam and started -- an e-marketplace selling fashion items. And luckily, after five years, we became one of the top destination for fashion lovers in Vietnam. And we got acquired by the biggest conglomerate in Vietnam. And right now I'm running Adayroi.com. Basically, we're the Amazon[.com] of Vietnam. We sell everything from electronics to even groceries online. And our goal is to bring safe and high-quality products at affordable price to every family in Vietnam.

President Obama: That's great. Now, you look very good. Is this some of your fashion that you can sell online? Is that like you can buy the necklace and the earrings?

VY: They are available on Adayroi.com.

President Obama: So if you're looking for a good deal -- Excellent.

And, Hang, you started out as an entrepreneur. Now you're an investor as well. Tell us what have been the challenges that you’ve met. And there have been some special challenges about being a woman entrepreneur and investor here in Vietnam.

Hang: Mr. President, I am glad to be here as well. I guess let’s take it back a little bit. I came back to Vietnam five years ago after nine years in the States. So America is truly my second home. And when I came back it was basically because of my very close ties with Vietnam. My family has been here; my hometown is here; a lot of people here. Because the environment has been very supporting, I've learned a lot from previous generations. And certainly because I have seen successful role models here, that's why I came back.

I never thought that being a female entrepreneur would be a disadvantage here in the local market because, from my experience and observations about the area, I'm very proud to say that in Vietnam women are treated equally and given a lot of opportunity. So whether we try or not is all stuff within ourselves. And we see a lot of women entrepreneurs in the room as well. Le Hoang Uyen Vy, who you just mentioned, she’s incredible. She’s not an entrepreneur, per se, but she has done a terrific job here in Ho Chi Minh City. We all love her.

So if the world was run by women -- and I'm thinking the United States election this year -- it would be a better place. Like you always say. You always say that.

President Obama: I do. So what kind of businesses are you looking to invest in at this point?

Hang: Vietnam is among the top exporters of agricultural products in the world. Yet there are a lot of untapped opportunities in agriculture. And it is a very low-tech, low-productivity sector. And at Seedcom, we've worked with a lot of companies across retail, technology and logistics. But the project that we're most excited about at the moment is in agriculture. We apply technology to traditional farming -- stuff like tracking automation. Basically we bring the product all the way to end user at a higher value.

So that is I guess the next wave in innovation in Vietnam, where entrepreneurs and investors come together, using technology to tackle very traditional industries.

President Obama: So, Pham, you were born here, moved to the States when you were 11. Is that right?

Pham: That's right.

President Obama: And got your education there, worked in Washington, ended up at a very impressive startup called Microsoft. And so now you're here representing Microsoft in Ho Chi Minh City. Tell us about, what are the opportunities that Microsoft is seeing? And how you think U.S. companies can most effectively interact with Vietnamese businesspeople and startups and entrepreneurs.

Pham: Well, welcome to Vietnam, Mr. President. I know it's early morning in Washington, D.C. --

President Obama: I've gotten over the jetlag. I'm fine.

Pham: -- so I'm glad you're awake. So I returned to Vietnam for the same reason that my parents had when they took me out of Vietnam as a young boy, and that is that they wanted me to have an opportunity for a better life. And we found that in the U.S. And after 35 years living in the U.S., I decided to return to Vietnam to give the same opportunities and to make a difference to the young people of Vietnam -- maybe some sitting here today.

And so the way I look at my return is that Microsoft gives me the opportunity to make a difference, to improve lives for people, to produce the technology, as well as to accelerate the development of the country through technology by the improvement of our IT infrastructure. So I see a lot of investors, young entrepreneurs, and the spirit of entrepreneurship here in Vietnam. And that is the reason I returned to Vietnam.

President Obama: So, Vy, you were mentioning how you want to be the Amazon of Vietnam. Tell me about the challenges you have in trying to build a digital platform for commerce here in Vietnam, and what makes it different trying to develop that here than it might be in the United States, where, obviously, there’s more digital platforms and penetration. I'm assuming that, particularly if you want to reach rural areas, that some of the logistical challenges are different. So tell us what has been some of the hardest aspects of building on your vision, and how do you think both the Vietnamese government, or the United States government, or companies that are interested in working with you or other entrepreneurs -- how they can be most helpful. Where do you see the biggest roadblocks?

Vy: -- about bringing convenience and more lifestyle to the Vietnamese people. Imagine that working moms have a job from 9:00 to 6:00, and then after 6:00 p.m., she has to rush to the supermarket to shop for her dinner, it would probably take her an hour to get home, and then ready to cook for the family.

President Obama: Because the traffic is --

Vy: Right, the traffic jam. So imagine that one day she can sit in her office and order all the ingredients, and when she gets home the meal will be ready for her to cook dinner for her family. So every day we can save her an hour to spend more time with her family. Imagine that we can save her 360 hours per year, which translates to 7,300 hours over 20 years, which is equivalent to almost a year. So we can save a woman a year over 20 years. So that's now our dream.

But basically, it's very challenging because even online grocery is difficult because of the infrastructure. It's very difficult for us to get the items to the customer on time, and especially when you have a commitment to deliver it within two hours, which is quite impossible when we first started. But then we are very committed. So we do our own delivery structure, we do our own delivery. And up to now I think we have a feeling of it so we are able to deliver our product as fast as we can to satisfy the customers.

So a couple challenges that I think either the government in Vietnam or the U.S. government can help us is, first, to help us to develop our infrastructure -- the logistics, the payment structure, and bring technology to Vietnam. So that's always been my dream.

President Obama: So one of the challenges is just making sure that you have the physical infrastructure so that you can deliver fast enough. But in terms of the digital infrastructure, is that well developed, because everybody has a smartphone now?

Vy: It's much, much better now because people are getting used to using their smartphone to order things online. Three years ago, when I first started, it was so difficult to get people online. But now it's very easy. But still -- so the operational infrastructure is not there yet, so we need to learn it from successful companies like Amazon, or we need to come up with our own solution in Vietnam. Because the industry in Vietnam is not the same as the U.S. You understand, right? So we have all the deliverymen on motorbike. And they have to know their way around. It's very difficult to install GPS.

President Obama: And just one last question. In terms of access to capital, typically, are startups here self-financed, or are they financed through the banks? Is there enough of sort of a bank infrastructure for small businesses and medium-sized businesses? Or are you using -- are most entrepreneurs using family savings? Is there venture capital? How are people getting started?

Vy: That's a very good question. To be honest, I think in Vietnam, it's very difficult to get early funding. Especially there’s not that many venture capital funding here in Vietnam. For seed funding and investors, very limited. I think most of the investors in Vietnam, they want to invest in companies that have track records, which is quite a challenge for a startup in Vietnam. So we have family startup here. It's good news for us. And we hope that in the near future, more venture funds can come to Vietnam, especially from America, to help us grow all of the new businesses.

President Obama: Well, I'm trying to do some advertising for you here. Hopefully somebody is paying attention back in the United States.

So, Hang, you were talking about agriculture. Obviously a large portion of Vietnam is still dependent on basic agricultural and small farmers. Is the goal here for them to be able to move their products to market at a better price and more quickly? Or is it that you want to move up the value chain so that there’s more processing that's taking place, so it's not just rice or other crops, but it's also the products that are derived from the foodstuffs that are being grown? Or is it all of the above? Tell me a little bit more about how you see the opportunity for agriculture to accelerate here in Vietnam.

Hang: I guess all of the above. Of course, myself, we cannot change the [inaudible], but many investors and entrepreneurs working together, we can make an impact. So as I mentioned, there are two partners in our business. One is to apply more technology. Some technology is just very, very simple. You can text message. You can [inaudible] on the farm, et cetera. That improves the productivity massively, and that helps the farmers to increase their output and, as a result, their income.

And secondly, basically, have a trust and more value and bring the products to the end users at a higher price. And obviously the result of that is also higher income. And we understand that there are a lot of challenges like you mentioned. Logistically, it's not there yet. The infrastructure, there is a lot to do. But we are a very young team and they are farmers and they have a lot of -- I know personally a lot of people, young people who work in agriculture. And we have so much passion and energy and drive, and beyond that, we even have a strategy and action plan to make this happen. So hopefully, in the next few years you see some very positive change in agriculture in Vietnam.

President Obama: So, Pham, when you think about business here versus business as you're accustomed to seeing in the United States, what are some of the big differences? And are there particular areas where you think a strategic investment would make a big difference in helping all these startups take off? And in terms of Microsoft’s strategy, are your main clients large businesses, and just helping them with respect to IT, or are you also working with some of these smaller startups to see how you can grow their businesses and hopefully help them really take off?

Pham: I'm sure you have heard from -- our CO. Our company mission is to empower every person, every organization on the planet to achieve more. And I think there is no better market to do that than in Vietnam, because of the young entrepreneurs that we have here and the penetration, the mobile base that we have here with young people. And I think that in terms of capturing the opportunity, I think that's important for us to look at -- for our government -- and businesses and entrepreneurs to really balance the opportunity and the responsibility in this new world that we live in, which is a mobile world.

And so if we look at the challenges in that respect, I think public policy, regulatory environment -- it needs to be more conducive, it needs to be modernized to address the digital economy. And I think that Vietnam is not unique in that space of the developing market. I think in the U.S. that the same things have been faced with how do we deal with e-commerce across borders, taxation issues and things of that nature. But I think that Vietnam can [inaudible] other markets, and seeing and capturing that opportunity.

For Microsoft Vietnam, in particular, we have a national empowerment plan that basically mirrors the government ICT master plan by 2020 to really develop Vietnam in ICT advanced nation. And so, in that regard, we look at the three key pillars, which is the ICT infrastructure of a country, helping really secure the cybersecurity apparatus of the country, really looking at the issue of privacy with the protection of the ICT infrastructure for a national cloud -- to really take advantage of that.

And also our investment, in the second pillar, which is about small and medium-sized enterprises -- I think that is going to be the driving factor for the economic growth in this country. We have about 500,000 businesses here of that size, and so I would say that the startup community is also the micro businesses that are starting out. And we have programs that provide free software, free cloud services to these startups. So this way, they can really focus on developing the best products.

And then, honestly, the education side, we really have to look at capacity building, and that is to really help the Vietnamese move from a labor-intensive economy into more of a knowledge economy, knowledge-based economy. And that is really getting them the right skill set for ICT skill set and also we need to really invest a bit more on STEM education. And we're doing that -- and teaching the technology in the classrooms, and really doing a lot of these startup community, co-working space, community events to really promote coding, because I think that's very important. And I think [inaudible] -- I think that's something we do here annually as well.

President Obama: I think that's a great point, and, Vy and Hang, maybe you want to talk about this a little bit. Ultimately, what makes startups and entrepreneurs successful is good ideas and the human capital. Obviously investors are important and infrastructure is important, but the most important thing is people. And when you look at Vietnam right now, it seems as if a culture of entrepreneurship is really beginning to grow. But one of the questions that I always have to ask myself in the United States is whether our education system is equipping our children effectively enough to be able to move forward on their ideas.

So you're both very young, so you can still remember what it's like to go to school. For me, I've forgotten. But I will say that when I was going to school we didn’t have computers. Well, you had these big mainframe computers, but you didn’t have personal computers.

How do you see the education system here adapting to the needs of this new 21st century economy?

Vy: I still remember taking entrepreneurship classes in the U.S. and I found it so helpful for me to learn about how to write a business plan, how to pitch to an investor -- and I think when I got back here, I don't find many entrepreneurship classes in Vietnam. So I think that's an empty area that we can tap on.

And secondly, I think after the startup gets funding, I think they also need mentorship program. Those are the things that really helps the startup community in Vietnam. And I also think that -- I used to be an exchange student. I came to U.S. when I was 17. I'm very thankful for that because I learned so much about innovation and I learned how to dream big and always hope for a brighter future. So I think there’s a chance for us to also create exchange programs, not just for students but for working adults. Especially we can send young startups to do on-the-job training or internship program at some U.S. company. So those are the things that I really want to get to the audience.

President Obama: Good. Hang?

Hang: I'd like to add to what Vy just said -- the power of technology. Again, I go back to this. Students now, they have access to a lot more information, and education opens new sector for startups to come and basically [inaudible.] So a friend, he has a education startup. Another friend who I know very well, she launched a startup that helps students learn English through an app. So all of those examples you can see that technology basically opens the door and opens opportunities for Vietnamese students to access global knowledge.

And the evidence of that is most of the teams that I work with in Vietnam for my previous startup -- they all are educated in Vietnam. I'm one of the very lucky few that got years of education in the States. But I respect my colleagues a lot every day -- they’re so smart. They learn in Vietnam. They learn not only by going to school, but also by doing, by talking to older people, and obviously learning from the Internet. So I do think technology is changing education.

President Obama: Well, Pham was talking about leapfrogging. One of the things that you're seeing in countries all around the world is if they haven't already developed a telephone infrastructure with landlines and telephone poles and underground tunnels, now, suddenly, they just go straight to cellular towers and smartphones. And banking is done there, and commerce is done through phones. And so they’ve leapfrogged over the infrastructure requirements of both systems.

And the same is true with education. If done properly, the opportunity for online education that is much cheaper but is still of high quality that can accelerate the ability of a child here in Vietnam to learn coding, learn business practices and so forth, without an expensive education or having to study overseas is hugely important. And with our contribution through the Peace Corps, through entrepreneurship summits, through the sponsorships that we're getting various companies to engage in, our hope is, is that we'll be able to provide the kind of training to young people that will be incredibly powerful for them in the future.

And we want to thank the Vietnamese government for their cooperation, because a lot of these systems that we're trying to build we could not do if it were not for the strong support that we're receiving from them.

But any other closing thoughts that you think either the President of the United States or the President of Vietnam or any of these business leaders here should hear about?

Question: Mr. President, let me ask you a question.

President Obama: Oh, sure. The tide is turned.

Question: So when you were a kid, did you dream of becoming President one day?

President Obama: No. I think there are some people who they had a very clear vision for themselves. I really didn’t -- I was not as well organized as all of you when I was young. I think it wasn’t until I was in college that I began to develop a sense of wanting to make a difference. And even then I did not know exactly how I might do it.

I was actually very skeptical of politics because I thought politicians weren’t always looking out for the people; that too often, I thought, they were looking out for themselves. So I actually worked in communities to try to hold politicians accountable. That was the first job that I did in the nonprofit sector.

So it wasn’t really until I think I finished law school that I thought that I might be interested in public service. In fact, I went to law school with my now who is my Trade Representative, our Ambassador Michael Froman. And he was much smarter than me. But it wasn’t until I came out of law school that I thought that maybe I might run for office at some point.

But the important point I think I want to make is that so many of the young people here today -- certainly all of you -- well, you sort of qualify as young. Young at heart. These two are young. You're younger than me. But so many of the young people I meet today I think have a different idea of their careers and their lives. I think they’re much more sophisticated. I think the Internet has exposed them to a lot more ideas of what they can do. I believe that many young people recognize that the old system where you find yourself a job and then you work in that same job for 30 or 40 years is less likely to be the path for them because the economy is just changing so quickly.

And so I think there’s much more interest on the part of all the young people I meet -- certainly here in Southeast Asia, in the States, Africa, Europe, wherever I go -- to try to make it on their own, and to try to find collaborations with groups of people who are interested in the same things they are, and to see if they can make it happen. And I think that's a wonderful thing. It's challenging. I think one of the well-known rules in Silicon Valley is, is that if you haven't failed quite a bit then you're probably not a very good entrepreneur because the first idea you have is not always going to work. And you have to be resilient and be able to learn from your failures as much as your successes.

But I truly believe that this generation is not only being entrepreneurial when it thinks about business, but also entrepreneurial when it thinks about trying to solve social problems; entrepreneurial when it thinks about government and making government more responsive and accountable to ordinary people. And it makes me very hopeful for the future.

Question: I guess the entrepreneurial spirit is very much engrained in Vietnamese people, just like for Americans. And you have seen, and just now have seen here the very vibrant startup business community here in Ho Chi Minh City. Just imagine how much more it can be if there is more exchange, of knowledge, of capital, technical know-how between the two countries, the U.S. and Vietnam.

And on that note, my question for you would be, if your daughter took a gap year from Harvard College, so tells you next week that she wants to live in Vietnam for a year, what would you tell her?

President Obama: Oh, I would encourage it. But what I've learned is, is that -- my daughter Malia will be 18 next month, and she already doesn’t listen to me, whatever I say. So if you want her to come to Vietnam, I shouldn’t be the one to tell her. Maybe you should tell her. Yes, absolutely. But certainly I would recommend students from the States to come and study here as much as I'm encouraging Vietnamese students to come and study in the United States.

Young people are going to be living in an interconnected world, in a global marketplace. And every business has to think globally. Even small businesses. If you have a good product today, you can reach billions of people if you have a good strategy, you have good marketing, you can handle the logistics. And so the barriers to entry that used to exist where only a Boeing or a GE or a very large company could operate in Vietnam is no longer true. And the same is true for small businesses here in Vietnam. If you have an interesting product that is unique and perhaps is very common in Vietnam, but nobody knows about in the United States, oftentimes some of the best ways to start a business is to take something that is very popular in one place but is unknown someplace else and be the first person to sell that product in another country.

So I think part of the education that young people have to have is to understand other cultures and understand other markets. If you're lucky enough to be able to travel, then that's one way to do it. But one of the wonderful things about the Internet is it gives you an opportunity to learn about another place, even if you can't set foot there. So that's something that I continually emphasize.

Last question or comment.

Pham: I have a question. In your opening remarks, you mentioned about TPP, and we didn’t have a chance to talk about that. And so TPP is considered a 21st century trade agreement, dealing directly with the digital economy, talking about the rules of law extending to security and privacy and also cost more [inaudible.] TPP is very important to Vietnam, and I know that the Vietnamese business community supports it. And as an employee of Microsoft, I can reaffirm that our company supports TPP.

As we look at the latest report published by the U.S. International Trade Commission, that indicates that, fully implemented, TPP will bring about 57 billion dollars into the U.S. economy. But apparently, the U.S. -- American politics is sort of turning against TPP. So I'd like to hear from you, what do you think is going to be -- what it takes to pass TPP in Washington, D.C. And what will you do in your power to make that happen?

President Obama: Well, it's a great question. And first of all, just to describe why TPP is so important. What TPP does is it takes 12 countries along the Asia Pacific region that represent a huge portion of the entire world’s marketplace, and it says we're going to create standards for trade and commerce that are fair; that create a level playing field; that have high standards; that encourage rule of law; that encourage protection of intellectual property -- so if Vy or Hang come up with a great idea, somebody is not just going to steal it off the Internet but the work that they’ve put in is protected; that has strong environmental provisions so that countries can't just take advantage of no environmental protection to undercut competitors who are following more responsible environmental practices.

And not only do all the countries who are participating stand to gain from increased trade, but Vietnam, in particular, I think economists who have studied it believe would be one of the biggest beneficiaries.

From the United States’ perspective, it's a common-sense thing to do because, frankly, our markets are already more open than many of the markets of the countries that are signing up. So Japan, for example, is able to sell a lot of cars in the United States but has a lot of problems importing beef from the United States. And what we've done is to make sure that a lot of the tariffs that are currently being placed on U.S. exports and U.S. goods are reduced.

And so it will create a better environment for U.S. businesses -- particularly because of some of the intellectual property protections, a lot of what we sell today are products of our knowledge-based economy. And so it's a smart thing to do across the board.

Now, the problem in the United States around trade -- and this is not new. This has been true for the last 30 years -- is that some of the previous trade agreements did not have enforceable labor protections or environmental protections. I think when China came in to the WTO, it was able to take advantage of the growing global supply chain, and a lot of manufacturing shifted to China in a very visible way. So a lot of Americans saw companies close and saw what they viewed as their jobs being exported to China. And some of that happened in Mexico, with NAFTA as well.

And so the perception was that this is bad for U.S. workers and U.S. jobs. If you look at the data, then what is true is that some manufacturing jobs were lost as a consequence of trade. On the other hand, other sectors of the economy improved significantly. And overall, it was good for the U.S. economy. But I think that in the design of some of the oil trade deals and some of the mistakes that may have been made in the past, people became suspicious of trade and worried that if we do TPP, then the same pattern will repeat itself, and the U.S. will lose more jobs.

My argument is that if you're dissatisfied with the current trading arrangements where tariffs are placed on U.S. goods but other goods are already coming into the U.S., why would you want to just maintain the status quo? Why not change it so that everybody is operating in a fair and transparent way?

And the good news is, is that the majority of Americans still believe in trade and still believe that it's good for our economy. The bad news is politics in the United States is not always -- how would I put it -- reasonable. That's the word I'm looking for. But I'm confident that we're going to be able to get it done because, in the past when we negotiated trade deals, even though there’s a lot of opposition, at the end of the day we end up getting it done. Keep in mind that we negotiated a very big free trade agreement with Korea, and even though the Bush administration negotiated it, he didn’t get it passed, when I came into office, one of the first things we did was we worked with Korea, we made some small modifications to some of the terms and we got it done, and it's in force today.

So the argument that I've made and I will continue to make in the United States is that we're not going to be able to end globalization. We have to make globalization work for us. And that means that we don't try to put barriers and walls between us and the rest of the world; but instead, we try to make sure that the world has high standards, treats our companies fairly. And if we do that, I'm confident we can compete with anybody.

So nothing is easy in Washington these days. But despite sometimes the lack of cooperation with Congress, I seem to be able to get a lot of things done anyway. It could have been easier. I would have less gray hair -- if Congress was working more effectively, but we do have some members of Congress who are here. That's Congressman Castro and Congressman O’Rourke who are two outstanding young congressmen from Texas. They’re strong TPP supporters and we're very proud of the work that they’ve done. So we're just going to have to work hard to convince some of their colleagues. But ultimately I think we can get it passed.

Well, everybody, I think that if you have any doubt about the outstanding future of Vietnamese entrepreneurs, then all those doubts have been pushed away because of the outstanding presentations by these three individuals. Give them a big round of applause.

Thank you so much.

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# Vietnam YSEALI Town Hall

Thank you! Thank you so much. Everybody, please have a seat. Thank you very much. Xin chÃ o. Thank you, Tu, for the excellent introduction and your outstanding work to help more young people in Vietnam get an education. Give Tu a big round of applause. It’s not that easy introducing the President of the United States. Also because the podium was a little higher than her.

I want to thank everybody at the GEM Convention Center for hosting us. I want to thank the government and the people of Vietnam for the wonderful hospitality that you’ve extended to me over the past three days. I’ve been deeply touched. Wherever I travel around the world, obviously one of my jobs is to meet with government leaders. And these meetings are important. But it means that I spend a lot of time with older people like me. There’s a lot of gray hair in the room. So one of my favorite parts of the trips I take overseas is to get out of the government offices and to spend time with young people like you. It’s fun. It gives me incredible optimism about the future, because all of you embody the energy and the drive that is helping to propel this region to new heights. You make me hopeful about the future of ASEAN, hopeful about the future of the world.

And so that’s what I want to briefly talk about before I start taking your questions.

As I think all of you know, I have a strong personal connection to this part of the world, to the Asia Pacific and to Southeast Asia. I was born in Hawaii, spent most of my childhood in Hawaii. But I also spent time in Indonesia as a young boy. My sister was born in Jakarta. So this region helped to shape me. It is also why I really like the food. And I have to say that the food I've had since I've been here I've been really happy with.

Now, as President, a key part of my foreign policy is to deepen our ties with countries and that peoples of Southeast Asia. And we’ve done that. We've deepened the ties with our allies and our partners. We’ve engaged more with institutions like ASEAN. We’re pursuing the Trans-Pacific Partnership to grow our economies and to support jobs in our countries. Together, we’re promoting peace and encouraging sustainable development. We're protecting our environment, and trying to meet shared challenges like climate change.

But government and businesses are only part of the equation. If we’re going to meet all of these challenges, we also have to build strong relationships between our people, and especially between young people like you and young people in other ASEAN countries.

Keep in mind that here in Vietnam, two-thirds of you were born after 1975. As I often say to young Americans back home, your generation can look at the world with fresh eyes, without some of the old notions, the old habits of a previous generation. And that gives you the perspective and the power not just to help to grow Vietnam, but also to help shape the world.

Thanks to technology and social media, you’re the most connected generation in history. I see it in my daughters, who are always on the phone, and they have to teach me how to use the phone. More than 30 million people in Vietnam -- one-third of the population -- are on Facebook -- just on Facebook. You’re posting selfies -- I know. I was in the gym this morning, people were trying to take selfies. You're streaming the latest Son Tung MTP hit. But you're also exchanging ideas and learning from each other.

And so this gives you tremendous power. And we need your passion and energy and talents to tackle some of our biggest global challenges -- whether it's reducing poverty, to advancing equality for women and girls, to fighting climate change.

Now, even in this digital age, as Tu pointed out, change doesn’t happen overnight. It requires that you stay active and involved over the long term. And it requires you to develop some practical tools. And that’s why, three years ago, I launched the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative -- or YSEALI. And the goal is to empower young people like you with the skills and the resources, and the networks that you need to turn your ideas into action.

Since we started this, the YSEALI Network has grown to more than 67,000 members across all 10 ASEAN countries -- including over 13,000 here in Vietnam alone. And we’ve welcomed more than 350 YSEALI Fellows to the United States -- including some of you -- with more than 200 coming in the next six months.

So a lot of what we do in YSEALI is rooted in the power and importance of education. That’s why nearly 19,000 Vietnamese students studying in the United States right now are helping to bring back the kinds of skills and talents that Vietnam will need to continue to grow and develop. It’s why, on this visit, we announced a new partnership between American universities like Arizona State and Vietnamese universities to boost training in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine. It’s why we announced that, for the first time, the Peace Corps will be coming to Vietnam, with a focus on teaching English.

And it’s why we announced that we’re moving ahead this fall with Fulbright University Vietnam, right here in Ho Chi Minh City -- the country’s first nonprofit, independent university. And the goal is to make sure that Vietnamese students, no matter what their background, has access to a world-class education that’s rooted in Vietnam’s rich culture and fueled by the free exchange of ideas.

And I want to thank former Senator Bob Kerrey, who is here, who’s been one of the key people to help lead this effort. Thank you very much, Bob.

So all these efforts reflect our belief in you -- in your ability to keep moving Vietnam forward. And there are some incredible young people who are here who are great examples of the incredible talent and drive of young people in Vietnam today. For example, I see Vietnam’s promise in Ngan Dang. Where’s Ngan? Somewhere. There you are right there.

So I had a chance to meet Ngan when I welcomed our YSEALI Fellows to the White House. She started as a volunteer -- she started a volunteer group to work with street children and orphans, and people with physical disabilities right here in Ho Chi Minh City. So far, they’ve recruited some 450 volunteers, delivered over 7,000 hours of mentoring, built five libraries in two cities. And that's just one example of the incredible work that's being done by young people right here in Vietnam. We're very proud of you. Thank you.

A couple other people I want to point out. We've got Loc Le Xuan. Where’s Loc? There he is right there. So Loc teaches at Ho Chi Minh City Vietnam National University. He’s a researcher at the Pasteur Institute. His dream is to go back to his hometown and open a medical center so he can deliver quality, affordable health care. He also helped start Give2Give, which works with YSEALI members across ASEAN to improve their skills and build stronger networks. So we're very excited about the work that you're doing, Loc. Thank you so much.

I'm going to close with one more story just to give you an example of the incredible work that's being done by young people. Elizabeth Phu is here, I think, and was born here. In the aftermath of the war, Liz and her family became refugees -- Liz was barely four years old. They packed themselves into a boat; they began a dangerous journey. Pirates ransacked their boat. But they made it to a refugee camp in Malaysia and, eventually, in 1979, to America. With just $20 in their pocket, Liz’s parents started to build a new life in California. They taught their children about the importance of education. And after years of studying and hard work, Liz -- a proud Vietnamese-American -- ended up becoming one of my top advisors on Asia in the White House. And we've relied on her for all kinds of incredible policy work that we've done over the last several years.

So Tu, Ngan, Loc, Liz, so many of you -- you're already showing that you can change the world to reflect our best values. You’re showing that with determination and commitment, and optimism and hard work, anything is possible. And that's why I'm so hopeful about the future between the United States and Vietnam, that our relationship will continue to grow deeper and stronger. But I'm also optimistic that you're going to be able to change the region and the world in so many positive ways.

So as the great Trần Lập sang, “the path to glory days is getting closer.” So cam on.

So with that, now is the time for me to start taking some questions. I don't know if you’ve been briefed, but we have microphones in the audience. I'm going to just call on people and I'm going to go boy, girl, boy, girl, so it's fair. If you can keep your questions relatively short, so that we can get as many questions as possible. And introduce yourself before you ask the question so we know who you are. Okay? I'm going to start right here. We've got a microphone coming.

Question: Good morning, Mr. President. I'm from Ho Chi Minh City. And we are 100 percent Vietnamese-owned company that produce high-end plastic products and components in the supporting industries. And today it is our honor to meet with the President, and we have an ambition to request for your help -- and that is we would like to be given opportunities to approach the leading enterprises in the United States, especially in the sector of consumer electronics, automotive, and airline industries, and other plastic-related products for supporting industries. And so, under your help, we could be able to join and be the supplier in the direct supply chain. And we are committed to share the values of integrity and accountability. Thank you, Mr. President.

President Obama: Well, thank you so much. As you know, one of the things that we're really emphasizing is entrepreneurship -- the idea of people starting their own businesses, selling goods across borders, creating jobs, creating great products and services. And yesterday I had a chance to meet with a number of young Vietnamese entrepreneurs who are already starting to create digital platforms to sell goods not just in Vietnam but also overseas.

This is one of the reasons why we're pushing very hard for the Trans-Pacific Partnership -- TPP. Because what that does is it reduces the barriers between countries for selling their goods and services. It gives opportunities not just to big companies but also to small companies to enter into the global supply chain. It raises labor standards and environmental standards so that all countries are working on a level playing field. And if we can get that done -- and the goal is, I think, to try to complete TPP before the end of this year -- then that will open up a lot of opportunities, and create great confidence among investors here in Vietnam and U.S. companies who are interested in working with young people like you who may have a great idea.

Now, my general rule in all this is not to actually broker deals and sign contracts. That's somebody else's job. My job is to make sure that we have the kinds of rules in place that make it easier for businesses to get to know each other, to meet. And one of the things that we're doing with the Vietnamese government is constantly looking for opportunities for trade missions, for businesses to come and learn about what's going on.

And so what we'll do is we'll make sure that, through the consulate or through the embassy, if and when we have U.S. businesses who are coming here to Vietnam and are interested in meeting young entrepreneurs, that you'll have an opportunity potentially to present your ideas and see if you can make a deal.

All right? Good luck.

All right, it's a gentleman's turn. All right, this guy. He looks very happy -- right here.

Q

uestion: Hello, sir. I'm a student in Vietnam National University. I have two questions for you. The first one is that you are a very great leader, and we are young leaders. Do you have any advice that how can we be great like you?

President Obama: Oh, wow. Now, what's the second question?

Question: And the second question is, we are young leaders. Do you have any suggestion that how can we have to strengthen the relationship between Vietnam and America?

President Obama: First of all, let me tell you, that when I was your age, I was not as well-organized and well-educated and sophisticated as all of you. When I was young, I fooled around a lot. I didn’t always take my studies very seriously. And I was more interested in basketball -- and girls. And I wasn’t always that serious. So you're already way ahead of me. You're doing good.

Whenever I meet with young people and they ask me this question, my most important advice is to find something that you care deeply about, find something that excites you, and put all your energy and effort into it -- because the path for everybody is different. Some people are very passionate about education. Some people are very passionate about medicine. Some people are passionate about business.

And so there's no one path to ending up being a leader. People sometimes think that to be a leader you have to be a great -- you have to make great speeches, or you have to be in politics. But there are a lot of ways to lead. Some of the greatest leaders are people who are behind the scenes. So, for example, in the United States, during the Civil Rights Movement that helped to create opportunities for people like me -- because at the time, African Americans couldn’t fully participate in society -- everybody here has heard of Martin Luther King, but there were all these young organizers, your age -- people like Bob Moses and John Lewis, and others who were helping go into poor communities and registering voters, and getting them active and getting them involved. And they were enormous leaders, amazing leaders -- even though they never made big speeches in front of big crowds.

But you have to feel passionate about something. And one of the things that I always tell young people is, don’t worry so much about what you want to be; worry more about what you want to do. And what I mean by that is, if you are passionate about your work, then naturally over time you are going to rise and people will admire and respect what you've done. But if all you're thinking about is, I want to be a member of the National Assembly, or I want to be very rich, or I want to be this or I want to be that, then you pay less attention to the actual work in front of you.

And most of the people I meet who are very successful, in any field, are people who just love their work. So Bill Gates, who started Microsoft, he didn’t start off thinking, I want to be a multi-billionaire. He started off thinking, I really like computers and I want to find out how I can create really neat software.

I didn’t start off thinking I wanted to be President of the United States. When I finally stopped fooling around and I wanted to get serious, what I decided was that I wanted to help people in low-income communities, poor people, have opportunity. And so I went to work in poor neighborhoods in Chicago. And because I was interested in the work, I started asking questions: Okay, how can I get more education dollars for these communities? How can I get better housing built in these communities? And that's when I became more aware of how politics worked. And I started asking questions about how could I have more influence and how could I build organizations that could potentially deliver the things that I was interested in. And that's what led me into politics. But I didn’t start off saying I want to be President. I started off saying I wanted to help these people.

So that's my most important advice. Decide what it is that you care about deeply, and then put everything you have into doing that. If you're interested in social media and you want to start a company, then focus on that. And if you're interested in health care for people in villages around Vietnam, focus on that. And if you get good at that, naturally you’ll end up being a leader and you’ll have opportunities to do great things in the future.

All right? Good. Okay, it's a young lady’s turn. There you go, since you got such a -- when you’ve got the paddy hat with the “Thank you, Obama” -- That was good organizing. So go ahead. She came prepared.

Question: I am. So thank you very much, President, for your very inspiring speeches. I'm from an organization called "Save Son Doong." So yesterday I literally burst into tears when you mentioned preserving the cave for our children, our grandchildren. That is something that we have been trying to do for the past few years. So my question for you is that, because Son Doong does not just belong to Vietnam, it is a world heritage, how would you, an American leader, a global citizen, preserve it? And you also mentioned that you would like to get back to Vietnam. If you have a chance to visit Son Doong, would you like to do it on foot by trekking, or would you take a cable car? Fortunately, there’s one. And also I have a gift.

President Obama: Well, you’ve got a shirt for me. Question: It would be my honor if you accept this gift.

President Obama: Well, that's a beautiful shirt. Well, first of all, I definitely want to go visit the next time I come. And I'm a pretty healthy guy, so I can go on foot. How long is it?

Question: Seven days.

President Obama: Seven days. Okay, I'm good. I can do that. Are there places to get something to eat along the way, or do I have to carry my own food? Well, no, I'll carry it myself.

Well, look, I think the possible designation of a world heritage site is a complex process. It would involve I think working with the government of Vietnam, with existing organizations that designate world heritage sites. We'll be happy to work with your organization, with the Vietnamese government and others about the possibilities of doing that.

But I do think that one of the great things about your generation is, is that you're already much more conscious about the environment than my generation was or previous generations were. And that's really important not only to preserve beautiful sites in our countries, but also because economic development and the well-being and the health of your people and everyone around the world is going to depend on how we deal with some of these environmental issues.

Now, to some degree, this is not fair, I think it's important to note, because if you think about Western industrial development, before we knew anything about climate change, they used enormous amounts of carbon energy, and we in the United States have a huge carbon footprint and for 100 years, or 150 years, were helping to warm the planet. So it's not entirely fair, then, to say to countries that are developing now, well, you have to stop because of climate change.

But the problem is, is that if a country like Vietnam, or China, or India took the same development path that the West did, we're all going to be under water, because the climate is going to warm up so quickly and the climate patterns are going to change, that, in fact, the terrible consequences could actually impede development rather than advance development.

That’s why we had this agreement in Paris to have all countries join together to deal with climate change. And what it says is, is that each country at different stages of development have different obligations. The United States, we have to do more. Countries like China that are large have to do more. But everybody has to do something. And we all have an obligation then also to help developing countries find new paths for energy and development that are environmentally friendly, developing clean energy strategies that can leapfrog over the old, dirty industries and immediately go to the clean industries.

Now, the good news is I think that can happen. Because if you think about -- everybody here has a cellphone, right? Everybody has a smartphone? Yes, you do. Of course, you do. Well, in many countries like Vietnam, you didn’t start off with a lot of phone towers and digging and laying telephone lines under the ground. You leapfrogged the old technologies and immediately went to a cellular technology and a wireless technology. Well, the same thing that we're doing with communications, that's what we need to do with energy.

And so, instead of going through the same energy usage in developing and providing electricity and power, we need to start immediately finding cleaner energy sources, which can create jobs and businesses and opportunities all throughout this region. And I'm very excited about the possibilities of doing that.

So we have to think about beautiful areas that need to be preserved. But we also have to recognize that no matter how well we preserve one or two areas in each country, if the overall climate patterns change radically, then we're all going to be in a really difficult situation. And you're already starting to see the effects of climate change here in Vietnam. I think this country is going to be one of the most affected. And in someplace like the Mekong Delta, you have drought on the one hand, but you also have saline intrusion on the other hand. And that could have a huge impact on Vietnam’s ability to feed its people, on fishermen, on farmers. And it could be a really, really big problem if we don't do something about it. So it's going to be up to you to start, and I'm going to want to partner with you to make that happen.

Thanks for the t-shirt also.

All right, so let’s see. You got flags and everything. Gentleman -- right here.

Question: Good morning, President Obama. I'm from Study Abroad, which brings American students to come to Vietnam to learn. My question is that, as you said earlier, YSEALI initiative -- and I know that you want to leave the White House very soon, but I'm wondering, when you leave do you come up any plans to handle for the next President to maintain this very good idea? Thanks.

President Obama: Well, it's a great question. This is something that we're already planning. Our expectation is, is that the next President will want to continue the incredible work that we've done with the YSEALI. It's not just, by the way, young people in Southeast Asia that we're doing this with. We have a Young Africa Leaders program that involves young people from 50 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. We have a Latin American version that brings young people together. And at some point, we're going to bring key leaders from each of these areas so that they can start learning from each other.

And our hope is, is that the State Department will continue this program. But one of the things -- people always ask me, what am I going to do after I leave the presidency. Because I'm so relatively young -- not compared to you, but compared to other Presidents, I'm pretty young. And I don't know everything that I'm going to do, but the one thing I do know I will continue to work on is developing young leaders in the United States and around the world. So, in addition to my hope that the next President continues the program through the State Department, I'll make sure that through my philanthropy and my own work that we're continuing to bring young people together so that we can start building the kind of talent that knows each other and is networked and is connected, and is learning from each other. Because that's what it's going to take for countries in the future to be able to solve these big problems.

If you ask me what I'm most excited about in terms of my legacy 20 years from now, I would feel really good if I see 10,000 or 20,000, or 50,000 young leaders who are now taking over governments and businesses and nonprofit organizations, and they now know each other from different countries and they’ve worked together, and they’ve built trust and they’ve built relationships. And if I can help facilitate that, that would be something that I'd be very proud of. So you can guarantee that I'll continue to work on this.

All right, yes, right here. Oops. Is it working? You might need to use mine. Okay, there you go. Just in time.

Question: Good morning, President Obama. I'm a YSEALI Academy fellow, presently at the University of Montana.

President Obama: Excellent. How do you like Montana?

Question: It's not cold, it is hot.

President Obama: Oh, it's very cold. You just haven't -- have you gone through January yet?

Question: Summer.

President Obama: When did you get there?

Question: June through August.

President Obama: Yes, it's not cold in June and August. You just went there at the right time. But it's a beautiful state, isn't it?

Question: Yes. I love it.

President Obama: Yes, it's lovely. You have gorgeous mountains. Have you learned how to fish?

Question: Yes.

President Obama: Fly fishing?

Question: Yes. I went rafting as well.

President Obama: And rafting also. That's great.

Question: So my topic is about global environmental issues. So I'm going to make my professor in Montana happy by asking a question related to climate change and environment. So in Mekong region, there are a lot of hydropower dams being are being built on the mainstream of the Mekong. And this problem is not easy because we have big countries and small countries related to the hydropower building in the area. So do you have any suggestions for all the governments of the Mekong region to get together and suspend in the interests, for the economic and environmental interests?

And just one more question. This is like a very tactical job interview. Where do you find yourself in five years? Because I think it is a very interesting period when Malia probably graduates from Howard University and you still holding the computer or iPhone 10. And also that's when probably maybe Mr. Sanders or Mrs. Hillary or maybe Mr. Trump finish their president term. So where do you find yourself and the world in five years? Thank you.

President Obama: Well, first of all, on the Mekong Delta, we actually, through ASEAN and the East Asia Summit, created a Mekong Delta working group with all the countries that are impacted. And through our State Department and various programs, we're working to help them plan and create sustainable development across countries.

Now, you're right that one of the big challenges is how do you deal with water resources and the building of dams and hydropower. And that's not a problem that's unique to the Mekong Delta. You see this in a lot of parts of the world where big projects get built with unintended consequences, and it has severe effects downstream. And the results in some cases have been not great. And they have significant environmental degradation because of lack of planning.

So what we're going to try to do is to continue to work with the affected countries and to provide them with the technical assistance and the evaluations of what needs to happen, what they need to watch out for. And hopefully that information is power. That information then can be used to negotiate on an international level to try to prevent some projects that might have very bad effects.

But one of the things that we've seen in ASEAN is when small countries band together as a unit, then their power is magnified. That's true on economic issues; that's true on environmental issues; that's true on security issues. And we've seen, since I became President, I think a greater willingness of the ASEAN countries to do more substantive work. It used to be I think ASEAN would meet and everybody was very polite, but you didn’t always have I think as many specific, concrete plans of action. And now you're starting to see I think ASEAN being used as a much more effective tool for policymaking, and the environmental area is a critical place where that can happen.

In terms of where I see the world in five years, some of you are going to be doing great things, and I'll be very excited to find out what you're doing. I suspect that I'm going to be doing the kinds of work that I've been doing all my life. I'll be doing organizing work and involved in public policy issues. But I just won't be doing it in a formal way through elected office. I'll be like a community organizer, except a little more famous than I used to be.

In terms of American politics, I tend to be positive and optimistic about American politics. I think sometimes other countries look at our election system and people think, wow, what a mess. But usually we end up doing okay because the American people are good people, and they -- as I hope you've gotten to know people in Montana -- the American people are generous, and they're decent and they're hardworking. And sometimes our politics doesn’t express all the goodness of the people. But usually, eventually, the voters make good decisions, and democracy works.

So I'm optimistic that we'll get through this period. And one of the great things about the United States is that even when it makes mistakes, I think it's able to adjust and recognize our mistakes, and then we correct course and take different steps. So things are going to be okay, I promise.

This guy, he has two hands up and a symbol. I don’t know what that means. I don’t know, it was interesting, so we'll call on him. Maybe he'll explain it.

Question: Hello, Mr. President. I want to say that you're so handsome.

President Obama: Oh, okay! Well, you can just stop there if you want.

Question: Okay. I have two questions of me -- now turn a little bit into business.

President Obama: Business.

Question: Yes. You told us just find something you deeply care about, and my biggest care about is human resource management or talent management. And now --

President Obama: Hotel management, did you say?

Question: Talent management.

President Obama: Talent management. Got it.

Question: Okay, now we are joining AEC and TPP. This may not -- beside opportunities, we have many challenges. The more challenge that -- they have many overseas companies, they want to attract Vietnamese talent. And can you give a suggestion? We cannot just base on the patriotism of them to force them to stay in Vietnam. They have a chance to seek for their own development. So how can Vietnamese firms and Vietnam government can have them stay and contribute to Vietnam? And one more question about entrepreneurship. There is more -- like some company will have lack of human resource because they move from other countries. And how can the young entrepreneurs can deal with it? Can you give any suggestion? Thank you.

President Obama: Okay. Look, if I understood your question -- so TPP, you've got these new opportunities. Companies are going to be interested in coming into Vietnam as investors or as business partners with existing Vietnamese companies. And I think that any good foreign company is going to want to partner with a Vietnamese partner who understands the culture, understands the system. They're going to be looking for young talent. And if you start a company that helps to identify talent and is then helping those who are doing business here to recruit, I'm sure that that will go very well.

This is not an area that I'm an expert on, but one of the things that we're seeing is, through organizations like -- or companies like LinkedIn -- I don’t know if you've heard of that -- based out of Silicon Valley. But they've been able to build these digital platforms where people are continually updating their rÃ©sumÃ©s and providing their information. And that becomes a powerful tool then for human resource people who are recruiting. And it's conceivable that you could do something equivalent to that in Vietnam in preparation for the ongoing growth and development of businesses here in Vietnam.

So that's a great idea. Good luck.

In terms of the question on entrepreneurship, I wasn’t clear exactly what your question was. Was it that you think talented Vietnamese are going someplace else instead of staying here? Is that right?

Question: How can Vietnamese firms and government have places to keep, to retain the talent?

President Obama: To retain talent.

Question: Yes.

President Obama: So you're worried about a brain-drain where --

Question: Yes, brain-drain, yes.

President Obama: -- where young Vietnamese, they get an education and suddenly they're being recruited to go to Australia, or to go to Singapore, or to go the United States, or China, and then you don’t have enough entrepreneurs here.

Well, look, I think the best way to retain talent in any country is to make sure that talent is rewarded. And the way to reward talent is to have strong rule of law; to have a good education system; to have the ability to start a business relatively easily; to make sure that government policies when it comes to taxation or when it comes to building infrastructure, that those policies are good ones, and so that people feel as if, by staying here, this is the best place for them to make it.

People usually don’t want to leave their home countries if they feel like they've got opportunity in their home countries. Usually, they end up leaving if they feel as if they're stuck in their home countries. And so one of the benefits of the Trans-Pacific Partnership is it's going to lead to the government taking a series of legal reforms that I actually think will create a better business environment. And it means for young talented people like you, there's no reason to leave because you're going to be in a position to do great things here in Vietnam.

The places that I think lose talent where there’s a lot of corruption -- so no matter how hard you work, you always have to pay a bribe or you've got to hire somebody's cousin to get a license to do something -- that ends up frustrating people. I think people feel frustrated if there's not a good education system, because the truth is, is that not only do you need a good education, but then if you want to start a business, you've got to be able to hire people who also have a good education. And so you've got to count on the schools training people properly. You want to have good infrastructure -- proper roads. And you want to have proper wireless service in order for you to do business in the 21st century.

Environmental issues are increasingly important. I mean, there are some countries where it's actually hard to recruit people because it's hard to breathe in some of the big cities. You don’t want to raise your kids -- no job is so important that it's okay if your children have asthma and they can't breathe. And so, interestingly enough, if you want the best talent today, you have to pay attention to quality-of-life issues and making sure that people can have clean air and clean water, and they're not being exposed to pollution that may cause cancer, and things like that.

So those are all policies that end up making a difference in retaining talent in any country, in any city, in any community.

Good. All right. Okay, well, we got these young ladies. They got a flag. So since you brought a flag, that's -- I'm very impressed with your planning. Those of you with the hat, with the flag -- it's good organizing.

Question: Hi, my name is Christina, and I'm with my colleague and some of our other colleagues here. And we work for an American anti-human trafficking NGO called Pacific Links Foundation. So we fight against human trafficking here in Vietnam. With Vietnam emerging as an important player in the TPP, many companies will start to shift their production in factories to Vietnam, which will create a new mobile workforce. With that comes the unfortunate opportunity for human traffickers and labor brokers to take advantage of these workers, such as creating false promises or tricking them or even coercing them into moving across borders, and therefore forcing them into a situation of being trafficked. What is the United States federal government doing to prevent human trafficking in the global supply chain?

Question: Before you answer, can I ask you a question?

President Obama: I'm sorry, I didn’t know --

Question: Because we had the same --

President Obama: You're a tag team -- I got you.

Question: Thank you. Before I came here I asked many -- whenever I met someone I also asked what do you want to ask if you can meet President? And a lot of questions and a lot of comments. And for now, I forgot everything, but this remind me about Kenya friend -- and he said if I see you see if he would come to Kenya, and he was pretty excited. And he said if you could ask please Obama about human trafficking prevents strategy. Thank you.

President Obama: All right. Well, let me see. You lost my train of thought. Look, the issue of human trafficking is something that we have made a top priority in our State Department and the United States government. So we have an entire set of policies designed specifically to work with countries to prevent human trafficking. And we've actually begun making progress in improved enforcement, in improved law enforcement coordination. NGOs have been very helpful as partners with us in identifying what are some of the paths where people are being exploited.

With respect to TPP, it's precisely because we put such an emphasis on this that we actually have provisions in TPP designed to prevent human trafficking. And it's actually given us leverage to work with some countries to say, if you want to be part of TPP, you have to have a better system in place to prevent human trafficking, including some of these cross-border migrant worker situations.

So when I was in Malaysia, for example, meeting with Prime Minister Najib, one of the most important topics as we were negotiating TPP was how could we do more work in order to protect people who are being brought in -- whether it's working at the palm oil plants or what have you -- so that there was better tracking, better enforcement, better protections for people. And that's in the actual agreement.

Now, I think that an agreement on paper is never enough, so there have to be systems in place to monitor what's taking place. And these human traffickers are very clever. They're like drug traffickers. If you cut off one path, then try to take another path, and they're always looking to exploit people who are desperate. So this is why this can't just be a government initiative or a law enforcement initiative. It has to be something where we're partnering with NGOs, human rights organizations. We have to be very nimble in how we adapt to changing circumstances so that we're constantly shutting down some of these pathways.

The last thing I'll say, though, is one of the best ways for us to reduce human trafficking is to provide more opportunity for people, particularly in rural areas through Southeast Asia. And if we can give young people in villages a chance to make a living and get an education, and if we particularly focus on women and girls -- because a lot of human trafficking results from the fact that girls are not given the same educational opportunities as boys, and as a consequence, they find themselves in very desperate situations -- the more we can change those dynamics, that will also reduce the ability of people to exploit people who have no hope, or think that they have to leave their village, and are vulnerable then to claims that if you just come with us you're going to be able to get a great job and everything is going to be okay. And then, by the time they get there, they suddenly find themselves trapped in a very bad situation.

Congratulations on the good work you're doing. I'm very proud of you. Thank you.

All right, how much more time we got? We only got time for one more question? All right, I'll take two more questions. But it's a guy's turn first. I'm going to call on this guy just because I kind of like the yellow in his hair there. I like the style. There you go.

Question: Thank you. I'm a filmmaker, so I'm very interested in personal stories. And you said before, when you are young you're like fooling around. And I read on Internet -- I'm not sure if it's true or not -- that you also like smoking weed and things like that.

President Obama: I don’t know if that's true.

Question: I wonder what makes you from that guy become a guy who care about the society. Because a lot of -- I think many young Vietnamese people, they still love like fooling around and they don’t really care about the society. But there must be something that makes you become this person. Thank you.

President Obama: Well, it's a good question. I wrote a book about this called, "Dreams From My Father." I think it was translated into Vietnamese, but I don’t know if it's still in bookstores near you. You know, you never know exactly why something inside you clicks and you decide to take a different path.

I think, for me, when I was young -- because I didn’t know my father, and I didn’t grow up with him in the house -- my grandparents and my mother raised me. And they were very loving and very generous. But I think I rebelled in part because I felt that something was missing. And as I got older I realized that instead of worrying about the father who wasn’t there I should worry more about what can I do, and take more responsibility for my own life.

And that led me to start studying more, and it led me to start thinking about social issues more. I grew up. And why it took me until I was 19 or 20, where some other people like many of you have always been very organized -- like this young lady, I'll bet she’s always been very focused -- you don't know why.

But I think your point about stories is good. One of the things that I've learned about being a leader is sometimes we think people are motivated only by money, or they’re only motivated by power, or these very concrete incentives.

But people are also inspired by stories. The stories they tell themselves about what’s important and about their lives and about their country and about their communities. And I think if you want to -- in whatever field you're in, whether it's business or politics or nonprofit work, it's worthwhile to listen to other people and ask them questions about the stories that are important to them, because oftentimes you’ll find their motivations. And when we come together to do important things, it's usually because we told a good story about why we should be working together.

You think about the United States of America. We have a really good story called the Declaration of Independence. “We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal; that we're endowed with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” That's a wonderful story. There’s no -- when the Declaration was made, there really was not United States. It was just a good story that they were telling about what could be. And then people were attracted to that story. And it led to independence, and it led to immigrants from around the world who wanted that vision for themselves -- it led Ho Chi Minh to adapt it when Vietnam was trying to declare independence. It inspired movements around the world.

So, yes, the stories we tell each other are very, very important. And good luck on making your movies. Don't believe everything you read on the Internet, though.

Okay, last question. This young lady, she stood up and she’s like -- I couldn't say "no" to her. She had her hand up. I thought she was going to hit me if I didn’t call on her. I'm teasing.

Question: Hi. So I am a rapper here in Saigon, Vietnam.

President Obama: Are you a rapper? Oh, yes?

Question: You have spoken a lot about environment and like politics and economic progress of Vietnam. But as an artist, we have a lot to say.

President Obama: Okay.

Question: We have message to say. I want to know how important it is for a nation to really help and promote their art and culture, and to help its nation in the future.

President Obama: Okay. Before I answer your question, why don't you give me a little rap? Let’s see what you got. Come on. Do you need like a little beat? Badoom, badoom.

Question: Yes, I do, actually.

President Obama: Go ahead. Come on.

Question: Vietnamese or English?

President Obama: In Vietnamese, of course.

Question: In Vietnamese?

President Obama: I won't know what it means, but just a short version -- because I got to get going.

Question: [Raps in Vietnamese] My name is Sue, by the way.

President Obama: Well, that was good. See there, that was pretty good. What were you just rapping? What was your verse there?

Question: I was just talking about some people having a lot of money, having big houses, but actually are they really happy?

President Obama: Okay.

Question: Yeah, a lot of things -- that people look at us and see like different thing and something they assume, or a lot of like stereotypes like me, Asian rapper, looking like a cute girl. People don't know --

President Obama: Is that what they think?

Question: But for Vietnamese people, it's different. They think rapping is not like for women.

President Obama: Ah. Well, that's true in the United States, too. No, no, I just mean that there’s always been sort of sexism and gender stereotypes in the music industry like every other part of life.

But to answer your question, look, the arts are important. Artistic expression is important. It's what I was just saying to the filmmaker about stories that we tell each other. Music, poetry, representations of life as it is and how it should be -- those are the things that inspire people. Life is a combination of very practical things, right? You got to eat, you got to work, you got to build roads and make sure that some dam isn't ruining a community. But it's also the spirit that we have inside of us, and how is that expressed, and what are our vision and what are our ideals for the future, and how do we want to live together, and how do we treat each other.

And one of the most important things about art is it teaches you to not just think about yourself, but it puts you in the head of other people. So you start realizing somebody else’s pain, or somebody else’s hopes. And you start realizing that we have more in common. So if I read a novel by somebody in Africa, now, suddenly, I understand more about how we are similar. And if I listen to a Vietnamese rap, and it connects to the things that I'm feeling, now I feel closer to a country on the other side of the world. And that's how we build understanding. And that's how we end up being able to work together and plan together and build a better future together.

So, look, let’s be honest. Sometimes art is dangerous, though. And that's why governments sometimes get nervous about art. But one of the things that I truly believe is that if you try to suppress the arts, then I think you're suppressing the deepest dreams and aspirations of a people.

And one of the great things about the United States, for all of our flaws in a lot of areas, is that we do give much greater expression to our culture. And something like rap, which started off as an expression of poor African Americans, now, suddenly has become a global phenomenon and is really the art form of most young people around the world today in a lot of ways. And imagine if, at the time when rap was starting off, that our government had said, no, because some of the things you say are offensive, or some of the lyrics are rude, or you're cursing too much -- then that connection that we've seen now in hip-hop culture around the world wouldn't exist.

So you got to let people express themselves. That's part of what a modern, 21st century culture is all about.

All right, everybody. I've got to go, but this has been wonderful. Thank you so much. God bless you. Thank you.

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# Press Conference with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe

Prime Minister Abe: [As interpreted.] At the very outset of our small group discussion, I firmly lodged a protest against President Obama as the Japanese Prime Minister with regard to the most recent case in Okinawa. The entire time for the small group discussion was spent on this specific case in Okinawa. And I feel profound resentment against this self-centered and absolutely despicable crime.

This case has shocked not only Okinawa, but also deeply shocked the entire Japan. I conveyed to the President that such feelings of Japanese people should be sincerely taken to heart. I also urged the United States to make sure to take effective and thorough means to prevent a recurrence, and vigorously and strictly address the situation.

In proceeding with the realignment of the U.S. forces without truly staying together with the feelings of the people in Okinawa we will not be able to make progress. And there is a tough and challenging road ahead of us as we seek to regain confidence, which was lost due to the most recent case. However, we both agreed to do our utmost in areas such as impact mitigation in Okinawa through Japan-U.S. cooperation.

At the plenary meeting, for myself, I conveyed to the President that I whole-heartedly welcome the decision by President Obama to visit Hiroshima, a place which suffered an atomic bomb. And he is going to visit Hiroshima as the first-ever U.S. President.

I am convinced that when the leader of a nation that is the only nation to have used the nuclear weapon and the leader of the nation that is the only nation to have suffered atomic bombings in the war express the feelings of sincere sorrow and pray for the repose of the souls of those citizens who sacrificed their life will create a significant and strong momentum toward the world free of nuclear weapons.

Japan and the United States, together, working hand in hand, and continuously doing utmost for global peace and prosperity -- I would like to send such a powerful message from Hiroshima together with President Obama.

So, tomorrow, finally, the G7 Ise-Shima Summit is starting. We could compare notes how we, the G7, can lead the world in addressing various challenges of the international community, including the global economy, which has become increasingly uncertain, and also the challenges against the international order.

In particular, the global economy is going to be the biggest theme for the G7 Ise-Shima Summit. And both President Obama and I could share the recognition the G7 should lead the global sustainable and powerful road. My determination is to demonstrate in a thorough manner a way forward toward resolving various challenges of the international community, through the close cooperation between Japan and the United States.

Japan and the United States, working hand in hand for regional and global peace and prosperity, based on our enduring bond, and also under our alliance of hope -- that is the determination that I could renew, together with President Obama today.

President Obama: Well, I want to thank Prime Minister Abe and the people of Japan for welcoming us. Prime Minister Abe and his team have done an outstanding job preparing for the G7 Summit. And we discussed, as Shinzo indicated, the need for us to continue to boost global growth and to move ahead with the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

The alliance between the United States and Japan is a critical foundation for the security of both of our countries. That alliance has also helped to fortify peace and security throughout the region.

As Prime Minister Abe indicated, we did discuss the tragedy that took place in Okinawa, and I extended my sincerest condolences and deepest regrets. And the United States will continue to cooperate fully with the investigation to ensure that justice is done under the Japanese legal system.

We also discussed a range of regional issues, and given the threat from North Korea, we agreed to continue reinforcing deterrents and strengthening our defense capabilities.

On maritime issues, we are united in upholding freedom of navigation and the peaceful resolution of disputes.

We also discussed a range of global issues, including the need for additional resources to help migrants and refugees, and to support Iraq. And we discussed the role our countries should play in achieving the early entry into force of the Paris Climate Change Agreement. Finally, I’m looking forward to the opportunity to visit with some of our American and Japanese military personnel to thank them for their service. And our visit to Hiroshima will honor all those who were lost in World War II and reaffirm our shared vision of a world without nuclear weapons, as well as highlight the extraordinary alliance that we have been able to forge over these many decades.

Question: [As interpreted.] I would like to ask a question to Prime Minister Abe with regard to the most recent, very tragic case in Okinawa. I understand that more than 20 years have already passed since the rape incident, which involved U.S. Marine Corps officers back in 1995. But even so, we do not see the decreasing number of crimes involving the U.S. people. And it is quite a regrettable trend. And whenever Japan faces each of the case or accident, I understand that the Japanese government has been requesting the U.S. side to take measures to prevent the recurrence of such measures. And also, you have been dealing with the situation through the improvement of the implementation of the SOFA instead of having amendment to the SOFA itself. And I am aware of the fact that your judicial systems are quite different between Japan and the United States.

So my question to the Prime Minister is that whether or not you have requested to the President that we should have the revision or amendment to the SOFA. And also, in order for you to see the progress in the base-related issues, I understand that the key is to regain the confidence among the people in Okinawa, as well as ensuring safety and security among the people in Okinawa. So what specific measures are you planning to implement as you move forward? Prime Minister Abe: [As interpreted.] I, too, feel profound resentment. When thinking of fear and real disappointment of this victim, I am just speechless. We will investigate in a vigorous manner under the Japanese jurisdiction, in mind with the Japanese laws, this offender who committed this self-centered and absolutely despicable crime.

With regard to the Japanese investigation process, during our discussion, President Obama assured me that the U.S. side will offer full support as we move forward. The entire Japan was deeply shocked due to this most recent case. And as I said earlier, for myself, I conveyed to the President that such feelings of the Japanese people should be taken to heart sincerely. I also requested that the United States vigorously and strictly address the situation, including making sure to take effective and thorough measures to prevent recurrence.

On the Status of Forces Agreement, when facing issues, we will steadily realize the visible improvement in concrete terms as for each and every issue that we face. And by doing so, we will achieve results, one after another, in a steady manner, in parallel with such steady efforts. My view is that we both make efforts and persistently pursue the most appropriate form of the regime, based on the Status of Forces Agreement and related arrangements. As a result of the case in Okinawa, people in Okinawa feel strong sense of uneasiness in light of their security situation. My intention is to thoroughly implement measures to prevent crimes, and ensure safety and peace of mind among the people in Okinawa. So I already gave the instruction to my Chief Cabinet Secretary to consider such measures in a timely manner.

Securing lives and property of the Japanese people is my responsibility as Prime Minister. I am determined to take every possible means so that such tragic case is never to be repeated.

Question: Thank you very much, Mr. President and Mr. Prime Minister. Mr. President, on this trip you are confronting old warzones and the use of American military might in them. This week, you also crossed into sovereign Pakistani territory, where you did not have permission to operate, in order to kill the leader of the Taliban. After expanding the use of the drone program as you have, are you worried at all about handing it over to the next President? Could I also ask what your response is to the Chinese warnings this week that the U.S. and its partners in this region may be creating a tinderbox that would lead to regional conflict?

And, Mr. Prime Minister, if you would also reflect on that, I would appreciate it. Could you also tell us a little bit about what you think the President’s visit to Hiroshima means to the Japanese people? And will you also consider a trip to Pearl Harbor, sir? Thank you.

President Obama: Before I answer your questions, Christi, let me just touch on the points that were made earlier about the Okinawa case, because this has shaken up I think people in Okinawa as well as people throughout Japan.

I want to emphasize that the United States is appalled by any violent crime that may have occurred or been carried out by any U.S. personnel or U.S. contractors. We consider it inexcusable. And we are committed to doing everything that we can to prevent any crimes from taking place of this sort. And that involves reviewing procedures and making sure that everything that can be done to prevent such occurrences from happening again are put into place.

I think it’s important to point out that the SOFA -- the Status of Forces Agreement -- does not in any way prevent the full prosecution and the need for justice under the Japanese legal system. And we will be fully cooperating with the Japanese legal system in prosecuting this individual and making sure that justice is served. And we want to see a crime like this prosecuted here the same way that we would feel horrified and want to provide a sense of justice to a victim’s family back in the United States.

So I think the Japanese people should know how deeply moved we are by what has happened and our intention to make sure that we’re working with the Japanese government to not only prosecute this crime but to prevent crimes like this from happening again.

Christi, with respect to your broader question, I wasn’t entirely clear on the parallel you were trying to draw. As Commander-in-Chief and President of the United States, my job is to protect the American people. I wish that never involves us having to take military actions. That’s not the world we live in.

Obviously, there are very few parallels between the deployment of 500,000 troops to Vietnam and us taking strikes against terrorists who are trying to kill our troops who are stationed in Afghanistan or potentially carry out actions in the homeland.

But I think that what might be a useful lesson to draw from the trip that I just took to Afghanistan -- or to Vietnam, rather -- is the extraordinary opportunities that have presented themselves through the diplomacy that we've been engaged in over the last seven years, and the fact that former adversaries are now working in partnership to provide economic opportunities to both of our peoples, to expand trade and commerce, to educate those remarkable young people that were in the town halls that we met today. And I am investing enormous amounts of time and energy and resources into those kinds of diplomatic initiatives because, to the extent that they’re successful, that shrinks areas of conflict, reduces the necessity of engaging in military action.

But, at the end of the day, it is still going to be a dangerous world and there are going to still be times where our U.S. fighting forces have to be deployed or have to take actions. And we have to do so in a way that is prudent, that is proportional, and that is mindful of the fact that any kinetic action, no matter how targeted and how justified, also can create tragedy. And one of the things that I hope to reflect on when I'm Hiroshima, and certainly something I reflected on when I was in Vietnam, is just a reminder that war involves suffering, and we should always do what we can to prevent it.

But, as I said early on in my presidency when I was in Oslo for the Nobel Peace Prize, I am the President of a nation that at times is threatened by very real risks, not imaginary risks, and it's important for us to act on occasion in order to make sure that the American people are protected.

My answer sounds so much longer in translation. So, just very briefly, on China. Our growing partnership with Vietnam is happening entirely independent from China, and is based on mutual interests to expand trade, to expand cooperation across a whole range of areas, and is 30 years in the making now. So the fact that China would perceive that as some sort of provocation to them I think says more about Chinese attitudes than it says anything about our attitudes.

The tensions between China and Vietnam, or China and the Philippines, or China and other claimants in the South China Sea are not of our making. And we would very much like to see a peaceful resolution of those disputes. What’s preventing that from happening is not anything we're doing. We would welcome China and Vietnam having a conversation and being able to resolve those disputes. We're not taking a position on those claims. So it's entirely within China’s power to resolve those disputes. And our goal with respect to our own interest in the South China Sea is simply to maintain freedom of navigation, freedom of overflight, and the maintenance of international rules and norms because we thing that benefits everybody, including China.

Prime Minister Abe: [As interpreted.] With regard to China, we certainly welcome the peaceful rise of China. And what we have been advocating for vis-Ã -vis the situation in this region is as follows -- namely, three-pronged principles. First, if you are to make a claim you have to make a claim based on international law. And also, second, you should never intimidate others through the use of force or coercion, or you should not unilaterally change the status quo. And third, you should settle the disputes in a peaceful manner in accordance with international law.

With regard to President Obama’s visit to Hiroshima, I'd like to touch on this. Seventy-one years ago, back in 1945, two atomic bombs were dropped. And in Hiroshima, numerous citizens sacrificed their lives, and even now there are those of us suffering because of the atomic bombing. And what those Japanese people’s suffering from the atomic bomb desiring is never to repeat such tragedy in the world. And I understand that the upcoming visit by President Obama to Hiroshima will no doubt create further powerful momentum towards realizing a world free of nuclear weapons.

At this moment, I don't have any specific plan to visit Hawaii. However, last year, when we marked the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, I made an official visit to the United States. During my visit to the United States last year, I had an opportunity to deliver a speech to the joint houses of the U.S. Congress. And on that occasion, I sincerely reflected on the past and expressed my sincere sense and also I highlighted the fact that former adversaries are now transforming into the relationship of allies, as the United States and Japan -- as we stand at this moment. And also, during my visit to the United States, I had a chance to visit the Second World War Memorial, where I laid a wreath to pray for the souls of all the war dead.

So as we move forward, I am determined to work closely with the United States in addressing various challenges of the international community based on our robust alliance, namely the alliance of hope between Japan and the United States.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Post G7 Press Conference in Japan

Hello, everybody. So, as all of you know, we're going to Hiroshima tomorrow. And in the interest of getting you all home at a reasonable hour, we're not going to be doing a press conference after, so I thought I'd give you guys a chance to fire off some questions now.

Just a quick comment on the G7 meeting so far. It's been extremely productive. I think that one of the benefits of the G7 is that you have likeminded countries who are committed to democracy and free markets, and international law and international norms. And so for us to be able to get together and focus on critical issues that not only affect individual countries but affect the international order I think is vitally important. And we very much appreciate the work that the Japanese and Prime Minister Abe have done in organizing an excellent meeting.

So far, we’ve discussed issues of the global economy and the need to continue to accelerate growth, to use all the tools at our disposal to make sure that we're not only putting people back to work but also helping to lift wages and helping to make sure that we can sustain the momentum of the recovery that's taken place in the United States most prominently, but also we're starting to see some progress in Europe. The fact that the Greek debt crisis has been resolved for a reasonable length of time I think should help. But we've all got a lot of work to do. And we agreed to continue to focus on making sure that each country, based on its particular needs and capacities, are taking steps to accelerate growth.

We had a chance to talk about trade -- not only TPP and our involvement in that, but also T-TIP -- and recommitted ourselves to making sure that we try to finish those negotiations before the end of the year, and emphasized the importance of pushing back against either protectionism or competitive currency devaluations, or the kinds of beggar-thy-neighbor strategies that all too often end up leaving everybody worse off.

We began to touch on some of the key security issues that are important to all of us -- the South China Sea and maritime security. Touched on issues surrounding Ukraine, where we've started to see some progress in negotiations, but we're still seeing too much violence, and we need to get that resolved. And we're going to spend some time this evening tackling some of the other major international hotspots.

So that gives you an update of where we're at so far. And with that, I'm just going to dive in, and you guys can ask some questions. And we're going to start with Gardiner.

Question: Mr. President, eleven of your predecessors decided against going to Hiroshima. What do you know that they didn’t? What were they worried about that you aren’t?

And just sort of generally on nonproliferation -- because I think that's your focus and that's obviously a priority for you -- how do you communicate risks and concerns about this in a way that would do more to get it resolved? Because it seems to be getting worse. I mean, Americans worry a lot about terrorists with suicide vests, which are unlikely events that can kill dozens. Do they worry enough about the risks of nuclear mishaps or attacks, which are unlikely events that could potentially kill millions instead of dozens? In short, are we paying enough attention to Kim Jong-un and Pakistani tactical nuclear weapons, these sorts of things that you know are going on?

President Obama: Well, it's a terrific question. First of all, I won't characterize how other Presidents were thinking about these issues. I can tell you how I'm thinking about it, and that is that the dropping of the atomic bomb, the ushering in of nuclear weapons was an inflection point in modern history. It is something that all of us have had to deal with in one way or another. Obviously, it's not as prominent in people's thinking as it was during the Cold War, at a time when our parents or grandparents were huddling under desks in frequent drills. But the backdrop of a nuclear event remains something that I think presses on the back of our imaginations.

I do think that part of the reason I'm going is because I want to once again underscore the very real risks that are out there and the sense of urgency that we all should have. So it's not only a reminder of the terrible toll of World War II and the death of innocents across continents, but it's also to remind ourselves that the job is not done in reducing conflict, building institutions of peace, and reducing the prospect of nuclear war in the future.

In some ways, we've seen real progress over the last several years. The Iran nuclear deal is a big piece of business -- because without us having to fire a shot, we were able to persuade a big, sophisticated country that had a well-developed nuclear program not to develop nuclear weapons. The START II Treaty that I negotiated in my first couple years in office with the Russians has reduced our respective stockpiles. The Nuclear Security Summit and all the work that we've done on that score has made it less likely that nuclear materials fall into the hand of terrorists or non-state actors.

And although we have not seen the kind of progress that I would have liked to have seen with respect to North Korea, what we have been able to do is mobilize the international community so that their proliferation activities are scrutinized much more carefully, and they have far fewer countries that are tolerant of potential actions by North Korea outside of their own program.

Having said that, North Korea is a big worry for all of us. They're not at the point right now where they can effectively hit U.S. targets, but each time that they test -- even if those tests fail -- they learn something. And it is clear that ideologically they are still convinced that -- and Kim Jong-un in particular seems to be convinced that his own legitimacy is tied up with developing nuclear weapons.

You pointed out the continuing tensions that exist in South Asia. That is still a concern. And we know that terrorist organizations would have no compunction about using a weapon of mass destruction if they got their hands on it.

So we've got a lot of work to do. I think we've built up an architecture during the course of my presidency that has made a difference, that has focused attention on some key points of vulnerability. But we're not where we need to be yet. And obviously we haven’t achieved all the goals that I set when I spoke in Prague at the beginning of my presidency. Of course, I noted at the time that I didn’t expect to be able to achieve all those goals during the course of my presidency or even in my lifetime. And this is going to be an ongoing task, but it's one that I think we have to be paying a lot of attention to.

Q

uestion: One follow-up. Mr. Kerry, your Secretary of State, called the North Korean nuclear program the biggest threat in the world right now -- the gravest threat. Do you agree with that? Do you see this nuclear program as the worst thing going on?

President Obama: Well, it is not the thing necessarily that poses the most immediate risk. Obviously, ISIL using rifles and crude bombs can kill a lot of people in a Paris or a Brussels. And people are rightly insistent that the world community stamp out ISIL. So there's a reason why we are focused on that. But this is not a situation where we can afford to just focus on the short term. Over the long term, when you have such an unstable regime that is so isolated, that generally flouts international norms and rules more than perhaps any other nation on Earth, that is also devoting enormous national resources hell-bent on getting nuclear weapons that they can fire long distances -- that poses the kind of medium-term threat that we have to pay a lot of attention to.

And I assure you it's something that my administration has paid a lot of attention to. It's something that I think has been at the center of the trilateral work that we've done with our close allies in the region. It's something that we've put at the center of our discussions and negotiations with China. And as I said before, what we've seen actually is improved responses from countries like China, countries in the region, like Vietnam and Burma taking these issues much more seriously because of our engagement. And so that may reduce the risks of North Korea selling weapons or fissile material to other countries, or putting it out on the black market. But it does not, so far at least, solve the core problem of North Korea continuing to develop its program. And we're going to have to continue to work in a concerted way.

In the meantime, I've been working with the Pentagon for several years now on making sure that we can develop the kinds of defense architecture that can protect the United States and our allies from an unexpected escalation.

Carol. Question: Thank you. You've said before that when you talk to world leaders, they often ask you about the presidential election. Can you give us a sense of the conversations that you’ve had so far -- what they're saying to you, what you're saying to them -- particularly now that Donald Trump is the nominee, and he recently said that Japan should pay for the U.S. troop presence? But also, on the Democratic side, what they're saying about that and what you think of that, because it's obviously continuing to be divisive with Bernie Sanders saying he would take it to the convention. And he's endorsed your Democratic Party chair, her primary opponent. Should he change course? Have you decided that you're just not going to get involved until one of them concedes to the other?

President Obama: Well, look, the world pays attention to the U.S. elections. They pay more attention to our elections sometimes than we pay to theirs, because the United States is, as I've said before, at the heart of the international order. And even those countries that are critical of us, even those countries that complain or question particular policy decisions that we make know that ultimately things don’t hold together so well if the United States is not making good decisions, and count on us to provide a certain level of stability and direction in meeting global challenges.

So they are paying very close attention to this election. I think it's fair to say that they are surprised by the Republican nominee. They are not sure how seriously to take some of his pronouncements. But they're rattled by him -- and for good reason -- because a lot of the proposals that he's made display either ignorance of world affairs, or a cavalier attitude, or an interest in getting tweets and headlines instead of actually thinking through what it is that is required to keep America safe and secure and prosperous, and what's required to keep the world on an even keel.

With respect to the Democratic primary process, as I've said before, it's been my view to let this play out, let voters make up their minds. And during primaries, people get a little grumpy with each other. It's just the nature of the process. You start off and everybody is thinking, oh, this is fine, this is going to be a friendly competition, we're going to debate ideas. And somebody says one thing and then another person says another thing, and that felt a little sharper than I expected, and somebody's supporter pops off. And there's a certain buildup of aggravation. We saw that in my lengthy primary in 2008. This is no different.

But what I think is really important to remember is that, unlike what you've seen in the Democratic or in Republican primary, for the most part there's not that big a difference ideologically in terms of the issues. Both Hillary and Bernie believe that every American should have health care. Both of them think that we've got to make college more affordable. Both of them believe that it's important for us to have a tax system that is fair, and that we should be closing corporate loopholes in order to pay for things like infrastructure investment and early childhood education.

I mean, if you put their proposals side by side, they're all pointing in the same direction, and the differences are primarily tactical. They have to do with how do you get some of this stuff done. So that doesn’t mean that those aren’t serious questions to ask and debate. It does mean, though, that once the primary process is resolved, the ability for us to pull together around a common vision that is in sharp contrast to the vision that's being offered on the other side I think is one that will get done by the time of the convention.

I would urge -- and have urged -- both sides to try to stick to the issues, because a lot of that grumpiness arises where folks feel as if we're not talking about an issue but we're talking about personalities and character. And they're both good people. I know them both well. And I think that it's important for us to try to end this in a way that leaves both sides feeling proud of what they've done. And both sides have run serious, competitive races, and debated issues in a serious way. So I'm proud of Democrats for doing that.

And, Carol, as you know -- I sure know, because I've been through this a bunch of times -- there is just the natural impulse when you're having to report every day on campaigns that every little blip, speed bump, conflict, trash-talking that takes place is elevated -- not to mention polls. And the one thing I've learned after being around for a while is that kind of day-to-day choppiness is not indicative of longer-term trends. I feel confident about the Democratic vision for the country, and I feel confident about our ability not just to win elections but, more importantly, to deliver on behalf of the American people and the issues they care about.

Q

uestion: Does this going until the end of July make it harder to defeat Mr. Trump?

President Obama: No. Look, would it be nice if everybody was immediately unified and singing "Kumbaya," and whoever the nominee ended up being could just take a nice two-week vacation to recharge? Absolutely. I guarantee you that the eventual nominee sure wishes it was over now, because this is a grind. It's hard. And in some ways, one of the things I've always found is that it's a lot more draining arguing against your friends than it is arguing against your political opponents. It just -- it weighs on you more. Being criticized by folks who are in your own party always hurts just a little bit more.

And so it takes a little energy out of you. But these are folks who are serious about trying to solve the country's problems. They're both veterans of the political grind. And so they're going to hold up. And by the time we get to the convention, I'm confident they'll be in good shape.

As a special bonus, I'm going to take one more question. Go ahead. Question: Thank you, Mr. President. You mentioned some tactical differences between the two Democratic candidates. But when you hear Bernie Sanders speak, it seems like he's talking more about the issue of trustability and the need for a political revolution. And just yesterday we saw that the State Department's inspector general put out a report about Secretary Clinton's emails, and it basically undermined some of what she said about her email practices. I'm wondering if you think that undermines her trustworthiness with the American people, and if you agree with Bernie Sanders that she should release the transcripts of her highly paid speeches to Wall Street.

President Obama: Okay. You know what, I take it back. I'm not taking another question. We're in Japan. Don't we have something on Asia that we want to talk about? I'll be talking about this in Washington the whole time.

Look, I've already said a lot about those issues. I think those are better directed to the campaign. As I said before, during the course of a primary people say what they think might help them get some votes. And once the campaign is over, then they move on, and they make an assessment in terms of how they can make sure that the vision they care most deeply about has the best chance of passing a Congress and getting signed by a President, and that Supreme Court nominees are confirmed, and all the things that make for a functioning, effective government.

So I think that the noise that is going on back and forth between the candidates at this point, if you want insights into how they’re thinking about it, those should be directed to them.

I'll take --

Question: Can I have another question?

President Obama: You’ve already had a question, so if I'm going to ask another question I think it's fair to give it to --

Question: That's true.

Question: Can I ask you your thinking on the new Taliban leader and how that affects prospects for peace in the region?

President Obama: Well, as I was saying to my team, I wasn’t expecting a liberal democrat to be the newly appointed leader of the Taliban. So this continues to be an organization that sees violence as a strategy for obtaining its goals and moving its agenda forward in Afghanistan. We have a democratically elected government in Afghanistan that we're supporting, and our goal right now is to make sure that that constitution and that democratic process is upheld -- not to mention that we're able to maintain the counterterrorism platforms that we need in that region so that al Qaeda and now ISIL are not able to take root and use that as bases to attack us in the United States.

My hope -- although not my expectation -- is that there comes a point at which the Taliban recognizes that they are not going to simply be able to overrun the country and that what they need to be doing is to enter into serious reconciliation talks that are led by Afghans. And I think if that happens, that's something that the United States and others in the world community would support. But I am doubtful that that will be happening anytime soon. And we'll have to wait and see how those things develop.

In the short term, we anticipate that the Taliban will continue to pursue an agenda of violence and VBEDS and blowing up innocent people, and the kinds of actions that have characterized their approach over the last 15, 20 years. But I do think that there will come a point, perhaps not this year, next year, but eventually, where there are those within the community that surrounds the Taliban, at least, that recognize their goals are best achieved by negotiations.

Okay? Question: And on the Vietnamese activists that were banned from the meeting --

Question: Right, is that embarrassing that they couldn’t --

President Obama: To me, or to them? Why is it embarrassing to me?

Question: Well, because you invited these people and they didn’t show up.

President Obama: Well, I wasn’t the one who held them up. Look, I was very blunt with the Vietnamese government. There is so much good going on in that country, and what I indicated to them is that these kinds of heavy-handed actions end up being entirely counterproductive. And the folks we invited, including those who were there, are people that are prepared to have a constructive conversation with the government about how to advance peace and prosperity, and economic development, and environmental security in that country.

And my general message, as you heard at the youth town hall meeting, is harness that talent. Let them loose to create startups and to solve problems, and engage them. It's the same message I had with Cuba. It's the same message that I had in a wide range of countries where you still are seeing serious problems with human rights.

The one thing I'm absolutely convinced of, though, is, is that by us engaging, by us meeting with civil society activists, it helps move the ball, it moves the needle. It doesn’t solve these problems immediately. Right now Burma/Myanmar is undergoing this democratic transformation, in part because of the process that we helped to spearhead. They are going through revolutionary changes over the last several years. But I guarantee you that there’s still some human rights activists inside of Burma/Myanmar who are being harassed, are not able to speak freely, are not able to assemble the way we would expect them to be able to do in our own country.

When I went to Cuba and I met with those dissidents, one of the individuals who was there still had cuts in his wrists from handcuffs because he had been detained just the day before. I didn’t come out of that meeting thinking the problems of human rights in Cuba are solved. But what I'm pretty darn sure of is, is that by us meeting with them, by us shining a spotlight on their stories, by us indicating not that we were going to dictate how these societies develop, but that we do think there are certain universal values that we care deeply about and that we're going to stand with -- that that helps.

And that, I think, is the biggest lesson over the course of the seven years as we've been engaging some of these countries with serious human rights problems. The expectation that I think sometimes we've had that I've we just stand back and scold, that somehow that's going to change these internal dynamics has proven to be less effective than us engaging. Indicating to governments that we're prepared to work with them, but that they need to make progress, and continually trying to lift up the actions of these civil society leaders in a way that provides them a little bit more space, and that space slowly grows and it ends up being a process -- and it's not always a process that travels in a straight line. Sometimes you take two steps forward, you take a step back. Sometimes you start seeing openings in some of these societies, and then governments get nervous and they clamp back down.

But that steady pressure, combined with an appreciation of the history of these countries, combined with a willingness to listen, combined with an ability to mobilize the international community so that we're not thinking that we're doing this all by ourselves -- over time, we've seen results. More modest than I would hope, but that’s true of pretty much everything about foreign policy and domestic policy and the human condition.

All right?

Question: Speaking of --

President Obama: Okay, guys. I gave you a couple -- I already gave you bonuses. I gave you a bunch of bonuses. Thank you, guys.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial

Seventy-one years ago, on a bright, cloudless morning, death fell from the sky and the world was changed. A flash of light and a wall of fire destroyed a city and demonstrated that mankind possessed the means to destroy itself.

Why do we come to this place, to Hiroshima? We come to ponder a terrible force unleashed in a not so distant past. We come to mourn the dead, including over 100,000 in Japanese men, women and children; thousands of Koreans; a dozen Americans held prisoner. Their souls speak to us. They ask us to look inward, to take stock of who we are and what we might become.

It is not the fact of war that sets Hiroshima apart. Artifacts tell us that violent conflict appeared with the very first man. Our early ancestors, having learned to make blades from flint and spears from wood, used these tools not just for hunting, but against their own kind. On every continent, the history of civilization is filled with war, whether driven by scarcity of grain or hunger for gold; compelled by nationalist fervor or religious zeal. Empires have risen and fallen. Peoples have been subjugated and liberated. And at each juncture, innocents have suffered, a countless toll, their names forgotten by time.

The World War that reached its brutal end in Hiroshima and Nagasaki was fought among the wealthiest and most powerful of nations. Their civilizations had given the world great cities and magnificent art. Their thinkers had advanced ideas of justice and harmony and truth. And yet, the war grew out of the same base instinct for domination or conquest that had caused conflicts among the simplest tribes; an old pattern amplified by new capabilities and without new constraints. In the span of a few years, some 60 million people would die -- men, women, children no different than us, shot, beaten, marched, bombed, jailed, starved, gassed to death.

There are many sites around the world that chronicle this war -- memorials that tell stories of courage and heroism; graves and empty camps that echo of unspeakable depravity. Yet in the image of a mushroom cloud that rose into these skies, we are most starkly reminded of humanity’s core contradiction; how the very spark that marks us as a species -- our thoughts, our imagination, our language, our tool-making, our ability to set ourselves apart from nature and bend it to our will -- those very things also give us the capacity for unmatched destruction.

How often does material advancement or social innovation blind us to this truth. How easily we learn to justify violence in the name of some higher cause. Every great religion promises a pathway to love and peace and righteousness, and yet no religion has been spared from believers who have claimed their faith as a license to kill. Nations arise, telling a story that binds people together in sacrifice and cooperation, allowing for remarkable feats, but those same stories have so often been used to oppress and dehumanize those who are different.

Science allows us to communicate across the seas and fly above the clouds; to cure disease and understand the cosmos. But those same discoveries can be turned into ever-more efficient killing machines.

The wars of the modern age teach this truth. Hiroshima teaches this truth. Technological progress without an equivalent progress in human institutions can doom us. The scientific revolution that led to the splitting of an atom requires a moral revolution, as well.

That is why we come to this place. We stand here, in the middle of this city, and force ourselves to imagine the moment the bomb fell. We force ourselves to feel the dread of children confused by what they see. We listen to a silent cry. We remember all the innocents killed across the arc of that terrible war, and the wars that came before, and the wars that would follow.

Mere words cannot give voice to such suffering, but we have a shared responsibility to look directly into the eye of history and ask what we must do differently to curb such suffering again. Someday the voices of the hibakusha will no longer be with us to bear witness. But the memory of the morning of August 6th, 1945 must never fade. That memory allows us to fight complacency. It fuels our moral imagination. It allows us to change.

And since that fateful day, we have made choices that give us hope. The United States and Japan forged not only an alliance, but a friendship that has won far more for our people than we could ever claim through war. The nations of Europe built a Union that replaced battlefields with bonds of commerce and democracy. Oppressed peoples and nations won liberation. An international community established institutions and treaties that worked to avoid war and aspire to restrict and roll back, and ultimately eliminate the existence of nuclear weapons.

Still, every act of aggression between nations; every act of terror and corruption and cruelty and oppression that we see around the world shows our work is never done. We may not be able to eliminate man’s capacity to do evil, so nations -- and the alliances that we’ve formed -- must possess the means to defend ourselves. But among those nations like my own that hold nuclear stockpiles, we must have the courage to escape the logic of fear, and pursue a world without them.

We may not realize this goal in my lifetime. But persistent effort can roll back the possibility of catastrophe. We can chart a course that leads to the destruction of these stockpiles. We can stop the spread to new nations, and secure deadly materials from fanatics.

And yet that is not enough. For we see around the world today how even the crudest rifles and barrel bombs can serve up violence on a terrible scale. We must change our mindset about war itself -- to prevent conflict through diplomacy, and strive to end conflicts after they’ve begun; to see our growing interdependence as a cause for peaceful cooperation and not violent competition; to define our nations not by our capacity to destroy, but by what we build.

And perhaps above all, we must reimagine our connection to one another as members of one human race. For this, too, is what makes our species unique. We’re not bound by genetic code to repeat the mistakes of the past. We can learn. We can choose. We can tell our children a different story -- one that describes a common humanity; one that makes war less likely and cruelty less easily accepted.

We see these stories in the hibakusha -- the woman who forgave a pilot who flew the plane that dropped the atomic bomb, because she recognized that what she really hated was war itself; the man who sought out families of Americans killed here, because he believed their loss was equal to his own.

My own nation’s story began with simple words: All men are created equal, and endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights, including life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Realizing that ideal has never been easy, even within our own borders, even among our own citizens.

But staying true to that story is worth the effort. It is an ideal to be strived for; an ideal that extends across continents, and across oceans. The irreducible worth of every person, the insistence that every life is precious; the radical and necessary notion that we are part of a single human family -- that is the story that we all must tell.

That is why we come to Hiroshima. So that we might think of people we love -- the first smile from our children in the morning; the gentle touch from a spouse over the kitchen table; the comforting embrace of a parent -- we can think of those things and know that those same precious moments took place here seventy-one years ago. Those who died -- they are like us. Ordinary people understand this, I think. They do not want more war. They would rather that the wonders of science be focused on improving life, and not eliminating it.

When the choices made by nations, when the choices made by leaders reflect this simple wisdom, then the lesson of Hiroshima is done.

The world was forever changed here. But today, the children of this city will go through their day in peace. What a precious thing that is. It is worth protecting, and then extending to every child. That is the future we can choose -- a future in which Hiroshima and Nagasaki are known not as the dawn of atomic warfare, but as the start of our own moral awakening.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# U.S. Air Force Academy Commencement Address

Hello, Air Force! Thank you so much. Thank you. It is wonderful to be back at the United States Air Force Academy! Thank you.

Secretary James, for your service to our Air Force and to our nation. Governor Hickenlooper, Academy leaders, faculty and staff -- especially your outstanding Superintendent, Lieutenant General Michelle Johnson. And most of all, congratulations to the Class of 2016!

As he prepares to conclude a remarkable 40-year career in the Air Force -- a career that started on this day 40 years ago -- please join me in saluting someone who many of you look up to and whose counsel I've relied on as well -- Chief of Staff General Mark Welsh. Thank you, Mark. Thank you, Mark, and thank you, Betty.

And although he’s not here today, I am proud to have nominated another Academy graduate -- and a combat-tested pilot -- to serve as the 21st Air Force Chief of Staff, General David Goldfein.

Cadets, you can take enormous pride in all the hard work that has brought you to this day. I also ask you to give a big round of applause to all your moms and dads, grandparents, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles who supported you and sacrificed for you so you could be here today. Give them another round of applause.

Now, I have to tell you, some days I spend more time with the Air Force than my own family. Especially on Air Force One. You take good care of me. You are always on time. You never lose my luggage. I don't have to take off my shoes before I get on. So I’m really going to miss Air Force One -- as well as the incredible Airmen that I’ve come to know. And that includes the pilots who flew me here -- Lieutenant Colonels Dan Thorn and Rob Tobler and Major Brett Ellis -- all three of them proud Air Force Academy graduates. Give them a big round of applause.

This Academy is one of our nation’s most selective academic institutions. Just being accepted is a big deal -- a testament to your talent and your leadership. And we are particularly grateful to those of you with prior enlisted service, including Cameron Kistler, who deployed to Iraq -- Robert Parati and Clayton Logan, who deployed to Afghanistan. We thank you. Your country thanks you.

Cadets, here you were tested by fire -- literally. When you went through Beast, as General Johnson noted, Waldo Canyon was actually on fire. During Recognition, you ran to the Rock in a blizzard. So you have more than earned your unofficial motto -- “forged in fire and tempered in ice.” Which is a great motto -- although it does sound like something out of Game of Thrones.

And through it all, you’ve become like family. You survived morning accountability formations, survived living in Sijan Hall. That night in F-1 where you learned to “earn each day.” You cheered Coach Calhoun and the Falcons as I’ve welcomed them to the White House to present the Commander-in-Chief Trophy -- which Air Force has won a record 19 times.

And I look out into your ranks and I see Airmen who will excel as pilots and engineers, analysts -- so many specialties. The first cyber graduates in this Academy’s history. And David Higgins, a marksman who’s going to the Olympics in Rio -- bring home the gold, David! No pressure.

In you, I see men and women of integrity and service and excellence. And you’ve made us all proud. And perhaps no one would have been more proud of your success than Major David Brodeur, whose sacrifice in Afghanistan we honor, and whose family joins us today -- 2016.

You’ve learned other lessons, as well, like what happens when you paint one of the planes on the Terrazo in your class color. With such “achievements” in mind -- I hereby grant amnesty to all cadets serving restrictions and confinements for minor offenses. Only minor.

Today, we congratulate our newest Air Force officers. On behalf of the American people, I thank you for choosing a life of service. In the coming weeks, some of you will head to the chapel to get married. In the years ahead, you and your families will serve around the world. As officers, you’ll be responsible for the lives of those under your command, and you’ll be called upon to lead with wisdom, courage and compassion. That’s what I want to talk with you about today.

I’ve served as Commander-in-Chief for nearly eight years now. It has been the highest honor of my life to lead the greatest military in the history of the world. It inspires me every day. Today will be the last time that I have the honor of addressing a graduating class of military officers. And there’s a debate going on in our country about our nation’s role in the world. So, with that in mind, I hope you don't mind if I share some lessons I’ve learned as Commander-in-Chief -- lessons that you may find useful as you lead those under your command, and as we work together to keep our nation strong and secure.

First, as you look at the world, be guided by an honest and clear-eyed assessment. Remember what you learned at this Academy -- the importance of evidence and facts and judgment. And here’s a fact: The United States of America remains the most powerful nation on Earth and a force for good.

We have big challenges in our country -- in our politics, our economy, our society. Those are challenges we have to address. But look around. We have the world’s strongest economy. Our scientists, our researchers, our entrepreneurs are global leaders in innovation. Our colleges and universities attract the best talent from around the world. Our values -- freedom, equality, opportunity -- those values inspire people everywhere, including immigrants who come here, ready to work, and integrate and help renew our country.

Our standing in the world is higher. I see it in my travels from Havana to Berlin to Ho Chi Minh City -- where huge crowds of Vietnamese lined the streets, some waving American flags. So make no mistake, the United States is better positioned to lead in the 21st century than any other nation.

And here’s another fact: Our military is, by a mile, the strongest in the world. Yes, after two major ground wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, we’re drawing down the size of our Armed Forces, which is natural and necessary. And we have to keep improving readiness and modernizing our force. But it is undeniable -- our military is the most capable fighting force on the planet. It’s not close.

Our soldiers are the best-trained, best-equipped land force on Earth, tested by years of combat, able to sustain power anywhere in the globe. Nobody can match our Army. Our sailors serve on aircraft carriers that can go almost anywhere, and submarines that move undetected -- the largest and most lethal Navy in the world, on track to surpass 300 ships. Nobody can match our Navy. Our Marines are ready at a moment’s notice, “first to fight” or deliver help in a crisis, the world’s only truly global expeditionary force. Nobody can match our Marines. Our Coast Guardsmen serve on the most advanced cutters in history, and special teams can shoot smugglers’ engines, hook and climb or repel aboard, protecting our shores. Nobody can match our Coast Guard.

And as for our Airmen -- with your unequaled vigilance and reach, unrivaled fifth-generation fighters, a new generation of remotely piloted aircraft pilots, astonishing precision that calls to mind your actual class motto, “On Target, On Time” -- nobody can match America’s Air Force.

Not only that, no other nation brings its forces together like we do in one joint force, as we saw in an operation against ISIL in Syria just last year. Air Force aircraft provided surveillance. Navy F-18s provided close air support. Army aviation assets delivered our Special Operators, an assault force of Marines and soldiers, to the target, and one of ISIL’s top leaders, Abu Sayyaf, was eliminated. That’s the power of America’s military. And we need to keep it that way.

And here’s one more fact as you go out into the world: We are blessed to be living in the most peaceful, most prosperous era in human history. Now, that sounds controversial until you survey the history of the world. It’s hard to see, with all the violence and suffering in the world, and what’s reported on the news every day. But if you step back for a moment -- think about last week, when I was in Hiroshima to remember all who were lost in a World War that killed some 60 million people -- not 60,000, 60 million.

For decades, there have been no wars between major powers. Wars between nations are increasingly rare. More people live in democracies. More than 1 billion people have been lifted from extreme poverty. From the Americas to Africa to Southeast Asia, there’s a new generation of young people, connected by technology and ready to make their mark. I’ve met them. They look up to America. They aspire to be our partner. That’s the progress and the hope that we have to build on. And so much of that derives from the extraordinary leadership and sacrifice of our Air Force and the other branches of our military.

So we are well-positioned. You enter this moment with a lot of good cards to play. But we face serious threats. Terrorist networks slaughter the innocent and plot attacks against our nation. Civil wars like in Iraq tear countries apart and create humanitarian catastrophes and havens for terrorists. Russian aggression against Ukraine, disputes in the South China Sea -- these are testing an international order that we built, where the sovereignty of nations is respected and all nations abide by the same rules. Nuclear weapons, as in North Korea, and the specter of nuclear terrorism still threaten us all.

So how to meet these threats while also seizing the incredible opportunities of this moment in history, that’s going to be your challenge -- the challenge of your generation.

Which leads me to a second lesson. As we navigate this complex world, America cannot shirk the mantle of leadership. We can’t be isolationist. It’s not possible in this globalized, interconnected world. In these uncertain times, it’s tempting sometimes to pull back and try to wash our hands of conflicts that seem intractable, let other countries fend for themselves. But history teaches us, from Pearl Harbor to 9/11, that oceans alone cannot protect us. Hateful ideologies can spark terror from Boston to San Bernardino.

In a global economy, it’s not possible to stop trading goods and services with other countries. Weak public health systems on the other side of the world allow diseases to develop that end up reaching our shores. So we cannot turn inward. We cannot give in to isolationism. That’s a false comfort. Allowing problems to fester over there makes us less secure here. So, as Americans, we have to keep leading and working with others to build the security and prosperity and justice we want in the world.

By the way, one of the most effective ways to lead and work with others is through treaties that advance our interests. Lately, there's been a mindset in Congress that just about any international treaty is somehow a violation of American sovereignty, and so the Senate almost never approves treaties anymore. They voted down a treaty to protect disabled Americans, including our veterans, while Senator and World War II veteran Bob Dole was sitting right there in the Senate chambers in a wheelchair.

We don't always realize it, but treaties help make a lot of things in our lives possible that we take for granted -- from international phone calls to mail. Those are good things. Those are not a threat to our sovereignty. I think we can all agree on that.

But also from NATO to treaties controlling nuclear weapons, treaties help keep us safe. So if we’re truly concerned about China’s actions in the South China Sea, for example, the Senate should help strengthen our case by approving the Law of the Sea Convention -- as our military leaders have urged. And by the way, these treaties are not a new thing. The power to make treaties is written into our Constitution. Our Founding Fathers ratified lots of treaties. So it’s time for the Senate to do its job and help us advance American leadership, rather than undermine it.

A part of the reason this is so important is because the United States remains the one indisputable nation in world affairs. I say this all the time. After eight years, I have not gone to an international conference, summit, meeting where we were not the ones who made the agenda possible -- even if we weren’t hosting it. We have more alliances with other countries than anybody else -- and they’re the foundation of global stability and prosperity. On just about every issue, the world looks to us to set the agenda. When there’s a problem around the world, they do not call Beijing or Moscow -- they call us.

And we lead not by dictating to other nations, but by working with them as partners; by treating other countries and their peoples with respect, not by lecturing them. This isn’t just the right thing to do; it’s in our self-interest. It makes countries more likely to work with us, and, ultimately, it makes us more secure. So we need smart, steady, principled American leadership.

And part of leading wisely is seeing threats clearly. Remember Ebola? That was a serious threat, and we took it seriously. But in the midst of it, there was hysteria. “Flights must be banned!” “Quarantine citizens!” These were actual quotes. “Seal the border!” And my favorite -- “Remove Obama…or millions of Americans die!” That’s an actual quote.

The thing is, when we panic, we don’t make good decisions. So, with Ebola, instead of responding with fear, we responded with facts and responded with science and organization. And thanks to a coordinated global response -- enabled by the American military and our medical workers who got in there first -- we stopped the spread of Ebola in West Africa and saved countless lives, and protected ourselves.

So we’ve got to engage with the world. We can’t pull back. Of course, leading wisely also means resisting the temptation to intervene militarily every time there’s a problem or crisis in the world. History is littered with the ruins of empires and nations that overextended themselves, draining their power and influence. And so we have to chart a smarter path. As we saw in Vietnam and the Iraq War, oftentimes the greatest damage to American credibility comes when we overreach, when we don’t think through the consequences of all of our actions. And so we have to learn from our history. And that also means we’re doing right by our men and women in uniform.

So, cadets, in your positions of leadership, you will be called upon to sustain this balance -- to be hard-headed and big-hearted; guided by realism and idealism, even when these forces are sometimes at odds. We’ve got to have the realism to see the world as it is -- where sometimes uncomfortable compromises are necessary; where we have the humility to recognize that there are limits to what even a nation as powerful as ours can do; that there may be wars we cannot always stop right away, or lives we cannot save. But we also need the idealism that sees the world as it ought to be -- a commitment to the universal values of democracy and equality and human rights, and a willingness to stand up for them around the world -- not just when it’s easy, but when it’s hard. Because that’s who we are and that’s American leadership.

At times, ensuring our security requires the use of military force. That’s the third lesson I want to discuss. As Commander-in-Chief, I have not hesitated to use force, unilaterally where necessary, to protect the American people. Thanks to our military, intelligence and counterterrorism professionals, bin Laden is gone. Anwar al-Awlaki, a leader of the al Qaeda affiliate in Yemen, is gone. Ahmed Abdi Godane, the al Qaeda leader in Somalia -- he’s gone. Ahmed Abu Khattala, accused in the attacks in Benghazi -- captured. Mohammad Mansur, the leader of the Taliban -- gone. Leader after leader in ISIL -- Haji Mutazz, their number two; Mohamed Emwazi, who brutally murdered Americans; Abu Nabil, the ISIL leader in Libya -- all gone. Abu Dawud, a leader of their chemical weapons program -- captured.

The list goes on. Because if you target Americans, we will find you and justice will be done, and we will defend our nation.

But even as we celebrate the courage of our troops who serve in war, even where we do not hesitate to act on behalf of our security, we should never celebrate war itself. War, no matter how noble our intentions may be, promises agony and tragedy. And no one knows this more than those who fight those wars -- our wounded warriors who bear the scars, seen and unseen; our veterans, who remember their fallen comrades; our Gold Star families, whose hearts ache with pride and with loss.

We have a solemn responsibility to these Americans who sacrifice in our name. We have a responsibility to be guided by intelligence, and not ideology, and to never rush into war, and to explore other options first. Because sending our troops into harm’s way must always be a last resort.

And sometimes those decisions are tough. I know, for example, that my decision not to conduct strikes against Syria after it used chemical weapons was controversial among some in Washington. But because we seized a diplomatic option, backed by our threat of force, nations came together and we accomplished far more than military strikes ever could have -- all of Syria’s declared chemical weapons were successfully removed.

And in acting militarily, we have a responsibility, whenever possible, to build coalitions and partnerships. There are times where we have to do it alone. But on a whole lot of global problems, the United States shouldn’t bear the entire burden of global security by itself. Others have to step up. That’s why, as we assist and train Afghan forces, we’re part of a 39-nation coalition. Our coalition against ISIL includes 66 partners, including Arab nations. We’ve learned that often the best way to defeat terrorists is not by sending large numbers of American ground forces to occupy and patrol foreign cities and towns. It’s better to train and build up local partners -- they’re the ones who have to stabilize their own countries over the long term.

Compared to when I came into office -- when we had nearly 180,000 American troops in Afghanistan and Iraq -- today that number is less than 15,000. Most of our troops have come home. Our local partners on the ground are in the lead. And as ISIL continues to lose territory in Iraq and Syria, these terrorists are learning the same lesson as others before them -- you will never be strong enough to destroy America or our way of life. You are going to lose. But part of that is because we’re on the right side of history, and part of it is because we can mobilize others to work with us.

When we use force, we have a responsibility to use it proportionally. Unlike terrorists who try to kill as many people as possible, the United States military goes to extraordinary lengths to avoid civilian casualties. It’s the tragedy of war, however, whenever -- whether it’s conventional warfare or precision strikes -- that innocents sometimes are caught in the crossfire. And these are deaths that haunt us all. Nobody more than me. As technology evolves, we can never grow numb to the consequences of our actions. We have to hold ourselves to high standards, be even more transparent, and do everything in our power to prevent the loss of innocent life. That’s how America goes to war. And that’s how, ultimately, America also wins the peace.

And we have a responsibility to always give our troops a clear mission, the support they need to get the job done, and a plan for what comes after. I insisted, for example, that our surge of forces in Afghanistan be matched with a transition to ensure Afghans took responsibility for their own security.

In Libya, we were right to launch an air campaign to prevent Qaddafi from massacring innocent civilians, but we didn’t do enough to plan for the day after, when deep-rooted tribalism plunged Libya into disorder.

In Syria, the suffering in the civil war has been heartbreaking to see a nation shattered, and hundreds of thousands killed and millions driven from their homes. It is gut-wrenching. And as a father, I look at Syria’s children and I see my own. That’s why we’ve said the dictator, Assad, must go and why we support a moderate Syrian opposition. And it’s why America provides more humanitarian aid to the Syrian people than any other nation.

But suggestions for deeper U.S. military involvement in a conflict like the Syrian civil war have to be fully thought through, rigorously examined with an honest assessment of the risks and tradeoffs. How will it alter the conflict? What comes next? When we ask those questions, we prevent the kind of mission creep that history teaches us to avoid.

If Iran and Russia want to spill their blood and treasure trying to prop up their Syrian client and get sucked into a quagmire, that is their choice. As President of the United States, I’ve made a different choice. And the only real solution to the Syrian conflict is a political solution, including a transition away from Assad. And that takes diplomacy -- not American soldiers being dragged into the middle of another civil war in the Middle East. Our foreign policy has to be strong, but it also has to be smart.

Which brings me to my last lesson that I want to share: As powerful as our military is, we have to remember that many of the threats to our security cannot be solved by military force alone. We’ve got to draw on every tool, all elements of our national power.

When we invest in the development that promotes education and opportunity around the globe, it can make conflicts and military interventions less likely later. So if you want to support our military, you also have to be in favor of foreign assistance that helps some young person learn in a very poor country, because it may end up making it less necessary to send our sons and daughters somewhere to fight. You can’t separate the two.

When we encourage economic and political reforms -- when citizens, especially young people, in other countries have jobs and can choose their own leaders and have their human rights and dignity upheld -- that can help reduce the appeal of violent extremism. We now have hope of averting the worst effects of climate change and the instability that would threaten our national security because American leadership helped rally the world and forge the most ambitious agreement in history to fight climate change.

So if we’re going to seize the possibilities of our time, we have to use all these tools, and we have to have the courage to chart new paths. Because we negotiated with Iran and enforced strong sanctions, we reached a deal that prevents Iran from obtaining a nuclear bomb -- and we did it without firing a shot. With diplomacy, not war. We put aside 50 years of failed policies, and now we’re seeing Americans returning to Cuba and the Cuban people looking to us, and having new hope for the future. Four decades after the conflict between us, Vietnam and America are forging a new partnership, showing the world that peace is better than war.

And perhaps no element of our power is more enduring than the example that we set ourselves -- the values we live as a nation and as individuals. That’s how we won the Cold War -- not just with the strength of our arms, but with the power of our ideas, the power of our example. It’s how we defend our nation -- including our refusal to torture -- because America doesn’t just insist that other countries respect human rights, we have to uphold them, as well, and lead the way. It’s how we treat those we capture. It’s one of the reasons we have to close the prison at Guantanamo -- because America has to stand for rule of law.

We live our values when our military, like America itself, truly welcomes the talents of all people. We’re stronger when our gay and lesbian cadets and troops can serve their country -- a country they love -- without hiding who they love. We’re stronger when cadets -- like Wasim Soomro and Ismail Baumy and James Salem -- know that we celebrate their service as proud, patriotic Muslim Americans who are also serving in our Armed Forces.

And on this 40th anniversary of the first female cadets arriving at this Academy, we are stronger because General Johnson leads this institution; because Air Force General Lori Robinson leads Northern Command -- our nation’s first female combatant commander; and because all combat positions in our military are now open to women like you. We’re stronger because of it.

So there you have it -- a few thoughts from your Commander-in-Chief on how to keep our military strong and our nation secure. We can never know what the future holds. But in the not-so-distant future, when I’m no longer President, I will sleep well at night because I know that men and women like you serve to keep us free.

Take care of each other. Take care of those under your command. And as long as you keep strong that Long Blue Line, stay true to the values you’ve learned here -- integrity, service before self, excellence -- do this and I’m confident that we will always remain one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Congratulations, Class of 2016.

God bless you all.

God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Presidential Endorsement of Hillary Rodham Clinton

For more than a year now, across thousands of miles and all 50 states, tens of millions of Americans have made their voices heard.

Today, I just want to add mine.

I want to congratulate Hillary Clinton on making history as the presumptive Democratic nominee for President of the United States.

Look, I know how hard this job can be. That’s why I know Hillary will be so good at it. In fact, I don't think there's ever been someone so qualified to hold this office. She’s got the courage, the compassion, and the heart to get the job done. And I say that as somebody who had to debate or more than 20 times.

Even after our own hard-fought campaign, in a testament to her character, she agreed to serve our country as Secretary of State. From the decision we made in the Situation Room to get bin Laden to our pursuit of diplomacy in capitals around the world, I have seen her judgment. I've seen her toughness. I've seen her commitment to our values up close. I've seen her determination to give every American a fair shot at opportunity no matter how tough the fight was. That's what has always driven her -- and it still does.

So, I want those of you who've been with me from the beginning of this incredible journey to be the first to know that I'm with her. I am fired up. And I cannot wait to get out there and campaign for Hillary.

I also want to thank everybody who turned out to vote and who worked so hard for our candidates. This has been a hard-fought race. I know some say these primaries have somehow left the Democratic Party more divided. Well, you know, they said that eight years ago as well. But just like eight years ago, there are millions of Americans -- not just Democrats -- who've cast their ballots for the very first time.

And a lot of that is thanks to Senator Bernie Sanders, who has run an incredible campaign.

I had a great meeting with him this week, and I thanked him for shining a spotlight on issues like economic inequality, and the outside influence of money in our politics, and bringing young people into the process. Embracing that message is going to help us win in November. But more importantly, it will make the Democratic Party stronger and it will make America stronger.

Secretary Clinton and Senator Sanders may have been rivals during this primary, but they're both patriots who love this country, and they share a vision for the America that we all believe in -- an America that's hopeful, an America that's big hearted, an America that is strong and fair and gives every child the same chance that we had.

Those are the values that unite us as Democrats.

Those are the values that make America great.

Those are the values that are going to be tested in this election.

And, if we all come together, in common effort, I'm convinced we won't just win in November -- we'll build on the progress that we’ve made and we will win a brighter future for this country that we love.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Statement on the Orlando, Florida Shootings

Today, as Americans, we grieve the brutal murder -- a horrific massacre -- of dozens of innocent people. We pray for their families, who are grasping for answers with broken hearts. We stand with the people of Orlando, who have endured a terrible attack on their city. Although it’s still early in the investigation, we know enough to say that this was an act of terror and an act of hate. And as Americans, we are united in grief, in outrage, and in resolve to defend our people.

I just finished a meeting with FBI Director Comey and my homeland security and national security advisors. The FBI is on the scene and leading the investigation, in partnership with local law enforcement. I’ve directed that the full resources of the federal government be made available for this investigation.

We are still learning all the facts. This is an open investigation. We’ve reached no definitive judgment on the precise motivations of the killer. The FBI is appropriately investigating this as an act of terrorism. And I’ve directed that we must spare no effort to determine what -- if any -- inspiration or association this killer may have had with terrorist groups. What is clear is that he was a person filled with hatred. Over the coming days, we’ll uncover why and how this happened, and we will go wherever the facts lead us.

This morning I spoke with my good friend, Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer, and I conveyed the condolences of the entire American people. This could have been any one of our communities. So I told Mayor Dyer that whatever help he and the people of Orlando need -- they are going to get it. As a country, we will be there for the people of Orlando today, tomorrow and for all the days to come.

We also express our profound gratitude to all the police and first responders who rushed into harm’s way. Their courage and professionalism saved lives, and kept the carnage from being even worse. It’s the kind of sacrifice that our law enforcement professionals make every single day for all of us, and we can never thank them enough.

This is an especially heartbreaking day for all our friends -- our fellow Americans -- who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. The shooter targeted a nightclub where people came together to be with friends, to dance and to sing, and to live. The place where they were attacked is more than a nightclub -- it is a place of solidarity and empowerment where people have come together to raise awareness, to speak their minds, and to advocate for their civil rights.

So this is a sobering reminder that attacks on any American -- regardless of race, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation -- is an attack on all of us and on the fundamental values of equality and dignity that define us as a country. And no act of hate or terror will ever change who we are or the values that make us Americans.

Today marks the most deadly shooting in American history. The shooter was apparently armed with a handgun and a powerful assault rifle. This massacre is therefore a further reminder of how easy it is for someone to get their hands on a weapon that lets them shoot people in a school, or in a house of worship, or a movie theater, or in a nightclub. And we have to decide if that’s the kind of country we want to be. And to actively do nothing is a decision as well.

In the coming hours and days, we’ll learn about the victims of this tragedy. Their names. Their faces. Who they were. The joy that they brought to families and to friends, and the difference that they made in this world. Say a prayer for them and say a prayer for their families -- that God give them the strength to bear the unbearable. And that He give us all the strength to be there for them, and the strength and courage to change. We need to demonstrate that we are defined more -- as a country -- by the way they lived their lives than by the hate of the man who took them from us.

As we go together, we will draw inspiration from heroic and selfless acts -- friends who helped friends, took care of each other and saved lives. In the face of hate and violence, we will love one another. We will not give in to fear or turn against each other. Instead, we will stand united, as Americans, to protect our people, and defend our nation, and to take action against those who threaten us.

May God bless the Americans we lost this morning. May He comfort their families. May God continue to watch over this country that we love. Thank you.

# Counter-ISIL Meeting Briefing

I just met with my National Security Council as part of our regular effort to review and intensify our campaign to destroy the terrorist group ISIL. Our meeting was planned before the terrible attack in Orlando. But obviously that tragedy -- the awful loss of life -- shaped much of our work today. In all of our efforts, foremost in our minds is the loss and the grief of the people of Orlando -- those who died, those who are still recovering, the families who have seen their loved ones harmed, the friends of ours who are lesbian and gay and bisexual and transgender who were targeted. I want to remind them that they are not alone. The American people, and our allies and friends all over the world, stand with you and are thinking about you, and are praying for you.

As Director Comey has said, we currently do not have any information to indicate that a foreign terrorist group directed the attack in Orlando. It is increasingly clear, however, that the killer took in extremist information and propaganda over the Internet. He appears to have been an angry, disturbed, unstable young man who became radicalized. As we know all too well, terrorist groups like ISIL have called on people around the world and here in the United States to attack innocent civilians. Their propaganda, their videos, their postings are pervasive and more easily accessible than we want. This individual appears to have absorbed some of that. And during his killing spree, the shooter in Orlando pledged allegiance to ISIL.

As I’ve said before, these lone actors or small cells of terrorists are very hard to detect and very hard to prevent. But across our government, at every level -- federal, state and local, military and civilian -- we are doing everything in our power to stop these kinds of attacks. We work to succeed a hundred percent of the time. An attacker, as we saw in Orlando, only has to succeed once. Our extraordinary personnel -- our intelligence, our military, our homeland security, our law enforcement -- have prevented many attacks and saved many lives. And we can never thank them enough. But we are all sobered by the fact that, despite the extraordinary hard work, something like Orlando can occur.

In our meeting today, Director Comey updated us on the investigation in Orlando. Secretary Johnson reviewed the measures we continue to take on behalf of our homeland security. Secretary Carter and Chairman Dunford reviewed the military campaign against ISIL. And I want to thank Secretary Lew and his team here at Treasury for hosting us and for their tireless efforts to cut off the money that ISIL relies on to fund its terror network.

At the outset, I want to reiterate our objective in this fight. Our mission is to destroy ISIL. Since I last updated the American people on our campaign two months ago, we’ve seen that this continues to be a difficult fight -- but we are making significant progress. Over the past two months, I’ve authorized a series of steps to ratchet up our fight against ISIL: additional U.S. personnel, including Special Forces, in Syria to assist local forces battling ISIL there; additional advisors to work more closely with Iraqi security forces, and additional assets, including attack helicopters; and additional support for local forces in northern Iraq. Our aircraft continue to launch from the USS Harry Truman, now in the Mediterranean. Our B-52 bombers are hitting ISIL with precision strikes. Targets are being identified and hit even more quickly -- so far, 13,000 airstrikes. This campaign at this stage is firing on all cylinders.

And as a result, ISIL is under more pressure than ever before. ISIL continues to lose key leaders. This includes Salman Abd Shahib, a senior military leader in Mosul; Abu Sa’ad al-Sudani, who plotted external attacks; Shakir Wahayb, ISIL’s military leader in Iraq’s Anbar province; and Maher al-Bilawi, the top ISIL commander in Fallujah. So far, we’ve taken out more than 120 top ISIL leaders and commanders. And our message is clear: If you target America and our allies, you will not be safe. You will never be safe.

ISIL continues to lose ground in Iraq. In the past two months, local forces in Iraq, with coalition support, have liberated the western town of Rutbah and have also pushed up the Euphrates River Valley, liberating the strategic town of Hit and breaking the ISIL siege of Haditha. Iraqi forces have surrounded Fallujah and begun to move into the city. Meanwhile, in the north, Iraqi forces continue to push up the Tigris River Valley, making gains around Makhmour, and now preparing to tighten the noose around ISIL in Mosul. All told, ISIL has now lost nearly half of the populated territory that it once controlled in Iraq -- and it will lose more.

ISIL continues to lose ground in Syria as well. Assisted by our Special Operations Forces, a coalition of local forces is now pressuring the key town of Manbij, which means the noose is tightening around ISIL in Raqqa as well. In short, our coalition continues to be on offense. ISIL is on defense. And it’s now been a full year since ISIL has been able to mount a major successful offensive operation in either Syria or Iraq.

As ISIL continues to lose territory, it also continues to lose the money that is its lifeblood. As a result of our strikes against its oil infrastructure and supply lines, we believe that we’ve cut ISIL’s revenue from oil by millions of dollars per month. In destroying the storage sites where they keep their cash, we’ve deprived ISIL of many millions more.

Thanks to the great work of Secretary Lew and many others here today -- and working with nations and financial institutions around the world -- ISIL is now effectively cut off from the international financial system. Cutting off ISIL’s money may not be as dramatic as military strikes, but it is critically important. And we’re seeing the results. ISIL’s cash reserves are down. It has had to cut salaries for its fighters. It’s resorting to more extortion of those trapped in its grip. And by ISIL’s own admission, some of its own leaders have been caught stealing cash and gold. Once again, ISIL’s true nature has been revealed: These are not religious warriors, they are thugs and they are thieves.

In continuing to push on this front, I want to mention that it is critical for our friends in the Senate to confirm Adam Szubin, my nominee for Under Secretary of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence. Adam has served in Democratic and Republican administrations. Everyone agrees he’s eminently qualified. He has been working on these kinds of issues for years. It’s now been more than a year since I nominated him -- more than 420 days -- and he still has not been given a full vote. There is no good reason for it. It is inexcusable. So it’s time for the Senate to do its job, put our national security first, and have a vote on Adam Szubin that can lead our financial fight against ISIL and help keep our country safe.

ISIL’s ranks are shrinking as well. Their morale is sinking. As one defender -- as one defector said, ISIL “is not bringing Islam to the world, and people need to know that.” Thanks to international efforts, the flow of foreign fighters -- including from America to Syria and Iraq -- has plummeted. In fact, our intelligence community now assesses that the ranks of ISIL fighters has been reduced to the lowest levels in more than two and half years.

Even as we continue to destroy ISIL militarily, we’re addressing the larger forces that have allowed these terrorists to gain traction in parts of the world. With regard to Iraq, this means helping Iraqis stabilize liberated communities and promote inclusive governance so ISIL cannot return.

With regard to Syria, it means our continued support for the fragile cessation of hostilities there. The cessation of hostilities has not stopped all or even most of the hardship on the Syrian people, the hardship on civilians. And the Assad regime has been the principal culprit in violating the cessation of hostilities. ISIL and al Nusra, which is al Qaeda's affiliate in Syria, also continue to terrorize Syrians. But as fragile and incomplete as the cessation is, it has saved lives and it has allowed the delivery of some lifesaving aid to Syrians who are in desperate need. And as difficult as it is, we will continue to push for a political process that can end the civil war and result in a transition away from Assad.

Beyond Syria and Libya -- beyond Syria and Iraq, ISIL is also losing ground in Libya. Forces of the Libyan unity government are going after ISIL in their stronghold in Sirte. And we’ll continue to assist the new Libyan government as it works to secure its country.

Lastly, here at home, if we really want to help law enforcement protect Americans from homegrown extremists, the kind of tragedies that occurred at San Bernardino and that now have occurred in Orlando, there is a meaningful way to do that. We have to make it harder for people who want to kill Americans to get their hands on weapons of war that let them kill dozens of innocents. It is absolutely true we cannot prevent every tragedy. But we know that, consistent with the Second Amendment, there are common-sense steps that could reduce gun violence and could reduce the lethality of somebody who intends to do other people harm. We should give ATF the resources they need to enforce the gun laws that we already have. People with possible ties to terrorism who aren't allowed on a plane shouldn't be allowed to buy a gun.

Enough talking about being tough on terrorism. Actually be tough on terrorism, and stop making it easy as possible for terrorists to buy assault weapons. Reinstate the assault weapons ban. Make it harder for terrorists to use these weapons to kill us. Otherwise, despite extraordinary efforts across our government by local law enforcement, by our intelligence agencies, by our military, despite all the sacrifices that folks make, these kinds of events are going to keep on happening. And the weapons are only going to get more powerful.

And let me make a final point. For a while now, the main contribution of some of my friends on the other side of the aisle have made in the fight against ISIL is to criticize this administration and me for not using the phrase “radical Islam.” That’s the key, they tell us -- we can’t beat ISIL unless we call them “radical Islamists.” What exactly would using this label accomplish? What exactly would it change? Would it make ISIL less committed to trying to kill Americans? Would it bring in more allies? Is there a military strategy that is served by this? The answer is none of the above. Calling a threat by a different name does not make it go away. This is a political distraction. Since before I was President, I’ve been clear about how extremist groups have perverted Islam to justify terrorism. As President, I have repeatedly called on our Muslim friends and allies at home and around the world to work with us to reject this twisted interpretation of one of the world’s great religions.

There has not been a moment in my seven and a half years as President where we have not been able to pursue a strategy because we didn’t use the label "radical Islam." Not once has an advisor of mine said, man, if we really use that phrase, we're going to turn this whole thing around. Not once. So if someone seriously thinks that we don’t know who we're fighting, if there's anyone out there who thinks we're confused about who our enemies are, that would come as a surprise to the thousands of terrorists who we've taken off the battlefield.

If the implication is that those of us up here and the thousands of people around the country and around the world who are working to defeat ISIL aren't taking the fight seriously, that would come as a surprise to those who have spent these last seven and a half years dismantling al Qaeda in the FATA, for example -- including the men and women in uniform who put their lives at risk and the Special Forces that I ordered to get bin Laden and are now on the ground in Iraq and in Syria. They know full well who the enemy is. So do the intelligence and law enforcement officers who spend countless hours disrupting plots and protecting all Americans, including politicians who tweet and appear on cable news shows. They know who the nature of the enemy is.

So there’s no magic to the phrase “radical Islam.” It’s a political talking point; it's not a strategy. And the reason I am careful about how I describe this threat has nothing to do with political correctness and everything to do with actually defeating extremism. Groups like ISIL and al Qaeda want to make this war a war between Islam and America, or between Islam and the West. They want to claim that they are the true leaders of over a billion Muslims around the world who reject their crazy notions. They want us to validate them by implying that they speak for those billion-plus people; that they speak for Islam. That’s their propaganda. That's how they recruit. And if we fall into the trap of painting all Muslims with a broad brush and imply that we are at war with an entire religion -- then we’re doing the terrorists' work for them.

Now, up until this point, this argument about labels has mostly just been partisan rhetoric. And, sadly, we've all become accustomed to that kind of partisanship, even when it involves the fight against these extremist groups. And that kind of yapping has not prevented folks across government from doing their jobs, from sacrificing and working really hard to protect the American people.

But we are now seeing how dangerous this kind of mindset and this kind of thinking can be. We're starting to see where this kind of rhetoric and loose talk and sloppiness about who exactly we're fighting, where this can lead us. We now have proposals from the presumptive Republican nominee for President of the United States to bar all Muslims from emigrating to America. We hear language that singles out immigrants and suggests that entire religious communities are complicit in violence. Where does this stop? The Orlando killer, one of the San Bernardino killers, the Fort Hood killer -- they were all U.S. citizens.

Are we going to start treating all Muslim Americans differently? Are we going to start subjecting them to special surveillance? Are we going to start discriminating against them because of their faith? We’ve heard these suggestions during the course of this campaign. Do Republican officials actually agree with this? Because that's not the America we want. It doesn't reflect our democratic ideals. It won’t make us more safe; it will make us less safe -- fueling ISIL’s notion that the West hates Muslims, making young Muslims in this country and around the world feel like no matter what they do, they're going to be under suspicion and under attack. It makes Muslim Americans feel like they're government is betraying them. It betrays the very values America stands for.

We've gone through moments in our history before when we acted out of fear -- and we came to regret it. We've seen our government mistreat our fellow citizens. And it has been a shameful part of our history.

This is a country founded on basic freedoms, including freedom of religion. We don't have religious tests here. Our Founders, our Constitution, our Bill of Rights are clear about that. And if we ever abandon those values, we would not only make it a lot easier to radicalize people here and around the world, but we would have betrayed the very things we are trying to protect -- the pluralism and the openness, our rule of law, our civil liberties -- the very things that make this country great; the very things that make us exceptional. And then the terrorists would have won. And we cannot let that happen. I will not let that happen.

Two weeks ago, I was at the commencement ceremony at the Air Force Academy. And it could not have been more inspiring to see these young people stepping up, dedicated to serve and protect this country. And part of what was inspiring was the incredible diversity of these cadets. We saw cadets, who are straight, applauding classmates who were openly gay. We saw cadets, born here in America, applauding classmates who are immigrants and love this country so much they decided they wanted to be part of our armed forces. We saw cadets and families of all religions applaud cadets who are proud, patriotic Muslim Americans serving their country in uniform, ready to lay their lives on the line to protect you and to protect me. We saw male cadets applauding for female classmates, who can now serve in combat positions. That’s the American military. That’s America -- one team, one nation. Those are the values that ISIL is trying to destroy, and we shouldn’t help them do it.

Our diversity and our respect for one another, our drawing on the talents of everybody in this country, our making sure that we are treating everybody fairly -- that we’re not judging people on the basis of what faith they are or what race they are, or what ethnicity they are, or what their sexual orientation is -- that’s what makes this country great. That’s the spirit we see in Orlando. That’s the unity and resolve that will allow us to defeat ISIL. That’s what will preserve our values and our ideals that define us as Americans. That’s how we’re going to defend this nation, and that’s how we’re going to defend our way of life.

Thank you very much.

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# Address at the United State of Women Summit

Can you please give it up again for Mikaila [Ulmer]. What an amazing young lady. I will be back on the job market in seven months, so I hope she is hiring.

I was just told backstage, when she was asked to introduce me, there were some folks who were organizing this amazing event that said, is she going to feel a little nervous speaking in front of 5,000 people? And so they asked her and she said, oh, no, I just spoke to 11,000 last week. So we were looking backstage -- she was on her tippy-toes with her entrepreneurial self.

So I know you’re really here to see Michelle. Or Oprah. Actually, they’re together, so you’re here to see both of them. I cannot compete with them. But I did want to stop by and make one thing very clear -- I may be a little grayer than I was eight years ago, but this is what a feminist looks like. Of course, in my household there’s no choice.

It is great to be with so many friends. One of my first acts as President was to establish the White House Council on Women and Girls, led by Tina Tchen and Valerie Jarrett, and they’ve worked with a lot of you very closely. We’re so appreciative of those of you who helped not just make this event possible, but have guided a lot of our thinking across our Administration.

We’ve got some outstanding members of Congress -- of course including my dear friend and one of the finest Speakers we’ve ever had, and hope to soon have again, Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi. And I want to thank all of you who worked so hard to make this event happen. Because this is an opportunity to reflect on how far we’ve come, and why it is we’ve got to keep going.

It was almost 100 years ago that Alice Paul and her fellow suffragists were arrested for picketing outside the White House for the right to vote. Today, women make up more than half of the electorate. For the first time in history, a woman is a major party’s presumptive presidential nominee. And we are here, at the first-ever White House Summit on the United State of Women.

Because of all of you, over the past seven years, we have significantly improved the lives of women and girls not just here at home, but around the world. And I could not be prouder of what we’ve accomplished. I want to talk about why it matters, and why we’ve got to do more.

Some of you may know that on Friday, my older daughter Malia graduated from high school. And I sat in the back and wore dark glasses. And only cried once, but it was -- I made this weird sound because I was choking back -- and people looked at me, people sitting in front of us turned back. And then I suppressed it. But I was thinking about how she is graduating at this extraordinary time for women in America.

The year I was born, in 1961, women made up less than 40 percent of college students. Today, you earn almost 60 percent of college degrees, make up roughly half of the workforce. Back then, the pill was still illegal in some states. And today, thanks to the Affordable Care Act, birth control is free. In the old days, women actually needed a husband to open a credit card. Today, more women are choosing to be single -- and all Americans are able to marry whoever they love.

Fifty-four years ago, Katherine Johnson did the behind-the-scenes math to put a man in orbit. Today, almost 60 women have blasted into space themselves. When I was growing up, fewer than 300,000 girls played high school sports. Today, because of Title IX, more than 3 million girls are on the field. Women are leading America at every level of society, from Hollywood to Silicon Valley, from the c-suite to the federal bench to the Federal Reserve.

And that is progress. It’s real and we have to celebrate it, but we also have to remember that progress is not inevitable. It’s the result of decades of slow, tireless, often frustrating and unheralded work by people like Dorothy Pitman-Hughes and Gloria Steinem, who is here today -- people who opened our eyes to the discrimination, both subtle and overt, that women face. People like Pauli Murray and Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who insisted on equal justice under the law. People like Wilma Mankiller and Patsy Mink, who redefined what leadership looks like. And, yes, people like Hillary Clinton who’ve raised the expectations of our daughters -- and our sons -- for what is possible.

In other words, our progress has been the result of countless ordinary women and men whose names will never be written into the history books or chiseled on monuments, but who dedicated their lives to ensuring that America lives up to its promise of liberty and justice for all.

What’s also true is, is that despite all that incredible progress, we are living in a time of great change, a time where people are economically anxious. Unemployment has dropped below five percent. Wages are growing again. But while we’ve made progress in narrowing the gap between rich and poor, it is still too big and the trend lines, because of globalization and automation, are still upon us.

You hear politicians peddle the fiction that blocking immigrants or cutting off trade or “big government” are all to blame, but we know what the causes are. The rise of global competition, the weakening of the labor movement and participation in unions, the automation of more jobs, the race of technology -- all these trends have the potential of leaving workers behind. They let a few at the top do even better. And we see some of those divisions not just between groups, but within groups. There are women who have never had more opportunity, but there are a lot of women who are still stuck in the toughest of economic circumstances.

There is an important reason that so many working families feel like the system is rigged, and it’s because the economy hasn’t caught up to some of the enormous changes that have transformed America over the past 50 years. Those days when the average family was a dad who went to work every day and a mom who stayed at home and did all the unpaid labor -- that’s not what our economy looks like anymore. Household and work arrangements come in all shapes and all combinations, and yet, our workplace policies still look like they’re straight out of Mad Men.

I will tell you, a lot of the problems that cross my desk are really hard to solve. If they end up on my desk, it’s because other people couldn’t solve them. But this issue of how we support working families, the policies that we could put in place that would make a meaningful difference, here we actually have solutions right in front of us. Just as we know what the problems are, we know what some of the solutions are.

We need equal pay for equal work. We need paid family and sick leave. We need affordable child care. We’ve got to raise the minimum wage. If we’re truly a nation of family values, we wouldn’t put up with the fact that many women can’t even get a paid day off to give birth. We should guarantee paid maternity leave and paid paternity leave, too. That’s how you value families. That’s how employers retain great workers. And it’s good for women -- because when childcare falls disproportionately on mothers, as it often does, it makes it that much harder to advance in their careers.

So we’ve got to retool our system so that modern families and modern businesses can thrive. And let me be clear, this is not about big government, or expanding some fictional welfare-and-food-stamp state, the 47 percent mooching off the government. It is accounting for the realities of how people live now, today -- the necessities of a 21st century economy.

We’ve gotten some things done through executive actions. When we had a cooperative Congress, we got a whole lot more done. So far, a lot of Republicans in Congress have been unwilling to act on these agenda items that I just mentioned. But we just keep on looking for ways to get stuff done. They keep on waiting for this whole lame duck thing to happen. Let me tell you, it will happen as soon as I’ve elected a really good successor to carry on our policies. But until then, we’re working pretty hard.

But we’ve made progress. The first bill I signed into law was the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act. And I know some of you have seen Lilly here today. We passed the Affordable Care Act to give more Americans the security of health care coverage so that not only people without health insurance could finally get it, but people who had health insurance were treated fairly, so that, for example, no insurer could charge you more just for being a woman. Dry cleaners are next. Valerie, we need to work on that, don’t we? Those little blouses of yours -- I don’t know why they charge so much.

So my Administration has taken what action that we can. And we’ve strengthened equal pay protections and paid sick leave for federal contractors, enhanced work flexibility for all federal employees, raised the minimum wage for federal contract workers, extended overtime-pay protections to over four million workers across the country. We try to set a good example providing my staff with 12 weeks of paid parental leave. And by the way, we’ve been having a lot of babies -- I’ve noticed -- in the White House. Which I’m happy about -- I love babies. They bring them into the Oval Office and they make me feel good.

This is the right thing to do, it’s the smart thing to do. And the great news is, we’re not the only ones doing it. You’ve got cities and states and businesses across the country that are adjusting to meet the needs of today’s workers. In fact, today we can announce that 28 of America’s leading businesses are committed to closing the gender pay gap. We should encourage more businesses to join them. We should shop and frequent those companies that are doing the right thing because the truth is, most folks agree with each other on this. We don’t have to have Congress agree with us -- we can go ahead and make progress without waiting for them. They’ll catch up eventually. They’re usually a lagging indicator on these issues.

If we really want workplace policies that work for everybody, I will say, though, it would help if we had more women in Congress. It would help if we had more women in the corner suite. I have a corner suite, by the way. Just making that connection for you.

If we are going to truly change our policies and our politics, then we’re also going to have to change something else, though. We’re going to have to be honest with ourselves. We’re going to have to change something else. We’re going to have to change the way we see ourselves. And this is happening already, but I want us to be more intentional about it. I know I’m preaching to the choir here, but we’re still boxed in by stereotypes about how men and women should behave.

As the great Shirley Chisholm once said, “The emotional, sexual, and psychological stereotyping of females begin when the doctor says, ‘It’s a girl.’” And that has consequences for all of us, whether we’re men or women, black, white, gay, straight, transgender or otherwise.

We need to keep changing the attitude that raises our girls to be demure, and our boys to be assertive; that criticizes our daughters for speaking out, and our sons for shedding a tear.

We need to change the attitude that punishes women for their sexuality but gives men a pat on the back for theirs. We need to change an Internet where women are routinely harassed and threatened when they go online.

We need to keep changing the attitude that congratulates men for changing a diaper, stigmatizes full-time dads, penalizes working moms.

We need to keep changing the attitude that prioritizes being confident, competitive, and ambitious in the workplace -- unless you’re a woman.

We need to keep changing a culture that shines a particularly unforgiving light on women and girls of color. About how they look, about how they feel, about what they should or should not do. Michelle will talk about this in a little bit. She’s talked about this. Despite her extraordinary achievements and success, the fact that she is -- she is an American original, she is unique, but she still had times where she’s had doubts, where she’s had to worry whether she was acting the right way or looking the right way, or whether she was being too assertive or too angry. You remember that?

So we’ve been working to change these stereotypes. That’s why we’re encouraging more girls to pursue their love for science, and technology, and engineering, and math. That’s why we’ve highlighted women trailblazers, and encouraged media to depict more examples of women in STEM -- because it’s hard to be what you can’t see. It’s why we’ve launched a movement of women and men to fight campus sexual assault -- because it’s on all of us to stop it.

It’s why we’re changing the culture in our military, from the top down, to take this issue seriously. It’s why we’re working with communities, and businesses, and foundations to rethink workplace policies, and fund women entrepreneurs, and expand female leadership, and create more opportunities for girls and women of color -- everybody has a role to play in America.

And even as we make progress at home, we look abroad and we know that any country that oppresses half the population -- that doesn’t let them go to school or work, and does not give them control over their own bodies -- that’s a society that will not work over the long term. It will not reach its potential. And this is a national security issue. As Commander-in-Chief, I’ve seen how the ideology that leads Boko Haram to kidnap schoolgirls, and leads ISIL to enslave and rape women is the same ideology that leads to instability, and violence, and terrorism. There’s a connection there.

So we need to be clear about what we’re about, what we stand for. Because organizations and ideologies that are repressive and cultivate violence and anger -- those are -- there’s a running thread, and it’s dangerous, and poses a threat to pluralism and tolerance and openness.

So I’ve made advancing gender equality a foreign policy priority. And we’ve implemented a comprehensive strategy to end gender-based violence around the world, from prevention, to treating survivors, to bringing perpetrators to justice. And we’re helping to remove barriers that prevent women from participating fully in their societies. We’re empowering the next generation of women by investing in adolescent girls and advancing the Let Girls Learn initiative to get 62 million girls into schools.

This is the future that we’re building, one where all of us here at home and around the world are free to live out our dreams. Where our children’s aspirations aren’t segregated into pink and blue. Where working families don’t have to choose between taking care of a loved one and earning a paycheck. Where women and girls, no matter where they live, are free from fear of violence -- including gun violence. Where hatred against women, or hatred against the LGBT community, that doesn’t neatly fit into some predetermined notion of how people should be or how they love -- where that is no longer the operative rule in any society. A future where women lead half our businesses, make up half of Congress. Where our girls know they can hold any job, and run any company, and compete on any field, and perform on any stage, and science the heck out of any challenge. That’s the future we’re trying to build.

And the good news is this is the future my daughters’ generation already believes in. They believe every door is open to them. They’re not engaging in any sort of self-censorship. They’re not going to hold themselves back. It couldn’t occur to them that they couldn’t rise to the top of whatever field they choose. It wouldn’t occur to them not to accept all people, no matter how they identify or who they love. They think discrimination is for losers. They think it’s weird that we haven’t already had a woman President. They expect the world to catch up to them.

They expect the world to catch up to them, and I have no doubt that we will. It will take leadership. It will take the right policies. It’s going to take creating more opportunities. It requires us telling each other and our children the right stories -- because the stories we tell matter.

We admire the men who shaped our country, and rightfully so, the men we see as heroes -- from Alexander Hamilton to Muhammad Ali -- for their confidence and their courage in believing they could change our nation, this idea of self-creation, that there’s nothing holding us back. In them, we see America itself, constantly reinventing itself, fearless, looking out over the horizon at the next frontier.

But our country is not just all about the Benjamins -- it’s about the Tubmans, too. We need all our young people to know that Clara Barton and Lucretia Mott and Sojourner Truth and Eleanor Roosevelt and Dorothy Height, those aren’t just for Women’s History Month. They’re the authors of our history, women who shaped their destiny. They need to know that.

A woman did not magically appear on a space shuttle. It took Sally Ride’s relentless commitment, Mae Jemison’s boundless courage to shatter that glass ceiling. A group of California farm workers -- they weren’t just handed their rights. It took Dolores Huerta organizing and mobilizing, fighting for the dignity and justice they deserved.

Rosa Parks wasn’t simply a tired seamstress who sat down by accident. She was a civil rights leader with the eye of a strategist and the heart of a warrior. She had the confidence to board on that bus, the courage to risk her own life and liberty for the sake of ours. History did not fall into her lap -- she seized that moral arc and she bent it with her bare hands in the direction of justice.

That’s the story that’s still being written, today, by our modern-day heroes like Nancy Pelosi or Sonia Sotomayor or Billie Jean King or Laverne Cox or Sheryl Sandberg or Oprah Winfrey or Mikaila Ulmer or Michelle Obama -- the countless ordinary people every day who are bringing us closer to our highest ideals. That’s the story we’re going to keep on telling, so our girls see that they, too, are America -- confident and courageous and, in the words of Audre Lord, “deliberate and afraid of nothing.”

That’s the country we love, and I’ve never been optimistic -- as optimistic as I am now that we’re going to create a country where everybody, no matter who they are or what they look like or where they come from or who they love, can make of their lives what they will. And together, we can build a world that’s more just and more prosperous and more free. That’s a job for all of us.

God bless you.

God bless the United States of America.

Thank you.

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# Address to the Community of Orlando, Florida, After Meeting Privately with Families of the Victims

Four days ago, this community was shaken by an evil and hateful act. Today, we are reminded of what is good. That there is compassion, empathy and decency, and most of all, there is love. That’s the Orlando that we’ve seen in recent days. And that is the America that we have seen.

This afternoon, the Vice President and I had the opportunity to meet with many of the families here. As you might imagine, their grief is beyond description. Through their pain and through their tears, they told us about the joy that their loved ones had brought to their lives. They talked about their sons or their daughters -- so many young people, in their 20s and 30s; so many students who were focused on the future. One young woman was just 18 years old. Another, said her father, was a happy girl with so many dreams.

There were siblings there talking about their brothers and their sisters and how they were role models that they looked up to. There were husbands and wives who had taken a solemn vow; fathers and mothers who gave their full hearts to their children. These families could be our families. In fact, they are our family -- they’re part of the American family. Today, the Vice President and I told them, on behalf of the American people, that our hearts are broken, too, but we stand with you and that we are here for you, and that we are remembering those who you loved so deeply.

As a nation, we’ve also been inspired by the courage of those who risked their lives and cared for others. Partners whose last moments were spent shielding each other. The mother who gave her life to save her son. The former Marine whose quick thinking saved dozens of lives.

Joe and I had the chance to thank Mayor Dyer, Chief Mina, Sheriff Demings, all who responded in heroic ways; the outstanding police and first responders who were able to, through their professionalism and quick response, rescue so many people. We also owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to all the doctors, all the nurses who have worked day and night to treat the injured, save lives and prevent even more anguish. As one of the doctors here said, “after the worst of humanity reared its ugly head…the best of humanity came roaring back.” Let me get that quote more precisely -- “after the worst of humanity reared its evil head…the best of humanity came roaring back.”

Now, if we’re honest with ourselves, if, in fact, we want to show the best of our humanity, then we're all going to have to work together at every level of government, across political lines, to do more to stop killers who want to terrorize us. We will continue to be relentless against terrorist groups like ISIL and al Qaeda. We are going to destroy them. We are going to disrupt their networks, and their financing, and the flow of fighters in and out of war theaters. We're going to disrupt their propaganda that poisons so many minds around the world.

We're going to do all that. Our resolve is clear. But given the fact that the last two terrorist attacks on our soil -- Orlando and San Bernardino -- were homegrown, carried out it appears not by external plotters, not by vast networks or sophisticated cells, but by deranged individuals warped by the hateful propaganda that they had seen over the Internet, then we’re going to have to do more to prevent these kinds of events from occurring. It's going to take more than just our military. It's going to require more than just our intelligence teams. As good as they are, as dedicated as they are, as focused as they are, if you have lone wolf attacks like this, hatched in the minds of a disturbed person, then we're going to have to take different kinds of steps in order to prevent something like this from happening.

Those who were killed and injured here were gunned down by a single killer with a powerful assault weapon. The motives of this killer may have been different than the mass shooters in Aurora or Newtown, but the instruments of death were so similar. And now, another 49 innocent people are dead. Another 53 are injured. Some are still fighting for their lives. Some will have wounds that will last a lifetime. We can't anticipate or catch every single deranged person that may wish to do harm to his neighbors, or his friends, or his coworkers, or strangers. But we can do something about the amount of damage that they do. Unfortunately, our politics have conspired to make it as easy as possible for a terrorist or just a disturbed individual like those in Aurora and Newtown to buy extraordinarily powerful weapons -- and they can do so legally.

Today, once again, as has been true too many times before, I held and hugged grieving family members and parents, and they asked, why does this keep happening? And they pleaded that we do more to stop the carnage. They don’t care about the politics. Neither do I. Neither does Joe. And neither should any parent out there who’s thinking about their kids being not in the wrong place, but in places where kids are supposed to be.

This debate needs to change. It’s outgrown the old political stalemates. The notion that the answer to this tragedy would be to make sure that more people in a nightclub are similarly armed to the killer defies common sense. Those who defend the easy accessibility of assault weapons should meet these families and explain why that makes sense. They should meet with the Newtown families -- some of whom Joe saw yesterday -- whose children would now be finishing fifth grade -- on why it is that we think our liberty requires these repeated tragedies. That's not the meaning of liberty.

I’m pleased to hear that the Senate will hold votes on preventing individuals with possible terrorist ties from buying guns, including assault weapons. I truly hope that senators rise to the moment and do the right thing. I hope that senators who voted no on background checks after Newtown have a change of heart. And then I hope the House does the right thing, and helps end the plague of violence that these weapons of war inflict on so many young lives.

I've said this before -- we will not be able to stop every tragedy. We can't wipe away hatred and evil from every heart in this world. But we can stop some tragedies. We can save some lives. We can reduce the impact of a terrorist attack if we're smart. And if we don't act, we will keep seeing more massacres like this -- because we’ll be choosing to allow them to happen. We will have said, we don't care enough to do something about it.

Here in Orlando, we are reminded not only of our obligations as a country to be resolute against terrorists, we are reminded not only of the need for us to implement smarter policies to prevent mass shootings, we're also reminded of what unites us as Americans, and that what unites us is far stronger than the hate and the terror of those who target us.

For so many people here who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, the Pulse Nightclub has always been a safe haven, a place to sing and dance, and most importantly, to be who you truly are -- including for so many people whose families are originally from Puerto Rico. Sunday morning, that sanctuary was violated in the worst way imaginable. So whatever the motivations of the killer, whatever influences led him down the path of violence and terror, whatever propaganda he was consuming from ISIL and al Qaeda, this was an act of terrorism but it was also an act of hate. This was an attack on the LGBT community. Americans were targeted because we’re a country that has learned to welcome everyone, no matter who you are or who you love. And hatred towards people because of sexual orientation, regardless of where it comes from, is a betrayal of what’s best in us.

Joe and I were talking on the way over here -- you can't make up the world into “us” and “them,” and denigrate and express hatred towards groups because of the color of their skin, or their faith, or their sexual orientation, and not feed something very dangerous in this world.

So if there was ever a moment for all of us to reflect and reaffirm our most basic beliefs that everybody counts and everybody has dignity, now is the time. It's a good time for all of us to reflect on how we treat each other, and to insist on respect and equality for every human being.

We have to end discrimination and violence against our brothers and sisters who are in the LGBT community -- here at home and around the world, especially in countries where they are routinely persecuted. We have to challenge the oppression of women, wherever it occurs -- here or overseas. There’s only “us” -- Americans.

Here in Orlando, in the men and women taken from us, those who loved them, we see some of the true character of this country -- the best of humanity coming roaring back; the love and the compassion and the fierce resolve that will carry us through not just through this atrocity, but through whatever difficult times may confront us.

It’s our pluralism and our respect for each other -- including a young man who said to a friend, he was “super proud” to be Latino. It’s our love of country -- the patriotism of an Army reservist who was known as “an amazing officer.” It’s our unity -- the outpouring of love that so many across our country have shown to our fellow Americans who are LGBT, a display of solidarity that might have been unimaginable even a few years ago.

Out of this darkest of moments, that gives us hope -- seeing people reflect, seeing people’s best instincts come out, maybe in some cases, minds and hearts change. It is our strength and our resilience -- the same determination of a man who died here who traveled the world, mindful of the risks as a gay man, but who spoke for us all when he said, “we cannot be afraid…we are not going to be afraid.”

May we all find that same strength in our own lives. May we all find that same wisdom in how we treat one another. May God bless all who we lost here in Orlando. May He comfort their families. May He heal the wounded. May He bring some solace to those whose hearts have been broken. May He give us resolve to do what’s necessary to reduce the hatred of this world, curb the violence. And may He watch over this country that we call home.

Thank you very much, everybody.

# Press Conference on USSC Ruling in U.S. v. Texas

Good morning, everybody. I wanted to say a few words on two of the cases the Supreme Court spoke on today.

First, in the affirmative action case, I’m pleased that the Supreme Court upheld the basic notion that diversity is an important value in our society, and that this country should provide a high-quality education to all our young people, regardless of their background. We are not a country that guarantees equal outcomes, but we do strive to provide an equal shot to everybody. And that’s what was upheld today.

Second, one of the reasons why America is such a diverse and inclusive nation is because we’re a nation of immigrants. Our Founders conceived of this country as a refuge for the world. And for more than two centuries, welcoming wave after wave of immigrants has kept us youthful and dynamic and entrepreneurial. It has shaped our character, and it has made us stronger.

But for more than two decades now, our immigration system, everybody acknowledges, has been broken. And the fact that the Supreme Court wasn’t able to issue a decision today doesn’t just set the system back even further, it takes us further from the country that we aspire to be.

Just to lay out some basic facts that sometimes get lost in what can be an emotional debate. Since I took office, we've deployed more border agents and technology to our southern border than ever before. That has helped cut illegal border crossings to their lowest levels since the 1970s. It should have paved the way for comprehensive immigration reform. And, in fact, as many of you know, it almost did. Nearly 70 Democrats and Republicans in the Senate came together to pass a smart, common-sense bill that would have doubled the border patrol, and offered undocumented immigrants a pathway to earn citizenship if they paid a fine, paid their taxes, and played by the rules.

Unfortunately, Republicans in the House of Representatives refused to allow a simple yes or no vote on that bill. So I was left with little choice but to take steps within my existing authority to make our immigration system smarter, fairer, and more just.

Four years ago, we announced that those who are our lowest priorities for enforcement -- diligent, patriotic young DREAMers who grew up pledging allegiance to our flag -- should be able to apply to work here and study here and pay their taxes here. More than 730,000 lives have been changed as a result. These are students, they’re teachers, they’re doctors, they’re lawyers. They’re Americans in every way but on paper. And fortunately, today’s decision does not affect this policy. It does not affect the existing DREAMers.

Two years ago, we announced a similar, expanded approach for others who are also low priorities for enforcement. We said that if you’ve been in America for more than five years, with children who are American citizens or legal residents, then you, too, can come forward, get right with the law, and work in this country temporarily, without fear of deportation.

Both were the kinds of actions taken by Republican and Democratic Presidents over the past half-century. Neither granted anybody a free pass. All they did was focus our enforcement resources -- which are necessarily limited -- on the highest priorities: convicted criminals, recent border crossers, and threats to our national security.

Now, as disappointing as it was to be challenged for taking the kind of actions that other administrations have taken, the country was looking to the Supreme Court to resolve the important legal questions raised in this case. Today, the Supreme Court was unable to reach a decision. This is part of the consequence of the Republican failure so far to give a fair hearing to Mr. Merrick Garland, my nominee to the Supreme Court. It means that the expanded set of common-sense deferred action policies -- the ones that I announced two years ago -- can’t go forward at this stage, until there is a ninth justice on the Court to break the tie.

I know a lot of people are going to be disappointed today, but it is important to understand what today means. The deferred action policy that has been in place for the last four years is not affected by this ruling. Enforcement priorities developed by my administration are not affected by this ruling. This means that the people who might have benefitted from the expanded deferred action policies -- long-term residents raising children who are Americans or legal residents -- they will remain low priorities for enforcement. As long as you have not committed a crime, our limited immigration enforcement resources are not focused on you.

But today’s decision is frustrating to those who seek to grow our economy and bring a rationality to our immigration system, and to allow people to come out of the shadows and lift this perpetual cloud on them. I think it is heartbreaking for the millions of immigrants who’ve made their lives here, who’ve raised families here, who hoped for the opportunity to work, pay taxes, serve in our military, and more fully contribute to this country we all love in an open way.

So where do we go from here?

Most Americans -- including business leaders, faith leaders, and law enforcement, Democrats and Republicans and independents -- still agree that the single best way to solve this problem is by working together to pass common-sense, bipartisan immigration reform.

That is obviously not going to happen during the remainder of this Congress. We don’t have is a Congress that agrees with us on this. Nor do we have a Congress that’s willing to do even its most basic of jobs under the Constitution, which is to consider nominations. Republicans in Congress currently are willfully preventing the Supreme Court from being fully staffed and functioning as our Founders intended. And today’s situation underscores the degree to which the Court is not able to function the way it's supposed to.

The Court’s inability to reach a decision in this case is a very clear reminder of why it’s so important for the Supreme Court to have a full bench. For more than 40 years, there’s been an average of just over two months between a nomination and a hearing. I nominated Judge Merrick Garland to the Supreme Court more than three months ago. But most Republicans so far refuse to even meet with him. They are allowing partisan politics to jeopardize something as fundamental as the impartiality and integrity of our justice system. And America should not let it stand.

This is an election year. And during election years, politicians tend to use the immigration issue to scare people with words like “amnesty” in hopes that it will whip up votes. Keep in mind that millions of us, myself included, go back generations in this country, with ancestors who put in the painstaking effort to become citizens. And we don’t like the notion that anyone might get a free pass to American citizenship. But here’s the thing. Millions of people who have come forward and worked to get right with the law under this policy, they’ve been living here for years, too -- in some cases, even decades. So leaving the broken system the way it is, that’s not a solution. In fact, that's the real amnesty. Pretending we can deport 11 million people, or build a wall without spending tens of billions of dollars of taxpayer money is abetting what is really just factually incorrect. It's not going to work. It's not good for this country. It's a fantasy that offers nothing to help the middle class, and demeans our tradition of being both a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants.

In the end, it is my firm belief that immigration is not something to fear. We don’t have to wall ourselves off from those who may not look like us right now, or pray like we do, or have a different last name. Because being an American is about something more than that. What makes us Americans is our shared commitment to an ideal that all of us are created equal, all of us have a chance to make of our lives what we will. And every study shows that whether it was the Irish or the Poles, or the Germans, or the Italians, or the Chinese, or the Japanese, or the Mexicans, or the Kenyans -- whoever showed up, over time, by a second generation, third generation, those kids are Americans. They do look like us -- because we don't look one way. We don't all have the same last names, but we all share a creed and we all share a commitment to the values that founded this nation. That's who we are. And that is what I believe most Americans recognize.

So here’s the bottom line. We've got a very real choice that America faces right now. We will continue to implement the existing programs that are already in place. We're not going to be able to move forward with the expanded programs that we wanted to move forward on because the Supreme Court was not able to issue a ruling at this stage. And now we've got a choice about who we’re going to be as a country, what we want to teach our kids, and how we want to be represented in Congress and in the White House.

We’re going to have to make a decision about whether we are a people who tolerate the hypocrisy of a system where the workers who pick our fruit or make our beds never have the chance to get right with the law -- or whether we’re going to give them a chance, just like our forebears had a chance, to take responsibility and give their kids a better future.

We’re going to have to decide whether we’re a people who accept the cruelty of ripping children from their parents’ arms -- or whether we actually value families, and keep them together for the sake of all of our communities.

We’re going to have to decide whether we’re a people who continue to educate the world’s brightest students in our high schools and universities, only to then send them away to compete against us -- or whether we encourage them to stay and create new jobs and new businesses right here in the United States.

These are all the questions that voters now are going to have to ask themselves, and are going to have to answer in November. These are the issues that are going to be debated by candidates across the country -- both congressional candidates as well as the presidential candidates. And in November, Americans are going to have to make a decision about what we care about and who we are.

I promise you this, though -- sooner or later, immigration reform will get done. Congress is not going to be able to ignore America forever. It's not a matter of if, it's a matter of when. And I can say that with confidence because we've seen our history. We get these spasms of politics around immigration and fear-mongering, and then our traditions and our history and our better impulses kick in. That's how we all ended up here. Because I guarantee you, at some point, every one of us has somebody in our background who people didn’t want coming here, and yet here we are.

And that's what’s going to happen this time. The question is, do we do it in a smart, rational, sensible way -- or we just keep on kicking the can down the road. I believe that this country deserves an immigration policy that reflects the goodness of the American people. And I think we're going to get that. Hopefully, we're going to get that in November.

All right. I'll take two questions. Two questions. Go ahead.

Question: Thank you.

President Obama: I’ll take two questions. Go ahead.

Question: Thank you. Realistically, what do you see is the risk of deportation for these more than 4 million people? I mean, you say we can’t deport 11 million. This is 4 million, and there’s a chunk of time here before something else --

President Obama: Well, let me just be very clear. What was unaffected by today’s ruling -- or lack of a ruling -- is the enforcement priorities that we’ve put in place. And our enforcement priorities that have been laid out by Secretary Jeh Johnson at the Department of Homeland Security are pretty clear: We prioritize criminals. We prioritize gangbangers. We prioritize folks who have just come in. What we don’t do is to prioritize people who’ve been here a long time, who are otherwise law-abiding, who have roots and connections in their communities. And so those enforcement priorities will continue.

The work that we’ve done with the DREAM Act kids, those policies remain in place. So what this has prevented us from doing is expanding the scope of what we’ve done with the DREAM Act kids. Keep in mind, though, that even that was just a temporary measure. All it was doing was basically saying to these kids, you can have confidence that you are not going to be deported, but it does not resolve your ultimate status. That is going to require congressional action.

So, although I’m disappointed by the lack of a decision today by the Supreme Court, a deadlock, this does not substantially change the status quo, and it doesn’t negate what has always been the case, which is if we’re really going to solve this problem effectively, we’ve got to have Congress pass a law.

I have pushed to the limits of my executive authority. We now have to have Congress act. And hopefully, we’re going to have a vigorous debate during this election -- this is how democracy is supposed to work -- and there will be a determination as to which direction we go in.

As I said, over the long term, I’m very confident about the direction this country will go in because we’ve seen this in the past. If we hadn’t seen it in the past, America would look very different than it looks today. But whether we’re going to get this done now, soon, so that this does not continue to be this divisive force in our politics, and we can get down to the business of all pulling together to create jobs, and educate our kids, and protect ourselves from external threats, and do the things that we need to do to ensure a better future for the next generation, that’s going to be determined in part by how voters turn out and who they vote for in November.

All right. One more question. Go ahead.

Question: Two practical, going-forward questions. Number one, is this going to -- are you going to be able to do anything more at all for immigrants going forward in terms of executive action before the election of the next president? And number two, do you in any way take this as some Republicans have presented this, as a slap at your use of executive authority, this tie vote? And will this in any way circumscribe how aggressively or forcefully you use executive authority for the remainder of your time in office?

President Obama: Okay. On the specifics of immigration, I don’t anticipate that there are additional executive actions that we can take. We can implement what we’ve already put in place that is not affected by this decision. But we have to follow, now, what has been ruled on in the Fifth Circuit because the Supreme Court could not resolve the issue.

And we’re going to have to abide by that ruling until an election and a confirmation of a ninth justice of the Supreme Court so that they can break this tie. Because we’ve always said that we are going to do what we can lawfully through executive action, but we can’t go beyond that. And we’ve butted up about as far as we can on this particular topic.

It does not have any impact on, from our perspective, on the host of other issues that we’re working on, because each one of these issues has a different analysis and is based on different statutes or different interpretations of our authority.

So, for example, on climate change, that’s based on the Clean Air Act and the EPA and previous Supreme Court rulings, as opposed to a theory of prosecutorial discretion that, in the past, has -- every other President has exercised. And the Supreme Court wasn’t definitive one way or the other on this. I mean, the problem is they don’t have a ninth justice. So that will continue to be a problem.

With respect to the Republicans, I think what it tells you is, is that if you keep on blocking judges from getting on the bench, then courts can’t issue decisions. And what that means is then you’re going to have the status quo frozen, and we’re not going to be able to make progress on some very important issues.

Now, that may have been their strategy from the start. But it’s not a sustainable strategy. And it’s certainly a strategy that will be broken by this election -- unless their basic theory is, is that we will never confirm judges again. Hopefully, that’s not their theory, because that’s not how a democracy is designed.

Question: You reject their portrayal of this as a chastisement of you for your use of executive authority?

President Obama: It was a one-word opinion that said, we can’t come up with a decision. I think that would be a little bit of a stretch, yes. Maybe the next time they can -- if we have a full Court issuing a full opinion on anything, then we take it seriously. This we have to abide by, but it wasn’t any kind of value statement or a decision on the merits of these issues.

All right? Thank you, guys.

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# Address to the Parliament of Canada

Thank you so much. Good evening. Bonjour.

Mr. Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker, members of the House, members of the Senate, distinguished guests, people of Canada -- thank you for this extraordinary welcome, which temps me to just shut up and leave. Because it can't get any better than this. Obviously I'm grateful for the warm welcome. I'm extraordinarily grateful for the close working relationship and friendship with your outstanding Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, and his extraordinary wife, Sophie.

But I think it's fair to say that much of this greeting is simply a reflection of the extraordinary alliance and deep friendship between Canadians and Americans.

Justin, thank you for your very kind words, and for the new energy and hope that your leadership has brought to your nation as well as to the alliance. My time in office may be nearing an end, but I know that Canada -- and the world -- will benefit from your leadership for years to come.

So Canada was the very first country that I visited as President. It was in February. It was colder. I was younger. Michelle now refers to my hair as the Great White North. And on that visit, I strolled around the ByWard Market, tried a “beaver tail” -- which is better than it sounds. And I was struck then, as I am again today, by the warmth of the Canadians. I could not be more honored to be joining you in this historic hall -- this cathedral of freedom. And we Americans can never say it enough -- we could not ask for a better friend or ally than Canada. We could not. It’s true. It is true. And we do not take it for granted. That does not mean we don't have our differences. As I understand it, one of the reasons the Queen chose this site for Parliament was that it was a safe distance from America’s border. And I admit, in the War of 1812, American troops did some damage to Toronto. I suspect that there were some people up here who didn’t mind when the British returned the favor and burned down the White House. In more recent times, however, the only forces crossing our borders are the armies of tourists and businesspeople and families who are shopping and doing business and visiting loved ones. Our only battles take place inside the hockey rink. Even there, there’s an uneasy peace that is maintained. As Americans, we, too, celebrate the life of Mr. Hockey himself, the late, great Gordie Howe. Just as Canadians can salute American teams for winning more Stanley Cups in the NHL. Audience: Ooooh -- President Obama: I told you I should have stopped after the applause. But in a world where too many borders are a source of conflict, our two countries are joined by the longest border of peace on Earth. And what makes our relationship so unique is not just proximity. It’s our enduring commitment to a set of values -- a spirit, alluded to by Justin, that says no matter who we are, where we come from, what our last names are, what faith we practice, here we can make of our lives what we will. It was the grit of pioneers and prospectors who pushed West across a forbidding frontier. The dreams of generations -- immigrants, refugees -- that we’ve welcomed to these shores. The hope of run-away slaves who went north on an underground railroad. “Deep in our history of struggle,” said Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “Canada was the north star… The freedom road links us together.” We’re bound as well by the service of those who’ve defended us -- at Flanders Field, the beaches of Normandy, in the skies of the Balkans, and more recently, in the mountains of Afghanistan, and training bases in Iraq. Their sacrifice is reflected in the silent rows of Arlington and in the Peace Tower above us. Today we honor those who gave their lives for all of us. We’re linked together, as well, by the institutions that we’ve built to keep the peace: A United Nations to advance our collective aspirations. A NATO alliance to ensure our security. NORAD, where Americans and Canadians stand watch side by side -- and track Santa on Christmas Eve. We’re linked by a vast web of commerce that carries goods from one end of this continent to another. And we're linked by the ties of friendship and family -- in my case, an outstanding brother-in-law in Burlington. Had to give Burlington a shout out. Our relationship is so remarkable precisely because it seems so unremarkable -- which is why Americans often are surprised when our favorite American actor or singer turns out to be Canadian! The point is we see ourselves in each other, and our lives are richer for it. As President, I’ve deepened the ties between our countries. And because of the progress we’ve made in recent years, I can stand before you and say that the enduring partnership between Canada and the United States is as strong as it has ever been, and we are more closely aligned than ever before. And yet, we meet at a pivotal moment for our nations and for the globe. From this vibrant capital, we can look upon a world that has benefited enormously from the international order that we helped to build together’ but we can see that same order increasingly strained by the accelerating forces of change. The world is by most every measure less violent than ever before; but it remains riven by old divisions and fresh hatreds. The world is more connected than ever before; but even as it spreads knowledge and the possibility of greater understanding between peoples, it also empowers terrorists who spread hatred and death -- most recently in Orlando and Istanbul. The world is more prosperous than ever before, but alongside globalization and technological wonders we also see a rise in inequality and wage stagnation across the advanced economies, leaving too many workers and communities fearful of diminishing prospects, not just for themselves, but more importantly, for their children. And in the face of such rising uncertainty, it is not enough to look at aggregate growth rates, or stock prices, or the pace of digital innovation. If the benefits of globalization accrue only to those at the very top, if our democracies seem incapable of assuring broad-based growth and opportunity for everyone, then people will push back, out of anger or out of fear. And politicians -- some sincere, and some entirely cynical -- will tap that anger and fear, harkening back to bygone days of order and predictability and national glory, arguing that we must rebuild walls and disengage from a chaotic world, or rid ourselves of the supposed ills brought on by immigrants -- all in order to regain control of our lives. We saw some of these currents at work this past week in the United Kingdom’s referendum to leave the European Union. Despite some of the initial reactions, I am confident that the process can be managed in a prudent, orderly way. I expect that our friends on both sides of the Channel will develop a workable plan for how to move forward. And I’m equally confident that the Transatlantic values that we all share as liberal, market-based democracies are deeper and stronger than any single event. But while the circumstances of Brexit may be unique to the United Kingdom, the frustrations people felt are not. The short-term fallout of Brexit can be sensibly managed, but the long-term trends of inequality and dislocation and the resulting social division -- those can't be ignored. How we respond to the forces of globalization and technological change will determine the durability of an international order that ensures security and prosperity for future generations. And fortunately, the partnership between the United States and Canada shows the path we need to travel. For our history and our work together speak to a common set of values to build on --proven values, values that your Prime Minister spoke of in his introduction -- values of pluralism and tolerance, rule of law, openness; global engagement and commerce and cooperation, coupled with equal opportunity and an investment in our people at home. As Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau once said, “A country, after all, is not something you build as the pharaohs build the pyramids, and then leave standing there to defy eternity. A country is something that is built every day out of certain basic shared values.” What is true of countries is true of the world. And that's what I want to talk about today -- how to strengthen our institutions to advance these commitments in a rapidly changing world. Let me start with our shared economic vision. In all we do, our commitment to opportunity for all of our people has to be at the centerpiece of our work. We are so fortunate because both of our countries are so well-positioned to succeed in the 21st century. Our two nations know firsthand the awesome power of free markets and innovation. Canadians help run some of Silicon Valley’s most innovative companies. Our students study at each other’s world-class universities. We invest in research and development, and make decisions based on science and evidence. And it works. It's what’s created these extraordinary economies of ours. But if the financial crisis and recent recession taught us anything, it’s that economies do better when everyone has a chance to succeed. For a long time, it was thought that countries had to choose between economic growth or economic inclusion. But it turns out that’s a false choice. If a CEO makes more in a day than a typical employee makes in a year, that kind of inequality is not just bad for morale in the company, it turns out it’s bad for the economy -- that worker is not a very good customer for business. If a young man in Ohio can’t pay his student loans, or a young woman in Ontario can’t pay her bills, that has ramifications for our economy. It tamps down the possibilities of growth. So we need growth that is broad and that lifts everybody up -- including tax policies that do right by working families, and robust safety nets for those who fall on hard times. As John Kenneth Galbraith once said, “the common denominator of progress” is our people. It's not numbers, it's not abstractions, it's how are our people doing. Of course, many who share this progressive, inclusive vision can be heard now arguing that investments in our people, protection for our workers, fair tax policies, these things are not enough. For them, globalization is inherently rigged towards the top one percent, and therefore, what’s needed is an end to trade agreements and various international institutions and arrangements that integrate national economies. And I understand that vision. I know why it's tempting. It seems as if we draw a line around our borders that it will give us more control, particularly when the benefits of trade and economic integration are sometimes hard to see or easy to take for granted, and very specific dislocations are obvious and real. There’s just one problem: Restricting trade or giving in to protectionism in this 21st century economy will not work. It will not work. Even if we wanted to, we can't seal ourselves off from the rest of the world. The day after Brexit, people looked around and said, oh! How is this going to work? The drag that economic weakness in Europe and China and other countries is having on our own economies right now speaks to the degree to which we depend -- our economies depend, our jobs, our businesses depend -- on selling goods and services around the world. Very few of our domestic industries can sever what is now truly a global supply chain. And so, for those of us who truly believe that our economies have to work for everybody, the answer is not to try and pull back from our interconnected world; it is rather to engage with the rest of the world, to shape the rules so they’re good for our workers and good for our businesses. And the experience between our two nations points the way. The United States and Canada have the largest bilateral trade and investment relationship in the world -- and we are stronger for it. It means a company in Quebec can create jobs in North Carolina. And a start-up in Toronto can attract investment from Texas. Now, the problem is that some economies in many of the fastest-growing regions of the world -- particularly the Asia Pacific region -- don’t always abide by the same rules. They impose unfair tariffs; or they suppress workers’ rights; or they maintain low environmental standards that make it hard for our businesses to compete fairly. With the Trans-Pacific Partnership, we have the ability to not only open up these markets to U.S. and Canadian products and eliminate thousands of these unfair tariffs -- which, by the way, we need to do because they’re already selling here under existing rules, but we're not selling as much as we should over there -- but it also affords us the opportunity to increase protections for workers and the environment, and promote human rights, including strong prohibitions against human trafficking and child labor. And that way our workers are competing on a level playing field, and our businesses are less prone to pursue a race to the bottom. And when combined with increased investments in our own people’s education, and skills and training, and infrastructure and research and development and connectivity, then we can spur the kind of sustained growth that makes all of us better off. All of us. The point is we need to look forward, not look backward. And more trade and more people-to-people ties can also help break down old divides. I thank Canada for its indispensable role in hosting our negotiations with the Cuban government, and supporting our efforts to set aside half a century of failed policies to begin a new chapter with the Cuban people. I know a lot of Canadians like going to Cuba -- maybe because there haven’t been Americans crowding the streets and the beaches. But that’s changing. And as more Americans engage with the Cuban people, it will mean more economic opportunity and more hope for ordinary Cubans. We also agree, us Americans and Canadians, that wealthy countries like ours cannot reach our full potential while others remain mired in poverty. That, too, is not going to change in this interconnected world; that if there is poverty and disease and conflict in other parts of the world, it spills over, as much as we’d like to pretend that we can block it out. So, with our commitment to new Sustainable Development Goals, we have the chance to end the outrage of extreme poverty. We can bring more electricity to Africa, so that students can study at night and businesses can stay open. We can banish the scourge of malaria and Zika. We can realize our goal of the first AIDS-free generation. We can do that. It's within our grasp. And we can help those who are working to replace corruption with transparent, accountable institutions that serve their people. As leaders in global development, the United States and Canada understand that development is not charity -- it’s an investment in our future prosperity. Because not only do such investments and policies help poor countries, they’re going to create billions of customers for U.S. and Canadian products, and they’ll make less likely the spread of deadly epidemics to our shores, and they’ll stabilize parts of the word that threaten the security of our people. In fact, both the United States and Canada believe our own security -- and not just prosperity -- is enhanced when we stand up for the rights of all nations and peoples to live in security and peace. and even as there are times when unilateral action is necessary to defend our people, we believe that in a world where wars between great powers are far less likely but transnational threats like terrorism know no boundaries, our security is best advanced when nations work together. We believe that disputes that do arise between nations should be, wherever possible, resolved peacefully, with diplomacy; that international organizations should be supported; that multilateralism is not a dirty word. And certainly, we’re more secure when we stand united against terrorist networks and ideologies that have reached to the very doorstep of this hall. We honor all those taken from us by violent extremists, including Canadians John Ridsdel and Robert Hall. With Canada’s additional contributions, including training Iraqi forces, our coalition is on the offensive across Iraq, across Syria. And we will destroy the terrorist group ISIL. We will destroy them. We’ll continue helping local forces and sharing intelligence, from Afghanistan to the Philippines, so that we're pushing back comprehensively against terrorist networks. And in contrast to the hatred and the nihilism of terrorists, we’ll work with partners around the world, including, particularly, Muslim communities, to offer a better vision and a path of development, and opportunity, and tolerance. Because they are, and must be, our partners in this effort. Meanwhile, when nations violate international rules and norms -- such as Russia’s aggression against Ukraine -- the United States and Canada stand united, along with our allies, in defense of our collective security. Doing so requires a range of tools, like economic sanctions, but it also requires that we keep our forces ready for 21st century missions, and invest in new capabilities. As your ally and as your friend, let me say that we’ll be more secure when every NATO member, including Canada, contributes its full share to our common security. Because the Canadian armed forces are really good -- and if I can borrow a phrase, the world needs more Canada. NATO needs more Canada. We need you. We need you. Just as we join together in our common defense, so must we work together diplomatically, particularly to avert war. Diplomacy results are rarely quick, but it turns out even the most intractable conflicts can be resolved. Here in our own hemisphere, just in the last few weeks, after half a century of war, Colombia is poised to achieve an historic peace. And the nations of North America will be an important partner to Colombia going forward, including working to remove landmines. Around the world, Canadian and American diplomats working together can make a difference. Even in Syria, where the agony and the suffering of the Syrian people tears at our hearts, our two nations continue to be leaders in humanitarian aid to the Syrian people. And although a true resolution of this conflict so far has eluded us, we know that the only solution to this civil war is a political solution, so that the Syrian people can reclaim their country and live in peace. And Canadians and Americans are going to work as hard as we can to make that happen. I should add that here in the nation of Lester Pearson, we reaffirm our commitment to keep strengthening the peacekeeping that saves lives around the world. There is one threat, however, that we cannot solve militarily, nor can we solve alone -- and that is the threat of climate change. Now, climate change is no longer an abstraction. It's not an issue we can put off for the future. It is happening now. It is happening here, in our own countries. The United States and Canada are both Arctic nations, and last year, when I became the first U.S. President to visit the Arctic, I could see the effects myself. Glaciers -- like Canada’s Athabasca Glacier -- are melting at alarming rates. Tundra is burning. Permafrost is thawing. This is not a conspiracy. It's happening. Within a generation, Arctic sea ice may all but disappear in the summer. And so skeptics and cynics can insist on denying what’s right in front of our eyes. But the Alaska Natives that I met, whose ancestral villages are sliding into the sea -- they don't have that luxury. They know climate change is real. They know it is not a hoax. And from Bangladesh to the Pacific islands, rising seas are swallowing land and forcing people from their homes. Around the world, stronger storms and more intense droughts will create humanitarian crises and risk more conflict. This is not just a moral issue, not just a economic issue, it is also an urgent matter of our national security. And for too long, we’ve heard that confronting climate change means destroying our own economies. But let me just say, carbon emissions in the United States are back to where they were two decades ago, even as we’ve grown our economy dramatically over the same period. Alberta, the oil country of Canada, is working hard to reduce emissions while still promoting growth. So if Canada can do it, and the United States can do it, the whole world can unleash economic growth and protect our planet. We can do this. We can do it. We can do this. We can help lead the world to meet this threat. Already, together in Paris, we achieved the most ambitious agreement in history to fight climate change. Now let’s bring it into force this year. With our agreement with Mexico that we announced today, let’s generate half the electricity on this continent from clean energy sources within a decade. That's achievable. Let’s partner in the Arctic to help give its people the opportunity they deserve, while conserving the only home they know. And building on the idea that began in Montreal three decades ago, let’s finally phase down dangerous HFC greenhouse gases. This is the only planet we’ve got. And this may be the last shot we’ve got to save it. And America and Canada are going to need to lead the way. We're going to have to lead the way. Just as we are joined in our commitment to protecting the planet, we are also joined in our commitment to the dignity of every human being. We believe in the right of all people to participate in society. We believe in the right of all people to be treated equally, to have an equal shot at success. That is in our DNA, the basic premise of our democracies. I think we can all agree that our democracies are far from perfect. They can be messy, and they can be slow, and they can leave all sides of a debate unsatisfied. Justin is just getting started. So in case you hadn't figured that out, that's where this gray hair comes from. But more than any other system of government, democracy allows our most precious rights to find their fullest expression, enabling us, through the hard, painstaking work of citizenship, to continually make our countries better. To solve new challenges. To right past wrongs. And, Prime Minister, what a powerful message of reconciliation it was -- here and around the world -- when your government pledged a new relationship with Canada’s First Nations. Democracy is not easy. It’s hard. Living up to our ideals can be difficult even in the best of times. And it can be harder when the future seems uncertain, or when, in response to legitimate fears and frustrations, there are those who offer a politics of “us” versus “them,” a politics that scapegoats others -- the immigrant, the refugee, someone who seems different than us. We have to call this mentality what it is -- a threat to the values that we profess, the values we seek to defend. It’s because we respect all people that the world looks to us as an example. The colors of the rainbow flag have flown on Parliament Hill. They have lit up the White House. That is a testament to our progress, but also the work that remains to ensure true equality for our fellow citizens who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. Our Muslim friends and neighbors who run businesses, and serve in our governments and in our armed forces, and are friends with our children, play on our sports teams -- we've got to stand up against the slander and the hate leveled against those who look or worship differently. That's our obligation. That's who we are. That's what makes America special. That's what makes Canada special. Here. Here in Canada. Here in Canada, a woman has already risen to the highest office in the land. In America, for the first time, a woman is the presumptive nominee of a major party and perhaps President. I have a bias on these issues but our work won’t be finished until all women in our country are truly equal -- paid equally, treated equally, given the same opportunities as men, when our girls have the same opportunities as our boys. That's who we need to be. And let me say this -- because I don't feel particularly politically correct on this issue -- I don't believe that these are American values or Canadian values or Western values. I believe, and Justin believes, and I hope all of you believe, these are universal values. And we must be bold in their defense, at home and around the world. And not shy away from speaking up on behalf of these values of pluralism and tolerance and equality. I fear sometimes that we are timid in defense of these values. That’s why I will continue to stand up for those inalienable rights, here in our own hemisphere -- in places like Cuba and Venezuela -- but also in more distant lands. For the rights of citizens in civil society to speak their mind and work for change. For the right of journalists to report the truth. For the right of people of all faiths to practice their religion freely. Those things are hard, but they’re right. They’re not always convenient, but they’re true. In the end, it is this respect for the dignity of all people, especially the most vulnerable among us, that perhaps more than anything else binds our two countries together. Being Canadian, being American is not about what we look like or where our families came from. It is about our commitment to a common creed. And that’s why, together, we must not waver in embracing our values, our best selves. And that includes our history as a nation of immigrants, and we must continue to welcome people from around the world. The vibrancy of our economies are enhanced by the addition of new, striving immigrants. But this is not just a matter of economics. When refugees escape barrel bombs and torture, and migrants cross deserts and seas seeking a better life, we cannot simply look the other way. We certainly can't label as possible terrorists vulnerable people who are fleeing terrorists. We can insist that the process is orderly. We can insist that our security is preserved. Borders mean something. But in moments like this, we are called upon to see ourselves in others, because we were all once strangers. If you weren't a stranger, your grandparents were strangers. Your great-grandparents were strangers. They didn’t all have their papers ready. They fumbled with language faced discrimination, had cultural norms that didn’t fit. At some point, somewhere, your family was an outsider. So the mothers, the fathers, the children we see today -- they’re us. We can’t forsake them. So, as Americans and Canadians, we will continue to welcome refugees, and we can ensure that we're doing so in a way that maintains our security. We can and we will do both. We can and we will do both. We’re increasing our support to Central America, so that fewer families and children attempt the dangerous journey north. This fall at the United Nations, we’ll host a global summit on refugees, because in the face of this crisis, more nations need to step up and meet our basic obligations to our fellow human beings. And it will be difficult, and budgets are tight, and there are legitimate issues and not everybody is going to be helped. But we can try. People of goodwill and compassion show us the way. Greek islanders pulling families to shore. And Germans handing out sweets to migrants at railway stations. A synagogue in Virginia inviting Syrian refugees to dinner. And here, in Canada, the world has been inspired as Canadians across this country have opened up their hearts and their homes. And we’ve watched citizens knitting tuques to keep refugees warm in the winter. And we’ve seen your Prime Minister welcome new arrivals at the airport, and extend the hand of friendship and say, “You’re safe at home now.” And we see the refugees who feel that they have a special duty to give back, and seize the opportunities of a new life. Like the girl who fled Afghanistan by donkey and camel and jet plane, and who remembers being greeted in this country by helping hands and the sound of robins singing. And today, she serves in this chamber, and in the cabinet, because Canada is her home. A country “is not something you build as the pharaohs built the pyramids…a country is something that is built every day out of certain basic shared values.” How true that is. How blessed we are to have had people before us, day by day, brick by brick, build these extraordinary countries of ours. How fortunate, how privileged we are to have the opportunity to now, ourselves, build this world anew. What a blessing. And as we go forward together, on that freedom road, let’s stay true to the values that make us who we are -- Canadians and Americans, allies and friends, now and forever. Thank you very much. Merci beaucoup. Thank you.

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# Press Conference Following NATO Summit

Good evening, everybody. Once again, I want to thank the government and the people of Poland for hosting this NATO Summit. And I especially want to thank the people of Warsaw for their wonderful hospitality. It is my third visit to Poland. Each time, we have been received with tremendous friendship, and it signifies the close bonds between our two countries.

I want to begin this press conference with events back home. This has been a tough week -- first and foremost, for the families who have been killed, but also for the entire American family. In my call yesterday to Attorney General Loretta Lynch, I stressed that the Justice Department and our federal government should continue to do everything that we can to assist the investigation in Dallas, and to support the police and the city of Dallas as they deal with this tragedy.

In my call to Chief Brown, I commended him for showing outstanding leadership during an extremely challenging time, and asked him to convey to all the officers and their families how the American people are grieving with them and that we stand with them.

I'll have the opportunity to convey our condolences and show our solidarity when I visit Dallas in a few days. But before I do, let me just make some very brief points. First of all, as painful as this week has been, I firmly believe that America is not as divided as some have suggested. Americans of all races and all backgrounds are rightly outraged by the inexcusable attacks on police, whether it's in Dallas or anyplace else.

That includes protestors. It includes family members who have grave concerns about police conduct, and they have said that this is unacceptable. There's no division there. And Americans of all races and all backgrounds are also rightly saddened and angered about the deaths of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile, and about the larger, persistent problem of African Americans and Latinos being treated differently in our criminal justice system.

So there is sorrow, there is anger, there is confusion about next steps. But there's unity in recognizing that this is not how we want our communities to operate. This is not who we want to be as Americans. And that serves as the basis for us being able to move forward in a constructive and positive way.

So we cannot let the actions of a few define all of us. The demented individual who carried out those attacks in Dallas, he's no more representative of African Americans than the shooter in Charleston was representative of white Americans, or the shooter in Orlando or San Bernardino were representative of Muslim Americans. They don't speak for us. That's not who we are.

And one of the things that gives me hope this week is actually seeing how the overwhelming majority of Americans have reacted -- with empathy and understanding. We've seen police continue to reach out to communities that they serve all across the country, and show incredible professionalism as they're protecting protestors. We've seen activists and grassroots groups who have expressed concern about police shootings, but are also adamant in their support of the Dallas Police Department -- which is particularly appropriate because the Dallas Police Department is a great example of a department that has taken the issue of police shootings seriously and has engaged in an approach that has not only brought down their murder rates but also drastically reduced complaints around police misconduct.

That's the spirit that we all need to embrace. That's the spirit that I want to build on. It's one of the reasons why next week, using the task force that we had set up after Ferguson, but also building on it, and inviting both police and law enforcement and community activists and civil rights leaders, bringing them together to the White House. I want to start moving on constructive actions that are actually going to make a difference, because that is what all Americans want.

So when we start suggesting that somehow there's this enormous polarization, and we're back to the situation in the '60s -- that's just not true. You're not seeing riots, and you're not seeing police going after people who are protesting peacefully. You've seen almost uniformly peaceful protests. And you've seen uniformly police handling those protests with professionalism.

And so, as tough, as hard, as depressing as the loss of life was this week, we've got a foundation to build on. We just have to have to confidence that we can build on those better angels of our nature. And we have to make sure that all of us step back, do some reflection, and make sure that the rhetoric that we engage in is constructive, and not destructive; that we're not painting anybody with an overly broad brush; that we're not constantly thinking the worst in other people rather than the best. If we do that, then I'm confident that we will continue to make progress.

Now, here in Europe, this is a pivotal moment for our Alliance. In the nearly 70 years of NATO, perhaps never have we faced such a range of challenges all at once -- security, humanitarian, political. NATO nations -- the United States, Canada, France, Belgium, and Turkey -- have endured heinous terrorist attacks directed or inspired by ISIL. Russia has violated the sovereignty and territorial integrity of an independent European nation -- Ukraine -- and engaged in provocative behavior toward NATO allies. European borders and economies have been tested by millions of migrants fleeing conflicts and depravation. And the vote in the United Kingdom to leave the EU has raised questions about the future of European integration.

In this challenging moment, I want to take this opportunity to state clearly what will never change -- and that is the unwavering commitment of the United States to the security and defense of Europe, to our transatlantic relationship, to our commitment to our common defense.

And next year will mark the 100th anniversary of the first American troops arriving on European soil in the first world war. And ever since, through two world wars, a long Cold War, and the decades since, generations of Americans have served here for our common security. In quiet cemeteries, from France to the Netherlands to Italy, Americans still rest where they fell. Even now, more than 60,000 American military personnel serve in dozens of European countries.

And my point is this: In good times and in bad, Europe can count on the United States -- always.

Here in Warsaw, we haven’t simply reaffirmed our enduring Article 5 obligations to our common security; we’re moving forward with the most significant reinforcement of our collective defense any time since the Cold War. First, we’re strengthening NATO’s defense and deterrence posture. Building on our European Reassurance Initiative -- which has already increased readiness, from the Baltics to the Black Sea -- our Alliance will enhance our forward presence on our eastern flank.

As I announced yesterday, the United States will be the lead nation here in Poland, deploying a battalion of American soldiers. The United Kingdom will take the lead in Estonia, Germany in Lithuania, and Canada in Latvia. This will mean some 4,000 additional NATO troops, on a rotational basis, in this region. Moreover, the additional U.S. Armored Brigade will rotate through Europe, including an additional 4,000 U.S. troops. Meanwhile, to the south, we agreed on new deterrence measures in Romania and Bulgaria. So NATO is sending a clear message that we will defend every ally.

We’re also strengthening the readiness of our forces against a range of threats. So NATO’s joint task force is now operational and can deploy anywhere in Europe on short notice. With recent progress here in Poland, Romania and Spain, NATO's ballistic missile defense is coming online. And we're launching a new effort to boost the resilience of allies to better defend against new types of threats, including cyberattacks.

NATO is increasing our support to Ukraine. At our meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Commission, we agreed on a new assistance package to improve Alliance support for Ukrainian forces. Prime Minister Cameron, President Hollande, Chancellor Merkel, Prime Minister Renzi and I met with President Poroshenko, and we reaffirmed our strong support for Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as the need to continue political and economic reforms.

[Applause heard from another room.]

Thank you. I'm already getting applause. I'm not even finished yet.

And even as the NATO-Russia Council will meet in Brussels next week, our 28 nations are united in our view that there can be no business as usual with Russia until it fully implements its Minsk obligations.

NATO will do more also to fight against terrorist networks. Every ally already contributes to the campaign against ISIL. Now, the Alliance will contribute AWACS aircraft to improve our intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance against ISIL. NATO training of Iraqi security forces, currently run in Jordan, will move to Iraq, where they can be even more effective. And building on my decision to largely maintain the current U.S. troop presence in Afghanistan into next year, 39 nations, including the U.S., have committed more than 12,000 troops to NATO’s training mission. And, in addition, some 30 nations have pledged upwards of $900 million to help sustain Afghan forces -- which is a very strong message of our enduring commitment to Afghanistan.

We’re bolstering our efforts on NATO’s southern flank. The Alliance will increase our support to EU naval operations in the Mediterranean to stop arms traffickers and go after criminals that are exploiting desperate migrants. And we’re going to do more to help partners from North Africa to the Middle East to Georgia strengthen their own defense capacity.

And, finally, after many years, NATO has stopped the collective decline in defense spending. Over the past two years, most NATO members have halted cuts and begun investing more in defense. And this means defense spending across the Alliance is now scheduled to increase. I especially want to commend our friends in the UK, Poland, Greece, Estonia -- all who, along with the United States, pay their full share of at least 2 percent of GDP for our collective defense. But for those of you doing the math, that means that the majority of allies are still not hitting that 2 percent mark -- an obligation we agreed to in Wales. So we had a very candid conversation about this. There’s a recognition that given the range of threats that we face and the capabilities that we need, everybody has got to step up and everybody has got to do better.

So, in closing, I'd just note that this is my final NATO Summit. Throughout my time in office, one of my top foreign policy priorities has been to strengthen our alliances, especially with NATO. And as I reflect on the past eight years -- both the progress and the challenges -- I can say with confidence that we’ve delivered on that promise. The United States has increased our presence here in Europe. NATO is as strong, as nimble, and as ready as ever. And as we see from the presence of Montenegro at this summit, the door to NATO membership remains open to nations that can meet our high standards.

So nobody should ever doubt the resolve of this Alliance to stay united and focused on the future. And just as our nations have stood together over the past hundred years, I know that we’ll stay united and grow even stronger for another hundred more.

With that, let me take some questions. I'm going to start with Kathleen Hennessey of AP.

Question: Thanks, Mr. President. I wanted to specifically ask about the Dallas shooting and the attacker there. Now that we know more about the man who we believe did those crimes, I'm wondering if you could help us understand how you describe his motives. Do you consider this an act of domestic terrorism? Was this a hate crime? Was this a mentally ill man with a gun? How should Americans understand why that happened? And then also, on the issue of political division and looking for solutions, there have been some critics who noted that you immediately mentioned your call for gun control soon after the attacks. Do you think that in any way encourages or ensures that people retreat to their corners as they think about this?

President Obama: First of all, I think it's very hard to untangle the motives of this shooter. As we've seen in a whole range of incidents with mass shooters, they are, by definition, troubled. By definition, if you shoot people who pose no threat to you -- strangers -- you have a troubled mind. What triggers that, what feeds it, what sets it off, I'll leave that to psychologists and people who study these kinds of incidents.

What I can say is that although he may have used as an excuse his anger about previous incidents -- as has been indicated, at least, in the press, and as Chief Brown I think indicated -- in no way does that represent what the overwhelming majority of Americans think.

Americans, to a large degree, want to make sure that we have a police force that is supported, because they know our police officers do a really tough, dangerous job. And witness the professionalism of our Dallas police officers. As they were being shot at, the fact that they helped to clear the area, they helped to get the fallen and the injured out of there, they were able to isolate the suspect, and that you didn't have other casualties as a consequence of the police shooting back -- that just gives you an indication of what a tough job they have and how well they do it on a regular basis.

So I think the danger, as I said, is that we somehow suggest that the act of a troubled individual speaks to some larger political statement across the country. It doesn't. When some white kid walks into a church and shoots a bunch of worshippers who invite him to worship with them, we don't assume that somehow he's making a political statement that's relevant to the attitudes of the rest of America. And we shouldn't make those assumptions around a troubled Muslim individual who is acting on their own in that same way.

Now, with respect to the issue of guns, I am going to keep on talking about the fact that we cannot eliminate all racial tension in our country overnight; we are not going to be able to identify ahead of time and eliminate every madman or troubled individual who might want to do harm against innocent people; but we can make it harder for them to do so.

And if you look at the pattern of death and violence and shootings that we've experienced over the course of the last year, or the last five years, or the last 10 years -- I've said this before -- we are unique among advanced countries in the scale of violence that we experience. And I'm not just talking about mass shootings. I'm talking about the hundreds of people who have already been shot this year in my hometown of Chicago -- the ones that we just consider routine.

Now, we may not see that issue as connected to what happened in Dallas, but part of what’s creating tensions between communities and the police is the fact that police have a really difficult time in communities where they know guns are everywhere. As I said before, they have a right to come home -- and now they have very little margin of error in terms of making decisions. So if you care about the safety of our police officers, then you can't set aside the gun issue and pretend that that's irrelevant.

At the protest in Dallas, one of the challenges for the Dallas Police Department -- as they're being shot at -- is because this is an open-carry state, there are a bunch of people participating in the protest who have weapons on them. Imagine if you're a police officer and you're trying to sort out who is shooting at you and there are a bunch of people who have got guns on them.

In Minneapolis, we don't know yet what happened, but we do know that there was a gun in the car that apparently was licensed, but it caused in some fashion those tragic events.

So, no, we can't just ignore that and pretend that that’s somehow political or the President is pushing his policy agenda. It is a contributing factor -- not the sole factor, but a contributing factor to the broader tensions that arise between police and the communities where they serve. And so we have to talk about that.

And as I've said before, there is a way to talk about that that is consistent with our Constitution and the Second Amendment. The problem is even mention of it somehow evokes this kind of polarization.

And you're right, when it comes to the issue of gun safety, there is polarization between a very intense minority and a majority of Americans who actually think that we could be doing better when it comes to gun safety. But that expresses itself in stark terms when it comes to legislation in Congress or in state legislatures. And that's too bad. We're going to have to tackle that at some point. And I'm not going to stop talking about it, because if we don't talk about it, we're not going to solve these underlying problems. It's part of the problem.

Carol Lee.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. You mentioned San Bernardino and Orlando. And Americans have been warned that similar attacks could happen here in -- over there in the United States. And obviously what happened this week in Minnesota and Louisiana and Dallas -- these are not necessarily the same types of attacks and the motivations may be different, but, collectively, they’re having a real impact on the American public in that there’s a real anxiety out there, where people are genuinely afraid, going about their daily lives, doing routine things.

President Obama: Right.

Question: So my questions are, do you see any sort of common thread in these events? Is this sort of just a new normal? Is there anything that you can do about this? And what’s your message to Americans who are genuinely afraid? Because the anxiety just seems to be getting worse, not better, and these attacks keep seeming to happen in much more regularity that wasn’t a part of their experience even, say, a year ago.

President Obama: Well, Carol Lee, I do think we have to disentangle these issues. When it comes to terrorist attacks, people are understandably concerned not just because of what’s happening in the United States, but what happened in Brussels, and what’s happened in Paris, and what’s happened in Turkey, and what is consistently happening in Iraq and Bangladesh and all around the world. And that's why the work that we've done with NATO and our counter-ISIL coalition and other partners is so vital.

One of the things that's been commented on is that as ISIL loses territory and the fraud of the caliphate becomes more obvious, they are going to start resorting to more traditional terrorist tactics. They can't govern. They can't deliver anything meaningful to the people whose territory they can control. The one thing they know how to do is kill.

And so we're going to have to redouble our efforts in terms of intelligence, coordination, our counter-messaging on extremism, working closely with Muslim communities both overseas and in our own countries to make sure that we are reducing the number of people who are inspired by their message or are, in some coordinated fashion, trying to attack us.

And obviously, we have built up a huge infrastructure to try to do that. The more successful we are in Iraq and Syria and Libya and other places where ISIL has gotten a stronghold, the weaker they are, the less resources they have, the less effectively they can recruit. But when individuals are willing to die, and they have no conscience and compunction about killing innocent people, they are hard to detect. And it means that we've got to continually up our game.

Having said that, I think it is important to note just the success that we've seen in the last several weeks when it comes to rolling back al Qaeda. The liberation of Fallujah got a little bit lost in the news, but that's a big town, and with our support, the counter-ISIL coalition support, the Iraqi government was able to move through there quickly. They’re now positioning themselves so that they can start going after Mosul. In Syria, you're seeing progress along Pocket Manbij that has been used for foreign fighter flows. And so they’re on their heels, and we're going to stay on it.

Now, when it comes to crime, generally, I think it's just important to keep in mind that our crime rate today is substantially lower than it was five years ago, 10 years ago, 20 years ago, 30 years ago. Over the last four or five years, during the course of my presidency, violent crime in the United States is the lowest it's been since probably the 1960s, maybe before the early 1960s. There’s been an incredible drop in violent crime.

So that doesn’t lessen, I think, people’s understandable fears if they see a video clip of somebody getting killed. But it is important to keep in perspective that in places like New York, or Los Angeles, or Dallas, you’ve seen huge drops in the murder rates. And that's a testimony to smarter policing, and there are a range of other factors that have contributed to that.

So that should not -- we should never be satisfied when any innocent person has been killed, but that should not be something that is driving our anxieties, relative to where we've been in the past.

And with respect to, finally, the issue of police shootings, there’s no doubt that the visual records that we're seeing have elevated people’s consciousness about this. But as I've said before, for African Americans or Latinos in the pre-smartphone age, I don’t think that people were not aware of the fact that there is evidence of racial bias in our criminal justice system. It's been well-documented, and it's been experienced. And even before I got to the U.S. Senate, when I was in the State Senate in Illinois, I passed legislation to try to reduce the incidents of racial profiling by collecting data. And that was prompted by evidence that it was taking place in certain parts of the state.

And the fact that we're aware of it may increase some anxiety right now, and hurt and anger. But it's been said, sunshine is the best disinfectant. By seeing it, by people feeling a sense of urgency about it, by the larger American community realizing that, gosh, maybe this is a problem -- and we've seen even some very conservative commentators begin to acknowledge this is something maybe we need to work on -- that promises the possibility of actually getting it done. So, it hurts, but if we don’t diagnose this we can’t fix it.

Ayesha Rascoe. Reuters.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. As you come to the end of your term, there's a lot of talk about your legacy. I know you may like to leave that to the historians, but --

President Obama: I do.

Question: -- but when you look back on your presidency and consider race relations, what do you hope your legacy will be? How do you think the shootings in Dallas and the high-profile shootings by police, and other events will shape the way your presidency is remembered?

President Obama: I do want to leave legacy questions to the history books. But what I can do -- maybe this is a fair response to your question -- is to say how I've tried to lead the country on this issue.

More than anything, what I hope is that my voice has tried to get all of us as Americans to understand the difficult legacy of race; to encourage people to listen to each other; to recognize that the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow and discrimination didn’t suddenly vanish with the passage of the Civil Rights Act or the Voting Rights Act, or the election of Barack Obama; that things have gotten better -- substantially better -- but that we've still got a lot more work to do; and that, as was the case with the police task force that we set up, that I've tried to encourage people to come up with practical, concrete solutions that can reduce, if not eliminate, the problems of racial bias.

And if my voice has been true and positive, then my hope would be that it may not fix everything right away, but it surfaces problems, it frames them; it allows us to wrestle with these issues and try to come up with practical solutions; and that that perspective may lead to continued improvement so that not just Malia and Sasha, but their children can experience a country that is more just and more united and more equal.

And that's not going to happen right away, and that's okay. We plant seeds, and somebody else maybe sits under the shade of the tree that we planted. And I'd like to think that, as best as I could, I have been true in speaking about these issues.

Justin.

Question: Thanks, Mr. President. Throughout the summit, EU leaders have echoed your confidence about Brexit happening in an orderly way. They’ve also stressed that the UK has to have access to an open market, must continue to respect the freedom of migration for workers. Someone who has repeatedly advocated for globalization and extolled the virtues of immigration, shouldn’t that principle be pre-baked in the negotiations? What specific assurances did you get during the summit from other leaders that make you confident that the currency markets are wrong, and the political turmoil in Britain and subsequently -- the EU will go smoothly?

And finally, both you and Secretary Kerry have used “if” to describe Brexit. So I'm wondering if you see any way for the British people to put the toothpaste back in the tube on this issue.

President Obama: I think we have to assume that a referendum having been passed, with a lot of attention, a lengthy campaign and relatively high participation rates, is going to stick, and that the incoming government, a conservative government, is going to invoke Article 50 and begin the process of negotiations. How that process unfolds, how the negotiations work I think is going to be up to the parties involved.

The main message I've had here is we are close friends, allies, commercial partners with the UK and with the EU. We will remain close friends, allies, partners, continue to have strong relationships on both sides of the Channel. Our primary interest is to make sure that the negotiations and this process are as orderly and as sensible as possible, recognizing that it is in the interests of both sides to get it right.

They are major trading partners. That's where goods get sent, back and forth. And it's important that neither side harden positions in ways that ultimately do damage to their respective economies and ultimately to the world economy at a time when our world economy is still pretty wobbly in places.

I want to make a further point. I'm not sure it's accurate to say that I am a huge booster of globalization. What is accurate to say is that I believe the process of globalization is here to stay -- as a consequence of technology and the mobility of capital, and cargo container ships and global supply chains. And conceivably, we could run back the tape to 50 years ago and see whether we could rearrange some of that process, but it's happening. It's here. And we see it every day in our lives. Everybody who has got a smartphone in their pocket is seeing it.

And my argument has been that there are enormous benefits to be gained from that global integration, just as there are enormous benefits to be gained from European integration, so long as we recognize that with that integration there is the danger of increased inequality, or workers having less leverage and capital having more leverage, that it threatens to leave people behind.

And if we don't take steps to make sure everybody can participate in that global integration -- making sure that wages are high enough, making sure that we rebuild the social compact so that pensions and health care are taken care of, making sure that communities are not completely abandoned when a factory leaves and there’s an economic plan for transition -- if we do not do that effectively, then there’s going to be a backlash.

With respect to immigration, it is America’s experience that immigration has been, by far, a net plus for our economic growth, our culture, our way of life. Now, in America, that's by necessity, because unless you're a Native American, you came from -- everybody came from someplace else. Europe may not have as many of those traditions.

But keep in mind, one of the huge macroeconomic advantages that America has is we're still a relatively young country, our birth rate is not dropping off like Europe’s is, or Russia’s is, or China’s, or Japan’s. And that's as a consequence of immigration. And it's economics 101, if you’ve got a younger population, your growth rate is going to be higher.

And immigrants are strivers, and they work hard. And they’re looking to build a better life. Otherwise they wouldn't move from where they were. And that's been part of our tradition and our culture and our society.

Now, huge influxes of the sort that we've seen in Europe -- that's always going to be a shock to the system. And I think it is entirely appropriate for Europe, even as generous as it has been -- and I think that Chancellor Merkel deserves enormous credit, and other European leaders who have taken in these migrant populations deserve enormous credit, because that's hard. It's a strain on the budget. It's a strain on politics. It's a strain on culture. It's legitimate for them to say, look, we got to slow this thing down. We got to manage it properly.

That's why we're setting up a U.N. Conference on Refugees on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly, because a few countries shouldn’t be shouldering the burden for 60 million refugees. And we've got to come up with strategies to allow people in countries that are very poor, or are in the middle of a war zone, enjoy some peace and prosperity. Otherwise, the world has shrank and they’re going to want to move. And that's not going to go away anytime soon.

So it's one more reason why, given the fact of global integration, we have to think globally, more broadly. Because our security interests, our economies are all going to depend on the institutional arrangements that we have across boundaries.

And NATO is an example of a really enduring multilateral institution that helped us get through some very difficult times. But even the best of institutions have to be adapted to new circumstances. That's true for organizations like NATO. It's true for organizations like the U.N. It's true for organizations like the EU. It's true for all the architecture that has helped the world and our countries improve their standard of livings and reduce overall violence between states substantially over the last several decades.

Mark Landler.

Question: Thank you very much, Mr. President. You’ve been scrupulous about saying you would not comment on the Justice Department investigation of Hillary Clinton’s email. The investigation is now closed. And I hope that I could ask you about some of the comments that FBI Director Comey made a few days ago.

President Obama: You may, Mark, but I want you to make sure you're not wasting your question. I'm going to continue to be scrupulous about not commenting on it, just because I think Director Comey could not have been more exhaustive. My understanding is not only did he make a full presentation, but while we were over here, or at least flying, he was presenting to Congress for hours on end. But I just want to give you a chance, just in case you didn’t want to burn your question.

Question: Okay. I actually have a backup. Maybe I could cut to the chase and ask you about a broader question. Let’s leave aside Mrs. Clinton for the moment. He did talk at the end of his presentation about how he feared that there was a broader cultural issue in the State Department for the handling of classified information that troubled him. And I wondered whether you -- since you rely on the State Department to conduct your foreign policy -- whether that concerns you as well.

And if I may, could I ask another question -- because I think it might get an interesting response. You, last May, passed a milestone in that you are now President longer when the country was at war than your predecessor, George W. Bush. And if you complete your presidency, as you will, with troops in Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq, you will be the only two-term President in American history to have served with the country at war. And I wonder, given the way that you ran for office and the aspirations you brought into office, how you feel about that reality? And a second follow-up on that -- should the American people simply resign themselves to living in a state of perpetual war, even if that war is not the all-out war that we think of in the 20th century?

President Obama: That was an interesting question so -- first of all, with respect to the State Department, I am concerned. And the challenge that we've got is primarily driven by the changing nature of how information flows. Look, the advent of email and texts and smartphones is just generating enormous amounts of data. Now, it is hugely convenient. It means that in real time I'm getting information that some of my predecessors might not have gotten for weeks.

But what it also is doing is creating this massive influx of information on a daily basis, putting enormous pressure on the department to sort through it, classify it properly, figure out what are the various points of entry because of the cyber-attack risks that these systems have, knowing that our adversaries are constantly trying to hack into these various systems. If you overclassify, then all the advantages of this new information suddenly go away because it's taking too long to process.

And so we've been trying to think about this in a smart way. And I think Secretary Kerry has got a range of initiatives to try to get our arms around this. It reflects a larger problem in government. We just recently, for example -- I just recently signed a bill about FOYA requests -- Freedom of Information Act requests that built on a number of reforms that we've put in place. We're processing more Freedom of Information Act requests and doing so faster than ever before. The problem is the volume of requests has skyrocketed. The amount of information that answers the request has multiplied exponentially.

So across government, you're seeing this problem. And it's a problem in terms of domestic affairs. It becomes an even bigger problem when you're talking about national security issues. So it is something that we're going to have to take care of.

With respect to reflections on war, when I came into office, we had 180,000 troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. Today we have a fraction of that. They are not involved in active combat situations, but are involved in train, advise and assist situations, other than the direct attacks that we launch against ISIL in conjunction with the Iraq government and the Syrian government.

So in some ways, Mark, I think you’d recognize that our military operations today in Iraq and Afghanistan are fundamentally different than the wars that we were engaged in when I came into office. But I think you are making an important point, which is when we are dealing with non-state actors, and those non-state actors are located in countries with limited capacity, our ultimate goal is to partner with those countries so that they can secure their borders and, themselves, eliminate these terrorist threats.

But as we've seen in Afghanistan, for example, that takes some time. The Afghans are fighting. They are much more capable now than they were when I came into office. But they still need support -- because it's really tough territory, and it's a really poor country with really low literacy rates and not much experience in things that we take for granted like logistics.

And so, we have an option of going in, taking out al Qaeda, pulling out, potentially then seeing a country crumble under the strains of continued terrorist activity or insurgency, and then going back in. Or we can try to maintain a limited partnership that allows them to continue to build their capacity over time, and selectively take our own actions against those organizations that we know are trying to attack us or our allies.

Because they’re non-state actors, it's very hard for us ever to get the satisfaction of McArthur and the Emperor meeting and a war officially being over. AQI was defeated in the sense that we were able to execute a transition to a democratically elected Iraqi government. But for all of our efforts, and incredible courage and bravery and sacrifice of our troops, the political structure there was still uneven. You had continued Sunni resentments, continued de-Baathification, and as a consequence, those vestiges of AQI were able to reconstitute themselves, move into Syria as Syria began to engage in civil war, rebuild and then come back in.

Some have argued that this is the reason why we should have never pulled out of Iraq, or at least we should have left some larger presence there. Of course, the problem was that we didn’t have an Iraqi government that wanted them, unlike Afghanistan where we've been invited. And it's very difficult for us to -- for me, as Commander-in-Chief, to want to put our troops in a precarious situation where they’re not protected.

So I think what we've been trying to do, what I've been trying to do is to create an architecture, a structure -- and it's not there yet -- that emphasizes partnerships with countries, emphasizes building up fragile states, resolving internal conflicts wherever we can, trying to do as much as we can through our local partners, preserving the possibility, the necessity to take strikes ourselves against organizations or individuals that we know are trying to kill Americans or Belgians or French or Germans -- combine that with much more effective intelligence-gathering. But it becomes more of a hybrid approach to national security. And that I do think is probably going to be something that we have to continue to grapple with for years to come.

The good news is that there are fewer wars between states than ever before. And almost no wars between great powers. And that's a great legacy of leaders in the United States and Europe and Asia, after the Cold War -- or after the end of World War II that built this international architecture. That's worked. And we should be proud of that and preserve it.

But this different kind of low-grade threat, one that's not an existential threat but can do real damage and real harm to our societies, and creates the kind of fear that can cause division and political reactions -- we have to do that better. We have to continually refine it.

So, for example, the reason that I put out our announcement about the civilian casualties resulting from drone attacks -- understanding that there are those who dispute the numbers -- what I'm trying to do there is to institutionalize a system where we begin to hold ourselves accountable for this different kind of national security threat and these different kinds of operations.

And it's imperfect, still. But I think we can get there. And what I can say honestly is, whether we're talking about how the NSA operates, or how drone strikes operate, or how we're partnering with other countries, or my efforts to close Guantanamo -- that by the end of my presidency -- or banning torture -- by the end of my presidency, I feel confident that these efforts will be on a firmer legal footing, more consistent with international law and norms, more reflective of our values and our ethics. But we're going to have more work to do. It's not perfect, and we have to wrestle with these issues all the time.

And as Commander-in-Chief of the most powerful military in the world, I spend a lot of time brooding over these issues. And I'm not satisfied that we've got it perfect yet. I can say honestly, it's better than it was when I came into office.

Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you, Poland.

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# Dallas Police Memorial Address

Mr. President and Mrs. Bush; my friend, the Vice President, and Dr. Biden; Mayor Rawlings; Chief Spiller; clergy; members of Congress; Chief Brown -- I’m so glad I met Michelle first, because she loves Stevie Wonder; but most of all, to the families and friends and colleagues and fellow officers:

Scripture tells us that in our sufferings there is glory, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. Sometimes the truths of these words are hard to see. Right now, those words test us. Because the people of Dallas, people across the country, are suffering.

We’re here to honor the memory, and mourn the loss, of five fellow Americans -- to grieve with their loved ones, to support this community, to pray for the wounded, and to try and find some meaning amidst our sorrow.

For the men and women who protect and serve the people of Dallas, last Thursday began like any other day. Like most Americans each day, you get up, probably have too quick a breakfast, kiss your family goodbye, and you head to work. But your work, and the work of police officers across the country, is like no other. For the moment you put on that uniform, you have answered a call that at any moment, even in the briefest interaction, may put your life in harm’s way.

Lorne Ahrens, he answered that call. So did his wife, Katrina -- not only because she was the spouse of a police officer, but because she’s a detective on the force. They have two kids. And Lorne took them fishing, and used to proudly go to their school in uniform. And the night before he died, he bought dinner for a homeless man. And the next night, Katrina had to tell their children that their dad was gone. “They don’t get it yet,” their grandma said. “They don’t know what to do quite yet.”

Michael Krol answered that call. His mother said, “He knew the dangers of the job, but he never shied away from his duty.” He came a thousand miles from his home state of Michigan to be a cop in Dallas, telling his family, “This is something I wanted to do.” Last year, he brought his girlfriend back to Detroit for Thanksgiving, and it was the last time he’d see his family.

Michael Smith answered that call -- in the Army, and over almost 30 years working for the Dallas Police Association, which gave him the appropriately named “Cops Cop” award. A man of deep faith, when he was off duty, he could be found at church or playing softball with his two girls. Today, his girls have lost their dad, for God has called Michael home.

Patrick Zamarripa, he answered that call. Just 32, a former altar boy who served in the Navy and dreamed of being a cop. He liked to post videos of himself and his kids on social media. And on Thursday night, while Patrick went to work, his partner Kristy posted a photo of her and their daughter at a Texas Rangers game, and tagged her partner so that he could see it while on duty.

Brent Thompson answered that call. He served his country as a Marine. And years later, as a contractor, he spent time in some of the most dangerous parts of Iraq and Afghanistan. And then a few years ago, he settled down here in Dallas for a new life of service as a transit cop. And just about two weeks ago, he married a fellow officer, their whole life together waiting before them.

Like police officers across the country, these men and their families shared a commitment to something larger than themselves. They weren’t looking for their names to be up in lights. They’d tell you the pay was decent but wouldn’t make you rich. They could have told you about the stress and long shifts, and they’d probably agree with Chief Brown when he said that cops don’t expect to hear the words "thank you" very often, especially from those who need them the most.

No, the reward comes in knowing that our entire way of life in America depends on the rule of law; that the maintenance of that law is a hard and daily labor; that in this country, we don’t have soldiers in the streets or militias setting the rules. Instead, we have public servants -- police officers -- like the men who were taken away from us.

And that’s what these five were doing last Thursday when they were assigned to protect and keep orderly a peaceful protest in response to the killing of Alton Sterling of Baton Rouge and Philando Castile of Minnesota. They were upholding the constitutional rights of this country.

For a while, the protest went on without incident. And despite the fact that police conduct was the subject of the protest, despite the fact that there must have been signs or slogans or chants with which they profoundly disagreed, these men and this department did their jobs like the professionals that they were. In fact, the police had been part of the protest’s planning. Dallas PD even posted photos on their Twitter feeds of their own officers standing among the protesters. Two officers, black and white, smiled next to a man with a sign that read, “No Justice, No Peace.”

And then, around nine o’clock, the gunfire came. Another community torn apart. More hearts broken. More questions about what caused, and what might prevent, another such tragedy.

I know that Americans are struggling right now with what we’ve witnessed over the past week. First, the shootings in Minnesota and Baton Rouge, and the protests, then the targeting of police by the shooter here -- an act not just of demented violence but of racial hatred. All of it has left us wounded, and angry, and hurt. It’s as if the deepest fault lines of our democracy have suddenly been exposed, perhaps even widened. And although we know that such divisions are not new -- though they have surely been worse in even the recent past -- that offers us little comfort.

Faced with this violence, we wonder if the divides of race in America can ever be bridged. We wonder if an African-American community that feels unfairly targeted by police, and police departments that feel unfairly maligned for doing their jobs, can ever understand each other’s experience. We turn on the TV or surf the Internet, and we can watch positions harden and lines drawn, and people retreat to their respective corners, and politicians calculate how to grab attention or avoid the fallout. We see all this, and it’s hard not to think sometimes that the center won't hold and that things might get worse.

I understand. I understand how Americans are feeling. But, Dallas, I’m here to say we must reject such despair. I’m here to insist that we are not as divided as we seem. And I know that because I know America. I know how far we’ve come against impossible odds. I know we’ll make it because of what I’ve experienced in my own life, what I’ve seen of this country and its people -- their goodness and decency --as President of the United States. And I know it because of what we’ve seen here in Dallas -- how all of you, out of great suffering, have shown us the meaning of perseverance and character, and hope.

When the bullets started flying, the men and women of the Dallas police, they did not flinch and they did not react recklessly. They showed incredible restraint. Helped in some cases by protesters, they evacuated the injured, isolated the shooter, and saved more lives than we will ever know. We mourn fewer people today because of your brave actions.

“Everyone was helping each other,” one witness said. “It wasn’t about black or white. Everyone was picking each other up and moving them away.” See, that’s the America I know.

The police helped Shetamia Taylor as she was shot trying to shield her four sons. She said she wanted her boys to join her to protest the incidents of black men being killed. She also said to the Dallas PD, “Thank you for being heroes.” And today, her 12-year old son wants to be a cop when he grows up. That’s the America I know.

In the aftermath of the shooting, we’ve seen Mayor Rawlings and Chief Brown, a white man and a black man with different backgrounds, working not just to restore order and support a shaken city, a shaken department, but working together to unify a city with strength and grace and wisdom. And in the process, we've been reminded that the Dallas Police Department has been at the forefront of improving relations between police and the community.

The murder rate here has fallen. Complaints of excessive force have been cut by 64 percent. The Dallas Police Department has been doing it the right way. And so, Mayor Rawlings and Chief Brown, on behalf of the American people, thank you for your steady leadership, thank you for your powerful example. We could not be prouder of you.

These men, this department -- this is the America I know. And today, in this audience, I see people who have protested on behalf of criminal justice reform grieving alongside police officers. I see people who mourn for the five officers we lost but also weep for the families of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile. In this audience, I see what’s possible -- I see what's possible when we recognize that we are one American family, all deserving of equal treatment, all deserving of equal respect, all children of God. That’s the America that I know.

Now, I'm not naÃ¯ve. I have spoken at too many memorials during the course of this presidency. I’ve hugged too many families who have lost a loved one to senseless violence. And I've seen how a spirit of unity, born of tragedy, can gradually dissipate, overtaken by the return to business as usual, by inertia and old habits and expediency. I see how easily we slip back into our old notions, because they’re comfortable, we’re used to them. I’ve seen how inadequate words can be in bringing about lasting change. I’ve seen how inadequate my own words have been.

And so I’m reminded of a passage in John’s Gospel [First John]: Let us love not with words or speech, but with actions and in truth. If we’re to sustain the unity we need to get through these difficult times, if we are to honor these five outstanding officers who we’ve lost, then we will need to act on the truths that we know. And that’s not easy. It makes us uncomfortable. But we’re going to have to be honest with each other and ourselves.

We know that the overwhelming majority of police officers do an incredibly hard and dangerous job fairly and professionally. They are deserving of our respect and not our scorn. And when anyone, no matter how good their intentions may be, paints all police as biased or bigoted, we undermine those officers we depend on for our safety. And as for those who use rhetoric suggesting harm to police, even if they don’t act on it themselves -- well, they not only make the jobs of police officers even more dangerous, but they do a disservice to the very cause of justice that they claim to promote.

We also know that centuries of racial discrimination -- of slavery, and subjugation, and Jim Crow -- they didn’t simply vanish with the end of lawful segregation. They didn’t just stop when Dr. King made a speech, or the Voting Rights Act and the Civil Rights Act were signed. Race relations have improved dramatically in my lifetime. Those who deny it are dishonoring the struggles that helped us achieve that progress.

But we know -- but, America, we know that bias remains. We know it. Whether you are black or white or Hispanic or Asian or Native American or of Middle Eastern descent, we have all seen this bigotry in our own lives at some point. We’ve heard it at times in our own homes. If we’re honest, perhaps we’ve heard prejudice in our own heads and felt it in our own hearts. We know that. And while some suffer far more under racism’s burden, some feel to a far greater extent discrimination’s sting. Although most of us do our best to guard against it and teach our children better, none of us is entirely innocent. No institution is entirely immune. And that includes our police departments. We know this.

And so when African Americans from all walks of life, from different communities across the country, voice a growing despair over what they perceive to be unequal treatment; when study after study shows that whites and people of color experience the criminal justice system differently, so that if you’re black you’re more likely to be pulled over or searched or arrested, more likely to get longer sentences, more likely to get the death penalty for the same crime; when mothers and fathers raise their kids right and have “the talk” about how to respond if stopped by a police officer -- “yes, sir,” “no, sir” -- but still fear that something terrible may happen when their child walks out the door, still fear that kids being stupid and not quite doing things right might end in tragedy -- when all this takes place more than 50 years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act, we cannot simply turn away and dismiss those in peaceful protest as troublemakers or paranoid. We can’t simply dismiss it as a symptom of political correctness or reverse racism. To have your experience denied like that, dismissed by those in authority, dismissed perhaps even by your white friends and coworkers and fellow church members again and again and again -- it hurts. Surely we can see that, all of us.

We also know what Chief Brown has said is true: That so much of the tensions between police departments and minority communities that they serve is because we ask the police to do too much and we ask too little of ourselves. As a society, we choose to underinvest in decent schools. We allow poverty to fester so that entire neighborhoods offer no prospect for gainful employment. We refuse to fund drug treatment and mental health programs. We flood communities with so many guns that it is easier for a teenager to buy a Glock than get his hands on a computer or even a book -- and then we tell the police “you’re a social worker, you’re the parent, you’re the teacher, you’re the drug counselor.” We tell them to keep those neighborhoods in check at all costs, and do so without causing any political blowback or inconvenience. Don’t make a mistake that might disturb our own peace of mind. And then we feign surprise when, periodically, the tensions boil over.

We know these things to be true. They’ve been true for a long time. We know it. Police, you know it. Protestors, you know it. You know how dangerous some of the communities where these police officers serve are, and you pretend as if there’s no context. These things we know to be true. And if we cannot even talk about these things -- if we cannot talk honestly and openly not just in the comfort of our own circles, but with those who look different than us or bring a different perspective, then we will never break this dangerous cycle.

In the end, it's not about finding policies that work; it’s about forging consensus, and fighting cynicism, and finding the will to make change.

Can we do this? Can we find the character, as Americans, to open our hearts to each other? Can we see in each other a common humanity and a shared dignity, and recognize how our different experiences have shaped us? And it doesn’t make anybody perfectly good or perfectly bad, it just makes us human. I don’t know. I confess that sometimes I, too, experience doubt. I've been to too many of these things. I've seen too many families go through this. But then I am reminded of what the Lord tells Ezekiel: I will give you a new heart, the Lord says, and put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

That’s what we must pray for, each of us: a new heart. Not a heart of stone, but a heart open to the fears and hopes and challenges of our fellow citizens. That’s what we’ve seen in Dallas these past few days. That’s what we must sustain.

Because with an open heart, we can learn to stand in each other’s shoes and look at the world through each other’s eyes, so that maybe the police officer sees his own son in that teenager with a hoodie who's kind of goofing off but not dangerous -- and the teenager -- maybe the teenager will see in the police officer the same words and values and authority of his parents.

With an open heart, we can abandon the overheated rhetoric and the oversimplification that reduces whole categories of our fellow Americans not just to opponents, but to enemies.

With an open heart, those protesting for change will guard against reckless language going forward, look at the model set by the five officers we mourn today, acknowledge the progress brought about by the sincere efforts of police departments like this one in Dallas, and embark on the hard but necessary work of negotiation, the pursuit of reconciliation.

With an open heart, police departments will acknowledge that, just like the rest of us, they are not perfect; that insisting we do better to root out racial bias is not an attack on cops, but an effort to live up to our highest ideals. And I understand these protests -- I see them, they can be messy. Sometimes they can be hijacked by an irresponsible few. Police can get hurt. Protestors can get hurt. They can be frustrating.

But even those who dislike the phrase “Black Lives Matter,” surely we should be able to hear the pain of Alton Sterling’s family. We should -- when we hear a friend describe him by saying that “Whatever he cooked, he cooked enough for everybody,” that should sound familiar to us, that maybe he wasn’t so different than us, so that we can, yes, insist that his life matters. Just as we should hear the students and coworkers describe their affection for Philando Castile as a gentle soul -- “Mr. Rogers with dreadlocks,” they called him -- and know that his life mattered to a whole lot of people of all races, of all ages, and that we have to do what we can, without putting officers' lives at risk, but do better to prevent another life like his from being lost.

With an open heart, we can worry less about which side has been wronged, and worry more about joining sides to do right. Because the vicious killer of these police officers, they won’t be the last person who tries to make us turn on one other. The killer in Orlando wasn’t, nor was the killer in Charleston. We know there is evil in this world. That's why we need police departments. But as Americans, we can decide that people like this killer will ultimately fail. They will not drive us apart. We can decide to come together and make our country reflect the good inside us, the hopes and simple dreams we share.

“We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

For all of us, life presents challenges and suffering -- accidents, illnesses, the loss of loved ones. There are times when we are overwhelmed by sudden calamity, natural or manmade. All of us, we make mistakes. And at times we are lost. And as we get older, we learn we don’t always have control of things -- not even a President does. But we do have control over how we respond to the world. We do have control over how we treat one another.

America does not ask us to be perfect. Precisely because of our individual imperfections, our founders gave us institutions to guard against tyranny and ensure no one is above the law; a democracy that gives us the space to work through our differences and debate them peacefully, to make things better, even if it doesn’t always happen as fast as we’d like. America gives us the capacity to change.

But as the men we mourn today -- these five heroes -- knew better than most, we cannot take the blessings of this nation for granted. Only by working together can we preserve those institutions of family and community, rights and responsibilities, law and self-government that is the hallmark of this nation. For, it turns out, we do not persevere alone. Our character is not found in isolation. Hope does not arise by putting our fellow man down; it is found by lifting others up.

And that’s what I take away from the lives of these outstanding men. The pain we feel may not soon pass, but my faith tells me that they did not die in vain. I believe our sorrow can make us a better country. I believe our righteous anger can be transformed into more justice and more peace. Weeping may endure for a night, but I’m convinced joy comes in the morning. We cannot match the sacrifices made by Officers Zamarripa and Ahrens, Krol, Smith, and Thompson, but surely we can try to match their sense of service. We cannot match their courage, but we can strive to match their devotion.

May God bless their memory. May God bless this country that we love.

# 2016 Democratic National Convention Address

Hello, America!

Hello, Democrats!

So, twelve years ago tonight, I addressed this convention for the very first time.

You met my two little girls, Malia and Sasha -- now two amazing young women who just fill me with pride. You fell for my brilliant wife and partner Michelle, who has made me a better father and a better man; who’s gone on to inspire our nation as First Lady; and who somehow hasn’t aged a day.

I -- I know the same can’t be said for me. My girls remind me all the time: "Wow, you’ve changed so much, daddy." And then they try to clean it up. Yeah. Not bad -- just more mature.

And -- And it’s true: I -- I was so young that first time in Boston. And...look, I'll admit maybe a little nervous addressing such a big crowd. But I was filled with faith, faith in America -- the generous, bighearted, hopeful country that made my story, that made all of our stories possible.

A lot’s happened over the years. And while this nation has been tested by war, and it's been tested recession and all manner of challenges, I stand before you again tonight, after almost two terms as your President, to tell you I am more optimistic about the future of America than every before.

How could I not be after all that we’ve achieved together?

After the worst recession in 80 years, we’ve fought our way back. We’ve seen deficits come down, 401k)s recover, an auto industry set new records, unemployment reach eight-year lows, and our businesses create 15 million new jobs.

After a century of trying, we declared that health care in America is not a privilege for a few; it is a right for everybody.

After decades of talk, we finally began to wean ourselves off foreign oil. We doubled our production of clean energy.

We brought more of our troops home to their families. And we delivered justice to Osama bin Laden.

Through diplomacy, we shut down Iran’s nuclear weapons program.

We opened up a new chapter with the people of Cuba; brought nearly 200 nations together around a climate agreement that could save this planet for our children.

We put policies in place to help students with loans, protect consumers from fraud, cut veteran homelessness almost in half.

And through countless acts of quiet courage, America learned that love has no limits, and marriage equality is now a reality across the land.

By so many measures, our country is stronger and more prosperous than it was when we started. And through every victory and every setback, I’ve insisted that change is never easy, and never quick; that we wouldn’t meet all of our challenges in one term, or one presidency, or even in one lifetime.

So tonight, I’m here to tell you that, yes, we've still got more work to do -- more work to do for every American still in need of a good job or a raise, paid leave or a decent retirement; for every child who needs a sturdier ladder out of poverty or a world-class education; for everyone who has not yet felt the progress of these past seven and a half years. We need to keep making our streets safer, and our criminal justice system fairer; our homeland more secure; our world more peaceful and sustainable for the next generation. We’re not done perfecting our union, or living up to our founding creed -- that all of us are created equal; all of use are free in the eyes of God.

And that work involves a big choice this November. I think it's fair to say, this is not your typical election. It’s not just a choice between parties or policies -- the usual debates between left and right. This is a more fundamental choice -- about who we are as a people, and whether we stay true to this great American experiment in self-government.

Look, we Democrats have always had plenty of differences with the Republican Party, and there’s nothing wrong with that; it’s precisely this contest of idea[s] that pushes our country forward.

But what we heard in Cleveland last week wasn’t particularly Republican -- and it sure wasn’t conservative. What we heard was a deeply pessimistic vision of a country where we turn against each other, and turn away from the rest of the world. There were no serious solutions to pressing problems -- just the fanning of resentment, and blame, and anger, and hate. And that is not the America I know.

The America I know is full of courage and optimism and ingenuity. The America I know is decent and generous. Sure, we have real anxieties about paying the bills, and protecting our kids, caring for a sick parent. We get frustrated with political gridlock, and worry about racial divisions. We are shocked and saddened by the madness of Orlando -- or Nice. There are pockets of America that never recovered from factory closures -- men who took pride in hard work and providing for their families who now feel forgotten; parents who wonder whether their kids will have the same opportunities that we had.

All of that is real. We are challenged to do better; to be better.

But as I’ve traveled this country, through all 50 states, as I’ve rejoiced with you and mourned with you, what I have also seen, more than anything, is what is right with America. I see people working hard and starting businesses. I see people teaching kids and serving our country. I see engineers inventing stuff, doctors coming up with new cures. I see a younger generation full of energy and new ideas, not constrained by what is, ready to seize what ought to be.

And most of all, I see Americans of every party, every background, every faith who believe that we are stronger together -- black, white, Latino, Asian, Native American; young, old; gay, straight; men, women, folks with disabilities, all pledging allegiance, under the same proud flag, to this big, bold country that we love. That's what I see. That's the America I know!

And there is only one candidate in this race who believes in that future, has devoted her life to that future; a mother and a grandmother who would do anything to help our children thrive; a leader with real plans to break down barriers, and blast through glass ceilings, and widen the circle of opportunity to every single American -- the next President of the United States, Hillary Clinton.

Audience: Hillary! Hillary! Hillary!

President Obama: That's right!

Let me tell you, eight years ago, you may remember Hillary and I were rivals for the Democratic nomination. We battled for a year and a half. Let me tell you, it was tough, because Hillary was tough. I was worn out. She was doing everything I was doing, but just like Ginger Rogers, it was backwards in heels. And every time I thought I might have the race won, Hillary just came back stronger.

But after it was all over, I asked Hillary to join my team. And she was a little surprised. Some of my staff was surprised. But ultimately she said yes -- because she knew that what was at stake was bigger than either of us. And for four years -- for four years, I had a front-row seat to her intelligence, her judgment, and her discipline. I came to realize that her unbelievable work ethic wasn’t for praise, it wasn’t for attention -- that she was in this for everyone who needs a champion. I understood that after all these years, she has never forgotten just who she’s fighting for.

Hillary has still got the tenacity that she had as a young woman, working at the Children’s Defense Fund, going door-to-door to ultimately make sure kids with disabilities could get a quality education.

She’s still got the heart she showed as our First Lady, working with Congress to help push through a Children’s Health Insurance Program that to this day protects millions of kids.

She’s still seared with the memory of every American she met who lost loved ones on 9/11 -- which is why, as a Senator from New York, she fought so hard for funding to help first responders, to help the city rebuild; why, as Secretary of State, she sat with me in the Situation Room and forcefully argued in favor of the mission that took out bin Laden.

You know, nothing truly prepares you for the demands of the Oval Office. You can read about it. You can study it. But until you’ve sat at that desk, you don’t know what it’s like to manage a global crisis, or send young people to war. But Hillary has been in the room; she’s been part of those decisions. She knows what’s at stake in the decisions our government makes -- what’s at stake for the working family, for the senior citizen, or the small business owner, for the soldier, for the veteran. And even in the midst of crisis, she listens to people, and she keeps her cool, and she treats everybody with respect. And no matter how daunting the odds, no matter how much people try to knock her down, she never, ever quits.

That is the Hillary I know. That’s the Hillary I’ve come to admire. And that’s why I can say with confidence there has never been a man or a woman -- not me, not Bill, nobody -- more qualified than Hillary Clinton to serve as President of the United States of America.

I hope you don't mind, Bill, but I was just telling the truth, man.

And, by the way, in case you’re wondering about her judgment, take a look at her choice of running mate. Tim Kaine is as good a man, as humble and as committed a public servant as anybody that I know. I know his family. I love Anne. I love their kids. He will be a great Vice President. He will make Hillary a better President -- just like my dear friend and brother, Joe Biden, has made me a better President.

Now, Hillary has real plans to address the concerns she’s heard from you on the campaign trail. She’s got specific ideas to invest in new jobs, to help workers share in their company’s profits, to help put kids in preschool and put students through college without taking on a ton of debt. That’s what leaders do.

And then there’s Donald Trump.

Audience: Booo --

President Obama: Don't boo -- vote.

Audience: Don't boo, vote! Don't boo, vote!

President Obama: You know, the Donald is not really a plans guy. He’s not really a facts guy, either. He calls himself a business guy, which is true, but I have to say, I know plenty of businessmen and women who’ve achieved remarkable success without leaving a trail of lawsuits, and unpaid workers, and people feeling like they got cheated.

Does anyone really believe that a guy who’s spent his 70 years on this Earth showing no regard for working people is suddenly going to be your champion? Your voice?

Audience: Nooo --

President Obama: If so, you should vote for him. But if you’re someone who’s truly concerned about paying your bills, if you're really concerned about pocketbook issues and seeing the economy grow, and creating more opportunity for everybody, then the choice isn’t even close. If you want someone with a lifelong track record of fighting for higher wages, and better benefits, and a fairer tax code, and a bigger voice for workers, and stronger regulations on Wall Street, then you should vote for Hillary Clinton.

If you’re rightly concerned about who’s going to keep you and your family safe in a dangerous world, well, the choice is even clearer. Hillary Clinton is respected around the world -- not just by leaders, but by the people they serve.

I have to say this. People outside of the United States do not understand what’s going on in this election. They really don't. Because they know Hillary. They’ve seen her work. She’s worked closely with our intelligence teams, our diplomats, our military. She has the judgment and the experience and the temperament to meet the threat from terrorism. It’s not new to her. Our troops have pounded ISIL without mercy, taking out their leaders, taking back territory. And I know Hillary won’t relent until ISIL is destroyed. She will finish the job. And she will do it without resorting to torture, or banning entire religions from entering our country. She is fit and she is ready to be the next Commander-in-Chief.

Meanwhile, Donald Trump calls our military a disaster. Apparently, he doesn’t know the men and women who make up the strongest fighting force the world has ever known. He suggests America is weak. He must not hear the billions of men and women and children, from the Baltics to Burma, who still look to America to be the light of freedom and dignity and human rights. He cozies up to Putin, praises Saddam Hussein, tells our NATO allies that stood by our side after 9/11 that they have to pay up if they want our protection.

Well, America’s promises do not come with a price tag. We meet our commitments. We bear our burdens. That’s one of the reasons why almost every country on Earth sees America as stronger and more respected today than they did eight years ago when I took office.

America is already great. America is already strong. And I promise you, our strength, our greatness, does not depend on Donald Trump. In fact, it doesn’t depend on any one person. And that, in the end, may be the biggest difference in this election -- the meaning of our democracy.

Ronald Reagan called America “a shining city on a hill.” Donald Trump calls it “a divided crime scene” that only he can fix. It doesn’t matter to him that illegal immigration and the crime rate are as low as they’ve been in decades -- because he’s not actually offering any real solutions to those issues. He’s just offering slogans, and he’s offering fear. He’s betting that if he scares enough people, he might score just enough votes to win this election.

And that's another bet that Donald Trump will lose. And the reason he'll lose it is because he’s selling the American people short. We're not a fragile people. We're not a frightful people. Our power doesn’t come from some self-declared savior promising that he alone can restore order as long as we do things his way. We don’t look to be ruled. Our power comes from those immortal declarations first put to paper right here in Philadelphia all those years ago: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that We the People, can form a more perfect union.

That's who we are. That’s our birthright -- the capacity to shape our own destiny. That’s what drove patriots to choose revolution over tyranny and our GIs to liberate a continent. It’s what gave women the courage to reach for the ballot, and marchers to cross a bridge in Selma, and workers to organize and fight for collective bargaining and better wages.

America has never been about what one person says he’ll do for us. It’s about what can be achieved by us, together through the hard and slow, and sometimes frustrating, but ultimately enduring work of self-government.

And that’s what Hillary Clinton understands. She knows that this is a big, diverse country. She has seen it. She's traveled. She's talked to folks. And she understands that most issues are rarely black and white. She understands that even when you’re 100 percent right, getting things done requires compromise; that democracy doesn’t work if we constantly demonize each other. She knows that for progress to happen, we have to listen to each other, and see ourselves in each other, and fight for our principles but also fight to find common ground, no matter how elusive that may sometimes seem.

Hillary knows we can work through racial divides in this country when we realize the worry black parents feel when their son leaves the house isn’t so different than what a brave cop’s family feels when he puts on the blue and goes to work; that we can honor police and treat every community fairly. We can do that. And she knows -- she knows that acknowledging problems that have festered for decades isn’t making race relations worse -- it’s creating the possibility for people of goodwill to join and make things better.

Hillary knows we can insist on a lawful and orderly immigration system while still seeing striving students and their toiling parents as loving families, not criminals or rapists; families that came here for the same reason our forebears came -- to work and to study, and to make a better life, in a place where we can talk and worship and love as we please. She knows their dream is quintessentially American, and the American Dream is something no wall will ever contain. These are the things that Hillary knows.

It can be frustrating, this business of democracy. Trust me, I know. Hillary knows, too. When the other side refuses to compromise, progress can stall. People are hurt by the inaction. Supporters can grow impatient and worry that you’re not trying hard enough; that you’ve maybe sold out. But I promise you, when we keep at it, when we change enough minds, when we deliver enough votes, then progress does happen. And if you doubt that, just ask the 20 million more people who have health care today. Just ask the Marine who proudly serves his country without hiding the husband that he loves.

Democracy works, America, but we got to want it -- not just during an election year, but all the days in between.

So if you agree that there’s too much inequality in our economy and too much money in our politics, we all need to be as vocal and as organized and as persistent as Bernie Sanders supporters have been during this election. We all need to get out and vote for Democrats up and down the ticket, and then hold them accountable until they get the job done.

That's right -- feel the Bern!

If you want more justice in the justice system, then we’ve all got to vote -- not just for a President, but for mayors, and sheriffs, and state’s attorneys, and state legislators. That's where the criminal law is made. And we’ve got to work with police and protesters until laws and practices are changed. That's how democracy works.

If you want to fight climate change, we’ve got to engage not only young people on college campuses, we've got to reach out to the coal miner who’s worried about taking care of his family, the single mom worried about gas prices.

If you want to protect our kids and our cops from gun violence, we’ve got to get the vast majority of Americans, including gun owners, who agree on things like background checks to be just as vocal and just as determined as the gun lobby that blocks change through every funeral that we hold. That is how change happens.

Look, Hillary has got her share of critics. She has been caricatured by the right and by some on the left. She has been accused of everything you can imagine -- and some things that you cannot. But she knows that’s what happens when you’re under a microscope for 40 years. She knows that sometimes during those 40 years she’s made mistakes -- just like I have; just like we all do. That’s what happens when we try. That’s what happens when you’re the kind of citizen Teddy Roosevelt once described -- not the timid souls who criticize from the sidelines, but someone “who is actually in the arena…who strives valiantly; who errs…but who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement.”

Hillary Clinton is that woman in the arena. She’s been there for us -- even if we haven’t always noticed. And if you’re serious about our democracy, you can’t afford to stay home just because she might not align with you on every issue. You’ve got to get in the arena with her, because democracy isn’t a spectator sport. America isn’t about “yes, he will.” It’s about “yes, we can.” And we’re going to carry Hillary to victory this fall, because that’s what the moment demands.

Audience: Yes, we can! Yes, we can! Yes, we can!

President Obama: Yes, we can. Not "yes, she can." Not "yes, I can." "Yes, we can."

You know, there’s been a lot of talk in this campaign about what America has lost -- people who tell us that our way of life is being undermined by pernicious changes and dark forces beyond our control. They tell voters there’s a “real America” out there that must be restored. This isn’t an idea, by the way, that started with Donald Trump. It’s been peddled by politicians for a long time -- probably from the start of our Republic.

And it’s got me thinking about the story I told you 12 years ago tonight, about my Kansas grandparents and the things they taught me when I was growing up. See, my grandparents, they came from the heartland. Their ancestors began settling there about 200 years ago. I don’t know if they have their birth certificates -- but they were there. They were Scotch-Irish mostly -- farmers, teachers, ranch hands, pharmacists, oil rig workers. Hardy, small town folks. Some were Democrats, but a lot of them -- maybe even most of them -- were Republicans. Party of Lincoln.

And my grandparents explained that folks in these parts, they didn’t like show-offs. They didn’t admire braggarts or bullies. They didn’t respect mean-spiritedness, or folks who were always looking for shortcuts in life. Instead, what they valued were traits like honesty and hard work, kindness, courtesy, humility, responsibility, helping each other out. That’s what they believed in. True things. Things that last. The things we try to teach our kids.

And what my grandparents understood was that these values weren’t limited to Kansas. They weren’t limited to small towns. These values could travel to Hawaii. They could travel even to the other side of the world, where my mother would end up working to help poor women get a better life; trying to apply those values. My grandparents knew these values weren’t reserved for one race. They could be passed down to a half-Kenyan grandson, or a half-Asian granddaughter. In fact, they were the same values Michelle’s parents, the descendants of slaves, taught their own kids, living in a bungalow on the South Side of Chicago. They knew these values were exactly what drew immigrants here, and they believed that the children of those immigrants were just as American as their own, whether they wore a cowboy hat or a yarmulke, a baseball cap or a hijab.

America has changed over the years. But these values that my grandparents taught me -- they haven’t gone anywhere. They’re as strong as ever, still cherished by people of every party, every race, every faith. They live on in each of us. What makes us American, what makes us patriots is what’s in here. That’s what matters.

And that’s why we can take the food and music and holidays and styles of other countries, and blend it into something uniquely our own. That’s why we can attract strivers and entrepreneurs from around the globe to build new factories and create new industries here. That’s why our military can look the way it does -- every shade of humanity, forged into common service. That’s why anyone who threatens our values, whether fascists or communists or jihadists or homegrown demagogues, will always fail in the end.

That is America. That is America. Those bonds of affection; that common creed. We don’t fear the future; we shape it. We embrace it, as one people, stronger together than we are on our own. That’s what Hillary Clinton understands -- this fighter, this stateswoman, this mother and grandmother, this public servant, this patriot -- that’s the America she’s fighting for.

And that is why I have confidence, as I leave this stage tonight, that the Democratic Party is in good hands. My time in this office, it hasn’t fixed everything. As much as we’ve done, there’s still so much I want to do. But for all the tough lessons I’ve had to learn, for all the places where I’ve fallen short -- I’ve told Hillary, and I’ll tell you, what’s picked me back up every single time: It’s been you. The American people.

It’s the letter I keep on my wall from a survivor in Ohio who twice almost lost everything to cancer, but urged me to keep fighting for health care reform, even when the battle seemed lost. Do not quit.

It’s the painting I keep in my private office, a big-eyed, green owl with blue wings, made by a seven year-old girl who was taken from us in Newtown, given to me by her parents so I wouldn’t forget -- a reminder of all the parents who have turned their grief into action.

It’s the small business owner in Colorado who cut most of his own salary so he wouldn’t have to lay off any of his workers in the recession -- because, he said, “that wouldn’t have been in the spirit of America.”

It’s the conservative in Texas who said he disagreed with me on everything, but he appreciated that, like him, I try to be a good dad.

It’s the courage of the young soldier from Arizona who nearly died on the battlefield in Afghanistan, but who has learned to speak again and walk again -- and earlier this year, stepped through the door of the Oval Office on his own power, to salute and shake my hand.

It is every American who believed we could change this country for the better, so many of you who’d never been involved in politics, who picked up phones and hit the streets, and used the Internet in amazing new ways that I didn’t really understand, but made change happen. You are the best organizers on the planet, and I am so proud of all the change that you made possible.

Time and again, you’ve picked me up. And I hope, sometimes, I picked you up, too. And tonight, I ask you to do for Hillary Clinton what you did for me. I ask you to carry her the same way you carried me. Because you're who I was talking about 12 years ago when I talked about hope. It’s been you who fueled my dogged faith in our future, even when the odds were great; even when the road is long. Hope in the face of difficulty. Hope in the face of uncertainty. The audacity of hope.

America, you've vindicated that hope these past eight years. And now I’m ready to pass the baton and do my part as a private citizen. So this year, in this election, I’m asking you to join me -- to reject cynicism and reject fear, and to summon what is best in us; to elect Hillary Clinton as the next President of the United States, and show the world we still believe in the promise of this great nation.

Thank you for this incredible journey. Let’s keep it going.

God bless you.

God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill 2008)

# Post Security Council Meeting Press Conference on ISIL

Good afternoon, everybody. I just met again with my National Security Council on the campaign to destroy ISIL. I want to thank Secretary Carter and Chairman Dunford -- who just returned from meetings with our coalition partners in the Middle East -- for hosting us and for their continued leadership of our men and women in uniform.

I last updated the American people on our campaign in June, shortly after the horrifying attack in Orlando. In the weeks since, we’ve continued to be relentless in our fight against ISIL -- and on the ground in Syria and Iraq, ISIL continues to lose territory. Tragically, however, we have also seen that ISIL still has the ability to direct and inspire attacks. So we've seen terrible bombings in Iraq and in Jordan, in Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Afghanistan; attacks on an Istanbul airport, a restaurant in Bangladesh, Bastille Day celebrations and a church in France, and a music festival in Germany. In fact, the decline of ISIL in Syria and Iraq appears to be causing it to shift to tactics that we've seen before -- an even greater emphasis on encouraging high-profile terrorist attacks, including in the United States.

As always, our military, diplomatic, intelligence, homeland security and law enforcement professionals are working around the clock -- with other countries and with communities here at home -- to share information and prevent such attacks. And over the years, they’ve prevented many. But as we’ve seen, it is still very difficult to detect and prevent lone actors or small cells of terrorists who are determined to kill the innocent and are willing to die. And that’s why, as we discussed today, we’re going to keep going after ISIL aggressively across every front of this campaign.

Our air campaign continues to hammer ISIL targets. More than 14,000 strikes so far. More than 100,000 sorties --including those hitting the ISIL core in Raqqa and in Mosul. And in stark contrast to ISIL -- which uses civilians as human shields -- America’s armed forces will continue to do everything in our power to avoid civilian casualties. With our extraordinary technology, we’re conducting the most precise air campaign in history. After all, it is the innocent civilians of Syria and Iraq who are suffering the most and who need to be saved from ISIL’s terror. And so when there are allegations of civilian casualties, we take them very seriously. We work to find the facts, to be transparent, and to hold ourselves accountable for doing better in the future.

We continue to take out senior ISIL leaders and commanders. This includes ISIL’s deputy minister of war, Basim Muhammad al-Bajari; a top commander in Mosul, Hatim Talib al-Hamdani; and, in yet another significant loss for ISIL, its minister of war, Umar al-Shishani. None of ISIL’s leaders are safe -- and we are going to keep going after them.

On the ground in Iraq, local forces keep pushing ISIL back. In a major success, Iraqi forces, with coalition support, finally liberated Fallujah. Now they’re clearing ISIL fighters from more areas up the Euphrates Valley, and Iraqi forces retook the strategic airbase at Qayyarah -- just 40 miles from Mosul, now the last major ISIL stronghold in Iraq. Given this success, the additional 560 U.S. support personnel that I ordered to Iraq last month will help turn this base into a logistical hub and launch pad for Iraqi forces as they push into Mosul.

Meanwhile, in Syria, a coalition of local forces -- backed by our Special Operations Forces and airstrikes -- continues to take the fight to ISIL as well. The coalition is fighting its way into the town of Manbij -- a gateway for ISIL fighters coming in and terrorists heading out to attack Europe, which is why ISIL is fighting hard to hold it. As ISIL is beaten back, we’re gaining vast amounts of intelligence -- thousands of documents, thumb drives, digital files -- which we will use to keep destroying ISIL’s networks and stop foreign fighters. We also continue to intensify our efforts against al Qaida in Syria, which -- no matter what name it calls itself -- cannot be allowed to maintain a safe haven to train and plot attacks against us.

I do want to step back and note the broader progress that has been made in this campaign so far. Two years ago, ISIL was racing across Iraq, to the outskirts of Baghdad itself, and, to many observers, ISIL looked invincible. Since then, in Iraq, ISIL has lost at the Mosul Dam, at Tikrit, at Baiji, at Sinjar, at Ramadi, at Hit, at Rutbah and now Fallujah. In Syria, ISIL has lost at Kobani and Tal Abyad and the Tishrin Dam and al-Shaddadi. ISIL has lost territory across vast stretches of the border with Turkey and almost all major transit routes into Raqqa. And in both Iraq and Syria, ISIL has not been able to reclaim any significant territory that they have lost.

So I want to repeat -- ISIL has not had a major successful offensive operation in either Syria or Iraq in a full year. Even ISIL’s leaders know they’re going to keep losing. In their message to followers, they’re increasingly acknowledging that they may lose Mosul and Raqqa. And ISIL is right, they will lose them. And we’ll keep hitting them and pushing them back and driving them out until they do. In other words, ISIL turns out not to be invincible -- they’re, in fact, inevitably, going to be defeated.

But we do recognize at the same time that the situation is complex. And this cannot be solved by military force alone. That's why, last month, the United States and countries around the world pledged more than $2 billion in new funds to help Iraqis stabilize and rebuild their communities. It’s why we’re working with Iraq so that the military campaign to liberate Mosul is matched with humanitarian and political efforts to protect civilians and promote inclusive governance and development so ISIL cannot return by exploiting divisions or new grievances.

In Syria, as I’ve repeatedly said, defeating ISIL and al Qaeda requires an end to the civil war and the Assad regime’s brutality against the Syrian people, which pushes people into the arms of extremists. The regime and its allies continue to violate the Cessation of Hostilities, including with vicious attacks on defenseless civilians, medieval sieges against cities like Aleppo, and blocking food from reaching families that are starving. It is deplorable. And the depravity of the Syrian regime has rightly earned the condemnation of the world.

Russia's direct involvement in these actions over the last several weeks raises very serious questions about their commitment to pulling the situation back from the brink. The U.S. remains prepared to work with Russia to try to reduce the violence and strengthen our efforts against ISIL and al Qaeda in Syria. But so far, Russia has failed to take the necessary steps. Given the deteriorating situation, it is time for Russia to show that it is serious about pursuing these objectives.

Beyond Syria and Iraq, we’ll keep working with allies and partners to go after ISIL wherever it tries to spread. At the request of Libya’s Government of National Accord, we are conducting strikes in support of government-aligned forces as they fight to retake Sirte from ISIL, and we will continue to support the government’s efforts to secure their country.

In Afghanistan, one of the reasons that I decided to largely maintain our current force posture was so that we could keep eliminating ISIL’s presence there -- and we delivered another blow last month when we took out a top ISIL leader in Afghanistan, Umar Khalifa.

Finally, it should be clear by now -- and no one knows this better than our military leaders -- that even as we need to crush ISIL on the battlefield, their military defeat will not be enough. So long as their twisted ideology persists and drives people to violence, then groups like ISIL will keep emerging and the international community will continue to be at risk in getting sucked into the kind of global whack-a-mole where we’re always reacting to the latest threat or lone actor. That’s why we’re also working to counter violent extremism more broadly -- including the social, economic and political factors that help fuel groups like ISIL and al Qaeda in the first place.

Nothing will do more to discredit ISIL and its phony claims to being a caliphate than when it loses its base in Raqqa and in Mosul. And we're going to keep working with partners -- including Muslim countries and communities -- especially online -- to expose ISIL for what they are: murderers who kill innocent people, including Muslim families and children as they break their Ramadan fast, and who set off bombs in Medina near the Prophet’s Mosque, one of the holiest sites in Islam.

Moreover, we refuse to let terrorists and voices of division undermine the unity and the values of diversity and pluralism that keep our nation strong. One of the reasons that America’s armed forces are the best in the world is because we draw on the skills and the talents of all of our citizens, from all backgrounds and faiths, including patriotic Muslim Americans who risk and give their lives for our freedom. And I think the entire world was inspired this past Sunday, when Muslims across France joined their Catholic neighbors at Mass and, in a moving display of solidarity, prayed together. The greeting they extended to each other has to be the message we echo in all of our countries and all of our communities -- peace be with you, and also with you.

Now, before I take some questions, I also want to say a few words on another topic. As our public health experts have been warning for some time, we are now seeing the first locally transmitted cases of the Zika virus by mosquitoes in the continental United States. This was predicted and predictable. So far, we've seen 15 cases in the Miami area. We're taking this extremely seriously. Our CDC experts are on the ground working shoulder-to-shoulder with Florida health authorities. There’s a very aggressive effort underway to control mosquitoes there. And pregnant women have been urged to stay away from the particular neighborhood that we’re focused on. We’ll keep working as one team -- federal, state and local -- to try to slow and limit the spread of the virus.

I do want to be very clear, though, our public health experts do not expect to see the kind of widespread outbreaks of Zika here that we’ve seen in Brazil or in Puerto Rico. The kind of mosquitoes that are most likely to carry Zika are limited to certain regions of our country. But we cannot be complacent because we do expect to see more Zika cases. And even though the symptoms for most people are mild -- many may never even know that they have it -- we’ve seen that the complications for pregnant women and their babies can be severe. So I, again, want to encourage every American to learn what they can do to help stop Zika by going to CDC.gov.

In addition, Congress needs to do its job. Fighting Zika costs money. Helping Puerto Rico deal with its Zika crisis costs money. Research into new vaccines -- and, by the way, NIH just announced the first clinical trials in humans -- that costs money. And that’s why my administration proposed an urgent request for more funding back in February. Not only did the Republican-led Congress not pass our request -- they worked to cut it. And then they left for summer recess without passing any new funds for the fight against Zika.

Meanwhile, our experts at the NIH and CDC -- the folks on the frontlines -- have been doing their best and making do by moving funds from other areas. But now the money that we need to fight Zika is rapidly running out. The situation is getting critical. For instance, without sufficient funding, NIH critical trials -- clinical trials and the possibilities of a vaccine -- which is well within reach -- could be delayed.

So this is not the time for politics. More than 40 U.S. servicemembers have now contracted Zika overseas. In 50 U.S. states, we know of more than 1,800 cases of Zika connected to travel to infected areas, and that includes nearly 500 pregnant women. Zika is now present in almost every part of Puerto Rico. And now we have the first local transmission in Florida -- and there will certainly be more.

And meanwhile, Congress is on a summer recess. A lot of folks talk about protecting Americans from threats. Well, Zika is a serious threat to Americans, especially babies -- right now. So, once again, I want to urge the American people to call their members of Congress and tell them to do their job, deal with this threat, help protect the American people from Zika.

With that, I'm going to take some questions. I'm going to start with someone who just assumed the second-most powerful office in the land -- Jeff Mason -- the new Correspondents’ Association president -- also from Reuters.

Jeff.

Question: Thank you, sir. Hardly powerful. And happy birthday.

President Obama: Thank you very much.

Question: As Islamic State loses territory, you and other officials have said that it is becoming a more traditional terrorist group. Are you satisfied that the United States and its allies have shifted strategy sufficiently to address that change?

And secondly, given your comments this week about Donald Trump’s volatility and lack of fitness to be President, are you concerned that he will be receiving security briefings about ISIS and other sensitive national security issues?

President Obama: I’m never satisfied with our response, because if you’re satisfied that means the problem is solved, and it’s not. So we just spent a couple hours meeting with my top national security folks to look at what more can be done.

It is absolutely necessary for us to defeat ISIL in Iraq and Syria. It is not sufficient, but it is necessary. Because so long as they have those bases, they can use their propaganda to suggest that somehow there’s still some caliphate being born, and that can insinuate itself then in the minds of folks who may be willing to travel there or carry out terrorist attacks. It’s also destabilizing for countries in the region at a time when the region is already unstable.

So I am pleased with the progress that we’ve made on the ground in Iraq and Syria. We’re far from freeing Mosul and Raqqa. But what we’ve shown is, is that when it comes to conventional fights, ISIL can be beaten with partners on the ground so long as they’ve got the support from coalition forces that we’ve been providing.

In the meantime, though, you’re seeing ISIL carry out external terrorist acts, and they’ve learned something they’ve adapted from al Qaeda, which had a much more centralized operation and tried to plan very elaborate attacks. And what ISIL has figured out is that if they can convince a handful of people, or even one person, to carry out an attack on a subway or at a parade or some other public venue and kill scores of people, as opposed to thousands of people, it still creates the kinds of fear and concern that elevates their profile.

So, in some ways, rooting out these networks for smaller, less complicated attacks is tougher, because it doesn’t require as many resources on their part or preparation. But it does mean that we’ve got to do even more to generate the intelligence and to work with our partners in order to degrade those networks.

And the fact is, is that those networks will probably sustain themselves even after ISIL is defeated in Raqqa and Mosul. But what we’ve learned from our efforts to defeat al Qaeda is that if we stay on it, our intelligence gets better, and we adapt as well. And eventually, we will dismantle these networks also.

This is part of the reason why, however, it is so important for us to keep our eye on the ball and not panic, not succumb to fear. Because ISIL can’t defeat the United States of America or our NATO partners. We can defeat ourselves, though, if we make bad decisions. And we have to understand that as painful and as tragic as these attacks are, that we are going to keep on grinding away, preventing them wherever we can, using a whole-of-government effort to knock down their propaganda, to disrupt their networks, to take their key operatives off the battlefield, and that eventually we will win.

But if we start making bad decisions -- indiscriminately killing civilians, for example, in some of these areas, instituting offensive religious tests on who can enter the country -- those kinds of strategies can end up backfiring. Because in order for us to ultimately win this fight, we cannot frame this as a clash of civilizations between the West and Islam. That plays exactly into the hands of ISIL and the perversions -- the perverse interpretations of Islam that they’re putting forward.

As far as Mr. Trump, we are going to go by the law, which is that -- in both tradition and the law -- that if somebody is the nominee, the Republican nominee for President, they need to get a security briefing so that if they were to win, they are not starting from scratch in terms of being prepared for this office.

And I’m not going to go into details of the nature of the security briefings that both candidates receive. What I will say is that they have been told these are classified briefings. And if they want to be President, they got to start acting like President, and that means being able to receive these briefings and not spread them around. Question: Are you worried about that?

President Obama: Well, I think I’ve said enough on that.

Mary Bruce. Question: Thank you, Mr. President. What is your response to critics who say the $400 million in cash that you sent to Iran was a ransom payment? Was it really, simply a pure coincidence that a sum that was -- a payment that was held up for almost four decades was suddenly sent at the exact same time that the American prisoners were released? And can you assure the American people that none of that money went to support terrorism?

President Obama: Okay. It’s been interesting to watch this story surface. Some of you may recall we announced these payments in January -- many months ago. There wasn’t a secret. We announced them to all of you. Josh did a briefing on them. This wasn’t some nefarious deal. And at the time we explained that Iran had pressed a claim before an international tribunal about them recovering money of theirs that we had frozen; that, as a consequence of its working its way through the international tribunal, it was the assessment of our lawyers that we were now at a point where there was significant litigation risk and we could end up costing ourselves billions of dollars. It was their advice and suggestion that we settle. And that's what these payments represent. And it wasn’t a secret. We were completely open with everybody about it. And it’s interesting to me how suddenly this became a story again. That's point number one.

Point number two, we do not pay ransom for hostages. We've got a number of Americans being held all around the world. And I meet with their families, and it is heartbreaking. And we have stood up an entire section of interagency experts who devote all their time to working with these families to get these Americans out.

But those families know that we have a policy that we don't pay ransom. And the notion that we would somehow start now in this high-profile way and announce it to the world -- even as we're looking into the faces of other hostage families whose loved ones are being held hostage and say to them that we don't pay ransom -- defies logic. So that's point number two.

We do not pay ransom. We didn't here. And we don't -- we won’t in the future -- precisely because if we did, then we would start encouraging Americans to be targeted, much in the same way that some countries that do pay ransom end up having a lot more of their citizens being taken by various groups.

Point number three is that the timing of this was, in fact, dictated by the fact that as a consequence of us negotiating around the nuclear deal, we actually had diplomatic negotiations and conversations with Iran for the first time in several decades. So the issue is not so much that it was a coincidence as it is that we were able to have a direction discussion.

John Kerry could meet with the foreign minister, which meant that our ability to clear accounts on a number of different issues at the same time converged. And it was important for us to take advantage of that opportunity both to deal with this litigation risk that had been raised -- it was important for us to make sure that we finished the job on the Iran nuclear deal -- and since we were in a conversation with them, it was important for us to be able to push them hard in getting these Americans out.

And let me make a final point on this. It's now been well over a year since the agreement with Iran to stop its nuclear program was signed. And by all accounts, it has worked exactly the way we said it was going to work. You will recall that there were all these horror stories about how Iran was going to cheat, and this wasn't going to work, and Iran was going to get $150 billion to finance terrorism and all these kinds of scenarios. And none of them have come to pass.

And it's not just the assessment of our intelligence community. It's the assessment of the Israeli military and intelligence community -- the country that was most opposed to this deal -- that acknowledges this has been a game-changer, and that Iran has abided by the deal, and that they no longer have the sort of short-term breakout capacity that would allow them to develop nuclear weapons.

So what I'm interested in is, if there's some news to be made, why not have some of these folks who were predicting disaster say, you know what, this thing actually worked? Now that would be a shock. That would be impressive, if some of these folks who had said the sky is falling suddenly said, you know what, we were wrong and we are glad that Iran no longer has the capacity to break out in short term and develop a nuclear weapon. But, of course, that wasn't going to happen.

Instead, what we have is the manufacturing of outrage in a story that we disclosed in January. And the only bit of news that is relevant on this is the fact that we paid cash -- which brings me to my last point. The reason that we had to give them cash is precisely because we are so strict in maintaining sanctions and we do not have a banking relationship with Iran that we couldn't send them a check and we could not wire the money.

And it is not at all clear to me why it is that cash, as opposed to a check or a wire transfer, has made this into a new story. Maybe because it kind of feels like some spy novel or some crime novel because cash was exchanged. The reason cash was exchanged is because we don't have a banking relationship with Iran -- which is precisely part of the pressure that we're able to apply to them so that they would ship a whole bunch of nuclear material out and close down a bunch of facilities that, as I remember, two years ago, three years ago, five years ago, was people's top fear and priority that we make sure Iran doesn't have breakout nuclear capacity. They don't. This worked.

Josh Lederman.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Repeatedly now, Donald Trump has said that this election will be rigged against him, challenging really the core foundation of our democratic system. Can you promise the American people that this election will be conducted in a fair way? And are you worried that comments like his could erode the public's faith in the outcome of the election? And if he does win, given that you have just declared him "unfit," what will you say to the American people?

President Obama: Well, at the end of the day, it's the American people's decision. I have one vote. I have the same vote you do. I have the vote that all the voters who are eligible all across the country have. I've offered my opinion, but ultimately it's the American people's decision to make collectively. And if somebody wins the election and they are President, then my constitutional responsibility is to peacefully transfer power to that individual and do everything I can to help them succeed.

It is -- I don't even really know where to start on answering this question. Of course the elections will not be rigged. What does that mean? The federal government doesn't run the election process. States and cities and communities all across the country, they are the ones who set up the voting systems and the voting booths. And if Mr. Trump is suggesting that there is a conspiracy theory that is being propagated across the country, including in places like Texas, where typically it's not Democrats who are in charge of voting booths, that's ridiculous. That doesn't make any sense. And I don't think anybody would take that seriously.

Now, we do take seriously -- as we always do -- our responsibilities to monitor and preserve the integrity of the voting process. If we see signs that a voting machine or system is vulnerable to hacking, then we inform those local authorities who are running the elections that they need to be careful. If we see jurisdictions that are violating federal laws in terms of equal access and aren't providing ramps for disabled voters, or are discriminating in some fashion, or are otherwise violating civil rights laws, then the Justice Department will come in and take care of that.

But this will be an election like every other election. And I think all of us at some points in our lives have played sports or maybe just played in a schoolyard or a sandbox. And sometimes folks, if they lose, they start complaining that they got cheated. But I've never heard of somebody complaining about being cheated before the game was over, or before the score is even tallied. So my suggestion would be go out there and try to win the election.

If Mr. Trump is up 10 or 15 points on Election Day and ends up losing, then maybe he can raise some questions. That doesn’t seem to be the case at the moment.

Barbara Starr.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. On the question of ISIS expansion that you've been talking about, because you see them expanding around the world, because you see them trying to inspire attacks, what is your current level of concern about the homeland? You talk about the protection measures, but what is your assessment about the possibility your own intelligence advisors suggest is possible about the direct ISIS threat to Americans? And if I may follow up somewhat along the same lines, what is your assessment today as you stand here about whether Donald Trump can be trusted with America's nuclear weapons?

President Obama: On your second question -- and I'll sort of address this to any additional Trump questions -- I would ask all of you to just make your own judgment. I've made this point already multiple times. Just listen to what Mr. Trump has to say and make your own judgment with respect to how confident you feel about his ability to manage things like our nuclear triad.

Question: With respect, sir, it suggests that you're not confident.

President Obama: Well, as I recall, I just answered a question about this a couple days ago and I thought I made myself pretty clear. And I don’t want to just keep on repeating it, or a variation on it. I obviously have a very strong opinion about the two candidates who are running here. One is very positive and one is not so much. And I think that you will just hear -- any further questions that are directed at this subject I think you'll hear pretty much variations on the same theme.

What I can say is that this is serious business. And the person who is in the Oval Office and who our Secretary of Defense and our Joint Chiefs of Staff and our outstanding men and women in uniform report to, they are counting on somebody who has the temperament and good judgment to be able to make decisions to keep America safe. And that should be very much on the minds of voters when they go into the voting booth in November.

In terms of the threat that ISIL poses to the homeland, I think it is serious. We take it seriously. And as I said earlier, precisely because they are less concerned about big, spectacular 9/11-style attacks, because they've seen the degree of attention they can get with smaller-scale attacks using small arms or assault rifles, or, in the case of Nice, France, a truck, the possibility of either a lone actor or a small cell carrying out an attack that kills people is real.

And that's why our intelligence and law enforcement and military officials are working around the clock to try to anticipate potential attacks, to obtain the threads of people who might be vulnerable to brainwashing by ISIL. We are constrained here in the United States to carry out this work in a way that's consistent with our laws and presumptions of innocence. And the fact that we prevent a lot of these attacks as effectively as we do, without a lot of fanfare and abiding by our law, is a testament to the incredible work that these folks are doing. They work really hard at it. But it is always a risk.

And some of you may have read the article in The New York Times today -- I guess it came out last night online -- about this individual in Germany who had confessed and given himself up, and then explained his knowledge of how ISIL’s networks worked. There was a paragraph in there that some may have caught, which we don't know for a fact that this is true, but according to this reporting, the individual indicated that ISIL recognizes it’s harder to get its operatives into the United States, but the fact that we have what he referred to as “open gun laws” meant that anybody, as long as they didn't have a criminal record that barred them from purchase, could go in and buy weapons -- that made sort of a homegrown extremist strategy more attractive to them. And those are the hardest to stop because, by definition, if somebody doesn't have a record, if it’s not triggering something, it means that anticipating their actions becomes that much more difficult.

And this is why the military strategy that we have in Syria and Iraq is necessary, but it is not sufficient. We have to do a better job of disrupting networks. And those networks are more active in Europe than they are here. But we don't know what we don't know, and so it’s conceivable that there are some networks here that could be activated. But we also have to get to the messaging that can reach a troubled individual over the Internet and do a better job of disrupting that. And what I’ve told my team is that, although we've been working on this now for five, six, seven years, we've got to put more resources into it. This can't be an afterthought. It’s something that we have to really focus on.

This is also why how we work with the Muslim American community, the values that we affirm about their patriotism and their sacrifice and our fellow feeling with them is so important. One of the reasons that we don’t have networks and cells that are as active here as they are in certain parts of Europe is because the Muslim American community in this country is extraordinarily patriotic and largely successful, and fights in our military, and serves as our doctors and our nurses, and there are communities in which they are raising their kids with love of country and a rejection of violence. And that has to be affirmed consistently. And if we screw that up, then we’re going to have bigger problems.

Gregory Korte of USA Today.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Yesterday, you commuted the sentences of 214 federal inmates. It was the largest single-day grant of commutations in the history of the American presidency. So I wanted to ask you a couple of questions about your clemency thought process.

One is, you’ve talked about this as low-level drug offenders who got mandatory minimum sentences, but about a quarter of the commutations you’ve made also had firearms offenses. Given your overall philosophy on firearms, can you reconcile that for us? And given that previously in your presidency you had sent a memo to the Office of Pardon Attorney saying there was sort of a predisposition against firearms to be granted clemency, why did you change your mind on that?

Also, the other side of the ledger here is pardons. You’ve granted more commutations than any President since Calvin Coolidge. You’ve granted fewer pardons than any two-term President since John Adams. Why is that? Is the focus on commutations taking energy away from pardons, especially since these are -- you’ve talked about second chances; a full pardon would give people a better chance at those second chances.

President Obama: Good.

Question: And then finally, just one other thing on pardons. Many of your predecessors in the final days of their presidency have saved -- reserved that for their more politically sensitive pardons. Should we expect you to do that? Or would you rule that out? Thanks.

President Obama: Okay. I appreciate the question, Gregory, because I haven’t had a chance to talk about this much and this is an effort that I’m really proud of.

It is my view, shared by Democrats and Republicans alike in many quarters, that as successful as we’ve been in reducing crime in this country, the extraordinary rate of incarceration of nonviolent offenders has created its own set of problems that are devastating. Entire communities have been ravaged where largely men, but some women, are taken out of those communities. Kids are now growing up without parents. It perpetuates a cycle of poverty and disorder in their lives. It is disproportionately young men of color that are being arrested at higher rates, charged and convicted at higher rates, and imprisoned for longer sentences.

And so ultimately, the fix on this is criminal justice reform. And I still hold out hope that the bipartisan effort that’s taking place in Congress can finish the job and we can have a criminal justice system, at least at the federal level, that is both smart on crime, effective on crime, but recognizes the need for proportionality in sentencing and the need to rehabilitate those who commit crimes.

But even as that slow process of criminal justice reform goes forward, what I wanted to see is we could reinvigorate the pardon process and commutation process that had become stalled over the course of several years -- partly because it’s politically risky. You commute somebody and they commit a crime, and the politics of it are tough. And everybody remembers the Willie Horton ad.

And so the bias I think of my predecessors and, frankly, a number of my advisors early in my presidency is, be careful about that. But I thought it was very important for us to send a clear message that we believe in the principles behind criminal justice reform even if ultimately we need legislation.

So we have focused more on commutations than we have on pardons. I would argue, Gregory, that by the time I leave office, the number of pardons that we grant will be roughly in line with what other Presidents have done. But standing up this commutations process has required a lot of effort and a lot of energy, and it’s not like we got a new slug of money to do it. So you’ve got limited resources. The primary job of the Justice Department is to prevent crime and to convict those who have committed crimes and to keep the American people safe. And that means that you’ve had this extraordinary and Herculean effort by a lot of people inside the Justice Department to go above and beyond what they’re doing to also review these petitions that have been taking place. And we’ve been able to get bar organizations around the country to participate, to kind of screen and help people apply.

And what we -- the main criteria that I’ve tried to set is if under today’s laws -- because there have been changes in how we charge nonviolent drug offenses -- if under today’s charges, their sentences would be substantially lower than the charges that they received, if they got a life sentence but a U.S. attorney or the Justice Department indicates that today they’d be likely to get 20 years and they’ve already served 25, then what we try to do is to screen through and find those individuals who have paid their debt to society, that have behaved themselves and tried to reform themselves while incarcerated, and we think have a good chance of being able to use that second chance well.

On the firearms issue, what I've done is to try to screen out folks who seem to have a propensity for violence. And so -- and these are just hypotheticals, but there may be a situation where a kid at 18 was a member of a gang, had a firearm, did not use it in the offense that he was charged in, there's no evidence that he used it in any violence offense, it's still a firearms charge in enhancement, but he didn't use it. He's now 48 -- or 38, 20 years later, and has a unblemished prison record, has gone back to school, gotten his GED, has gone through drug treatment, has the support of the original judge that presided, the support of the U.S. attorney that charged him, support of the warden, has a family that loves him. And in that situation, the fact that he had 20 years early an enhancement because he had a firearm is different than a situation where somebody has engaged in armed robbery and shot somebody. In those cases, that is still something that I'm concerned about.

Our focus really has been on people who we think were overcharged and people who we do not believe have a propensity towards violence.

And in terms of your last question about sort of last-minute pardons that are granted, the process that I put in place is not going to vary depending on how close I get to the election. So it's going to be reviewed by the pardon attorney, it will be reviewed by my White House counsel, and I'm going to, as best as I can, make these decisions based on the merits, as opposed to political considerations.

And finally, Jim Miklaszewski is retiring after 30 years at NBC. He has done an outstanding job, mostly covering the Department of Defense. This may be my last press conference here, so I just wanted to thank Jim for the extraordinary career that he's had and the great job that he's done. And he gets the last question.

Question: Thank you very much, Mr. President.

President Obama: You bet.

Question: First, back to ISIS and Iran and Syria. Your very own national counterterrorism operation has found that despite all of the decisive defeats that the U.S. and coalition have dealt ISIS on the battlefield, that they've expanded their threat worldwide to include as many as 18 operational bases. In the six years you've been dealing, do you feel any personal disappointment that there hasn't been more progress? And in any discussions you've had with the U.S. military and your intelligence agencies, have you come up with any new ideas on how to deal or defeat ISIS?

President Obama: Every time there is a terrorist attack I feel disappointment because I'd like to prevent all of them. And that's true not just when the attacks are in Europe or in the United States. When you read stories about attacks in Lebanon or Iraq or Afghanistan or distant parts of the world that don't get as much attention, they get my attention because that's somebody's kid and that's somebody's mom and that's somebody who was just going about his business, and mindlessly, senselessly, this person was murdered.

So I haven't gotten numb to it. It bugs me whenever it happens and wherever it happens. And we are constantly pushing ourselves to see are there additional ideas that we can deploy to defeat this threat.

Now, it is important that we recognize terrorism as a tactic has been around for a long time. And if you look at the '70s or the '80s or the '90s, there was some terrorist activity somewhere in the world that was brutal. And as much as I would like to say that during my eight-year presidency we could have eliminated terrorism completely, it's not surprising that that hasn't happened and I don't expect that will happen under the watch of my successors.

I do think that because of our extraordinary efforts, the homeland is significantly safer than it otherwise would be. Now, in some ways this is arguing the counterfactuals, but the attacks we prevent I take great satisfaction in, and I am grateful for the extraordinary work that our teams do. I don't think there's any doubt that had we not destroyed al Qaeda in the FATA that more Americans would have been killed, and we might have seen more attacks like we saw on 9/11. And we have maintained vigilance, recognizing that those threats still remain, those aspirations in the minds of these folks still remain, but it is much harder for them to carry out large-scale attacks like that than it used to be.

What we have seen is that these lower-level attacks carried out by fewer operatives or an individual with less sophisticated and less expensive weapons can do real damage. And that, I think, points to the need for us to not just have a military strategy, not just have a traditional counterterrorism strategy that's designed to bust up networks and catch folks before they carry out their attacks -- although those still are necessary, and we have to be more and more sophisticated about how we carry those out, it still requires us to have much greater cooperation with our partners around the world -- but it points to the fact that we're going to have to do a better job in draining the ideology that is behind these attacks, that right now is emanating largely out of the Middle East and a very small fraction of the Muslim world a perversion of Islam that has taken root and has been turbocharged over the Internet, and that is appealing to even folks who don’t necessarily know anything about Islam and aren’t even practicing Islam in any serious way, but have all kinds of psychosis and latch on to this as some way of being important and magnifying themselves.

And that's tougher because that involves both changes in geopolitics in places like Syria. It requires cultural changes in regions like the Middle East and North Africa that are going through generational changes and shifts as the old order collapses. It requires psychology and thinking about how do these messages of hate reach individuals and are there ways in which we can intervene ahead of time. And all that work is being done. And we've got the very best people at it, and each day they're making a difference in saving lives -- not just here, but around the world.

But it's a challenge precisely because if you're successful 99 percent of the time, that 1 percent can still mean heartbreak for families. And it's difficult because in a country, let's say, of 300 million people here in the United States, if 99.9 percent of people are immune from this hateful ideology but one-tenth of 1 percent are susceptible to it, that's a lot of dangerous people running around. And we can't always anticipate them ahead of time because they may not have criminal records. So this is going to be a challenge.

I just want to end on the point that I made earlier. How we react to this is as important as the efforts we take to destroy ISIL, prevent these networks from penetrating. You can't separate those two things out. The reason it's called terrorism, as opposed to just a standard war, is that these are weak enemies that can't match us in conventional power, but what they can do is make us scared. And when societies get scared, they can react in ways that undermine the fabric of our society. It makes us weaker and makes us more vulnerable, and creates politics that divide us in ways that hurt us over the long term.

And so if we remain steady and steadfast and vigilant, but also take the long view and maintain perspective and remind ourselves of who we are and what we care about most deeply, and what we cherish and what's good about this country, and what's good about the international order and civilization that was built in part because of the sacrifices of our men and women after a 20th century full of world war -- if we remember that, then we're going to be okay. But we're still going to see, episodically, these kinds of tragedies, and we're going to have to keep working on until we make things better.

Question: If I may, Mr. President --

President Obama: You may only because this is your retirement.

Question: I was hoping you'd --

President Obama: But I hope it's not too long because --

Question: No, no --

President Obama: -- I'm going to be late for my birthday dinner.

Question:

You alluded earlier to the negotiations between the U.S. and Russia over some military-to-military cooperation in Syria against some of the militant forces there, presumably in exchange for whatever Russian influence could be imposed on the Assad regime for a variety of reasons. Now, I’m sure you're not surprised that some in the military are not supportive of that deal. Some European allies think it would be a deal with the devil. What makes you so confident that you can trust the Russians and Vladimir Putin?

President Obama: I’m not confident that we can trust the Russians and Vladimir Putin, which is why we have to test whether or not we can get an actual Cessation of Hostilities that includes an end to the kinds of aerial bombing and civilian death and destruction that we've seen carried out by the Assad regime. And Russia may not be able to get there either because they don't want to or because they don't have sufficient influence over Assad. And that's what we're going to test.

So we go into this without any blinders on. We're very clear that Russia has been willing to support a murderous regime and an individual, in Assad, who has destroyed his country just to cling on to power. What started with peaceful protests has led to a shattering of an entire pretty advanced society. And so whenever you're trying to broker any kind of deal with an individual like that, or a country like that, you got to go in there with some skepticism.

On the other hand, if we are able to get a genuine Cessation of Hostilities that prevents indiscriminate bombing, that protects civilians, that allows humanitarian access and creates some sort of pathway to begin the hard work of political negotiations inside of Syria, then we have to try -- because the alternative is a perpetuation of civil war.

I’ve been wrestling with this now for a lot of years. I am pretty confident that a big chunk of my gray hair comes out of my Syria meetings. And there is not a meeting that I don't end by saying is there something else we could be doing that we haven’t thought of. Is there a plan F, G, H that we think would lead to a resolution of this issue so that the Syrian people can put their lives back together and we can bring peace and relieve the refugee crisis that's taken place. And the options are limited when you have a civil war like this, when you have a ruler who doesn't care about his people, when you've got terrorist organizations that are brutal and would impose their own kind of dictatorship on people, and you have a moderate opposition and ordinary civilians who are often outgunned and outmanned. And that's a very difficult situation to deal with. But we've got to give it a chance.

There are going to be some bottom lines that we expect for us to cooperate with Russia beyond the sort of de-confliction that we're currently doing. And that means restraint on the part of the regime that so far has not been forthcoming.

Early on in this version of the Cessation of Hostilities, we probably saw some lives saved and some lessening of violence. The violations of this cessation have grown to the point where it just barely exists, particularly up in the northwestern part of the country. So we're going to test and see if we can get something that sticks. And if not, then Russia will have shown itself very clearly to be an irresponsible actor on the world stage that is supporting a murderous regime and will have to answer to that on the international stage.

All right? Thank you very much, everybody.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Baton Rouge Flooding Press Statement and Q&A

Well, to begin with, I just want to say thank you to the outstanding officials behind me who have been on the ground, working 24/7 since this flood happened. It begins with outstanding leadership from the top -- with Governor John Bel Edwards. And we very much appreciate all the outstanding work he’s done. His better half, the First Lady of Louisiana, I know has been by his side every step of the way, and we are grateful for her. I know they’ve got their own cleaning-up to do because the Governor’s Mansion was flooded as well.

In addition, I want to acknowledge Senator Bill Cassidy; Senator David Vitter; Representative Garret Graves; Representative Cedric Richmond; the Mayor of Baton Rouge, Kip Holden; and somebody who I can't brag enough about, one of the best hires I made as President -- the Administrator of FEMA, Craig Fugate, who has done such an outstanding job not just in dealing with this particular incident, but has really rebuilt FEMA so that there’s a change of culture. And everybody knows that when a disaster happens, FEMA is going to be there on the ground, cooperating with state and local officials rapidly and with attention to detail, and keeping the families who’ve been affected uppermost in their minds. So we very much appreciate everything Craig has done.

It's hard, by the way, for Craig to be here because he’s a Florida Gator -- and he’s been seeing a lot of LSU T-shirts as we've been passing by.

I just had a chance to see some of the damage from the historic floods here in Louisiana. I come here, first and foremost, to say that the prayers of the entire nation are with everybody who lost loved ones. We are heartbroken by the loss of life. There are also people who are still desperately trying to track down friends and family. We’re going to keep on helping them every way that we can.

As I think anybody who can see just the streets, much less the inside of the homes here, people’s lives have been upended by this flood. Local businesses have suffered some terrible damage. Families have, in some cases, lost homes. They’ve certainly lost possessions, priceless keepsakes. I was just speaking to a young woman whose husband died shortly after the birth of her second child, and she was talking about how her daughter was trying to gather all the keepsakes that she had in her bedroom, but reminded her of her father. And that gives you some sense that this is not just about property damage. This is about people’s roots.

You also have a situation where there are a lot of kids who are supposed to start a new school year, and they’re going to need some special help and support for a while.

Sometimes when these kinds of things happen, it can seem a little bit too much to bear. But what I want the people of Louisiana to know is that you’re not alone on this. Even after the TV cameras leave, the whole country is going to continue to support you and help you until we get folks back in their homes and lives are rebuilt.

And the reason I can say that with confidence is because that's what Americans do in times like this. I saw it when I visited displaced Louisianans when I came down here as a senator after Katrina. I saw it when I visited New Orleans for the 10th anniversary last year. I know how resilient the people of Louisiana are, and I know that you will rebuild again. And what I've seen today proves it.

I want to thank all the first responders, the National Guard, all the good neighbors who were in a boat, going around and making sure people were safe, showing extraordinary heroism -- in some cases, risking their own lives. Governor Edwards, the state of Louisiana, the city, the parish governments, they’ve all stepped up under incredibly difficult circumstances.

I just want to thank the people on this block. As I was walking down, one woman at the end, elderly, she was on her own. She had just lost her daughter. But you had a young man next door who was helping out his father, but had also offered to help out that neighbor, so that she could salvage as much as she could and start the process of rebuilding.

With respect to the federal response, over a week ago I directed the federal government to mobilize and do everything we could to help. FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate arrived here a week ago to help lead that effort. Secretary of Homeland Secretary Jeh Johnson visited last week to make sure state and local officials are getting what they need.

To give you a sense of the magnitude of the situation here, more than 100,000 people have applied for federal assistance so far. As of today, federal support has reached $127 million. That’s for help like temporary rental assistance, essential home repairs, and flood insurance payments.

FEMA is also working with Louisiana around the clock to help people who were displaced by floods find temporary housing. And any Louisiana family that needs help, you can find your nearest disaster recovery center by visiting FEMA.gov, or calling 1-800-621-FEMA. I’m going to

repeat that: FEMA.gov, or 1-800-621-FEMA.

Now, federal assistance alone is not going to be enough to make people’s lives whole again. So I’m asking every American to do what you can to help get families and local businesses back on their feet. If you want help -- if you want to help, Governor Edwards put together some ways to start at VolunteerLouisiana.gov. That’s VolunteerLouisiana.gov.

And the reason this is important is because even though federal money is moving out, volunteer help actually helps the state because it can offset some of its costs. Obviously, private donations are going to be extremely important, as well. We want to thank the Red Cross for everything they’re doing, but there are a lot of private, philanthropic organizations, churches, parishes around the state and around the country who want to help, as well. And that how we’re going to make sure that everybody is able to get back on their feet.

So let me just remind folks: Sometimes once the floodwaters pass, people’s attention spans pass. This is not a one-off. This is not a photo op issue. This is, how do you make sure that a month from now, three months from now, six months from now, people still are getting the help that they need. I need all Americans to stay focused on this. If you’re watching this today, make sure that you find out how you can help. You can go to VolunteerLouisiana.gov, or you can go to FEMA.gov. We’ll tell you, we’ll direct you -- you can go to WhiteHouse.gov, and we’ll direct you how you can help.

But we’re going to need to stay on this, because these are some good people down here. We’re glad that the families I had a chance to meet are safe, but they’ve got a lot of work to do, and they shouldn’t have to do it alone.

All right? Thank you very much, everybody. God bless.

Question: With the damage you’ve seen, what more help may they need from Congress in terms of emergency spending?

President Obama: You know, we discussed that on the way down here. What you have is the Stafford Act provides a certain match. A lot of the homes have flood insurance, but a lot of homes don’t. And what Craig Fugate is doing, what I instructed him to do from the start, is let’s get money out as fast as we can. Because we know that there’s going to be a certain amount of assistance that’s going to be forthcoming, so there’s no point in waiting. We kind of make initial estimates and we start pushing stuff out. That helps us and helps the Governor and all these officials here do their jobs.

And then what we have to do is, as we fine-tune exactly what’s needed -- when we know, for example, how much permanent housing is going to have to be built, when we have a better sense of how much infrastructure has been damaged, what more we need to do in terms of mitigation strategies -- that’s when Congress I think may be called upon to do some more.

Now, the good news is, is that you’ve got four members of Congress right here, and a number of them happen to be in the majority, so I suspect that they may be able to talk to the Speaker and talk to Mitch McConnell. But in part because of the fine stewardship at FEMA and, frankly, because we’ve been a little lucky so far -- and I’m going to knock on some wood -- in terms of the amount of money that’s gone out this year, FEMA has enough money for now to cover the costs that can be absorbed.

The issue is going to be less what we need to do in terms of paying for the short term; it’s going to be the medium-term and the long-term rebuilding. Congress should be back in session right after Labor Day. By that time we’ll probably have a better assessment. And in the meantime, lawyers at FEMA will be examining what statutory flexibility we’ve got. And I know the Governor has been right on top of making sure that Louisiana gets everything that it can get in order to help rebuild.

Question: Mr. President, do you worry about that process becoming politicized and the trip here becoming politicized?

President Obama: No, I don’t. First of all, one of the benefits of being five months short of leaving here is I don’t worry too much about politics.

The second thing I have seen, historically, is that when disasters strike, that’s probably one of the few times where Washington tends not to get political. I guarantee you nobody on this block, none of those first responders, nobody gives a hoot whether you’re Democrat or Republican. What they care about is making sure they’re getting the drywall out and the carpet out, and there’s not any mold building, and they get some contractors in here and they start rebuilding as quick as possible. That’s what they care about. That’s what I care about.

So we want to make sure that we do it right. We want to make sure that we do it systematically. But the one thing I just want to repeat is how proud I am of FEMA. Because if you think about the number of significant natural disasters that have occurred since my presidency began, you’d be hard-pressed to find a local official anywhere in the country, including those in the other party, who wouldn’t say that Craig Fugate and his team have been anything less than exemplary and professional.

And one of the things I did when I walked through each of these homes was ask, have you contacted FEMA? Have you filed? And uniformly they said that they had been in touch with FEMA; they had acted professionally; some of them had already been out here for inspections.

And I think that does indicate why it’s important for us to take the federal government seriously, federal workers seriously. There’s a tendency sometimes for us to bash them and to think that they’re these faceless bureaucrats. But when you get into trouble, you want somebody who knows what they’re doing who’s on the ground working with outstanding officials. And that’s true whatever party. And I could not be prouder of the work that FEMA has done.

That doesn’t mean that there aren’t going to still be folks who need more help, and that we’re not going to have some constraints statutorily, and Congress isn’t going to have to step up. But it does mean that the basic backbone, the basic infrastructure and architecture that we have in terms of disaster response I think has been high quality. And I’m very proud of them for that. And I want to publicly acknowledge that at the moment.

Thank you, guys.

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# Press Conference Following G20 Summit

Good evening, everybody. Let me begin by thanking President Xi and the people of Hangzhou and China for the hospitality in hosting this G20 summit on the shores of beautiful West Lake. Thank you so much. Xie xie.

This visit offered the eighth opportunity for President Xi and me to meet. We agreed to advance our cooperation across a range of issues, including climate change, global health and development, peacekeeping, counter-narcotics, and nuclear security. We also addressed our differences on issues like religious freedom, maritime security, and a level economic playing field, but we did so in a clear, candid, direct, and I think constructive way. That has helped us to manage problems, and it’s consistently helped us to improve relations between the United States and China.

This has also been my tenth and final G20 meeting. It goes by fast. And so before I take your questions, let me put into context what we’ve done over the course of our G20 meetings.

And I think back to April 2009, when hundreds of thousands of Americans were losing their jobs and their homes and their savings each month, and unemployment was on its way to 10 percent. Around the world, for the first time in a generation, the global economy was contracting, trade was shrinking, and the international financial system was nearly frozen. By several key measures, the global economy was on a worse trajectory than it was at the outset of the Great Depression.

But the size and the scope of the crisis was not what made that London G20 historic. What made it historic was the speed and magnitude of our collective response. One nation couldn’t solve the problem alone, so together, developed and developing nations alike, took a comprehensive and unprecedented set of actions to prevent another depression and set the stage for recovery.

Most important was to create jobs and growth by stimulating demand across our economies. And America led the way. By then, in just my first 10 or so weeks as President, we had already passed the Recovery Act, set in motion plans to rescue our auto industry, stabilize our banks, jumpstart loans to small businesses, and launch programs to help homeowners refinance and stay in their homes. And our G20 partners would follow with similar actions.

To stabilize the global economy, we rejected the protectionism that could deepen the crisis. We cooperated to keep markets open and trade finance flowing, and bolstered the international finance system’s lending capacity to respond to countries that were hurting the most. And to prevent future crises, we took steps to reform our financial regulatory system -- including the historic Wall Street Reform that we passed more than six years ago.

These were the actions we took in 2009. They were actions that prevented another depression, and created conditions for the global economy to grow by more than 25 percent over the past seven years.

What we also did, though, was to elevate the G20 to become the world’s premier forum for international economic cooperation. And that decision allowed us, as the global recovery progressed, to take further actions to strengthen the global economy. And that’s what we came to Hangzhou to do.

We’ve had long debates over the years about the best ways to promote sustained growth. But America’s voice in the G20 has always been one of bold action, and that stance has been backed up by our economic performance. Since job growth turned positive in early 2010, America’s businesses have created more than 15 million new jobs. We’ve cut the unemployment rate in half. And so far this year, wages have risen by almost 3 percent, which is much faster than the pace of inflation.

But one of the things that we learned through the G20 process is that more than ever our economies are interconnected and we’ve got more work to do together to keep the global economy growing. We have to do more to grow wages faster; to shrink inequality faster; to give everybody a shot at opportunity and security in a changing economy. And that should be the way forward for the G20 -- to make sure that the benefits of trends like globalization and technological progress are shared broadly by more workers and families who still feel like the global economy is not working for them.

And that’s what we did here at this G20 Summit. We committed to using all of our policy tools to promote robust, inclusive growth that creates opportunity for young people and the middle class that they’re working to join. We focused on making sure that businesses can compete fairly and all working families can take advantage of the new prospects the digital economy creates. And we reaffirmed our commitment to support emerging economies through an array of development initiatives.

We also discussed ways to unlock the mutual benefits that trade provides while keeping it fair for our workers and the playing field level for our businesses. And that includes high-standard trade agreements that actually benefit the middle class, like the TPP. That includes working together to abstain from unfair currency practices, and address corruption and global tax evasion. And it includes our agreement to establish a new forum to address some of the market-distorting policies in the global steel sector that have hurt workers and businesses.

We also added momentum to the fight to protect our planet for future generations. On Saturday, the U.S. and China formally entered the Paris Agreement. And today, the G20 welcomed efforts to enter the Paris Agreement into force by the end of this year.

So if there’s anything that the past eight years have taught us, it’s that the complicated challenges of the 21st century cannot be met without coordinated and collective action. Agreement is not always easy and results do not always come quickly. Respecting different points of view; forging consensus instead of dictating terms -- that can sometimes be frustrating. But it is how progress has been won and how it will be won in the future. It’s how we’ve come as far as we have in the eight years since the crisis affected us all. And it’s how the G20 can make progress for all people in the years to come.

So, with that, let me take some questions. And I will start with Roberta Rampton of Reuters.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. I want to ask you about tomorrow, the next leg of your trip, a little bit. And tomorrow you're going to be meeting for the first time with President Duterte, and he’s a leader whose war on drugs has led to the death of about 2,400 people in just the last two months since he took office. And today he said in a very colorful way that you better not bring this up. And I'm wondering, are you are committed to raising this with President Duterte? And are you concerned that meeting him legitimizes his approach on this issue?

President Obama: Well, I just came out of a long day of meetings, so I just heard about some of this. But I have seen some of those colorful statements in the past, and so, clearly, he’s a colorful guy. And what I’ve instructed my team to do is to talk to their Philippine counterparts to find out is this, in fact, a time where we can have some constructive, productive conversations. Obviously, the Filipino people are some of our closest friends and allies, and the Philippines is a treaty ally of ours. But I always want to make sure that if I'm having a meeting that it's actually productive and we're getting something done.

We recognize the significant burden that the drug trade plays just not just in the Philippines, but around the world. And fighting narco-trafficking is tough. But we will always assert the need to have due process and to engage in that fight against drugs in a way that's consistent with basic international norms. And so, undoubtedly, if and when we have a meeting, that this is something that's going to be brought up, and my expectation, my hope is, is that it could be dealt with constructively.

But I'll have my team discuss this. I've got a whole bunch of folks that I'm going to be meeting with over the course of the next several days. And, as I said, historically, our relationship with the Philippines is one of our most important, and my relationship with the Philippine people has been extraordinarily warm and productive. So I expect that will continue. But I want to make sure that the setting is right and the timing is right for us to have the best conversation possible.

Question: So you're not going to meet with him?

President Obama: Well I'm -- no, as I said, I'm going to just make an assessment. I just got out of these meetings. What is certainly true is, is that the issues of how we approach fighting crime and drug trafficking is a serious one for all of us, and we've got to do it the right way.

Michelle Kosinski.

Question: Thank you. Same subject, I guess, of colorful guys. What can you tell us about this hour-and-a-half-long meeting you had with President Putin -- the tone of it, any progress that was made? And do you agree with him that the relationship between our two countries is now frozen?

On the cyber front, Senator Reid recently cited intelligence briefings when he was expressing his suspicions that Russia is trying to meddle in the election and may even have direct ties to one of the campaigns. What can you tell us? Do you think Russia is trying to influence the U.S. election through hacking?

President Obama: Well, President Putin is less colorful, but typically the tone of our meetings are candid, blunt, businesslike --- and this one was no different. We had a range of issues that we had to discuss, but the two most important were, as has been reported, discussions that have been taking place between Secretary Kerry and Russia's Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, about ways in which we can institute a meaningful, serious, verifiable Cessation of Hostilities in Syria, and our capacity to provide some humanitarian relief to families, children, women who are suffering enormously under the burdens of that war.

As you'll recall, we had initiated a Cessation of Hostilities a while back. Initially, it did lessen some of the violence, and then slowly it unwound. And we're back into a situation in which Assad's regime is bombing with impunity. That, in turn, we think is actually strengthening the capacity of Nusra to recruit people who might not have initially been sympathetic to terrorism but now view anyone who’s fighting against Assad as legitimized. And that is a very dangerous dynamic.

And so we have had some productive conversations about what a real Cessation of Hostilities would look like that would allow us both, the United States and Russia, to focus our attention on common enemies, like ISIL and Nusra. But given the gaps of trust that exist, that's a tough negotiation, and we haven’t yet closed the gaps in a way where we think it would actually work. But my instructions to Secretary Kerry, and Mr. Putin's instructions to Mr. Lavrov was to keep working at it over the next several days -- because the faster we can provide some relief to folks on the ground, the better off we're going to be.

And that, then, is a predicate for us to be able to transition into a serious conversation about a political solution to this problem that would involve all the parties that have either directly or indirectly involved themselves in the Syrian conflict.

We also spent time talking about Ukraine. There is a Minsk agreement that arose out of the Normandy negotiations between Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany, but it hasn’t been implemented. And I made very clear that until it is implemented, the United States is not going to pull down sanctions; that it is important for both sides to try to seize this opportunity in the coming weeks to finalize an agreement and to figure out a sequence in which that document is put into effect. And there was agreement not just between myself and Mr. Putin, but also with Chancellor Merkel and President Hollande, that that effort should increase in urgency over the next several weeks.

And so that what was constructive but not conclusive. And we'll have to see whether we can actually get this done, or whether, in fact, President Putin -- despite talking about wanting a negotiation and a solution -- in fact, is comfortable with this constant low-grade conflict along the Russia-Ukraine border.

And finally, we did talk about cybersecurity, generally. I'm not going to comment on specific investigations that are still live and active. But I will tell you that we've had problems with cyber intrusions from Russia in the past, from other countries in the past. And, look, we're moving into a new era here where a number of countries have significant capacities. And, frankly, we got more capacity than anybody both offensively and defensively. But our goal is not to suddenly, in the cyber arena, duplicate a cycle of escalation that we saw when it comes to other arms races in the past, but rather to start instituting some norms so that everybody is acting responsibly.

We're going to have enough problems in the cyberspace with non-state actors who are engaging in theft and using the Internet for all kinds of illicit practices, and protecting our critical infrastructure, and making sure that our financial systems are sound. And what we cannot do is have a situation in which suddenly this becomes the Wild, Wild West, where countries that have significant cyber capacity start engaging in competition -- unhealthy competition or conflict through these means when, I think, wisely we've put in place some norms when it comes to using other weapons.

So that's been a topic of conversation with President Putin as it has been with other countries. We've started to get some willingness on the part of a lot of countries around the world, including through our G20 process, to adopt these norms, but we've got to make sure that we're observing them.

William Wan.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Heading into Laos, what are the main things you can offer its leaders? And what do you plan to push for in return? On the offering side, for example, I'm wondering how you view U.S. responsibility for unexploded ordnance. On the asking side, what are you pushing for most? Is it human rights? Closer U.S. ties in the face of China? Improving their problems with governance and corruption? What's the priority?

President Obama: Well, look, symbolically, it is important. I'll be the first U.S. President to visit Laos. And when you think about the history of the United States and Laos, I think it’s useful to see what’s happened in the evolution of our relationship with Vietnam, a country that I just visited recently.

At the outset, as we’re trying to build trust, a lot of work can be done around war legacy issues. For the Lao, that involves dealing with unexploded ordnance, which is still plaguing big chunks of the countryside. And since Laos is still a relatively poor country that is developing, their capacity alone to clean that up is hampered by a lack of resources. We should help. And my expectation is, is that, in our meetings over the course of several days, that we’ll be able to provide some really concrete assistance that ensures that innocent kids who are running through a field, or a farmer that’s trying to clear a field, or a business that’s trying to get set up -- that they’re not endangered by the possibility of an explosion.

Likewise, we have deep commitments to accounting for those who were lost during that war. And as was true with Vietnam, to the extent that we’re able to find out more about our missing-in-action and our POWs, that not only provides enormous comfort and meaning for families and is consistent with our traditions, but it also ends up being a show of good faith on the part of the country, and a way for us to move into a next phase of a relationship.

And so a lot of the conversation I think will start there, but it doesn’t end there. We’ve had an initiative, for example, helping all the countries along the Mekong Delta to find ways to harness development and deal with environmental issues. And that’s something that we’ve been doing through ASEAN over the course of several years now. For us to be able to expand some of that work I think would be important. Establishing people-to-people exchanges is another area that historically has been important.

I do think Laos -- seeing the enormous economic progress that Vietnam and China and others have made, are going to be very interested in finding ways in which they can advance into the global economy and help themselves grow, and I think that we can be a useful partner there.

So I think there will be a broad-based agenda. But if you think about the visit I made to Ho Chi Minh City, and driving through those streets, and the enormous wellspring of goodwill that you saw -- that started with some of the same kinds of steps that we’re going to be taking with Laos. But I think we can hopefully do it faster, make more progress faster than we did over the course of 10, 15 years, because we’ve learned some things. And I think Laos is very eager to engage with us, and we’re eager to engage with them.

So I look forward to visiting what I hear is a beautiful country.

Christi Parsons.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. On the Transpacific Partnership, how do you plan to sell this to these Asian leaders who still have work to do in their own countries, and with some political -- you know, it’s not -- the politics aren’t easy, and maybe they don’t want to do that. So much of it seems like the future is rocky in the U.S. Can you -- the U.S. usually ratifies its trade deals. Do you plan to convey a sense of inevitability? Do you feel that for the lame duck session, even if it doesn’t happen then, do you feel like it’s inevitable anyway?

And, if I may, I wonder what you think about the silent protest of Colin Kaepernick? And I also wonder what you think about the public response to it, which is really divided. I mean, some police don’t want to secure ‘49ers games, and many fans feel that he’s giving voice to something they feel strongly. So I just wonder how you look at that.

President Obama: Well, with respect to TPP, I don’t have to sell it to Asian leaders here who were part of the negotiations because they see this as the right thing to do for their own countries. And when you look at the architecture, the structure of TPP, what it does is open up new markets for us that are generally closed. Our markets are more open than theirs for the most part, so we benefit from a reduction in tariffs and taxes that are already in place.

But for many of them, what they benefit from is this trade deal is the spur, the incentive for them to engage in a whole bunch of structural reforms that they know, over the long term, will reinvigorate their economy.

So, for example, Prime Minister Abe of Japan, yes, he’s having to make some difficult decisions about opening up markets that previously have been closed, but he’s also looking at a couple of decades of stagnation and anemic growth. And what he said to the Japanese people is, if we want to break out of this, then we’re going to have to change how we do business, and this provides us a road map of how we can become more competitive on the world stage.

Vietnam, that, for the first time, is debating in a very serious way how they can provide protections to their workers and allow them to participate and have voice and bargain for wages, and, yeah, that’s tough politically for Vietnam. On the other hand, they recognize that if they want to move up the value chain in the global market that they’ve got to start abiding by basic norms.

So the good news is they’re ready to go. And what I’ll be telling them is that the United States has never had a smooth, uncontroversial path to ratifying trade deals, but they eventually get done. And it’s my intention to get this one done, because, on the merits, it is smart for America to do it. And I have yet to hear a persuasive argument from the left or the right as to why we wouldn’t want to create a trade framework that raises labor standards, raising environmental standards, protects intellectual property, levels the playing field for U.S. businesses, brings down tariffs.

It is indisputable that it would create a better deal for us than the status quo. Nobody has been able to describe to me -- with all the general criticism of trade that you hear coming out of some quarters, nobody is able to describe to me how this would not be a significant improvement for U.S. workers and U.S. businesses going forward compared to the status quo.

And so I intend to be making that argument. I will have to be less persuasive here because most people already understand that. Back home, we'll have to cut through the noise once election season is over. It's always a little noisy there.

And in terms of Mr. Kaepernick, I got to confess that I haven’t been thinking about football while I've been over here, and I haven’t been following this closely. But my understanding, at least, is, is that he's exercising his constitutional right to make a statement. I think there's a long history of sports figures doing so. I think there are a lot of ways you can do it. As a general matter, when it comes to the flag and the National Anthem, and the meaning that that holds for our men and women in uniform and those who fought for us, that is a tough thing for them to get past to then hear what his deeper concerns are. But I don’t doubt his sincerity, based on what I've heard. I think he cares about some real, legitimate issues that have to be talked about. And if nothing else, what he's done is he's generated more conversation around some topics that need to be talked about.

So, again, I haven’t been paying close attention to it, but you've heard me talk about in the past the need for us to have an active citizenry. Sometimes that's messy and controversial, and it gets people angry and frustrated. But I'd rather have young people who are engaged in the argument and trying to think through how they can be part of our democratic process than people who are just sitting on the sidelines and not paying attention at all.

And my suspicion is, is that over time he's going to refine how he's thinking about it, and maybe some of his critics will start seeing that he has a point around certain concerns about justice and equality. And that's how we move forward. Sometimes it's messy, but it's the way democracy works.

All right, last one. Angela Greiling Keane of Bloomberg.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. The G20 group today discussed the importance of tax fairness and consistency among countries. For you, how much of that discussion was centered on the Apple case and the EU's decision? And how do you balance your efforts here to ensure global tax fairness with your need and desire to protect U.S. companies and their shareholders? And if I may, on one other business topic, how would you assess the likelihood of the actions taken on steel today of making a difference in overcapacity?

President Obama: Those are both great questions. This issue of tax avoidance and tax evasion is something that we have actively promoted as an issue for the G20 to tackle. We've worked with not only the G20 countries, but also some of the multilateral organizations, like the OECD, to refine how we can approach these problems. It's a complicated piece of business.

We did not bring up the specific case of Apple, because as a general rule, I don’t want to bring up a single case in a forum like this where we're trying to shape broader policy. But at home, we have been focused -- whether it's on the inversion rules that we put forward, the proposals that we put forward to define who the beneficiaries are behind the veil so that we can catch people who are avoiding their taxes -- we're doing a bunch of stuff at home, and we want to coordinate better norms internationally.

The one thing that we have to make sure we do is to move in concert with other countries, because there's always a danger that if one of us acts unilaterally, that it's not just amatter of a U.S. company being impacted, but it may also have an effect in terms of our ability to collect taxes from that same company. And so you might end up with a situation where they pay into Europe, and the U.S. Treasury is shortchanged. So if there is not some coordination between various tax authorities, you get a problem there.

In the same way, we think there has to be some coordination about even some of our closest allies racing to the bottom in terms of how they enforce their tax policies in ways that lead to revenue-shifting and tax avoidance in our country.

So this is not something that I think is going to be sorted out overnight. I do think that if we are to regain the trust of ordinary people but the system is not rigged, and deal with these trends of inequality that have risen out of globalization and technological change, that we've got to make sure we tackle this issue in an effective way.

And we've made some progress, but not as much as we need to. And my hope is, is that it's recognized that it's in the interest of all countries -- whether they're developed countries or developing countries -- to work together to put a stop to this. Because developed countries are losing revenue, and that erodes their tax base and their ability to educate kids and build universities and build infrastructure, but it also wallops developing countries because oftentimes tax avoidance can go hand in hand with corrupt practices that impede development.

In terms of excess capacity, this is an issue that we wanted to get on the agenda. We got it on the agenda. In my bilateral conversations with President Xi, there was an agreement that we would make progress on dealing with steel overcapacity -- which, by the way, is consistent with the plans that President Xi himself has had to reorient the economy so that it's not so heavily dependent on state-owned enterprises and an export model.

So, we’ve made some progress -- not as much as we'd like to see -- but some progress on that front bilaterally. Multilaterally, the way this was resolved was the G20 agreed to put together an intensive process of gathering all the data, determining what the best steps are, which will then be reported in the G20 in Hamburg next year. And I think there was a validation of the basic principle that, to the extent that overcapacity is the result not just of market forces but specific policy decisions that are distorting a well-functioning market, that that needs to be fixed.

And so it was one of a number of examples that aren’t always sexy and don’t attract a lot of headlines of where issues that we've raised in the G20 get adopted and then a bunch of work gets done, and the following year you start seeing action, and slowly we strengthen and build up international norms.

If you look at the issue of IT and the digital economy, we were able to get the G20 to adopt a range of principles about an open Internet, net neutrality, making sure that businesses and vendors and providers aren’t discriminated across borders, reflecting a lot of the foundational principles that have led to this digital revolution over the last several years.

And that will, in turn, generate a bunch of new work. And there will still be conflicts about how people deal with censorship or how they deal with cybersecurity issues, but we chip away at it, and over time what you get it sturdier international norms that everybody abides to and will help all countries grow and help people prosper.

So my parting words at the G20 were, having watched this process over the last eight years, I think we all have to recognize these are turbulent times. A lot of countries are seeing volatile politics. Sometimes you read the headlines and you can get discouraged about whether the international community and leadership are able to shape solutions fast enough for the scale of the problems -- whether it's migrants and refugees, or climate change, or terrorism, or making sure the international economy is working for everybody. But then when you look back over the course of eight years, actually you find out things have gotten better -- not always as fast as we'd like, but in significant ways.

You look at the progress we've made on the financial system. The American banking system now has 700 billion dollars more in capital; it is much safer and much sturdier. But it's not just us. Because of the G20, you also have a Basel III agreement in which all countries are having to strengthen their capital requirements and put in place some basic safeguards to prevent what happened at Lehmans. And that's true across the board.

So, as always, I’d always like to see even more get done, but I’m cautiously optimistic about the progress that we made. I tell my staff when they feel worn out sometimes that better is always good. It may not be everything that needs to get done, but if it's better than before we started, we'll take it.

All right? Thank you very much, everybody.

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# Address to the People of Laos

President Obama: Thank you so much. Thank you. Sabaidii! Sabaidee bor?

Audience: Sabaidii.

President Obama: To the government and the people of Laos, thank you so much for the kind welcome that you’ve extended to me and my delegation. I am very honored to be the first American president to visit Laos. Thank you.

I am told that this hall is where you come together for the national singing contest. And I know that you celebrate your musical traditions, including kap lam. But I’m not going to sing today, so you should not worry. As you host leaders from across Southeast Asia and beyond, I do want to thank Laos for your leadership as this year’s chair of ASEAN.

Today, the eyes of the world are on Laos. And I know that that may be a little unusual, because Laos is a small nation next to larger neighbors and, as a result, too often, the richness of your culture has not been fully appreciated. And that’s why, as part of my visit, I’m grateful for the opportunity to know Laos better, and to help share your story with the world.

I know that here, you cherish the beauty of the land -- the mist-covered mountains and sunsets over the Mekong. The achievements of ancient civilizations that echo in the ruins of Vat Phou, and palm leaf manuscripts that are preserved at your temples. Tomorrow, I’ll experience some of this heritage myself when I visit Luang Prabang. I only regret that -- I know this is called the Land of a Million Elephants, but Secret Service will not let me ride an elephant. But maybe I’ll come back when I’m no longer President.

But in countless stupas and in your daily lives, we see the strength that draws -- so many of you from your Buddhist faith -- a faith that tells you that you have a moral duty to each other, to live with kindness and honesty, and that we can help end suffering if we embrace the right mindset and the right actions. And in literature like the epic of Sinxay, we see the values that define the people of Laos, which is modesty and compassion, and resilience and hope.

At our luncheon today, I was treated to the best of Lao culture and cuisine, including khao niaw. I did not get any Beerlao, but I will try some later, maybe this evening. And in all of you here today -- and especially the young people of Laos -- we see the diversity that is the strength of this nation. You have Lao and Khmu and Hmong, and a tapestry of proud ethnic groups and indigenous peoples. So you are truly a people of the heart, and I thank you for welcoming me with such generosity, your nam jai.

I realize that having a U.S. president in Laos would have once been unimaginable. Six decades ago, this country fell into civil war. And as the fighting raged next door in Vietnam, your neighbors and foreign powers, including the United States, intervened here. As a result of that conflict and its aftermath, many people fled or were driven from their homes. At the time, the U.S. government did not acknowledge America’s role. It was a secret war, and for years, the American people did not know. Even now, many Americans are not fully aware of this chapter in our history, and it’s important that we remember today.

Over nine years -- from 1964 to 1973 -- the United States dropped more than two million tons of bombs here in Laos -- more than we dropped on Germany and Japan combined during all of World War II. It made Laos, per person, the most heavily bombed country in history. As one Laotian said, the “bombs fell like rain.” Villages and entire valleys were obliterated. The ancient Plain of Jars was devastated. Countless civilians were killed. And that conflict was another reminder that, whatever the cause, whatever our intentions, war inflicts a terrible toll, especially on innocent men, women and children. Today, I stand with you in acknowledging the suffering and sacrifices on all sides of that conflict.

And from the anguish of war, there came an unlikely bond between our two peoples. Today, the United States is home to many proud Laotian Americans. Many have made a hard journey through refugee camps and relocation, building new lives in a new country. And even as they’ve become Americans, they’ve held on to their Lao heritage -- worshipping in their temples, honoring their elders, dancing the lamvong. Even now, they remember a beloved song -- that “If we depart from our homeland and flee far away from her, we will always have you as our true friend as long as we live.” And as a new generation has come of age, more Laotian Americans have made the journey here to their ancestral homeland. Said one of them who was born in Vientiane, our “heart and home have always been in Laos.” And this spirit of reconciliation is what brings me here today.

Our two governments will continue to have differences. That’s true with many nations. As we do around the world, the United States will continue to speak up on behalf of what we consider universal human rights, including the rights of the people of Laos to express yourselves freely and decide your own future. Yet even as our governments deal candidly with our differences, I believe, as we have shown from Cuba to Burma to Vietnam, the best way to deliver progress for all of our peoples is by closer cooperation between our countries. And that’s why, today, the United States and Laos have agreed to a new comprehensive partnership to guide and deepen our relationship for years to come.

Our partnership recognizes that the Lao People’s Democratic Republic is an independent, sovereign nation. The United States does not seek to impose our will on Laos. Rather, we seek a relationship based on mutual respect, including respect for your independence and your sovereignty.

Our new partnership will continue to deal with the painful legacy of war. And on behalf of the American people, especially our veterans and military families, I thank the government and the people of Laos for your humanitarian cooperation as we’ve worked together to account for Americans missing in action. And I’m pleased that, as a result of this visit, we will increase our efforts and bring more of our missing home to their families in America.

I also know that the remnants of war continue to shatter lives here in Laos. Many of the bombs that were dropped were never exploded. Over the years, thousands of Laotians have been killed or injured -- farmers tending their fields, children playing. The wounds -- a missing leg or arm -- last a lifetime. And that’s why, as President, I’ve dramatically increased our funding to help remove these unexploded bombs. As a result, Laos is clearing more bombs. Fewer Laotians are being hurt or killed. And together, we are saving lives.

But there is still much more work to do. So today, I’m proud to announce a historic increase in these efforts. The United States will double our annual funding to $90 million over the next three years to help Laos expand its work. This will help Laos expand its work to remove even more bombs, allow Laotians to farm more land, and increase support for victims. I’ll bear witness to this work tomorrow when I meet with survivors.

Given our history here, I believe that the United States has a moral obligation to help Laos heal. And even as we continue to deal with the past, our new partnership is focused on the future. We want to be your partners as you invest in the well-being of your people, and especially your children. I believe that when any child anywhere goes hungry, when their growth is stunted, that’s a profound injustice. So we’re joining with Laos to promote nutrition and bring more healthy meals to children in school so they can grow strong, focus in class, and realize their full potential.

We want to be your partner in improving education. I’m told that there’s a saying here -- “a tray full of silver is not worth a mind full of knowledge.”[1] So we’ll help more children learn how to read. We’ll bring more American teachers here to help teach English, and more Lao teachers to America to strengthen their English. And I’m proud to announce that an initiative that’s very important to me and to my wife Michelle, an initiative called Let Girls Learn, is coming to Laos and Nepal. We believe that the daughters of Laos have just as much talent and potential as your sons. And none of our countries anywhere in the world can truly succeed unless our girls and our women have every opportunity to succeed, the same opportunities as boys and men do.

We want to be your partner with the young people of Laos as you strengthen your communities and start businesses, and use Facebook to raise awareness for the rights and dignity of all people. And that’s why, as part of our Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative, we’re helping young men and women across Laos develop the skills you need to succeed. Two of our top companies -- Microsoft and General Electric -- are helping to increase training in engineering and technology. Young people in Laos shouldn’t have to move someplace else in order to prosper. You should be able to work and build a better life right here in Laos.

And we want to be your partners as Laos forges greater trade and commerce with the world. When other countries invest here, it should create jobs here for the people of Laos. So as Laos pursues economic and labor reforms, we’ll work to encourage more trade and investment between our two countries, and between Laos and the rest of this region. As a result of my visit, I hope that more Americans come here as well, to experience your country and the beautiful culture, and to forge new friendships between our peoples.

And as Laos grows, we want to be your partner in protecting the natural beauty of your country, from your forests to your rivers. As Laos works to meet its growing need for energy, I want to work with you to pursue clean, renewable energies like solar. And let’s help farmers protect their crops, and villages adapt to a changing climate. We should work together so that development is sustainable -- especially along the Mekong, upon which millions of people depend for their livelihood and their food and their health. The Mekong is a treasure that has to be protected for future generations, and we want to be your partner in that process.

So this is the future our two countries can build together, and I’m optimistic that we can do it. I’m confident because my visit is part of a broader agenda. As some of you know, as President, a key priority of my foreign policy has been to deepen our engagement with the nations and peoples of the Asia Pacific. And here, on the final leg of my last visit to Asia as President, I want to discuss why the commitment of the United States to this region will endure for the long term.

America’s interest in the Asia Pacific is not new. It’s not a passing fad. It reflects fundamental national interests. And in the United States, across the political spectrum, there’s widespread recognition that the Asia Pacific will become even more important in the century ahead, both to America and to the world. In this region, we see hundreds of millions of young people with high expectations for their lives. With many of our major trading partners and most of the world’s growing middle class, growth here can mean more jobs and opportunity in all countries. This region is home to five of our treaty allies and some of the world’s most capable militaries, which means Asia will shape the course of global security. And this region is home to more than half of humanity -- Asian nations, developing and developed, who will be essential in the fight against challenges like climate change.

So for all these reasons, I’ve worked to rebalance our foreign policy so the United States is playing a larger and long-term role in the Asia Pacific region. We’ve strengthened our alliances. With our new defense guidelines, Japan and the United States will do even more together to uphold regional security. We’ve expanded our collaboration with the Republic of Korea, including on missile defense to counter North Korean threats. Today, I’ll be meeting with President Park to reaffirm our unbreakable alliance and to insist that the international community remain united so that North Korea understands that its provocations will only continue to deepen its isolation. With our U.S. Marines now rotating through Australia, we can respond even faster to regional challenges. And with our new access agreement with the Philippines, our militaries are closer than they’ve been in decades.

To keep the peace and deter aggression, we’ve deployed more of our most advanced military capabilities to the region, including ships and aircraft to Singapore. And by the end of the decade, a majority of our Navy and Air Force fleets will be based out of the Pacific. And our allies and partners are collaborating more with each other as well. So our alliances and defense capabilities in the Asia Pacific are as strong as they’ve ever been.

We’ve also forged deeper ties with emerging economies and emerging powers. With Indonesia and Malaysia, we’re promoting entrepreneurship. We’re opposing violent extremism, and we’re addressing environmental degradation. With my recent visit to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, we’ve shown our commitment to fully normalizing our relationship with Vietnam. We’ve elevated our ties with India across the board, and we welcome India’s growing role in the Asia Pacific.

We’ve deepened our cooperation with regional institutions, especially here in Southeast Asia. And as part of our new strategic partnership with ASEAN, we’ve agreed to key principles, including that ASEAN will remain central to peace, prosperity and progress in the Asia Pacific. The United States is now part of the East Asia Summit, and together we’ve made it the leading forum in the region for addressing political and security challenges, including maritime security.

We’ve increased the trade and investment that creates jobs and opportunity on both sides of the Pacific. Since I took office, we’ve boosted U.S. exports to the Asia Pacific by 50 percent. Our young leaders’ initiative is helping more than 100,000 young men and women across this region start new companies and ventures. So we’re connecting entrepreneurs and investors and businesses in America and in ASEAN with each other. And thanks to our sustained leadership, 12 of our nations have come together in the Trans-Pacific Partnership to establish the rules of trade for nearly 40 percent of the global economy.

We’ve also stood with citizens on behalf of democracy and human rights. We’ve expanded our support for civil society groups and open government. We saw another democratic election and transition in Indonesia. And as the first U.S. president to visit Myanmar, I am proud that the United States encouraged and now is supporting a historic transition toward democracy. And I look forward to welcoming State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi to the White House next week as we stand with the people of Myanmar in their journey towards pluralism and peace.

And alongside all these efforts, we’ve worked to build a constructive relationship with China. Our two governments continue to have serious differences in important areas. The United States will remain unwavering in our support for universal human rights, but at the same time, we’ve shown that we can work together to advance mutual interests. The United States and China are engaged across more areas than ever before -- from preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, to our shared commitment to denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula, to our historic leadership together on climate change.

So I will say it again: The United States welcomes the rise of a China that is peaceful and stable and prosperous and a responsible player in global affairs, because we believe that that will benefit all of us.

In other words, the United States is more deeply engaged across the Asia Pacific than we have been in decades. Our position is stronger. And we’ve sent a clear message that, as a Pacific nation, we’re here to stay. In good times and bad, you can count on the United States of America.

And the question going forward is, what will the future hold for this region? Will disagreements be resolved peacefully, or lead to conflict? Will economies continue to integrate, or succumb to mercantilism or protectionism? Will human dignity be upheld, or will it be denied? Will the international rules and norms that have enabled progress in this region be maintained, or will they erode?

So with the time I have left, allow me to share our vision, the values that guide us, and the future we’re working toward; our basic principles for peace and progress here in this region, including Laos, and across the Asia Pacific.

First, we believe that all nations and peoples deserve to live in security and peace. We believe that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of every nation must be upheld. And we believe that every nation matters, no matter their size. We believe that bigger nations should not dictate to smaller nations, and that all nations should play by the same rules. America’s treaty allies must know our commitment to your defense is a solemn obligation that will never waiver. And across the region, including in the East and South China Seas, the United States will continue to fly and sail and operate wherever international law allows, and support the right of all countries to do the same.

We will stand with our allies and partners in upholding fundamental interests, among them freedom of navigation and overflight, lawful commerce that’s not impeded, and peaceful resolution of disputes. That’s the security that we seek.

We also believe that just as nations have rights, nations also have responsibilities, including the responsibility to work together to address problems no nation can solve alone. So many of today’s threats transcend borders, and every country has a role to play. We will have to cooperate better together to stop terrorist attacks, and to prevent the spread of the world’s most dangerous weapons. We will have to work together to avoid the worst effects of climate change. We have to work together to stop the horror of human trafficking, and end the outrage of modern-day slavery. These are areas where we seek deeper cooperation.

We believe in prosperity that is shared and that reduces poverty and inequality by lifting up the many and not just a few wealthy people at the top. Rather than simply extracting another country’s natural resources, we believe development has to invest in people -- in their education and in their skills. We believe that trade should be free and truly fair, and that workers and the environment should be protected. We believe that governments should not conduct or knowingly support cyber-enabled theft of intellectual property for commercial gain. And we believe that there needs to be good governance, because people should not have to pay a bribe to start a business or sell their goods. And that’s the kind of development and the kind of trade that we seek.

That’s why the Trans-Pacific Partnership is so important -- not only because TPP countries, including the United States, will be able to sell more goods to each other, but it also has important strategic benefits. TPP is a core pillar of America’s rebalance to the Asia Pacific. And the trade and the growth it supports will reinforce America’s security alliances and regional partnerships. It will build greater integration and trust across this region. And I have said before and I will say again: Failure to move ahead with TPP would not just have economic consequences, but would call into question America’s leadership in this vital region. So as difficult as the politics are back home, I will continue to push hard on the U.S. Congress to approve TPP before I leave office, because I think it is important for this entire region and it is important for the United States.

I believe that nations are stronger and more successful when they uphold human rights. We speak out for these rights not because we think our own country is perfect -- no nation is -- not because we think every country should do as we do, because each nation has to follow its own path. But we will speak up on behalf of human rights because we believe they are the birthright of every human being. And we know that democracy can flourish in Asia because we’ve seen it thrive from Japan and South Korea to Taiwan.

Across this region, we see citizens reaching to shape their own futures. And freedom of speech and assembly, and the right to organize peacefully in civil society without harassment or fear of arrest or disappearing we think makes a country stronger. A free press that can expose abuse and injustice makes a country stronger. And access to information and an open Internet where people can learn and share ideas makes a country stronger. An independent judiciary that upholds the rule of law, and free and fair elections so that citizens can choose their own leaders -- these are all the rights that we seek for all people.

We believe that societies are more stable and just when they recognize the inherent dignity of every human being -- the dignity of being able to live and pray as you choose, so that Muslims know they are a part of Myanmar’s future, and Christians and Buddhists have the right to worship freely in China. The dignity of being treated equally under the law, so that no matter where you come from or who you love or what you look like you are respected. And the dignity of a healthy life -- because no child should ever die from hunger or a mosquito bite, or the poison of dirty water. This is the justice that we seek in the world.

And finally, we believe that the ties between our nations must be rooted in friendship and trust between our peoples. I think of several Laotian Americans whose families came to the United States as refugees. Our nations are connected not just by policies, but also by people like John Douangdara -- whose family settled in our state of Nebraska -- and after high school joined our military, served with our elite Special Forces, and ultimately gave his life for our nation. His mother said, “He is a son of the Lao people.” And he sacrificed for us, and we honor him.

We’re connected by Channapha Khamvongsa, who came to America when she was seven years old and who is back here today. And for years, she urged the United States to do more to help remove unexploded bombs here in Laos. “There are many, many problems in this world that might not be able to be solved in a lifetime,” she’s said, but this is one we can fix. So, Channapha, we thank you for working to fix this problem.

And we’re connected by Stacey Phengvath, who is here as well and who I met earlier. Her parents came to America and stressed the importance of education. And today, this proud Laotian American serves at our embassy here in Laos. “I feel a sense of home,” she says, “as if I have known this country before, through my parents.” It feels “like we’ve come full circle.” So, Stacey, on behalf of all of us, thank you for helping to bring our countries closer together.

So these are the values that guide us. And this is the partnership that America offers here in Laos and across the Asia Pacific. Respect for your sovereignty. Security and peace through cooperation. Investment in the health of children. Education for students. Support for entrepreneurs. Development and trade that creates jobs for all of us and protects our environment. A commitment to rights and dignity that is borne out of our common humanity.

This is our vision. This is the future we can realize together. And based on my visit to Laos and the proud work of the past eight years, I believe that Americans and the peoples of the Asia Pacific will be able to say to each other, as the song goes, “we will always have you as our true friend as long as we live.” Khop jai lai lai. ["Thank you very much."]

Thank you very much.

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# Post ASEAN Press Conference

Good afternoon, everybody. Once again, I want to thank the government and the people of Laos for their wonderful hospitality and for their leadership as host of the ASEAN and East Asia Summits. And I especially want to express my gratitude for the warmth and the kindness that they’ve shown to me as the first U.S. President to visit this nation. It has been a memorable and, at times, a very moving visit.

We’re here because, as a region with more than 600 million people, several fast-growing economies, some vibrant democracies, but also countries transitioning to democracies, and given their strategic location along vital trade routes, the 10 nations of ASEAN are critical to peace and prosperity not only in the Asia Pacific but to the world. Indeed, the United States and ASEAN are among each other’s top trading partners. We’re the largest investors in this region, and ASEAN is one of our largest markets for U.S. exports, supporting hundreds of thousands of American jobs. So our trade and investment fuels jobs and prosperity across our countries.

And that’s why, as part of my rebalance of American foreign policy to the Asia Pacific, I’ve deepened our engagement with the nations of Southeast Asia and with ASEAN as an institution. As the first U.S. President to meet with the leaders of all 10 ASEAN countries, I’ve sustained our cooperation throughout my presidency. Earlier this year, I was proud to host the first U.S.-ASEAN Summit in the United States, at Sunnylands, California. Our meeting here in Laos was our eighth meeting. And this visit marks my ninth to the ASEAN region -- more than any U.S. President.

Together, the United States and ASEAN have forged a strategic partnership guided by key principles, including that ASEAN will remain central to peace, prosperity and progress in the Asia Pacific. The United States is now firmly part of the East Asia Summit, and we have worked to make that organization the region’s leading forum for dealing with political and security challenges, including maritime security. And we’re guided by the shared vision of the region that we put forward at Sunnylands -- open, dynamic and competitive economies; mutual security and the peaceful resolution of disputes; and respect for human rights -- in short, a region where all nations play by the same rules. That’s a vision that we advanced here.

We’re stepping up our efforts to increase trade and investment. As part of the initiative I announced earlier this year -- U.S.-ASEAN Connect -- we’re doing more to connect our businesses and investors so that it is easier to start new ventures together. More to connect our entrepreneurs so we’re encouraging innovation in what are increasingly digital economies. More to connect clean energy projects as we pursue a low-carbon future. All of which will also reinforce this region’s continued economic integration through the ASEAN Community. And given that four ASEAN nations are also part of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, I reiterated that I am determined to do everything I can to encourage the U.S. Congress to approve TPP before I leave office.

With regard to security, our nations reaffirmed our commitment to a regional order where international rules and norms are upheld and where disagreements are resolved peacefully. There was recognition of the importance of the international arbitration ruling in July, which is legal and binding, and which clarified maritime claims by the Philippines and China in the South China Sea. We discussed the importance of claimants adhering to steps to which they've already agreed, including respecting international law, not militarizing disputed areas and not occupying uninhabited islands, reefs and shoals. And I reiterated that the United States will stand with allies and partners in upholding fundamental interests, among them the freedom of navigation and overflight, lawful commerce that is not impeded, and peaceful resolution of disputes.

The United States and ASEAN also continue to deepen our cooperation on transnational challenges. We discussed the importance of continuing to share information to prevent terrorism and the flow of foreign fighters. Given the threat of climate change to all our nations -- especially countries in this region -- we agreed on the importance of bringing the Paris agreement into force as soon as possible. We agreed to cooperation in the fight against human trafficking, including sharing more information on smugglers, closer law enforcement cooperation and more support for victims.

And at the East Asia Summit, our 18 nations expressed our grave concern about North Korea’s provocative missile launches, highlighted the threat posed by its nuclear and ballistic missile programs, and called on North Korea to uphold its international obligations.

And, finally, I’m especially pleased that we continue to deepen the connections between the people of ASEAN and America -- particularly our young people, like the inspiring young men and women that I met with at our town hall yesterday. Our Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative is now [more] than 100,000 strong. The women’s leadership academy that I announced yesterday will support women leaders in business, government and civil society throughout ASEAN. And we’re going to help increase language skills among students and teachers through our English for All program.

In closing, I’m mindful that this is the last day of my last trip to this region as President. And when I think back to the time that I spent here as a boy, I can’t help but be struck by the extraordinary progress that’s been made across so much of the region in the decades since -- even as there’s still a lot of work to be done. And so it means a great deal to me, not only as President, but also personally, that over the past eight years we’ve increased cooperation between ASEAN countries and the United States. It is unprecedented the breadth and depth of our relationships. And I think it’s one of the most successful parts of our rebalance policy.

We’ve made it clear that the United States will continue to stand with the people of this region in advancing their security, prosperity and dignity, including universal human rights. And I am very optimistic that the ties of friendship between our people -- as reflected by that roomful of young people that we saw yesterday -- will bring us even closer in the years to come.

So, with that, I'm going to take a couple questions. And I will start with Kathleen Hennessey of AP.

Question: Thanks very much, Mr. President. There’s been a lot of talk back at home and here about how you were received on this trip, your last to Asia. Donald Trump said you were humiliated. I suspect you think that was overblown, but --

President Obama: Yes.

Question: Maybe you could talk about whether or not you think your reception here was at all limited to some of the -- or at all related to the limits and challenges of your Asia pivot policy. And while we're talking about legacy items, if I could just ask another quick one on Guantanamo Bay. You have four months left, 60 prisoners left. At this point, are you willing to acknowledge that the prison will be open by the time you leave office?

President Obama: Well, in terms of my reception here as far as I can tell has been terrific. I don't know if you’ve gone and talked to some people in Laos. They seem pretty happy about my visit. Everywhere we've gone, we've had a great reception -- just as earlier when we went to Vietnam we got a great reception. You will recall there were millions of people lining the streets.

So if this theory about my reception and my rebalance policy is based on me going down the short stairs in China, yes, I think that is overblown. And I think that any reasonable person, certainly any person in the region, would be puzzled as to how this became somehow indicative of the work that we've done here.

If you look at the remarks of leaders, if you look at the remarks of ordinary people, if you look at the concrete work that we've gotten done on everything from economic programs to development programs, to legacy of war issues, to promoting civil society and young people, the concern that I've heard is not that what we've done hasn't been important and successful; the concern that I've heard is will it continue. And almost uniformly, the question I get from other leaders is, we hope that America’s interest and presence and engagement is sustained.

And my hope and expectation is, is that my successor will, in fact, sustain this kind of engagement, because there is a lot happening here. You’ve got countries here that are taking off. You’ve got one of the most dynamic and youngest populations in the world. This is where the action is going to be when it comes to commerce and trade, and ultimately creating U.S. jobs by being able to sell to this market.

And that's the only feedback that I've received. And that's not just based on what leaders tell me. If you read local newspapers or you talk to people, that's been the same commentary that we receive generally.

With respect to Guantanamo, I am not ready to concede that it may still remain open because we're still working diligently to continue to shrink the population. I continue to believe that Guantanamo is a recruitment tool for terrorist organizations, that it clouds and sours some of the counterterrorism cooperation that we need to engage in. And it's not necessary and it's hugely expensive for U.S. taxpayers.

Is there strong resistance in Congress? Absolutely. But as we continue to shrink the population to the point where we're looking at 40 or 50 people and are maintaining a multimillion-dollar operation to house these handfuls of individuals, I think the American people should be asking the question, why are we spending this kind of money that could be spent on other things when it's not necessary for our safety and security.

So there's no doubt that because of the politics in Congress right now, it is a tough road to hoe. But I expect to work really hard over the next four months -- five months -- four and a half months.

Margaret Brennan.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Can you tell us if last night Philippine President Duterte offered his apology to you, and if you said to him the U.S. will continue to help the Philippines push back against China? And last night, sir, Donald Trump said Vladimir Putin has been more of a leader than you, and then he said you have reduced American generals to rubble. Do you care to defend your legacy?

President Obama: Do I care to defend -- okay.

Question: Respond.

President Obama: Okay, okay -- respond. Got it. I did shake hands with President Duterte last night. It was not a long interaction. And what I indicated to him is, is that my team should be meeting with his and determine how we can move forward on a whole range of issues.

As I said when I was asked about this in China, I don’t take these comments personally, because it seems as if this is a phrase he's used repeatedly, including directed at the Pope and others, and so I think it seems to be just a habit, a way of speaking for him.

But as I said in China, we want to partner with the Philippines on the particular issue of narco-traffickers, which is a serious problem in the Philippines. It's a serious problem in the United States and around the world. On that narrow issue, we do want to make sure that the partnership we have is consistent with international norms and rule of law. So we're not going to back off our position that if we're working with a country -- whether it's on antiterrorism, whether it's on going after drug traffickers -- as despicable as these networks may be, as much damage as they do, it is important from our perspective to make sure that we do it the right way, because the consequences of when you do it the wrong way is innocent people get hurt and you have a whole bunch of unintended consequences that don’t solve the problem.

It has no impact on our broader relationship with the Philippine people, on the wide range of programs and security cooperation that we have with this treaty ally. And it certainly has no impact in terms of how we interpret our obligations to continue to build on the longstanding alliance that we have with the Philippines however that may play itself out. And my hope and expectation is, is that as President Duterte and his team get acclimated to his new position, that they're able to define and clarify what exactly they want to get done, how that fits in with the work that we're already doing with the Philippine government, and hopefully it will be on a strong footing by the time the next administration comes in.

As far as Mr. Trump, I think I've already offered my opinion. I don’t think the guy is qualified to be President of the United States. And every time he speaks, that opinion is confirmed. And I think the most important thing for the public and the press is to just listen to what he says and follow up and ask questions about what appear to be either contradictory or uninformed or outright wacky ideas.

There is this process that seems to take place over the course of the election season where somehow behavior that in normal times we would consider completely unacceptable and outrageous becomes normalized, and people start thinking that we should be grading on a curve. But I can tell you from the interactions that I've had over the last eight or nine days with foreign leaders, that this is serious business, and you actually have to know what you're talking about, and you actually have to have done your homework. And when you speak, it should actually reflect thought-out policy that you can implement. And I have confidence that if, in fact, people just listen to what he has to say and look at his track record -- or lack thereof -- that they'll make a good decision.

Elise Hu.

Question: Thank you very much, Mr. President. On North Korea, there's increasing evidence that China isn’t enforcing economic sanctions, namely when it comes to coal. So what's the next move there in your remaining four and a half months in office? And second, is it time for a fundamental rethink of North Korea policy, given that all these years of condemnations and increasing sanctions haven’t led to a desired outcome? Thank you.

President Obama: Well, those are good questions. In my meeting with President Xi, we emphasized the importance of full implementation of the U.N. sanctions that have been put forward. I can tell you that based on not only their presentations but actually intelligence and evidence that we've seen, China has done more on sanctions implementation than they have on some of the previous U.N. Security Council sanctions. But you are absolutely right that there are still places where they need to tighten up. And we continue to indicate to them the importance of tightening those up.

You may have noted that China continues to object to the THAAD deployment in the Republic of Korea, one of our treaty allies. And what I've said to President Xi directly is that we cannot have a situation where we're unable to defend either ourselves or our treaty allies against increasingly provocative behavior and escalating capabilities by the North Koreans. And I indicated to him that if the THAAD bothered him, particularly since it has no purpose other than defensive and does not change the strategic balance between the United States and China, that they need to work with us more effectively to change Pyongyang's behavior.

Now, when it comes to changing Pyongyang's behavior, it's tough. It is true that our approach -- my approach since I've been President -- is to not reward bad behavior. And that was based on the fact that, before I came into office, you had a pattern in which North Korea would engage in some provocative action and, as a consequence of the equivalent of throwing a tantrum, countries would then try to placate them by giving them humanitarian aid or providing other concessions, or engaging in dialogue, which would relieve some of the pressure, and then they would just go right back to the same provocative behavior later.

And so our view was, that wasn’t working, let's trying something else. Now, it is entirely fair to say that they have continued to engage in the development of their nuclear program and these ballistic missile tests. And so we are constantly examining other strategies that we can take, close consultations with Republic of Korea and Japan, as well as China and Russia and others who are interested parties, and we do believe that if there are any signs, at any point, that North Korea is serious about dialogue around denuclearization in the Korean Peninsula, that we'll be ready to have those conversations.

It's not as if we are looking for a problem, or avoiding a willingness to engage diplomatically. But diplomacy requires that Pyongyang meet its international obligations, and not only is it failing to meet those international obligations, it's not even suggesting that they have any intention to do so anytime in the future regardless of the inducements that might be put on the table.

So, look, we are deeply disturbed by what's happened. We are going to make sure that we put our defensive measures in place so that America is protected, our allies are protected. We will continue to put some of the toughest pressure that North Korea has ever been under as a consequence of this behavior. Can I guarantee that it works? No. But it is the best options that we have available to us right now. And we will continue to explore with all parties involved, including China, other potential means by which we can bring about a change in behavior.

Bob Woodruff.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. First of all, I just want to let you know that this is going to be more of a personal question for you. We are almost the same exact age, born August 1961, but I'm two weeks younger than you.

President Obama: You know, I noticed that when we were in the gym together, you were working out a little harder than me. So those two weeks clearly are making a difference.

Question: But I want to ask you about some of your thoughts all those years ago, since we were living in those days of the Vietnam era. What were your thoughts about Vietnam, the war at that time, and certainly as time when on, but more importantly, about the Secret War, when you found out about that, and also as time went by? Given what you learned about that and what you see now, and what you’ve witnessed when you're here, do you think you should apologize fully to the country of Laos? And one other very important thing, too, is, for those American veterans who did serve in the Secret War, those that are Special Ops, CIA, certainly pilots that dropped the bombs -- those are the ones that targeted known enemies in a war they did not create. Would you be comfortable, in Laos, calling them heroes as we do with those that served in Iraq and Afghanistan?

President Obama: Well, because we're the same age, you'll recall that at the peak of the war, we were still too young, I think, to fully understand the scope of what was taking place. It was the tail end of the war where we're entering high school and starting to understand the meaning of it. But at that point, it was -- I think the debate had raged. Even those who had been strong supporters of the war recognized there needed to be some mechanism to bring it to an end. So I can't say that I was so precocious that I had deep thoughts about it at the time, other than the images that we all saw on television.

Standing here now, in retrospect, I think what I can say is that the United States was on the right side of history when it came to the Cold War. There may have been moments, particularly here in Southeast Asia, in which, in our singular focus on defeating an expansionist and very aggressive communism, that we didn’t think through all the implications of what we did as policymakers. And certainly when you see the dropping of cluster bombs, trying to figure out how that was going to be effective -- particularly since part of the job was to win over hearts and minds -- how that was going to work, I think with the benefit of hindsight, we have to say that a lot of those consequences were not ones that necessarily served our interests.

Having said that -- and I've said this before -- regardless of what happens in the White House and decisions made by policymakers, when our men and women in uniform go into action and put their lives on the line, and they're carrying out their duty, my attitude is they're always heroes, because they are saying that I am willing to do whatever it takes, what my Commander-in-Chief has ordered, in order to keep the American people safe. And, by definition, their job is to put their lives on the line and make sacrifices, both seen and unseen, that have longstanding ramifications. And that act of sacrifice is heroic.

And one of the things that when I think about in terms of legacy and I reflect back on my presidency as it comes to an end, is the degree to which I came in respecting and honoring our men and women in uniform, I leave here even more in awe of what they do.

And it also is one of the reasons why I take so seriously the decisions I make about war and peace. Because I know whatever decision I make, there are men and women out there who will carry out my decision, even if they think it's wrong, even if they didn’t vote for me, even if they have completely different ideas about what's required for our national security. That's heroism. That's service. That's the definition of it. And that puts a special burden on the occupant of my office to get it right -- or at least as right as you can. And hopefully, when people look back 20 years from now, or 30 years from now, at the decisions I made, they'll be able to say that he did pretty good.

All right? Thank you very much, everybody. Let's go home.

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# Address on the 15-Year Anniversary of 9/11

Good morning. Scripture tells us, “Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you…write them on the tablet of your heart.”

Secretary Carter, Chairman Dunford, outstanding members of our Armed Forces, and most of all, survivors of that September day and the families of those we lost -- it is a great honor, once again, to be with you on this day, a day that I know is still difficult, but which reveals the love and faithfulness in your hearts and in the heart of our nation.

We remember, and we will never forget, the nearly 3,000 beautiful lives taken from us so cruelly -- including 184 men, women and children here, the youngest just three years old. We honor the courage of those who put themselves in harm’s way to save people they never knew. We come together in prayer and in gratitude for the strength that has fortified us across these 15 years. And we renew the love and the faith that binds us together as one American family.

Fifteen years may seem like a long time, but for the families who lost a piece of their heart that day, I imagine it can seem like just yesterday. Perhaps it’s the memory of a last kiss given to a spouse, or the last goodbye to a mother or father, a sister or a brother. We wonder how their lives might have unfolded, how their dreams might have taken shape. And I am mindful that no words we offer, or deeds we do, can ever truly erase the pain of their absence.

And yet, you -- the survivors and families of 9/11 -- your “steadfast love and faithfulness” has been an inspiration to me and to our entire country. Even as you’ve mourned, you’ve summoned the strength to carry on. In the names of those you’ve lost, you’ve started scholarships and volunteered in your communities, and done your best to be a good neighbor and a good friend and a good citizen. And in your grief and grace, you have reminded us that, together, there’s nothing we Americans cannot overcome.

The question before us, as always, is: How do we preserve the legacy of those we lost? How do we live up to their example? And how do we keep their spirit alive in our own hearts?

Well, we have seen the answer in a generation of Americans -- our men and women in uniform, diplomats, intelligence, homeland security and law enforcement professionals -- all who have stepped forward to serve and who have risked and given their lives to help keep us safe. Thanks to their extraordinary service, we’ve dealt devastating blows to al Qaeda.

We've delivered justice to Osama bin Laden. We’ve strengthened our homeland security. We've prevented attacks. We've saved lives. We resolve to continue doing everything in our power to protect this country that we love. And today, we once again pay tribute to these patriots, both military and civilian, who serve in our name, including those far away from home in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Perhaps most of all, we stay true to the spirit of this day by defending not only our country, but also our ideals. Fifteen years into this fight, the threat has evolved. With our stronger defenses, terrorists often attempt attacks on a smaller, but still deadly, scale. Hateful ideologies urge people in their own country to commit unspeakable violence. We’ve mourned the loss of innocents from Boston to San Bernardino to Orlando.

Groups like al Qaeda, like ISIL, know that we will never be able -- they will never be able to defeat a nation as great and as strong as America. So, instead, they've tried to terrorize in the hopes that they can stoke enough fear that we turn on each other and that we change who we are or how we live. And that's why it is so important today that we reaffirm our character as a nation -- a people drawn from every corner of the world, every color, every religion, every background -- bound by a creed as old as our founding, e pluribus unum. Out of many, we are one. For we know that our diversity -- our patchwork heritage -- is not a weakness; it is still, and always will be, one of our greatest strengths. This is the America that was attacked that September morning. This is the America that we must remain true to.

Across our country today, Americans are coming together in service and remembrance. We run our fingers over the names in memorial benches here at the Pentagon. We walk the hallowed grounds of a Pennsylvania field. We look up at a gleaming tower that pierces the New York City skyline. But in the end, the most enduring memorial to those we lost is ensuring the America that we continue to be -- that we stay true to ourselves, that we stay true to what's best in us, that we do not let others divide us.

As I mark this solemn day with you for the last time as President, I think of Americans whose stories I’ve been humbled to know these past eight years -- Americans who, I believe, embody the true spirit of 9/11.

It’s the courage of Welles Crowther, just 24 years old, in the South tower -- the man in the red bandana who spent his final moments helping strangers to safety before the towers fell. It’s the resilience of the firehouse on Eighth Avenue -- patriots who lost more than a dozen men, but who still suit up every day as the “Pride of Midtown.” It’s the love of a daughter -- Payton Wall of New Jersey -- whose father, in his last moments on the phone from the towers, told her, “I will always be watching over you.”

It’s the resolve of those Navy SEALS who made sure justice was finally done, who served as we must live as a nation -- getting each other’s backs, looking out for each other, united, one mission, one team. It’s the ultimate sacrifice of men and women who rest for eternity not far from here, in gentle green hills in perfect formation -- Americans who gave their lives in faraway places so that we can be here today, strong and free and proud. It’s all of us -- every American who gets up each day, and lives our lives, carries on. Because as Americans, we do not give in to fear. We will preserve our freedoms and the way of life that makes us a beacon to the world.

“Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you…write them on the tablet of your heart.” And how we conduct ourselves as individuals and as a nation, we have the opportunity each and every day to live up to the sacrifice of those heroes that we lost. May God bless the memory of the loved ones here and across the country. They remain in our hearts today.

May He watch over these faithful families and all who protect us.

And may God forever bless the United States of America.

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# Statement on the Explosions in New York and New Jersey

Good morning, everybody. I want to say a few words about the explosions that occurred here in New York City and New Jersey and the other devices that have been found in New Jersey. I’ve been monitoring the situation closely and receiving frequent updates from my team. And I’ve just been briefed again by FBI Director Comey. In addition, I've had a chance to speak with Governors Cuomo and Christie, as well as Mayor de Blasio.

We’ve seen what was apparently a pipe bomb go off in New Jersey, in Seaside Park, where it could have seriously injured our U.S. Marines and spectators who were there for a race. The bombing in the Chelsea neighborhood, here in New York, injured more than two dozen people. We are extremely fortunate and grateful that nobody was killed. And our prayers go out to all those who have been injured. We want to wish them a speedy recovery.

I especially want to commend all the outstanding police and first responders in both New York City and New Jersey for their extraordinary professionalism and their quick response, which surely prevented even more people from being hurt, and ensured that people got assistance quickly.

The investigation is moving rapidly, and as is my practice, I’m going to leave it to the FBI and law enforcement to provide details. I think everybody is aware at this point that there is a person of interest who is the focus of the investigation. And the FBI can give you further details in terms of how that is proceeding.

I told Governors Cuomo and Christie and Mayor de Blasio that they and their teams will continue to have all federal support as they move ahead with their investigations, and tracking down every lead, and working to keep the people of this city and of this region safe. Law enforcement is asking for the help of the community. And so to everybody in this region, I want to repeat what we've said before: If you see something suspicious, then you need to say something -- contact local law enforcement.

In the meantime, I would ask that the press try to refrain from getting out ahead of the investigation. I am extraordinarily happy with the cooperation that's been taking place between the FBI and state and local law enforcement officials. They are moving smartly on this investigation. It does not help if false reports or incomplete information is out there. So try to, as much as possible, stick to what our investigators say, because they actually know what they're talking about.

Meanwhile, I know that the United Nations meetings here every year already create an additional workload for New York. But given the U.N. meetings, we also have a particularly high level of federal resources here to help as needed. We’re going to make sure that everybody is working together seamlessly, as one team, to get to the bottom of what happened, to find those responsible, and to make sure that justice is done. Meanwhile, while all this is going on in New York and New Jersey, we’re also focused on the stabbing attack at the shopping mall in Minnesota. At this point, we see no connection between that incident and what happened here in New York and New Jersey. Our attention there is on the people who were injured. And again, we are very grateful that no one lost their life. Thanks to the quick action of a brave off-duty police officer, the suspect was killed and we avoided more people being hurt.

I had a chance also to speak with Governor Dayton this morning. I assured him that we will provide all the assistance that he needs in the investigation. The FBI is investigating the Minnesota incident as a potential act of terrorism. We will direct the full resources of the federal government to make sure that the investigation goes forward aggressively.

And finally, I want to take this opportunity to reassure the people in this city, in this region, and Americans across our country that our counterterrorism and law enforcement professionals at every level -- federal, state and local -- are working together, around the clock, to prevent attacks and to keep us safe. They are the best of the best. Over the years, they have thwarted many plots and saved many lives. And we are incredibly grateful for their service, today and every single day.

We will continue to lead the global coalition in the fight to destroy ISIL, which is instigating a lot of people over the Internet to carry out attacks. We are going to continue to go after them. We're going to take out their leaders. We're going to take out their infrastructure. They are continuing to lose ground in Iraq and in Syria. And later today, I’ll be meeting with Prime Minister Abadi of Iraq to discuss the need to sustain that momentum. As we take away more of their territory, it exposes ISIL as the failed cause that it is. And it helps to undermine their ideology, which over time will make it harder for them to recruit and inspire people to violence. And we're going to continue to enlist tech companies and community and religious leaders to push back against online extremist content and all messages of hate.

At moments like this, I think it’s important to remember what terrorists and violent extremists are trying to do. They are trying to hurt innocent people, but they also want to inspire fear in all of us, and disrupt the way we live, to undermine our values. And so, even as we have to be vigilant and aggressive, both in preventing senseless acts of violence but also making sure that we find those who carry out such acts and bring them to justice, we all have a role to play as citizens in making sure that we don’t succumb to that fear. And there’s no better example of that than the people of New York and New Jersey.

When I was speaking to Governor Cuomo and Governor Christie and Mayor De Blasio, one point that they all made is, folks around here, they don’t get scared. They’re tough, they’re resilient, they go about their business every single day. And that kind of toughness and resoluteness, and a recognition that neither individuals nor organizations like ISIL can ultimately undermine our way of life, that’s the kind of strength that makes me so proud to be an American. And that’s the kind of strength that is going to be absolutely critical not just in the days to come but in the years to come.

By showing those who want to do us harm that they will never beat us, by showing the entire world that as Americans we do not, and never will, give in to fear, that’s going to be the most important ingredient in us defeating those who would carry our terrorist acts against us.

Thank you very much, everybody. And as I said, you will be receiving, I’m sure, ongoing briefings from both the FBI and local law enforcement in terms of the details of the investigation.

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# Final Address to the United Nations General Assembly

Mr. President; Mr. Secretary General; fellow delegates; ladies and gentlemen: As I address this hall as President for the final time, let me recount the progress that we’ve made these last eight years.

From the depths of the greatest financial crisis of our time, we coordinated our response to avoid further catastrophe and return the global economy to growth. We’ve taken away terrorist safe havens, strengthened the nonproliferation regime, resolved the Iranian nuclear issue through diplomacy. We opened relations with Cuba, helped Colombia end Latin America’s longest warm, and we welcome a democratically elected leader of Myanmar to this Assembly. Our assistance is helping people feed themselves, care for the sick, power communities across Africa, and promote models of development rather than dependence. And we have made international institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund more representative, while establishing a framework to protect our planet from the ravages of climate change.

This is important work. It has made a real difference in the lives of our people. And it could not have happened had we not worked together. And yet, around the globe we are seeing the same forces of global integration that have made us interdependent also expose deep fault lines in the existing international order.

We see it in the headlines every day. Around the world, refugees flow across borders in flight from brutal conflict. Financial disruptions continue to weigh upon our workers and entire communities. Across vast swaths of the Middle East, basic security, basic order has broken down. We see too many governments muzzling journalists, and quashing dissent, and censoring the flow of information. Terrorist networks use social media to prey upon the minds of our youth, endangering open societies and spurring anger against innocent immigrants and Muslims. Powerful nations contest the constraints placed on them by international law.

This is the paradox that defines our world today. A quarter century after the end of the Cold War, the world is by many measures less violent and more prosperous than ever before, and yet our societies are filled with uncertainty, and unease, and strife. Despite enormous progress, as people lose trust in institutions, governing becomes more difficult and tensions between nations become more quick to surface.

And so I believe that at this moment we all face a choice. We can choose to press forward with a better model of cooperation and integration. Or we can retreat into a world sharply divided, and ultimately in conflict, along age-old lines of nation and tribe and race and religion.

I want to suggest to you today that we must go forward, and not backward. I believe that as imperfect as they are, the principles of open markets and accountable governance, of democracy and human rights and international law that we have forged remain the firmest foundation for human progress in this century. I make this argument not based on theory or ideology, but on facts -- facts that all too often, we forget in the immediacy of current events.

Here’s the most important fact: The integration of our global economy has made life better for billions of men, women and children. Over the last 25 years, the number of people living in extreme poverty has been cut from nearly 40 percent of humanity to under 10 percent. That's unprecedented. And it's not an abstraction. It means children have enough to eat; mothers don’t die in childbirth.

Meanwhile, cracking the genetic code promises to cure diseases that have plagued us for centuries. The Internet can deliver the entirety of human knowledge to a young girl in a remote village on a single hand-held device. In medicine and in manufacturing, in education and communications, we’re experiencing a transformation of how human beings live on a scale that recalls the revolutions in agriculture and industry. And as a result, a person born today is more likely to be healthy, to live longer, and to have access to opportunity than at any time in human history.

Moreover, the collapse of colonialism and communism has allowed more people than ever before to live with the freedom to choose their leaders. Despite the real and troubling areas where freedom appears in retreat, the fact remains that the number of democracies around the world has nearly doubled in the last 25 years.

In remote corners of the world, citizens are demanding respect for the dignity of all people no matter their gender, or race, or religion, or disability, or sexual orientation, and those who deny others dignity are subject to public reproach. An explosion of social media has given ordinary people more ways to express themselves, and has raised people’s expectations for those of us in power. Indeed, our international order has been so successful that we take it as a given that great powers no longer fight world wars; that the end of the Cold War lifted the shadow of nuclear Armageddon; that the battlefields of Europe have been replaced by peaceful union; that China and India remain on a path of remarkable growth.

I say all this not to whitewash the challenges we face, or to suggest complacency. Rather, I believe that we need to acknowledge these achievements in order to summon the confidence to carry this progress forward and to make sure that we do not abandon those very things that have delivered this progress.

In order to move forward, though, we do have to acknowledge that the existing path to global integration requires a course correction. As too often, those trumpeting the benefits of globalization have ignored inequality within and among nations; have ignored the enduring appeal of ethnic and sectarian identities; have left international institutions ill-equipped, underfunded, under-resourced, in order to handle transnational challenges.

And as these real problems have been neglected, alternative visions of the world have pressed forward both in the wealthiest countries and in the poorest: religious fundamentalism; the politics of ethnicity, or tribe, or sect; aggressive nationalism; a crude populism -- sometimes from the far left, but more often from the far right -- which seeks to restore what they believe was a better, simpler age free of outside contamination.

We cannot dismiss these visions. They are powerful. They reflect dissatisfaction among too many of our citizens. I do not believe those visions can deliver security or prosperity over the long term, but I do believe that these visions fail to recognize, at a very basic level, our common humanity. Moreover, I believe that the acceleration of travel and technology and telecommunications -- together with a global economy that depends on a global supply chain -- makes it self-defeating ultimately for those who seek to reverse this progress. Today, a nation ringed by walls would only imprison itself.

So the answer cannot be a simple rejection of global integration. Instead, we must work together to make sure the benefits of such integration are broadly shared, and that the disruptions -- economic, political, and cultural -- that are caused by integration are squarely addressed. This is not the place for a detailed policy blueprint, but let me offer in broad strokes those areas where I believe we must do better together.

It starts with making the global economy work better for all people and not just for those at the top. While open markets, capitalism have raised standards of living around the globe, globalization combined with rapid progress and technology has also weakened the position of workers and their ability to secure a decent wage. In advanced economies like my own, unions have been undermined, and many manufacturing jobs have disappeared. Often, those who benefit most from globalization have used their political power to further undermine the position of workers.

In developing countries, labor organizations have often been suppressed, and the growth of the middle class has been held back by corruption and underinvestment. Mercantilist policies pursued by governments with export-driven models threaten to undermine the consensus that underpins global trade. And meanwhile, global capital is too often unaccountable -- nearly 8 trillion dollars stashed away in tax havens, a shadow banking system that grows beyond the reach of effective oversight.

A world in which one percent of humanity controls as much wealth as the other 99 percent will never be stable. I understand that the gaps between rich and poor are not new, but just as the child in a slum today can see the skyscraper nearby, technology now allows any person with a smartphone to see how the most privileged among us live and the contrast between their own lives and others. Expectations rise, then, faster than governments can deliver, and a pervasive sense of injustice undermine people’s faith in the system.

So how do we fix this imbalance? We cannot unwind integration any more than we can stuff technology back into a box. Nor can we look to failed models of the past. If we start resorting to trade wars, market distorting subsidies, beggar thy neighbor policies, an overreliance on natural resources instead of innovation -- these approaches will make us poorer, collectively, and they are more like to lead to conflict. And the stark contrast between, say, the success of the Republic of Korea and the wasteland of North Korea shows that central, planned control of the economy is a dead end.

But I do believe there’s another path -- one that fuels growth and innovation, and offers the clearest route to individual opportunity and national success. It does not require succumbing to a soulless capitalism that benefits only the few, but rather recognizes that economies are more successful when we close the gap between rich and poor, and growth is broadly based. And that means respecting the rights of workers so they can organize into independent unions and earn a living wage. It means investing in our people -- their skills, their education, their capacity to take an idea and turn it into a business. It means strengthening the safety net that protects our people from hardship and allows them to take more risks -- to look for a new job, or start a new venture.

These are the policies that I’ve pursued here in the United States, and with clear results. American businesses have created now 15 million new jobs. After the recession, the top one percent of Americans were capturing more than 90 percent of income growth. But today, that's down to about half. Last year, poverty in this country fell at the fastest rate in nearly 50 years. And with further investment in infrastructure and early childhood education and basic research, I’m confident that such progress will continue.

So just as I’ve pursued these measures here at home, so has the United States worked with many nations to curb the excesses of capitalism -- not to punish wealth, but to prevent repeated crises that can destroy it. That’s why we’ve worked with other nations to create higher and clearer standards for banking and taxation -- because a society that asks less of oligarchs than ordinary citizens will rot from within. That’s why we’ve pushed for transparency and cooperation in rooting out corruption, and tracking illicit dollars, because markets create more jobs when they're fueled by hard work, and not the capacity to extort a bribe. That’s why we’ve worked to reach trade agreements that raise labor standards and raise environmental standards, as we've done with the Trans-Pacific Partnership, so that the benefits are more broadly shared.

And just as we benefit by combating inequality within our countries, I believe advanced economies still need to do more to close the gap between rich and poor nations around the globe. This is difficult politically. It's difficult to spend on foreign assistance. But I do not believe this is charity. For the small fraction of what we spent at war in Iraq we could support institutions so that fragile states don’t collapse in the first place, and invest in emerging economies that become markets for our goods. It's not just the right thing to do, it's the smart thing to do.

And that’s why we need to follow through on our efforts to combat climate change. If we don't act boldly, the bill that could come due will be mass migrations, and cities submerged and nations displaced, and food supplies decimated, and conflicts born of despair. The Paris Agreement gives us a framework to act, but only if we scale up our ambition. And there must be a sense of urgency about bringing the agreement into force, and helping poorer countries leapfrog destructive forms of energy.

So, for the wealthiest countries, a Green Climate Fund should only be the beginning. We need to invest in research and provide market incentives to develop new technologies, and then make these technologies accessible and affordable for poorer countries. And only then can we continue lifting all people up from poverty without condemning our children to a planet beyond their capacity to repair.

So we need new models for the global marketplace, models that are inclusive and sustainable. And in the same way, we need models of governance that are inclusive and accountable to ordinary people.

I recognize not every country in this hall is going to follow the same model of governance. I do not think that America can -- or should -- impose our system of government on other countries. But there appears to be growing contest between authoritarianism and liberalism right now. And I want everybody to understand, I am not neutral in that contest. I believe in a liberal political order -- an order built not just through elections and representative government, but also through respect for human rights and civil society, and independent judiciaries and the rule of law.

I know that some countries, which now recognize the power of free markets, still reject the model of free societies. And perhaps those of us who have been promoting democracy feel somewhat discouraged since the end of the Cold War, because we've learned that liberal democracy will not just wash across the globe in a single wave. It turns out building accountable institutions is hard work -- the work of generations. The gains are often fragile. Sometimes we take one step forward and then two steps back. In countries held together by borders drawn by colonial powers, with ethnic enclaves and tribal divisions, politics and elections can sometimes appear to be a zero-sum game. And so, given the difficulty in forging true democracy in the face of these pressures, it’s no surprise that some argue the future favors the strongman, a top-down model, rather than strong, democratic institutions.

But I believe this thinking is wrong. I believe the road of true democracy remains the better path. I believe that in the 21st century, economies can only grow to a certain point until they need to open up -- because entrepreneurs need to access information in order to invent; young people need a global education in order to thrive; independent media needs to check the abuses of power. Without this evolution, ultimately expectations of people will not be met; suppression and stagnation will set in. And history shows that strongmen are then left with two paths -- permanent crackdown, which sparks strife at home, or scapegoating enemies abroad, which can lead to war.

Now, I will admit, my belief that governments serve the individual, and not the other way around, is shaped by America’s story. Our nation began with a promise of freedom that applied only to the few. But because of our democratic Constitution, because of our Bill of Rights, because of our ideals, ordinary people were able to organize, and march, and protest, and ultimately, those ideals won out -- opened doors for women and minorities and workers in ways that made our economy more productive and turned our diversity into a strength; that gave innovators the chance to transform every area of human endeavor; that made it possible for someone like me to be elected President of the United States.

So, yes, my views are shaped by the specific experiences of America, but I do not think this story is unique to America. Look at the transformation that's taken place in countries as different as Japan and Chile, Indonesia, Botswana. The countries that have succeeded are ones in which people feel they have a stake.

In Europe, the progress of those countries in the former Soviet bloc that embraced democracy stand in clear contrast to those that did not. After all, the people of Ukraine did not take to the streets because of some plot imposed from abroad. They took to the streets because their leadership was for sale and they had no recourse. They demanded change because they saw life get better for people in the Baltics and in Poland, societies that were more liberal, and democratic, and open than their own.

So those of us who believe in democracy, we need to speak out forcefully, because both the facts and history, I believe, are on our side. That doesn’t mean democracies are without flaws. It does mean that the cure for what ails our democracies is greater engagement by our citizens -- not less.

Yes, in America, there is too much money in politics; too much entrenched partisanship; too little participation by citizens, in part because of a patchwork of laws that makes it harder to vote. In Europe, a well-intentioned Brussels often became too isolated from the normal push and pull of national politics. Too often, in capitals, decision-makers have forgotten that democracy needs to be driven by civic engagement from the bottom up, not governance by experts from the top down. And so these are real problems, and as leaders of democratic governments make the case for democracy abroad, we better strive harder to set a better example at home.

Moreover, every country will organize its government informed by centuries of history, and the circumstances of geography, and the deeply held beliefs of its people. So I recognize a traditional society may value unity and cohesion more than a diverse country like my own, which was founded upon what, at the time, was a radical idea -- the idea of the liberty of individual human beings endowed with certain God-given rights. But that does not mean that ordinary people in Asia, or Africa, or the Middle East somehow prefer arbitrary rule that denies them a voice in the decisions that can shape their lives. I believe that spirit is universal. And if any of you doubt the universality of that desire, listen to the voices of young people everywhere who call out for freedom, and dignity, and the opportunity to control their own lives.

This leads me to the third thing we need to do: We must reject any forms of fundamentalism, or racism, or a belief in ethnic superiority that makes our traditional identities irreconcilable with modernity. Instead we need to embrace the tolerance that results from respect of all human beings.

It’s a truism that global integration has led to a collision of cultures; trade, migration, the Internet, all these things can challenge and unsettle our most cherished identities. We see liberal societies express opposition when women choose to cover themselves. We see protests responding to Western newspaper cartoons that caricature the Prophet Muhammad. In a world that left the age of empire behind, we see Russia attempting to recover lost glory through force. Asian powers debate competing claims of history. And in Europe and the United States, you see people wrestle with concerns about immigration and changing demographics, and suggesting that somehow people who look different are corrupting the character of our countries.

Now, there’s no easy answer for resolving all these social forces, and we must respect the meaning that people draw from their own traditions -- from their religion, from their ethnicity, from their sense of nationhood. But I do not believe progress is possible if our desire to preserve our identities gives way to an impulse to dehumanize or dominate another group. If our religion leads us to persecute those of another faith, if we jail or beat people who are gay, if our traditions lead us to prevent girls from going to school, if we discriminate on the basis of race or tribe or ethnicity, then the fragile bonds of civilization will fray. The world is too small, we are too packed together, for us to be able to resort to those old ways of thinking.

We see this mindset in too many parts of the Middle East. There, so much of the collapse in order has been fueled because leaders sought legitimacy not because of policies or programs but by resorting to persecuting political opposition, or demonizing other religious sects, by narrowing the public space to the mosque, where in too many places perversions of a great faith were tolerated. These forces built up for years, and are now at work helping to fuel both Syria’s tragic civil war and the mindless, medieval menace of ISIL.

The mindset of sectarianism, and extremism, and bloodletting, and retribution that has been taking place will not be quickly reversed. And if we are honest, we understand that no external power is going to be able to force different religious communities or ethnic communities to co-exist for long. But I do believe we have to be honest about the nature of these conflicts, and our international community must continue to work with those who seek to build rather than to destroy.

And there is a military component to that. It means being united and relentless in destroying networks like ISIL, which show no respect for human life. But it also means that in a place like Syria, where there’s no ultimate military victory to be won, we’re going to have to pursue the hard work of diplomacy that aims to stop the violence, and deliver aid to those in need, and support those who pursue a political settlement and can see those who are not like themselves as worthy of dignity and respect.

Across the region’s conflicts, we have to insist that all parties recognize a common humanity and that nations end proxy wars that fuel disorder. Because until basic questions are answered about how communities co-exist, the embers of extremism will continue to burn, countless human beings will suffer -- most of all in that region -- but extremism will continue to be exported overseas. And the world is too small for us to simply be able to build a wall and prevent it from affecting our own societies.

And what is true in the Middle East is true for all of us. Surely, religious traditions can be honored and upheld while teaching young people science and math, rather than intolerance. Surely, we can sustain our unique traditions while giving women their full and rightful role in the politics and economics of a nation. Surely, we can rally our nations to solidarity while recognizing equal treatment for all communities -- whether it’s a religious minority in Myanmar, or an ethnic minority in Burundi, or a racial minority right here in the United States. And surely, Israelis and Palestinians will be better off if Palestinians reject incitement and recognize the legitimacy of Israel, but Israel recognizes that it cannot permanently occupy and settle Palestinian land. We all have to do better as leaders in tamping down, rather than encouraging, a notion of identity that leads us to diminish others.

And this leads me to the fourth and final thing we need to do, and that is sustain our commitment to international cooperation rooted in the rights and responsibilities of nations.

As President of the United States, I know that for most of human history, power has not been unipolar. The end of the Cold War may have led too many to forget this truth. I’ve noticed as President that at times, both America’s adversaries and some of our allies believe that all problems were either caused by Washington or could be solved by Washington -- and perhaps too many in Washington believed that as well. But I believe America has been a rare superpower in human history insofar as it has been willing to think beyond narrow self-interest; that while we’ve made our share of mistakes over these last 25 years -- and I’ve acknowledged some -- we have strived, sometimes at great sacrifice, to align better our actions with our ideals. And as a consequence, I believe we have been a force for good.

We have secured allies. We’ve acted to protect the vulnerable. We supported human rights and welcomed scrutiny of our own actions. We’ve bound our power to international laws and institutions. When we've made mistakes, we've tried to acknowledge them. We have worked to roll back poverty and hunger and disease beyond our borders, not just within our borders.

I'm proud of that. But I also know that we can't do this alone. And I believe that if we're to meet the challenges of this century, we are all going to have to do more to build up international capacity. We cannot escape the prospect of nuclear war unless we all commit to stopping the spread of nuclear weapons and pursuing a world without them.

When Iran agrees to accept constraints on its nuclear program that enhances global security and enhances Iran's ability to work with other nations. On the other hand, when North Korea tests a bomb that endangers all of us. And any country that breaks this basic bargain must face consequences. And those nations with these weapons, like the United States, have a unique responsibility to pursue the path of reducing our stockpiles, and reaffirming basic norms like the commitment to never test them again.

We can't combat a disease like Zika that recognizes no borders -- mosquitoes don't respect walls -- unless we make permanent the same urgency that we brought to bear against Ebola -- by strengthening our own systems of public health, by investing in cures and rolling back the root causes of disease, and helping poorer countries develop a public health infrastructure.

We can only eliminate extreme poverty if the sustainable development goals that we have set are more than words on paper. Human ingenuity now gives us the capacity to feed the hungry and give all of our children -- including our girls -- the education that is the foundation for opportunity in our world. But we have to put our money where our mouths are.

And we can only realize the promise of this institution’s founding -- to replace the ravages of war with cooperation -- if powerful nations like my own accept constraints. Sometimes I'm criticized in my own country for professing a belief in international norms and multilateral institutions. But I am convinced that in the long run, giving up some freedom of action -- not giving up our ability to protect ourselves or pursue our core interests, but binding ourselves to international rules over the long term -- enhances our security. And I think that's not just true for us.

If Russia continues to interfere in the affairs of its neighbors, it may be popular at home, it may fuel nationalist fervor for a time, but over time it is also going to diminish its stature and make its borders less secure. In the South China Sea, a peaceful resolution of disputes offered by law will mean far greater stability than the militarization of a few rocks and reefs.

We are all stakeholders in this international system, and it calls upon all of us to invest in the success of institutions to which we belong. And the good news is, is that many nations have shown what kind of progress is possible when we make those commitments. Consider what we’ve accomplished here over the past few years.

Together, we mobilized some 50,000 additional troops for U.N. peacekeeping, making them nimble, better equipped, better prepared to deal with emergencies. Together, we established an Open Government Partnership so that, increasingly, transparency empowers more and more people around the globe. And together, now, we have to open our hearts and do more to help refugees who are desperate for a home.

We should all welcome the pledges of increased assistance that have been made at this General Assembly gathering. I'll be discussing that more this afternoon. But we have to follow through, even when the politics are hard. Because in the eyes of innocent men and women and children who, through no fault of their own, have had to flee everything that they know, everything that they love, we have to have the empathy to see ourselves. We have to imagine what it would be like for our family, for our children, if the unspeakable happened to us. And we should all understand that, ultimately, our world will be more secure if we are prepared to help those in need and the nations who are carrying the largest burden with respect to accommodating these refugees.

There are a lot of nations right now that are doing the right thing. But many nations -- particularly those blessed with wealth and the benefits of geography -- that can do more to offer a hand, even if they also insist that refugees who come to our countries have to do more to adapt to the customs and conventions of the communities that are now providing them a home.

Let me conclude by saying that I recognize history tells a different story than the one that I've talked about here today. There's a much darker and more cynical view of history that we can adopt. Human beings are too often motivated by greed and by power. Big countries for most of history have pushed smaller ones around. Tribes and ethnic groups and nation states have very often found it most convenient to define themselves by what they hate and not just those ideas that bind them together.

Time and again, human beings have believed that they finally arrived at a period of enlightenment only to repeat, then, cycles of conflict and suffering. Perhaps that's our fate. We have to remember that the choices of individual human beings led to repeated world war. But we also have to remember that the choices of individual human beings created a United Nations, so that a war like that would never happen again. Each of us as leaders, each nation can choose to reject those who appeal to our worst impulses and embrace those who appeal to our best. For we have shown that we can choose a better history.

Sitting in a prison cell, a young Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote that, Human progress never rolls [in] on the wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men willing to be co-workers with God.” And during the course of these eight years, as I've traveled to many of your nations, I have seen that spirit in our young people, who are more educated and more tolerant, and more inclusive and more diverse, and more creative than our generation; who are more empathetic and compassionate towards their fellow human beings than previous generations. And, yes, some of that comes with the idealism of youth. But it also comes with young people’s access to information about other peoples and places -- an understanding unique in human history that their future is bound with the fates of other human beings on the other side of the world.

I think of the thousands of health care workers from around the world who volunteered to fight Ebola. I remember the young entrepreneurs I met who are now starting new businesses in Cuba, the parliamentarians who used to be just a few years ago political prisoners in Myanmar. I think of the girls who have braved taunts or violence just to go to school in Afghanistan, and the university students who started programs online to reject the extremism of organizations like ISIL. I draw strength from the young Americans -- entrepreneurs, activists, soldiers, new citizens -- who are remaking our nation once again, who are unconstrained by old habits and old conventions, and unencumbered by what is, but are instead ready to seize what ought to be.

My own family is a made up of the flesh and blood and traditions and cultures and faiths from a lot of different parts of the world -- just as America has been built by immigrants from every shore. And in my own life, in this country, and as President, I have learned that our identities do not have to be defined by putting someone else down, but can be enhanced by lifting somebody else up. They don’t have to be defined in opposition to others, but rather by a belief in liberty and equality and justice and fairness.

And the embrace of these principles as universal doesn't weaken my particular pride, my particular love for America -- it strengthens it. My belief that these ideals apply everywhere doesn’t lessen my commitment to help those who look like me, or pray as I do, or pledge allegiance to my flag. But my faith in those principles does force me to expand my moral imagination and to recognize that I can best serve my own people, I can best look after my own daughters, by making sure that my actions seek what is right for all people and all children, and your daughters and your sons.

This is what I believe: that all of us can be co-workers with God. And our leadership, and our governments, and this United Nations should reflect this irreducible truth.

Thank you very much.

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# Address at the Dedication of the National Museum of African-American History & Culture

James Baldwin once wrote, For while the tale of how we suffer, and how we are delighted, and how we may triumph is never new, it always must be heard.” For while the tale of how we suffer, and how we are delighted, and how we may triumph is never new, it always must be heard.

Today, as so many generations have before, we gather on our National Mall to tell an essential part of our American story -- one that has at times been overlooked -- we come not just for today, but for all time.

President and Mrs. Bush; President Clinton; Vice President and Dr. Biden; Chief Justice Roberts; Secretary Skorton; Reverend Butts; distinguished guests: Thank you. Thank you for your leadership in making sure this tale is told. We’re here in part because of you and because of all those Americans -- the Civil War vets, the Civil Rights foot soldiers, the champions of this effort on Capitol Hill -- who, for more than a century, kept the dream of this museum alive.

That includes our leaders in Congress -- Paul Ryan and Nancy Pelosi. It includes one of my heroes, John Lewis, who, as he has so often, took the torch from those who came before him and brought us past the finish line. It includes the philanthropists and benefactors and advisory members who have so generously given not only their money but their time. It includes the Americans who offered up all the family keepsakes tucked away in Grandma’s attic. And of course, it includes a man without whose vision and passion and persistence we would not be here today -- Mr. Lonnie Bunch.

What we can see of this building -- the towering glass, the artistry of the metalwork -- is surely a sight to behold. But beyond the majesty of the building, what makes this occasion so special is the larger story it contains. Below us, this building reaches down 70 feet, its roots spreading far wider and deeper than any tree on this Mall. And on its lowest level, after you walk past remnants of a slave ship, after you reflect on the immortal declaration that “all men are created equal,” you can see a block of stone. On top of this stone sits a historical marker, weathered by the ages. That marker reads: “General Andrew Jackson and Henry Clay spoke from this slave block…during the year 1830.”

I want you to think about this. Consider what this artifact tells us about history, about how it’s told, and about what can be cast aside. On a stone where day after day, for years, men and women were torn from their spouse or their child, shackled and bound, and bought and sold, and bid like cattle; on a stone worn down by the tragedy of over a thousand bare feet -- for a long time, the only thing we considered important, the singular thing we once chose to commemorate as “history” with a plaque were the unmemorable speeches of two powerful men.

And that block I think explains why this museum is so necessary. Because that same object, reframed, put in context, tells us so much more. As Americans, we rightfully passed on the tales of the giants who built this country; who led armies into battle and waged seminal debates in the halls of Congress and the corridors of power. But too often, we ignored or forgot the stories of millions upon millions of others, who built this nation just as surely, whose humble eloquence, whose calloused hands, whose steady drive helped to create cities, erect industries, build the arsenals of democracy.

And so this national museum helps to tell a richer and fuller story of who we are. It helps us better understand the lives, yes, of the President, but also the slave; the industrialist, but also the porter; the keeper of the status quo, but also of the activist seeking to overthrow that status quo; the teacher or the cook, alongside the statesman. And by knowing this other story, we better understand ourselves and each other. It binds us together. It reaffirms that all of us are America -- that African-American history is not somehow separate from our larger American story, it's not the underside of the American story, it is central to the American story. That our glory derives not just from our most obvious triumphs, but how we’ve wrested triumph from tragedy, and how we've been able to remake ourselves, again and again and again, in accordance with our highest ideals.

I, too, am America.

The great historian John Hope Franklin, who helped to get this museum started, once said, “Good history is a good foundation for a better present and future.” He understood the best history doesn’t just sit behind a glass case; it helps us to understand what’s outside the case. The best history helps us recognize the mistakes that we’ve made and the dark corners of the human spirit that we need to guard against. And, yes, a clear-eyed view of history can make us uncomfortable, and shake us out of familiar narratives. But it is precisely because of that discomfort that we learn and grow and harness our collective power to make this nation more perfect.

That’s the American story that this museum tells -- one of suffering and delight; one of fear but also of hope; of wandering in the wilderness and then seeing out on the horizon a glimmer of the Promised Land.

It is in this embrace of truth, as best as we can know it, in the celebration of the entire American experience, where real patriotism lies. As President Bush just said, a great nation doesn’t shy from the truth. It strengthens us. It emboldens us. It should fortify us. It is an act of patriotism to understand where we've been. And this museum tells the story of so many patriots.

Yes, African Americans have felt the cold weight of shackles and the stinging lash of the field whip. But we’ve also dared to run north, and sing songs from Harriet Tubman’s hymnal. We’ve buttoned up our Union Blues to join the fight for our freedom. We’ve railed against injustice for decade upon decade -- a lifetime of struggle, and progress, and enlightenment that we see etched in Frederick Douglass’s mighty, leonine gaze.

Yes, this museum tells a story of people who felt the indignity, the small and large humiliations of a “whites only” sign, or wept at the side of Emmett Till’s coffin, or fell to their knees on shards of stained glass outside a church where four little girls died. But it also tells the story of the black youth and white youth sitting alongside each other, straight-backed, so full of dignity on those lunch counter stools; the story of a six-year-old Ruby Bridges, pigtails, fresh-pressed dress, walking that gauntlet to get to school; Tuskegee airmen soaring the skies not just to beat a dictator, but to reaffirm the promise of our democracy -- but remind us that all of us are created equal.

This is the place to understand how protest and love of country don’t merely coexist but inform each other; how men can proudly win the gold for their country but still insist on raising a black-gloved fist; how we can wear “I Can’t Breathe” T-shirt and still grieve for fallen police officers. Here’s the America where the razor-sharp uniform of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff belongs alongside the cape of the Godfather of Soul. We have shown the world that we can float like butterflies and sting like bees; that we can rocket into space like Mae Jemison, steal home like Jackie, rock like Jimi, stir the pot like Richard Pryor; or we can be sick and tired of being sick and tired, like Fannie Lou Hamer, and still Rock Steady like Aretha Franklin.

We are large, Walt Whitman told us, containing multitudes. We are large, containing multitudes. Full of contradictions. That's America. That's what makes us grow. That's what makes us extraordinary. And as is true for America, so is true for African American experience. We're not a burden on America, or a stain on America, or an object of pity or charity for America. We're America.

And that's what this museum explains -- the fact that our stories have shaped every corner of our culture. The struggles for freedom that took place made our Constitution a real and living document, tested and shaped and deepened and made more profound its meaning for all people. The story told here doesn’t just belong to black Americans; it belongs to all Americans -- for the African-American experience has been shaped just as much by Europeans and Asians and Native Americans and Latinos. We have informed each other. We are polyglot, a stew.

Scripture promised that if we lift up the oppressed, then our light will rise in the darkness, and our night will become like the noonday. And the story contained in this museum makes those words prophecy. And that’s what this day is about. That’s what this museum is about. I, too, am America. It is a glorious story, the one that's told here. It is complicated and it is messy and it is full of contradictions, as all great stories are, as Shakespeare is, as Scripture is. And it’s a story that perhaps needs to be told now more than ever.

A museum alone will not alleviate poverty in every inner city or every rural hamlet. It won't eliminate gun violence from all our neighborhoods, or immediately ensure that justice is always colorblind. It won't wipe away every instance of discrimination in a job interview or a sentencing hearing or folks trying to rent an apartment. Those things are up to us, the decisions and choices we make. It requires speaking out, and organizing, and voting, until our values are fully reflected in our laws and our policies and our communities.

But what this museum does show us is that in even the face of oppression, even in the face of unimaginable difficulty, America has moved forward. And so this museum provides context for the debates of our times. It illuminates them and gives us some sense of how they evolved, and perhaps keeps them in proportion. Perhaps it can help a white visitor understand the pain and anger of demonstrators in places like Tulsa and Charlotte. But it can also help black visitors appreciate the fact that not only is this younger generation carrying on traditions of the past but, within the white communities across this nation we see the sincerity of law enforcement officers and officials who, in fits and starts, are struggling to understand, and are trying to do the right thing.

It reminds us that routine discrimination and Jim Crow aren't ancient history, it's just a blink in the eye of history. It was just yesterday. And so we should not be surprised that not all the healing is done. We shouldn’t despair that it’s not all solved. And knowing the larger story should instead remind us of just how remarkable the changes that have taken place truly are -- just in my lifetime -- and thereby inspire us to further progress.

And so hopefully this museum can help us talk to each other. And more importantly, listen to each other. And most importantly, see each other. Black and white and Latino and Native American and Asian American -- see how our stories are bound together. And bound together with women in America, and workers in America, and entrepreneurs in America, and LGBT Americans. And for young people who didn’t live through the struggles represented here, I hope you draw strength from the changes that have taken place. Come here and see the power of your own agency. See how young John Lewis was. These were children who transformed a nation in a blink of an eye. Young people, come here and see your ability to make your mark.

The very fact of this day does not prove that America is perfect, but it does validate the ideas of our founding, that this country born of change, this country born of revolution, this country of we, the people, this country can get better.

And that’s why we celebrate, mindful that our work is not yet done; mindful that we are but on a waystation on this common journey towards freedom. And how glorious it is that we enshrine it here, on some of our nation’s most hallowed ground -- the same place where lives were once traded but also where hundreds of thousands of Americans, of all colors and creeds, once marched. How joyful it is that this story take its rightful place -- alongside Jefferson who declared our independence, and Washington who made it real, and alongside Lincoln who saved our union, and the GIs who defended it; alongside a new monument to a King, gazing outward, summoning us toward that mountaintop. How righteous it is that with tell this story here.

For almost eight years, I have been blessed with the extraordinary honor of serving you in this office. Time and again, I’ve flown low over this mall on Marine One, often with Michelle and our daughters. And President Clinton, President Bush, they’ll tell you it is incredible sight. We pass right across the Washington Monument -- it feels like you can reach out and touch it. And at night, if you turn the other way, you don't just see the Lincoln Memorial, Old Abe is lit up and you can see him, his spirit glowing from that building. And we don’t have many trips left. But over the years, I’ve always been comforted as I’ve watched this museum rise from this earth into this remarkable tribute. Because I know that years from now, like all of you, Michelle and I will be able to come here to this museum, and not just bring our kids but hopefully our grandkids. I imagine holding a little hand of somebody and tell them the stories that are enshrined here.

And in the years that follow, they’ll be able to do the same. And then we’ll go to the Lincoln Memorial and we'll take in the view atop the Washington Monument. And together, we’ll learn about ourselves, as Americans -- our sufferings, our delights, and our triumphs. And we’ll walk away better for it, better because the better grasp of history. We'll walk away that much more in love with this country, the only place on Earth where this story could have unfolded.

It is a monument, no less than the others on this Mall, to the deep and abiding love for this country, and the ideals upon which it is founded. For we, too, are America.

So enough talk. President Bush is timing me. He had the over/under at 25. Let us now open this museum to the world. Today, we have with us a family that reflects the arc of our progress: the Bonner family -- four generations in all, starting with gorgeous seven-year-old Christine and going up to gorgeous 99-year-old Ruth.

Now, Ruth’s father, Elijah Odom, was born into servitude in Mississippi. He was born a slave. As a young boy, he ran, though, to his freedom. He lived through Reconstruction and he lived through Jim Crow. But he went on to farm, and graduate from medical school, and gave life to the beautiful family that we see today -- with a spirit reflected in beautiful Christine, free and equal in the laws of her country and in the eyes of God.

So in a brief moment, their family will join us in ringing a bell from the First Baptist Church in Virginia -- one of the oldest black churches in America, founded under a grove of trees in 1776. And the sound of this bell will be echoed by others in houses of worship and town squares all across this country -- an echo of the ringing bells that signaled Emancipation more than a century and a half ago; the sound, and the anthem, of American freedom.

God bless you all. God bless the United States of America.

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# Shimon Peres Memorial Service Address

Zvia, Yoni, Chemi and generations of the Peres family; President Rivlin; Prime Minister Netanyahu; members of the Israeli government and the Knesset; heads of state and the government and guests from around the world, including President Abbas, whose presence here is a gesture and a reminder of the unfinished business of peace; to the people of Israel: I could not be more honored to be in Jerusalem to say farewell to my friend Shimon Peres, who showed us that justice and hope are at the heart of the Zionist idea.

A free life, in a homeland regained. A secure life, in a nation that can defend itself, by itself. A full life, in friendship with nations who can be counted on as allies, always. A bountiful life, driven by simple pleasures of family and by big dreams. This was Shimon Peres's life. This is the State of Israel. This is the story of the Jewish people over the last century, and it was made possible by a founding generation that counts Shimon as one of its own.

Shimon once said, “The message of the Jewish people to mankind is that faith and moral vision can triumph over all adversity.”

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For Shimon, that moral vision was rooted in an honest reckoning of the world as it is. Born in the shtetl, he said he felt, “surrounded by a sea of thick and threatening forests.” When his family got the chance to go to Palestine, his beloved grandfather’s parting words were simple: “Shimon, stay a Jew.” Propelled with that faith, he found his home. He found his purpose. He found his life’s work. But he was still a teenager when his grandfather was burned alive by the Nazis in the town where Shimon was born. The synagogue in which he prayed became an inferno. The railroad tracks that had carried him toward the Promised Land also delivered so many of his people to death camps.

And so from an early age, Shimon bore witness to the cruelty that human beings could inflict on each other, the ways that one group of people could dehumanize another; the particular madness of anti-Semitism, which has run like a stain through history. That understanding of man’s ever-present sinfulness would steel him against hardship and make him vigilant against threats to Jewry around the world.

But that understanding would never harden his heart. It would never extinguish his faith. Instead, it broadened his moral imagination, and gave him the capacity to see all people as deserving of dignity and respect. It helped him see not just the world as it is, but the world as it should be.

What Shimon did to shape the story of Israel is well-chronicled. Starting on the kibbutz he founded with his love Sonya, he began the work of building a model community. Ben Gurion called him to serve the Haganah at headquarters to make sure that the Jewish people had the armaments and the organization to secure their freedom. After independence, surrounded by enemies who denied Israel’s existence and sought to drive it into the sea, the child who had wanted to be a “poet of stars” became a man who built Israel’s defense industry, who laid the foundation for the formidable armed forces that won Israel’s wars. His skill secured Israel’s strategic position. His boldness sent Israeli commandos to Entebbe, and rescued Jews from Ethiopia. His statesmanship built an unbreakable bond with the United States of America and so many other countries.

His contributions didn't end there. Shimon also showed what people can do when they harness reason and science to a common cause. He understood that a country without many natural resources could more than make up for it with the talents of its people. He made hard choices to roll back inflation and climb up from a terrible economic crisis. He championed the promise of science and technology to make the desert bloom, and turned this tiny country into a central hub of the digital age, making life better not just for people here, but for people around the world.

Indeed, Shimon’s contribution to this nation is so fundamental, so pervasive, that perhaps sometimes they can be overlooked. For a younger generation, Shimon was probably remembered more for a peace process that never reached its endpoint. They would listen to critics on the left who might argue that Shimon did not fully acknowledge the failings of his nation, or perhaps more numerous critics on the right who argued that he refused to see the true wickedness of the world, and called him naÃ¯ve.

But whatever he shared with his family or his closest friends, to the world he brushed off the critics. And I know from my conversations with him that his pursuit of peace was never naÃ¯ve. Every Yom HaShoah, he read the names of the family that he lost. As a young man, he had fed his village by working in the fields during the day, but then defending it by carrying a rifle at night. He understood, in this war-torn region, where too often Arab youth are taught to hate Israel from an early age -- he understood just how hard peace would be. I'm sure he was alternatively angry and bemused to hear the same critics, who called him hopelessly naÃ¯ve, depend on the defense architecture that he himself had helped to build.

I don’t believe he was naÃ¯ve. But he understood from hard-earned experience that true security comes through making peace with your neighbors. “We won them all,” he said of Israel’s wars. “But we did not win the greatest victory that we aspired to: release from the need to win victories.”

And just as he understood the practical necessity of peace, Shimon believed that Israel’s exceptionalism was rooted not only in fidelity to the Jewish people, but to the moral and ethical vision, the precepts of his Jewish faith. “The Jewish people weren’t born to rule another people,” he would say. “From the very first day we are against slaves and masters.”

Out of the hardships of the diaspora, he found room in his heart for others who suffered. He came to hate prejudice with the passion of one who knows how it feels to be its target. Even in the face of terrorist attacks, even after repeated disappointments at the negotiation table, he insisted that as human beings, Palestinians must be seen as equal in dignity to Jews, and must therefore be equal in self-determination. Because of his sense of justice, his analysis of Israel’s security, his understanding of Israel’s meaning, he believed that the Zionist idea would be best protected when Palestinians, too, had a state of their own.

Of course, we gather here in the knowledge that Shimon never saw his dream of peace fulfilled. The region is going through a chaotic time. Threats are ever present. And yet, he did not stop dreaming, and he did not stop working. By the time that I came to work with Shimon, he was in the twilight of his years -- although he might not admit it. I would be the 10th U.S. President since John F. Kennedy to sit down with Shimon; the 10th to fall prey to his charms.

I think of him sitting in the Oval Office, this final member of Israel’s founding generation, under the portrait of George Washington, telling me stories from the past, but more often talking with enthusiasm of the present -- his most recent lecture, his next project, his plans for the future, the wonders of his grandchildren.

In many ways, he reminded me of some other giants of the 20th century that I’ve had the honor to meet -- men like Nelson Mandela; women like Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth -- leaders who have seen so much, whose lives span such momentous epochs, that they find no need to posture or traffic in what’s popular in the moment; people who speak with depth and knowledge, not in sound bites. They find no interest in polls or fads.

And like these leaders, Shimon could be true to his convictions even if they cut against the grain of current opinion. He knew, better than the cynic, that if you look out over the arc of history, human beings should be filled not with fear but with hope. I'm sure that's why he was so excited about technology -- because for him, it symbolized the march of human progress. And it’s why he loved so much to talk about young people -- because he saw young people unburdened by the prejudices of the past. It’s why he believed in miracles -- because in Israel, he saw a miracle come true.

As Americans and Israelis, we often talk about the unbreakable bonds between our nations. And, yes, these bonds encompass common interests -- vital cooperation that makes both our nations more secure. But today we are reminded that the bonds which matter most run deeper. Anchored in a Judeo-Christian tradition, we believe in the irreducible value of every human being. Our nations were built on that idea. They were built in large part by stubborn idealists and striving immigrants, including those who had fled war and fled oppression. Both our nations have flaws that we have not always fixed, corners of our history which date back to our founding that we do not always squarely address. But because our founders planted not just flags in the eternal soil, but also planted the seeds of democracy, we have the ability to always pursue a better world. We have the capacity to do what is right.

As an American, as a Christian, a person partly of African descent, born in Hawaii -- a place that could not be further than where Shimon spent his youth -- I took great pleasure in my friendship with this older, wiser man. We shared a love of words and books and history. And perhaps, like most politicians, we shared too great a joy in hearing ourselves talk. But beyond that, I think our friendship was rooted in the fact that I could somehow see myself in his story, and maybe he could see himself in mine. Because for all of our differences, both of us had lived such unlikely lives. It was so surprising to see the two of us where we had started, talking together in the White House, meeting here in Israel. And I think both of us understood that we were here only because in some way we reflected the magnificent story of our nations.

Shimon’s story, the story of Israel, the experience of the Jewish people, I believe it is universal. It’s the story of a people who, over so many centuries in the wilderness, never gave up on that basic human longing to return home. It’s the story of a people who suffered the boot of oppression and the shutting of the gas chamber’s door, and yet never gave up on a belief in goodness. And it’s the story of a man who was counted on, and then often counted out, again and again, and who never lost hope.

Shimon Peres reminds us that the State of Israel, like the United States of America, was not built by cynics. We exist because people before us refused to be constrained by the past or the difficulties of the present. And Shimon Peres was never cynical. It is that faith, that optimism, that belief -- even when all the evidence is to the contrary -- that tomorrow can be better, that makes us not just honor Shimon Peres, but love him.

The last of the founding generation is now gone. Shimon accomplished enough things in his life for a thousand men. But he understood that it is better to live to the very end of his time on Earth with a longing not for the past but for the dreams that have not yet come true -- an Israel that is secure in a just and lasting peace with its neighbors. And so now this work is in the hand of Israel’s next generation, in the hands of Israel's next generation and its friends.

Like Joshua, we feel the weight of responsibility that Shimon seemed to wear so lightly. But we draw strength from his example and the fact that he believed in us -- even when we doubted ourselves.

Scripture tells us that before his death, Moses said:

I call upon heaven and earth to bear witness this day that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live.

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Uvacharta Bachayim. Choose life. For Shimon, let us choose life, as he always did. Let us make his work our own. May God bless his memory. And may God bless this country, and this world, that he loved so dearly.

Shimon: Todah Rabah Chaver Yakar.

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# Presidential Election Outcome Address

Good afternoon, everybody.

Yesterday, before votes were tallied, I shot a video that some of you may have seen in which I said to the American people, regardless of which side you were on in the election, regardless of whether your candidate won or lost, the sun would come up in the morning.

And that is one bit of prognosticating that actually came true. The sun is up. And I know everybody had a long night. I did as well. I had a chance to talk to President-elect Trump last night about 3:30 in the morning, I think it was, to congratulate him on winning the election. And I had a chance to invite him to come to the White House tomorrow to talk about making sure that there is a successful transition between our presidencies.

Now, it is no secret that the president-elect and I have some pretty significant differences. But remember, eight years ago President Bush and I had some pretty significant differences. But President Bush's team could not have been more professional or more gracious in making sure we had a smooth transition so that we could hit the ground running.

And one thing you realize quickly in this job is that the presidency and the vice presidency is bigger than any of us. So I have instructed my team to follow the example that President Bush's team set eight years ago, and work as hard as we can to make sure that this is a successful transition for the President-elect -- because we are now all rooting for his success in uniting and leading the country. The peaceful transition of power is one of the hallmarks of our democracy. And over the next few months, we are going to show that to the world.

I also had a chance last night to speak with Secretary Clinton and I just had a chance to hear her remarks. I could not be prouder of her. She has lived an extraordinary life of public service. She was a great First Lady. She was an outstanding senator for the state of New York. And she could not have been a better secretary of state.

I'm proud of her. A lot of Americans look up to her. Her candidacy and nomination was historic and sends a message to our daughters all across the country that they can achieve at the highest levels of politics. And I'm absolutely confident that she and President Clinton will continue to do great work for people here in the United States and all around the world.

Now, everybody is sad when their side loses an election, but the day after we have to remember that we're actually all on one team. This is an "intramural scrimmage." We're not Democrats first. We're not Republicans first. We are Americans first. We're patriots first.

We all what -- want what's best for this country. That's what I heard in Mr. Trump's remarks last night. That's what I heard when I spoke to him directly. And I was heartened by that. That's what the country needs -- a sense of unity, a sense of inclusion, a respect for our institutions, our way of life, rule of law, and a respect for each other. I hope that he maintains that spirit throughout this transition. And I certainly hope that's how his presidency has a chance to begin.

I also told my team today to keep their heads up, because the remarkable work that they have done, day in, day out, often without a lot of fanfare, often with a lot of -- a lot of attention -- work in agencies, work in obscure areas of policy that make government run better, and make it more responsive, and make it more efficient, and make it more service-friendly so that it's actually helping more people. That remarkable work has left the next President with a stronger, better country than the one that existed eight years ago.

So win or lose in this election, that was always our mission. That was our mission from day one. And everyone on my team should be extraordinarily proud of everything that they have done; and so should all the Americans that I've had a chance to meet all across this country who do the hard work of building on that progress every single day: teachers in schools, doctors in E.R. clinic, small businesses putting their all into starting something up, making sure they're treating their employees well, all the important work that's done by moms and dads and families and congregations in every state, the work of perfecting this union.

So this was a long and hard fought campaign. A lot of our fellow Americans are exalted today; a lot of Americans are less so, but that's the nature of campaigns. That's the nature of democracy. It is hard and sometimes contentious and noisy and it's not always inspiring.

But to the young people who got into politics for the first time and may be disappointed by the results, I just want you to know, you have to stay encouraged. Don't get cynical. Don't ever think you can't make a difference. As Secretary Clinton said this morning, fighting for what is right is worth it. Sometimes you lose an argument; sometimes you lose an election.

You know, the path that this country has taken has never been a straight line. We zig and zag and sometimes, you know, we move in ways that some people think is forward and others think is moving back, and that's okay. I've lost elections before. Joe hasn't, but, you know -- So I've been -- I've been sort of sharing --

Vice President Biden: I remember you beat me badly.

President Obama: That's the way politics works sometimes. We -- We try really hard to persuade people that we're right and then people vote. And then if we lose, we learn from our mistakes. We do some reflection. We lick our wounds. We brush ourselves off. We get back in the arena. We go at it. We try even harder the next time.

The point, though, is is that we all go forward with a presumption of good faith in our fellow citizens, because that presumption of good faith is essential to a vibrant and functioning democracy. That's how this country has moved forward for 240 years. It's how we've pushed boundaries and promoted freedom around the world. That's how we've expanded the rights of our founding to reach all of our citizens. It's how we have come this far.

And that's why I'm confident that this incredible journey that we're on, as Americans, will go on. And I'm looking forward to doing everything that I can to make sure that the next President is successful in that.

I've said before, I think of this job as being a relay runner. You take the baton. You run your best race. And hopefully by the time you hand it off, you're a little further ahead; you've made a little progress. And I can say that we've done that, and I want to make sure that handoff is well executed because ultimately we're all on the same team.

All right? Thank you very much, everybody.

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# Remarks on First Meeting with President-Elect Donald Trump

President Obama: Well, I just had the opportunity to have an excellent conversation with President-elect Trump. It was wide-ranging. We talked about some of the organizational issues in setting up the White House. We talked about foreign policy. We talked about domestic policy. And as I said last night, my number-one priority in the coming two months is to try to facilitate a transition that ensures our President-elect is successful.

And I have been very encouraged by the, I think, interest in President -- President-elect Trump's wanting to work with my team around many of the issues that this great country faces. And I believe that it is important for all of us, regardless of party and regardless of political preferences, to now come together, work together, to deal with the many challenges that we face.

And in the meantime, Michelle has had a chance to greet the incoming First Lady. And we had an excellent conversation with her as well, and we want to make sure that they feel welcome as they prepare to make this transition.

And most of all, I want to emphasize to you, Mr. President-elect, that we now are going to want to do everything we can to help you succeed -- because if you succeed, then the country succeeds.

Please, Mr. Trump.

President-Elect Trump: Well, thank you very much, President Obama. This was a meeting that was going to last for maybe 10 or 15 minutes, and we were just going to get to know each other. We had never met each other. I have great respect. The meeting lasted for almost an hour and a half. And it could have -- as far as I'm concerned, it could -- could have gone on for a lot longer.

We really -- We discussed a lot of different situations, some wonderful and some difficulties. I very much look forward to dealing with the President in the future, including counsel. He's -- He explained some of the difficulties, some of the -- the high-flying assets and some of the -- some of the really great things that have been achieved.

So, Mr. President, it was a great honor being with you, and I look forward to being with you many, many more times in the future.

President Obama: Sure. All right.

President-Elect Trump: Thank you, sir.

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# Press Conference Post 2016 Presidential Election

Hello, everybody. Hello, hello.

Hello, everybody. In a couple hours, I’ll be departing on my final foreign trip as President. And while we’re abroad, I’ll have a chance to take a few of your questions, but I figured why wait? I know that there’s a lot of domestic issues that people are thinking about, so I wanted to see if I could clear out some of the underbrush so that when we're overseas, and people are asking about foreign policy questions, people don't feel obliged to tack on three other questions to them.

Let me -- I know you still will. That I'm aware, but I'm trying something out here. First of all, let me mention three brief topics.

First of all, as I discussed with the President-elect on Thursday, my team stands ready to accelerate in the next steps that are required to ensure a smooth transition. And we are going to be staying in touch as we travel. I remember what it was like when I came in eight years ago. It is a big challenge. This office is bigger than any one person. And that’s why ensuring a smooth transition is so important.

It’s not something that the Constitution explicitly requires, but it is one of those norms that are vital to a functioning democracy -- similar to norms of civility and tolerance, and a commitment to reason and to facts and analysis. It's part of what makes this country work. And as long as I’m President, we are going to uphold those norms and cherish and uphold those ideals.

As I’ve told my staff, we should be very proud that their work has already ensured that when we turn over the keys the car is in pretty good shape. We are indisputably in a stronger position today than we were when I came in eight years ago. Jobs have been growing for 73 straight months. Incomes are rising. Poverty is falling. The uninsured rate is at the lowest level on record. Carbon emissions have come down without impinging on our growth.

And so my instructions to my team are that we run through the tape. We make sure that we finish what we started, that we don't let up in these last couple of months, because my goal is, on January 21st, America is in the strongest position possible and hopefully there’s an opportunity for the next President to build on that.

Number two, our work has also helped to stabilize the global economy. And because there is one President at a time, I’ll spend this week reinforcing America’s support for the approaches that we’ve taken to promote economic growth and global security on a range of issues.

I look forward to my first visit in Greece. And then, in Germany, I’ll visit with Chancellor Merkel, who’s probably been my closest international partner these past eight years. I’ll also signal our solidarity with our closest allies, and express our support for a strong, integrated, and united Europe. It’s essential to our national security and it's essential to global stability. And that’s why the Transatlantic Alliance and the NATO Alliance have endured for decades under Democratic and Republican Administrations.

Finally, in Peru, I’ll meet with the leaders of countries that have been the focus of our foreign policy through our rebalance in the Asia Pacific. This is a time of great change in the world. But America has always been a pillar of strength and a beacon of hope to peoples around the globe. And that’s what it must continue to be.

Finally, on a personal note, Michelle and I want to offer our deepest condolences to Gwen Ifill’s family and to all of you, her colleagues, on her passing. Gwen was a friend of ours. She was an extraordinary journalist. She always kept faith with the fundamental responsibilities of her profession -- asking tough questions, holding people in power accountable, and defending a strong and free press that makes our democracy work.

I always appreciated Gwen’s reporting, even when I was at the receiving end of one of her tough and thorough interviews. Whether she reported from a convention floor or from the field, whether she sat at the debate moderator’s table or at the anchor desk, she not only informed today’s citizens, but she also inspired tomorrow’s journalists. She was an especially powerful role model for young women and girls who admired her integrity, her tenacity, and her intellect -- and for whom she blazed a trail as one-half of the first all-female anchor team on network news.

So Gwen did her country a great service. Michelle and I join her family and her colleagues, and everybody else who loved her in remembering her fondly today.

So, with that, I'm going to take some questions. And because Josh Earnest has some pull around here, he just happened to put at the top of the list Colleen Nelson of the Wall Street Journal.

My understanding is, Colleen, that this is wrapping up your stint here and you're going to Kansas City.

Question: Correct.

President Obama: Josh just happens to be from Kansas City. So I didn’t know if there was any coincidence there. But we wish you the very best of luck in your new endeavors.

Question: As it turns out, there’s no place like Kansas City.

President Obama: There you go.

Question: You're about to embark on your final foreign trip. What will you say to other world leaders about your successor? They’ve expressed many of the same misgivings that you have about Donald Trump. Should they be worried about the future of U.S. foreign policy? And secondly, as Democrats scramble to regroup after a pretty shocking upset, what is your advice about where the party goes now? And who should lead your party?

President Obama: One of the great things about the United States is that when it comes to world affairs, the President obviously is the leader of the executive branch, the Commander-in-Chief, the spokesperson for the nation, but the influence and the work that we have is the result not just of the President, it is the result of countless interactions and arrangements and relationships between our military and other militaries, and our diplomats and other diplomats, and intelligence officers and development workers. And there's enormous continuity beneath the day-to-day news that makes us that indispensable nation when it comes to maintaining order and promoting prosperity around the world. That will continue.

In my conversation with the President-elect, he expressed a great interest in maintaining our core strategic relationships. And so one of the messages I will be able to deliver is his commitment to NATO and the Transatlantic Alliance. I think that's one of the most important functions I can serve at this stage, during this trip, is to let them know that there is no weakening of resolve when it comes to America's commitment to maintaining a strong and robust NATO relationship, and a recognition that those alliances aren’t just good for Europe, they're good for the United States, and they're vital for the world.

With respect to the Democratic Party, look, as I said in the Rose Garden right after the election, when your team loses, everybody gets deflated and it's hard and it's challenging. And so I think it's a healthy thing for the Democratic Party to go through some reflection. I think it's important for me not to be big-footing that conversation. I think we want to see new voices and new ideas emerge. That's part of the reason why I think term limits are a really useful thing.

The Democrats should not waver on our core beliefs and principles; The belief that we should an economy that works for everybody, not just a few. The belief that America, at its best, is inclusive and not exclusive. That we insist on the dignity and God-given potential and worth of every child, regardless of race, or gender, or sexual orientation, or what zip code they were born in. That we are committed to a world in which we keep America safe, but we recognize that our power doesn’t just flow from our extraordinary military, it also flows from the strength of our ideals and our principles and our values.

So there are going to be a core set of values that shouldn’t be up for debate, should be our North Star. But how we organize politically I think is something that we should spend some time thinking about. I believe that we have better ideas. But I also believe that good ideas don’t matter if people don’t hear them. And one of the issues that Democrats have to be clear on is that, given population distribution across the country, we have to compete everywhere. We have to show up everywhere. We have to work at a grassroots level -- something that's been a running thread in my career.

I won Iowa not because the demographics dictated that I would win Iowa, it was because I spent 87 days going to every small town and fair and fish fry and VFW hall. And there were some counties where I might have lost, but maybe I lost by 20 points instead of 50 points. There are some counties maybe I won that people didn’t expect because people had a chance to see you and listen to you and get a sense of who you stood for and who you were fighting for.

And the challenge for a national party is how do you dig in there and create those kinds of structures so that people have a sense of what it is that you stand for. And that increasingly is difficult to do just through a national press story. It’s increasingly difficult to do because of the splintering of the press.

And so I think the discussions that have been taking place about how do you build more grassroots organizing, how do you build up state parties and local parties and schoolboard elections you’re paying attention to, and state rep races and city council races -- that all I think will contribute to stronger outcomes in the future.

And I’m optimistic that will happen. For Democrats who are feeling completely discouraged, I’ve been trying to remind them everybody remembers my Boston speech in 2004; they may not remember me showing up here in 2005 when John Kerry had lost a close election, Tom Daschle, the leader of the Senate, had been beaten in an upset. Ken Salazar and I were the only two Democrats that won nationally. Republicans controlled the Senate and the House. And two years later, Democrats were winning back Congress, and four years later, I was President of the United States.

Things change pretty rapidly. But they don’t change inevitably. They change because you work for it. Nobody said democracy was supposed to be easy. This is hard. And in a big country like this, it probably should be hard.

Mark Knoller.

Question: Thank you, sir.

President Obama: Good to see you.

Question: Thank you. Good to see you. Mr. President, what can you tell us about the learning curve on becoming President? Can you tell us how long it took you before you were fully at ease in the job, if that ever happens? And did you discuss this matter with President-elect Trump?

President Obama: About a week ago I started feeling pretty good. No, look, I think the learning curve always continues. This is a remarkable job. It is like no other job on Earth. And it is a constant flow of information and challenges and issues. That is truer now than it has ever been, partly because of the nature of information and the interconnection between regions of the world.

If you were President 50 years ago, the tragedy in Syria might not even penetrate what the American people were thinking about on a day-to-day basis. Today, they’re seeing vivid images of a child in the aftermath of a bombing. There was a time when if you had a financial crisis in Southeast Asia somewhere, it had no impact on our markets; today it does.

So the amount of information, the amount of incoming that any Administration has to deal with today -- and respond to much more rapidly than ever before -- that makes it different. I was watching a documentary, that during the Bay of Pigs crisis, JFK had about two weeks before anybody reported on it. Imagine that. I think it’s fair to say that if something like that happens under a current President, they’ve got to figure out in about an hour what their response is.

So these are the kinds of points that I shared with the President-elect. It was a free-flowing and, I think, useful conversation. I hope it was. I tried to be as honest as I could about the things I think any President coming in needs to think about. And probably the most important point that I made was that how you staff -- particularly your chief of staff, your national security advisor, your White House counsel -- how you set up a process and a system to surface information, generate options for a President, understanding that ultimately the President is going to be the final decision-maker, that that’s something that has to be attended to right away.

I have been blessed by having -- and I admittedly am biased -- some of the smartest, hardest-working, good people in my Administration that I think any President has ever had. And as a consequence of that team, I’ve been able to make good decisions. And if you don’t have that around you, then you’ll get swamped. So I hope that he appreciated that advice.

What I also discussed was the fact that I had been encouraged by his statements on election night about the need for unity and his interest in being the President for all people, and that how he staffs, the first steps he takes, the first impressions he makes, the reset that can happen after an election -- all those things are important and should be thought about. And I think it’s important to give him the room and the space to do that. It takes time to put that together.

But I emphasized to him that, look, in an election like this that was so hotly contested and so divided, gestures matter. And how he reaches out to groups that may not have supported him, how he signals his interest in their issues or concerns, I think those are the kinds of things that can set a tone that will help move things forward once he’s actually taken office.

Question: And how long did it take before you were at ease in the job?

President Obama: Well, I didn't really have time to worry about being at ease, because you’ll recall we were losing about 800,000 jobs a month.

So the good news is that in some ways my experience is atypical. It’s hard to find an analogous situation. By the time FDR came into office, the Depression had been going on for a couple of years. We were in the midst of a free fall. The financial system was locking up. The auto industry was about to go belly up. The housing market had entirely collapsed. So one of the advantages that I had was that I was too busy to worry about how acclimated I was feeling in the job. We just had to make a bunch of decisions.

In this situation, we're turning over a country that has challenges, has problems, and obviously there are people out there who are feeling deeply disaffected -- otherwise, we wouldn’t have had the results that we had in the election. On the other hand, if you look at the basic indicators of where the country is right now, the unemployment rate is as low as it’s been in eight, nine years. Incomes and wages have both gone up over the last year faster than they have in a decade or two. We've got historically low uninsured rates. The financial systems are stable. The stock market is hovering around its all-time high, and 401(k)s have been restored. The housing market has recovered.

We have challenges internationally, but our most immediate challenge with respect to ISIL, we're seeing significant progress in Iraq, and Mosul is now increasingly being retaken by Iraqi security forces supported by us. Our alliances are in strong shape. The progress we've made with respect to carbon emissions has been greater than any country on Earth. And gas is two bucks a gallon.

So he will have time and space I think to make judicious decisions. The incoming Administration doesn't have to put out a huge number of fires. They may want to take the country in a significantly different direction, but they've got time to consider what exactly they want to achieve. And that's a testament to the tremendous work that my team has done over the last eight years. I’m very proud of them for it.

Athena Jones.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. You said more than once that you do not believe that Donald Trump would ever be elected President, and that you thought he was unfit for the office. Now that you've spent time with him, sitting down and talking to him for an hour and a half in the Oval Office, do you now think that President-elect Trump is qualified to be President?

And if I can do a compound question, the other one is you mentioned staffing and tone. What do you say to those Americans who may not doubt that there will be a peaceful transition but that are concerned about some of the policies and sentiments that were expressed by President-elect Trump himself or his supporters that may seem hostile to minorities and others? Specifically, I’m talking about the announcement that Steve Bannon, who is a proponent of the so-called alt-right movement, what many call the white nationalist movement, is going to have a prominent role in the White House under President Trump as his chief strategist and senior advisor. What message does that send to the country, to the world?

President Obama: Athena, without copping out, I think it’s fair to say that it would not be appropriate for me to comment on every appointment that the President-elect starts making if I want to be consistent with the notion that we're going to try to facilitate a smooth transition.

Look, the people have spoken. Donald Trump will be the next President, the 45th President of the United States. And it will be up to him to set up a team that he thinks will serve him well and reflect his policies. And those who didn’t vote for him have to recognize that that's how democracy works. That's how this system operates.

When I won, there were a number of people who didn’t like me and didn’t like what I stood for. And I think that whenever you've got an incoming President of the other side, particularly in a bitter election like this, it takes a while for people to reconcile themselves with that new reality. Hopefully it's a reminder that elections matter and voting counts. And so I don’t know how many times we have to relearn this lesson, because we ended up having 43 percent of the country not voting who were eligible to vote. But it makes a difference.

So given that President-elect Trump is now trying to balance what he said in the campaign and the commitments he made to his supporters with working with those who disagreed with him, and members of Congress, and reaching out to constituencies that didn’t vote for him, I think it's important for us to let him make his decisions. And I think the American people will judge over the course of the next couple of years whether they like what they see, and whether these are the kinds of policies and this is the direction that they want to see the country go in.

And my role is to make sure that when I hand off this White House that it is in the best possible shape and that I've been as helpful as I can to him in going forward and building on the progress that we've made.

And my advice, as I said, to the President-elect when we had our discussions was that campaigning is different from governing. I think he recognizes that. I think he's sincere in wanting to be a successful President and moving this country forward. And I don’t think any President ever comes in saying to themselves, I want to figure out how to make people angry or alienate half the country. I think he's going to try as best he can to make sure that he delivers, not only for the people who voted for him, but for the people at large. And the good thing is, is that there are going to be elections coming up, so there's a built-in incentive for him to try to do that.

But it's only been six days. And I think it will be important for him to have the room to staff up, to figure out what his priorities are, to be able to distinguish between what he was campaigning on and what is practical, what he can actually achieve. There are certain things that make for good sound bites but don’t translate into good policy. And that's something that he and his team, I think, will wrestle with, in the same way that every President wrestles with.

I did say to him, as I've said publicly, that because of the nature of the campaigns, and the bitterness and ferocity of the campaigns, that it's really important to try to send some signals of unity, and to reach out to minority groups or women or others that were concerned about the tenor of the campaign. And I think that's something that he will want to do. But this is all happening real fast. He's got commitments to supporters that helped to get him here, and he's going to have to balance those. And over the coming weeks and months and years, my hope is, is that those impulses ultimately win out. But it's a little too early to start making judgments on that.

Question: And your view of his qualifications. Has that changed after meeting with him?

President Obama: I think that he successfully mobilized a big chunk of the country to vote for him, and he's going to win -- he has won. He's going to be the next President. And regardless of what experience or assumptions he brought to the office, this office has a way of waking you up. And those aspects of his positions or predispositions that don’t match up with reality he will find shaken up pretty quick, because reality has a way of asserting itself.

And some of his gifts that obviously allowed him to execute one of the biggest political upsets in history -- those are ones that hopefully he will put to good use on behalf of all the American people.

Scott Horsley.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. You’re off to Europe, which is facing some of the same populous pressures we see at work in this country. When you spoke at the U.N., you talked about the choice we're facing between integration and building walls. What choice do you think the American people made last week? And is there still a chance for what you called a course correction before Europeans make some of their choices?

President Obama: I think the American people recognize that the world has shrunk, that it’s interconnected, that you’re not going to put that genie back in the bottle. The American people recognize that their careers, or their kids’ careers are going to have to be more dynamic -- that they might not be working at a single plant for 30 years, but they might have to change careers. They might have to get more education. They might have to retool or retrain.

And I think the American people are game for that. They want to make sure that the rules of the game are fair. And what that means is that if you look at surveys around Americans’ attitudes on trade, the majority of the American people still support trade. But they’re concerned about whether or not trade is fair, and whether we’ve got the same access to other countries’ markets as they have with us; is there just a race to the bottom when it comes to wages, and so forth.

Now, I made an argument -- thus far, unsuccessfully -- that the trade deal we had organized, TPP, did exactly that, that it strengthened workers’ rights and environmental rights, leveled the playing field and, as a consequences, would be good for American workers and American businesses. But that’s a complex argument to make when people remember plants closing and jobs being offshored.

So part of what I think this election reflected was people wanting that course correction that you described. And the message around stopping surges of immigration, not creating new trade deals that may be unfair -- I think those were themes that played a prominent role in the campaign.

As we now shift to governing, my argument is that we do need to make sure that we have an orderly, lawful immigration process, but that if it is orderly and lawful, immigration is good for our economy. It keeps this country young. It keeps it dynamic. We have entrepreneurs and strivers who come here and are willing to take risks. And that’s part of the reason why America, historically, has been successful. It’s part of the reason why our economy is stronger and better positioned than most of our other competitors, is because we got a younger population that’s more dynamic.

When it comes to trade, I think when you’re governing, it will become increasingly apparent that if you were to just eliminate trade deals with Mexico, for example, well, you’ve got a global supply chain. The parts that are allowing auto plants that were about to shut down to now employ double shifts is because they’re bringing in some of those parts to assemble out of Mexico. And so it’s not as simple as it might have seemed.

And the key for us -- when I say “us,” I mean Americans, but I think particularly for progressives -- is to say your concerns are real, your anxieties are real; here’s how we fix them: Higher minimum wage. Stronger worker protections so workers have more leverage to get a bigger piece of the pie. Stronger financial regulations, not weaker ones. Yes to trade, but trade that ensures that these other countries that trade with us aren’t engaging in child labor, for example. Being attentive to inequality and not tone deaf to it, but offering prescriptions that are actually going to help folks that are in communities that feel forgotten.

That’s going to be our most important strategy. And I think we can successfully do that. People will still be looking to the United States. Our example will still carry great weight. And it continues to be my strong belief that the way we are going to make sure that everybody feels a part of this global economy is not by shutting ourselves off from each other even if we could, but rather by working together more effectively than we have in the past.

Martha Raddatz.

Question: Thanks, Mr. President. We heard some of the harsh words you had about Mr. Trump, calling him “temperamentally unfit to be Commander-in-Chief.” Did anything surprise you about President-elect Trump when you met with him in your office? And also I want to know, does anything concern you about a Trump presidency?

President Obama: Well, we had a very cordial conversation. And that didn't surprise me to some degree because I think that he is obviously a gregarious person. He’s somebody who I think likes to mix it up and to have a vigorous debate.

And what’s clear is that he was able to tap into, yes, the anxiety, but also the enthusiasm of his voters in a way that was impressive. And I said so to him, because I think that to the extent that there were a lot of folks who missed the Trump phenomenon, I think that connection that he was able to make with his supporters that was impervious to events that might have sunk another candidate, that's powerful stuff.

I also think that he is coming to this office with fewer set hard-and-fast policy prescriptions than a lot of other Presidents might be arriving with. I don't think he is ideological. I think ultimately he’s pragmatic in that way. And that can serve him well, as long as he’s got good people around him and he has a clear sense of direction.

Do I have concerns? Absolutely. Of course, I’ve got concerns. He and I differ on a whole bunch of issues. But the federal government and our democracy is not a speedboat, it’s an ocean liner -- as I discovered when I came into office. It took a lot of really hard work for us to make significant policy changes -- even in our first two years, when we had larger majorities than Mr. Trump will enjoy when he comes into office.

And one of the things I advised him to do was to make sure that before he commits to certain courses of action, he’s really dug in and thought through how various issues play themselves out. I’ll use an obvious example where we have a difference, but it will be interesting to see what happens in the coming year, and that's the Affordable Care Act.

So obviously this has been the Holy Grail for Republicans over the last six, seven years -- was “we've got to kill Obamacare.” Now, that has been taken as an article of faith -- that this is terrible, it doesn’t work and we have to undo it.

But now that Republicans are in charge, they got to take a look and say, let's see, we got 20 million people who have health insurance who didn’t have it before; health care costs generally have gone up at a significantly slower rate since Obamacare was passed than they did before, which has saved the federal Treasury hundreds of billions of dollars; people who have health insurance are benefitting in all sorts of ways that they may not be aware of -- everything from no longer having lifetime limits on the claims that they can make, to seniors getting prescription drug discounts under Medicare, to free mammograms.

Now, it's one thing to characterize this thing as not working when it's just an abstraction. Now, suddenly, you're in charge and you're going to repeal it. Okay, well, what happens to those 20 million people who have health insurance? Are you going to just kick them off and suddenly they don’t have health insurance? And in what ways are their lives better because of that? Are you going to repeal the provision that ensures that if you do have health insurance on your job, and you lose your job or you change jobs or you start a small business that you're not discriminated against because you've got a preexisting condition? That's really popular. How are you going to replace it? Are you going to change the policy that kids can stay on their parents' health insurance plan until they're 26? How are you going to approach all these issues?

Now, my view is that if they can come up with something better that actually works, and a year or two after they've replaced the Affordable Care Act with their own plan, that 25 million people have health insurance, and it's cheaper and better and running smoothly, I'll be the first one to say, that's great -- congratulations.

If, on the other hand, whatever they're proposing results in millions of people losing coverage, and results in people who already have health insurance losing protections that were contained in the legislation, then we're going to have a problem. And I think that's not going to be unique to me; I think the American people will respond that way.

So I think on a lot of issues, what you're going to see is now comes the hard part. Now is governance. We are going to be able to present to the incoming Administration a country that is stronger, a federal government that is working better and more efficiently; a national security apparatus that is both more effective and truer to our values; energy policies that are resulting in not just less pollution, but also more jobs.

And I think the President-elect, rightly, would expect that he's judged on whether we improve from that baseline and on those metrics, or things get worse. And if things get worse, then the American people will figure that out pretty quick. And if things get better, then more power to him. And I'll be the first to congratulate him.

Question: Mr. President, you had talked specifically about his temperament. Do you still have any concern about his temperament?

President Obama: As I said -- because, Athena asked the question -- whatever you bring to this office, this office has a habit of magnifying and pointing out, and hopefully then you correct for it.

This may seem like a silly example, but I know myself well enough to know I can't keep track of paper. I am not well organized in that way. And so pretty quickly, after I'm getting stacks of briefing books coming in every night, I say to myself, I've got to figure out a system because I have bad filing, sorting and organizing habits. And I've got to find some people who can help me keep track of this stuff. That seems trivial, but actually it ends up being a pretty big piece of business.

I think what will happen with the President-elect is there are going to be certain elements of his temperament that will not serve him well unless he recognizes them and corrects them. Because when you're a candidate and you say something that is inaccurate or controversial, it has less impact than it does when you're President of the United States. Everybody around the world is paying attention. Markets move. National security issues require a level of precision in order to make sure that you don't make mistakes. And I think he recognizes that this is different, and so do the American people.

All right, I'm going to take just a couple more questions and then I get out of here.

Nadia Bilbassy.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. President-elect Trump threatened to unravel the Iran nuclear deal that your Administration worked very hard to get. What would be a concern if he alters part of it? And what would your advice be, considering that he said he’s open to advice?

And on Syria, sir, the Syrian regime now is threatening Aleppo with massive destruction. You spoke passionately a few years back about Benghazi and you warned against the killing of civilians there. Many people criticized your Administration for the shortcoming of the Syria policy. Are you willing to admit any fault under your watch? And how do you act with President-elect Trump says that he won't support the Syrian opposition? Thank you.

President Obama: Iran is a good example of the gap I think between some of the rhetoric in this town -- not unique to the President-elect -- and the reality. I think there was a really robust debate about the merits of the Iran deal before it was completed. And I actually was pretty proud of how our democracy processed that. It was a serious debate. I think people of goodwill were on both sides of the issue. Ultimately, we were able to persuade members of Congress and the public -- at least enough of them -- to support it.

At the time, the main argument against it was Iran wouldn’t abide by the deal, that they would cheat. We now have over a year of evidence that they have abided by the agreement. That's not just my opinion, it's not just people in my Administration. That's the opinion of Israeli military and intelligence officers who are part of a government that vehemently opposed the deal.

So my suspicion is, is that when the President-elect comes in, and he’s consulting with his Republican colleagues on the Hill, that they will look at the facts. Because to unravel a deal that's working and preventing Iran from pursuing a nuclear weapon would be hard to explain -- particularly if the alternative were to have them freed from any obligations and go ahead and pursue a weapon.

And keep in mind this is not just an international agreement between us and the Iranians; this is between the P5+1, other countries, some of our closest allies. And for us to pull out would then require us to start sanctioning those other countries in Europe or China or Russia that were still abiding by the deal because, from their perspective, Iran had done what it was supposed to do.

So it becomes more difficult I think to undo something that’s working than undo something that isn’t working. And when you’re not responsible for it, I think you can call it a terrible deal. When you are responsible for the deal and preventing Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, you’re more likely to look at the facts.

That is going to be true in other circumstances. For example, the Paris agreement. There’s been a lot of talk about the possibility of undoing this international agreement. Now, you’ve got 200 countries that have signed up to this thing. And the good news is that what we’ve been able to show over the last five, six, eight years is that it’s possible to grow the economy really fast and possible to bring down carbon emissions as well.

It’s not just a bunch of rules that we’ve set up. You’ve got utilities that are putting in solar panels and creating jobs. You’ve got the Big Three automakers who have seen record sales and are overachieving on the fuel efficiency standards that we set. Turns out that people like not having to fill up as often and save money at the pump, even if it’s good for the environment.

You’ve got states like California that have been moving forward on a clean energy agenda separate and apart from any federal regulations that have been put forward. In fact, 40 percent of the country already lives under -- in states that are actively pursuing what’s embodied in the Paris agreement and the Clean Power Plan rule. And even states like Texas that politically tend to oppose me -- you’ve seen huge increases in wind power and solar power. And you’ve got some of the country’s biggest companies, like Google and Walmart, all pursuing energy efficiency because it’s good for their bottom line.

So what we’ve been able to do is to embed a lot of these practices into how our economy works. And it’s made our economy more efficient, it’s helped the bottom line of folks, and it’s cleaned up the environment.

What the Paris agreement now does is say to China and India and other countries that are potentially polluting, come onboard; let’s work together so you guys do the same thing.

And the biggest threat when it comes to climate change and pollution isn’t going to come from us -- because we only have 300 million people. It’s going to come from China, with over a billion people, and India, with over a billion people. And if they are pursuing the same kinds of strategies that we did before we became more aware of the environment, then our kids will be choked off.

And so, again, do I think that the new Administration will make some changes? Absolutely. But these international agreements, the tradition has been that you carry them forward across Administrations, particularly if, once you actually examine them, it turns out that they’re doing good for us and binding other countries into behavior that will help us.

Last question. Justin Sink.

Question: Sir, on Syria.

President Obama: I’m sorry, I’m sorry. Okay, you’re right. You are right about that.

With respect to Syria -- in Benghazi, we had an international mandate. We had a U.N. Security resolution. We had a broad-based coalition, and we were able to carry out a support mission that achieved the initial goal of preventing Benghazi from being slaughtered fairly quickly. It’s no secret -- you know this region well -- that Syria is a much more messy situation, with proxies coming from every direction.

And so I wish that I could bring this to a halt immediately. We have made every effort to try to bring about a political resolution to this challenge. John Kerry has spent an infinite amount of time trying to negotiate with Russians and Iranians and Gulf States and other parties to try to end the killing there. But if what you’re asking is do we have the capacity to carry out the same kinds of military actions in Syria that we did in Libya, the situation is obviously different. We don’t have that option easily available to us.

And so we’re going to have to continue to try to pursue, as best we can, a political solution and, in the interim, put as much pressure as we can on the parties to arrive at humanitarian safe spaces and ceasefires that at least alleviate the suffering that’s on the ground.

I recognize that that has not worked. And it is something that I continue to think about every day, and we continue to try to find some formula that would allow us to see that suffering end. But I think it’s not surprising to you, because you study this deeply, that if you have a Syrian military that is committed to killing its people indiscriminately, as necessary, and it is supported by Russia that now have substantial military assets on the ground and are actively supporting that regime, and Iran actively supporting that regime, and we are supporting what has to be our number-one national security priority, which is going after ISIL both in Mosul and ultimately in Raqqa -- that the situation is not the same as it was in Libya.

And obviously there are some who question the steps we took in Libya. I continue to believe that was the right thing to do, although, as I indicated before, in the aftermath of that campaign, I think the world community did not sufficiently support the need for some sort of security structures there and now is a situation that we have to get back into a better place.

I’ve given you -- last question is Justin Sink of Bloomberg.

Question: Thanks, Mr. President. I wanted to ask about two things that might be on your desk over the next couple months as you prepare for a Trump Administration. One is at least three-quarters of a million undocumented immigrants provided the federal government information about themselves and their families as part of your deferred action program. I’m wondering if there’s anything you can do to either reassure them or shield that information from the incoming Trump Administration, considering his stance on immigration.

And the second is, the Administration and you have long maintained that the legal constraints upon you by Congress governing the movement of detainees from Gitmo are an unconstitutional infringement on your right as Commander-in-Chief. Considering that the gradual transfers that you've pursued are unlikely to continue under a Trump Administration, is this now the time to sort of test that theory by moving the detainees and see where the chips will lie?

President Obama: Those are both excellent questions. On the deferred action program that we have known as DACA that relates to DREAMers who are currently benefitting from these provisions, I will urge the President-elect and the incoming Administration to think long and hard before they are endangering that status of what for all practical purposes are American kids.

These are kids who were brought here by their parents. They did nothing wrong. They've gone to school. They have pledged allegiance to the flag. Some of them have joined the military. They've enrolled in school. By definition, if they're part of this program, they are solid, wonderful young people of good character. And it is my strong belief that the majority of the American people would not want to see suddenly those kids have to start hiding again. And that's something that I will encourage the President-elect to look at.

With respect to Guantanamo, it is true that I have not been able to close the darn thing because of the congressional restrictions that have been placed on us. What is also true is we have greatly reduced the population. You now have significantly less than a hundred people there. There are some additional transfers that may be taking place over the next two months.

There is a group of very dangerous people that we have strong evidence of having been guilty of committing terrorist acts against the United States. But because of the nature of the evidence, in some cases, that evidence being compromised, it’s very difficult to put them before a typical Article III court. And that group has always been the biggest challenge for us. My strong belief and preference is that we would be much better off closing Gitmo, moving them to a different facility that was clearly governed by U.S. jurisdiction. We’d do it a lot cheaper and just as safely.

Congress disagrees with me, and I gather that the President-elect does, as well. We will continue to explore options for doing that. But keep in mind that it’s not just a matter of what I’m willing to do. One of the things you discover about being President is that there are all these rules and norms and laws, and you got to pay attention to them. And the people who work for you are also subject to those rules and norms. And that's a piece of advice that I gave to the incoming President.

I am very proud of the fact that we will -- knock on wood -- leave this Administration without significant scandal. We've made mistakes, there have been screw-ups, but I will put the ethics of this Administration and our track record in terms of just abiding by the rules and norms, and keeping trust with the American people -- I will put this Administration against any Administration in history.

And the reason is because, frankly, we listened to the lawyers. And we had a strong White House Counsel’s Office. We had a strong Ethics Office. We had people in every agency whose job it was to remind people, this is how you're supposed to do things. It doesn't mean everybody always did everything exactly the way it’s supposed to -- because we got 2 million people working in the federal government, if you're including the military, and so we had to just try to institutionalize this as much as we could. And that takes a lot of work.

And one of my suggestions to the incoming President is, is that he take that part of the job seriously, as well. Again, you wouldn’t know this if you were listening to some news outlets, or some members of oversight committees in Congress. But if you actually look at the facts, it works.

And this is just one example of the numerous ways in which the federal government is much better today than it was, without people really knowing. You look at VA. People remember the legitimate problems that were publicized in Phoenix. It was scandalous what happened. What people don’t remember is, is that we’ve brought in well over a million people who are getting benefits that weren’t getting it before, driven the backlog for disability benefits way down, cut homelessness in half. Just made the agency work better -- not work perfect, but work better.

And one of the mottos I always had with my staff was, better is good. Perfect is unattainable. Better is possible.

And so we will try to share the lessons that we’ve learned over these last eight years with the incoming President. And my hope is he makes things better. And if he does, we’ll all benefit from it.

All right? Thank you, everybody. You guys, some of you who are traveling, you’ll get a chance to ask more questions. All right?

Thank you.

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# Address to the People of Greece

Hello, Greece! Yia sas! Kalispera! [Good evening!] To the government and the people of Greece -- including Prime Minister Tsipras, who I thank for his partnership and for being here, along with so many young people, the future of Greece -- I want to thank you for your warm and generous welcome.

As many of you know, this is my final trip overseas as President of the United States, and I was determined, on my last trip, to come to Greece -- partly because I’ve heard about the legendary hospitality of the Greek people -- your philoxenia. Partly because I had to see the Acropolis and the Parthenon. But also because I came here with gratitude for all that Greece -- “this small, great world” -- has given to humanity through the ages.

Our hearts have been moved by the tragedies of Aeschylus and Euripides. Our minds have been opened by the histories of Herodotus and Thucydides. Our understanding of the world and our place in it has been expanded by Socrates and Aristotle.

In the United States, we’re especially grateful for the friendship of so many proud Greek Americans. In my hometown of Chicago -- you can find them in Greektown, with their fustanellas. And together, we’ve celebrated Greek Independence Day at the White House. We’ve had some spanakopita and some ouzo. Greek Americans have worn the uniform to keep our country free. Greek Americans have marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to make us more just. Greek or American, we’re all cheering for Giannis Antetokounmpo -- who seems to be getting better each year. And if anyone seeks an example of our shared spirit, our resilience, they need look no further than New York City, near Ground Zero, where the Greek Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas, once in ruins, is now rising again.

Most of all, we’re indebted to Greece for the most precious of gifts -- the truth, the understanding that as individuals of free will, we have the right and the capacity to govern ourselves. For it was here, 25 centuries ago, in the rocky hills of this city, that a new idea emerged. Demokratia. Kratos -- the power, the right to rule -- comes from demos -- the people. The notion that we are citizens -- not servants, but stewards of our society. The concept of citizenship -- that we have both rights and responsibilities. The belief in equality before the law -- not just for a few, but for the many; not just for the majority, but also the minority. These are all concepts that grew out of this rocky soil.

Of course, the earliest forms of democracy here in Athens were far from perfect -- just as the early forms of democracy in the United States were far from perfect. The rights of ancient Athens were not extended to women or to slaves. But Pericles explained, “our constitution favors the many instead of the few…this is why it is called a democracy.”1

Athenians also knew that, however noble, ideas alone were not enough. To have meaning, principles must be enshrined in laws and protected by institutions, and advanced through civic participation. And so they gathered in a great assembly to debate and decide affairs of state, each citizen with the right to speak, casting their vote with a show of hands, or choosing a pebble -- white for yes, black for no. Laws were etched in stone for all to see and abide by. Courts, with citizen jurors, upheld that rule of law.

Politicians weren’t always happy because sometimes the stones could be used to ostracize, banish those who did not behave themselves.

But across the millennia that followed, different views of power and governance have often prevailed. Throughout human history, there have been those who argue that people cannot handle democracy, that they cannot handle self-determination, they need to be told what to do. A ruler has to maintain order through violence or coercion or an iron fist. There’s been a different concept of government that says might makes right, or that unchecked power can be passed through bloodlines. There’s been the belief that some are superior by virtue of race or faith or ethnicity, and those beliefs so often have been used to justify conquest and exploitation and war.

But through all this history, the flame first lit here in Athens never died. It was ultimately nurtured by a great Enlightenment. It was fanned by America’s founders, who declared that “We, the People” shall rule; "that all men are created equal" and "endowed by [their] Creator with certain inalienable rights."

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Now, at times, even today, those ideals are challenged. We’ve been told that these are Western ideals. We’ve been told that some cultures are not equipped for democratic governance and actually prefer authoritarian rule. And I will say that after eight years of being President of the United States, having traveled around the globe, it is absolutely true that every country travels its own path; every country has its own traditions. But what I also believe, after eight years, is that the basic longing to live with dignity, the fundamental desire to have control of our lives and our future, and to want to be a part of determining the course of our communities and our nations -- these yearnings are universal. They burn in every human heart.

It’s why a Greek bishop atop a mountain raised the flag of independence. It’s why peoples from the Americas to Africa to Asia threw off the yoke of colonialism. It’s why people behind an Iron Curtain marched in Solidarity, and tore down that wall, and joined you in a great union of democracies. It’s why, today, we support the right of Ukrainians to choose their own destiny; why we partner with Tunisians and the people of Myanmar as they make historic transitions to democracy.

This has been my foreign policy during my presidency. By necessity, we work with all countries, and many of them are not democracies. Some of them are democracies in the sense they have elections, but not democracies in the sense of actually permitting participation and dissent. But our trajectory as a country has been to support the efforts of those who believe in self-governance, who believe in those ideas that began here so many years ago.

And it is not simply a matter of us being true to our values. It’s not just a matter of idealism. I believe it is practical for the United States to support democracies. Because history shows us that countries with democratic governance tend to be more just, and more stable, and more successful.

Open, democratic societies can deliver more prosperity --because when people are free to think for themselves and share ideas and discover and create -- the young people who are here, what they’re able to do through the Internet and technology, that’s when innovation is unleashed, when economies truly flourish. That’s when new products, and new services, and new ideas wash through an economy. In contrast to regimes that rule by coercion, democracies are rooted in consent of the governed -- citizens know that there’s a path for peaceful change, including the moral force of nonviolence. And that brings a stability that so often can facilitate economic growth.

The history of the past two centuries indicates that democracies are less likely to fight wars among themselves. So more democracy is good for the people of the world, but it’s also good for our national security. Which is why America’s closest friends are democracies -- like Greece. It’s why we stand together in NATO -- an alliance of democracies.

In recent years, we’ve made historic investments in NATO, increased America’s presence in Europe, and today’s NATO -- the world’s greatest alliance -- is as strong and as ready as it’s ever been. And I am confident that just as America’s commitment to the transatlantic alliance has endured for seven decades --whether it’s been under a Democratic or Republican Administration -- that commitment will continue, including our pledge and our treaty obligation to defend every ally.

Our democracies show that we’re stronger than terrorists, and fundamentalists, and absolutists who can’t tolerate difference, can’t tolerate ideas that vary from their own, who try to change people’s way of life through violence and would make us betray or shrink from our values. Democracy is stronger than organizations like ISIL.

Because our democracies are inclusive, we’re able to welcome people and refugees in need to our countries. And nowhere have we seen that compassion more evident than here in Greece. The Greek people’s generosity towards refugees arriving on your shores has inspired the world. That doesn’t mean that you should be left on your own -- and only a truly collective response by Europe and the world can ensure that these desperate people receive the support that they need. Greece cannot be expected to bear the bulk of the burden alone -- but the fact that your democracy opens your heart to people in need in a way that might not otherwise be the case.

Just as democracies are premised on the peaceful resolution of disagreements within our societies, we also believe that cooperation and dialogue is the best way to address challenges between nations. And so it is my belief that democracies are more likely to try to resolve conflicts between nations in a way that does not result in war. That’s how, with diplomacy, we were able to shut down Iran’s nuclear weapons program without firing a shot. With diplomacy, the United States opened relations with Cuba. With diplomacy, we joined Greece and nearly 200 nations in the most ambitious agreement ever to save our planet from climate change.

And speaking of climate change, I would point out that there is a connection between democracy and science. The premise of science is that we observe and we test our hypotheses, our ideas. We base decisions on facts, not superstition; not what our ideology tells us, but rather what we can observe. And at a time when the globe is shrinking and more and more we’re going to have to take collective action to deal with problems like climate change, the presence of a democratic debate allows the science to flourish and to shape our collective responses.

Now, democracy, like all human institutions, is imperfect. It can be slow; it can be frustrating; it can be hard; it can be messy. Politicians tend to be unpopular in democracies, regardless of party, because, by definition, democracies require that you don’t get a hundred percent of what you want. It requires compromise. Winston Churchill famously said "that democracy is the worst form of government" -- except for all the others.

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And in a multiethnic, multiracial, multicultural society, like the United States, democracy can be especially complicated. Believe me, I know.

But it is better than the alternatives because it allows us to peacefully work through our differences and move closer to our ideals. It allows us to test new ideas and it allows us to correct for mistakes. Any action by a President, or any result of an election, or any legislation that has proven flawed can be corrected through the process of democracy.

And throughout our history, it’s how we have come to see that all people are created equal -- even though, when we were founded, that was not the case. We could work to expand the rights that were established in our founding to African Americans, and to women, to Americans with disabilities, to Native Americans; why all Americans now have the freedom to marry the person they love. It’s why we welcome people of all races and all religions and all backgrounds, and immigrants who strive to give their children a better life and who make our country stronger.

And so here, where democracy was born, we affirm once more the rights and the ideals and the institutions upon which our way of life endures: freedom of speech and assembly -- because true legitimacy can only come from the people, who must never be silenced; a free press to expose injustice and corruption and hold leaders accountable; freedom of religion -- because we’re all equal in the eyes of God; independent judiciaries to uphold rule of law and human rights; separation of powers to limit the reach of any one branch of government; free and fair elections -- because citizens must be able to choose their own leaders, even if your candidate doesn’t always win.

We compete hard in campaigns in America and here in Greece. But after the election, democracy depends on a peaceful transition of power, especially when you don’t get the result you want.

And as you may have noticed, the next American President and I could not be more different. We have very different points of view, but American democracy is bigger than any one person. That’s why we have a tradition of the outgoing President welcoming the new one in -- as I did last week. And why, in the coming weeks, my Administration will do everything we can to support the smoothest transition possible -- because that’s how democracy has to work.

And that’s why, as hard as it can be sometimes, it’s important for young people, in particular, who are just now becoming involved in the lives of their countries, to understand that progress follows a winding path -- sometimes forward, sometimes back -- but as long as we retain our faith in democracy, as long as we retain our faith in the people, as long as we don’t waver from those central principles that ensure a lively, open debate, then our future will be okay, because it remains the most effective form of government ever devised by man.

It is true, of course, over the last several years that we’ve seen democracies faced with serious challenges. And I want to mention two that have an impact here in Greece, haven an impact in the United States, and are having an impact around the world.

The first involves the paradox of a modern, global economy. The same forces of globalization and technology and integration that have delivered so much progress, have created so much wealth, have also revealed deep fault lines. Around the world, integration and closer cooperation, and greater trade and commerce, and the Internet -- all have improved the lives of billions of people -- lifted families from extreme poverty, cured diseases, helped people live longer, gave them more access to education and opportunity than at any time in human history.

I’ve often said to young people in the United States, if you had to choose a moment in history to be born, and you did not know ahead of time who you would be -- you didn’t know whether you were going to be born into a wealthy family or a poor family, what country you’d be born, whether you were going to be a man or a woman -- if you had to choose blindly what moment you’d want to be born: You’d choose now. Because the world has never, collectively, been wealthier, better educated, healthier, less violent than it is today. That’s hard to imagine, given what we see in the news, but it’s true. And a lot of that has to do with the developments of a integrated, global economy.

But trends underway for decades have meant that in many countries and in many communities there have been enormous disruptions. Technology and automation mean that goods can be produced with fewer workers. It means jobs and manufacturing can move across borders where wages are lower or rights are less protected. And that means that workers and unions oftentimes have less leverage to bargain for better wages, better benefits, have more difficulty competing in the global marketplace. Hardworking families worry their kids may not be better off than they were because of this global competition.

What we’ve also seen is that this global integration is increasing the tendencies towards inequality, both between nations and within nations, at an accelerated pace. And when we see people -- global elites, wealthy corporations -- seemingly living by a different set of rules, avoiding taxes, manipulating loopholes -- when the rich and the powerful appear to game the system and accumulate vast wealth while middle and working-class families struggle to make ends meet, this feeds a profound sense of injustice and a feeling that our economies are increasingly unfair.

This inequality now constitutes one of the greatest challenges to our economies and to our democracies. An inequality that was once tolerated because people didn’t know how unequal things were now won’t be tolerated because everybody has a cellphone and can see how unequal things are. The awareness that people have in the smallest African village, they can see how people in London or New York are living. The poorest child in any of our countries now has a sense of what other people have that they don’t. So not only is there increasing inequality, but also there is greater awareness of inequality. And that’s a volatile mix for our democracies.

And this is why addressing inequality has been one of the key areas of focus for my economic policy. In our countries, in America and in most advanced market economies, we want people to be rewarded for their achievement. We think that people should be rewarded if they come up with a new product or a new service that is popular and helps a lot of people. But when a CEO of a company now makes more money in a single day than a typical worker does in an entire year, when it’s harder for workers to climb their way up the economic ladder, when they see a factory close that used to support an entire city or town, fuels the feeling that globalization only benefits those at the top. And the reaction can drag down a country’s growth and make recessions more likely. It can also lead to politics that create an unhealthy competition between countries. Rather than a win-win situation, people perceive that if you’re winning, I’m losing, and barriers come up and walls come up.

And in advanced economies, there are at times movements from both the left and the right to put a stop to integration, and to push back against technology, and to try to bring back jobs and industries that have been disappearing for decades. So this impulse to pull back from a globalized world is understandable. If people feel that they’re losing control of their future, they will push back. We have seen it here in Greece. We’ve seen it across Europe. We’ve seen it in the United States. We saw it in the vote in Britain to leave the EU.

But given the nature of technology, it is my assertion that it’s not possible to cut ourselves off from one another. We now are living in a global supply chain. Our growth comes through innovation and ideas that are crossing borders all the time. The jobs of tomorrow will inevitably be different from the jobs of the past. So we can’t look backwards for answers, we have to look forward.

We cannot sever the connections that have enabled so much progress and so much wealth. For when competition for resources is perceived as zero-sum, we put ourselves on a path to conflict both within countries and between countries. So I firmly believe that the best hope for human progress remains open markets combined with democracy and human rights. But I have argued that the current path of globalization demands a course correction. In the years and decades ahead, our countries have to make sure that the benefits of an integrated global economy are more broadly shared by more people, and that the negative impacts are squarely addressed.

And we actually know the path to building more inclusive economies. It’s just we too often don’t have the political will or desire to get it done. We know we need bold policies that spur growth and support jobs. We know that we need to give workers more leverage and better wages, and that, in fact, if you give workers better wages businesses do better, too, because their customers now have money to spend.

We know that we have to invest more in our people -- the education of our young people, the skills and training to compete in the global economy. We have to make sure that it is easy for young people who are eager to learn and eager to work to get the education that they need, the training that they need, without taking on huge amounts of debt.

We know that we have to encourage entrepreneurship so that it’s easier to start a business and do business. We know that we have to strengthen the social compact so that the safety net that is available for people, including quality health care and retirement benefits, are there even if people aren’t working in the same job for 30 years, or 40 years, or 50 years.

We have to modernize our infrastructure, which will put people back to work. We have to commit to the science and research and development that sparks new industries.

In our trading relationships, we have to make sure that trade works for us, and not against us. And that means insisting on high standards in all countries to support jobs, strong protections for workers, strong protections for the environment, so that even as we freely trade, people and workers in all countries see the benefits of trade in their own lives, not just benefits for the bottom line of large, multinational corporations.

These are the kinds of policies, this is the work that I’ve pursued throughout my time as President. Keep in mind I took office in the midst of the worst crisis since the Great Depression. And we pursued a recovery that has been shared now by the vast majority of Americans. We put people back to work building bridges and roads. We passed tax cuts for the middle class. We asked the wealthiest Americans to pay a little more taxes -- their fair share. We intervened to save our auto industry, but insisted that the auto industry become more energy efficient, produce better cars that reduce pollution.

We put in place policies to help students with loans and protect consumers from fraud. We passed the strongest Wall Street reforms in history so that the excesses and abuses that triggered the global financial crisis never happen again -- or at least don’t start on Wall Street.

And today, our businesses have created more than 15 million new jobs. Incomes last year in America rose faster than any time since 1968. Poverty fell at the fastest rate since 1968. Inequality is being narrowed. And we’ve also begun to close the pay gap between men and women.

We declared that health care in America is a privilege not for the few, but a right for everybody. Today our uninsured rate is at the lowest levels on record. And we’ve done all this while doubling our production of clean energy, lowering our carbon pollution faster than any advanced nation. So we’ve proven that you can grow the economy and reduce the carbon emissions that cause climate change at the same time.

Now, I say all this not because we’ve solved every problem. Our work is far from complete. There are still too many people in America who are worried about their futures. Still too many people who are working at wages that don’t get them above the poverty line. Still too many young people who don’t see opportunity. But the policies I describe point the direction for where we need to go in building inclusive economies. And that’s how democracies can deliver the prosperity and hope that our people need. And when people have opportunity and they feel confidence the future, they are less likely to turn on each other and they’re less likely to appeal to some of the darker forces that exist in all our societies -- those that can tear us apart.

Here in Greece, you’re undergoing similar transformations. The first step has been to build a foundation that allows you to return to robust economic growth. And we don’t need to recount all the causes of the economic crisis here in Greece. If we’re honest, we can acknowledge that it was a mix of both internal and external forces. The Greek economy and the level of debt had become unsustainable. And in this global economy, investment and jobs flow to countries where governments are efficient, not bloated, where the rules are clear. To stay competitive, to attract investment that creates jobs, Greece had to start a reform process.

Of course, the world, I don’t think, fully appreciates the extraordinary pain these reforms have involved, or the tremendous sacrifices that you, the Greek people, have made. I’ve been aware of it, and I’ve been proud of all that my Administration has done to try to support Greece in these efforts. And part of the purpose of my visit is to highlight for the world the important steps that have been taken here in Greece.

Today, the budget is back in surplus. Parliament passed reforms to make the economy more competitive. Yes, there is still much more work to do. I want to commend Prime Minister Tsipras for the very difficult reforms his government is pursuing to put the economy on a firmer footing. Now, as Greece works to attract more investment, and to prevent old imbalances from re-emerging, and to put your economy on a stronger foundation, you’ll continue to have the full support of the United States.

At the same time, I will continue to urge creditors to take the steps needed to put Greece on a path towards sustained economic recovery. As Greece continues to implement reforms, the IMF has said that debt relief will be crucial to get Greece back to growth. They are right. It is important because if reforms here are going to be sustained, people need to see hope, and they need to see progress. And the young people who are in attendance here today and all across the country need to know there is a future -- there is an education and jobs that are worthy of your incredible potential. You don’t have to travel overseas, you can put roots right here in your home, in Greece, and succeed.

And I’m confident that if you stay the course, as hard as it has been, Greece will see brighter days. Because, in this magnificent hall and center -- this symbol of the Greek culture and resilience -- we’re reminded that just as your strength and resolve have allowed you to overcome great odds throughout your history, nothing can break the spirit of the Greek people. You will overcome this period of challenge just as you have other challenges in the past.

So economics is something that will be central to preserving our democracies. When our economies don’t work, our democracies become distorted and, in some cases, break down. But this brings me to another pressing challenge that our democracies face -- how do we ensure that our diverse, multicultural, multiracial, multi-religious world and our diverse nations uphold both the rights of individuals and a fundamental civic adherence to a common creed that binds us together.

Democracy is simplest where everybody thinks alike, looks alike, eats the same food, worships the same God. Democracy becomes more difficult when there are people coming from a variety of backgrounds and trying to live together. In our globalized world, with the migration of people and the rapid movement of ideas and cultures and traditions, we see increasingly this blend of forces mixing together in ways that often enrich our societies but also cause tensions.

In the Information Age, the unprecedented exchange of information can always accentuate differences, or seem to threaten cherished ways of life. It used to be that you might not know how people in another part of your country, or in the cities versus the countryside, were living. Now everybody knows how everybody is living, and everybody can feel threatened sometimes if people don’t do things exactly the way they do things. And they start asking themselves questions about their own identity. And it can create a volatile politics.

Faced with this new reality where cultures clash, it's inevitable that some will seek a comfort in nationalism or tribe or ethnicity or sect. In countries that are held together by borders that were drawn by colonial powers, including many countries in the Middle East and in Africa, it can be tempting to fall back on perceived safety of enclaves and tribal divisions.

In a world of widening inequality, there's a growing suspicion -- or even disdain -- for elites and institutions that seem remote from the daily lives of ordinary people. What an irony it is, at a time when we can reach out to people in the most remote corners of the planet, so many citizens feel disconnected from their own governments.

So, just as we have to have an inclusive economic strategy, we have to have an exclusive political and cultural strategy. In all of our capitals, we have to keep making government more efficient, more effective in responding to the daily needs to citizens. Governing institutions, whether in Athens, Brussels, London, Washington, have to be responsive to the concerns of citizens. People have to know that they're being heard.

Here in Europe, even with today's challenges, I believe that by virtue of the progress it has delivered over the decades -- the stability it has provided, the security it's reinforced -- that European integration and the European Union remains one of the great political and economic achievements of human history. And today more than ever, the world needs a Europe that is strong and prosperous and democratic.

But I think all institutions in Europe have to ask themselves: How can we make sure that people within individual countries feel as if their voices are still being heard, that their identities are being affirmed, that the decisions that are being made that will have a critical impact on their lives are not so remote that they have no ability to impact them?

We have to make clear that governments exist to serve the interest of citizens, and not the other way around. And so this is why, as President of the United States, I've pursued initiatives like the Open Government Partnership that promotes transparency and accountability so that ordinary people know more about the decisions that affect their lives. That's why both at home and around the world, we have taken steps to fight corruption that can rot a society from within.

As authoritarian governments work to close space that citizens depend upon to organize and have their voices heard, we've begun the work of empowering civil society to defend democratic values and promote solutions to the problems within our communities. And as so many people around the world sometimes are tempted by cynicism and not being involved because they think that politicians and government don’t care about them, we've created networks for young leaders and invested in young entrepreneurs, because we believe that the hope and renewal of our societies begins with the voices of youth.

In closing, our globalized world is passing through a time of profound change. Yes, there is uncertainty and there is unease, and none of us can know the future. History does not move in a straight line. Civil rights in America did not move in a straight line. Democracy in Greece did not move in a straight line. The evolution of a unified Europe certainly has not moved in a straight line. And progress is never a guarantee. Progress has to be earned by every generation. But I believe history gives us hope.

Twenty-five centuries after Athens first pointed the way, 250 years after the beginning of the great American journey, my faith and my confidence, my certainty in our democratic ideals and universal values remain undiminished. I believe more strongly than ever that Dr. King was right when he said that, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.”

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But it bends towards justice not because it is inevitable, but because we bend it towards justice; not because there are not going to be barriers to achieving justice, but because there will be people, generation after generation, who have the vision and the courage and the will to bend the arc of our lives in the direction of a better future.

In the United States, and in every place I have visited these last eight years, I have met citizens, especially young people, who have chosen hope over fear, who believe that they can shape their own destiny, who refuse to accept the world as it is and are determined to remake it as it should be. They have inspired me.

In every corner of the world, I have met people who, in their daily lives, demonstrate that despite differences of race or religion or creed or color, we have the capacity to see each other in ourselves. Like the woman here in Greece who said of the refugees arriving on these shores, "We live under the same sun. We fall in love under the same moon. We are all human -- we have to help these people."

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Women like that give me hope.

In all of our communities, in all of our countries, I still believe there's more of what Greeks call philotimo -- love and respect and kindness for family and community and country, and a sense that we’re all in this together, with obligations to each other. Philotimo -- I see it every day -- and that gives me hope.

Because in the end, it is up to us. It's not somebody else's job, it's not somebody else's responsibility, but it's the citizens of our countries and citizens of the world to bend that arc of history towards justice.

And that’s what democracy allows us to do. That's why the most important office in any country is not President or Prime Minister. The most important title is “citizen.” And in all of our nations, it will always be our citizens who decide the kind of countries we will be, the ideals that we will reach for, and the values that will define us. In this great, imperfect, but necessary system of self-government, power and progress will always come from the demos -- from “We, the people.” And I'm confident that as long as we are true to that system of self-government, that our futures will be bright.

Thank you very much. Zito e ellas. [Long live Greece.]

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# Joint Presser with Chancellor Angela Merkel

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# Young Leaders of the Americas Initiative Address

President Obama: Hola Peru! Asu! Muchas gracias. Thank you so much. Thank you. Everybody, please have a seat. Thank you, Cyntia, for your kind words and your great work here in Peru in bringing people together across generations to meet challenges. Please give Cyntia a big round of applause for the great introduction.

So it is wonderful to be here in Peru. I want to thank everybody at Catholic University of Peru for hosting us. I want to thank the government and the people of this beautiful country for your hospitality.

Audience Member: I love you!

President Obama: I love you, too!

So, while I'm here, I’m hoping to enjoy some good food -- some pollo a la brasa. Maybe a pisco sour. But I will not be attempting the Marinera because I usually leave the dancing to my wife, Michelle. She's a better dancer than me.

But I want to thank all of you for being here -- our Young Leaders of America, both live and online, representing every country in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Now, this is my final stop on my final trip abroad as President of the United States. And I’ve had the usual meetings with world leaders, and we've done important business. But whenever I travel, one of the things that I've been trying to do for the last eight years is to meet with young people. First of all, young people are more fun than old people. Second, because today more than half of the world’s population is 30 or younger. And that means your generation will determine the course of our future -- as individual nations and as a global community. Now, the good news is, because I've had a chance to meet so many young people around the world, it makes me very optimistic to know that you are going to be in charge. And that's why I wanted my last public event abroad to be with you.

I often say to young people in my own country: If you had to be born at any time in human history, it would be right now. If you think about all the progress that's been made, not just in your lifetimes, but even in the last few years, fewer people than ever around the world live in extreme poverty. Scientific breakthroughs are paving the way for cures to new diseases. More children are going to school; more girls in particular are going to school than ever before. People across the world are securing their human rights. And technology has reshaped the world, as you can tell, because everybody has their phones. At a time when Earth is now populated by more cell phones than people, you have the power to connect with each other across borders, across nations. You have the tools in your hand to solve problems that we couldn’t even imagine when I was your age.

Now, even as we make all these important strides in advancing the rights of more people, even as technology brings us closer together, this unprecedented change also brings challenges. We see it in the widening gap between the rich and the poor around the world. We see it in the forces of extremism and division that too often tear communities apart. So the question for all of us is, how can we make sure that in this rapidly changing world, nobody is left behind and that all of us are stronger and more prosperous?

So over the last eight years as President, I've worked to strengthen our relationship with the Americas. We’re more than just neighbors -- we're linked by trade and culture, and family and values. Our students study in each other’s countries. Our businesses sell goods across borders. Our tourists travel back and forth. And we’ve moved beyond many of the old arguments to create a new vision for the future -- one that your generation, which is liberated from old ways of thinking, can lead.

During my presidency, the United States recommitted itself to the region, in partnership with your countries, based on mutual interests and mutual respect. We increased trade. We stood up for democracy and human rights, fought against corruption and organized crime. We’ve promoted clean energy. We’ve led the global fight against climate change. We opened a new relationship with Cuba.

I strongly believe that this work has to be done with governments, but it's even more important that it's done by people -- because government is important, but it can't solve every problem. So we have to work together at a people-to-people level -- teachers, and doctors, and students, and entrepreneurs, and religious leaders -- all trying to find ways in which we can promote those values of dignity and humanity and respect that so often are threatened.

And that's why we developed this Young Leaders Initiative. Our goal is to find the most innovative young entrepreneurs, the most energetic civil society leaders like you, and help empower you with the training, and tools and connections so you can make a difference in your communities and your countries. This network already has 20,000 people. This fall, we welcomed the first class of 250 YLAI Fellows to the United States. This is just 100 of them. They're from every country across the Americas.

We want to help. So we want to help this generation with grants, seed funding, skills training. Today, I’m announcing the launch of the Latin American and Caribbean Civil Society Innovation Initiative Hub, which is a way to virtually connect civil society organizations across the region so you can learn from each other, share your good work, support each other. We’re investing $40 million in the talents and entrepreneurship of young people across the Caribbean to help start your own businesses and ventures. We’re opening what we call the Global Innovation Exchange so that you can showcase your new business or enterprise to people around the world, and that way you can connect and hopefully get resources that you otherwise didn’t have.

And we’re moving ahead with more education partnerships, like the 100,000 Strong in the Americas. By the end of the decade, we want 100,000 U.S. students studying in the Americas, and 100,000 students from the Americas studying in the United States. And today, we’re announcing a partnership between the U.S. Department of State, Sempra, and CAF, which is Latin America’s development bank, to fund the first Innovation Fund competition exclusively between Peruvian and U.S. colleges and universities so students can come together to work on climate change and environmental science.

So we're focused on the hemisphere, we're focused on the region. But it's more than just North America, South America. You're now part of a global network of young leaders from Africa, Southeast Asia, Europe, and the Americas who are doing amazing work in their own communities. And while my time as U.S. President is coming to an end, this network is just beginning -- it’s never been more important. We need you to stay connected, work together, learn from each other, so we can build that next generation of leadership who can take on challenges like climate change and poverty, can help grow our economies, make sure that women get opportunity. Make sure that every child, wherever they live, has a chance to build a good life.

And I’m going to just give you some examples of the amazing people that are involved in this process. We need leaders like Dr. ValÃ©ry Moise. As a young doctor in Haiti, ValÃ©ry saw firsthand how issues like acute malnutrition -- hunger -- affected the poorest children in his country. So he and a team of social workers and doctors started an organization called Diagnostik Group, which focuses on improving health care for abandoned children at the largest pediatric hospital in Haiti. His goal is for the group to become the standard for pediatric care and to expand so that he can reach even more children across Haiti. So thank you, ValÃ©ry, for the great work that you are doing.

We need leaders like Abbigale Loncke of Guyana. Abbigale, are you here? So after struggling to find her own grandfather home care, Abbigale realized this is a problem for so many other families, so she started Community Health Care, a home care agency. She started out as a service to help families take care of their loved ones but now has a social movement that also provides training and job opportunities for young women in the health care industry. So thank you, Abbigale, for the great work you’re doing. And you already heard the great work that Cyntia is doing right here in Peru.

Across the world and across the Americas, young people are taking the lead. They’re seeing problems, they’re seeing injustice, and they are finding ways to take action.

And the main message I want you to know is that you have a partner in me and you have a partner in the United States government. And we are going to work together -- we’re going to work together. We expect the fellowships to continue, but I want you to know that I will also continue to be involved, even after I’m President, because I want to make sure that we continue to invest in your success. If you succeed, not only do your countries succeed, but the world succeeds. And I’m very excited to see all the great things you’re going to do in the future.

So, muchas gracias. Let’s take some questions. And now we’re going to start with some questions. I’m going to take off my jacket because it’s a little hot. I wasn’t trying to get a cheer out of that but --

President Obama: All right, so we’re going to start with this question from this gentleman right here. Please introduce yourself as you speak.

Hold on, the mic is not working. No, not yet. Do we have a second mic? Testing -- one, two, three. Hold on, here's the technical expert. Here we go. Here's another one. Not yet? Uh-oh. Uh-oh. Here we go. We got to try this one. One of these is going to work.

Question: Testing.

President Obama: Oh, there you go. Hey!

Question: Good afternoon, Mr. President. My name is Luis Santiago [ph]. I’m from Caracas, Venezuela. I’m a YLAI Fellow. We’re working on the first electronic health records platform for Latin America, and I was a proud member of this chord of YLAI fellows.

I’m here to read a question from our YLAI network. There were 200 questions posted on Facebook, but Carlos David Carrasco Muro from Venezuela asks: In Venezuela, there’s a debate about what matters most for stability, whether it’s peace or democracy. How can we create a world where we do not have to choose between them? Both are important for development.

Thank you very much.

President Obama: Well, it’s a great question. And it’s a timely question, because I think that after a decade in which we’ve seen more and more countries adopt democratic practices, you’re now starting to see some of those gains reversed. You’re seeing some countries that are going backwards rather than forwards in terms of freedom of the press, in terms of freedom of the Internet, in terms of respecting political opposition and civil society. And there are those who argue that democracy is incompatible with development because you need order, you need somebody from the top to tell people what to do in order to achieve.

And I would just suggest that you look at the evidence over the last 20, 30, 40 years. Those countries that pursue democracy, that pursue transparency, where their leaders are held accountable -- those are the countries that are doing best. Those countries that are repressive, that don’t respect democracy, that silence critics -- they go backwards economically.

And it makes sense when you think about it, because in this time that we live in, development is based on knowledge and innovation and education and new thinking and sharing of ideas. It’s not based on how much land you have, it’s not based on natural resources. It’s based on your people. And in a democracy, what we’re able to do is -- people, through the freedom they enjoy, are able to create, start businesses, start organizations, solve problems. And what’s also true then is, they’re able to hold the government accountable, so when the government doesn’t deliver for its people -- if it engages in corruption, if its policies only benefit a few rather than the many -- people can react and respond, and over time people get better policies from their governments.

And look at what’s happened just along the coast here in Latin America. If you look at Chile, Peru, Colombia -- all of them are growing faster, all of them are doing better because of the new openness and democracy that exists in these countries. And what’s true here is true around the world.

Now, the one thing I have to say though is, democracy is more than just elections. Democracy is also a free press. Democracy is also freedom of religion. Democracy is making sure that the rights of minorities are protected, not just the majority. Democracy is rule of law and an independent judiciary. So it’s a matter of all these elements coming together.

But the main thing we’ve learned is that, in this knowledge-based society, you can maintain order for a while with repressive, nondemocratic governments, but it will rot from within. Over time, those governments fail and those economies fail -- because when they make mistakes, they try to hide them instead of trying to solve them. When somebody has a legitimate criticism of a problem, it can be ignored because the politicians don’t have to answer. And eventually, those societies end up doing much worse, oftentimes by increasing repression as people get more and more dissatisfied and then society breaks down.

It’s also true, by the way, that nondemocratic countries are much more likely to get into wars with other nondemocratic countries. Democracies tend to try to solve problems through diplomacy and dialogue. So not only is there not a contradiction between democracy and development, it is my belief that in order, in this new knowledge-based economy, for development to be successful, you need democracy.

I will say this one last thing, though. Democracy can be frustrating, because democracy means that you don’t always get 100 percent of what you want. Democracy means that sometimes you have to compromise. And it means that the outcomes of elections don’t always turn out the way you would hope. And then you -- we're going through that in the United States, and I'm doing everything I can to help facilitate a successful transition with the President-elect in the United States. But as long as we keep our democratic systems open, then the society has a chance to try something new, and then it can make a decision and correct problems that they see in the future, and progress will continue.

Good. All right. Let's see -- right there. Yeah, you. So let's get a microphone to you so we can hear you. And introduce yourself. By the way, I apologize, my Spanish is just okay. So we're doing this in English, but hopefully I'm being clear. Go ahead.

Question: Hi, Mr. President. I'm very glad to be here -- that you are here in my country, in Peru. And for me, it's an honor to be here in this conference. Well, my question is, what do you think about the European Union has come together to promote military integration in defense that -- after the victory of Trump? And do you think we have global paranoia created by the media, or it's real?

President Obama: Good. What's your name?

Question: Jocelyn Ramirez [ph].

President Obama: Nice to meet you. Are you a student here?

Question: I'm a student from UPC.

President Obama: Fantastic. Okay. You have some classmates here. Well, the United States is such a big country that, after any election, people are uncertain. And I think it will be important for everybody around the world to not make immediate judgments but give this new President-elect a chance to put their team together, to examine the issues, to determine what their policies will be -- because as I've always said, how you campaign isn’t always the same as how you govern. Sometimes when you're campaigning, you're trying to stir up passions. When you govern, you actually have reality in front of you, and you have to figure out how do I make this work.

The alliance between the United States and Europe, through NATO, is very strong. And the President-elect Trump has already reaffirmed our commitment to NATO. We actually have been asking, under my administration, for Europe to carry more of the burden of defense spending than they've been doing, because the United States spends a lot more than some of our NATO partners. And they recognize and acknowledge, I think, the need for them to spend more time -- more resources on that.

With respect to Latin America, I don't anticipate major changes in policy from the new administration. I think the work that we've done has been successful in establishing the strongest relationships between the United States and Latin America in modern history. The friendships that we've established with countries like Peru, the reopening of diplomatic relations with Cuba, the investments we're making in trade, in environmental policy, and so forth -- all those things I expect to continue.

There are going to be tensions that arise, probably around trade more than anything else, because the President-elect campaigned on looking at every trade policy and potentially reversing some of those policies. But once they look at how it's working, I think they'll determine that it's actually good both for the United States and our trading partners. There may need to be modifications. I've called for modifications in certain elements of our trading policy. When we established the U.S.-Peru Free Trade Agreement, one of the requirements was for Peru to strengthen its protection of labor rights, workers' rights. And we did that in part because, with all of our trading partners we don’t want to be disadvantaged because we're dealing with labor that has no rights, and so it gets the lowest wages and can be exploited. But we did it also because that will help lift the wages and benefits and protections that workers here in Peru enjoy, because ultimately that's good for everybody.

One of the things that I really believe is that when you pay workers well, when ordinary people are getting a decent wage and decent benefits and decent protections, then they have more money in their pockets, and then they go out and they spend that money, which is good for business, and everybody is better off. So that's the kind of attitude that we want to try to promote in the years going forward. And my hope is, is that that policy will continue.

So my message to you, though, and the message I delivered in Europe is, don’t just assume the worst. Wait until the administration is in place, it's actually putting its policies together, and then you can make your judgments as to whether or not it's consistent with the international community's interest in living in peace and prosperity together.

Okay. Good. All right. Okay, so what I'm doing is I'm going boy, girl, boy, girl, so that everybody gets a fair chance. Okay, this gentleman right here, in the purple shirt.

Question: Thank you very much. First of all, I just want to say thank you for being such a great world leader over your tenure. I truly think that you've done your best in making the world a better place.

President Obama: I appreciate that.

Question: My name is Lubi Jorges [ph].

President Obama: Where you are from, Lubi?

Question: I'm from the Bahamas.

President Obama: Hey.

Question: I'm the son of two Haitian immigrants living in the Bahamas. And I'm a human rights activist and also a radio talk show host. I filter my advocacy work through radio, because it's a great form of communication in getting everybody involved.

Nonetheless, you spoke about youth and us shaping the future and the direction of the world, and what it's going to be in the very near future. But I'll give you a quick example of what I experienced and then a question that can apply to all of us here as young people.

As a person being born to Haitian parents, immigrants, in the Bahamas, there is a certain perception on you not being a native. And governments have fed on that over time. And so the average individual that you would come into contact with, they would see you in a certain light. And so the opportunities to assist then, to help your country, then are diminished. For example, I'm trying to bridge the gap between Haitians and Bahamians in the Bahamas, but government officials and other individuals, they would have said, well, you're fighting for Haitians to take over the Bahamas -- when it's not that. I just want Bahamians and Haitians to live in peace in the Bahamas.

And so if you had the opportunity to have all of our prime ministers and presidents in one room, and you had one word of advice that you could have given those leaders in regards to young people, and especially millennials, what would you say to those leaders?

President Obama: Well, you know, I've had that opportunity a number of times. They don’t always follow my advice.

But to your broader point -- look, we live in a world that is smaller than ever before. Because of the Internet, because of modern travel, your generation gets ideas and culture and your politics from everywhere, right? You are listening to everything from Rolling Stones, to Kendrick Lamar, to salsa, to reggaeton to right?

So what is true in music, what’s true in food is also true in terms of politics and ideas. And the great thing about young people is, is that that’s made your identities both national but also international. So people here are Peruvian, but you’re also people who care about what happens around this continent and around the world. It means that you can be both proud of your Haitian heritage and live in the Bahamas, and also be concerned about what happens in Africa, or what is happening in Myanmar. That’s a good thing.

Now, I’ll be honest with you, older people sometimes are more threatened than younger people by this convergence because -- you know, now that I’ve got gray hair, I see what happens as you get older -- you get set in your ways and you are afraid of things that are new. And oftentimes, politicians can feed into that sense that everything is changing so fast, let’s go back to our old identities -- identities of race or tribe or nationality.

And my main advice, not just to world leaders, but more importantly to citizens around the world is, if you’re defining yourself just by what you’re not, if you’re defining yourself just by the color of your skin or where you were born, then you are not fully appreciating what will give you a strong identity and meaning in your life, and what will lead to prosperity and security for everyone. And that is the values and ideals that we should all promote: That we respect everybody, regardless of what they look like. That we give everybody opportunity no matter where they were born, whether they were born poor or they were born rich. That we have laws that everybody has to observe, not just laws for one set of people and then a different set of laws for other people.

Because the problem with that approach -- a very narrow way of thinking about yourself -- is that that means almost inevitably you have to be in conflict with somebody else. If the most important thing about you is that you are an American -- if that’s the one thing that defines you -- then you may end up being threatened by people from other places, when in fact you may have a lot in common and you may miss opportunities.

Now, I’m a very proud American, and my job as President of the United States is to look out for American interests. But my argument to the American people has always been, the best way for us to look out for American interests is to also care about what’s happening in our neighborhood. Because if their house is burning down, eventually my house will burn down. The best way for my daughters to be secure as Americans is to make sure that people in El Salvador or Guatemala are also feeling some security, because if they’re not, then eventually that may spill over the borders to us.

And some of the challenges that we face today are ones that no single group can solve. If you look at something like climate change -- that knows no borders. If there is pollution in China, it affects you here in Peru. If we are going to make sure that the oceans don’t rise so that suddenly all of the streets around Lima are two feet underwater, then it’s going to require everybody taking the kind of collective action that we talked about in the Paris Agreement.

So I think that we should all have the capacity, and governments should reflect this capacity, to be proud of our particular circumstance, be proud that you’re Haitian, be proud that you’re in the Bahamas, be proud that you’re a young, black man. Be proud of your particular identity, but also see what you have in common with people who don’t look like you or don’t come from the same place as you do. Because if we see what we have in common, then we’re going to be able to work together and that’s going to be good for all of us. If all we see is differences, then we’re automatically going to be in competition -- and in order for me to do well, that means I have to put you down, which then makes you want to put me down, and everybody stays down here instead of everybody lifting each other up. It’s the most important thing we can do.

All right, so it’s a woman’s turn. Okay, everybody is pointing at this young lady. All her friends were pointing at her, so she has something very important to say.

Question: Welcome to Peru, Mr. President.

President Obama: Thank you.

Question: My name is Sofia, and my friends and I are students at Laboratoria. I know you have met Mariana [inaudible]. Do you remember about Laboratoria?

President Obama: I’m sorry, what? I’m sorry.

Question: Do remember about Laboratoria?

President Obama: Yes.

Question: With Mariana Costa?

President Obama: Yes, yes.

Question: Okay, I’m a student over there, me and my friends. We are so lucky to be studying over there to get a job in tech, but there are so many young people still without these type of opportunities. So what do you recommend to open more quality education or job opportunities for young people in Latin America?

President Obama: Well, the program you described is doing great work, and there’s a lot of good work all across Latin America. One of the goals is to make sure that not only are we providing a great education for people at the youngest ages -- basic reading, arithmetic, all those things -- but today you also need to have some knowledge of technology. And what we’re trying to do is to work with governments and NGOs to expand access to the Internet, to digital platforms. And what we also want to do then is to help design curriculum and programs through the Internet so that online learning is accessible in places where previously there might not be opportunities.

And we’re seeing some of those investments here in Peru. That’s part of the broader educational program that we have throughout Latin America. But we can still do more. And it’s not just us, it’s a public-private partnership also. So having Facebook participate, and Microsoft and Google and other big companies who have an interest in an educated population -- because the more educated and more wired they are, the more, over time, customers are using their products and their platforms.

What we want to do is to make sure that everybody, even in the smallest village, has suddenly this library to the world and to the best educational opportunities, even if there’s not a big university in that small town. And some of the learning that we can do, it doesn’t have to be four years. Sometimes, a six-week program could teach people coding in computers, and suddenly right away that person has a job, and then they can learn more and ultimately go and get a four-year education. But oftentimes what you need is just that first step.

And we’re doing this in the United States, by the way. It's not just in Latin America. In the United States, one of the things that we're finding is that we need to expand computer science and literacy in the schools. We need to make sure, also, that we set up technical training systems where somebody who's unemployed in a city where there used to be a big factory but now the factory is closed; or because of automation and robots, fewer people are working there; those people who have lost their jobs, they may not be able to afford to just go to a four-year university, give them six weeks, eight weeks, ten weeks of training. Get them in a job right now, and then over time they can learn even more.

So, congratulations. You guys are doing good work.

All right. Okay, so this is a team effort now. It's good to see this cooperation. Everybody is pointing at one person. All right, this gentleman right here, right in the front.

Question: Hello, Mr. President. I'm a student representative from this beautiful university with this gorgeous group of people. My name is Kai [ph]. And I'm going to give a little bit of context to my question. You see, the smartest man I know is my dad. My dad was born in Cuba. And when he was seven years old, he went to the United States to get an opportunity. He lived all of his university life there, from community college to doctorate, and he managed to do a lot of things because the USA had an open, honest towards him.

Today, many immigrants can bring innovation to the USA because it has still this open, honest policy. But the administration that is set to go after you is allegedly saying that it will have a closed door policy. In your opinion, what do you think that today the stand of the USA is for offshore innovators that want to leave their comfort zone to the USA, to go to Harvard, MIT, Yale, to find -- to strive? And what would be the damages of the USA closing their doors to these young innovators?

And a final remark, I hope you have two amazing last months of presidency.

President Obama: Thank you. Thank you very much. Well, first of all, I know that your father is very proud that you said he's the smartest man you know. I hope that Malia and Sasha would say the same thing about their father -- I don’t know. But I'm sure that made him feel good.

Look, America is a nation of immigrants. Those of you who visited America, if you walk in an American city -- not just New York or Los Angeles, but St. Louis or Indianapolis or Columbus, Ohio -- if you walk down the street, you see people that look like they could be from anyplace. Because the fact is, is that except for the Native American populations, everybody in America came from someplace else. All of us are immigrants. And that's been our greatest strength, because we've been able to attract talent from everywhere.

I use this as an example: You notice that the United States did really well in the Olympics. Now, some of that is because we're a big country, we're a wealthy country, so we have all these training facilities and we can do all kinds of -- best equipment. All that is true. But you know what, China is a bigger country and spends a lot of money also. The big advantage that America has, if you look at our team -- actually, two big advantages. First, we passed something called Title IX many years ago that requires that women get the same opportunities in sports as men do. And that's why -- one of the reasons the American teams did so well is the women were amazing, and just because they've gotten opportunities. Right? Which teaches us something about the need to make sure that women and men, boys and girls, get the same opportunities. Because you do better when everybody has a chance, not just some.

But the second thing -- you look at a U.S. Olympic team and there are all kinds of different sorts of people of all different shapes and sizes. And part of it is because we draw from a bigger genetic pool than anybody -- right? We have people who -- these little gymnasts, they're like this big. Simone Biles came by the White House. She's a tiny little thing. Amazing athlete. Then we have Michael Phelps, he's 6'8" and his shoulders are this big. And that's good for swimming. He couldn’t do gymnastics, but he's a really good swimmer.

The point is, is that when you have all this talent from all these different places, then you actually, as a team, do better. And that's been the great gift of America.

Now, what we have to do not just in the United States, but in all countries, is to find a way to have a open, smart immigration policy, but it has to be orderly and lawful. And I think that part of what's happened in the United States is that even though the amount of illegal immigration that is happening has actually gone down while I've been President, the perception is that it has just gone up. Partly this is because it used to be that immigrants primarily stayed in Texas and Arizona and New Mexico, border countries, or in Florida. And now they're moving into parts of the country that aren’t used to seeing immigrants, and it makes people concerned -- who are these people, and are they taking our jobs and are they taking opportunity, and so forth.

So my argument has been that no country can have completely open borders, because if they did, then nationality and citizenship wouldn’t mean anything. And obviously if we had completely open borders, then you would have tens of millions of people who would suddenly be coming into the United States -- which, by the way, wouldn’t necessarily be good for the countries where they leave, because in some places like in Africa, you have doctors and nurses and scientists and engineers who all try to leave, and then you have a brain drain and they're not developing their own countries.

So you have to have some rules, but my hope is, is that those rules are set up in a way that continues to invite talented young people to come in and contribute, and to make a good life for themselves. What we also, though, have to do is to invest in countries that are sending migrants so that they can develop themselves. So you mentioned Cuba, for example, where your father fled. He left in part because they didn’t feel that there was enough opportunity there. Part of the reason I said let's reopen our diplomatic relations with Cuba is to see if you can start encouraging greater opportunity and freedom in Cuba. Because if you have people who have been able to leave Cuba and do really well in the United States, that means they have enough talent that they should be able to do really well by staying at home in Cuba.

There are enormously talented people here in Peru. I don’t want all the young people in Peru to suddenly all go -- I don’t want you to feel as if you have to go to New York in order to be successful. You should be able to be successful right here in Lima, right?

So this is true in the Americas, it's true in Europe, where obviously they've been flooded -- and it's been very controversial -- with migrants, some of them displaced from war in Syria, but some of them just coming for economic reasons from Africa. I just left meetings with European leaders, and we discussed the fact that if we're investing more in development in those African countries, and encouraging greater rule of law and less corruption and more opportunity in those countries, then people are less likely to want to come to Germany or Italy for their futures because they feel that they can make a future where they are.

But this is an example of what I was saying earlier. If we think only about, in very narrow terms, about our borders and what's good for us, and ignore what's happening everywhere else, eventually it will have an impact on us whether we like it or not. Because the world is just much smaller than it used to be.

Okay. Let's see, we got -- all right, young lady right there. Go ahead, in the black. Yes, you.

Question: Oh, my God, thank you for this amazing opportunity. More than a question -- well, I have to introduce myself first, sorry. I’m Jennifer Schell, and I’m from Venezuela. We already talked a little about my country, but I just want to thank you for giving us the women’s opportunity to make us feel empowered.

I’m the CEO and founder of the TrabajaMama, a social initiative that promotes values for mothers around the world. I’m a mother. I have a daughter, and it’s a little bit hard to become an entrepreneur. And I know that you have been supporting woman empowerment. You support a candidate who was a woman, Hillary. You are supported by your wife, Michelle. And what is --

President Obama: Michelle is amazing.

Question: I’m sure, I’m sure. I’m sure of that. So I know how you have been telling a lot of advice for young leaders. What I want -- special advice for female entrepreneurs, for those who have to strive a little bit more, for those who are mothers who have to split their self, and ask herself, should I be a mother or should I be a professional. I truly believe that we can be both at the same time, but I would like to hear it from you -- an advice for all the women, potential women that are going to become a mother, will have our future generations.

And on behalf of all my YLAI fellows, thank you for this amazing opportunity. And all the fellows that are looking -- there are more fellows looking right now from their countries because they couldn’t come to Peru, so thank you for all the fellows that are watching right us now.

President Obama: Okay. Well, it’s a great question.

I mean, Michelle probably would have more to say about this because, you know, she’s gone through it as a professional woman. But let me offer just a few observations.

First of all, the leaders and the men in every country need to understand that the countries that are most successful are going to be the countries that give opportunities to girls and women, and not just boys and men.

And if you look at which countries are doing best -- most advanced, grow the fastest -- it’s partly because you can’t have half the population uneducated, not working, out of the house, not in leadership positions, and expect to be as good as a country where 100 percent of the people are getting a good education, and having opportunities, and can do amazing things -- starting a business or entering into politics or what have you.

So this is not just a problem for girls and women; men have to also recognize, this is good for you. And if you’re a strong man, you shouldn’t be threatened that women are doing well. You should be proud that women are doing well. And families where women have opportunity, that means they’re going to be able to bring in more income, which means the family as a whole is going to do better.

And let’s be honest, sometimes, you know, that whole machismo attitude sometimes makes it harder for women to succeed, and sometimes that is coming even from those who love them. So, men, those of you who end up being fathers and you’ve got daughters, you’ve got to lift up your daughters. Just telling them they’re pretty is not enough. You’ve got to tell them they’re smart, and you got to tell them they’re ambitious, and you have to give them opportunity.

So once you have the whole country thinking in those terms, then you need to start having policies that can support women, and the most important thing, in addition to making sure that girls from an early age are getting a good education and that they’re not being told, oh, you can just do certain things -- like engineering, that’s a man’s job, or being scientist, that a man’s job. No, no -- girls can do everything. It can’t just be, you know, be a teacher -- which is a wonderful profession, but, traditionally, women sometimes are just told there are a few things they can do -- nurse, teacher -- as opposed to anything. Right?

So that starts -- once you’ve done that, then you have to recognize that the big conflicts that women have in the professional world has to do with family and childrearing. And for biological reasons, women have more of a burden than men do. But it’s not just biology, it’s also sociology, all right? Men’s attitudes is, well, yeah, I don’t have to do as much. And even in my marriage with Michelle, I like to think of myself as a modern, enlightened man, but I’ll admit it -- Michelle did more work than I did with Sasha and Malia.

So part of what societies can do, though, is they can help with, for example, having smart policies for childcare. One of the hardest things for professional women, particularly when their children are still small and not yet in school, is who’s going to take care of my baby when I’m working, and how do I make sure that they’re safe and that they’re trusted. So making sure that governments have policies in place that help. Now, having a mother-in-law who helps, that’s also very useful. But not everybody has the option where they have family members who are close by. So that’s an example of something that we have to really work on.

Then we have to put pressure on institutions to treat women equally when it comes to getting loans to start a business. Up until just maybe 20 years ago, in some places -- in the United States even -- a husband had to sign a loan document with a bank, even though it was the wife’s business, even if the woman was the one making the money, it was her idea, it was her investment, she was doing all the work. Because of these old stereotypes, you’re having men co-sign. That kind of mentality, that kind of discrimination still exists in a lot of institutions.

So we have to push back against those, we have to fight against those. Women who are successful, you have to then fight for the younger women who are coming behind you, and make sure that you are changing some of these attitudes. If you are high up in a bank, then you got to make sure that these policies are good for women. If you succeed in politics, then you have to help promote and encourage women who are coming behind you.

So the last thing I guess I would say would be -- I know that Michelle says this to our daughters: You can be a wonderful mom and have a wonderful family and have a really successful career. You may have to kind of not try to do everything all at the same time exactly. You may have to time things out a little bit and have a husband who supports taking turns a little bit. So it may be that when the child is very young, you’re not doing something that is as hard, because having a really young child is already really hard, and you have to sleep sometimes. But then as the child gets older, maybe that’s when you are doing something -- maybe your husband is doing something that gives him more time to support that child. So there’s going to have to be finding the right balance throughout your life in order to be successful.

But congratulations on the good work you’re doing.

All right, I've got time for -- so I only have time for two more questions. I'll call on that gentleman up there with the glasses, in the blue shirt. No, no, right here. Let him ask his question, and then I'll ask the last one. Go ahead.

Question: Hello, Mr. President.

President Obama: Hello!

Question: It's really an honor to ask you this question. Well, my name is Alonso Cornejo [ph]. I'm studying marketing at Universidad San Ignacio Loyola. And my question is about what advice will you give to Peruvian students that they are starting to think different, to making a change not just in Peru, [but] worldwide -- make a change about worldwide. What advice will you give? Right now we live in a world that maybe the bad is good, and the good is bad. So what advice will you give them to chase their dreams, make the country better -- not Peru, just worldwide? That will be my question. Thank you.

President Obama: Well, look, you're already doing so well. I don’t know that I can give you the perfect advice. But I'll tell you what I tell my young people who work in the White House and who I meet in the United States, because I think what's true in the United States is true for you, as well.

We live at a time where you're always seeing bad news. Everybody -- bad news gets a lot of attention. But the truth is that, in some many ways, the world is better now than it was 20 years ago or 40 years ago, or 100 years ago. People are healthier today, they're wealthier today, they're better educated today. The world, if you look overall, is less violent than it was. Look at the 20th century -- millions of people dying everywhere. Look at Latin America and the wars that were taking place everywhere across the continent. And so you actually are living in a time of relative peace and historic prosperity.

And I say that so that you should feel optimistic about the future. You shouldn’t feel pessimistic. Yeah, you're always seeing bad news, but the truth is the world is in a place where it can solve its problems and be even better 20 years from now or 50 years from now. You have to start with that hope, that sense of optimism inside you, because if you don’t feel that way, then you don’t bother to try to have an impact because you think, ah, every politician is corrupt and all the governments are terrible, and people are greedy and people are mean, and so I'm just going to look out for myself. And then nothing gets better. So you have to start knowing that things have gotten better and can continue to get better. That's number one.

Number two, I always tell young people to -- and I don’t know if this translates well in Spanish -- but I say: Worry more about what you want to do, and not what you want to be. Now, here is what I mean. I think a lot of people, they say to themselves, "I want to be rich," or they say to themselves, "I want to be powerful." Or they say, "I want to be the President," or "I want to be a CEO," so they -- or "I want to be a rap star." So they say they have this idea, but the people I know who are most successful, usually they're successful because they found something that they really care about, and they worked at it and became really good at it. And over time, because they were so good at what they did, they ended up being rich, or they ended up being powerful and influential. But in the meantime, they were constantly doing what they enjoyed doing and learning, and that's what made them successful.

So what I would say to all of you is, find something you care deeply about. If you care about poor children, then find a way right now that you can start helping some poor children. Don’t wait, saying to yourself, oh, someday, when I'm President of Peru I'm going to help poor children. No, go now and find an organization or create an organization that is helping poor kids learn or be exposed to new experiences. If you care about the environment, don’t wait. In addition to your studies, you could start having an impact right now on trying to improve your local community, or trying to be involved in some of the work that's being done around things like climate change.

The point is that once you decide what it is that you really care about, there are ways for you to now get involved and pursue that passion. And if you pursue that passion and you get good at it, you're not going to change the world overnight -- nobody does. I mean, I eventually, at the age of 45, became a senator and then the President of the United States, but I worked for 25 years in poor communities, and worked on issues. And hopefully I was doing some good, even before I was famous or powerful, so that if I hadn’t ended up being President I could still look back and say, I worked on the things that I cared about and I got something done that was important. And that, I think, is the most important advice that I have for you.

All right, last question. It's a woman's turn. So all the men, you can put your -- all the boys can put their hands down. It's a woman's turn.

Okay, go ahead, right there.

Question: Okay, first of all, my name is Melisa. I represent Universidad Peruana de Ciencias Aplicadas. Besides, I'm a proud member of UPC [inaudible]. And once again, I want to welcome you to this amazing country. And on behalf of this whole audience, I would like to thank you for this amazing opportunity.

Okay, so my question is the following. As it is well known, during your presidency you have stepped up and accepted mistakes you made yourself or maybe the team you're leading. And that's -- I believe that shows how you reaffirm your belief in introspection and how you want to leave the past behind. What would your advice to us entrepreneurs, most of us, that would like to leave the mistakes -- learn from them, step up, and leave what's the past in the past? Thank you, President.

President Obama: Well, you know, I don’t -- you shouldn’t ignore the past. You should learn from it. And you should learn from history, and learn from experience.

The truth is that I was -- right before I came to Peru, I was in Europe, and I started my trip in Athens. And I went to the Parthenon, the birthplace of democracy. And you look at all these buildings from ancient Greece, and you try to imagine all the things that were happening in that time, and it seems very long ago. But the fact of the matter is, is that humanity keeps on making the same mistakes, and we oftentimes find ourselves dealing with the same problems and the same issues. So studying our past, studying our history, is very, very important.

But the main thing I tell you and I tell my own daughters is, you can't be trapped by the past. There's a difference between understanding your past. You need to know the history of Peru. If you live in the United States, you need to know how America came about -- and that includes both the amazing and wonderful things, but also the bad things. If you want to understand America today, then you have to understand slavery, and you have to understand the history of immigration, and how the debates we’re having today about immigration aren’t that different from when the Irish or the Italians came and people were saying, we can’t have any more Italians and we can’t have any more Irish. If you don’t know that then you aren’t going to understand the patterns that we are having today.

But the point is, is that we have the power to make our own history. We don’t have to repeat the same mistakes. We don’t have to just be confined to what has happened before or what is going on today. We can think differently, and imagine differently, and do things differently.

The one thing that we should remember, though, is that even as we try to do things that are new, we should remember that change generally doesn’t happen overnight. It happens over time. So I say that to young people because sometimes they get impatient. In the United States, sometimes people say to me, oh, why haven’t we eliminated racial discrimination in the United States? And I say, well, we’ve made a lot of progress since I was born. In terms of human history, if you think on the scale of hundreds of years or thousands of years -- in 50 years, the changes that have taken place have been amazing.

So you have to understand that even though we can think differently, societies don’t move immediately. It requires hard work, and you have to persuade people. And sometimes you take two steps forward and then you take one step back. And you shouldn’t be discouraged when that happens, because history doesn’t just move in a smooth, straight line.

The good news is that we have more access to information than we’ve ever had before. Young people are in a position to change the world faster than ever before. And I am confident that if you are respectful of people and you look for what you have in common with humanity, if you stay true to the values of kindness, and respect, and reason, and trying to live together in peace, that the world will keep getting better. And I’ll be looking forward to seeing all the amazing things that you do in the years to come.

Okay? Thank you very much, everybody.

Thank you.

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# Press Conference in Peru

Good evening, everybody. Let me begin by thanking President Kuczynski and the wonderful people of Peru for hosting us and for their outstanding hospitality. Peru is one of the United States’ strongest partners in the Americas -- from standing up for democracy, to promoting jobs and growth, to fighting climate change. And this summit has been a success thanks to the great work of our Peruvian friends. So on behalf of us all, muchas gracias.

This summit, and my trip over the past week, has obviously occurred against a backdrop of the broader debate over globalization and trade. As I’ve said, over the decades, our global, integrated economy has helped to improve the lives of billions of people around the world with historic gains in prosperity, education, and health. At the same time, when jobs and capital can move across borders, when workers have less leverage, when wealthy corporations and global elites too often seem to be playing by a different set of rules, then workers and communities can be hit especially hard; the gaps between the rich and everyone else grow wider. And that can reverberate through our politics.

That’s why I firmly believe that one of our greatest challenges in the years ahead -- across our nations and within them -- will be to make sure that the benefits of the global economy are shared by more people and that the negative impacts, such as economic inequalities, are addressed by all nations. When it comes to trade, I believe that the answer is not to pull back or try to erect barriers to trade. Given our integrated economies and global supply chains, that would hurt us all. But rather the answer is to do trade right, making sure that it has strong labor standards, strong environmental standards, that it addresses ways in which workers and ordinary people can benefit rather than be harmed by global trade. All of this is the central work of APEC.

As this debate moves forward in the United States, it’s important to remember how vital the Asia Pacific is to America’s prosperity. The 21 Asia Pacific economies here represent nearly three billion people, a majority of the global middle class, six of America’s top 10 trading partners, more than half of the global economy, and the world’s fastest-growing region. In other words, these 21 countries represent tremendous opportunity for the United States to sell our goods and support U.S. jobs. And that’s why, as part of the rebalance of our foreign policy to the Asia Pacific, we’ve boosted U.S. exports to the region by some 50 percent. Nearly 60 percent of our exports go to the region.

And this is part of broader progress. With 95 percent of the world’s customers beyond America’s borders, I’ve made it a priority to open up new markets overseas. And during my Administration, we’ve increased U.S. exports to the world by more than 40 percent -- to record levels -- and these exports support more than 11 million American jobs. Moreover, we know that companies that export tend to grow faster and hire more employees and pay their workers more than companies that do not export. All of which is why exports have helped to drive our economic recovery. It's one of the reasons that U.S. businesses have created more than 15 million new jobs.

So that’s the kind of progress that trade -- when done right -- can deliver. And that’s the kind of work that we’ve tried to do here at this summit. We’re continuing our work to make it easier to do business between our countries so we’re creating even more jobs. In the United States, we’re simplifying the process of starting a new business, increasing access to credit, all of which will help more ventures -- especially small businesses -- get up and running, and helping them to be able to export as well, so that they can access a global market even if they can't afford fancy lawyers and accountants and foreign offices.

We agreed to increase our collective effort against corruption by targeting the bribery that enriches elites at the expense of people. And we committed to making it easier to trade in services as well as goods.

We also discussed the excess capacity that exists in certain sectors, like steel and aluminum that distorts markets and hurts business and workers, including American workers. And even as I've argued that we cannot engage in protectionist measures, my Administration has been at the forefront of really cracking down hard on unfair trade practices and brought, consistently, cases against the -- cases under the WTO against those who are engaging in unfair trading practices, and we've had a great track record of trade enforcement that has to be a part of this process.

I’ve been very clear that excess capacity is not the result of market forces; it’s the result of specific government policies, and it needs to be fixed. And here at APEC, we've been taking steps, as we were at the G20 in Hangzhou, to start addressing these issues in a systematic way.

With regard to the digital economy, we endorsed rules to protect the privacy of personal information as it crosses borders. We discussed the importance of maintaining the current moratorium on customs duties for digital goods and innovation. And given growing cyber threats, our 21 APEC economies affirmed that no one should conduct or support cyber-enabled theft of intellectual property, including trade secrets, with the intent to providing a competitive advantage to companies or commercial sectors.

We’re also moving ahead with making our economies more inclusive. And one particular area of focus is making sure that women have fair access to economic growth -- expanding education; expanding access to careers in science, technology, engineering and math; helping more women entrepreneurs to access finance and integrate their businesses into the global supply chain. According to one study, if women around the world participated in the labor force, it could add up to $28 trillion of additional output for the global economy -- $28 trillion. When women are more prosperous, then families, communities and countries are all more prosperous as well.

My meeting yesterday with my fellow leaders of the Trans-Pacific Partnership was a chance to reaffirm our commitment to the TPP, with its high standards, strong protections for workers, the environment, intellectual property and human rights. Our partners made very clear during the meeting that they want to move forward with TPP; preferably, they’d like to move forward with the United States. A number of countries already are starting to ratify TPP.

At the same time, we’re already hearing calls for a less ambitious trade agreement in the region with lower standards, lower protections for workers, lower protections for the environment. That kind of agreement would obviously exclude U.S. workers and businesses and access to those markets. So for all those reasons, I believe that TPP is a plus for America’s economy, America’s workers, American jobs. I think not moving forward would undermine our position across the region and our ability to shape the rules of global trade in a way that reflects our interests and our values.

Finally, our cooperation with APEC has been critical to our historic progress in fighting climate change -- bringing the Paris agreement into force, agreeing to limit aviation emissions, phrasing out dangerous HFCs. Here in Lima, we continue our work to phase out fossil fuel subsidies, and countries made new commitments toward our goal of doubling our renewable energy over the next two decades.

So, as I wrap up my last summit and likely my last foreign trip as President, I could not be more proud of the progress that we’ve made together. Obviously, the work is never done. And given the prosperity and security we seek for not only the United States but our allies and our partners, I continue to believe that America will have a vital role to play in creating and sustaining a strong, enduring leadership role in the Asia Pacific.

So, with that, let me take some questions. And I'll start with Darlene Superville of AP.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. You’ve been telling world leaders this week that President-elect Trump is unlikely to govern in the divisive way that he campaigned. But I'm wondering, how can you be so certain of that given that the first group of people he’s chosen for top national security and law enforcement positions hold the same views that he espoused as a candidate? And second, to follow up on your meeting earlier today with President Putin, did you discuss with him Russia’s alleged meddling in the U.S. election? And are you concerned that the kind of involvement that we saw in this year’s campaign will be the new normal going forward in future U.S. elections?

President Obama: Well, what I have said to world leaders is the same thing that I've said in a number of press conferences, which is the President-elect now has to put together a team and put forward specifics about how he intends to govern. And he hasn't had a full opportunity to do that yet. And so people should take a wait-and-see approach in how much his policy proposals once in the White House, once he is sworn in, matches up with some of the rhetoric of his campaign.

My simple point is, is that you can't assume that the language of campaigning matches up with the specifics of governing, legislation, regulations, and foreign policy.

I can't be sure of anything. I think, like everyone else, we'll have to wait and see. But as I've said before, once you're in the Oval Office, once you begin interacting with world leaders, once you see the complexities of the issues, that has a way of shaping your thinking and, in some cases, modifying your thinking, because you recognize this solemn responsibility not only to the American people but the solemn responsibility that America has as the largest, most powerful country in the world.

And I can't guarantee that the President-elect won't pursue some of the positions that he's taken. But what I can guarantee is, is that reality will force him to adjust how he approaches many of these issues. That's just the way this office works.

And I've said before, if these issues were easy -- if ensuring prosperity, jobs, security, good foreign relations with other countries -- if all that was simple, then it would have been done by every previous President. And I'm a pretty good presidential historian; I've looked at my 43 predecessors, and it seems like for all of them -- even the best ones -- that you end up confronting realities that you didn't anticipate. I think the same will happen here. And that's a good thing. That's an important thing.

With respect to President Putin, I didn't have a meeting. We talked briefly while we were in between sessions. And the conversation that I had with him was consistent with the conversations I've had with him over the previous several months, indicating to him that we are still deeply concerned about the bloodshed and chaos that's being sown by constant bombing attacks by Assad and the Russian military against populations in Aleppo, and the need for us to arrive first at some sort of humanitarian ceasefire and begin moving towards a political transition of some sort.

And I talked to him about Ukraine and the need for us to get Minsk done. I urged him to instruct his negotiators to work with ourselves, with Frances, with Germany, with Ukraine to see if we can get that done before my term is up. As usual, it was a candid and courteous meeting, but very clear about the strong differences that we have on policy.

The issue of the elections did not come up because that's behind us and I was focused in this brief discussion on moving forward. I had already made very clear to him our concerns around cyberattacks, generally, as well as specific concerns we had surrounding the DNC hack.

I don't think this will be the norm, but as I've said before, the concern I have has less to do with any particular misinformation or propaganda that's being put out by any particular party, and a greater concern about the general misinformation from all kinds of sources -- domestic, foreign, on social media -- that make it very difficult for voters to figure out what's true and what's not. And let me put it this way. I think if we have a strong, accurate and responsible press, and we have a strong, civic culture and an engaged citizenry, then various attempts to meddle in our elections won't mean much.

If, generally, we've got elections that aren't focused on issues and are full of fake news and false information and distractions, then the issue is not going to be what's happening from the outside; the issue is going to be what are we doing for ourselves from the inside. The good news is that's something that we have control over.

Gardiner Harris.

Question: Mr. President, thanks so much for holding this press conference. If you had had hotels, real estate, and other businesses distributed around the world prior to becoming President, would you have thought it appropriate to sell them off and put the cash proceeds in a blind trust? Or is it okay for the President of the United States to be personally vulnerable to the policy decisions of the foreign leaders he meets and in the foreign policy decisions he makes as President? And also, just briefly, what's your complaint about how the NSA and Cyber Command have done their job? And are you considering firing Admiral Mike Rogers?

President Obama: That was a rhetorical question, that first one. Rather than comment on hypotheticals, let me say specifically what I did. Obviously, my assets were significantly smaller than some other Presidents or President-elects. But we made a decision to liquidate assets that might raise questions about how it would influence policy.

I basically had our accountant put all our money in Treasury bills -- the yields, by the way, have not been massive over the course of the last eight years -- just because it simplified my life. I did not have to worry about the complexities of whether a decision that I made might even inadvertently benefit me.

And that's consistent with the broader approach that we've taken throughout my Administration, which is to not just meet the letter of the law, but to go well beyond the letter to the spirit of the law -- not just for me, but for the people in the White House and in our leadership positions.

We have established a whole set of rules, norms, playbooks that just keep us far away from the line. Early on in the Administration, there would be questions about could a staff person go to this conference, or what should they do about this gift that was provided. And I think it was maybe our first general counsel who was responsible for setting up our guidelines and rules inside the White House that said, if it sounds like it would be fun, then you can't do it. That's a general test. If it sounds like something you would enjoy or appreciate -- no go.

And as a consequence -- and I'll knock on some wood here, because we got two months left -- I am extremely proud of the fact that over eight years we have not had the kinds of scandals that have plagued other Administrations. And when I met with the President-elect, I suggested to him that having a strong White House Counsel that could provide clear guideposts and rules would benefit him and benefit his team because it would eliminate a lot of ambiguity. And I think it will be up to him to make determinations about how he wants to approach it.

I know what worked for us, and I think it served the American people well. And because I had made a promise to the American people that I would not fall into some of the familiar habits of Washington, that I wanted a new kind of politics, this was one indicator. And at the end of eight years, I think I can say to the American people I delivered on that commitment.

With respect to cyber, the NSA, Admiral Rogers is a terrific patriot and has served this country well in a number of positions. I generally don't comment on personnel matters here. I can say generally that we've spent a lot of time over the last several years looking at how we can organize our cyber efforts to keep pace with how rapidly the environment is changing.

Increasingly, our critical infrastructure, government data, financial systems are vulnerable to attack. And both state and non-state actors are getting better and better at it, and it is becoming more and more rapid. And it is inevitable that we're doing to have to modernize and update not just the tools we use to defend those assets and the American people, but also how we organize it. And it is true that we are exploring a range of options in terms of how we organize the mission that currently exists.

Rich Edson.

Question: Good evening, and thank you, Mr. President. Earlier this year, former President George W. Bush reportedly said that he worried he would be the last Republican President. Now Republicans have won the White House, control the House and Senate, two-thirds of state legislatures, 34 governorships, and there are charges of a shallow Democratic bench behind you. Are you worried you could be the last Democratic President for a while? And secondly, sir, speaking of your predecessor, he made sure to offer essentially no public criticism of you during your time in office. Will you equally withhold public criticism for President Trump, even if he attempts to dismantle much of what you’ve accomplished? Thank you.

President Obama: Well, no, I'm not worried about being the last Democratic President. I think -- not even for a while. And I say that, not being cute. The Democratic nominee won the popular vote, and obviously this was an extremely competitive race and I would expect that future races will be competitive as well. I certainly think it's true that politics in America right now are a little up for grabs, that some of the old alignments within both parties -- Democrat and Republican -- are being reshaped. And although the results of this election involved some of the specifics of the candidates and aren't going to be duplicated in every subsequent election, Democrats do have to do some thinking about how do we make sure that the message we have is received effectively and results in winning elections.

This is something that I've been wrestling with throughout my presidency. When you look at the proposals I put forward, they garner majority support. The majority believes in raising the minimum wage. The majority believes in common-sense gun safety rules. The majority believes in investing to rebuild our infrastructure and create jobs. The majority believes in making sure that people aren't going bankrupt when they get sick. The majority agrees with all the individual components of Obamacare.

I think there was a Gallup Poll this week, subsequent to the election, that showed that the general public has a more favorable view of Democrats than Republicans. And as I noted, my approval ratings are quite high. And yet what’s been true during the course of my eight years is that does not always translate; in fact, too often it hasn't translated into working majorities either at the state level or at the federal level.

Now, some of that is just the nature of our system, and geography. As long as Wyoming gets the same number of senators as California, there’s going to be some tilt towards Republicans when it comes to congressional races. The fact that a lot of Democratic voters are bunched up in big cities, and a lot of Republican voters are spread out across geography gives them an advantage when it comes to congressional races.

Some of it is just political bad luck. For example, I came in as an economy was in free fall, and although we took the right steps to save the economy, in my midterm election in 2010, people couldn't yet see the recovery and, not surprisingly, the President’s party got punished. We lost control of a lot of not just congressional seats but also gubernatorial seats and state legislative seats. And that happened to be the year that the Census is done and you start doing redistricting, and those Republicans took advantage of political gerrymandering to lock in majorities, even though in numerous subsequent elections, Democrats have actually cast more votes -- or more votes have been cast for Democratic congressional candidates than Republican. And yet you end up having large Republican majorities.

So there are just some structural problems that we have to deal with. But, look, you can't make excuses about the rules. That's the deal, and we got to do better. And I think doing better, as I said, involves us working at the grassroots; not ceding territory; going out into areas where right now we may not stand a chance of actually winning but we're building up a cadre of young talent; we're making arguments; we're persuading; we're talking about the things that matter to ordinary people, day to day, and trying to avoid some of the constant distractions that fill up people’s Twitter accounts.

And if we do that, then I'm confident that we'll be back on track. I don't think that there has to be a complete overhaul here. I think that there does have to be better organization, a smarter message. And one message I do have for Democrats is that a strategy that's just micro-targeting particular, discrete groups in a Democratic coalition sometimes will win you elections, but it's not going to win you the broad mandate that you need. And ultimately, the more we can talk about what we have in common as a nation, and speak to a broad set of values, a vision that speaks to everybody and not just one group at a time, the better off we're going to be.

I think that's part of the reason why I was able to get elected twice, is that I always tried to make sure that, not only in proposals but also in message, that I was speaking to everybody.

You had a second part to your question?

Question: [Inaudible.]

President Obama: Ah. Look, I've said before, President Bush could not have been more gracious to me when I came in. And my intention is to, certainly for the next two months, is finish my job. And then, after that, to take Michelle on vacation, get some rest, spend time with my girls, and do some writing, do some thinking. So I want to be respectful of the office and give the President-elect an opportunity to put forward his platform and his arguments without somebody popping off in every instance.

As an American citizen who cares deeply about our country, if there are issues that have less to do with the specifics of some legislative proposal or battle, but go to core questions about our values and our ideals, and if I think that it's necessary or helpful for me to defend those ideals, then I'll examine it when it comes. But what I do know is, is that I have to take Michelle on vacation.

Juliet Eilperin.

Question: Thanks, Mr. President. Given what you just said about the strong differences that you and President Putin have on the future of Syria and the conflict there, can you talk a little about how you see that unfolding, both at the end of your tenure, at the beginning of Donald Trump’s, and whether you have concerns that even if we eliminate the Islamic state in eastern Syria and western Iraq, you may be allowing a permanent al Qaeda safe haven around Aleppo and [inaudible.] And on Aleppo, can you say to what extent you think the United States has fulfilled its responsibility to protect in that instance?

And then, in terms of finishing your job, which you just mentioned, last week you exercised your executive authority on multiple fronts -- finalizing oil and gas leasing rules on public lands, as well as issuing a five-year leasing plan, banning drilling in the Arctic and the Atlantic. Many Republicans say that you should hold off finalizing anymore rules as you're headed out the door because they oppose many of them -- when they control both the executive and legislative branch next year. What do you say to that suggestion?

President Obama: Well, on the second question, these are the same Republicans who suggested that they didn’t need to confirm a Supreme Court justice when I was nine months out until the next election. I think their general approach seems to be that probably two days after my reelection, I should stop until the next election. I don't think that that's what the Constitution calls for.

The regulations that we have issued are ones that we've been working on for a very long time. They’ve been subject to extensive public notice and comment, and everybody has known they’ve been out there. These aren't things that we've been surprising people with. They’re well-considered, they’re the right thing to do. They’re part of my task of finishing my work.

And I recognize that when the new Administration comes in, and a new Congress comes in, that they will have the option of trying to undo some of those rules and regulations that we've put in place. And that's their prerogative. That's part of how democracy works. But I feel very strongly these are the right things to do, and I'm going to make sure I do them.

With respect to Syria, as I said I think even on this trip in a previous press conference, I am not optimistic about the short-term prospects in Syria. Once Russia and Iran made a decision to back Assad in a brutal air campaign and essentially a pacification of Aleppo, regardless of the potential for civilian casualties, children being killed or wounded, schools or hospitals being destroyed, then it was very hard to see a way in which even a trained and committed moderate opposition could hold its ground for long periods of time.

And the issue that obviously I've wrestled with for the last five years -- how involved should the United States be? What are our legal constraints in such involvement? What are our moral obligations? What are our strategic interests? Those haven't changed. I continue to believe that we did not have a legal basis for military intervention there; that it would have been a strategic mistake given the work we still had to do in Iraq, the counter-ISIL campaign, ongoing operations in Afghanistan; that we had worked tirelessly to arrive at a political transition of some sort that could alleviate the suffering and provide humanitarian access. And we will continue to do that work all the way until the last day that me and John Kerry and others have the authority to speak for the United States government.

But ultimately, it takes two -- or in this case, four, or six, or eight -- to tango. And we're just not getting help or interest from those parties that are supporting Assad, and Assad, as a consequence, has been emboldened. Look, this is a man who has decided that destroying his country, turning it to rubble, and seeing its population scattered or killed was worth it for him to cling to power, when he had the option to peacefully engage in a transition that could have kept the country intact. That's his mentality. That's not a mentality we support. That's a mentality that the Russians and the Iranians have been willing to support. But at this stage, we're going to need to have a change in how all parties think about this in order for us to end the situation there.

Now, our ability to go after ISIL I think can be sustained. There’s no doubt that there will continue to be extremist forces in and around Syria because it's still going to be in chaos for quite some time. There will be elements in Iraq, just as there have been elements in Afghanistan even after the Taliban we're swept out, even after we killed bin Laden. But I think we can effectively reduce the risk and take their key external operators off the field.

The thing I'm probably most concerned about is making sure that even as we do that, U.S. policy, U.S. statements, U.S. positions don't further radicalize Muslims around the world, or alienate and potentially law-abiding Muslims who are living in Europe or the United States. And that's why I think it's important for us to understand those are our key allies in this fight, not enemies.

Mike Memoli.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. This final foreign trip of your presidency is obviously playing out in very different circumstances than you might have expected. A very different transition is underway than the one you might have envisioned. Given that, though, I wonder if you intentionally sought to approach this trip reflecting more on the powers of and influence of the presidency on the world stage so that you might be able to offer the kind of counsel to your successor that he has said he hopes to draw upon.

And also, on a political note, you talked often during your reelection campaign about this fever that had consumed the Republican Party, an effective political strategy that they employed to block you even on issues where there might have been some common ground. What would be your advice to Democrats who might see that kind of strategy as the same kind of path to taking back power that the Republicans employed? And related to that, what would your advice be to House Democrats about whether or not to reelect Nancy Pelosi as the party leader in the House?

President Obama: I'll work in reverse. I think Nancy Pelosi is an outstanding and historic political leader. So much of what we accomplished was accomplished because of her smarts, her tenacity, her legislative skill. And I don't normally meddle with party votes, and certainly on my way out the door, probably I shouldn’t meddle here. But I cannot speak highly enough of Nancy Pelosi. She combines strong, progressive values with just extraordinary political skill. And she does stuff that's tough, not just stuff that's easy. She’s done stuff that's unpopular in her own base because it's the right thing to do for the American people. I think she’s a remarkable leader.

With respect to Democrats and Republicans and how Democrats should deal with a new Administration, I think you give them a hearing. I certainly don't want them to do what Mitch McConnell did when I was elected -- meet the day of and say our sole objective is to not cooperate with him on anything even if the country is about to go into a depression, so that we can gain seats in the midterms and ultimately defeat him.

That's not why the American people send us to Washington, to play those games. So that's not my advice to Democrats. My advice to Democrats is know what you care about and what you stand for, and fight for your principles even if it's a hard fight. If there are areas where the new Administration is doing something that's going to be good for the American people, find a way to work with him. If you think it's going to be a problem, then say so, and make the argument.

The touchstone is, what’s good for the American people. And that's worked for me. That means that at the end of the day -- and at the end of eight years -- I can look back and I can say that I consistently did what I thought was best. It doesn’t mean you don't make mistakes, but it means that you're being true to your oath and the commitments you made to the people who elected you.

And in terms of reflecting on the U.S. presidency as I've been traveling, I think the main reflection I have and the main advice that I give to the incoming President is the United States really is an indispensable nation in our world order. And I say that as somebody who has gone out of his way to express respect for every country and its people, and to consistently acknowledge that many of the challenges that we face are not challenges that America can solve on its own. But what I also know is that the basic framework of the world order coming out of World War II and then on through the end of the Cold War was shaped by a set of ideals and principles that have worked for the vast majority of people -- not just America, but around the world. The notion of democracy and rule of law, and a free press and independent judiciary, and open markets, and a social welfare state to moderate some off the sharp edges of capitalism, and lifting up issues of human rights, and investing in public health and development not just within our own borders but elsewhere in the world. And working with multilateral institutions, like the United Nations; making sure that were upholding international norms and rules.

That's what’s made the modern world. And there have been times where we, ourselves, have not observed some of these norms as well as we should, and have been accused of hypocrisy. Here in Latin America, there have been times where countries felt disrespected and, on occasion, had cause for that. There are times where we haven't observed these values in our own country and have fallen short of our ideals. But that basic structure is the reason why the world is much wealthier, much more secure, and, yes, less violent, healthier, better educated, more tolerant than it was 50 years ago.

And that requires constant work. It doesn’t just happen on its own. I've said this in Europe. I've said this in places where there’s this pushback against this modern order. But you take an example like Europe -- before that order was imposed, we had two world wars in the span of 30 years. In the second one, 60 million people were killed. Not half a million, not a million, but 60 million. Entire continents in rubble.

In places like the Asia Pacific, before that order existed, you routinely saw famines of millions of people -- not just concerns about low wages, but people dying because they didn’t have any food or drinking water, or died of cholera or simple diseases -- if somebody had some penicillin.

And so what I would say would be that we all share responsibilities for improving that order and maintaining it, and making sure it's more inclusive, and delivers greater hope and prosperity for more corners of the world. We all have responsibilities -- every nation -- in respecting the dignity and worth of their citizens. And America can't do it all for everybody else. There are limits to our reach into other countries if they’re determined to oppress their people, or not provide girls education, or siphon off development funds into Swiss bank accounts because they’re corrupt. We're not going to be able to handle every problem.

But the American President and the United States of America -- if we're not on the side of what’s right, if we're not making the argument and fighting for it, even if sometimes we're not able to deliver at 100 percent everywhere -- then it collapses. And there’s nobody to fill the void. There really isn't. There are other very important countries -- like a China -- where if it weren't for China’s cooperation, we couldn't have gotten the Paris agreement done. But China is not the one who was going around organizing 200 nations to sign on to a Paris agreement, or putting together the paper and the policy outlines and the conceptual framework.

Russia is a very significant military power, but they’re not worrying right now about how to rebuild after a hurricane in Haiti. We are.

And I've said before, that's a burden that we should carry proudly. And I would hope that not just the 45th President of the United States, but every President of the United States understands that that's not only a burden, but it's also an extraordinary privilege. And if you have a chance to do that right, then you should seize it.

All right? Thank you, everybody.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Address at the Kennedy Center Honors Reception

Well, good evening, everybody. On behalf of Michelle and myself, welcome to the White House. Over the past eight years, this has always been one of our favorite nights. And this year, I was especially looking forward to seeing how Joe Walsh cleans up -- pretty good.

I want to begin by once again thanking everybody who makes this wonderful evening possible, including David Rubenstein, the Kennedy Center Trustees -- I’m getting a big echo back there -- and the Kennedy Center President, Deborah Rutter. Give them a big round of applause.

We have some outstanding members of Congress here tonight. And we are honored also to have Vicki Kennedy and three of President Kennedy’s grandchildren with us here -– Rose, Tatiana, and Jack.

So the arts have always been part of life at the White House, because the arts are always central to American life. And that’s why, over the past eight years, Michelle and I have invited some of the best writers and musicians, actors, dancers to share their gifts with the American people, and to help tell the story of who we are, and to inspire what’s best in all of us. Along the way, we’ve enjoyed some unbelievable performances -– this is one of the perks of the job that I will miss.

Thanks to Michelle’s efforts, we’ve brought the arts to more young people -– from hosting workshops where they learn firsthand from accomplished artists, to bringing “Hamilton” to students who wouldn’t normally get a ticket to Broadway. And on behalf of all of us, I want to say thanks to my wife for having done simply. Yes. And she’s always looked really good doing it. She does.

This is part of how we’ve tried to honor the legacy of President and Mrs. Kennedy. They understood just how vital art is to our democracy -- that we need song and cinema and paintings and performance to help us challenge our assumptions, to question the way things are, and maybe inspire us to think about how things might be. The arts help us celebrate our triumphs, but also holds up a mirror to our flaws. And all of that deepens our understanding of the human condition. It helps us to see ourselves in each other. It helps to bind us together as a people.

As President Kennedy once said, “In serving his vision of the truth, the artist best serves his nation.” Tonight, we honor five amazing artists who have dedicated their lives to telling their truth, and helping us to see our own.

At eight years old, Mavis Staples climbed onto a chair in church, leaned into the microphone, raised her eyes upwards and belted out the gospel. When people heard that deep, old soul coming out of that little girl, they wept -- which, understandably, concerned her. But her mother told her, “Mavis, they’re happy. Your singing makes them cry happy tears.”

It was those early appearances on the South Side of Chicago -– South Side! -- with Mavis, her siblings, their father, Roebuck “Pops” Staples that launched the legendary Staple Singers. Theirs was gospel with just a touch of country, a twist of the blues, little bit of funk. There was a little bit of sin with the salvation. And driven by Pops’ reverbed guitar, Mavis’ powerhouse vocals and the harmonies that only family can make, the Staple Singers broke new ground with songs like “Uncloudy Day.” They had some truths to tell. Inspired by Dr. King, Pops would tell his kids, “If he can preach it, we can sing it.” And so they wrote anthems like “Freedom Highway,” and “When Will We Be Paid” -- which became the soundtrack of the Civil Rights movement.

As a solo artist, Mavis has done it all and worked with just about everybody from Bob Dylan to Prince to Jeff Tweedy. On albums like “We’ll Never Turn Back,” and “One True Vine,” she still is singing for justice and equality, and influencing a new generation of musicians and fans. And each soulful note -- even in heartbreak and even in despair -– is grounded in faith, and in hope, and the belief that there are better days yet to come. “These aren't just songs I'm singing to be moving my lips,” she says. “I mean this.” And we mean it too. Six decades on, nobody makes us feel “the weight” like Mavis Staples. Give her a big round of applause.

Al Pacino calls the theater his “flashlight.” It’s how he finds himself, where he sees truth. And since Al first hit Broadway in 1969, his singular talent has been the gold standard for acting.

A great playwright once compared the way Al inhabits his characters to the way Louis Armstrong played jazz. One director said that while “some actors play characters, Al Pacino becomes them.” And we’ve all seen it. In the span of five years -- you think about it -- he became Serpico, became Sonny Wortzik, twice became Michael Corleone for, let’s face it, what have got to be the two best movies of all time, became Tony Montana on screen, then became the owner of a couple of Tonys on stage. And he’s always been this way.

At 13, Al committed so profoundly to a role in the school play that when his character was supposed to get sick on stage, Al actually got sick on stage. I’m not sure how audiences felt about that. Later, when he played Richard III and Jackie Kennedy visited him backstage, the actor playing the self-absorbed king didn’t even stand up to greet actual American royalty, which he says he still regrets.

Through it all, Al has always cared more for his “flashlight” than the spotlight. He says he’s still getting used to the idea of being an icon. But his gift, for all the inspiration and intensity that he brings to his roles, is that he lets us into what his characters are feeling. And for that, we are extraordinarily grateful. Al Pacino.

In the late sixties, James Taylor got the chance to audition in front of Paul McCartney and George Harrison. Ringo, I don’t know if you were there -- but this is a true story. “I was as nervous as a Chihuahua on methamphetamines" is what James Taylor says. Which is exactly the kind of metaphor that makes him such a brilliant songwriter.

But if James has a defining gift, it is empathy. It’s why he’s been such a great friend to and Michelle and myself. We're so grateful to him and Kim for their friendship over the years. It’s why everybody from Carole King to Garth Brooks to Taylor Swift collaborates with him. It’s what makes him among the most prolific and admired musicians of our time. In fact, James recently went through all his songs and kept coming across the same stories -- songs about fathers and traffic jams; love songs, recovery songs. I really love this phrase: “Hymns for agnostics.” He says that in making music, “There’s the idea of comforting yourself. There’s also the idea of taking something that’s untenable and internal and communicating it.” And that's why it feels like James is singing only to you when he sings. It feels like he's singing about your life. The stories he tells and retells dwell on our most enduring and shared experiences. “Carolina on My Mind” is about where you grew up, even if you didn’t grow up in Carolina. “Mean Old Man” is probably somebody you know. “Angels of Fenway” -- well, actually, that’s just about the Red Sox. So if you're a White Sox fan you don’t love that song, but it's okay.

James is the consummate truth-teller about a life that can leave us with more unresolved questions than satisfying answers, but holds so much beauty that you don’t mind. And from his honesty about his own struggles with substance abuse to his decades of progressive activism, James Taylor has inspired people all over the world and helped America live up to our highest ideals. Thank you, James Taylor.

Without a preschool rivalry, we might not be honoring Martha Argerich. The story goes that when Martha was two years old, a little boy taunted her, saying, “I bet you can’t play the piano!” So she sat down at the keys, remembered a piece her teacher had played, and played it flawlessly. By eight years old, she had made her concert debut. By the time she was a teenager, she left her native Argentina to study in Vienna and won two major international competitions, launching one of the most storied and influential careers in classical music. That little boy lost his bet.

Martha combines unparalleled technical prowess with passion and glittering musicianship. From Bach to Schumann, she doesn’t just play the piano, she possesses it. Martha can charge through a passage with astonishing power and speed and accuracy, and, in the same performance, uncover the delicate beauty in each note. As a critic once wrote, “She is an unaffected interpreter whose native language is music.”

But what truly sets her apart and has cemented her place as one of the greatest pianists in modern history is her dogged commitment to her craft. In an age of often superficial connections, where people too often seek fame and recognition, Martha has been guided by one passion, and that is fidelity to the music. She can only be herself. And that is the truest mark of an artist. And the result is timeless, transcendent music for which we thank Martha Argerich.

And finally, there have been some interesting things said about this next group, including being called "one of rock's most contentiously dysfunctional families." So, yeah, it was unlikely that they'd ever get back together and that they called their reunion tour "Hell Freezes Over." I love that. But here's the thing -- when you listen to the Eagles, you hear the exact opposite story, and that is perfect harmony.

You hear it in the crisp, overpowering a capella chords of "Seven Bridges Road"; dueling guitar solos in "Hotel California"; complex, funky riffs opening "Life in the Fast Lane." It's the sound not just of a California band, but one of America's signature bands -- a supergroup whose greatest hits sold more copies in the United States than any other record in the 20th century. And the 20th Century had some pretty good music.

So, here tonight, we have three of the Eagles: Don Henley, the meticulous, introspective songwriter with an unmistakable voice that soars above his drum set. Timothy Schmit, the bass player and topline of many of those harmonies. And Joe Walsh, who’s as rowdy with a guitar lick as I’m told he once was in a hotel room. Twice. This is the White House, though. And Michelle and I are about to leave. As I've said before, we want to get our security deposit back.

But, of course, the Eagles are also the one and only Glenn Frey. And we all wish Glenn was still here with us. We are deeply honored to be joined by his beautiful wife, Cindy, and their gorgeous children. Because the truth is that these awards aren't just about this reception or even the show we have this evening, which will be spectacular. The Kennedy Center Honors are about folks who spent their lives calling on us to think a little harder, and feel a little deeper, and express ourselves a little more bravely, and maybe “take it easy” once in a while. And that is Glenn Frey -- the driving force behind a band that owned a decade, and did not stop there. We are all familiar with his legacy. And the music of the Eagles will always be woven into the fabric of our nation.

So we are extraordinarily honored to be able to give thanks for the Eagles. And what's true for them is true for all of tonight’s honorees: remarkable individuals who have created the soundtrack to our own lives -- on road trips, in jukebox diners; folks who have mesmerized us on a Saturday night out at the movies or at a concert hall.

Mavis Staples. Al Pacino. James Taylor. Martha Argerich The Eagles. Their legacies are measured not just in works of art, but the lives they've touched, and creating a stronger and more beautiful America. They’re artists who have served our nation by serving their truth. And we’re all better off for it.

So before we transport ourselves to what I'm sure will be a spectacular evening, please join me in saluting our extraordinary 2016 Kennedy Center Honorees.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# On the Administration's Approach to Counter-Terrorism

Good afternoon, everybody. I was just told that was going to be the last "Hail to the Chief" on the road, and it got me kind of sentimental. I want to first and foremost say thanks to all of you. Just before I came here, I was able to visit with some of the men and women from MacDill Air Force Base, Central Command, our Special Operations Command to thank them for their extraordinary service. And so to you and your families, and to the extended family of American servicemembers, let me say that our nation owes you an unbelievable debt of gratitude. We are grateful for you, and will be praying for you over the holidays.

As you know all too well, your mission -- and the course of history -- was changed after the 9/11 attacks. By the time I took office, the United States had been at war for seven years. For eight years that I've been in office, there has not been a day when a terrorist organization or some radicalized individual was not plotting to kill Americans. And on January 20th, I will become the first President of the United States to serve two full terms during a time of war. Now, we did not choose this fight, but once it came to us, the world saw the measure of our resolve.

The most solemn responsibility for any President is keeping the American people safe. In carrying out that duty, I have sent men and women into harm’s way. I've visited troops around the globe. I have met our wounded warriors, and I've grieved with Gold Star families. I know better than most that it is because of your service and your sacrifice that we have been able, during these eight years, to protect our homeland, to strike crippling blows against terrorist networks, and fortify our friends and our allies. So today, I’d like to reflect on that work, and talk about the foundation that we will leave for the next administration.

I came to this office with a set of core convictions that have guided me as Commander-in-Chief. I believe that the United States military can achieve any mission; that we are, and must remain, the strongest fighting force the world has ever known. I believe that we must never hesitate to act when necessary, including unilaterally when necessary, against any imminent threats to our people. But I have also insisted that it is unwise and unsustainable to ask our military to build nations on the other side of the world, or resolve their internal conflicts, particularly in places where our forces become a magnet for terrorists and insurgencies. Instead, it has been my conviction that even as we focus relentlessly on dismantling terrorist networks like al Qaeda and ISIL, we should ask allies to do their share in the fight, and we should strengthen local partners who can provide lasting security.

And these convictions guided the policies we pursued both in Iraq and Afghanistan. When I took office, the United States was focused overwhelmingly on Iraq, where nearly 150,000 American troops had spent years fighting an insurgency and helping to build a democratic government. Meanwhile, al Qaeda had regrouped in the border region of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and was actively planning attacks against our homeland. So we brought nearly 150,000 troops home from Iraq, consistent with the Status of Forces Agreement negotiated by the previous administration, and we surged our efforts along with our allies in Afghanistan, which allowed us to focus on dismantling al Qaeda and give the Afghan government the opportunity to succeed.

And this focus on al Qaeda -- the most dangerous threat to the United States at the time -- paid dividends. Today, by any measure, core al Qaeda -- the organization that hit us on 9/11 -- is a shadow of its former self. Plots directed from within Afghanistan and Pakistan have been consistently disrupted. Its leadership has been decimated. Dozens of terrorist leaders have been killed. Osama bin Laden is dead. And, importantly, we have built a counterterrorism capability that can sustain this pressure against any terrorist network in South Asia that might threaten the United States of America. That was because of the work of our outstanding servicemembers.

Moreover, that early decision to strengthen our efforts in Afghanistan allowed us to build the capacity of Afghans to secure and defend their own country. So today, there are less than 10,000 American troops in Afghanistan. Instead of being in the lead against the Taliban, Americans are now supporting 320,000 Afghan security forces who are defending their communities and supporting our counterterrorism efforts.

Now, I don’t want to paint too rosy a picture. The situation in Afghanistan is still tough. War has been a part of life in Afghanistan for over 30 years, and the United States cannot eliminate the Taliban or end violence in that country. But what we can do is deny al Qaeda a safe haven, and what we can do is support Afghans who want a better future, which is why we have worked not only with their military, but we’ve backed a unity government in Kabul. We’ve helped Afghan girls go to school. We’ve supported investments in health care and electricity and education. You have made a difference in Afghanistan, and America is safer for it.

Of course, the terrorist threat was never restricted to South Asia, or to Afghanistan, or Pakistan. Even as al Qaeda has been decimated in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the threat from terrorists metastasized in other parts of the Middle East and North Africa. And most dangerously, we saw the emergence of ISIL, the successor to al Qaeda in Iraq, which fights as both a terrorist network and an insurgency.

There’s been a debate about ISIL that’s focused on whether a continued U.S. troop presence in Iraq back in 2011 could have stopped the threat of ISIL from growing. And as a practical matter, this was not an option. By 2011, Iraqis wanted our military presence to end, and they were unwilling to sign a new Status of Forces Agreement to protect our troops from prosecution if they were trying to defend themselves in Iraq.

In addition, maintaining American troops in Iraq at the time could not have reversed the forces that contributed to ISIL’s rise -- a government in Baghdad that pursued a sectarian agenda, a brutal dictator in Syria who lost control of large parts of the country, social media that reached a global pool of recruits, and a hollowing out of Iraq’s security forces, which were ultimately overrun in Mosul in 2014. In fact, American troops, had they stayed there, would have lacked legal protections and faced a choice between remaining on bases or being drawn back into a sectarian conflict against the will of Iraq’s elected government or Iraq’s local populations.

But circumstances changed. When ISIL made substantial gains first in Mosul and then in other parts of the country, then suddenly Iraqis reached out once again for help. And in shaping our response, we refused to repeat some of the mistakes of the 2003 invasion that have helped to give rise to the organization that became ISIL in the first place.

We conditioned our help on the emergence of a new Iraqi government and prime minister that was committed to national unity, and committed to working with us. We built an international coalition of nearly 70 nations, including some of Iraq’s neighbors. We surged our intelligence resources so that we could better understand the enemy. And then we took the fight to ISIL in both Iraq and Syria, not with American battalions but with local forces backed by our equipment and our advisors and, importantly, our Special Forces. In that campaign, we have now hit ISIL with over 16,000 airstrikes. We have equipped and trained tens of thousands of partners on the ground.

And today, the results are clear: ISIL has lost more than half its territory. ISIL has lost control of major population centers. Its morale is plummeting. Its recruitment is drying up. Its commanders and external plotters are being taken out, and local populations are turning against it.

As we speak, ISIL faces an offensive on Mosul from Iraqi troops and coalition support. That’s the largest remaining city that it controls. Meanwhile, in Syria, ISIL’s self-declared capital in Raqqa is being squeezed. We have attacked ISIL’s financial lifeline, destroying hundreds of millions of dollars of oil and cash reserves. The bottom line is we are breaking the back of ISIL. We’re taking away its safe havens. And we’ve accomplished all this at a cost of $10 billion over two years, which is the same amount that we used to spend in one month at the height of the Iraq War.

So the -- So the campaign against ISIL has been relentless. It has been sustainable. It has been multilateral. And it demonstrates a shift in how we’ve taken the fight to terrorists everywhere from South Asia to the Sahel. Instead of pushing all of the burden onto American ground troops, instead of trying to mount invasions wherever terrorists appear, we’ve built a network of partners.

In Libya, where U.S. airpower has helped local militias dislodge a dangerous ISIL cell. In Mali, where U.S. logistics and intelligence support helped our French allies roll back al Qaeda branches there. In Somalia, where U.S. operations support an African Union-led force and international peacekeepers. And in Yemen, where years of targeted strikes have degraded al Qaeda in the Peninsula.

And these offensive efforts have buttressed a global effort to make it harder for terrorist networks to breach our defenses and spread their violent ideologies. Working with European allies who have suffered terrible attacks, we’ve strengthened intelligence-sharing and cut in half the flow of foreign fighters to ISIL. We’ve worked with our tech sector to supports efforts to push back on terrorist messages on social media that motivate people to kill. A recent study shows that ISIL’s propaganda has been cut in half. We’ve launched a Global Engagement Center to empower voices that are countering ISIL’s perversion of Islam, and we’re working closely with Muslim-majority partners from the Gulf to Southeast Asia.

This is your work. We should take great pride in the progress that we’ve made over the last eight years. That's the bottom line.

No foreign terrorist organization has successfully planned and executed an attack on our homeland. And it’s not because they didn't try. Plots have been disrupted. Terrorists have been taken off the battlefield. And we've done this even as we drew down nearly 180,000 troops in harm’s way in Iraq and Afghanistan. Today there are just 15,000.

New partnerships have been built. We’ve respected the rule of law. We've enlisted our values in this fight. And all of this progress is due to the service of millions of Americans like you -- in intelligence and in law enforcement, in homeland security, in diplomacy, in the armed services of the United States of America. It’s thanks to you -- thanks to you.

Now, to say that we've made progress is not to say that the job is done. We know that a deadly threat persists. We know that in some form this violent extremism will be with us for years to come. In too many parts of the world, especially in the Middle East, there has been a breakdown of order that's been building for decades, and it’s unleashed forces that are going to take a generation to resolve. Long-term corruption has rotted too many nation-states from within. Governance is collapsing. Sectarian conflicts rage. A changing climate is increasing competition for food and water. And false prophets are peddling a vision of Islam that is irreconcilable with tolerance and modernity and basic science. And in fact, every one of these trends is at play inside of Syria today.

And what complicates the challenge even more is the fact that for all of our necessary focus on fighting terrorists overseas, the most deadly attacks on the homeland over the last eight years have not been carried out by operatives with sophisticated networks or equipment, directed from abroad. They’ve been carried out by homegrown and largely isolated individuals who were radicalized online.

These deranged killers can’t inflict the sort of mass casualties that we saw on 9/11, but the pain of those who lost loved ones in Boston, in San Bernardino, in Fort Hood and Orlando, that pain continues to this day. And in some cases, it has stirred fear in our populations and threatens to change how we think about ourselves and our lives.

So while we’ve made it much more difficult -- you have made it much more difficult -- to carry out an attack approaching the scale of 9/11, the threat will endure. We will not achieve the kind of clearly defined victory comparable to those that we won in previous wars against nations. We won’t have a scene of the Emperor of Japan and Douglas MacArthur in a surrender. And the reason we won’t have that is because technology makes it impossible to completely shield impressionable minds from violent ideologies. And somebody who is trying to kill and willing to be killed is dangerous, particularly when we live in a country where it’s very easy for that person to buy a very powerful weapon.

So rather than offer false promises that we can eliminate terrorism by dropping more bombs, or deploying more and more troops, or fencing ourselves off from the rest of the world, we have to take a long view of the terrorist threat, and we have to pursue a smart strategy that can be sustained.

In the time remaining, let me suggest what I think should guide this approach. First of all, a sustainable counterterrorism strategy depends on keeping the threat in perspective. The terrorist threat is real and it is dangerous. But these terrorists want to cast themselves as the vanguard of a new world order. They are not. They are thugs and they are murderers, and they should be treated that way. Fascism threatened to overrun the entire world -- and we had to wage total war in response. Communism threatened not only to overturn a world order, but threatened nuclear holocaust -- so we had to build armaments and alliances to contain it. Today’s terrorists can kill innocent people, but they don't pose an existential threat to our nation, and we must not make the mistake of elevating them as if they do. That does their job for them. It makes them more important and helps them with recruitment.

A second and related point is that we cannot follow the path of previous great powers who sometimes defeated themselves through over-reach. By protecting our homeland while drawing down the number of troops serving in harm’s way overseas, we helped save resources, but more importantly, we saved lives. I can tell you, during the course of my eight years, that I have never shied away from sending men and women into danger where necessary. It's always the hardest decision I make, but it's one that I've made where the security of the American people is at stake. And I've seen the costs. I've held the hands of our wounded warriors at Walter Reed. I've met the caskets of the fallen at Dover. And that's why I make no apologies for only sending our troops into harm’s way when there is a clear mission that is achievable and when it is absolutely necessary.

Number three, we need the wisdom to see that upholding our values and adhering to the rule of law is not a weakness; in the long term, it is our greatest strength. The whole objective of these terrorists is to scare us into changing the nature of who we are and our democracy. And the fact is, people and nations do not make good decisions when they are driven by fear. These terrorists can never directly destroy our way of life, but we can do it for them if we lose track of who we are and the values that this nation was founded upon.

And I always remind myself that as Commander-in-Chief, I must protect our people, but I also swore an oath to defend our Constitution. And over these last eight years, we have demonstrated that staying true to our traditions as a nation of laws advances our security as well as our values.

We prohibited torture, everywhere, at all times -- and that includes tactics like waterboarding. And at no time has anybody who has worked with me told me that doing so has cost us good intelligence. When we do capture terrorists, despite all the political rhetoric about the need to strip terrorists of their rights, our interrogation teams have obtained valuable information from terrorists without resorting to torture, without operating outside the law. Our Article III courts have delivered justice faster than military trials. And our prisons have proven more than capable of holding the most dangerous terrorists.

Consider the terrorists who have been captured, lawfully interrogated, and prosecuted in civilian courts. Faisal Shahzad, who tried to set off a car bomb in Times Square. Dzohkar Tsarneyev, the Boston Marathon bomber. Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, the so-called “underwear bomber.” American juries and judges have determined that none of these people will know freedom again. But we did it lawfully. And the wheels of justice right now are turning for others -- terrorists like Ahmed Warsame, an al-Shabaab commander, and Abu Khatalla, accused leader of the Benghazi attacks. We can get these terrorists and stay true to who we are.

And, in fact, our success in dealing with terrorists through our justice system reinforces why it is past time to shut down the detention facility at Guantanamo. This is not just my opinion, it's the opinion of many military leaders. During my administration, we have responsibly transferred over 175 detainees to foreign governments, with safeguards to reduce the risk of them returning to the battlefield. And we've cut the population in Gitmo from 242 to 59. The politics of fear has led Congress to prevent any detainees from being transferred to prisons in the United States -- even though, as we speak, we imprison dangerous terrorists in our prisons, and we have even more dangerous criminals in all of our prisons across the country; even though our allies oftentimes will not turn over a terrorist if they think that terrorist could end up in Gitmo; even though groups like ISIL use Gitmo in their propaganda. So we're wasting hundreds of millions of dollars to keep fewer than 60 people in a detention facility in Cuba. That’s not strength. Until Congress changes course, it will be judged harshly by history, and I will continue to do all that I can to remove this blot on our national honor.

Number four, we have to fight terrorists in a way that does not create more terrorists. For example, in a dangerous world, terrorists seek out places where it’s often impossible to capture them, or to count on local governments to do so. And that means the best option for us to get those terrorists becomes a targeted strike. So we have taken action under my command, including with drones, to remove terrorists from the battlefield, which protects our troops and has prevented real threats to the American people.

Now, under rules that I put in place and that I made public, before any strike is taken outside of a warzone, there must be near certainty that no civilians will be killed or injured. And while nothing is certain in any strike, and we have acknowledged that there are tragic instances where innocents have been killed by our strikes, this is the highest standard that we can set. Nevertheless, we still have critics who suggest that these strikes are wrong. And I say to them, you have to weigh the alternatives. Drone strikes allow us to deny terrorists a safe haven without airstrikes, which are less precise, or invasions that are much more likely to kill innocent civilians as well as American servicemembers.

So the actions that we’ve taken have saved lives at home and abroad. But the point is, is that we do have to be careful to make sure that when we take actions, we’re not alienating local populations, because that will serve as recruitment for new terrorists.

Number five, transparency and accountability serve our national security not just in times of peace, but, more importantly, in times of conflict. And that’s why we’ve made public information about which terrorist organizations we’re fighting and why we’re fighting them. We’ve released assessments of non-combatants killed in our operations, taken responsibility when mistakes are made. We've declassified information about interrogation methods that were wrong so we learn from past mistakes. And yesterday, I directed our government for the first time to release a full description of the legal and policy frameworks that guide our military operations around the world.

This public information allows for a more informed public debate, and it provides a potential check on unfettered executive power. The power of the presidency is awesome, but it is supposed to be bound by you, our citizens. But here’s the thing: That information doesn’t mean anything, it doesn’t work if the people’s representatives in Congress don’t do their jobs, if they’re not paying attention.

Right now, we are waging war under authorities provided by Congress over 15 years ago -- 15 years ago. I had no gray hair 15 years ago. Two years ago, I asked Congress, let’s update the authorization, provide us a new authorization for the war against ISIL, reflecting the changing nature of the threats, reflecting the lessons that we’ve learned from the last decade. So far, Congress has refused to take a vote.

Democracies should not operate in a state of permanently authorized war. That’s not good for our military, it’s not good for our democracy. And, by the way, part of the reason that’s dangerous is because today, with our outstanding, all-volunteer force, only one percent of the population is actually fighting. Which means that you are carrying the burden. Which means that it is important for us to know what it is that we’re doing and have to explain what we are doing to the public, because it becomes too easy to just send one percent of the population out to do things even if they’re not well thought through.

If a threat is serious enough to require the sacrifice of our men and women in uniform, then members of Congress should at least have the courage to make clear where they stand -– not on the sidelines -- not on cable TV shows, but by fulfilling their constitutional duty and authorizing the use of force against the threats that we face today. That’s how democracies are supposed to work.

Number six, alongside our outstanding military work, we have to draw upon the strength of our diplomacy. Terrorists would love to see us walk away from the type of work that builds international coalitions, and ends conflicts, and stops the spread of deadly weapons. It would make life easier for them; it would be a tragic mistake for us.

Just think about what we’ve done these last eight years without firing a shot. We’ve rolled back Iran’s nuclear program. That’s not just my assessment, that’s the assessment of Israeli intelligence, even though they were opposed to the deal. We’ve secured nuclear materials around the globe, reducing the risk that they fall into the hands of terrorists. We’ve eliminated Syria’s declared chemical weapons program. All of these steps have helped keep us safe and helped keep our troops safe. Those are the result of diplomacy. And sustained diplomatic efforts, no matter how frustrating or difficult they sometimes appear, are going to be required to resolve the conflicts roiling the in Middle East, from Yemen, to Syria, to Israel and Palestine. And if we don’t have strong efforts there, the more you will be called upon to clean up after the failure of diplomacy.

Similarly, any long-term strategy to reduce the threat of terrorism depends on investments that strengthen some of these fragile societies. Our generals, our commanders understand this. This is not charity. It’s fundamental to our national security. A dollar spent on development is worth a lot more than a dollar spent fighting a war.

This is how we prevent conflicts from starting in the first place. This is how we can ensure that peace is lasting -- after we've fought. It’s how we stop people from falling prey to extremism -- because children are going to school and they can think for themselves, and families can feed themselves and aren’t desperate, and communities are not ravaged by diseases, and countries are not devastated by climate changes.

As Americans, we have to see the value of empowering civil societies so that there are outlets for people’s frustrations, and we have to support entrepreneurs who want to build businesses instead of destroying. We have to invest in young people because the areas that are generating terrorists are typically having a huge youth bulge, which makes them more dangerous. And there are times where we need to help refugees who have escaped the horrors of war in search of a better life. Our military recognizes that these issues of governance and human dignity and development are vital to our security. It’s central to our plans in places like Afghanistan and Iraq. Let’s make sure that this wisdom is reflected in our budgets, as well.

And finally, in this fight, we have to uphold the civil liberties that define us. Terrorists want us to turn on one another. And while defeating them requires us to draw upon the enormous capabilities of all of our government, we have make sure changes in how we address terrorists are not abused. This is why, for example, we’ve made extensive reforms in how we gather intelligence around the world, increasing oversight, placing new restrictions on the government’s ability to retain and search and use certain communications so that people trust us, and that way they cooperate and work with us.

We don’t use our power to indiscriminately read emails or listen to phone calls just targeted at folks who might be trying to do us harm. We use it to save lives. And by doing so, by maintaining these civil liberties, we sustain the confidence of the American people and we get the cooperation of our allies more readily. Protecting liberty -- that's something we do for all Americans, and not just some.

We are fighting terrorists who claim to fight on behalf of Islam. But they do not speak for over a billion Muslims around the world, and they do not speak for American Muslims, including many who wear the uniform of the United States of America’s military.

If we stigmatize good, patriotic Muslims, that just feeds the terrorists’ narrative. It fuels the same false grievances that they use to motivate people to kill. If we act like this is a war between the United States and Islam, we're not just going to lose more Americans to terrorist attacks, but we’ll also lose sight of the very principles we claim to defend.

So let my final words to you as your Commander-in-Chief be a reminder of what it is that you're fighting for, what it is that we are fighting for. The United States of America is not a country that imposes religious tests as a price for freedom. We're a country that was founded so that people could practice their faiths as they choose. The United States of America is not a place where some citizens have to withstand greater scrutiny, or carry a special ID card, or prove that they’re not an enemy from within. We’re a country that has bled and struggled and sacrificed against that kind of discrimination and arbitrary rule, here in our own country and around the world.

We’re a nation that believes freedom can never be taken for granted and that each of us has a responsibility to sustain it. The universal right to speak your mind and to protest against authority, to live in a society that’s open and free, that can criticize a President without retribution -- a country where you're judged by the content of your character rather than what you look like, or how you worship, or what your last name is, or where your family came from -- that's what separates us from tyrants and terrorists.

We are a nation that stands for the rule of law, and strengthen the laws of war. When the Nazis were defeated, we put them on trial. Some couldn’t understand that; it had never happened before. But as one of the American lawyers who was at Nuremberg says, “I was trying to prove that the rule of law should govern human behavior.” And by doing so, we broadened the scope and reach of justice around the world. We held ourselves out as a beacon and an example for others.

We are a nation that won World Wars without grabbing the resources of those we defeated. We helped them rebuild. We didn't hold on to territory, other than the cemeteries where we buried our dead. Our Greatest Generation fought and bled and died to build an international order of laws and institutions that could preserve the peace, and extend prosperity, and promote cooperation among nations. And for all of its imperfections, we depend on that international order to protect our own freedom.

In other words, we are a nation that at our best has been defined by hope, and not fear. A country that went through the crucible of a Civil War to offer a new birth of freedom; that stormed the beaches of Normandy, climbed the hills of Iwo Jima; that saw ordinary people mobilize to extend the meaning of civil rights. That's who we are. That's what makes us stronger than any act of terror.

Remember that history. Remember what that flag stands for. For we depend upon you -- the heirs to that legacy -- our men and women in uniform, and the citizens who support you, to carry forward what is best in us -- that commitment to a common creed. The confidence that right makes might, not the other way around.

That’s how we can sustain this long struggle. That's how we’ll protect this country. That's how we’ll protect our Constitution against all threats, foreign and domestic.

I trust that you will fulfill that mission, as you have fulfilled all others. It has been the greatest honor of my life to serve as your Commander-in-Chief. I thank you for all that you've done, and all that you will do in the future.

May God bless you.

May God bless our troops.

And may God bless the United States of America.

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# Final Presidential Press Conference of Year

Good afternoon. This is the most wonderful press conference of the year. I've got a list of who’s been naughty and nice to call on. But let me first make a couple of quick points, and then I’ll take your questions.

Typically, I use this yearend press conference to review how far we’ve come over the course of the year. Today, understandably, I'm going to talk a little bit about how far we’ve come over the past eight years.

As I was preparing to take office, the unemployment rate was on its way to 10 percent. Today, it’s at 4.6 percent -- the lowest in nearly a decade. We’ve seen the longest streak of job growth on record, and wages have grown faster over the past few years than at any time in the past 40.

When I came into office, 44 million people were uninsured. Today, we’ve covered more than 20 million of them. For the first time in our history, more than 90 percent of Americans are insured. In fact, yesterday was the biggest day ever for HealthCare.gov. More than 670,000 Americans signed up to get covered, and more are signing up by the day.

We’ve cut our dependence on foreign oil by more than half, doubled production of renewable energy, enacted the most sweeping reforms since FDR to protect consumers and prevent a crisis on Wall Street from punishing Main Street ever again. None of these actions stifled growth, as critics predicted. Instead, the stock market has nearly tripled. Since I signed ObamaCare into law, our businesses have added more than 15 million new jobs. And the economy is undoubtedly more durable than it was in the days when we relied on oil from unstable nations and banks took risky bets with your money.

Add it all up, and last year, the poverty rate fell at the fastest rate in almost 50 years, while the median household income grew at the fastest rate on record. In fact, income gains were actually larger for households at the bottom and the middle than for those at the top. And we’ve done all this while cutting our deficits by nearly two-thirds and protecting vital investments that grow the middle class.

In foreign policy, when I came into office, we were in the midst of two wars. Now, nearly 180,000 troops are down to 15,000. Bin Laden, rather than being at large, has been taken off the battlefield, along with thousands of other terrorists. Over the past eight years, no foreign terrorist organization has successfully executed an attack on our homeland that was directed from overseas.

Through diplomacy, we’ve ensured that Iran cannot obtain a nuclear weapon -- without going to war with Iran. We opened up a new chapter with the people of Cuba. And we brought nearly 200 nations together around a climate agreement that could very well save this planet for our kids. And almost every country on Earth sees America as stronger and more respected today than they did eight years ago. In other words, by so many measures, our country is stronger and more prosperous than it was when we started.

That's a situation that I’m proud to leave for my successor.

And it’s thanks to the American people -- to the hard work that you’ve put in, the sacrifices you’ve made for your families and your communities, the businesses that you started or invested in, the way you looked out for one another. And I could not be prouder to be your President.

Of course, to tout this progress doesn’t mean that we’re not mindful of how much more there is to do. In this season in particular, we’re reminded that there are people who are still hungry, people who are still homeless; people who still have trouble paying the bills or finding work after being laid off. There are communities that are still mourning those who have been stolen from us by senseless gun violence, and parents who still are wondering how to protect their kids. And after I leave office, I intend to continue to work with organizations and citizens doing good across the country on these and other pressing issues to build on the progress that we’ve made.

Around the world, as well, there are hotspots where disputes have been intractable, conflicts have flared up, and people -- innocent people are suffering as a result. And nowhere is this more terribly true than in the city of Aleppo. For years, we’ve worked to stop the civil war in Syria and alleviate human suffering. It has been one of the hardest issues that I've faced as President.

The world, as we speak, is united in horror at the savage assault by the Syrian regime and its Russian and Iranian allies on the city of Aleppo. We have seen a deliberate strategy of surrounding, besieging, and starving innocent civilians. We've seen relentless targeting of humanitarian workers and medical personnel; entire neighborhoods reduced to rubble and dust. There are continuing reports of civilians being executed. These are all horrific violations of international law. Responsibility for this brutality lies in one place alone -- with the Assad regime and its allies Russia and Iran. And this blood and these atrocities are on their hands.

We all know what needs to happen. There needs to be an impartial international observer force in Aleppo that can help coordinate an orderly evacuation through safe corridors. There has to be full access for humanitarian aid, even as the United States continues to be the world’s largest donor of humanitarian aid to the Syrian people. And, beyond that, there needs to be a broader ceasefire that can serve as the basis for a political rather than a military solution.

That’s what the United States is going to continue to push for, both with our partners and through multilateral institutions like the U.N.

Regretfully, but unsurprisingly, Russia has repeatedly blocked the Security Council from taking action on these issues. So we’re going to keep pressing the Security Council to help improve the delivery of humanitarian aid to those who are in such desperate need, and to ensure accountability, including continuing to monitor any potential use of chemical weapons in Syria. And we’re going to work in the U.N. General Assembly as well, both on accountability and to advance a political settlement. Because it should be clear that although you may achieve tactical victories, over the long term the Assad regime cannot slaughter its way to legitimacy.

That’s why we'll continue to press for a transition to a more representative government. And that’s why the world must not avert our eyes to the terrible events that are unfolding. The Syrian regime and its Russian and Iranian allies are trying to obfuscate the truth. The world should not be fooled. And the world will not forget.

So even in a season where the incredible blessings that we know as Americans are all around us, even as we enjoy family and friends and are reminded of how lucky we are, we should also be reminded that to be an American involves bearing burdens and meeting obligations to others. American values and American ideals are what will lead the way to a safer and more prosperous 2017, both here and abroad.

And by the way, few embody those values and ideals like our brave men and women in uniform and their families. So I just want to close by wishing all of them a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

With that, I will take some questions. And I'm going to start with Josh Lederman, of AP.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. There’s a perception that you're letting President Putin get away with interfering in the U.S. election, and that a response that nobody knows about or a lookback review just won’t cut it. Are you prepared to call out President Putin by name for ordering this hacking? And do you agree with what Hillary Clinton now says, that the hacking was actually partly responsible for her loss? And is your Administration’s open quarreling with Trump and his team on this issue tarnishing the smooth transition of power that you have promised?

President Obama: Well, first of all, with respect to the transition, I think they would be the first to acknowledge that we have done everything we can to make sure that they are successful as I promised. And that will continue. And it’s just been a few days since I last talked to the President-elect about a whole range of transition issues. That cooperation is going to continue.

There hasn’t been a lot of squabbling. What we’ve simply said is the facts, which are that, based on uniform intelligence assessments, the Russians were responsible for hacking the DNC, and that, as a consequence, it is important for us to review all elements of that and make sure that we are preventing that kind of interference through cyberattacks in the future.

That should be a bipartisan issue; that shouldn’t be a partisan issue. And my hope is that the President-elect is going to similarly be concerned with making sure that we don’t have potential foreign influence in our election process. I don’t think any American wants that. And that shouldn’t be a source of an argument.

I think that part of the challenge is that it gets caught up in the carryover from election season. And I think it is very important for us to distinguish between the politics of the election and the need for us, as a country, both from a national security perspective but also in terms of the integrity of our election system and our democracy, to make sure that we don’t create a political football here.

Now, with respect to how this thing unfolded last year, let’s just go through the facts pretty quickly. At the beginning of the summer, we’re alerted to the possibility that the DNC has been hacked, and I immediately order law enforcement as well as our intelligence teams to find out everything about it, investigate it thoroughly, to brief the potential victims of this hacking, to brief on a bipartisan basis the leaders of both the House and the Senate and the relevant intelligence committees. And once we had clarity and certainty around what, in fact, had happened, we publicly announced that, in fact, Russia had hacked into the DNC.

And at that time, we did not attribute motives or any interpretations of why they had done so. We didn’t discuss what the effects of it might be. We simply let people know -- the public know, just as we had let members of Congress know -- that this had happened.

And as a consequence, all of you wrote a lot of stories about both what had happened, and then you interpreted why that might have happened and what effect it was going to have on the election outcomes. We did not. And the reason we did not was because in this hyper-partisan atmosphere, at a time when my primary concern was making sure that the integrity of the election process was not in any way damaged, at a time when anything that was said by me or anybody in the White House would immediately be seen through a partisan lens, I wanted to make sure that everybody understood we were playing this thing straight -- that we weren’t trying to advantage one side or another, but what we were trying to do was let people know that this had taken place, and so if you started seeing effects on the election, if you were trying to measure why this was happening and how you should consume the information that was being leaked, that you might want to take this into account.

And that's exactly how we should have handled it. Imagine if we had done the opposite. It would have become immediately just one more political scrum. And part of the goal here was to make sure that we did not do the work of the leakers for them by raising more and more questions about the integrity of the election right before the election was taking place -- at a time, by the way, when the President-elect himself was raising questions about the integrity of the election.

And, finally, I think it's worth pointing out that the information was already out. It was in the hands of WikiLeaks, so that was going to come out no matter what. What I was concerned about, in particular, was making sure that that wasn’t compounded by potential hacking that could hamper vote counting, affect the actual election process itself.

And so in early September, when I saw President Putin in China, I felt that the most effective way to ensure that that didn’t happen was to talk to him directly and tell him to cut it out, and there were going to be some serious consequences if he didn’t. And, in fact, we did not see further tampering of the election process. But the leaks through WikiLeaks had already occurred.

So when I look back in terms of how we handled it, I think we handled it the way it should have been handled. We allowed law enforcement and the intelligence community to do its job without political influence. We briefed all relevant parties involved in terms of what was taking place. When we had a consensus around what had happened, we announced it -- not through the White House, not through me, but rather through the intelligence communities that had actually carried out these investigations. And then we allowed you and the American public to make an assessment as to how to weigh that going into the election.

And the truth is, is that there was nobody here who didn’t have some sense of what kind of effect it might have. I'm finding it a little curious that everybody is suddenly acting surprised that this looked like it was disadvantaging Hillary Clinton because you guys wrote about it every day. Every single leak. About every little juicy tidbit of political gossip -- including John Podesta's risotto recipe. This was an obsession that dominated the news coverage.

So I do think it's worth us reflecting how it is that a presidential election of such importance, of such moment, with so many big issues at stake and such a contrast between the candidates, came to be dominated by a bunch of these leaks. What is it about our political system that made us vulnerable to these kinds of potential manipulations -- which, as I've said publicly before, were not particularly sophisticated.

This was not some elaborate, complicated espionage scheme. They hacked into some Democratic Party emails that contained pretty routine stuff, some of it embarrassing or uncomfortable, because I suspect that if any of us got our emails hacked into, there might be some things that we wouldn’t want suddenly appearing on the front page of a newspaper or a telecast, even if there wasn’t anything particularly illegal or controversial about it. And then it just took off.

And that concerns me. And it should concern all of us. But the truth of the matter is, is that everybody had the information. It was out there. And we handled it the way we should have.

Now, moving forward, I think there are a couple of issues that this raises. Number one is just the constant challenge that we are going to have with cybersecurity throughout our economy and throughout our society. We are a digitalized culture, and there is hacking going on every single day. There’s not a company, there’s not a major organization, there’s not a financial institution, there’s not a branch of our government where somebody is not going to be phishing for something or trying to penetrate, or put in a virus or malware. And this is why for the last eight years, I’ve been obsessed with how do we continually upgrade our cybersecurity systems.

And this particular concern around Russian hacking is part of a broader set of concerns about how do we deal with cyber issues being used in ways that can affect our infrastructure, affect the stability of our financial systems, and affect the integrity of our institutions, like our election process.

I just received a couple weeks back -- it wasn’t widely reported on -- a report from our cybersecurity commission that outlines a whole range of strategies to do a better job on this. But it’s difficult, because it’s not all housed -- the target of cyberattacks is not one entity but it’s widely dispersed, and a lot of it is private, like the DNC. It’s not a branch of government. We can’t tell people what to do. What we can do is inform them, get best practices.

What we can also do is to, on a bilateral basis, warn other countries against these kinds of attacks. And we’ve done that in the past. So just as I told Russia to stop it, and indicated there will be consequences when they do it, the Chinese have, in the past, engaged in cyberattacks directed at our companies to steal trade secrets and proprietary technology. And I had to have the same conversation with Prime Minister -- or with President Xi, and what we’ve seen is some evidence that they have reduced -- but not completely eliminated -- these activities, partly because they can use cutouts.

One of the problems with the Internet and cyber issues is that there’s not always a return address, and by the time you catch up to it, attributing what happened to a particular government can be difficult, not always provable in court even though our intelligence communities can make an assessment.

What we’ve also tried to do is to start creating some international norms about this to prevent some sort of cyber arms race, because we obviously have offensive capabilities as well as defensive capabilities. And my approach is not a situation in which everybody is worse off because folks are constantly attacking each other back and forth, but putting some guardrails around the behavior of nation-states, including our adversaries, just so that they understand that whatever they do to us we can potentially do to them.

We do have some special challenges, because oftentimes our economy is more digitalized, it is more vulnerable, partly because we’re a wealthier nation and we’re more wired than some of these other countries. And we have a more open society, and engage in less control and censorship over what happens over the Internet, which is also part of what makes us special.

Last point -- and the reason I’m going on here is because I know that you guys have a lot of questions about this, and I haven't addressed all of you directly about it. With respect to response, my principal goal leading up to the election was making sure that the election itself went off without a hitch, that it was not tarnished, and that it did not feed any sense in the public that somehow tampering had taken place with the actual process of voting. And we accomplished that.

That does not mean that we are not going to respond. It simply meant that we had a set of priorities leading up to the election that were of the utmost importance. Our goal continues to be to send a clear message to Russia or others not to do this to us, because we can do stuff to you.

But it is also important for us to do that in a thoughtful, methodical way. Some of it we do publicly. Some of it we will do in a way that they know, but not everybody will. And I know that there have been folks out there who suggest somehow that if we went out there and made big announcements, and thumped our chests about a bunch of stuff, that somehow that would potentially spook the Russians. But keep in mind that we already have enormous numbers of sanctions against the Russians. The relationship between us and Russia has deteriorated, sadly, significantly over the last several years. And so how we approach an appropriate response that increases costs for them for behavior like this in the future, but does not create problems for us, is something that’s worth taking the time to think through and figure out. And that’s exactly what we’ve done.

So at a point in time where we’ve taken certain actions that we can divulge publically, we will do so. There are times where the message will go -- will be directly received by the Russians and not publicized. And I should point out, by the way, part of why the Russians have been effective on this is because they don't go around announcing what they're doing. It's not like Putin is going around the world publically saying, look what we did, wasn't that clever? He denies it. So the idea that somehow public shaming is going to be effective I think doesn't read the thought process in Russia very well.

Okay?

Question: Did Clinton lose because of the hacking?

President Obama: I'm going to let all the political pundits in this town have a long discussion about what happened in the election. It was a fascinating election, so I'm sure there are going to be a lot of books written about it.

I've said what I think is important for the Democratic Party going forward rather than try to parse every aspect of the election. And I've said before, I couldn't be prouder of Secretary Clinton, her outstanding service. I thinks she's worked tirelessly on behalf of the American people, and I don't think she was treated fairly during the election. I think the coverage of her and the issues was troubling.

But having said that, what I've been most focused on -- appropriate for the fact that I'm not going to be a politician in about, what is it, 32 days? 31?

Question: Thirty-four.

President Obama: Thirty four? But what I've said is, is that I can maybe give some counsel and advice to the Democratic Party. And I think that that the thing we have to spend the most time on -- because it's the thing we have the most control over -- is how do we make sure that we are showing up in places where I think Democratic policies are needed, where they are helping, where they are making a difference, but where people feel as if they're not being heard and where Democrats are characterized as coastal, liberal, latte-sipping, politically-correct, out-of-touch folks. We have to be in those communities. And I've seen that when we are in those communities, it makes a difference.

That's how I became President. I became a U.S. senator not just because I had a strong base in Chicago, but because I was driving around downstate Illinois and going to fish frys and sitting in VFW halls and talking to farmers. And I didn't win every one of their votes, but they got a sense of what I was talking about, what I cared about, that I was for working people, that I was for the middle class, that the reason I was interested in strengthening unions, and raising the minimum wage, and rebuilding our infrastructure, and making sure that parents had decent childcare and family leave was because my own family's history wasn't that different from theirs, even if I looked a little bit different. Same thing in Iowa.

And so the question is, how do we rebuild that party as a whole so that there's not a county in any state -- I don't care how red -- that we don't have a presence and we're not making the argument. Because I think we have the better argument. But that requires a lot of work. It's been something that I've been able to do successfully in my own campaigns. It is not something I've been able to transfer to candidates in midterms and sort of build a sustaining organization around. That's something that I would have liked to have done more of, but it's kind of hard to do when you're also dealing with a whole bunch of issues here in the White House.

And that doesn't mean, though, that it can't be done. And I think there are going to be a lot of talented folks out there, a lot of progressives who share my values who are going to be leading the charge in the years to come.

Michelle Kosinski of CNN.

Question: Thank you. So this week we heard Hillary Clinton talk about how she thinks that the FBI Director's most recent announcement made a difference in the outcome of the election. And we also just heard in an op-ed her campaign chairman talk about something being deeply broken within the FBI. He talked about thinking that the investigation early on was lackadaisical in his words. So what do you think about those comments? Do you think there's any truth to them? Do you think there's a danger there that they're calling into question the integrity of institutions in a similar way that Donald Trump's team has done?

And the second part to that is that Donald Trump's team repeatedly -- I guess, giving the indication that the investigation of the Russian hack, as well as the retaliation, might not be such a priority once he's in office, so what do you think the risk is there? And are you going to talk to him directly about some of those comments he made?

President Obama: Well, on the latter point, as I said before, the transition from election season to governance season is not always smooth. It's bumpy. There are still feelings that are raw out there. There are people who are still thinking about how things unfolded. And I get all that. But when Donald Trump takes the Oath of Office and is sworn as the 45th President of the United States, then he's got a different set of responsibilities and considerations.

And I've said this before: I think there is a sobering process when you walk into the Oval Office. And I haven’t shared previously private conversations I've had with the President-elect. I will say that they have been cordial and, in some cases, have involved me making some pretty specific suggestions about how to ensure that regardless of our obvious deep disagreements about policy, maybe I can transmit some thoughts about maintaining the effectiveness, integrity, cohesion of the office, of various democratic institutions. And he has listened. I can't say that he will end up implementing, but the conversations themselves have been cordial as opposed to defensive in any way. And I will always make myself available to him, just as previous Presidents have made themselves available to me as issues come up.

With respect to the FBI, I will tell you, I've had a chance to know a lot of FBI agents, I know Director Comey, and they take their job seriously, they work really hard, they help keep us safe and save a lot of lives. And it is always a challenge for law enforcement when there's an intersection between the work that they are doing and the political system. It's one of the difficulties of democracy, generally. We have a system where we want our law enforcement investigators and our prosecutors to be free from politics, to be independent, to play it straight, but sometimes that involves investigations that touch on politics. And particularly in this hyper-partisan environment that we've been in, everything is suspect, everything you do one way or the other.

One thing that I have done is to be pretty scrupulous about not wading into investigation decisions or prosecution decisions, or decisions not to prosecute. I have tried to be really strict in my own behavior about preserving the independence of law enforcement, free from my own judgments and political assessments, in some cases. And I don’t know why it would stop now.

Mike Dorning of Bloomberg.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. On Aleppo, your views that what happens there is the responsibility of the Russian government, the Iranian government, the Assad regime are pretty well aired. But do you, as President of the United States, leader of the free world, feel any personal moral responsibility now at the end of your presidency for the carnage that we’re all watching in Aleppo, which I’m sure disturbs you -- which you said disturbs you?

And, secondly, also on Aleppo, you’ve again made clear your practical disagreements with the idea of safe zones. And President-elect Trump has, throughout his campaign, and he said again last night that he wants to create safe zones in Syria. Do you feel like, in this transition, you need to help him toward implementing that? Or was that not something that you should be doing?

President Obama: Mike, I always feel responsible. I felt responsible when kids were being shot by snipers. I felt responsible when millions of people had been displaced. I feel responsible for murder and slaughter that’s taken place in South Sudan that’s not being reported on partly because there’s not as much social media being generated from there.

There are places around the world where horrible things are happening, and because of my office, because I’m President of the United States, I feel responsible. I ask myself every single day, is there something I could do that would save lives and make a difference and spare some child who doesn’t deserve to suffer.

So that’s a starting point. There’s not a moment during the course of this presidency where I haven’t felt some responsibility. That’s true, by the way, for our own country. When I came into office and people were losing their jobs and losing their homes and losing their pensions, I felt responsible, and I would go home at night and I would ask myself, was there something better that I could do or smarter that I could be that would make a difference in their lives, that would relieve their suffering and relieve their hardship.

So with respect to Syria, what I have consistently done is taken the best course that I can to try to end the civil war while having also to take into account the long-term national security interests of the United States.

And throughout this process, based on hours of meetings, if you tallied it up, days or weeks of meetings where we went through every option in painful detail, with maps, and we had our military, and we had our aid agencies, and we had our diplomatic teams, and sometimes we’d bring in outsiders who were critics of ours -- whenever we went through it, the challenge was that, short of putting large numbers of U.S. troops on the ground, uninvited, without any international law mandate, without sufficient support from Congress, at a time when we still had troops in Afghanistan and we still had troops in Iraq, and we had just gone through over a decade of war and spent trillions of dollars, and when the opposition on the ground was not cohesive enough to necessarily govern a country, and you had a military superpower in Russia prepared to do whatever it took to keeps its client-state involved, and you had a regional military power in Iran that saw their own vital strategic interests at stake and were willing to send in as many of their people or proxies to support the regime -- that in that circumstance, unless we were all in and willing to take over Syria, we were going to have problems, and that everything else was tempting because we wanted to do something and it sounded like the right thing to do, but it was going to be impossible to do this on the cheap.

And in that circumstance, I have to make a decision as President of the United States as to what is best -- I’m sorry, what’s going on? Somebody’s not feeling good? All right. Why don’t we have -- we’ve got -- we can get our doctors back there to help out. Does somebody want to go to my doctor’s office and just have them -- all right -- where was I?

Question: Doing it on the cheap.

President Obama: So we couldn’t do it on the cheap. Now, it may be --

Can somebody help out please and get Doc Jackson in here? Is somebody grabbing our doctor?

Question: Thank you, Mr. President, for stopping.

President Obama: Of course. In the meantime, just give her a little room. The doctor will be here in a second. You guys know where the doctor’s office is? Just go through the Palm doors. It’s right next to the Map Room. There he is. All right, there’s Doc Jackson. He’s all right. Okay. The doctor is in the house.

Question: You were saying you couldn’t do it on the cheap.

President Obama: And I don’t mean that -- I mean that with all sincerity. I understand the impulse to want to do something. But ultimately, what I’ve had to do is to think about what can we sustain, what is realistic. And my first priority has to be what’s the right thing to do for America.

And it has been our view that the best thing to do has been to provide some support to the moderate opposition so that they could sustain themselves, and that we wouldn’t see anti-Assad regime sentiments just pouring into al Nusra and al Qaeda or ISIL; that we engaged our international partners in order to put pressure on all the parties involved, and to try to resolve this through diplomatic and political means.

I cannot claim that we’ve been successful. And so that’s something that, as is true with a lot of issues and problems around the world, I have to go to bed with every night. But I continue to believe that it was the right approach, given what realistically we could get done absent a decision, as I said, to go in a much more significant way. And that, I think, would not have been sustainable or good for the American people because we had a whole host of other obligations that we also had to meet, wars we had already started and that were not yet finished.

With respect to the issue of safe zones, it is a continued problem. A continued challenge with safe zones is if you’re setting up those zones on Syrian territory, then that requires some force that is willing to maintain that territory in the absence of consent from the Syrian government and, now, the Russians or the Iranians. So it may be that with Aleppo’s tragic situation unfolding, that in the short term, if we can get more of the tens of thousands who are still trapped there out, that so long as the world’s eyes are on them and they are feeling pressure, the regime and Russia concludes that they are willing to find some arrangement, perhaps in coordination with Turkey, whereby those people can be safe. Even that will probably be temporary, but at least it solves a short-term issue that’s going to arise.

Unfortunately, we’re not even there yet, because right now we have Russians and Assad claiming that basically all the innocent civilians who were trapped in Aleppo are out when international organizations, humanitarian organizations who know better and who are on the ground have said unequivocally that there are still tens of thousands who are trapped and prepared to leave under pretty much any conditions. And so right now, our biggest priority is to continue to put pressure wherever we can to try to get them out.

Question: Notwithstanding --

President Obama: I can’t have too much --

Question: On the second question, your intentions are well aired, but do you feel responsibility notwithstanding a move in that direction or help President-elect Trump move in that direction?

President Obama: I will help President Trump -- President-elect Trump with any advice, counsel, information that we can provide so that he, once he’s sworn in, can make a decision. Between now and then, these are decisions that I have to make based on the consultations I have with our military and the people who have been working this every single day.

Peter Alexander.

Question: Mr. President, thank you very much. Can you, given all the intelligence that we have now heard, assure the public that this was, once and for all, a free and fair election? And specifically on Russia, do you feel any obligation now, as they’ve been insisting that this isn’t the case, to show the proof, as it were -- they say put your money where your mouth is and declassify some of the intelligence, some of the evidence that exists? And more broadly, as it relates to Donald Trump on this very topic, are you concerned about his relationship with Vladimir Putin, especially given some of the recent Cabinet picks, including his selection for Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, who toasted Putin with champagne over oil deals together? Thank you.

President Obama: I may be getting older, because these multipart questions, I start losing track.

I can assure the public that there was not the kind of tampering with the voting process that was of concern and will continue to be of concern going forward; that the votes that were cast were counted, they were counted appropriately. We have not seen evidence of machines being tampered with. So that assurance I can provide.

That doesn’t mean that we find every single potential probe of every single voting machine all across the country, but we paid a lot of attention to it. We worked with state officials, et cetera, and we feel confident that that didn’t occur and that the votes were cast and they were counted.

So that’s on that point. What was the second one?

Question: The second one was about declassification.

President Obama: Declassification. Look, we will provide evidence that we can safely provide that does not compromise sources and methods. But I’ll be honest with you, when you’re talking about cybersecurity, a lot of it is classified. And we’re not going to provide it because the way we catch folks is by knowing certain things about them that they may not want us to know, and if we’re going to monitor this stuff effectively going forward, we don’t want them to know that we know.

So this is one of those situations where unless the American people genuinely think that the professionals in the CIA, the FBI, our entire intelligence infrastructure -- many of whom, by the way, served in previous Administrations and who are Republicans -- are less trustworthy than the Russians, then people should pay attention to what our intelligence agencies have to say.

This is part of what I meant when I said that we’ve got to think about what’s happening to our political culture here. The Russians can’t change us or significantly weaken us. They are a smaller country. They are a weaker country. Their economy doesn’t produce anything that anybody wants to buy, except oil and gas and arms. They don’t innovate.

But they can impact us if we lose track of who we are. They can impact us if we abandon our values. Mr. Putin can weaken us, just like he’s trying to weaken Europe, if we start buying into notions that it’s okay to intimidate the press, or lock up dissidents, or discriminate against people because of their faith or what they look like.

And what I worry about more than anything is the degree to which, because of the fierceness of the partisan battle, you start to see certain folks in the Republican Party and Republican voters suddenly finding a government and individuals who stand contrary to everything that we stand for as being okay because that’s how much we dislike Democrats.

I mean, think about it. Some of the people who historically have been very critical of me for engaging with the Russians and having conversations with them also endorsed the President-elect, even as he was saying that we should stop sanctioning Russia and being tough on them, and work together with them against our common enemies. He was very complimentary of Mr. Putin personally.

That wasn’t news. The President-elect during the campaign said so. And some folks who had made a career out of being anti-Russian didn’t say anything about it. And then after the election, suddenly they’re asking, well, why didn’t you tell us that maybe the Russians were trying to help our candidate? Well, come on. There was a survey, some of you saw, where -- now, this is just one poll, but a pretty credible source -- 37 percent of Republican voters approve of Putin. Over a third of Republican voters approve of Vladimir Putin, the former head of the KGB. Ronald Reagan would roll over in his grave.

And how did that happen? It happened in part because, for too long, everything that happens in this town, everything that’s said is seen through the lens of "does this help or hurt us relative to Democrats, or relative to President Obama?" And unless that changes, we’re going to continue to be vulnerable to foreign influence, because we’ve lost track of what it is that we’re about and what we stand for.

With respect to the President-elect’s appointments, it is his prerogative, as I’ve always said, for him to appoint who he thinks can best carry out his foreign policy or his domestic policy. It is up to the Senate to advise and consent. There will be plenty of time for members of the Senate to go through the record of all his appointees and determine whether or not they’re appropriate for the job.

Martha Raddatz.

Question: Mr. President, I want to talk about Vladimir Putin again. Just to be clear, do you believe Vladimir Putin himself authorized the hack? And do you believe he authorized that to help Donald Trump? And on the intelligence, one of the things Donald Trump cites is Saddam Hussein and the weapons of mass destruction, and that they were never found. Can you say, unequivocally, that this was not China, that this was not a 400-pound guy sitting on his bed, as Donald Trump says? And do these types of tweets and kinds of statements from Donald Trump embolden the Russians?

President Obama: When the report comes out, before I leave office, that will have drawn together all the threads. And so I don’t want to step on their work ahead of time.

What I can tell you is that the intelligence that I have seen gives me great confidence in their assessment that the Russians carried out this hack.

Question: Which hack?

President Obama: The hack of the DNC and the hack of John Podesta.

Now, the -- but again, I think this is exactly why I want the report out, so that everybody can review it. And this has been briefed, and the evidence in closed session has been provided on a bipartisan basis -- not just to me, it’s been provided to the leaders of the House and the Senate, and the chairman and ranking members of the relevant committees. And I think that what you’ve already seen is, at least some of the folks who have seen the evidence don’t dispute, I think, the basic assessment that the Russians carried this out.

Question: But specifically, can you not say that --

President Obama: Well, Martha, I think what I want to make sure of is that I give the intelligence community the chance to gather all the information. But I’d make a larger point, which is, not much happens in Russia without Vladimir Putin. This is a pretty hierarchical operation. Last I checked, there’s not a lot of debate and democratic deliberation, particularly when it comes to policies directed at the United States.

We have said, and I will confirm, that this happened at the highest levels of the Russian government. And I will let you make that determination as to whether there are high-level Russian officials who go off rogue and decide to tamper with the U.S. election process without Vladimir Putin knowing about it.

Question: So I wouldn’t be wrong in saying the President thinks Vladimir Putin authorized the hack?

President Obama: Martha, I’ve given you what I’m going to give you.

What was your second question?

Question: Do the tweets and do the statements by Donald Trump embolden Russia?

President Obama: As I said before, I think that the President-elect is still in transition mode from campaign to governance. I think he hasn’t gotten his whole team together yet. He still has campaign spokespersons sort of filling in and appearing on cable shows. And there’s just a whole different attitude and vibe when you’re not in power as when you’re in power.

So rather than me sort of characterize the appropriateness or inappropriateness of what he’s doing at the moment, I think what we have to see is how will the President-elect operate, and how will his team operate, when they’ve been fully briefed on all these issues, they have their hands on all the levers of government, and they’ve got to start making decisions.

One way I do believe that the President-elect can approach this that would be unifying is to say that we welcome a bipartisan, independent process that gives the American people an assurance not only that votes are counted properly, that the elections are fair and free, but that we have learned lessons about how Internet propaganda from foreign countries can be released into the political bloodstream and that we’ve got strategies to deal with it for the future.

The more this can be nonpartisan, the better served the American people are going to be, which is why I made the point earlier -- and I’m going to keep on repeating this point: Our vulnerability to Russia or any other foreign power is directly related to how divided, partisan, dysfunctional our political process is. That’s the thing that makes us vulnerable.

If fake news that’s being released by some foreign government is almost identical to reports that are being issued through partisan news venues, then it’s not surprising that that foreign propaganda will have a greater effect, because it doesn’t seem that far-fetched compared to some of the other stuff that folks are hearing from domestic propagandists.

To the extent that our political dialogue is such where everything is under suspicion, everybody is corrupt and everybody is doing things for partisan reasons, and all of our institutions are full of malevolent actors -- if that’s the storyline that’s being put out there by whatever party is out of power, then when a foreign government introduces that same argument with facts that are made up, voters who have been listening to that stuff for years, who have been getting that stuff every day from talk radio or other venues, they’re going to believe it.

So if we want to really reduce foreign influence on our elections, then we better think about how to make sure that our political process, our political dialogue is stronger than it’s been.

Mark Landler.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. I wonder whether I can move you from Russia to China for a moment.

President Obama: Absolutely.

Question: Your successor spoke by phone with the President of Taiwan the other day and declared subsequently that he wasn’t sure why the United States needed to be bound by the one-China policy. He suggested it could be used as a bargaining chip perhaps to get better terms on a trade deal or more cooperation on North Korea. There’s already evidence that tensions between the two sides have increased a bit, and just today, the Chinese have evidently seized an underwater drone in the South China Sea. Do you agree, as some do, that our China policy could use a fresh set of eyes? And what’s the big deal about having a short phone call with the President of Taiwan? Or do you worry that these types of unorthodox approaches are setting us on a collision course with perhaps our biggest geopolitical adversary?

President Obama: That’s a great question. I’m somewhere in between. I think all of our foreign policy should be subject to fresh eyes. I think one of the -- I’ve said this before -- I am very proud of the work I’ve done. I think I’m a better President now than when I started. But if you’re here for eight years, in the bubble, you start seeing things a certain way and you benefit from -- the democracy benefits, America benefits from some new perspectives.

And I think it should be not just the prerogative but the obligation of a new President to examine everything that’s been done and see what makes sense and what doesn’t. That’s what I did when I came in, and I’m assuming any new President is going to undertake those same exercises.

And given the importance of the relationship between the United States and China, given how much is at stake in terms of the world economy, national security, our presence in the Asia Pacific, China’s increasing role in international affairs -- there’s probably no bilateral relationship that carries more significance and where there’s also the potential if that relationship breaks down or goes into a full-conflict mode, that everybody is worse off. So I think it’s fine for him to take a look at it.

What I’ve advised the President-elect is that across the board on foreign policy, you want to make sure that you’re doing it in a systematic, deliberate, intentional way. And since there’s only one President at a time, my advice to him has been that before he starts having a lot of interactions with foreign governments other than the usual courtesy calls, that he should want to have his full team in place, that he should want his team to be fully briefed on what’s gone on in the past and where the potential pitfalls may be, where the opportunities are, what we’ve learned from eight years of experience, so that as he’s then maybe taking foreign policy in a new direction, he’s got all the information to make good decisions and, by the way, that all of government is moving at the same time and singing from the same hymnal.

And with respect to China -- and let’s just take the example of Taiwan -- there has been a longstanding agreement, essentially, between China, the United States, and, to some degree, the Taiwanese, which is to not change the status quo. Taiwan operates differently than mainland China does. China views Taiwan as part of China, but recognizes that it has to approach Taiwan as an entity that has its own ways of doing things. The Taiwanese have agreed that as long as they’re able to continue to function with some degree of autonomy, that they won’t charge forward and declare independence.

And that status quo, although not completely satisfactory to any of the parties involved, has kept the peace and allowed the Taiwanese to be a pretty successful economy and a people who have a high degree of self-determination. But understand, for China, the issue of Taiwan is as important as anything on their docket. The idea of one China is at the heart of their conception as a nation.

And so if you are going to upend this understanding, you have to have thought through what the consequences are, because the Chinese will not treat that the way they’ll treat some other issues. They won’t even treat it the way they treat issues around the South China Sea, where we’ve had a lot of tensions. This goes to the core of how they see themselves. And their reaction on this issue could end up being very significant.

That doesn’t mean that you have to adhere to everything that’s been done in the past. It does mean that you’ve got to think it through and have planned for potential reactions that they may engage in.

All right. Isaac Dovere of Politico.

Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Two questions on where this all leaves us.

President Obama: What leaves us? Where my presidency leaves us?

Question: The election --

President Obama: It leaves us in a really good spot -- if we make some good decisions going forward.

Question: Well, what do you say to the electors who are going to meet on Monday and are thinking of changing their votes? Do you think that they should be given an intelligence briefing about the Russian activity? Or should they bear in mind everything you’ve said and is out already? Should they -- should votes be bound by the state votes as they’ve gone? And long term, do you think that there is a need for Electoral College reform that would tie it to the popular vote?

President Obama: It sounded like two, but that was all one.

Question: It was all one. You know the way this goes around here.

President Obama: I love how these -- I got two questions, each one has four parts.

Question: On the Democratic Party, your Labor Secretary is running to be the Chair of the Democratic National Committee. Is the vision that you’ve seen him putting forward what you think the party needs to be focused on? And what do you say to some of the complaints that say the future of the Democratic Party shouldn’t be a continuation of some of your political approach? Part of that is complaints that decisions that you’ve made as President, as the leader of the party, have structurally weakened the DNC and the Democratic Party, and they think that that has led to -- or has helped lead to some losses in elections around the country. Do you regret any of those decisions?

President Obama: Okay.

Question: Those are my two.

President Obama: Good. I’ll take the second one first and say that Tom Perez has been, I believe, one of the best secretaries of labor in our history. He is tireless. He is wicked smart. He has been able to work across the spectrum of labor, business, activists. He’s produced. I mean, if you look at his body of work on behalf of working people, what he’s pushed for in terms of making sure that workers get a fair deal, decent wages, better benefits, that their safety is protected on the job -- he has been extraordinary.

Now, others who have declared are also my friends and are fine people, as well. And the great thing is, I don’t have a vote in this, so we’ll let the process unfold. I don’t think it’s going to happen anytime soon. I described to you earlier what I think needs to happen, which is that the Democratic Party, whether that’s entirely through the DNC or through a rebuilding of state parties or some other arrangement, has to work at the grassroots level, has to be present in all 50 states, has to have a presence in counties, has to think about message and how are we speaking directly to voters.

I will say this -- and I’m not going to engage in too much punditry -- but that I could not be prouder of the coalition that I put together in each of my campaigns because it was inclusive, and it drew in people who normally weren’t interested in politics and didn’t participate. But I’d like to think -- I think I can show that in those elections, I always cast a broad net. I always said, first and foremost we’re Americans, that we have a common creed, that there’s more that we share than divides us, and I want to talk to everybody and get a chance to get everybody’s vote.

I still believe what I said in 2004, which is this red state/blue thing is a construct. Now, it is a construct that has gotten more and more powerful for a whole lot of reasons, from gerrymandering to big money, to the way that media has splintered. And so people are just watching what reinforces their existing biases as opposed to have to listen to different points of view. So there are all kinds of reasons for it.

But outside of the realm of electoral politics, I still see people the way I saw them when I made that speech -- full of contradictions, and there are some regional differences, but basically folks care about their families, they care about having meaningful work, they care about making sure their kids have more opportunity than they did. They want to be safe, they want to feel like things are fair. And whoever leads the DNC and any candidate with the Democratic brand going forward, I want them to feel as if they can reach out and find that common ground -- speak to all of America. And that requires some organization.

And you’re right that -- and I said this in my earlier remarks -- that what I was able to do during my campaigns, I wasn’t able to do during midterms. It’s not that we didn’t put in time and effort into it. I spent time and effort into it, but the coalition I put together didn’t always turn out to be transferable. And the challenge is that -- you know, some of that just has to do with the fact that when you’re in the party in power and people are going through hard times like they were in 2010, they’re going to punish, to some degree, the President’s party regardless of what organizational work is done.

Some of it has to do with just some deep-standing traditional challenges for Democrats, like during off-year election, the electorate is older and we do better with a younger electorate. But we know those things are true, and I didn’t crack the code on that. And if other people have ideas about how to do that even better, I’m all for it.

So with respect to the electors, I’m not going to wade into that issue because, again, it’s the American people’s job, and now the electors' job to decide my successor. It is not my job to decide my successor. And I have provided people with a lot of information about what happened during the course of the election. But more importantly, the candidates themselves, I think, talked about their beliefs and their vision for America. The President-elect, I think, has been very explicit about what he cares about and what he believes in. So it’s not in my hands now; it’s up to them.

Question: What about long-term about the Electoral College?

President Obama: Long-term with a respect to the Electoral College -- the Electoral College is a vestige, it’s a carryover from an earlier vision of how our federal government was going to work that put a lot of premium on states, and it used to be that the Senate was not elected directly, it was through state legislatures. And it’s the same type of thinking that gives Wyoming two senators with about half a million people, and California with 33 million get the same two.

So there are some structures in our political system, as envisioned by the Founders, that sometimes are going to disadvantage Democrats. But the truth of the matter is, is that, if we have a strong message, if we’re speaking to what the American people care about, typically the popular vote and the Electoral College vote will align.

And I guess part of my overall message here as I leave for the holidays is that if we look for one explanation or one silver bullet or one easy fix for our politics, then we’re probably going to be disappointed. There are just a lot of factors in what’s happened not just over the last few months, but over the last decade that has made both politics and governance more challenging. And I think everybody has raised legitimate questions and legitimate concerns.

I do hope that we all just take some time, take a breath -- this is certainly what I’m going to advise Democrats -- to just reflect a little bit more about how can we get to a place where people are focused on working together based on at least some common set of facts. How can we have a conversation about policy that doesn’t demonize each other. How can we channel what I think is the basic decency and goodness of the American people so it reflects itself in our politics, as opposed to it being so polarized and so nasty that, in some cases, you have voters and elected officials who have more confidence and faith in a foreign adversary than they have in their neighbors.

And those go to some bigger issues. How is it that we have some voters or some elected officials who think that Michelle Obama’s healthy eating initiative and school nutrition program is a great threat to democracy than our government going after the press if they’re issuing a story they don’t like? I mean, that’s an issue that I think we’ve got to wrestle with -- and we will.

People have asked me how do you feel after the election and so forth, and I say, well, look, this is a clarifying moment. It’s a useful reminder that voting counts, politics counts. What the President-elect is going to be doing is going to be very different than what I was doing, and I think people will be able to compare and contrast and make judgments about what worked for the American people.

And I hope that, building off the progress we’ve made, that what the President-elect is proposing works. What I can say with confidence is that what we’ve done works. That I can prove. I can show you where we were in 2008 and I can show you where we are now, and you can’t argue that we’re not better off. We are. And for that, I thank the American people and, more importantly, I thank -- well, not more importantly -- as importantly -- I was going to say Josh Earnest for doing such a great job. For that, I thank the American people. I thank the men and women in uniform who serve. I haven’t gotten to the point yet where I’ve been overly sentimental.

I will tell you, when I was doing my last Christmas party photoline -- many of you have participated in these; they’re pretty long -- right at the end of the line, the President’s Marine Corps Band comes in, those who had been performing, and I take a picture when them, and it was the last time that I was going to take a picture with my Marine Corps Band after an event, and I got a little choked up. Now, I was in front of Marines, so I had to, like, tamp it down.

But it was just one small example of all the people who have contributed to our success. I’m responsible for where we’ve screwed up. The successes are widely shared with all the amazing people who have been part of this Administration.

Thank you, everybody.

Mele Kalikimaka.

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# Reconciliation Address at Pearl Harbor

President Obama: Prime Minister Abe, on behalf of the American people, thank you for your gracious words. Thank you for your presence here today -- an historic gesture that speaks to the power of reconciliation and the alliance between the American and Japanese peoples; a reminder that even the deepest wounds of war can give way to friendship and lasting peace.

Distinguished guests, members of our armed forces -- and most of all, survivors of Pearl Harbor and their loved ones -- aloha.

Audience Members: Aloha.

President Obama: To Americans -- especially to those of us who call Hawaii home -- this harbor is a sacred place. As we lay a wreath or toss flowers into waters that still weep, we think of the more than 2,400 American patriots -- fathers and husbands, wives and daughters -- manning Heaven’s rails for all eternity. We salute the defenders of Oahu who pull themselves a little straighter every December 7th, and we reflect on the heroism that shone here 75 years ago.

As dawn broke that December day, paradise never seemed so sweet. The water was warm and impossibly blue. Sailors ate in the mess hall, or readied themselves for church, dressed in crisp white shorts and t-shirts. In the harbor, ships at anchor floated in neat rows: the California, the Maryland and the Oklahoma, the Tennessee, the West Virginia and the Nevada. On the deck of the Arizona, the Navy band was tuning up.

That morning, the ranks on men’s shoulders defined them less than the courage in their hearts. Across the island, Americans defended themselves however they could -- firing training shells, working old bolt-action rifles. An African-American mess steward, who would typically be confined to cleaning duties, carried his commander to safety, and then fired an anti-aircraft gun until he ran out of ammo.

We honor Americans like Jim Downing -- a gunner’s mate first class on the West Virginia. Before he raced to the harbor, his new bride pressed into his hand a verse of Scripture: “The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.” As Jim fought to save his ship, he simultaneously gathered the names of the fallen so that he could give closure to their families. He said, “It was just something you do.”

We remember Americans like Harry Pang -- a fireman from Honolulu who, in the face of withering fire, worked to douse burning planes until he gave his last full measure of devotion

-- one of the only civilian firefighters ever to receive the Purple Heart.

We salute Americans like Chief Petty Officer John Finn, who manned a .50-caliber machine gun for more than two hours and was wounded more than 20 times, earning him our nation’s highest military decoration, the Medal of Honor.

And it is here that we reflect on how war tests our most enduring values -- how, even as Japanese Americans were deprived of their own liberty during the war, one of the most decorated military units in the history of the United States was the 442nd Infantry Regiment and its 100th Infantry Battalion -- the Japanese-American Nisei. In that 442nd served my friend and proud Hawaiian, Daniel Inouye -- a man who was a senator from Hawaii for most of my life and with whom I would find myself proud to serve in the Senate chamber; a man who was not only a recipient of the Medal of Honor and the Presidential Medal of Freedom, but was one of the most distinguished statesmen of his generation as well.

Here at Pearl Harbor, America’s first battle of the Second World War roused a nation. Here, in so many ways, America came of age. A generation of Americans -- including my grandparents -- the Greatest Generation -- they did not seek war, but they refused to shrink from it. And they all did their part on fronts and in factories. And while, 75 years later, the proud ranks of Pearl Harbor survivors have thinned with time, the bravery we recall here is forever etched in our national heart. I would ask all our Pearl Harbor and World War II veterans who are able to, to please stand or raise your hands -- because a grateful nation thanks you.

The character of nations is tested in war, but it is defined in peace. After one of the most horrific chapters in human history -- one that took not tens of thousands, but tens of millions of lives -- with ferocious fighting across this ocean -- the United States and Japan chose friendship and peace. Over the decades, our alliance has made both of our nations more successful. It has helped underwrite an international order that has prevented another World War and that has lifted more than a billion people out of extreme poverty. And today, the alliance between the United States and Japan -- bound not only by shared interests, but also rooted in common values -- stands as the cornerstone of peace and stability in the Asia Pacific and a force for progress around the globe. Our alliance has never been stronger.

In good times and in bad, we are there for each other. Recall five years ago, when a wall of water bore down on Japan and reactors in Fukushima melted, America’s men and women in uniform were there to help our Japanese friends. Across the globe, the United States and Japan work shoulder-to-shoulder to strengthen the security of the Asia Pacific and the world -- turning back piracy, combating disease, slowing the spread of nuclear weapons, keeping the peace in war-torn lands.

Earlier this year, near Pearl Harbor, Japan joined with two dozen nations in the world’s largest maritime military exercise. That included our forces from U.S. Pacific Command, led by Admiral Harry Harris, the son of an American Naval officer and a Japanese mother. Harry was born in Yokosuka, but you wouldn’t know it from his Tennessee twang.

Thank you, Harry, for your outstanding leadership.

In this sense, our presence here today -- the connections not just between our governments, but between our people, the presence of Prime Minister Abe here today -- remind us of what is possible between nations and between peoples. Wars can end. The most bitter of adversaries can become the strongest of allies. The fruits of peace always outweigh the plunder of war. This is the enduring truth of this hallowed harbor.

It is here that we remember that even when hatred burns hottest, even when the tug of tribalism is at its most primal, we must resist the urge to turn inward. We must resist the urge to demonize those who are different. The sacrifice made here, the anguish of war, reminds us to seek the divine spark that is common to all humanity. It insists that we strive to be what our Japanese friends call otagai no tame ni -- “with and for each other.”

That’s the lesson of Captain William Callaghan of the Missouri. Even after an attack on his ship, he ordered that the Japanese pilot be laid to rest with military honors, wrapped in a Japanese flag sewn by American sailors. It’s the lesson, in turn, of the Japanese pilot who, years later, returned to this harbor, befriended an old Marine bugler and asked him to play taps and lay two roses at this memorial every month -- one for America’s fallen and one for Japan’s.

It’s a lesson our two peoples learn every day, in the most ordinary of ways -- whether it's Americans studying in Tokyo, young Japanese studying across America; scientists from our two nations together unraveling the mysteries of cancer, or combating climate change, exploring the stars. It’s a baseball player like Ichiro lighting up a stadium in Miami, buoyed by the shared pride of two peoples, both American and Japanese, united in peace and friendship.

As nations, and as people, we cannot choose the history that we inherit. But we can choose what lessons to draw from it, and use those lessons to chart our own futures.

Prime Minister Abe, I welcome you here in the spirit of friendship, as the people of Japan have always welcomed me. I hope that together, we send a message to the world that there is more to be won in peace than in war; that reconciliation carries more rewards than retribution.

Here in this quiet harbor, we honor those we lost, and we give thanks for all that our two nations have won -- together, as friends.

May God hold the fallen in His everlasting arms.

May He watch over our veterans and all who stand guard on our behalf.

May God bless us all.

Thank you.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Farewell Address to the United States Armed Forces

Well, good afternoon. It turns out these are easier when you're talking about somebody else. At a moment like this, I think of all the times I’ve stood before our men and women in uniform. Commissioning our newest officers. Presiding over promotions. Presenting the Commander-in Chief’s Trophy to -- the best football team in the military. I will let you argue over that one. I have never taken sides.

Secretary Carter, I could not be more grateful for your gracious words, but more importantly, for your outstanding leadership, across, as you noted, more than three decades and nearly all of my presidency. You have always given me, Ash, your best strategic counsel. You’ve made sure that we were investing in innovation for the long term and a strong Force of the Future. As a physicist, Ash is also one of the few people who actually understands how our defense systems work. And I know that our troops and their families are immensely grateful for the compassion that you and Stephanie have shown them over the years. So to you and your family, on behalf of all of us, thank you for your outstanding service.

General Dunford, we’ve relied on you as Commandant of the Marine Corps, as our commander in Afghanistan, and now, as our nation’s highest-ranking military officer. I thank you, and General Selva and the entire Joint Chiefs for the unvarnished military advice that you’ve always provided to me, for your dedication, for your professionalism, for you integrity. Because of you, because of this team, our Armed Forces are more integrated and better prepared across domains -- a truly Joint Force. Which is why, as a White Sox fan, I can overlook the fact that you love the Red Sox. Moreover, on a personal note, outside of your professional qualities, you are a good man, and I am grateful to have worked with you. And thank Ellyn for allowing you to do this.

To members of Congress; Vice President Biden -- who, along with Jill, has known the love and the pride and the sacrifice of a military family. To Deputy Secretary Work; service secretaries; distinguished guests; dedicated civilians from across the Defense Department; my national security team; most of all, our men and women in uniform. I thank you for this honor, and for the warmth and respect that you’ve always shown me, the support that you’ve shown Michelle and our daughters during these past eight years.

And so, although I recognize that the formalities require me listening to praise directed in large part to me, I want to turn the tables -- I am still Commander-in-Chief, so I get to do what I want to do -- and I want to thank you. Of all the privileges of this office -- and there are many -- I will miss Air Force One; I will miss Marine One; but I can stand before you today and say that there has been no greater privilege, and no greater honor, than serving as the Commander-in-Chief of the greatest military in the history of the world.

When I took office, I noted that Presidents and those of you in uniform swear a similar oath -- to protect and defend this country and the Constitution that we cherish. By stepping forward and volunteering, by raising your right hand and taking that oath, each of you made a solemn pledge. You committed yourself to a life of service and of sacrifice. And I, in turn, made a promise to you, which, to the best of my abilities, I've tried to uphold every single day since, that I would only send you into harm's way when it is absolutely necessary, with the strategy, the well-defined goals, with the equipment and the support that you needed to get the job done. Because that’s what you rightfully expect and that is what you rightfully deserve.

I made that pledge at a time when less than one percent of Americans wear the uniform. Fewer Americans know someone who serves. And as a result, a lot of Americans don’t see the sacrifices you make on our behalf. But as Commander-in-Chief, I do. I’ve seen it when I looked into the eyes of young cadets, knowing that my decisions could very well send them into harm’s way. I’ve seen it when I’ve visited the field -- at Bagram and Baghdad -- far from your families, risking your lives so that we can live ours safely and in freedom. And so you’ve inspired me, and I have been humbled by you consistently. And I want every American to know what I know -- through year after year after year of continuous military operations -- you have earned your place among the greatest generations.

The list of accomplishments that Joe and Ash so generously mentioned, they’re because of you. It's what I tell my staff -- I'm the front man, but you're the ones doing the work. Because of you, our alliances are stronger, from Europe to the Asia Pacific. Because of you, we surged in Afghanistan, trained Afghan forces to defend their country, while bringing most of our troops home. Today our forces serve there on a more limited mission -- because we must never again allow Afghanistan to be used for a safe haven in attacks against our nation.

It's because of you -- particularly our remarkable Special Forces -- that the core al Qaeda leadership that attacked us on 9/11 has been decimated. Countless terrorist leaders, including Osama bin Laden, are gone. From South Asia to Africa, we have forged partnerships to go after terrorists that threaten us. Because of you, we are leading a global coalition against ISIL. These terrorists have lost about half of their territory. They are losing their leaders. Towns and cities are being liberated. And I have no doubt this barbaric terrorist group will be destroyed -- because of you.

You've shown that when it comes to fighting terrorism, we can be strong and we can be smart. Not by letting our forces get dragged into sectarian conflicts and civil wars, but with smart, sustainable, principled partnerships. That’s how we’ve brought most of our troops home -- nearly 180,000 troops in Iraq and Afghanistan down to 15,000 today. That’s how, even as we’ve suffered terrible attacks here at home, from Boston to Orlando, no foreign terrorist organization has successfully planned and executed an attack on our homeland these past eight years.

Because of you, the world has seen the awesome reach of American Armed Forces. In some of the first few weeks of my job, when Somali pirates took Captain Phillips, later on, when they kidnapped Jessica Buchanan, it was you that went in and you that risked everything, and you that brought these Americans home to their families.

The world has seen your compassion -- the help you deliver in times of crisis, from an earthquake in Haiti to the tsunami in Japan. Think of Ebola and the countless lives this Armed Forces saved in West Africa. It was you that set up the architecture and set the example for the world's response. One woman in West Africa said, “We thanked God first and then we thanked America second for caring about us.” That’s the difference you make -- you continue to make -- in the lives of people around the world.

As you know well, with service comes great sacrifice. And after 15 years of war, our wounded warriors bear the scars -- both seen and unseen. In my visits to their bedsides and rehab centers, I have been in awe, watching a wounded warrior grab his walker and pull himself up and, and through excruciating pain, take a step, and then another. Or hearing troops describe how they grappled with post-traumatic stress but summoned the strength to ask for help. As a military and as a nation, we have to keep supporting our resilient and incredibly strong wounded warriors as they learn to walk and run and heal. As they find new ways to keep serving our nation, they need to know that we still need your incredible talents. You've given so much to America, and I know you have more to give.

And then you have not seen the depths of true love and true patriotism until you’ve been to Dover, when our troops receive our fallen heroes on their final journey home; until you have grieved with our Gold Star families who’ve given a piece of their heart to our nation -- a son or a daughter, a father or mother, a husband or wife, a brother or a sister. Every one a patriot. Every single one of these American families deserves the everlasting gratitude and support of our entire nation.

Today, after two major ground wars, our Armed Forces have drawn down, and that is natural and it is necessary. And after reckless budget cuts of sequester, we need to keep improving the readiness, and the training, and modernizing our forces. So let me take this opportunity, while I still have it, to appeal to our friends from Congress who are here: We cannot go back to sequestration. There is a responsible way forward -- investing in America’s strengths, our national security and our economic security. Investing in the reform and the equipment and support that our troops need, including the pay and the benefits, and the quality of life, and the education and the jobs that our troops and our veterans and all of your families deserve.

But make no mistake, even with the challenges of recent years -- and there have been challenges-- our allies and adversaries alike understand America’s military remains, by far, the most capable fighting force on the face of the Earth. Our Army, tested by years of combat, is the best-trained and best-equipped land force on the planet. Our Navy is the largest and most lethal in the world -- on track to surpass 300 ships. Our Air Force, with its precision and reach, is unmatched. Our Marine Corps is the world’s only truly expeditionary force. Our Coast Guard is the finest in the world.

And we’re also the best because this military has come to welcome the talents of more of our fellow Americans. Service members can now serve the country they love without hiding who they are or who they love. All combat positions in our military are now open to women. And Joe Biden and I know that women are at least as strong as men. We’re stronger for it. It’s one of the reasons that our military stands apart as the most respected institution in our nation by a mile. The American people look up to you and your devotion to duty, and your integrity, and your sense of honor, and your commitment to each other.

One of my proudest achievements is that I have been able to, I think, communicate through the constant partisan haze, along with so many others, how special this institution is, and the esteem in which our military is held has held steady and constant and high throughout my presidency. And I’m very grateful for that. Because you remind us that we are united as one team. At times of division, you’ve shown what it means to pull together.

So my days as your Commander-in-Chief are coming to an end, and as I reflect on the challenges we have faced together and on those to come, I believe that one of the greatest tasks before our Armed Forces is to retain the high confidence that the American people rightly place in you. This is a responsibility not simply for those of you in uniform, but for those who lead you. It’s the responsibility of our entire nation.

And so we are called to remember core principles: That we must never hesitate to act when necessary to defend our nation, but we must also never rush into war -- because sending you into harm’s way should be a last and not first resort. It should be compelled by the needs of our security and not our politics. We need to remember that we must not give in to the false illusion of isolationism, because in this dangerous time, oceans alone will not protect us, and the world still seeks and needs our leadership as the one indispensable nation.

We have to remember that our military has to be prepared for the full spectrum of threats, conventional and unconventional, from 20th century-style aggression to 21st century-style cyber threats. And when we do go to war, we have to hold ourselves to high standards and do everything in our power to prevent the loss of innocent life, because that’s what we stand for. That’s what we should stand for. We have to remember that as we meet the threats of our time, we cannot sacrifice our values or our way of life -- the rule of law and openness and tolerance that defines us as Americans, that is our greatest strength and makes us a beacon to the world. We cannot sacrifice the very freedoms that we’re fighting for.

And finally, in our democracy, the continued strength of our all-volunteer force also rests on something else -- a strong bond of respect and trust between those in uniform and the citizens that you protect and defend. At a time when too few Americans truly understand the realities or sacrifices of military service, at a time when many political leaders have not served, if some in the military begin to feel as though somehow they are apart from the larger society they serve those bonds can fray.

As every generation learns anew, freedom is not free. And so while less than 1 percent of Americans may be fighting our wars, 100 percent of Americans can do their parts -- at the very least -- to support you and your families. Everybody can do something -- every business, every profession, every school, every community, every state -- to reach out and to give back, and to let you know that we care, to help make the lives of our troops and your families just a little bit easier. Everybody can do something.

And that’s why Michelle and Jill Biden have mobilized more Americans to honor and support you and your families through Joining Forces. And that’s why, even after we leave the White House, Michelle and I intend to keep on looking for ways to help rally more of our fellow citizens to be there for you, just like you’ve always been there for us.

So we can’t say it enough and we can’t show it enough. Thank you for your patriotism. Thank you for your professionalism. Thank you for your character in representing the very best of the American spirit. Our nation endures -- we live free under the red, white and blue -- because of patriots like you.

It has been a privilege of a lifetime to serve with you. I have learned much from you. I’m a better man having worked with you. I’m confident that the United States and our Armed Forces will remain the greatest force for freedom and security that the world has ever known.

God bless you and your families.

And God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# VOX Live Interview at the Blair House

President Obama: Thank you. Good morning.

Ms. Kliff: Good morning.

Mr. Klein: Thank you for being here.

President Obama: It is great to be here. And thank you so much for all the good reporting you guys have been doing on this important issue.

Mr. Klein: Thank you.

Ms. Kliff: So we will get started. So there was an expectation that was shared among many of your staff, many congressional Democrats, that as the Affordable Care Act rolled out, as it delivered benefits to millions of people, that it would become more popular. It would be safe from repeal or even substantial reform. And it appears at this point that doesn’t seem to be quite true. What do you think that theory got wrong? Why didn’t the health care law become more popular?

President Obama: Well, let’s back up and say from the start there’s a reason why for a hundred years no President could get expansion of health care coverage beyond the work that had been done for Medicare and Medicaid, targeting primarily seniors. And the reason was that this is hard. The health care system is big; it is very personal. Families I think recognize the need for health insurance, but it's not something that they think about except when things go wrong -- when you have an accident or you're sick. And so any costs, particularly at a time when families are feeling stressed economically, any added costs, higher premiums, higher co-pays, all that ends up having real impacts on families.

And so the challenge of getting it passed was always the fact that, unlike other advanced countries, we didn’t start with a system in which everybody was covered, and we have a very complicated marketplace, and we have third-party insurers. And what that meant was that even after we got the law passed anything that dissatisfied people about the health care system could be attributed to -- quote, unquote -- “Obamacare,” even if it had nothing to do with Obamacare. And that was something that we recognized even when we were trying to get the law passed.

The other thing is the fact that the unwillingness of Republicans in Congress and around the country, including some governors, to, after the fight was over, say, all right, let’s try to make this work -- the way Democrats did during the time when President Bush tried to expand the prescription drug program, Part D -- meant that the public never heard from those who had originally been opposed any concession that, you know what, this is actually doing some good. And that ends up affecting public opinion.

And the third thing is that whenever you look at polls that say 40-something percent are supportive of the law and 40-something percent are dissatisfied -- in the dissatisfied column are a whole bunch of Bernie Sanders supporters who wanted a single-payer plan. And so the problem is not that they think Obamacare is a failure; the problem is that they don't think it went far enough and that it left too many people still uncovered, that the subsidies that people were getting weren’t as rich as they should have been, that there’s a way of dealing with prescription drug makers in a way that drives down those costs. And so all those things meant that even after the law was passed there was going to still be a lot tough politics.

Having said all that, the thing that I've been most proud of is the fact that not only have we gotten 20 million people covered, not only have we been able to reduce the pace at which health care costs have been going up -- ever since the law was passed, basically health care inflation has been as low as it's been in 50 years, which has saved the federal government hundreds of billions of dollars, extended the Medicare trust fund by 11 years -- but most importantly, for the people who have gotten insurance through the exchanges, there’s been pretty high satisfaction rates, as surveys have shown.

So rather than look at public opinion as a whole, the thing I've been most interested in is, how is this affecting the people who have gotten benefits? These are real families who have gotten real coverage. And I get letters every single day from people who say, this has saved my life, or this has saved my bank account, or this has made sure that my son who got hooked on some sort of opioid was able to get treatment, or I was able to get a mammogram that caught a cancer in time. And that ultimately is the measure of the success of the law.

Mr. Klein: So do you think this dynamic where when you reform the health care system, you own it goes the other way? Republicans are beginning with the repeal-and-delay strategy. President-elect Trump has said that he does want to repeal Obamacare, but he also wants to replace it with something that covers as many people -- or he said that at least at certain points.

Do you think that the dynamic in which you became responsible for what people didn’t like is going to hamper Republican movement in their efforts to change a system that maybe they don’t like but does have a lot of people relying on it?

President Obama: Well, let me start from a very simple premise: If it works, I’m for it. If something can cover all Americans, make sure that if they have a preexisting condition they can still get coverage, make sure that prescription drugs are affordable, encourage preventive measures to keep people healthy, that makes sure that in rural communities people have access to substance abuse care or mental health care, that Medicare and Medicaid continue to function effectively -- if you can do all that cheaper than we talked about, cheaper than Obamacare achieves and with better quality and it’s just terrific, I’m for it.

I think that part of the challenge in this whole debate. And this is true, dating back to 2009, back to 2010, is this idea that somehow we had a fixed way of trying to fix the health care system, that we were rigid and stubborn and wouldn’t welcome Republican ideas, and if we only had, they had all these great solutions. In fact, if you look at how this law evolved -- and I’ve said this publicly before, if I was starting from scratch, I probably would have supported a single-payer system because it’s just easier for people to understand and manage. And that’s essentially what Medicare is, is a single-payer system for people of a certain age. And people are very satisfied with it and it’s not that complicated to understand or to access services. But that wasn’t available; we weren’t starting from scratch.

So what did I then do? I said, well, where is a system out there that seems to be providing coverage for everybody that politically we could actually get through a Congress and where we could get Republican support. And lo and behold, in Massachusetts there was a plan that had been designed on a bipartisan basis -- including by a Republican governor who ultimately became the nominee for the Republican Party -- that came close to providing universal coverage. And I would have thought since this was an idea that had previously gotten a lot of Republican support that it would continue to get a lot of Republican support. And yet, somehow, magically, the minute we said this is a great idea and it’s working, Republicans said this is terrible and we don’t want to do this.

So I say all this, Ezra, simply to make something very clear. From the very start, in the earliest negotiations in 2009, 2010, I made clear to Republicans that, if they had ideas that they could show would work better than the ideas that we had thought of, I would be happy to incorporate them into the law. And rather than offer ideas, what we got was a big no, we just don’t want to do this.

After the law passed, for the last six, seven years, there has been the argument that we can provide a great replacement that will be much better for everybody than what the Affordable Care Act is providing. And yet, over the last six, seven years, there has been no actual replacement law that any credible health care policy experts have said would work better. In fact, many of them would result in millions of people losing coverage and the coverage being worse for those who kept it.

And so now is the time when Republicans, I think, have to go ahead and show their cards. If, in fact, they have a program that would genuinely work better and they want to call it whatever they want -- they can call it Trumpcare, they can call it McConnellcare, or Ryancare. If it actually works, I will be the first one to say, great, you should have told me that back in 2009. I asked. I suspect that will not happen.

And the reason it will not happen is because if you want to provide coverage to people, then there are certain baseline things that you got to do. Number one, health care is not cheap. And for people who can't afford health care or don’t get it through the job, that means the government has got to pay some money.

Number two, all those provisions that the Republicans say they want to keep and that they like -- for example, making sure that people can get health care even if they have a preexisting condition -- well, it turns out that the only way to meet that guarantee is to either make sure that everybody has some modest obligation to get health care so that they're not gaming the system, or you've got to be willing to provide huge subsidies to the insurance companies so that they're taking in people who are already sick.

And I think what you're going to see now that you have a Republican President-elect, you have Republicans who control both chambers in Congress -- is that all the promises they made about how they can do it better, cheaper, everybody is going to be satisfied, are going to be really hard to meet.

And this is why the strategy of repeal first and replace later is just a huge disservice to the American people, and is something that I think, whether you're a Republican or a Democrat, you should be opposed to. These are real lives at stake.

I'm getting letters right now from people who say, I am terrified because my son's or daughter's insurance -- their ability to get lifesaving drugs, their ability to get drug treatment, their ability to get mental health services are entirely dependent on us being able to afford and keep our insurance.

And if, in fact, there's going to be a massive undoing of what's one-sixth of our economy, then the Republicans need to put forward very specific ideas about how they're going to do it. People need to be able to debate it, they need to be able to study it the same way they did when we passed the Affordable Care Act. And let the American people gauge is this going to result in something better than what Obamacare has produced.

And if they're so convinced that they can do it better, they shouldn’t be afraid to make that presentation. It is really interesting to try to figure out why is it that they're trying to rush the repeal so quick. What is it that they're afraid of? Why wouldn’t they want to say, here's our plan, and show, side by side, here's why our plan is better than what Obamacare has produced? Because they have said, absolutely, adamantly, that they can do it better.

I am saying to every Republican right now, if you, in fact, can put a plan together that is demonstrably better than what Obamacare is doing, I will publicly support repealing Obamacare and replacing it with your plan. But I want to see it first. I want to see it first. And I want third-party, objective people -- whether it's the Congressional Budget Office or health care experts across the ideological spectrum, or Vox, or whoever --

Mr. Klein: We'd be happy to, yes.

President Obama: -- to just evaluate it. And the public will not have to take my word for it. They can -- we can designate some referees. And if they can show that they can do it better, cheaper, more effective, provide better coverage, why wouldn’t I be for it? Why wouldn’t I be for it?

This idea that somehow, oh, this is about Obama preserving his legacy -- keep in mind, I'm not the one who named it Obamacare. They were the ones who named it Obamacare, because what they wanted to do was personalize this and feed on antipathy towards me in their party as an organizing tool, as politics.

But I don’t have a pride of authorship on this thing. If they can come up with something better, I'm for it. But you have to show -- and I would advise every Democrat to be for it -- but you have to show that it's better. And that's not too much to ask. And that's the challenge.

And the question right now for Paul Ryan and Mitch McConnell is, why is it that you feel obliged to repeal it before you show what it is that is going to replace?

Because the majority of Americans have been very clear that they think that's a bad idea. You now have Republican governors, some Republican senators, who have said, we don’t think that's a good idea. And there's been no real explanation to why you would actually try to do this before the new President is even inaugurated. What exactly is this rush? Particularly if you're going to delay the actual repeal.

If they were making the argument that this is so disastrous that we actually think we have to repeal it completely today because it's just terrible, well, I would disagree, but at least I could understand it. But here you're saying, we're going to vote to repeal, but then were going to delay its effects for a couple of years. Well, why, if it's so bad?

And if the answer is, well, it would be disruptive and we don't want to take people’s insurance away right away, well, then that means you have time to show us and, more importantly, show the American people who need health insurance what exactly you're replacing it with.

In that sense -- Ezra, I know that was a long answer but in that sense, the answer is the Republicans, yes, will own the problems with the health care system if they choose to repeal something that is providing health insurance to a lot of people, and providing benefits to every American who has health insurance even if they’re getting it through the job, and they haven't shown us what it is that they’re going to do. Then they do own it. Because that is irresponsible. And even members of their own party, even those who are opposed to me, have said that that is an irresponsible thing to do.

Ms. Kliff: Let me follow up a little bit on the congressional fight. So we saw yesterday President-elect Donald Trump, he said yesterday on Twitter, “It's time for Republicans and Democrats to get together and come up with a health care plan that really works” -- which is something -- I remember you saying similar things in 2009, 2010, when I was covering this debate. Knowing what you know now about partisanship, a President who has tried to do this, was, like you said, unable to get Republican votes -- what three pieces of advice would you give someone trying to attempt to pass a bipartisan health care law?

President Obama: Well, look, I think I sort of gave the advice just now, which is, if, in fact, this is not about politics but this is about providing the best possible health care system for the American people, then my advice would be to say what precisely is it about Obamacare that you think doesn’t work. Because you’ve already said that there are some things you think do work.

The Republicans keep on saying, well, we want to keep the things that people like and that are working well. So they think that it's a good idea that Obamacare says your kids can stay on your health insurance plan until they’re 26. They think that's a good idea. They think it's a good idea that if you’ve got a preexisting condition you can still get health insurance. I assume they think it's a good idea that seniors have gotten discounts on their prescription drugs -- we closed the doughnut hole during the course of Obamacare. They approve of some of the changes we've made to encourage a health care system that rewards quality rather than just the number of procedures involved, and how we pay providers.

So we could make a list of all the things that, as terrible as Obamacare is, actually they think works, according to them. All right, well, let’s make, then, a list of the things they don't like or the American people are concerned about.

Well, what we know is that people would always like lower costs on their premiums and their out-of-pocket expenses. And although the Affordable Care Act provides a lot of subsidies to a lot of people so they can afford health insurance, what is absolutely true is we would love to see even higher subsidies to relieve the costs even more. But that costs money.

What we also know is that where we've seen problems in the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, it has been in certain areas, particularly more rural areas, less densely populated areas, where we're not seeing as many insurers so there’s not as much competition. Well, one way that we've suggested we could solve that problem is to say that if, in fact, there aren't enough insurers to drive competition and reduce costs and give people enough choices, then we should have a public option that's available.

So if you look at the things that people are frustrated about with Obamacare, the Affordable Care Act, the big things are the subsidies aren't as high as they’d like and they don't have as many options as they’d like. And I'm happy to provide both those things. I'd sign on to a Republican plan that said we're going to give more subsidies to people to make it even cheaper, and we're going to have a public option where there isn't an option.

Here’s the problem. I don't think that's the thing that they want to do.

Ms. Kliff: I don't think so, no.

President Obama: But I guess my point is this, that it is possible for people of goodwill to try to come up with significant improvements to the law that we already have, but it does require to be specific about what it is that you think needs to be changed. And that, so far, has not happened.

And my advice to the President-elect -- in fact, we talked about this when I met with him for an hour and a half right after he got elected -- I said make your team and make the Republican members of Congress come up with things that they can show will actually make this work better for people. And if they’re convincing, I think you would find that there are a lot of Democrats out there -- including me -- that would be prepared to support it. But so far, at least, that's not what’s happened.

Mr. Klein: I think Obamacare has exposed an interesting tension between controlling costs in the system and controlling economic pain for individuals. So the law has, until now, come in under budget. But part of the ways it's done that are higher deductibles than people expected, higher co-pays now in networks. In a couple of years, if it doesn’t change, the excise tax on high-value insurance will come into play, the individual mandate. And these things -- individual people -- while they keep the usage of health care down and they keep the cost of health care down, they make health care feel more expensive. They make health care feel unusable.

Do you think the Affordable Care Act got the balance right on controlling system-wide costs versus insulating individuals from their health expenses?

President Obama: Well, let me make a couple distinctions. First of all, part of what happened at the beginning of the marketplaces -- and for those who aren't wonks -- I was teasing Ezra and Sarah, I said this is like a Wonkapalooza. This is some serious policy detail, here.

But so the marketplaces are basically just those places where insurers put up, here’s the insurance package we're offering, and you can choose from a variety of different packages, and then once you’ve chosen you can figure out the subsidies that you're qualified for and that will give you a sense of what your out-of-pocket costs are.

And what we discovered was that a lot of insurers underpriced early on, because they had done surveys and -- look, people who are purchasing health insurance are like people who are purchasing everything else, they like to get the best deal for the lowest price. What makes health care tricky is, when you buy a TV you can kind of see what the picture looks like; when you're buying health insurance it's tempting to initially buy the cheapest thing -- until, heaven forbid, you get sick and it turns out, gosh, I can't see the doctor I want or the specialist I want, or this is more inconvenient than I expected.

So what ended up happening was people bought, oftentimes, the cheapest insurance that they could. Insurance companies, wanting to get as much market share as possible, ended up creating very low-cost plans, but those are going to have restrictions on them. And that's not just if you're buying health insurance in Obamacare, that's generally how it is even when employers buy health insurance for their employees.

Now, I think that what we're seeing is insurers now making adjustments, saying, okay, we need to charge more. And that is something that, the good news is, appears to -- may have stabilized and might be kind of a one-time thing, and now we're in a position to be able to do an evaluation of have we gotten this balance right, as you say.

We can't get health care for free. You're going to have to pay for it one way or another. Either the government is going to pay more so that people don't have as many out-of-pocket costs -- and that means, in some fashion, higher taxes for somebody -- or individuals are going to have to pay more out of pocket in one way or another.

The same is true for employers. Either employers pay more for a really good health care package, but that takes something out of the employer’s bottom line, or they’re putting more costs onto workers in the form of higher deductibles and higher co-pays.

And I think that a lot of the good work that can be done in lowering costs had to do not with cost shifting, but with actually making the system work better. And we've done a lot of work on that. What I referred to earlier, incentivizing a system that instead of ordering five tests because doctors and providers are getting paid for the test, you now have a system where you're going to get reimbursed if the person gets healthy quicker and is not returned to the hospital. Well, it turns out that that can, over time, be a real cost reduction.

Those are the kinds of things that we're implementing in the system as a consequence of Obamacare. The more we do that kind of stuff the less we're going to see this cost shifting. But the intention has never been to say let’s make it more expensive for people to get health care so they’re going to access the system more. And I think the proof of that is, is that even though per-person costs have not gone up a lot, the overall spending on health care has gone up because more people have come into the system.

We want people to use the health care system. We just don't want them to use it in the emergency room. We want them to use it to stay healthy -- and smoking cessation plans, and making sure that they’re getting regular checkups and mammograms, those are the things that are ultimately going to save us as much money as we can.

Ms. Kliff: I have a wonky follow-up question.

President Obama: There you go.

Ms. Kliff: What about controlling prices? We have some of the highest health care prices in the world in the United States. Most other developed countries, they regulate how much you can charge for an MRI, for an emergency room visit, for an appendectomy. That seems like it's really at the core of this tension, the fact that we have these very high prices. Americans don't go to the doctor more, we just pay a lot more when we go to the doctor. That is something the health care law did not tackle. And I'm curious to hear you reflect on that and what you would think about the role of price controls in American medicine.

President Obama: Well, look, this is the irony of this whole debate, is the things that people are most dissatisfied with about Obamacare, about the Affordable Care Act, are things that essentially in other countries are solved by more government control, not less. And so Republicans are pointing at these things to stir up dissatisfaction, but when it comes to, all right, what’s the solution for it, their answer is less government regulation and letting folks charge even more and doing whatever they want and letting the marketplace work its will.

I think that there are strengths to our system because we have a more market-based system. Our health care system is more innovative. Prescription drugs is probably the best example of this. It is true that we essentially come up with the new drugs in this country because our drug companies are fat and wealthy enough that they can invest in the research and development. They make bigger profits, which they can, then, plow back into drug development. And essentially we have a lot of other countries that are free riders on that system. So they can negotiate with the drug companies and force much lower prices, but they generally don't have a drug industry that develops new drugs.

That's true. This is an example where you probably do want some balance to maintain innovation, but to have some tougher negotiations around the system as a whole. And we are trying to use Medicare as the place where, since there’s no health care provider or stakeholder in the health care industry that doesn’t in some ways want to get Medicare business, we're trying to use Medicare as a lever to get better deals for consumers and better prices for consumers -- not just those in Medicare, but also people throughout the system.

But as I said, the irony is, is that when we tried to do that the people who are most resistant are the very Republican members of Congress who are criticizing us -- or at least telling the American people that you should want lower prices on various procedures.

If we want to control prices for consumers more, then the marketplace by itself will not do that. And the reason is because health care is not exactly like other products. It's not like buying a flat-screen TV. If you're sick, or if your kid is sick, most of the time you're not in a position to negotiate right there and then. You can't walk out of the store and say, well, I'm going to see if I can get a better deal. You're trying to figure out -- like when Sasha got meningitis when she was four months old -- make my child better, and that's all -- and I'll worry about the costs later. And that's the mentality that most people have when it comes to health care.

So the traditional models of the marketplace don't work perfectly in the health care system. There are areas where we can increase marketplace competition. There are areas in which we can make it work better. But ultimately, if we want to really get at some of these costs, there has to be some more expensive regulation in certain areas than we currently have.

Ms. Kliff: So I recently took a trip to an area of Kentucky -- on a slightly different topic -- I saw some huge coverage gains under the health care law, but also voted overwhelmingly for President-elect Trump. And one of the people I met there was Kathy Oller, who’s here with us today. She is an Obamacare enrollment worker who has signed up more than a thousand people for coverage. She supported you in 2008 and 2012, but voted for President-elect Trump in 2016, and expects him to improve on the Affordable Care Act. And she would like to ask you a question about that.

President Obama: Go ahead, Kathy.

Question: Hello, President Obama. I'm so excited to meet you.

President Obama: It's good to see you.

Question: Thanks. I'm a little bit nervous, as you can see. But over the years, I've enrolled and talked to numerous Kentuckians, and I've signed up some the first time -- so it was working -- in the Affordable Care Act. And also we've been, going over the years, and I've talked to people. But recently we found out that there was fewer choices in our area, and the increase in the premiums and deductibles, and our facilities aren’t even taking some of them. And many Kentuckians now are looking at the Affordable Care as unaffordable and unusable.

And I have the opportunity to ask you a few questions that you have probably went over, but how do you think this happened? How can we fix it? Do we start all over again? What do you think we should do?

President Obama: Well, first of all, Kathy, I want to thank you for being out there enrolling people.

Question: Thank you.

President Obama: That’s been hugely important.

The second point I would make is that Kentucky is a place where this has really worked, and it’s worked for two reasons. One is Kentucky expanded Medicaid. And we haven’t talked a lot about that, but a big chunk of Obamacare was just making Medicaid accessible to more people. And those states that expanded Medicaid have seen a much bigger drop in the uninsured than those states who didn’t.

And by the way, those states that didn’t, they didn’t do so just out of politics -- I’ll just be very blunt -- because the federal government was going to pay for this Medicaid expansion. And there are some states, because they had all this uncompensated care, ended up making money by providing more health insurance to your people. It was a hard bargain -- a hard deal to turn down, and yet you got a number of states that turned it down mainly because Republican governors and Republican state legislatures didn’t want to make it work.

Kentucky, under Steve Beshear, was one of those people that did expand Medicaid, had a really active program. Because I don’t poll that well in Kentucky, they didn’t call it Obamacare, they called it Connect -- Kentucky Connect, right?

And so there were a whole lot of people who said, well, we don’t like Obamacare but I like this program and we’ll signed you up, right? You signed people up, you didn’t tell them it was Obamacare all the time. And it’s actually worked. Right?

Now, what is true in Kentucky, though, is true in some other states. You had a governor who ran explicitly on the idea of rolling back Obamacare even though it was working. And so the state marketplace, the state exchange he dismantled, which means we had to shift everything onto the federal exchange. Most people got shifted, but it indicated a lack of interest and effort on his part in making the thing work. He promised to roll back Medicaid, but he started realizing that wasn’t as good politics as he thought it was when he was running, so he hasn’t done that.

But what is also true is -- and this is my main criticism of Obamacare, of the Affordable Care Act -- is that the subsidies aren’t as high as they probably should be for a lot of working people. If you don’t qualify for Medicaid where you don’t have to pay, for the most part, for your coverage, and instead you’re buying health insurance on the marketplace -- so you’re a working person but you don’t have a lot of money, and particularly if you are older, where you use the health care system more and you need a better benefit package than somebody 18 or 20 might, then there are families where the premiums are still too high.

And as I said earlier, there are some parts of the country where there are only a handful of hospitals and a few doctors, and where you don’t have a lot of competition, and the insurers are looking and they’re saying, we’re not going to make a lot of money there, so you don’t end up having a lot of insurance plans in those areas.

So the two things that we could do that would really make it work even better for people in Kentucky would be, number one, provide more subsidies to folks who are working hard every day but still find the premiums even with the subsidies hard to meet, and have the public option for those communities where they’re not getting a lot of competition and insurers aren’t coming in.

The problem is, is that that's not what's being proposed by Mitch McConnell, the senator from Kentucky. Instead what he's proposing, I gather, is you're going to repeal the law, then you're going to come up with something, except you will have taken away all the -- the way we pay for the subsidies for working people is we're taxing wealthier folks at a little bit higher. So he wants to cut those taxes, and that money would be gone right away. And then he's going to promise you, or those people who you've been signing up, better health care, except there's not going to be any money to pay for it. And nobody has explained to me yet how that's going to work.

And so I think this takes me back to the point I made earlier. If, in fact, the people you've been signing up, the folks in your communities, are not fully satisfied with the benefits that they're getting now and are hopeful for something better, then at the very least you should be putting pressure on your members of Congress to say, show us exactly what the deal is going to be for us before you take away the deal that we got. Because the people you sign up, they may not be as happy as they'd like, but -- tell me if I'm wrong -- they like it better than not having any insurance at all.

Ms. Kliff: And some didn’t even have insurance.

President Obama: And some people didn’t have insurance. Because I get letters from folks who say, for the first time in my life -- I have had a bad hip for 15 years and I've been pain-free for the first time because I finally got insurance. So the answer is not for them not to have insurance. And if we go back to a system where they've got to buy it on their own, they're not going to buy it because they'll have even less subsidy.

How much time do we got?

Mr. Klein: I think we're quite low.

President Obama: We got low time? Because I got all kinds of more stuff.

Mr. Klein: Well, it's your schedule. We're happy to keep you as long as you'd like.

President Obama: Well, there are a couple points I want to make in closing --

Mr. Klein: Excellent.

President Obama: -- but why don’t you ask some questions.

Mr. Klein: So one thing we haven’t touched on yet in much detail is the delivery system of follow-ups, which are a big part of the law. So what is a policy or experiment or change in that space that has over-performed your expectations? And what's one that has maybe not panned out as you’d liked or hoped?

President Obama: You know, I think a good example of something that's worked better than we expected, or at least worked as well as we expected is the issue of hospital readmissions. Now, it turns out that a lot of times you go to the hospital -- let's say, you get your appendix taken out, and then you go home and then there's a complication, and then you have to go back into the hospital. That's obviously inconvenient for you and it's expensive for the system as a whole. And it turns out that there are just a few things that you can do that help reduce people being readmitted.

First of all, making sure that the first procedure goes well, but, secondly, making sure that there's good follow-up. So it might be that a hospital or a health care system pays for, when you do go home, you just getting some phone calls to remind you to take the medicine that you got to take to make sure you heal properly -- because they may have done a study and it turns out that people forget to do what they're supposed to do, they don’t follow exactly their doctor's instructions, and they can't afford to have a nurse in their house who's doing it for them. Well, maybe there are just a few things that can be done to help make sure that they do what they are supposed to do, and that way they don’t have complications.

What we've seen is a significant reduction in hospital readmissions over the course of this law just by doing some smart incentivizing, just saying to the hospitals we'll reimburse you or we'll give you some other benefit for doing smart follow-up. That's an area where I think we've made some real progress.

The other place -- and this is connected -- where I think we've got some good bipartisan support is just encouraging what's called -- shifting from what's called fee-for-service payments, where you get paid by the procedure, which means that you may end up getting five tests instead of getting one test that's emailed to five providers who are treating you. And we've started to see some real movement when we say to the system as a whole we're going to pay you for outcomes -- did the patient do well. And that has been helpful.

In terms of areas where I think we haven’t seen as much improvement as I'd like, it's probably -- one thing that comes to mind is on the electronic medical records. If you think about how wired and plugged in everybody is now -- I mean, you can basically do everything off your phone. The fact that there are still just mountains of paperwork, and you don’t understand what these bills are that still get sent to your house, and nobody -- and the doctors still have to input stuff, and the nurses are spending all their time on all this administrative work -- we put a big slug of money into trying to encourage everybody to digitalize, catch up with the rest of the world here.

And it's proven to be harder than we expected, partly because everybody has different systems, they don’t all talk to each other. It requires retraining people in how to use them effectively. And I'm optimistic that over time it's inevitable that it's going to get better, because every other part of our lives, it's become paperless. But it's been a lot slower than I would have expected.

And some of it has to do with the fact that, as I said, it's decentralized and everybody has different systems. In some cases, you have sort of economic incentives that are pushing against making the system work better. For example, there are service providers -- people make money on keeping people's medical records, so making it easier for everybody to access each other's medical records means that there are some folks who could lose business. And that has turned out to be a little more complicated than I expected.

Ms. Kliff: Do you have any closing remarks? And one thing I'm interested in is kind of what you see your role in this debate we're gearing up for.

President Obama: Well, let me make a couple of closing remarks. Number one, I think it is important to remember that just because people campaigned on repealing this law, it is a much more complicated process to repeal this law than I think was being presented on the campaign trail, as my Republican friends are discovering.

The way this process is going to work, there's this rushed vote that's taking place this week, next week to -- quote, unquote -- "repeal Obamacare." But really all that is, is it's a resolution that is then instructing these committees in Congress to start actually drafting a law that specifically would say what's being repealed and what's not. Then, after that, they'd have to make a decision about what's going to replace it and how long is that going to take. And that stretches the process out further.

And so I think, whether you originally supported Obamacare or you didn’t, whether you like me or you don’t, the one thing I would just ask all the American people to do is adopt the slogan of the great state of Missouri -- "Show me." Show me. Do not rush this process.

And to Republicans, I would say: What are you scared of? If you are absolutely convinced, as you have been adamant about for the last seven years, that you can come up with something better, go ahead and come up with it. And I'll even cut you some slack for the fact that you've been saying you can come up with something better for seven years and I've never seen it. But we'll restart the clock.

It's interesting that we're here in the Blair House because this is a place where I met, in front of the American people, with Republicans who had already indicated their adamant opposition to health care. And I sat with them for a couple hours -- how long was it?

Secretary Sebelius: Eight.

President Obama: Eight hours. Kathleen Sebelius, who is my Secretary of Health and Human Services, remembers -- for eight hours, on live TV, to talk about here's why we're trying to do what we're doing here, and challenging them to come up with better answers than the ones we had come up with. And we spent a year of really significant debate.

And I would think that given that we now have proof that 20 million people do have health insurance, that we're at the lowest rate of uninsured in our history, that health care costs, rather than spiking way up, have actually gone up slower than they have in 50 years; given that the vast majority of people who get health insurance through Obamacare have said they're satisfied with their care and that they're better off than when they didn’t have care; given that even though a lot of people don’t know it, even if you're not getting health insurance through Obamacare, you've benefitted, because if you get health insurance on the job, it now doesn’t have a lifetime limit, it doesn’t have fine print that could end up costing you a lot of money -- given all those things, I would think that you'd at least want to explain to the American people what it is that you want to do.

And that, I think, is a minimum expectation out of this Congress and out of the President-elect.

I'm make a second point, and that is that we just worked, on a bipartisan basis, to sign something called the Cures Bill that included two really important bipartisan priorities. One was Joe Biden's Cancer Moonshot initiative -- because we're seeing so many medical breakthroughs in so many areas that we have an opportunity to make a real dent in how we deal with cancer, which affects everybody in some fashion -- somebody has been touched in your family with this terrible disease. So we got a lot more money for research in that, and the bill also contained a big investment in the opioid challenge.

As many of you know, you’re seeing more and more communities that are being ravaged by, initially, prescription drugs; then that ends up being a gateway into heroin, some of which, like synthetic heroin being produced called Fentanyl, just has terrible rates of overdose deaths. And this is not an inner-city problem, per se, but this is reaching every community. In some ways, it’s worse in a lot of rural communities.

So there was a bipartisan effort for us to put some more money into that. But here’s the thing. If we just put money into cancer research, and we just put money into dealing with the opioid crisis, and now we’re taking away money that is providing drug treatment services in those very same communities by repealing Obamacare, and taking away the ability to access a doctor to get new cancer treatments, then we’re not really helping anybody. So that’s a second point I want to make.

A third point I want to make is that I would encourage local communities to get involved in this process. And I think part of the problem with this whole law has been that the people who benefit aren’t out there making noise, and the people who ideologically have opposed it have been really loud. Well, now is the time for people who have benefitted or seen their families benefit to tell their stories.

Because, ultimately, this is not a political game. This is really something that affects people in the most personal ways. My friend, Natoma Canfield, is here in the front row. Some of you heard Natoma’s story before, where -- a cancer survivor who, because she had now a preexisting condition, was faced with either keeping her health insurance at such a high rate -- the only way she could get health insurance with a preexisting condition was to basically pay so much that she could no longer afford to pay the mortgage on her house.

And I remember her writing to me, and I thought, that could be my mom. That could be yours. And that’s not a choice that people should have to make. And when most people, even if they’re not Obama supporters, hear Natoma’s story or the stories of other people who have been helped, they know it’s wrong to just take away their health care. And it becomes less about who’s winning here in Washington. It becomes about how are we doing right by our fellow Americans.

But those stories have to be heard. And I would just encourage people to start telling their stories. And tell their stories -- you’re not always going to get a lot of attention here in Washington because they want to know this vote and this insult that was hurled back-and-forth between whoever. But you know what, tell that story in your local newspapers. Talk to your local reporters. Congregations that are involved in caring for those in need, make sure that you’re telling stories in church and in services so that people know.

Because the one thing that I’m convinced about is the American people want to do the right thing. They just -- it’s hard to get good information, and unless you’re reading Vox every day, which is hard to do --

Mr. Klein: It’s not that hard to do.

President Obama: -- getting the details of all this policy is hard. It’s complicated. You don’t know what’s true; you don’t know what’s not true.

I mean, those folks in Kentucky that you’ve signed up -- there are a lot of people who voted for not just a President, but also for a member of Congress who said, explicitly, we’re going to eliminate this. Well, I understand why people might think, okay, well, he’s going to eliminate it, but he will give us something better. But this is hard. And what you don’t want is a situation where they make a promise that they can’t keep.

And I’ve worked on this a long time. If we had had a better way to do this, we would have done it. It would have been in my interest to do it, because I knew I was going to be judged on whether or not it worked. And those areas that don’t work had to do with there not being enough money in the system and not having a public option. And I’m more than happy to put those fixes in place, anytime, anyplace. But that’s not, so far, what the Republicans are proposing. You deserve to know what it is that they’re doing.

So, anyway, I appreciate you guys taking the time to tell the story.

Mr. Klein: Real quick, Sarah had asked about your role going forward.

President Obama: Oh, my role going forward? Well, look, I mean, I do deserve a little sleep. And I’ve got to take Michelle on a vacation. But I’ve said consistently that the most important office in a democracy is the office of citizen. And I will be a citizen who still remembers what it was like when his mom died of cancer younger than I am now, and who didn’t have all the insurance and disability insurance and support, and wasn’t using the health care system enough to have early detection that might have prevented her from passing away.

You know, Michelle’s dad had multiple sclerosis -- MS -- but was part of that generation that just didn’t have a lot of expectations about health care and so just kind of suffered for years. I mean, those are our stories. So it’s not like I’m going to suddenly fade away on this. I will be a part of the work of our fellow citizens in trying to make sure that the wealthiest country on Earth is able to do the same thing that every other advanced country is able to do.

I mean, it’s not as if this has never been done before. If you’re in Canada, you got health care, no matter who you are. If you’re in France, you got health care. If you’re in England, you got health care. If you’re in Australia, you got health care. If you’re in New Zealand, you got health care.

I remember talking to my friend, John Key, who was the Prime Minister of New Zealand. He is part of the Conservative Party in New Zealand. And he said to me in the middle of this health care debate, he said, boy, if I proposed that we took away people’s health care, that we repealed it, I’d be run out of office by my own party. Because it was just assumed that, in a country this wealthy that this is one of the basic rights, not privileges, of citizenship in a well-to-do country like ours.

So I’ll be working with all of you. But my voice is going to be less important than the voices of people who are directly affected. And so I would urge everybody to make your voice heard. Now is the time to do it.

The people who have opposed this were opposing it not based on facts, but were opposing it based on sort of an ideological concern about expansion on the state, and taxes on wealthier people that are helping people who don’t have as much money. And I respect their role in the democracy. They’ve been really fighting hard. Well, folks here got to fight just as hard.

My final piece of advice would be to the news media, which is, generally speaking, when Obamacare has worked well it wasn’t attributed to Obamacare, and when there were problems they got front-page headlines. And I think that, hopefully, now is a time where people can be a little -- this doesn’t apply to Vox, by the way. But I think it would be a good time for people to be a little more measured and take a look at what are the facts of this thing. Because the stakes are high.

Even on this whole premium issue -- increase issue that happened right before the election, it is true, as I said, that insurers adjusted and hiked premiums. But I kept on trying to explain, number one, if you’re getting a tax subsidy, this wasn’t going to affect your out-of-pocket costs because the tax credit would just go up. But nobody kind of heard that.

And number two, these increases in premiums only applied to people who were buying health insurance on the exchanges. In fact, 85 percent of the people don’t get health insurance through Obamacare. And for you, your health care premiums actually have gone up a lot less since Obamacare was passed than they did before Obamacare was passed. The average family has probably saved about $3,000 in lower health care premiums than if you had seen those same health care cost trends increase at the pace that they did before the law was passed. But I didn’t see a lot of headlines about that -- which I understand, I mean because it’s not controversial enough, or it’s a little bit too complicated to get in a sound bite.

So that’s why the individual voice is so important. And that’s why I’m so appreciative of journalists who actually know what they’re talking about.

Mr. Klein: Thank you, Mr. President.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Presidential Farewell Address

My fellow Americans:

Michelle and I have been so touched by all the well-wishes that we’ve received over the past few weeks. But tonight -- tonight it’s my turn to say thanks. Whether we have seen eye-to-eye or rarely agreed at all, my conversations with you, the American people -- in living rooms and in schools; at farms, on factory floors; at diners and on distant military outposts -- those conversations are what have kept me honest, and kept me inspired, and kept me going. And every day, I have learned from you. You made me a better President, and you made me a better man.

So I first came to Chicago when I was in my early 20s. And I was still trying to figure out who I was, still searching for a purpose to my life. And it was the neighborhood not far from here where I began working with church groups in the shadows of closed steel mills. It was on these streets where I witnessed the power of faith, and the quiet dignity of working people in the face of struggle and loss.

Audience Members: Four more years! Four more years...!

President Obama: I can't do that.

Now, this is where I learned that change only happens when ordinary people get involved, and they get engaged, and they come together to demand it.

After eight years as your President, I still believe that. And it’s not just my belief. It’s the beating heart of our American idea -- our bold experiment in self-government. It’s the conviction that we are all created equal, endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights, among them life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It’s the insistence that these rights, while self-evident, have never been self-executing; that we, the people, through the instrument of our democracy, can form a more perfect union.

What a radical idea, the great gift that our Founders gave to us: the freedom to chase our individual dreams through our sweat, and toil, and imagination -- and the imperative to strive together as well, to achieve a common good, a greater good.

For 240 years, our nation’s call to citizenship has given work and purpose to each new generation. It’s what led patriots to choose republic over tyranny, pioneers to trek west, slaves to brave that makeshift railroad to freedom. It’s what pulled immigrants and refugees across oceans and the Rio Grande. It's what pushed women to reach for the ballot. It's what powered workers to organize. It’s why GIs gave their lives at Omaha Beach and Iwo Jima; Iraq and Afghanistan -- and why men and women from Selma to Stonewall were prepared to give theirs as well.

So -- So that’s what we mean when we say America is exceptional. Not that our nation's been flawless from the start, but that we have shown the capacity to change, and make life better for those who follow.

Yes, our progress has been uneven. The work of democracy has always been hard; it's always been contentious. Sometimes it's been bloody. For every two steps forward, it often feels that we take one step back. But the long sweep of America has been defined by forward motion, a constant widening of our founding creed to embrace all, and not just some.

If I had told you eight years ago that America would reverse a great recession, reboot our auto industry, and unleash the longest stretch of job creation in our history, if I had told you that we would open up a new chapter with the Cuban people, shut down Iran’s nuclear weapons program without firing a shot, take out the mastermind of 9/11, if I had told you that we would win marriage equality, and secure the right to health insurance for another 20 million of our fellow citizens -- if I had told you all that, you might have said our sights were set a little too high.

But that’s what we did.

That’s what you did.

You were the change.

You answered people’s hopes, and because of you, by almost every measure, America is a better, stronger place than it was when we started.

In 10 days, the world will witness a hallmark of our democracy --

Audience Members: Boo....

President Obama: No, no, no, no, no.

The peaceful transfer of power from one freely elected President to the next. I committed to President-elect Trump that my Administration would ensure the smoothest possible transition, just as President Bush did for me. Because it’s up to all of us to make sure our government can help us meet the many challenges we still face.

We have what we need to do so. We have everything we need to meet those challenges. After all, we remain the wealthiest, most powerful, and most respected nation on Earth. Our youth, our drive, our diversity and openness, our boundless capacity for risk and reinvention means that the future should be ours.

But that potential will only be realized if our democracy works; only if our politics better reflects the decency of the our people; only if all of us, regardless of party affiliation or particular interests, help restore the sense of common purpose that we so badly need right now.

That’s what I want to focus on tonight: the state of our democracy.

Understand, democracy does not require uniformity. Our Founders argued, they quarreled, eventually they compromised. They expected us to do the same. But they knew that democracy does require a basic sense of solidarity -- the idea that for all our outward differences, we're all in this together; that we rise or fall as one.

There have been moments throughout our history that threatened that solidarity. And the beginning of this century has been one of those times: a shrinking world, growing inequality, demographic change, and the specter of terrorism. These forces haven’t just tested our security and our prosperity, but are testing our democracy as well. And how we meet these challenges to our democracy will determine our ability to educate our kids, and create good jobs, and protect our homeland. In other words, it will determine our future.

To begin with, our democracy won’t work without a sense that everyone has economic opportunity. And the good news is that today the economy is growing again; wages, incomes, home values, and retirement accounts are all rising again; poverty is falling again. The wealthy are paying a fairer share of taxes even as the stock market shatters records. The unemployment rate is near a ten-year low. The uninsured rate has never, ever been lower. Health care costs are rising at the slowest rate in 50 years. And I've said -- and I mean it -- if anyone can put together a plan that is demonstrably better than the improvements we’ve made to our health care system -- that covers as many people at less cost -- I will publicly support it. Because that, after all, is why we serve -- not to score points or take credit, but to make people’s lives better.

But, for all the real progress that we’ve made, we know it’s not enough. Our economy doesn’t work as well or grow as fast when a few prosper at the expense of a growing middle class, and ladders for folks who want to get into the middle class. That's the economic argument, but stark inequality is also corrosive to our democratic idea. While the top one percent has amassed a bigger share of wealth and income, too many of our families, in inner cities and in rural counties, have been left behind: the laid-off factory worker; the waitress or health care worker who's just barely getting by and struggling to pay the bills -- convinced that the game is fixed against them, that their government only serves the interests of the powerful. That's a recipe for more cynicism and polarization in our politics.

And there are no quick fixes to this long-term trend. I agree, our trade should be fair and not just free. But the next wave of economic dislocations won’t come from overseas. It will come from the relentless pace of automation that makes a lot of good, middle-class jobs obsolete.

And so we're going to have to forge a new social compact -- to guarantee all our kids the education they need; to -- to give workers the power to unionize for better wages; to update the social safety net to reflect the way we live now, and make more reforms to the tax code so corporations and individuals who reap the most from this new economy don’t avoid their obligations to the country that’s made their very success possible.

We can argue about how to best achieve these goals. But we can’t be complacent about the goals themselves. For if we don’t create opportunity for all people, the disaffection and division that has stalled our progress will only sharpen in years to come.

There’s a second threat to our democracy -- and this one is as old as our nation itself. After my election, there was talk of a "post-racial America." And such a vision, however well-intended, was never realistic. Race remains a potent and often divisive force in our society. Now I’ve lived long enough to know that race relations are better than they were 10 or 20 or 30 years ago, no matter what some folks say. You can see it not just in statistics. You see it in the attitudes of young Americans across the political spectrum.

But we’re not where we need to be. And all of us have more work to do. If every economic issue is framed as a struggle between a hardworking white middle class and undeserving minority, then workers of all shades are going to be left fighting for scraps while the wealthy withdraw further into their private enclaves. If we're unwilling to invest in the children of immigrants just because they don’t look like us, we will diminish the prospects of our own children -- because those brown kids will represent a larger and larger share of America’s workforce. And we have shown that our economy doesn’t have to be a zero-sum game. Last year, incomes rose for all races, all age groups, for men and for women.

So, if we're going to be serious about race, going forward, we need to uphold laws against discrimination -- in hiring, and in housing, and in education, and in the criminal justice system. That is what our Constitution and our highest ideals require. But laws alone won’t be enough. Hearts must change. They won't change overnight. Social attitudes oftentimes take generations to change, but if our democracy is to work the way it should in this increasingly diverse nation, then each one of us need to try to heed the advice of a great character in American fiction -- Atticus Finch, who said “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view…until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.”

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For blacks and other minority groups, that means tying our own very real struggles for justice to the challenges that a lot of people in this country face -- not only the refugee, or the immigrant, or the rural poor, or the transgender American, but also the middle-aged white guy who, from the outside, may seem like he's got advantages, but has seen his world upended by economic and cultural and technological change. We have to pay attention, and listen.

For white Americans, it means acknowledging that the effects of slavery and Jim Crow didn't suddenly vanish in the '60s -- that when minority groups voice discontent, they're not just engaging in reverse racism or practicing political correctness. When they wage peaceful protest, they're not demanding special treatment but the equal treatment that our Founders promised.

For native-born Americans -- For native-born Americans it means reminding ourselves that the stereotypes about immigrants today were said, almost word for word, about the Irish, and Italians, and Poles -- who it was said we're going to destroy the fundamental character of America. And as it turned out, America wasn't weakened by the presence of these newcomers; these newcomers embraced this nation's creed, and this nation was strengthened.

So regardless of the station that we occupy, we all have to try harder. We all have to start with the premise that each of our fellow citizens loves this country just as much as we do; that they value hard work and family just like we do; that their children are just as curious and hopeful and worthy of love as our own.

And that's not easy to do. For too many of us, it's become safer to retreat into our own bubbles, whether in our neighborhoods or on college campuses, or places of worship, or especially our social media feeds, surrounded by people who look like us and share the same political outlook and never challenge our assumptions. And the rise of naked partisanship, and increasing economic and regional stratification, the splintering of our media into a channel for every taste -- all this makes this great sorting seem natural, even inevitable. And increasingly, we become so secure in our bubbles that we start accepting only information, whether it's true or not, that fits our opinions, instead of basing our opinions on the evidence that is out there. And this trend represents a third threat to our democracy.

But politics is a battle of ideas. That's how our democracy was designed. In the course of a healthy debate, we prioritize different goals, and the different means of reaching them. But without some common baseline of facts, without a willingness to admit new information, and concede that your opponent might be making a fair point, and that science and reason matter -- then we're going to keep talking past each other, and we'll make common ground and compromise impossible.

And isn't that part of what so often makes politics dispiriting? How can elected officials rage about deficits when we propose to spend money on preschool for kids, but not when we're cutting taxes for corporations? How do we excuse ethical lapses in our own party, but pounce when the other party does the same thing? It's not just dishonest, this selective sorting of the facts; it's self-defeating. Because, as my mother used to tell me, reality has a way of catching up with you.

Take the challenge of climate change. In just eight years, we've halved our dependence on foreign oil; we've doubled our renewable energy; we've led the world to an agreement that has the promise to save this planet. But without bolder action, our children won't have time to debate the existence of climate change. They'll be busy dealing with its effects: more environmental disasters, more economic disruptions, waves of climate refugees seeking sanctuary.

Now, we -- we can and should argue about the best approach to solve the problem. But to simply deny the problem not only betrays future generations, it betrays the essential spirit of this country -- the essential spirit of innovation and practical problem-solving that guided our Founders.

It is that spirit -- It is that spirit, born of the Enlightenment, that made us an economic powerhouse -- the spirit that took flight at Kitty Hawk and Cape Canaveral; the spirit that cures disease and put a computer in every pocket.

It’s that spirit -- a faith in reason, and enterprise, and the primacy of right over might -- that allowed us to resist the lure of fascism and tyranny during the Great Depression; that allowed us to build a post-World War II order with other democracies, an order based not just on military power or national affiliations but built on principles -- the rule of law, human rights, freedom of religion, and speech, and assembly, and an independent press.

That order is now being challenged -- first by violent fanatics who claim to speak for Islam; more recently by autocrats in foreign capitals who see free markets and open democracies and and civil society itself as a threat to their power. The peril each poses to our democracy is more far-reaching than a car bomb or a missile. They represent the fear of change; the fear of people who look or speak or pray differently; a contempt for the rule of law that holds leaders accountable; an intolerance of dissent and free thought; a belief that the sword or the gun or the bomb or the propaganda machine is the ultimate arbiter of what’s true and what’s right.

Because of the extraordinary courage of our men and women in uniform, because of our intelligence officers, and law enforcement, and diplomats who support our troops, no foreign terrorist organization has successfully planned and executed an attack on our homeland these past eight years. And although Boston and Orlando and San Bernardino and Fort Hood remind us of how dangerous radicalization can be, our law enforcement agencies are more effective and vigilant than ever. We have taken out tens of thousands of terrorists -- including bin Laden. The global coalition we’re leading against ISIL has taken out their leaders, and taken away about half their territory. ISIL will be destroyed, and no one who threatens America will ever be safe.

And to all who serve, or have served, it has been the honor of my lifetime to be your Commander-in-Chief. And we all owe you a deep debt of gratitude.

But protecting our way of life, that's not just the job of our military. Democracy can buckle when it gives in to fear. So just as we, as citizens, must remain vigilant against external aggression, we must guard against a weakening of the values that make us who we are.

And that’s why, for the past eight years, I’ve worked to put the fight against terrorism on a firmer legal footing. That’s why we’ve ended torture, worked to close Gitmo, reformed our laws governing surveillance to protect privacy and civil liberties. That’s why I reject discrimination against Muslim Americans, who are just as patriotic as we are.

That’s why -- That's why we cannot withdraw -- That's why we cannot withdraw from big global fights -- to expand democracy, and human rights, and women’s rights, and LGBT rights. No matter how imperfect our efforts, no matter how expedient ignoring such values may seem, that's part of defending America. For the fight against extremism and intolerance and sectarianism and chauvinism are of a piece with the fight against authoritarianism and nationalist aggression. If the scope of freedom and respect for the rule of law shrinks around the world, the likelihood of war within and between nations increases, and our own freedoms will eventually be threatened.

So let’s be vigilant, but not afraid. ISIL will try to kill innocent people. But they cannot defeat America unless we betray our Constitution and our principles in the fight. Rivals like Russia or China cannot match our influence around the world, unless we give up what we stand for, and turn ourselves into just another big country that bullies smaller neighbors.

Which brings me to my final point: Our democracy -- Our democracy is threatened whenever we take it for granted. All of us, regardless of party, should be throwing ourselves into the task of rebuilding our democratic institutions. When voting rates in America are some of the lowest among advanced democracies, we should be making it easier, not harder, to vote. When -- When trust in our institutions is low, we should reduce the corrosive influence of money in our politics, and insist on the principles of transparency and ethics in public service. When Congress is dysfunctional, we should draw our congressional districts to encourage politicians to cater to common sense and not rigid extremes.

But remember, none of this happens on its own. All of this depends on our participation, on each of us accepting the responsibility of citizenship, regardless of which way the pendulum of power happens to be swinging.

Our Constitution is a remarkable, beautiful gift. But it’s really just a piece of parchment. It has no power on its own. We, the people, give it power. We, the people, give it meaning -- with our participation, and with the choices that we make, and the alliances that we forge; whether or not we stand up for our freedoms; whether or not we respect and enforce the rule of law. That's up to us.

America is no fragile thing. But the gains of our long journey to freedom are not assured.

In his own farewell address, George Washington wrote that self-government is the underpinning of our safety, prosperity, and liberty, but “from different causes and from different quarters much pains will be taken, [many artifices employed] to weaken in your minds the conviction of this truth.” And so we have to preserve this truth with “jealous anxiety;” that we should reject “the first dawning of every attempt to alienate any portion of our country from the rest, or to enfeeble the sacred ties” that make us one.

America, we weaken those ties when we allow our political dialogue to become so corrosive that people of good character aren't even willing to enter into public service; so coarse with rancor that Americans with whom we disagree are seen not just as misguided but as malevolent. We weaken those ties when we define some of us as more American than others; when we write off the whole system as inevitably corrupt; and when we sit back and blame the leaders we elect without examining our own role in electing them.

It falls to each of us to be those anxious, jealous guardians of our democracy; to embrace the joyous task we’ve been given to continually try to improve this great nation of ours. Because for all our outward differences, we, in fact, all share the same proud title, the most important office in a democracy: "citizen."

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itizen

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So, you see, that’s what our democracy demands. It needs you. Not just when there’s an election; not just when your own narrow interest is at stake; but over the full span of a lifetime. If you’re tired of arguing with strangers on the Internet, try talking with one of them in real life. If something needs fixing, then lace up your shoes and do some organizing. If you’re disappointed by your elected officials, grab a clipboard, get some signatures, and run for office yourself.

Show up.

Dive in.

Stay at it.

Sometimes you’ll win. Sometimes you’ll lose. Presuming a reservoir of goodness in other people, that can be a risk, and there will be times when the process will disappoint you. But for those of us fortunate enough to have been a part of this work, and to see it up close, let me tell you: It can energize and inspire. And more often than not, your faith in America, and in Americans, will be confirmed.

Mine sure has been. Over the course of these eight years, I’ve seen the hopeful faces of young graduates and our newest military officers. I have mourned with grieving families searching for answers, and found grace in a Charleston church. I’ve seen our scientists help a paralyzed man regain his sense of touch. I've seen wounded warriors who at points were given up for dead walk again. I’ve seen our doctors and volunteers rebuild after earthquakes and stop pandemics in their tracks.

I’ve seen the youngest of children remind us through their actions and through their generosity of our obligations to care for refugees, or work for peace, and, above all, to look out for each other.

So that faith that I placed all those years ago, not far from here, in the power of ordinary Americans to bring about change -- that faith has been rewarded in ways I could not have possibly imagined. And I hope your faith has, too. Some of you here tonight or watching at home, you were there with us in 2004, in 2008, 2012; maybe you still can’t believe we pulled this whole thing off. Let me tell you, you're not the only ones.

Michelle -- Michelle LaVaughn Robinson, girl of the South Side: For the -- For the past 25 years you have not only been my wife and mother of my children, you have been my best friend. You took on a role you didn't ask for. And you made it your own with grace and with grit and with style, and good humor. You made the White House a place that belongs to everybody.

And a new generation sets its sights higher because it has you as a role model. So, you have made me proud, and you have made the country proud.

Malia and Sasha: Under the strangest of circumstances you have become two amazing young women. You are smart and you are beautiful. But more importantly, you are kind and you are thoughtful and you are full of passion. And yo wore the burden of years in the spotlight so easily. Of all that I have done in my life, I am most proud to be your dad.

To Joe Biden, the scrappy kid from Scranton who became Delaware's favorite son: You were the first decision I made as a nominee, and it was the best; not just because you have been a great Vice President, but because in the bargain I gained a brother. And we love you and Jill like family. And your friendship has been one of the great joys of our lives.

To my remarkable staff: For eight years -- and for some of you, a whole lot more -- I have drawn from your energy, and every day I tried to reflect back what you displayed: heart, and character, and idealism. I’ve watched you grow up, get married, have kids, start incredible new journeys of your own. Even when times got tough and frustrating, you never let Washington get the better of you. You guarded against cynicism. And the only thing that makes me prouder than all the good that we’ve done is the thought of all the amazing things that you’re going to achieve from here.

And to all of you out there -- every organizer who moved to an unfamiliar town, every kind family who welcomed them in, every volunteer who knocked on doors, every young person who cast a ballot for the first time, every American who lived and breathed the hard work of change: You are the best supporters and organizers anybody could ever hope for, and I will be forever grateful. Because you did change the world. You did.

And that’s why I leave this stage tonight even more optimistic about this country than when we started. Because I know our work has not only helped so many Americans, it has inspired so many Americans, especially so many young people out there, to believe that you can make a difference, to hitch your wagon to something bigger than yourselves.

Let me tell you, this generation coming up -- unselfish, altruistic, creative, patriotic, I’ve seen you in every corner of the country. You believe in a fair, and just, and inclusive America. You know that constant change has been America’s hallmark; that it's not something to fear but something to embrace. You are willing to carry this hard work of democracy forward. You’ll soon outnumber all of us, and I believe as a result the future is in good hands.

My fellow Americans:

It has been the honor of my life to serve you. I won’t stop. In fact, I will be right there with you, as a citizen, for all my remaining days. But for now, whether you are young or whether you're young at heart, I do have one final ask of you as your President -- the same thing I asked when you took a chance on me eight years ago:

I'm asking you to believe.

Not in my ability to bring about change -- but in yours.

I am asking you to hold fast to that faith written into our founding documents; that idea whispered by slaves and abolitionists; that spirit sung by immigrants and homesteaders and those who marched for justice; that creed reaffirmed by those who planted flags from foreign battlefields to the surface of the moon; a creed at the core of every American whose story is not yet written: Yes, we can.

Yes We Did! Yes We Can!

Thank you.

God bless you.

And may God continue to bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

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# Joe Biden Medal of Freedom Presentation Address

Welcome to the White House, everybody. As I have already delivered my farewell address, I will try to be relatively brief. But I just wanted to get some folks together to pay tribute to somebody who has not only been by my side for the duration of this amazing journey, but somebody who has devoted his entire professional life to service to this country, the best Vice President America has ever had, Mr. Joe Biden.

This also gives the Internet one last chance to talk about our bromance. This has been quite a ride. It was eight and a half years ago that I chose Joe to be my Vice President. There has not been a single moment since that time that I’ve doubted the wisdom of that decision. He was the best possible choice, not just for me, but for the American people. This is an extraordinary man with an extraordinary career in public service. This is somebody the people of Delaware sent to the Senate as quickly as they possibly could.

Elected at age 29, for more than a dozen years apiece he served as chair or ranking member of the Judiciary and Foreign Relation Committees. Domestically, he championed landmark legislation to make our communities safer, to protect our women from violence. Internationally, his wisdom and capacity to build relationships that shaped our nation's response to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain, to counterterrorism, Iraq, Afghanistan.

And for the past eight years, he could not have been a more devoted or effective partner in the progress that we've made. He fought to make college more affordable and revitalize American manufacturing as the head of our Middle Class Task Force. He suited up for our Cancer Moonshot, giving hope to millions of Americans touched by this disease.

He led our efforts to combat gun violence, and he rooted out any possible misappropriations that might have occurred. And as a consequence, the Recovery Act worked as well as just about any large-scale stimulus project has ever worked in this country. He visited college after college -- and made friends with Lady Gaga for our "It's On Us" campaign against campus sexual assault. And when the Pope visited, Joe was even kind enough to let me talk to His Holiness, as well.

Behind the scenes, Joe's candid, honest counsel has made me a better President and a better Commander-in-Chief. From the Situation Room to our weekly lunches, to our huddles after everybody else has cleared out of the room, he's been unafraid to give it to me straight, even if we disagree -- in fact, especially if we disagree.

And all of this makes him, I believe, the finest Vice President we have ever seen. And I also think he has been a lion of American history. The best part is he's nowhere close to finished. In the years ahead, as a citizen, he will continue to build on that legacy, internationally and domestically. He’s got a voice of vision and reason and optimism, and a love for people. And we're going to need that spirit and that vision as we continue to try to make our world safer and to make sure that everybody has got a fair shot in this country.

So, all told, that’s a pretty remarkable legacy. An amazing career in public service. It is, as Joe once said, a big deal. It is.

But we all know that, on its own, his work -- this list of accomplishments, the amazing rÃ©sumÃ© -- does not capture the full measure of Joe Biden. I have not mentioned Amtrak yet or aviators. Literally.

Folks don't just feel like they know Joe the politician, they feel like they know the person -- what makes him laugh, what he believes, what he cares about, and where he came from. Pretty much every time he speaks, he treats us to some wisdom from the nuns who taught him in grade school or from an old Senate colleague.

But, of course, more frequently cited -- Catherine and Joseph, Sr., his mom and dad: "No one’s better than you, but you're better than nobody." "Bravery resides in every heart, and yours is fierce and clear." “And when you get knocked down, Joey, get up -- get up." “Get up.”

That's where he got those broad shoulders. That's where he got that Biden heart. And through his life, through trial after trial, he has never once forgotten the values and the moral fiber that made him who he is. That's what steels his faith in God, and in America, and in his friends, and in all of us.

When Joe talks to autoworkers whose livelihoods he helped save, we hear the son of a man who once knew the pain of having to tell his kids that he had lost his job.

When Joe talks about hope and opportunity for our children, we hear the father who rode the rails home every night so that he could be there to tuck his kids into bed.

When Joe sticks up for the little guy, we hear the young boy who used to stand in front of the mirror, reciting Yeats or Emerson, studying the muscles in his face, determined to vanquish a debilitating stutter.

And when Joe talks to Gold Star families who have lost a hero, we hear a kindred spirit; another father of an American veteran; somebody whose faith has been tested, and who has been forced to wander through the darkness himself, and who knows who to lean on to find the light.

So that’s Joe Biden -- a resilient, and loyal, and humble servant, and a patriot. But most of all, a family man. Starts with Jill, "Captain of the Vice Squad." Only the Second Lady in our history to keep her regular day job. Jill says, teaching isn't what she does, it's who she is. A few days after Joe and I were inaugurated in 2009, she was back in the classroom teaching. That's why when our administration worked to strengthen community colleges, we looked to Jill to lead the way.

She's also traveled the world to boost education and empowerment for women. And as a Blue Star mom, her work with Michelle to honor our military families will go down in history as one of the most lasting and powerful efforts of this administration.

Of course, like Joe, Jill's work is only part of the story. She just seems to walk this Earth so lightly, spreads her joy so freely. And she reminds us that although we’re in a serious business, we don't have to take ourselves too seriously. She's quick with a laugh or a practical joke, disguising herself as a server at a party she once hosted to liven the mood. She once hid in the overhead compartment of Air Force 2 to scare the senior staff. Because why not? She seems to have a sixth sense of when to send a note of encouragement to a friend or a staffer, a simple thank you or a box of macaroons.

She is one of the best, most genuine people that I've met not just in politics, but in my entire life. She is grounded, and caring, and generous, and funny, and that's why Joe is proud to introduce himself as "Jill Biden's husband."

And to see them together is to see what real love looks like -- through thick and thin, good times and bad. It's an all-American love story. Jill once surprised Joe by painting hearts on his office windows for Valentine's Day.

And then there are these Biden kids and grandkids. They’re everywhere. They’re all good-looking. Hunter and Ashley, who lived out that family creed of raising good families and looking out for the least of our brothers and sisters. Beau, who is watching over us with those broad shoulders and mighty heart himself -- a man who left a beautiful legacy and inspired an entire nation. Naomi, and Finn, and Maisy, and Natalie, and little Hunter -- grandchildren who are the light of Joe's eyes, and gives him an excuse to bust out the squirt gun around the pool. This is the kind of family that built this country.

That's why my family is so proud to call ourselves honorary Bidens. As Yeats put it -- because I had to quote an Irish poet, and Seamus Heaney was taken, "Think where man's glory most begins and ends, and say my glory was I had such friends.”

Away from the camera, Jill and Michelle have each other’s backs just as much as when they're out championing our troops. Our girls are close, best friends at school, inviting each other for vacations and sleepovers. Even though our terms are nearly over, one of the greatest gifts of these past eight years is that we're forever bonded as a family.

But, of course, I know that the Obamas are not the only ones who feel like they're part of the Biden clan because Joe’s heart has radiated around this room. You see it in the enduring friendships he’s forged with folks of every stripe and background up on Capitol Hill. You see it in the way that his eyes light up when he finds somebody in a rope line from Scranton. Or just the tiniest towns in Delaware. You see it in the incredible loyalty of his staff, the team who knows that family always comes before work because Joe tells them so every day, the team that reflects their boss’s humble service. Here in this building where there have been no turf wars between our staffs because everybody here has understood that we were all on the same mission and shared the same values, there has just been cooperation and camaraderie. And that is rare. It’s a testament to Joe and the tone that he’s set.

And finally, you see Joe’s heart in the way he consoles families, dealing with cancer, backstage after an event; when he meets kids fighting through a stutter of their own, he gives them his private phone number and keeps in touch with them long after. To know Joe Biden is to know love without pretense, service without self-regard, and to live life fully.

As one of his long-time colleagues in the Senate, who happened to be a Republican, once said, “If you can’t admire Joe Biden as a person, you got a problem. He's as good a man as God ever created.”

So, Joe, for your faith in your fellow Americans, for your love of country, and for your lifetime of service that will endure through the generations, I’d like to ask the military aide to join us on stage.

For the final time as President, I am pleased to award our nation’s highest civilian honor -- the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

And for the first and only time in my presidency, I will bestow this medal with an additional level of veneration, an honor my three most recent successors reserved for only three others: Pope John Paul II, President Ronald Reagan, and General Colin Powell.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am proud to award the Presidential Medal of Freedom with Distinction to my brother, Joseph Robinette Biden, Jr.

Will the aide please read the citation.

Military Aide:

Vice President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. In a career of public service spanning nearly half a century, Vice President Joseph R. Biden, Jr., has left his mark on almost every part of our nation, fighting for a stronger middle class, a fairer judicial system and a smarter foreign policy; providing unyielding support for our troops; combating crime and violence against women; leading our quest to cure cancer; and safeguarding the landmark American Recovery and Reinvestment Act from corruption. With his charm, candor, unabashed optimism, and deep and abiding patriotism, Joe Biden has garnered the respect and esteem of colleagues of both parties, and the friendship of people across the nation and around the world. While summoning the strength, faith and grace to overcome great personal tragedy, this son of Scranton, Claymont, and Wilmington has become one of the most consequential Vice Presidents in American history, an accolade that nonetheless rests firmly behind his legacy as husband, father, and grandfather. A grateful nation thanks Vice President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. for his lifetime of service on behalf of the United States of America.

[The Medal of Freedom is presented.]

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Final Weekly Address

This week, I traveled to Chicago to deliver my final farewell address to the nation, following in the tradition of Presidents before me. It was an opportunity to say thank you. Whether we’ve seen eye-to-eye or rarely agreed at all, my conversations with you, the American people -- in living rooms and schools; at farms and on factory floors; at diners and on distant military outposts -- are what have kept me honest, kept me inspired, and kept me going. Every day, I learned from you. You made me a better President, and you made me a better man.

Over the course of these eight years, I have seen the goodness, the resilience, and the hope of the American people. I’ve seen neighbors looking out for each other as we rescued our economy from the worst crisis of our lifetimes. I’ve hugged cancer survivors who finally know the security of affordable health care. I’ve seen communities like Joplin rebuild from disaster, and cities like Boston show the world that no terrorist will ever break the American spirit.

I’ve seen the hopeful faces of young graduates and our newest military officers. I’ve mourned with grieving families searching for answers, and found grace in a Charleston church. I’ve seen our scientists help a paralyzed man regain his sense of touch, and our wounded warriors walk again. I’ve seen our doctors and volunteers rebuild after earthquakes and stop pandemics in their tracks. I’ve learned from students who are building robots and curing diseases and who will change the world in ways we can’t even imagine. I’ve seen the youngest of children remind us of our obligations to care for our refugees, to work in peace, and above all to look out for each other.

That’s what’s possible when we come together in the hard, slow, sometimes frustrating, but always vital work of self-government. But we can’t take our democracy for granted. All of us, regardless of party, should throw ourselves into the work of citizenship. Not just when there’s an election, not just when our own narrow interest is at stake, but over the full span of a lifetime. If you’re tired of arguing with strangers on the internet, try to talk with one in real life. If something needs fixing, lace up your shoes and do some organizing. If you’re disappointed by your elected officials, then grab a clipboard, get some signatures, and run for office yourself.

Our success depends on our participation, regardless of which way the pendulum of power swings. It falls on each of us to be guardians of our democracy; to embrace the joyous task we’ve been given to continually try to improve this great nation of ours. Because for all our outward differences, we all share the same proud title: Citizen.

It has been the honor of my life to serve you as President. Eight years later, I am even more optimistic about our country’s promise. And I look forward to working along your side, as a citizen, for all my days that remain.

Thanks, everybody. God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# MLB Champion Chicago Cubs White House Visit Address

They said this day would never come.

1,2

Here is something none of my predecessors ever got a chance to say: Welcome to the White House the World Series Champion Chicago Cubs!

Now, I know you guys would prefer to stand the whole time, but sit down.

I will say to the Cubs: It took you long enough. I mean, I’ve only got four days left. You’re just making it under the wire.

Now, listen, I -- I made a lot of promises in 2008. We’ve managed to fulfill a large number of them, but even I was not crazy enough to suggest that during these eight years we would see the Cubs win the World Series. But I did say that there’s never been anything false about hope. Hope. The audacity of hope.

Audience Member: Yes, we can!

President Obama: Yes, we can.

Now, listen, for those of you from Chicago who have known me a long time, it is no secret that there’s a certain South Side team that, you know, has...my loyalty. For me, the drought hasn’t been as long. We had the ’85 Bears; we had the the Bulls’ run in the ‘90s. I’ve hosted the Blackhawks a number of times. The White Sox did win just 11 years ago with Ozzie and Konerko and Buerhle. So -- So I...can’t claim that I have the same, just visceral joy of some in this White House.

But FLOTUS is a lifelong Cubs fan. And I will tell you, she had -- she had to go to another event, but in eight years that I’ve been here -- I told the team this -- in the eight years that I’ve been here, we’ve hosted at least 50 teams -- football, basketball, baseball, soccer, you name it. Michelle has never come to a single event celebrating a champion until today. And she came and shook hands and met with every one of these members of the Cubs organization, and told a story about what it meant for her to be able to see them win; because she remembers coming home from school and her dad would be watching a Cubs game, and the bond and the family, the -- the meaning that the Cubs had for her in terms of connecting with her father, and why it meant so much to her. And I -- I almost choked up listening to it. And it spoke, I think, to how people feel about this organization, and -- and that it’s been passed on generation after generation. And -- And it’s...more than sports.

And that is not just true for FLOTUS. My longest-serving aide, Anita [Decker Breckenridge], is a Cubs fan. When they -- When they -- “Fan”...is not enough -- When they won that -- they next day she said, "This is the best day of my life." And I said, "What about me winning the presidency?" "What about your wedding day?" She’s like, “No, this is the best.”

My chief speechwriter, Cody Keenan, Cuba fan. In fact, there were a lot of sick days during the playoffs.

One of my staff members was caught being interviewed at a bar outside of Wrigley, and -- and we’re watching him being interviewed. You remember, Luke? [ph] And he’s looking kind of sheepish about it. It’s like, why aren’t you in the office?

But look, the truth is, there was a reason not just that people felt good about the Cubs winning. There was something about this particular Cubs team winning that people felt good about. For example, David Ross and I have something in common: We’ve both been on a “year-long retirement party.” But unlike Grandpa, my team has not yet bought me a scooter with a motorized golf caddy. But there are four days left -- maybe I’ll get that.

The last time the Cubs won the World Series, Teddy Roosevelt was President. Albert Einstein -- or was it Thomas Edison? -- was still alive. The first Cubs radio broadcast wouldn’t be for almost two decades. We’ve been through World Wars, Cold War, a Depression, a space race, all manner of social and technological change. But during that time, those decades were also marked by Phil Cavarretta and Ernie Banks; Billy Williams, who’s here today; Ron Santo, Ferg, Ryne Sandberg, Dawson, Maddux, Grace.

Those decades were punctuated by Lee Elia’s rants and Harry Caray’s exuberance;

-- “Hey, Hey,”

-- And “Holy Cow!”

And capped off by “Go Cubs Go.”

So the first thing that made this championship so special for so many is, is that the Cubs know what it’s like to be loyal, and to persevere, and to hope, and to suffer, and then keep on hoping. And -- And it’s a -- it's a generational thing. That’s what you heard Michelle describing. People all across the city remember the first time a parent took them to Wrigley, where memories of climbing into their dad’s lap to watch games on WGN -- and that’s part of the reason, by the way, why Michelle had invited -- made sure that JosÃ© Cardenal was here, because that was her favorite player. And she was describing -- back then he had a big afro, and she was describing how she used to wear her hat over her afro the same way JosÃ© did.

You could see all that love this season in the fans who traveled to their dads’ gravesites to listen to games on the radio; who wore their moms’ old jerseys to games; who covered the brick walls of Wrigley with love notes in chalk to departed fans whose lifelong faith was finally fulfilled.

None of this, of course, would have happened without the extraordinary contributions of the Ricketts family. Tom met his wife, Cece, in the bleachers of Wrigley about 30 years ago -- which is about 30 years longer than most relationships that begin there last. Our...dear friend Laura Ricketts met her wife, Brooke, in the ballpark, as well.

You know, brothers and sisters -- they -- they turned this team around by hiring what has to be one of the greatest, if not -- I mean, he’s still pretty young, so we’ll see how long he keeps on going -- the greatest general managers of all time, Theo Epstein, and along with -- and along with Jed Hoyer and Jason McLeod. They -- They did just an unbelievable job. Theo, as you know is -- his job is to quench droughts -- 86 years in Boston; 108 in Chicago. He takes the reins of an organization that’s wandering in the wilderness; he delivers them to the Promised Land. I’ve talked to him about being DNC chair. But he decided wisely to stick to baseball.

That brings me to the other thing that was so special about this championship -- and that’s just the -- they guys behind me, the team. They steamrolled the majors this year with a 103-win record. All you had to know about this team was encapsulated in that one moment in Game 5, down three games to one, do or die, in front of the home fans when David Ross and Jon Lester turned to each other and said, “I love you, man.” And he said, “I love you, too.” It was sort of like a Obama-Biden moment.

And then you’ve got the manager, Joe Maddon, who, let’s face it -- let's face it, there are not a lot of coaches or managers who are as cool as this guy. Look how he looks right now. That’s cool. That’s cool. You know, he used costume parties and his “Shaggin’ Wagon.” So he’s got -- I'm just saying -- he’s got a lot of -- lot of tricks to -- to motivate. But he’s also a master of tactics, and makes the right move at the right time: when to pinch hit, when to pinch run, when to make it rain in Game 7 of the World Series. It was masterful. So he set the tone, but also some of the -- the amazing players here set the tone.

My fellow “44” -- Anthony Rizzo, who's the heart of this team. Five years ago, he was a part of the squad that lost 101 games. He stuck at it, led the National League in All-Star votes this year.

His business partner in the “Bryzzo Souvenir Company,” which delivers baseballs to fans in all parts of the bleachers -- Kris Bryant. This guy -- This guy had a good year. You know, you go from Rookie of the Year to being the MVP. You win the World Series. And then, like me, he marries up and comes to the White House. And he did all this just in 10 days -- when it took me a long time. So, congratulations to the newlyweds, Jessica and Kris Bryant.

Then you got these young guys like Baez and Russell. Baez turning tagging into an art form.

Russell becoming the youngest player to hit a World Series Grand Slam since Mickey Mantle.

And you -- you mix these amazing young talents with somebody like David Ross who, for example, helped Anthony out of his “glass case of emotions” in Game 7. But think about what Rossy did in his final season: caught a no-hitter, surpassed 100 home runs for his career, including one in his last game ever. If there was ever a way to go out, this was it.

And then you got Ben Zobrist, who didn’t get to come to the White House last year after winning it all with the Royals, but then hits .357 in the World Series, go-ahead RBI in the 10th inning of the Game 7, World Series MVP. I think he’s earned his way here; and is apparently a good guy, because I asked his wife -- she was in line before he was -- I said, "Has he gotten a big head since he got the whole MVP thing?" “No, he’s so sweet. He’s so humble.” You -- You owe her dinner tonight.

Extraordinary pitching staff, including Kyle Hendricks, the first Cub to lead the majors in ERA since 1938. Kyle, in turn, was the only pitcher this year with a better ERA than Jon Lester, who racked up 19 wins. Good job. You got Jake Arrieta, 2015 Cy Young [Award] winner, stretched a 20-game win streak featuring two no-hitters across the past two seasons, then hit a home run in the NLDS, and won two games in the World Series. So, apparently Pilates works. Michelle says it does.

So -- And then -- And then finally, the -- the game itself and the Series itself, come back from a 3-1 deficit against a great Cleveland Indians team forced what is widely considered the greatest Game 7 of all time. Dexter Fowler becomes the first player to hit a leadoff home run in Game 7. Javy Baez hits another leadoff the 5th. David Ross becomes the older player -- oldest player to knock one out in a Game 7, as well. Kyle Schwarber, who’s been hurt and hobbled, then suddenly he comes in and gets seven hits in the Series -- three in Game 7 alone.

And then you’ve got the 10th inning. You've got the rain. God finally feeling mercy on Cubs fans. An entire game, an entire season, an entire century of hope and heartbreak all coming down to a one-inning sprint. And then Zobrist knocked in one. Montero knocked in another. Carl Edwards, Jr., Mike Montgomery teamed up to shut the Indians down.

And then, at 12:47 a.m. Eastern Time, Bryant -- looks like he’s going to slip; everybody is getting a little stressed -- tosses a grounder to Rizzo; Rizzo gets the ball, slips it in his back pocket, which shows excellent situational awareness. And -- And suddenly everything is changed. No more black cats, billy goats, ghosts, flubbed grounders. The Chicago Cubs are -- are the champs. And on...ESPN, you’ve got Van Pelt saying, “one of the all-time great nights.” You’ve got Tim Kurkjian calling it “the "greatest night [in] baseball" in the history of the game. Two days later, millions of people, the largest gathering of Americans that I know of in Chicago, and for a moment, our hometown becomes the very definition of joy. So in Chicago, I think it’s fair to say you guys will be popular for a while.

But, in addition, they’re also doing a lot of good work. Anthony Rizzo and Jon Lester raised money to help others beat cancer like they did. Under the -- Under the Rickett[s] Family’s leadership, last year alone Cubs Charities supported charitable grants and donations of nearly 4 million dollars that reached nearly 120,000 children and young adults across Chicagoland. Under their “Let’s Give” initiative, Cubs staff, coaches, players, and spouses donated more than 1500 hours of service last year to the community. And after their visit here today, they will head to Walter Reed to visit with some of our brave wounded warriors.

So...just to wrap up, you know today is -- today is, I think, our last official event -- isn’t it? -- at the White House, under my presidency. And it also happens to be a day that we celebrate one of the great Americans of all time, Martin Luther King, Jr. And later, as soon as we’re done here, Michelle and I are going to go over and do a service project, which is what we do every year to honor Dr. King.

And it is worth remembering -- because sometimes people wonder, "Well why are you spending time on sports; there’s other stuff going on?" -- that throughout our history, sports has had this power to bring us together, even when the country is divided. Sports has changed attitudes and culture in ways that seem subtle but that ultimately made us think differently about ourselves and who we were. It -- It is a game and it is celebration, but there’s a direct line between Jackie Robinson and me standing here. There is a direct line between people loving Ernie Banks, and then the city being able to come together and work together in one spirit.

And I was in my hometown of Chicago on Tuesday, for my farewell address, and I said, sometimes it’s not enough just to change laws, you got to change hearts. And -- And sports has a way, sometimes, of changing hearts in a way that politics or business doesn’t. And, you know, sometimes it’s just a matter of us being able to escape and relax from the -- the difficulties of our days. But sometimes it also speaks to something better in us. And when you see this group of folks of different shades and different backgrounds, and coming from different communities and neighborhoods all across the country, and then playing as one team and playing the right way, and celebrating each other and being joyous in that, that tells us a little something about what America is and what America can be.

So it is entirely appropriate that we celebrate the Cubs today, here in this White House, on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s birthday because it helps direct us in terms of what this country has been and what it can be in the future.

With that, one more time, let’s congratulate the 2016 World Championship -- Chicago Cubs!

Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill (2008)

# Final Presidential Press Conference

Good afternoon, everybody. Let me start out by saying that I was sorely tempted to wear a tan suit today for my last press conference. But Michelle, whose fashion sense is a little better than mine, tells me that's not appropriate in January. I covered a lot of the ground that I would want to cover in my farewell address last week. So I'm just going to say a couple of quick things before I start taking questions. First, we have been in touch with the Bush family today, after hearing about President George H.W. Bush and Barbara Bush being admitted to the hospital this morning. They have not only dedicated their lives to this country, they have been a constant source of friendship and support and good counsel for Michelle and me over the years. They are as fine a couple as we know. And so we want to send our prayers and our love to them. Really good people. Second thing I want to do is to thank all of you. Some of you have been covering me for a long time -- folks like Christi and Win. Some of you I've just gotten to know. We have traveled the world together. We’ve hit a few singles, a few doubles together. I’ve offered advice that I thought was pretty sound, like “don’t do stupid…stuff.” And even when you complained about my long answers, I just want you to know that the only reason they were long was because you asked six-part questions. But I have enjoyed working with all of you. That does not, of course, mean that I’ve enjoyed every story that you have filed. But that’s the point of this relationship. You’re not supposed to be sycophants, you're supposed to be skeptics. You’re supposed to ask me tough questions. You're not supposed to be complimentary, but you're supposed to cast a critical eye on folks who hold enormous power and make sure that we are accountable to the people who sent us here. And you have done that. And you’ve done it, for the most part, in ways that I could appreciate for fairness even if I didn’t always agree with your conclusions. And having you in this building has made this place work better. It keeps us honest. It makes us work harder. It made us think about how we are doing what we do and whether or not we're able to deliver on what’s been requested by our constituents. And for example, every time you’ve asked “why haven’t you cured Ebola yet,” or “why is that still that hole in the Gulf,” it has given me the ability to go back to my team and say, “will you get this solved before the next press conference?” I spent a lot of time in my farewell address talking about the state of our democracy. It goes without saying that essential to that is a free press. That is part of how this place, this country, this grand experiment in self-government has to work. It doesn’t work if we don't have a well-informed citizenry. And you are the conduit through which they receive the information about what’s taking place in the halls of power. So America needs you, and our democracy needs you. We need you to establish a baseline of facts and evidence that we can use as a starting point for the kind of reasoned and informed debates that ultimately lead to progress. And so my hope is, is that you will continue with the same tenacity that you showed us to do the hard work of getting to the bottom of stories and getting them right, and to push those of us in power to be the best version of ourselves. And to push this country to be the best version of itself. I have no doubt that you will do so. I’m looking forward to being an active consumer of your work rather than always the subject of it. I want to thank you all for your extraordinary service to our democracy.

And with that, I will take some questions. And I will start with Jeff Mason -- whose term apparently is not up. I thought we’d be going out together, brother, but you got to hang around for a while. Question: I'm staying put. President Obama: Jeff Mason, Reuters. Question: Thank you, sir. Are you concerned, Mr. President, that commuting Chelsea Manning’s sentence will send a message that leaking classified material will not generate a tough sentence to groups like WikiLeaks? How do you reconcile that in light of WikiLeaks’ connection to Russia’s hacking in last year’s election? And related to that, Julian Assange has now offered to come to the United States. Are you seeking that? And would he be charged or arrested if he came here? President Obama: Well, first of all, let’s be clear, Chelsea Manning has served a tough prison sentence. So the notion that the average person who was thinking about disclosing vital, classified information would think that it goes unpunished I don't think would get that impression from the sentence that Chelsea Manning has served. It has been my view that given she went to trial, that due process was carried out, that she took responsibility for her crime, that the sentence that she received was very disproportional -- disproportionate relative to what other leakers had received, and that she had served a significant amount of time, that it made it sense to commute -- and not pardon -- her sentence. And I feel very comfortable that justice has been served and that a message has still been sent that when it comes to our national security, that wherever possible, we need folks who may have legitimate concerns about the actions of government or their superiors or the agencies in which they work -- that they try to work through the established channels and avail themselves of the whistleblower protections that had been put in place. I recognize that there’s some folks who think they're not enough, and I think all of us, when we're working in big institutions, may find ourselves at times at odds with policies that are set. But when it comes to national security, we're often dealing with people in the field whose lives may be put at risk, or the safety and security and the ability of our military or our intelligence teams or embassies to function effectively. And that has to be kept in mind. So with respect to WikiLeaks, I don't see a contradiction. First of all, I haven't commented on WikiLeaks, generally. The conclusions of the intelligence community with respect to the Russian hacking were not conclusive as to whether WikiLeaks was witting or not in being the conduit through which we heard about the DNC emails that were leaked. I don't pay a lot of attention to Mr. Assange's tweets, so that wasn't a consideration in this instance. And I'd refer you to the Justice Department for any criminal investigations, indictments, extradition issues that may come up with him. What I can say broadly is that, in this new cyber age, we're going to have to make sure that we continually work to find the right balance of accountability and openness and transparency that is the hallmark of our democracy, but also recognize that there are adversaries and bad actors out there who want to use that same openness in ways that hurt us -- whether that's in trying to commit financial crimes, or trying to commit acts of terrorism, or folks who want to interfere with our elections. And we're going to have to continually build the kind of architecture that makes sure the best of our democracy is preserved; that our national security and intelligence agencies have the ability to carry out policy without advertising to our adversaries what it is that we're doing, but do so in a way that still keeps citizens up to speed on what their government is doing on their behalf. But with respect to Chelsea Manning, I looked at the particulars of this case the same way I have for the other commutations and pardons that I've done, and I felt that in light of all the circumstances that commuting her sentence was entirely appropriate. Margaret Brennan. Question: Mr. President, thank you. The President-elect has said that he would consider lifting sanctions on Russia if they substantially reduced their nuclear stockpile. Given your own efforts at arms control, do you think that's an effective strategy? Knowing this office and Mr. Trump, how would you advise his advisors to help him be effective when he deals with Vladimir Putin? And given your actions recently on Russia, do you think those sanctions should be viewed as leverage? President Obama: Well, a couple of things. Number one, I think it is in America's interest and the world's interest that we have a constructive relationship with Russia. That's been my approach throughout my presidency. Where our interests have overlapped, we've worked together. At the beginning of my term, I did what I could to encourage Russia to be a constructive member of the international community, and tried to work with the President and the government of Russia in helping them diversify their economy, improve their economy, use the incredible talents of the Russian people in more constructive ways. I think it’s fair to say that after President Putin came back into the presidency that an escalating anti-American rhetoric and an approach to global affairs that seemed to be premised on the idea that whatever America is trying to do must be bad for Russia and so we want to try and counteract whatever they do -- that return to an adversarial spirit that I think existed during the Cold War has made the relationship more difficult. And it was hammered home when Russia went into Crimea and portions of Ukraine. The reason we imposed the sanctions, recall, was not because of nuclear weapons issues. It was because the independence and sovereignty of a country, Ukraine, had been encroached upon, by force, by Russia. That wasn’t our judgment; that was the judgment of the entire international community. And Russia continues to occupy Ukrainian territory and meddle in Ukrainian affairs and support military surrogates who have violated basic international law and international norms. What I’ve said to the Russians is, as soon as you’ve stop doing that the sanctions will be removed. And I think it would probably best serve not only American interest but also the interest of preserving international norms if we made sure that we don’t confuse why these sanctions have been imposed with a whole set of other issues. On nuclear issues, in my first term we negotiated the START II treaty. and that has substantially reduced our nuclear stockpiles, both Russia and the United States. I was prepared to go further. I told President Putin I was prepared to go further. They have been unwilling to negotiate. If President-elect Trump is able to restart those talks in a serious way, I think there remains a lot of room for our two countries to reduce our stockpiles. And part of the reason we’ve been successful on our nonproliferation agenda and on our nuclear security agenda is because we were leading by example. I hope that continues. But I think it’s important just to remember that the reason sanctions have been put in place against Russia has to do with their actions in Ukraine. And it is important for the United States to stand up for the basic principle that big countries don’t go around and invade and bully smaller countries. I’ve said before, I expect Russia and Ukraine to have a strong relationship. They are, historically, bound together in all sorts of cultural and social ways. But Ukraine is an independent country. And this is a good example of the vital role that America has to continue to play around the world in preserving basic norms and values, whether it’s advocating on behalf of human rights, advocating on behalf of women’s rights, advocating on behalf of freedom of the press. The United States has not always been perfect in this regard. There are times where we, by necessity, are dealing with allies or friends or partners who, themselves, are not meeting the standards that we would like to see met when it comes to international rules and norms. But I can tell you that in every multilateral setting -- in the United Nations, in the G20, in the G7 -- the United States typically has been on the right side of these issues. And it is important for us to continue to be on the right side of these issues, because if we, the largest, strongest country and democracy in the world, are not willing to stand up on behalf of these values, then certainly China, Russia, and others will not. Kevin Corke. Question: Thank you, Mr. President. You have been a strong supporter of the idea of a peaceful transfer of power, demonstrated not terribly far from the Rose Garden. And yet, even as you and I speak, there are more than five dozen Democrats that are going to boycott the inauguration of the incoming President. Do you support that? And what message would you send to Democrats to better demonstrate the peaceful transfer of power? And if I could follow, I wanted to ask you about your conversations with the President-elect previously. And without getting into too much of the personal side of it, I’m just curious, were you able to use that opportunity to convince him to take a fresh look at some of the important ideas that you will leave this office with -- maintaining some semblance of the Affordable Care Act, some idea of keeping DREAMers here in the country without fear of deportation. Were you able to use personal stories to try to convince him? And how successful were you? President Obama: Well, I won’t go into details of my conversations with President-elect Trump. As I’ve said before, they are cordial. At times they've been fairly lengthy and they've been substantive. I can't tell you how convincing I’ve been. I think you'd had to ask him whether I’ve been convincing or not. I have offered my best advice, counsel about certain issues both foreign and domestic. And my working assumption is, is that having won an election opposed to a number of my initiatives and certain aspects of my vision for where the country needs to go, it is appropriate for him to go forward with his vision and his values. And I don't expect that there’s going to be enormous overlap. It may be that on certain issues, once he comes into office and he looks at the complexities of how to, in fact, provide health care for everybody -- something he says he wants to do -- or wants to make sure that he is encouraging job creation and wage growth in this country, that that may lead him to some of the same conclusions that I arrived at once I got here. But I don't think we’ll know until he has an actual chance to get sworn in and sit behind that desk. And I think a lot of his views are going to be shaped by his advisors, the people around him -- which is why it’s important to pay attention to these confirmation hearings. I can tell you that -- and this is something I have told him -- that this is a job of such magnitude that you can't do it by yourself. You are enormously reliant on a team. Your Cabinet, your senior White House staff, all the way to fairly junior folks in their 20s and 30s, but who are executing on significant responsibilities. And so how you put a team together to make sure that they're getting you the best information and they are teeing up the options from which you will ultimately make decisions, that's probably the most useful advice, the most constructive advice that I've been able to give him. That if you find yourself isolated because the process breaks down, or if you're only hearing from people who agree with you on everything, or if you haven’t created a process that is fact-checking and probing and asking hard questions about policies or promises that you've made, that's when you start making mistakes. And as I indicated in some of my previous remarks, reality has a way of biting back if you're not paying attention to it. With respect to the inauguration, I'm not going to comment on those issues. All I know is I'm going to be there. So is Michelle. And I have been checking the weather, and I'm heartened by the fact that it won't be as cold as my first inauguration because that was cold. Jen Rodriguez. Question: Right here, Mr. President. Thank you very much. You have said that you would come back to fight for the DREAMers. You said that a couple of weeks ago. Are you fearful for the status of those DREAMers, the future of the young immigrants and all immigrants in this country with the new administration? And what did you mean when you said you would come back? Would you lobby Congress? Maybe explore the political arena again? And if I may ask you a second question -- why did you take action on "dry foot, wet foot" a week ago? President Obama: Well, let me be absolutely clear. I did not mean that I was going to be running for anything anytime soon. What I meant is that it's important for me to take some time to process this amazing experience that we've gone through; to make sure that my wife, with whom I will be celebrating a 25th anniversary this year, is willing to re-up and put up with me for a little bit longer. I want to do some writing. I want to be quiet a little bit and not hear myself talk so darn much. I want to spend precious time with my girls. So those are my priorities this year. But as I said before, I'm still a citizen. And I think it is important for Democrats or progressives who feel that they came out on the wrong side of this election to be able to distinguish between the normal back-and-forth, ebb and flow of policy -- are we going to raise taxes or are we going to lower taxes; are we going to expand this program or eliminate this program; how concerned are we about air pollution or climate change. Those are all normal parts of the debate. And as I've said before, in a democracy, sometimes you're going to win on those issues and sometimes you're going to lose. I'm confident about the rightness of my positions on a lot of these points, but we got a new President and a Congress that are going to make their same determinations. And there will be a back-and-forth in Congress around those issues, and you guys will report on all that. But there's difference between that normal functioning of politics and certain issues or certain moments where I think our core values may be at stake. I put in that category, if I saw systematic discrimination being ratified in some fashion. I'd put in that category, explicit or functional obstacles to people being able to vote, to exercise their franchise. I'd put in that category, institutional efforts to silence dissent or the press. And for me, at least, I would put in that category, efforts to round up kids who have grown up here and for all practical purposes are American kids and send them someplace else when they love this country; they are our kids' friends and their classmates, and are now entering into community colleges or, in some cases, serving in our military. The notion that we would just arbitrarily, or because of politics, punish those kids when they didn't do anything wrong themselves I think would be something that would merit me speaking out. It doesn't mean that I would get on the ballot anywhere. With respect to “wet foot, dry foot,” we underwent a monumental shift in our policy towards Cuba. My view was, after 50 years of a policy not working, it made sense for us to try to reopen diplomatic relations, to engage a Cuban government, to be honest with them about the strong disagreements we have around political repression and treatment of dissenters and freedom of press and freedom of religion, but that to make progress for the Cuban people, our best shot was to suddenly have the Cuban people interacting with Americans, and seeing the incredible success of the Cuban American community, and engaging in commerce and business and trade, and that it was through that process of opening up these bilateral relations that you would see over time serious and significant improvement. Given that shift in the relationship, the policy that we had in place was “wet foot, dry foot,” which treated Cuban emigres completely different from folks from El Salvador, or Guatemala, or Nicaragua, or any other part of the world, one that made a distinction between whether you got here by land or by foot -- that was a carryover of a old way of thinking that didn't make sense in this day and age, particularly as we're opening up travel between the two countries. And so we had very lengthy consultations with the Department of Homeland Security. We had some tough negotiations with the Cuban government. But we arrived at a policy which we think is both fair and appropriate to the changing nature of the relationship between the two countries. Nadia Bilbassy. Question: Thank you, sir. I appreciate the opportunity, and I want you and your family best of luck in the future. President Obama: Thank you. Question: Mr. President, you have been criticized and even personally attacked for the U.N. Security Council resolution that considered the Israeli settlements illegal and an obstacle to peace. Mr. Trump promised to move the embassy to Jerusalem. He appointed an ambassador that doesn't believe in the two-state solution. How worried are you about the U.S. leadership in the Arab world and beyond as an honest broker? Will this ignite a third intifada? Will this even protect Israel? And in retrospect, do you think that you should have held Israel more accountable, like President Bush, Senior, did with the loan guarantees? Thank you. President Obama: I continue to be significantly worried about the Israeli-Palestinian issue. And I’m worried about it both because I think the status quo is unsustainable, that it is dangerous for Israel, that it is bad for Palestinians, it is bad for the region, and it is bad for America’s national security. And I came into this office wanting to do everything I could to encourage serious peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians. And we invested a lot of energy, a lot of time, a lot of effort, first year, second year, all the way until last year. Ultimately, what has always been clear is that we cannot force the parties to arrive at peace. What we can do is facilitate, provide a platform, encourage. But we can't force them to do it. But in light of shifts in Israeli politics and Palestinian politics; a rightward drift in Israeli politics; a weakening of President Abbas’s ability to move and take risks on behalf of peace in the Palestinian Territories; in light of all the dangers that have emerged in the region and the understandable fears that Israelis may have about the chaos and rise of groups like ISIL and the deterioration of Syria -- in light of all those things, what we at least wanted to do, understanding that the two parties wouldn’t actually arrive at a final status agreement, is to preserve the possibility of a two-state solution. Because we do not see an alternative to it. And I’ve said this directly to Prime Minister Netanyahu. I’ve said it inside of Israel. I’ve said it to Palestinians, as well. I don't see how this issues gets resolved in a way that maintains Israel as both Jewish and a democracy, because if you do not have two states, then in some form or fashion you are extending an occupation, functionally you end up having one state in which millions of people are disenfranchised and operate as second-class occupant -- residents. You can’t even call them citizens, necessarily. And so the goal of the resolution was to simply say that the settlements -- the growth of the settlements are creating a reality on the ground that increasingly will make a two-state solution impossible. And we believed, consistent with the position that had been taken with previous U.S. administrations for decades now, that it was important for us to send a signal, a wake-up call, that this moment may be passing, and Israeli voters and Palestinians need to understand that this moment may be passing. And hopefully that, then, creates a debate inside both Israeli and Palestinian communities that won’t result immediately in peace, but at least will lead to a more sober assessment of what the alternatives are. So the President-elect will have his own policy. The ambassador -- or the candidate for the ambassadorship obviously has very different views than I do. That is their prerogative. That’s part of what happens after elections. And I think my views are clear. We’ll see how their approach plays itself out. I don’t want to project today what could end up happening, but obviously it’s a volatile environment. What we’ve seen in the past is, when sudden, unilateral moves are made that speak to some of the core issues and sensitivities of either side, that can be explosive. And what we’ve tried to do in the transition is just to provide the context in which the President-elect may want to make some of these decisions. Question: Are you worried that this [inaudible] -- President Obama: Well, that’s part of what we’ve tried to indicate to the incoming team in our transition process, is pay attention to this, because this is volatile stuff. People feel deeply and passionately about this. And as I’ve said I think many times, the actions that we take have enormous consequences and ramifications. We’re the biggest kid on the block. And I think it is right and appropriate for a new President to test old assumptions and reexamine the old ways of doing things. But if you’re going to make big shifts in policy, just make sure you’ve thought it through, and understand that there are going to be consequences, and actions typically create reactions, and so you want to be intentional about it. You don’t want to do things off the cuff when it comes to an issue this volatile. Chris Johnson. Question: On LGBT rights -- President Obama: I'm sorry, where is Chris? Question: I'm right here in the back. President Obama: I'm sorry, didn’t see you. Question: On LGBT rights, we've seen a lot of achievements over the past eight years, including signing hate crimes protection legislation, "don’t ask, don’t tell" repeal, marriage equality nationwide, and ensuring transgender people feel visible and accepted. How do you think LGBT rights will rank in terms of your accomplishments and your legacy? And how confident are you that progress will endure or continue under the President-elect? President Obama: I could not be prouder of the transformation that's taken place in our society just in the last decade. And I've said before, I think we made some useful contributions to it, but the primary heroes in this stage of our growth as a democracy and a society are all the individual activists, and sons and daughters and couples who courageously said, this is who I am and I'm proud of it. And that opened people's minds and opened their hearts. And, eventually, laws caught up. But I don’t think any of that would have happened without the activism -- in some cases, loud and noisy, but in some cases, just quiet and very personal. And I think that what we did as an administration was to help the society to move in a better direction, but to do so in a way that didn’t create an enormous backlash, and was systematic and respectful of the fact that, in some cases, these issues were controversial. I think the way we handled, for example, "don’t ask, don’t tell" -- being methodical about it, working with the Joint Chiefs, making sure that we showed this would not have an impact on the effectiveness of the greatest military on Earth -- and then to have Defense Secretary Bob Gates and Chairman Mike Mullen and a Joint Chiefs who were open to evidence and ultimately worked with me to do the right thing -- I am proud of that. But, again, none of that would have happened without this incredible transformation that was happening in society out there. You know, when I gave Ellen the Presidential Medal of Freedom, I meant what I said. I think somebody that kind and likeable projecting into living rooms around the country -- that changed attitudes. And that wasn’t easy to do for her. And that's just one small example of what was happening in countless communities all across the country. So I’m proud that in certain places we maybe provided a good block downfield to help the movement advance. I don't think it is something that will be reversible because American society has changed; the attitudes of young people, in particular, have changed. That doesn't mean there aren’t going to be some fights that are important -- legal issues, issues surrounding transgender persons -- there are still going to be some battles that need to take place. But if you talk to young people of Malia, Sasha’s generation, even if they’re Republicans, even if they're conservative, many of them would tell you, I don't understand how you would discriminate against somebody because of sexual orientation. That's just sort of burned into them in pretty powerful ways. April Ryan. Question: Thank you, Mr. President. Long before today you’ve been considered a rights President. Under your watch, people have said that you have expanded the rubber band of inclusion. And with the election and the incoming administration, people are saying that rubber band has recoiled and maybe is even broken. And I’m taking you back to a time on Air Force One going to Selma, Alabama, when you said your job was to close the gaps that remain. And with that, what gaps still remain when it comes to rights issues on the table? And also what part will you play in fixing those gaps after -- in your new life? And lastly, you are the first black President. Do you expect this country to see this again? President Obama: Well, I’ll answer the last question first. I think we're going to see people of merit rise up from every race, faith, corner of this country, because that's America’s strength. When we have everybody getting a chance and everybody is on the field, we end up being better. I think I’ve used this analogy before. We killed it in the Olympics in Brazil. And Michelle and I, we always have our -- the Olympic team here. And it’s a lot of fun, first of all, just because anytime you're meeting somebody who is the best at anything, it’s impressive. And these mostly very young people are all just so healthy-looking, and they just beam and exude fitness and health. And so we have a great time talking to them. But they are of all shapes, sizes, colors -- the genetic diversity that is on display is remarkable. And if you look at a Simone Biles, and then you look at a Michael Phelps, they're completely different. And it's precisely because of those differences that we've got people here who can excel at any sport. And, by the way, more than half of our medals came from women. And the reason is, is because we had the foresight several decades ago, with something called Title 9, to make sure that women got opportunities in sports, which is why our women compete better -- because they have more opportunities than folks in other countries. So I use that as a metaphor. And if, in fact, we continue to keep opportunity open to everybody, then, yes, we're going to have a woman President, we're going to have a Latino President, and we'll have a Jewish President, a Hindu President. Who knows who we're going to have? I suspect we'll have a whole bunch of mixed-up Presidents at some point that nobody really knows what to call them. And that's fine. But what do I worry about? I obviously spent a lot of time on this, April, at my farewell address on Tuesday, so I won't go through the whole list. I worry about inequality, because I think that if we are not investing in making sure everybody plays a role in this economy, the economy will not grow as fast, and I think it will also lead to further and further separation between us as Americans -- not just along racial lines. There are a whole bunch of folks who voted for the President-elect because they feel forgotten and disenfranchised. They feel as if they're being looked down on. They feel as if their kids aren't going to have the same opportunities as they did. And you don't want to have an America in which a very small sliver of people are doing really well and everybody else is fighting for scraps, as I said last week. Because that's oftentimes when racial divisions get magnified, because people think, well, the only way I'm going to get ahead is if I make sure somebody else gets less, somebody who doesn't look like me or doesn't worship at the same place I do. That's not a good recipe for our democracy. I worry about, as I said in response to a previous question, making sure that the basic machinery of our democracy works better. We are the only country in the advanced world that makes it harder to vote rather than easier. And that dates back -- there's an ugly history to that that we should not be shy about talking about. Question: Voting rights? President Obama: Yes, I'm talking about voting rights. The reason that we are the only country among advanced democracies that makes it harder to vote is it traces directly back to Jim Crow and the legacy of slavery. And it became sort of acceptable to restrict the franchise. And that's not who we are. That shouldn't be who we are. That's not when America works best. So I hope that people pay a lot of attention to making sure that everybody has a chance to vote. Make it easier, not harder. This whole notion of election -- of voting fraud, this is something that has constantly been disproved. This is fake news -- the notion that there are a whole bunch of people out there who are going out there and are not eligible to vote and want to vote. We have the opposite problem. We have a whole bunch of people who are eligible to vote who don't vote. And so the idea that we'd put in place a whole bunch of barriers to people voting doesn't make sense. And then, as I've said before, political gerrymandering that makes your vote matter less because politicians have decided you live in a district where everybody votes the same way you do so that these aren't competitive races, and we get 90 percent Democratic districts, 90 percent Republican districts -- that's bad for our democracy, too. I worry about that. I think it is very important for us to make sure that our criminal justice system is fair and just. But I also think it's also very important to make sure that it is not politicized, that it maintains an integrity that is outside of partisan politics at every level. I think at some point we’re going to have to spend -- and this will require some action by the Supreme Court -- we have to reexamine just the flood of endless money that goes into our politics, which I think is very unhealthy. So there are a whole bunch of things I worry about there. And as I said in my speech on Tuesday, we got more work to do on race. It is not -- it is simply not true that things have gotten worse. They haven’t. Things are getting better. And I have more confidence on racial issues in the next generation than I do in our generation or the previous generation. I think kids are smarter about it. They’re more tolerant. They are more inclusive by instinct than we are. And hopefully my presidency maybe helped that along a little bit. But, you know, we -- when we feel stress, when we feel pressure, when we’re just fed information that encourages some of our worst instincts, we tend to fall back into some of the old racial fears and racial divisions and racial stereotypes. And it’s very hard for us to break out of those, and to listen, and to think about people as people, and to imagine being in that person’s shoes. And by the way, it’s no longer a black and white issue alone. You got Hispanic folks, and you got Asian folks, and this is not just the same old battles. We’ve got this stew that’s bubbling up of people from everywhere. And we’re going to have to make sure that we, in our own lives, in our own families and workplaces, do a better job of treating everybody with basic respect. And understanding that not everybody starts off in the same situation, and imagining what would it be like if you were born in an inner city and had no job prospects anywhere within a 20-mile radius, or how does it feel being born in some rural county where there’s no job opportunities in a 20-mile radius -- and seeing those two things as connected as opposed to separate. So we got work to do. But, overall, I think on this front, the trend lines ultimately, I think, will be good. Christi Parsons. And Christi, you are going to get the last question. Question: Oh, no.

President Obama: Christi is -- I’ve been knowing her since Springfield, Illinois. When I was a state senator, she listened to what I had to say. So the least I can do is give her the last question as President of the United States. Go on. Question: 217 numbers still work. President Obama: There you go. Go ahead. Question: Well, thank you, Mr. President. It has been an honor. President Obama: Thank you. Question: And I have a personal question for you, because I know how much you like this. The First Lady puts the stakes of the 2016 election in very personal terms in a speech that resonated across the country, and she really spoke the concerns of a lot of women, LGBT folks, people of color, many others. And so I wonder now how you and the First Lady are talking to your daughters about the meaning of this election and how you interpret it for yourself and for them. President Obama: You know, every parent brags on their daughters or their sons. If your mom and dad don’t brag on you, you know you got problems. But, man, my daughters are something, and they just surprise and enchant and impress me more and more every single day as they grow up. And so these days, when we talk, we talk as parent to child, but also we learn from them. And I think it was really interesting to see how Malia and Sasha reacted. They were disappointed. They paid attention to what their mom said during the campaign and believed it because it’s consistent with what we’ve tried to teach them in our household, and what I've tried to model as a father with their mom, and what we've asked them to expect from future boyfriends or spouses. But what we've also tried to teach them is resilience, and we've tried to teach them hope, and that the only thing that is the end of the world is the end of the world. And so you get knocked down, you get up, brush yourself off, and you get back to work. And that tended to be their attitude. I think neither of them intend to pursue a future of politics -- and, in that, too, I think their mother's influence shows. But both of them have grown up in an environment where I think they could not help but be patriotic, to love this country deeply, to see that it's flawed but see that they have responsibilities to fix it. And that they need to be active citizens, and they have to be in a position to talk to their friends and their teachers and their future coworkers in ways that try to shed some light as opposed to just generate a lot of sound and fury. And I expect that's what they're going to do. They do not -- they don't mope. And what I really am proud of them -- what makes me proudest about them is that they also don't get cynical about it. They have not assumed because their side didn't win, or because some of the values that they care about don't seem as if they were vindicated, that automatically America has somehow rejected them or rejected their values. I don't think they feel that way. I think that they have, in part through osmosis, in part through dinnertime conversations, appreciated the fact that this is a big, complicated country, and democracy is messy and it doesn't always work exactly the way you might want, it doesn't guarantee certain outcomes. But if you're engaged and you're involved, then there are a lot more good people than bad in this country, and there's a core decency to this country, and that they got to be a part of lifting that up. And I expect they will be. And in that sense, they are representative of this generation that makes me really optimistic. I've been asked -- I've had some off-the-record conversations with some journalists where they said, okay, you seem like you're okay, but really, really, what are you thinking? And I've said, no, what I'm saying really is what I think. I believe in this country. I believe in the American people. I believe that people are more good than bad. I believe tragic things happen, I think there's evil in the world, but I think that at the end of the day, if we work hard, and if we're true to those things in us that feel true and feel right, that the world gets a little better each time. That's what this presidency has tried to be about. And I see that in the young people I've worked with. I couldn't be prouder of them. And so this is not just a matter of "No Drama Obama" -- this is what I really believe. It is true that behind closed doors I curse more than I do publicly. And sometimes I get mad and frustrated, like everybody else does. But at my core, I think we're going to be okay. We just have to fight for it. We have to work for it, and not take it for granted. And I know that you will help us do that. Thank you very much, press corps. Good luck.

# Farewell Remarks at Joint Base Andrews

Michelle and I, we've really been milking this goodbye thing, so it behooves me to be very brief.

Audience Members: No, no!

President Obama: Yes, yes.

You know, I said before and I will say again, that when we started on this journey we did so with an abiding faith in the American people and their ability, out ability, to join together to change the country

in ways that would make life better for our kids and our grandkids, that change didn’t happen from the top down, but it happened from the bottom up.

It was met sometimes with skepticism and doubt. Some folks didn’t think we could pull it off. There were those who felt that the institutions of power and privilege in this country were too deeply entrenched.

And yet, all of you came together, in small towns and big cities, a whole bunch of you really young, and you decided to believe. And you knocked on doors and you made phone calls, and you talked to your parents who didn’t know how to pronounce Barack Obama. And you got to know each other. And you went into communities that maybe you’d never even thought about visiting. And met people that on the surface seemed completely different than you -- who didn’t look like you or talk like you or watch the same TV programs as you. And yet, once you started talking to them, it turned out that you had something in common.

And it grew, and it built.

And people took notice. And throughout, it was infused with a sense of hope. And as I said in 2004, it wasn’t blind optimism that drove you to do all this work. It wasn’t naÃ¯vetÃ©. It wasn’t willful ignorance to all the challenges that America faces. It was hope in the face of difficulty, hope in the face of uncertainty.

You proved the power of hope.

And throughout this process, Michelle and I -- we’ve just been your frontmen and women. We have been the face, sometimes the voice, out front on the TV screen or in front of the microphone. But this has never been about us. It has always been about you.

And all the amazing things that happened over these last 10 years are really just a testament to you -- in the same way that when we talk about our amazing military and our men and women in uniform. The -- The military’s not a thing. It’s a group of committed patriots willing to sacrifice everything on our behalf. It works only because of the people in it. As -- As cool as the hardware is -- and we’ve got cool hardware -- as cool as the machines, weapons, and satellites are, ultimately it comes down to remarkable people, some of them a lot closer to Malia’s age than -- than mine or Michelle’s.

Well the same thing’s true for our democracy. Our democracy’s not the buildings; it’s not the monuments; it’s you being willing to work to make things better, and being willing to listen to each other and argue with each other and come together and knock on doors and make phone calls and treat people with respect.

And that doesn’t end. This is just a -- just a little old pit stop.

This...is not a period. This is a comma in the continuing story of building America.

So to all of you that have put your heart and soul, not just into our campaigns but into making schools better; making sure our veterans got the care they needed; making sure that we left behind a planet that is safe and secure for our kids; making sure that hardworking people have a ladder of opportunity that supports families.

For -- For all of you who have just done amazing, remarkable work, most of it unheralded, most of it without fanfare, most of it without you getting any word of thanks, we could not be prouder of you. I could not be prouder. This has been the privilege of my life, and I know I speak for Michelle as well.

And you know, we look forward to continuing this journey with all of you; and I can’t wait to see what you do next.

And I promise you, I’ll be right here with you.

All right?

God bless you. Thank you, everybody.

Yes we did. Yes we can.

God bless America.

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